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Subtitling Chinese Cinema: A Case Study of Zhang Yimou's Films

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Abstract

In recent years, more and more Chinese films have been exported abroad. This thesis intends to explore the subtitling of Chinese cinema into English, with Zhang Yimou's films as a case study. Zhang Yimou is arguably the most critically and internationally acclaimed Chinese filmmaker, who has experimented with a variety of genres of films. I argue that in the subtitling of his films, there is an obvious adoption of the domestication translation strategy that reduces or even omits Chinese cultural references. I try to discover what cultural categories or perspectives of China are prone to the domestication of translation and have formulated five categories: humour, politeness, dialect, history and songs and the Peking Opera. My methodology is that I compare the source Chinese dialogue lines with the existing English subtitles by providing literal translations of the source lines, and I will also give my alternative translations that tend to retain the source cultural references better. I also speculate that the domestication strategy is frequently employed by subtitlers possibly because the subtitlers assume the source cultural references are difficult for target language subtitle readers to comprehend, even if they are translated into a target language. However, subtitle readers are very likely to understand more than what the dialogue lines and the target language subtitles express, because films are multimodal entities and verbal information is not the only source of information for subtitle readers. The image and the sound are also significant sources of information for subtitle readers who are constantly involved in a dynamic film-watching experience. They are also expected to grasp visual and acoustic information. The complete omission or domestication of source cultural references might also affect their interpretation of the non-verbal cues. I also contemplate that the translation, which frequently domesticates the source culture carried out by a translator who is also a native speaker of the source language, is 'submissive translation'.

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Author's Declaration

This thesis represents the original work of Yilei Yuan, unless otherwise stated in the text. The research upon which it is based was carried out in Theatre, Film and Television Studies at the University of Glasgow under the supervision of Prof. Dimitris Eleftheriotis and Dr Amy Holdsworth during the period of October 2012 to February 2016.

Chapter One Introduction

In Stephen Chow's 2004 film *Kung Fu Hustle*, Sing, the bully and member of the Axe Gang played by Chow himself, discovers the 'Fire Cloud Demon God', aka 'the Beast', who has been hiding away for the lack of a potent opponent. The Gang is keen to pay the Beast to eliminate the landlady and the landlord of the Pig Sty Alley who oppose the evil and ruthless rule of the Axe Gang. The proud Beast is very interested in meeting the two phenomenal opponents and would annihilate them for free. When the Beast enters the casino run by the Gang, he meets the landlady and the landlord, and enquires if they are the legendary couple. The landlord replies 'Yang Guo', while the landlady says 'Xiaolongnü', which are their nicknames (see Fig.1.1 and Fig.1.2).



Fig.1.1 and Fig.1.2: The landlord and the landlady tell of their nicknames and confirm their identities to the Beast at the casino opened by the Axe Gang.

This scene renders many Chinese audiences burst into laughter, as the reason is culturally specific. Over approximately 2/3 of *Kung Fu Hustle*, the landlady strikes audiences as a violent, mean and extremely loud woman, whereas her husband the landlord seems to be exactly the opposite, who is fearful and uxorious. Nevertheless, their nicknames, 'Yang Guo' and 'Xiaolongnü', are two characters from the renowned martial art novel *The Return of the Condor Heroes* (《神雕侠侣》) written by Jin Yong which has been adapted into multiple TV drama series and films. Xiaolongnü or 'Dragon's daughter' might sound frightening and disturbing to foreigners, but dragon is a divine and revered creature for the Chinese nation and is also their totem¹, i.e. symbol. Also, this 'divine daughter' is a beautiful figure and *kung fu* master in the novel. Actresses who have been cast as Xiaolongnü are mostly young, beautiful and charismatic but have a distant look, such as Idy Chan Yuk Lin, Carmen Lee Yeuk Tung and Pan Yin-tze. However, the character of the landlady in *Kung Fu Hustle* has quite different behaviour and appearance; she is loud, violent and a little older. On the other hand, Yang Guo in *The Return of the Condor Heroes* is a young, handsome and valiant *kung fu* master and hero, while the landlord is uxorious and older too. Hence, the nicknames are quite a contrast to the representation of the couple and are comedic. The two fictional characters' names Yang Guo and Xiaolongnü which are unfamiliar to foreign viewers are translated into 'Paris' and 'Helen of Troy'.

There are two main reasons why the landlady and the landlord's nicknames are unexpected, amusing and essential. The first reason is that the landlady is chubby, looks fierce and has a cigarette in her mouth all the time, which contrasts to Xiaolongnü's incomparable beauty and glamour, and the landlord does not look like a valiant and charismatic hero like Yang Guo either. The landlady's and the landlord's appearances indeed contrast with those of Paris and Helen too. The second reason why their nicknames are significant is that although they show none of their martial arts prowess until after the Beast appears, they are absolute *kung fu* masters like Yang Guo and Xiaolongnü. At the first sight, this rendition into Paris and Helen seems to be familiar to English speakers, as they are a well-known couple from Greek mythology. They, too, produce a comic effect thanks to the contrast between the appearances and features of the mythological figures and those of the landlady and the landlord in *Kung Fu Hustle*. However, with a further observation, I realise that Paris and Helen might not be the optimal translations of the two nicknames. Yang Guo and Xiaolongnü are *kung fu* masters, as the couple in *Kung Fu Hustle* is also engaged in intense physical fight with various figures,

¹ Totem: an animal, plant etc that is thought to have a special SPIRITUAL connection with a particular tribe... (original capitalisation) (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*). [Online]. [Accessed 27 January 2016]. Available at: <http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/totem>

including the Beast. In comparison, Paris of Troy might be a fighter, but Helen is certainly not. When general Chinese audiences hear the source nicknames, they will comprehend the comparison from two perspectives, the appearance and the martial art. By contrast, English-speaking subtitle readers might only be able to understand the comparison from one perspective – the appearance. In this light, ‘Paris’ and ‘Helen’ might not be adequate to convey the significance and purpose of the nicknames. Another misleading impression such translations may leave on foreign viewers is that Chinese audiences seem to be familiar with the mythological figures Paris and Helen. Since the names might have to be translated into legendary or mythological figures that have incredible fighting skills, ‘Ares’ and ‘Enyo’ occur to me, who are the God and the Goddess of War and are lovers, or Mars and Bellona, their Roman counterparts. Nonetheless, compared to Mars, Ares, Enyo and Bellona might be less known even to Europeans, especially Enyo and Bellona, so ‘Ares’ and ‘Enyo’ are not ideal translations either. This example conveys a dilemma of translation. On the one hand, the existing translation might not fulfil the function of the source thoroughly. On the other hand, a more functionally equivalent translation might not strike a chord with target language subtitle readers.

The significant debates

The translation of the pair in *Kung Fu Hustle* did not initially draw my attention to film subtitling, but very well revealed to me an intricacy that the optimal translation seems to be non-existent. As a translator myself, I am apt to try to understand film subtitle translation from a translator’s point of view and from a translation studies perspective. Also, because of my particular research background in the English language and translation studies, this thesis will frequently involve theories from translation studies, but I will attempt to contemplate subtitle translation within film studies as much as I can. Another fact that contributes to the preliminary idea of the current thesis is the fairly scanty research on the subtitling of Chinese films into English. The release of a Hollywood blockbuster in Chinese cinemas is invariably followed by multiple journal articles analysing the subtitling of that film, which reflects Chinese scholars’ enthusiasm. They are apt to criticise the over-reduction of English-speaking culture-bound expressions, sayings and renditions that seem to be orientated to Chinese popular culture (Meng, 2012; Wang and Wang, 2013). And yet, there appears to be less concern about how Chinese films are translated for international distribution. More recently, some Chinese scholars have started to pay more attention to the subtitling of Chinese films into English. Even if some scholars lay their eyes on Chinese-into-English subtitling, their attitude is somewhat dubious to me. They more often than not support or affirm the names, culture-related

expressions, phrases and other terms in Chinese being rendered into English cultural-bound expressions, or simply being omitted (Tian, 2006; Ji and Song, 2007; Ji, 2007). They rarely question the strategies the subtitlers have opted.

At this point, I need to clarify two strategies and tendencies of translation. According to Venuti (2008, p.15), 'domestication' traces to Schleiermacher as a kind of translation that 'leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him' and allegedly, 'an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to receiving values, bringing the author back home'. On the other hand, foreignising translation is to 'register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad' (Venuti, 2008, p.15). It might be safe to say that domestication is target-language-reader-biased, while foreignisation is source-language or author-biased. It would be quite natural for a reader from the source language culture to prefer a foreignising translation strategy and for a reader from the target language culture to favour a domesticating strategy. However, domestication can often be adopted when Chinese films get translated into English, and many Chinese academics are in favour of this strategy. Long (2006) enthusiastically praises the employment of domestication and the reduction of culture-specific expressions in the English translation of *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000). Long (ibid., p.36) also refers to her communication with two American professors and an American writer who confirm that '...the language was very native like [colloquial] and without grammatical errors [syntax]' (original brackets), 'The story told in English flows well', 'The subtitles communicate well the ideas of the director. And the dialogue suits the personae of the characters of the situations where the communication takes place'. Whether an audience understands the source language or not, it is natural to presume English subtitles are good because there are no non-native expressions or grammatical errors. The professors' and the writer's comments seem to mean that the subtitles read like native English, which makes the subtitling successful. But if there is another version of English subtitles that has adopted domestication and reduction less frequently but is still fluent, how would English-speaking subtitle readers read the English subtitles?

Many Chinese academics' essays about subtitling Chinese films only relate to discovering what strategies subtitlers have adopted, or what translation studies theories could be applied to explain the choices of the translation strategies (Long, 2006; Zhang, 2011; Lü and Wu, 2012; Shao, 2012). Nonetheless, few have questioned whether the strategies that have been employed are truly irreplaceable. Also, few have explored the translation of Chinese films beyond the scope of certain translation studies theories, such as *skopos* theories. The truth is that there is no perfect strategy to translate a subtitle and there is always a certain element to

sacrifice in a translation. Hu (2003, pp.283-284) contends that when translators translate, they adapt and select, and their adaptation is selective and selection adaptive. However, translators' adaptation and selection has to be limited, although it is difficult to set the maximum limit for adaptation or selection. Hu (2008, p.4) also emphasises translators' central and dominant position in the adaptation and selection. This emphasis on the significance of translators corresponds to Nornes's (2007, p.243) 'global cinema as the translator's cinema'. Both Hu and Nornes appear to romanticise the source subtitles and the fidelity to them as if the source texts were the only location of the ultimate meaning (Eleftheriotis, 2010, p.183). They also indicate that the literal act of reading is the only way viewers read subtitles. Contrary to some translators' assumption that subtitle readers need 'special care' since they do not understand the source language, subtitle readers tend to notice errors in subtitles, because subtitles are not the sole source of meaning for subtitle readers. There is also visual and acoustic information, or the non-verbal, which interacts with textual information. Subtitle readers' activity of reading texts is not only literal, but semiotic too, as a variety of filmic elements are all sources of meaning for them (ibid., p.184). They read while studying the images and the audio as well as other filmic factors.

In *Red Sorghum* (Zhang Yimou, 1987), Jiu'er is forced by her father to marry a rich but leprous older man. She is resentful and scared. On the third day of her marriage, her father comes to take her home for a visit according to the local tradition. She protests to her father against the marriage and refuses to go back to her husband (see Fig.1.3). However, because her father has accepted and been pleased with the gift from Jiu'er's new husband – a big black mule, he insists she should return to her new home. She furiously proclaims that she will never come back to her father's home and storms out of the room. The image shows Jiu'er's father's attempt to reason with her and tell her the benefit of marrying her husband.



Fig.1.3: Jiu'er returns to her father's home for a visit and has an unhappy conversation with him.

What Jiu'er's father says is '掉到福祸窝里 (还整天五迷三道地转不过来)', which means '(You) dropped into the sea of happiness, (but cannot see it).' He indicates that Jiu'er is unaware of her luck and is ungrateful about the good marriage. However, the English subtitle says '*he* has dropped into the sea of happiness'. The English subtitle will be contextually correct if '*he*' is altered into '*you*'. As the daughter and bride is sitting at the far end of the frame, looking distraught with her eyes downcast, and the audio shows the father is speaking, it is fairly obvious that she is the one being criticised, disappointed and upset. His argument is directed to her. But the focus of the criticism in the English subtitle deviates from her because of '*he*', which is an evident error.

Approaching the end of the film, the local bandit Tu San Pao fights against the Japanese soldiers during the Japanese Aggression War (1937-1945). Tu is arrested by the Japanese who orders a local butcher to flay him alive. Yet, the butcher used to run a bistro for Tu, and they have been friendly with each other. When the butcher realises that he cannot disobey the order, he takes the knife and Tu begins to yell at him. The image Fig.1.4 reveals Tu's condemnation.



Fig.1.4: The butcher (on the left) takes the knife and walks slowly towards Tu San Pao (hanging on the right).

Tu shouts ‘翻脸不认人’ which roughly means ‘(You) turn your back and pretend you don’t know me.’ In fact, the English subtitle is not natural-sounding enough, which subtitle readers would be highly aware of. Also, in this scene, Tu on the right is shouting and condemning the butcher on the left for being heartless and ruthless. However, the subtitle evidently refers to ‘he’ who seems to be a third person out of the frame. Thanks to earlier film contexts, subtitle readers would remember the loyal relationship between the butcher and Tu and would understand Tu’s disappointment and fury. Tu also stares at the butcher when he yells at him. Again, the criticism is directed towards a non-existent third person just like the previous example, but the film’s context and visuality tells of the truthful meaning of the text.

The experience of film-watching is not passive but active where the viewer is constantly connecting the image with the sound, the plot and the depth of meaning. In the experience of a foreign film-watching, the viewer is required to be even more proactive in correlating the subtitle with the visual and the acoustic of various contexts. The foreign viewer, meanwhile, gradually trains themselves to internalise the subtitle and find out the imperfection in it, which is explained by the previous two examples. Normally in the subtitling industry, films for hearing audiences do not have subtitles in brackets that contain sound cues or coloured subtitles that explicate speakers’ identities, which are usually for the deaf or hard-of-hearing audiences. The reason is that hearing audiences are expected to grasp that information without the help of subtitles. That also implies a demand on hearing viewers to not just rely on reading target language subtitles when they watch a subtitled film, but they have to observe visual representation and listen to the sound, or to actively interact with the particular film via different channels. Simply reading subtitles is not enough to appreciate a foreign film. As

watching a film means much more than only understanding the dialogue, subtitle readers have to make more effort. However, on the one hand, because native audiences naturally have ample linguistic, historical, cultural and social knowledge that foreign audiences tend to lack, it is likely to be easier for native audiences to receive more verbal as well as non-verbal information than foreign audiences, which might be self-explanatory. On the other hand, when a subtitle reader makes the decision to watch a foreign film, they must be ready for alien languages, images and music. Even if subtitle readers are not ready for the demand of an active and interactive film-watching, the film might quickly prepare them for the process. It might be fair to say every time we watch a film, it is a challenge which can be both verbal and non-verbal.

Subtitle readers might not realise they are engaged in a challenging and proactive undertaking when they begin to watch a subtitled film, but they have to constantly pay attention to various sources of information. In *Raise the Red Lantern* (Zhang Yimou, 1991), Songlian is a young college student who has to give up her studies and marry a rich but much older husband. Her husband already has three other wives, among whom the third one, Meishan, seems to be aggressive and irritating. According to the long-existing familial tradition, the husband's favourite wife can enjoy a foot massage by an experienced servant with a delicate pair of hammers and is entitled to order her favourite food for the next day. One day Meishan invites Songlian to play majong and she agrees. While they are playing majong, they hear the sound of a foot massage made by the small hammers, because their husband returns home earlier and chooses to stay with the second wife, as Songlian, the new bride, is not in her own room. The image Fig.1.5 demonstrates that Songlian (on the right) has heard the noise and becomes upset and absent-minded, whereas Meishan (beside Songlian) sneaks a glance at her to see her response. The information absent from the image is the distant noise of the foot massage that is available to hearing viewers.



Fig.1.5: When Songlian and Meishan are playing majong with the two guests, they hear the foot massage. Songlian is surprised and disappointed at losing an opportunity to enjoy the privilege.

This moment has no subtitle, as no words are said. However, with a closer look at the two women, the viewer can discover Songlian on the right has her eyes looking forward and her expression blank, while Meishan sneaks a glance at her and is apparently concerned about her response. Truly no character says anything, and yet the behaviour of both women is caused by a noise from outside which is a significant sound cue. Subtitle readers can hear the particular noise and would be able to understand the looks on the women's faces. This can be attributed to an active engagement in the film-watching that subtitle readers are expected to be involved in.

Research questions

A semiotic and dynamic reading of subtitles and a study of the visual and the acoustic enable readers to notice errors in the subtitles, like the two examples from *Red Sorghum*. They are also involved in an interactive process as soon as they embark on watching a subtitled film. Therefore, it should be rational to assume that they are also ready for terms and expressions that allude to the original culture. If the source film is Chinese, the existence of references that reflect Chinese cultural elements would not be irrational or unimaginable. On the contrary, it would be odd if target language subtitles do not reflect any specificity of culture from China. I

would argue that cultural references should be retained to the largest extent possible, as long as retaining the cultural references:

- a. Would not cause unusual sentence structure, grammatical mistakes or blatantly contradict the target language norms.
- b. Would not make a subtitle too long which takes too much space and needs more time to read.

It might seem to be ambitious or demanding to translate as many culture-related terms into the target language as possible. Yet, as a matter of fact, it might not take too many words to translate those terms. It is extremely difficult to render a source reference, and an absolute equivalent or viewers' perfect understanding is too much to hope for or non-existent (Eleftheriotis, 2010, p.186). But sometimes, an extra word can express the essence of the source reference, and it is unnecessary to domesticate or reduce the reference, because the reference deserves that respect and deserves to be retained. Complete omission is even less recommendable than domestication also due to the lack of respect to the source culture. Since subtitle readers decide to receive the challenge that comes along with the undertaking of watching a subtitled film, they ought to be encouraged and their ability trusted to grasp verbal information from subtitles as well as non-verbal information from the image and the sound. It is not the optimal choice for translators to doubt or underestimate subtitle readers' ability to receive the subtitled cultural aspects, because subtitle readers 'read', watch and listen at the same time. On the other hand, if some readers are shocked by a subtitled culture, that would be peculiar too, because a subtitled film is destined to be alien and different. In fact, every film can be alien, even if it is made in our own countries or in our native languages, because a film is always set in a particular geographical and historical background. We can hardly find any film that is set in a place that we are entirely familiar with, in a language or dialect that we know all about, in an age that we have lived in, and about characters that we are absolutely sure about. Therefore, every film has elements that we do not know and every film-watching is a learning process. This ultimately contradicts Baudry's (1974-1975, p.42) cinematic apparatus theory of the cinema's denial of difference. In this light, everyone has the experience of watching an 'alien' film, whereas subtitles symbolise and strengthen the difference (Eleftheriotis, 2010, p.182). That is why being astonished by an alien culture in a subtitled film is astonishing *per se*, and the same if a viewer expects the subtitles to be deeply rooted in the target language. Moreover, many viewers who choose to see a subtitled film might have an interest in the source culture in a variety of ways, so they might mind source cultural elements in the subtitles even less, if not looking forward to more.

On the basis of the above argument, I formulate my research questions:

- a. What are the main categories of the lost source cultural specifics?
- b. How can the essence of the cultural specifics be retained?
- c. How do the specifics correlate with the visual and acoustic information? If the cultural specifics are apparently altered or omitted, would it affect subtitle readers' response?

Methodology

This thesis will adopt a methodology that combines theories from film studies, translation studies and studies of particular Chinese cultural aspects. The five case studies are respectively on the subtitling of humour, politeness, dialect, history, songs and the Peking Opera. There are two main contradictory tendencies or strategies of translation within the scope of translation studies. Domesticating translation attempts to make the language of the translation sound like the natural target language, or to make the translation text read as if it is deeply rooted in the target culture. Therefore, the reader is able to read the translation in the easiest possible manner and have an experience almost the same as reading a text originally from their native language without disturbance. The consequence of a domesticating translation is to leave the reader at peace. This assumes that the reader prefers reading a native language text or one that is approximately a native language text. In other words, it might assume the reader's 'laziness', which may be a wrong 'charge' against them, as some of them may not prefer evident domestication.

Domesticating translation exists in many cultures. I will first give an example from a literary translation perspective. Lin Shu (1852-1924) was a significant Chinese translator born during the Qing Dynasty who translated *Don Quixote*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *La Dame aux Camellias* and many other classic novels. Lin Shu did not understand foreign languages but translated by listening to colleagues interpreting the original novel and recording his own understanding in Old Chinese (Liu and Han, 2012). It is unavoidable that Lin's translations were domesticated into the register of Old Chinese. Lin's strategy of translation was excessive domesticating, as the translated texts were very different from the original texts in various ways. The advantage of this strategy was that many Chinese readers probably found the texts convenient to read. This type of translation seems to be overly considerate to readers of the target culture, but inconsiderate to the author of the original language. However, some particularities make subtitling more prone to domestication. In many cases, subtitling from one language to another renders target language subtitles longer than the original, for example from English into Italian. In Finland, all subtitled films have to have subtitles in both Finnish and Swedish, so

only one line of space is available for the Finnish subtitle and the Swedish subtitle (Gottlieb, 2001, p.257). It is widely acknowledged that subtitles are faced with rigid temporal-spatial constraints, and it may become an excuse for a subtitler to reduce cultural or linguistic specificities from an original subtitle in order to create a target language subtitle with a reasonable length. In other countries like France, Germany, Spain, etc., dubbing is more common than subtitling. When a film is dubbed, it is impossible for target language viewers to listen to the original audio, even if they can understand the original language. That means they can only rely on the dubbed audio for all verbal information, unless they can read actors' lips whenever possible. Moreover, dubbing tends to take into account actors' lip movements and requires the lip movements of the dubbers similar to those on screen. All these particular aspects may turn out to be an 'excuse' for the adoption of the domesticating strategy.

In contrast to the strategy of domesticating translation is the strategy of foreignising translation, which is to 'register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, sending the reader abroad' (Venuti, 2008, p.15). Foreignising translation is less common than domesticating translation. If we believe the act of translating is to assist target language readers in understanding the original text, completely retaining the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text is contradictory to the purpose of translation. This strategy respects the original work more than domestication, but may also incur tremendous difficulties for foreign readers to understand the text, so complete foreignisation may only be an experimental strategy but is not a practical one.

Therefore, I would like to propose a neutral position between absolute domestication and foreignisation. The excessive foreignisation of the original cultural and linguistic features will lead to a target text that can be so unfamiliar and difficult to comprehend for target language readers that it will contradict the purpose of translation. On the other hand, the excessive domestication of the original cultural features will not be respectful towards the author of the original text. In terms of film subtitles, if the subtitler intentionally domesticates original cultural references to a large extent, they may remove some of the references that can be translated with very few words. It will also be disrespectful towards a filmmaker's effort in making a film. Domesticating original cultural references in order to meet an assumed foreign viewers' expectations is what I would like to call 'submissive translation', which is submissive to the target culture that is allegedly dominant and prioritised. As a matter of fact, the existence of translation is commonly deemed as a bridge between cultures. If an original culture struggles to survive the process of translation, the translation will, by and large, fail. There is a deep distrust of the function of translation - to bridge the gap between cultures - in

the domestication strategy. The failed translation might not be owing to the 'invalidity' of the function of translation, but to subtitlers' attitudinal distrust.

Particularly in the case of subtitling and the fulfilment of the function of translation, non-verbal information plays a significant role in assisting with the dynamic communication between audiences and a film and compensates for what subtitles may fail to convey. Yet, domestication which withholds literal and semiotic meaning will contradict the effect that non-verbal information can make, as the verbal and the non-verbal culture ought to explain each other. Again, this is inconsistent with a world that is increasingly globalised where mutual understanding between different cultures should be promoted and facilitated. Besides, the concept of domestication is suspicious of readers' capacity to read and understand and possibly underestimates their curiosity too, as it presumes that readers may fail to understand all the original specificities or that they are simply not interested. Hence, domestication apparently harms the Chinese cultural elements and underestimates readers, while neither foreignisation nor domestication is as beneficial to both the original culture and the target language reader as a neutral strategy. It is worth noting that the romanticisation of a perfect relationship between the text and the reader is unrealistic, as the relationship is bound to be imperfect and accepting the imperfection is the only appropriate way to conceptualise such an understanding (Eleftheriotis, 2010, pp.186-188).

Humour, politeness, history, songs and the Peking Opera all involve both verbal expression and non-verbal presentation. The non-verbal presentation of humour, politeness, history, songs and the Peking Opera will be analysed from the perspectives of film studies, especially representation and performance. Zhang Yimou's films are always rich in cultural elements, and culture is an indispensable part of his films. Costumes, gestures, music, songs and all other rich non-verbal information does not necessarily need subtitles for foreign viewers to understand, but will undeniably facilitate a semiotic and dynamic experience of film watching, as viewers can learn to understand film plots with the aid of non-verbal information. For example, even if songs are not subtitled on many occasions for various reasons, foreign viewers who watch films with subtitles can still get a sense of the meaning of songs by means of the tune, timbre, pitch and voice of a song. Also, the existence of non-verbal information can accelerate viewers' interaction with film subtitles, which will contribute to an interactive and dynamic communication between film subtitles and subtitle readers. On the other hand, dialect may be a verbal specificity only, but how dialect is translated in subtitles is still significant. History is a vital element in historical films and can be represented both verbally and non-verbally. When history becomes verbal, how it is transferred into a target language needs to be investigated.

I will examine the subtitling of Zhang Yimou's films through detailed analysis of English subtitles of his films. By providing the literal meanings of the Chinese subtitles, the existing corresponding English subtitles and occasionally the back-translations of the English subtitles, I will speculate why subtitlers translated those subtitles with specific strategies, particularly domestication, and why some of the subtitles fail or why they are successful. When the subtitles fail to convey the original cultural references, I will suggest alternatives and compare them with the existing subtitles while discussing what advantages the alternatives have in comparison to the existing versions or why they are more beneficial to the cultural factors as well as general subtitle readers.

Two terms will be frequently mentioned in this thesis, 'source language' and 'target language'. As this thesis studies the subtitling of Zhang Yimou's films, the source language of the analysis in the case studies is Mandarin Chinese. The target language is English, the language of the subtitles of the DVDs and occasionally the online versions of the films and the databases. As this thesis will involve ample subtitle analysis, I will clarify at this point that all the Mandarin subtitles are transcribed by myself from the audio of the films, except those of *The Flowers of War*. Because the main language variation of that film is the Nanjing dialect, I referred to an online version (Letv, no date (a)) of the film that has Mandarin subtitles to ensure accuracy. The English subtitles are transcribed from the DVDs of the English versions of the films, unless specified otherwise. Another specific I would like to mention is that Zhang Yimou's most recent films, *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009), *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010), *The Flowers of War* (2011) and *Coming Home* (2014), were all subtitled by his daughter Zhang Mo, according to the credits. She was also the editor of *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (Ma, 2015). She became an associate director during the making of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* and directed a few scenes herself, while also being the subtitler (ibid.). During the making of *The Flowers of War*, other than being Zhang Yimou's personal assistant and Christian Bale's interpreter, Zhang Mo took the responsibility of an associate director, an editor as well as the subtitler again (ibid.). The fact that she fulfils so many tasks in the filmmaking process, particularly her being the editor and subtitler makes it more complex to speculate the reasons of the adoption of certain translation strategies and the omission of certain scenes in the English versions of certain films. The filmmaker himself might have also been involved in certain decision-making of the subtitling and the editing of the English-speaking releases. This will also be discussed in some of the case studies.

Zhang Yimou is widely accepted as the most internationally and critically acclaimed Chinese filmmaker (Larson, 2011). He was involved in the making of the epoch-breaking film *Yellow*

Earth (Chen Kaige, 1984) which probably signifies the beginning of New Chinese Cinema. Zhang along with some of his classmates in the Beijing Film Academy are now known as the Fifth Generation filmmakers. He established his reputation in the international film industry in the late 1980s and early 1990s with three 'red' film, *Red Sorghum* (1987), *Ju Dou* (1990) and *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) (Larson, 2011). His most recent film that has been released is *Coming Home* (2014). Apart from all the attention his films have drawn throughout China, they have also been widely researched by scholars in other countries over the recent decades (Clark, 1989; Browne et al., 1994; Cornelius, 2001; Dai, 2002; Qin, 2010). Being a prolific filmmaker, he has directed over 20 films so far and explored various themes and genres. He adapted Joel Coen and Ethan Coen's directorial debut and film noir *Blood Simple* (1985) into a comedy set in ancient China, *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop*. This comedy showcases humour as well as a folk art, the song-and-dance duet. Also, Zhang repeatedly reflects on the Cultural Revolution of China between the 1960s and 1970s and sets this particular period as the time background of several of his films, including *To Live* (1994), *The Road Home* (1999), *Under the Hawthorn Tree* and *Coming Home*. Those films reveal a large number of terms and expressions that were only used during the Revolution. Zhang has also directed three martial art films, *Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006). These martial art films are all set in different dynasties in ancient China and history is represented both visually and verbally in the film dialogue. Zhang also sets his films during the Anti-Japanese Aggression War (1937-1945) which was part of the World War II, for example *Red Sorghum* and *The Flowers of War*. *The Flowers of War* intentionally employs the Nanjing dialect of the wartime, and the dialect constitutes almost all the Chinese conversations in the film. All those films of Zhang Yimou involve common Chinese politeness address terms and gestures and many of them also embrace Chinese songs or the Peking Opera. Humour, politeness, dialect, history, songs and the Peking Opera are all important aspects of the Chinese culture and comprise my five case studies. Songs and the Peking Opera are one case study.

Zhang Yimou's different films were released through different channels. His early films were screened in international film festivals, such as *Red Sorghum* and *Raise the Red Lantern*. *Hero* was presented to American theatres by Quentin Tarantino and released on DVD too. *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* and *The Flowers of War*, among his more recent films, were also released on DVD. However, the same film released through distinct channels may have different versions of English subtitles. While I obtained DVDs of most of the films in this subtitling research, I found subtitles of some films on online subtitle databases or on YouTube. This is often to compare different versions of subtitles. Also, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is not

released in English on DVDs. Therefore, I list all the sources of my English subtitles in the Table 1.1. Zhang Yimou's four most recent films all have the subtitle's name –Zhang Mo - among the ending credits on the DVD releases. It is natural to assume that the director himself assigned the subtitling task to his daughter. However, it is hard to know whether the English subtitles translated by her and the subtitlers of Zhangs's earlier films had been altered before the eventual theatrical and/or DVD releases of the films. Thus, my subtitle analysis only takes into account the existing English subtitles that I see from the sources.

Titles of films	Sources of subtitles	Details of sources	Names of subtitlers/ subtitling companies
<i>Red Sorghum</i> (1987)	DVD	Guangzhou Xinsheng Culture Spread Co., Ltd. (no date)	Uncredited
<i>Ju Dou</i> (1990)	YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSOOgiT8ilQ&list=PLy7kP75uRYcTlq_QiilIrdu2Qw_4O5oBt	Helen Eiseman WJJ Opticals, N.Y.
<i>To Live</i> (1994)	YouTube	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZB7HYhUpDz8	Malin Post Production (Moriyama Takaaki et al.)
<i>Hero</i> (2002)	DVD	Buena Vista Home Entertainment (2005)	Carolyn Choa
	Online subtitle database	http://subsmx.com/subtitles-movie/hero-2002/ni	Not provided
<i>House of Flying Daggers</i> (2004)	DVD	20 th Century Fox (2005)	Linda Jaivin Sherrie Liu Chris Lu
<i>Curse of the Golden Flower</i> (2006)	DVD	Universal Pictures (2007)	Ending credit unclear
	Online subtitle database	http://www.moviesubtitles.org/subtitle-4744.html	Not provided
<i>A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop</i> (2009)	DVD	Momentum Pictures (2011)	Zhang Mo
<i>Under the Hawthorn Tree</i> (2010)	Online subtitle database	http://www.moviesubtitles.org/subtitle-67504.html	Zhang Mo, Tim Youngs
<i>The Flowers of War</i> (2011)	DVD	Revolver Entertainment (2012)	Zhang Mo

Table 1.1: Sources of the English subtitles in this thesis.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of an introduction, a literature review, five case studies and a conclusion. Chapter Two, the literature review, discusses how the theme of this thesis came into being. It begins with the birth of *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1984) which is arguably the first Fifth

Generation Chinese film and with its significance. This epoch-making film together with a group of new Chinese filmmakers launched Chinese cinema to the world. These filmmakers, now often referred to as the Fifth Generation, had a different life story from their predecessors. The Fifth Generation filmmakers moved on and made more films that were highly acclaimed in the international film festivals. Zhang Yimou is among them. He has been trying to combine art house cinema with commercial cinema and to win the international market. The literature review also explores the reception of his films in China as well as abroad and examines how his films investigate the reality of China during different historical periods. As Zhang's career developed, he directed martial art films, among which *Hero* (2002) was the most internationally successful. Thus, the transnationalism and the transnational production of Zhang's films is also discussed. Since *Yellow Earth*, international scholars have been attempting to read the new Chinese cinema and E. Ann Kaplan (1989/2006) examines whether the cross-cultural analysis can be fruitful. Yoshimoto (1991/2006) contends that the cross-cultural exchange has never been balanced between the East and the West. The lack of cultural understanding of the East also causes the misreading of the East (Chan, 2003). Therefore, a cultural translation between the East and the West is significant. This chapter also analyses how subtitles have been looked at in film studies, especially their relationship with the apparatus theory and the relationship between the text and the readers. I then draw upon readers' semiotic and literal act of reading raised by Eleftheriotis's (2010, p.184) and Benjamin's (1923/2012, p.81) 'translator's task' and emphasise that the meaning of the text and the filmic elements like the visual and the acoustic are both significant in translating subtitles.

Chapter Three focuses on humour that is showcased in *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* and the loss of it after translation. I refer to humour theories and a number of translation studies theories to examine the translation of humour in that particular film. I specifically emphasise the adoption of an *explicitation* strategy by the film subtitler Zhang Mo, Zhang Yimou's daughter. This strategy will be illustrated and exemplified in detail in this chapter with plenty of examples and the consequence of an adoption of such a strategy will also be discussed. The English subtitles of *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* manifest a few weak subtitles where the aforementioned strategy of domestication is applied. I will attempt to provide my alternative translations to expound how the alternatives might better retain the cultural references in the humour. Another aspect this chapter will lay emphasis on is omitted scenes in the English version of the film. I will explain the possible reasons why those scenes have been edited out from the original Chinese film and discuss how those scenes might be

translated into English. Humour in this film is represented non-verbally as well, so this chapter will analyse the visual humour and investigate how visuality and English subtitles might interact and affect subtitle readers' interpretation of humour at the same time.

Chapter Four analyses the politeness in four of Zhang Yimou's films, *To Live*, *Hero*, *Curse of the Golden Flower* and *The Flowers of War*. This chapter will mainly employ Gu's (1990) Address Maxim and Self-Denigration Maxim as a framework, and the purpose is to point out the domestication of politeness in the English subtitles. All four films reveal a large number of address terms, as addressing people with appropriate terms in China is a significant part of politeness habits. The address terms in the four films will be categorised into two types and exemplified with various examples. Self-denigration might not be a common polite phenomenon in other countries, but is fairly obvious in China, especially in the past, so this chapter will also explicate how Chinese people commonly denigrate themselves in ancient China as well as contemporary China. Although politeness is frequently domesticated and reduced, it is unquestionably demonstrated through gestures and performance just like humour. Thus, there will be a section in this part where visual information shows politeness specifics that should be obvious to subtitle readers.

The theme of Chapter Five is the Nanjing dialect in the film *The Flowers of War* and its translation. The filmmaker recruited an actor and most of the actresses in Nanjing and had them trained to speak the Nanjing wartime dialect, which indicates the significance of the dialect in the film. This chapter begins with a brief summary of some existing literature on the subtitling of dialects and an explication of the linguistic features of the Nanjing dialect and its difference from Mandarin. Three main translation strategies adopted by the subtitler Zhang Mo will be summarised and explained with examples from the film. This chapter will also emphasise the domestication and the loss of Chinese cultural references said with the dialect and provide alternatives that might better keep the references.

Chapter Six centres on history in subtitling and the first section employs three of Zhang Yimou's films that are set in ancient China, *Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers* and *Curse of the Golden Flower*. In historical films, history is often depicted visually and acoustically. However, history can also be manifested in the film dialogue, so how history is handled in subtitling needs to be researched. This chapter particularly aims at discovering the marks of history, i.e. archaisms, which are categorised into four kinds: nouns, idioms, adverbs and four-character phrases. Each of the four kinds of archaic terms and expressions and the ways they have been translated into English will be elaborated. Again, cultural references in Chinese are constantly

domesticated when they can be translated into English concisely. The second section of Chapter Six focuses on the Cultural Revolution, as Zhang Yimou's films set during that historical period involve a large number of terms that are specific to that era. Hence, this section will attempt to investigate what the Revolution-bound terms are and how they are translated. On the surface, those terms are faithfully translated, but in fact, there are more cultural, historical and social specifics that are hidden underneath the superficial meaning of them.

Chapter Seven investigates the subtitling of the songs and the Peking Opera in Zhang Yimou's films. In his films, the songs and the opera are often diegetic and are choreographed performances. It is undoubtedly that they are critical to specific film contexts. They are also multimodal entities of verbal, visual and acoustic information where the sound and the image are connected to the lyrics. I will examine the subtitling of songs with some examples from Zhang's films from three perspectives, rhyme, rhythm and content. There are several scenes of Peking Opera singing in the film *Raise the Red Lantern*, but none of them are translated into English, probably for various reasons, including the plethora of Chinese socio-cultural specifics which render it challenging to translate. Hence, I will also analyse possible solutions to translate the lyrics of the opera into English, and make an attempt to translate one of the scenes into English. Moreover, as both the songs and the Peking Opera are contextually significant, I will also explain how the lyrics are related to the visual and the acoustic and how the translation of the lyrics might help subtitle readers to understand the non-verbal information.

The significance of my thesis is that I emphasise the conspicuous existence of domestication in the translation of Chinese films into English. As the subtitling of Chinese films into English has not yet been widely researched by scholars in China or other countries, my thesis can fill in this gap. Research on the subtitling of Chinese politeness, dialects, historical words and expressions, songs and the Peking Opera is also very limited. Subtitle readers are very likely to comprehend more of a filmic context with the aid of the image and the sound, as the subtitles of the dialogue is not the sole source of information. That is why I purposefully combine my subtitle analysis with a discussion of non-verbal information in order to understand how the verbal and the non-verbal interact and how they reach audiences together. On the other hand, subtitled films are bound to reveal foreign cultures and it is most natural for the English subtitles of Chinese films to contain Chinese cultural specifics. Of course there might be meta-textual factors, such as deadline and pay, which limit translators' exhibition of their mastery of

the source and the target languages and their translation skills. Yet, my suggestion is that translators should try to retain more Chinese cultural references in their subtitles, as long as it does not render the subtitles too long or evidently go against the language norms of English. Even if the relationship between the text and the viewer is imperfect and the text is not the only location of meaning (Eleftheriotis, 2010, pp.183-188), textual details are still critical and it will be translators' task to unravel them to the audiences.

Chapter Two Literature Review

Yellow Earth (Chen Kaige, 1984)

In 1984, a Chinese film shown at the Hong Kong Film Festival was said to have marked a new epoch of Chinese cinema (Yau, 1987-8/2006, p.202; Clark, 2005, p.1). Applauded widely, *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1984) garnered several international awards and was soon regarded as the stylistic breakthrough in new Chinese cinema (Yau, 1987-8/2006, p.201). It initiated significant debates within China about filmmaking and attracted the attention of international film scholars (ibid.). While keeping the original story of the screenplay, the young film crew have managed to include a troubling picture of Chinese feudal culture that had never been conjured up so vividly before by urban intelligentsia (Yau, 1987-8/2006, p.201). This film is deemed a very important milestone for Chinese cinema. 'If it hadn't been for *Yellow Earth*, then there couldn't have been the whole debate about film aesthetics, and there couldn't have been the overall progress that cinema has made (Yang, 1991, p.127).' *Yellow Earth* demonstrates a style that was non-existent before. Classical Chinese cinema embodies a melodramatic imagination which is culturally and historically specific, as it is closely connected to the morality of Confucian ethics, and constitutes a symbolic response to the socio-political effects of Western modernity, from capitalism to Marxism, on China (Ma, 2006, p.184). The filmmaker Chen Kaige also rejected the conventions of socialist realism and revolutionary romanticism that dominated the mainland Chinese cinema in the previous decades (Berry and Farquhar, 2006, p.103).

A distinct style is one of the major factors that distinguishes *Yellow Earth* from earlier films. Tony Rayns (1989) has pointed out the stylistic elements that render the film a major contribution to the development of Chinese cinema, which are: the use of large foregrounds that resemble the look of Shaanxi peasant paintings; the dwarfed people in the long shots under the vast sky or yellow loess²; a preference for traditional peasant songs against dialogue; and the natural light that gives interior shots a claustrophobic quality. The landscapes strike the audiences with their resemblance to a traditional Chinese art: scroll painting (Dai, 2002a; Yau, 1987-8/2006; Hitchcock, 2006), and dynamically links abstraction with realism. Presumably, the vast sky and the yellow loess are the most impressive and striking view in the film. Esther Yau (1987-8/2006) notes both the scroll-painting style and the 'non-perspectival' use of space that alludes to a Daoist thought: 'Silent is the roaring sound, formless is the image

² 'Loess is a geologically recent deposit of silt or material which is usually yellowish or brown in color and consisting of tiny mineral particles brought by wind to the places where they now lie (Anon, no date (a)).' The loess showcased in *Yellow Earth* is the oldest area where the Han Chinese civilisation began.

grand.' Yau (1989) argues that the adoption of Daoist elements of the quasi-scroll painting style aims at freeing Chinese cinema from the repeated classical mainland cinematic tradition. From the director Chen Kaige's own perspective, the film may be interpreted through critical symbols and principles of Daoist cosmology, which traditionally formulated and explained the human and natural worlds and their relations and comprise the philosophy for traditional Chinese art (Farquhar, 2002, p.221).

The director Chen Kaige and his young crew, including cinematographer Zhang Yimou, brought onto the international screen a version of Chinese people that are hardworking, hungry and benevolent peasants who look inactive but whose storage of vitality would be released in their struggles to survive and in their celebration of living (Yau, 1987-8/2006, p.201). Peter Hitchcock (2006, p.120) also discovers the enthusiasm buried in the heart of Chinese peasants, and refers to 'a series of equivocations that together disrupt the simple oppositions between representation and reality, collective desire and individualism, and revolution and reaction.'

With the different stylistic features and a seemingly open ending, this film alienated the then Chinese audiences who complained about not understanding the meaning. However, audiences were not the only ones that were alienated. Peter Hitchcock (2006, p.125) argues that *Yellow Earth* presents a contradiction that concentrates on the alienation of the artist from the Communist state, and on the radical disjunction between the intelligentsia and the agricultural masses of China. Meanwhile, the exotic rural landscape, peasant life and women's subjugation to the patriarchal economy constitute elements of the then new Chinese cinematic product which just began but was growing popular (Chow, 1990, p.96).

The cinematographer Zhang Yimou went on in his own directing career and made his international debut three years later. *Yellow Earth* might be a start of a new Chinese cinema and arguably signifies the birth of a group of particular Chinese directors. After this film, the group of the Fifth Generation Chinese directors achieved a fruitful filmmaking career that launched Chinese cinema to the world.

The Fifth Generation Chinese directors

What makes the 'Fifth Generation' different from earlier generations in the Communist Chinese cinema? The short answer is: the life-stories of its directors. (Rayns, 1991, p.106)

The Fifth Generation directors began their studies in the Beijing Film Academy in 1978 and graduated in 1982. The story of Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou and their fellow classmates, now considered the Fifth Generation Chinese directors, goes back to more than half a century ago.

From 1966 to 1976, the Communist Party of China started the Cultural Revolution, or the Great Revolution of the Proletarians. Re-education of urban youth by peasants in the countryside was encouraged by the Party during that time, and millions of young people from cities were sent to the countryside against their will. The children of the 'Five Black Categories' (黑五类, *hei wu lei*) – landlords, rich farmers, anti-revolutionists, bad-influencers and rightists (地富反坏右, *di fu fan huai you*) – were among the first to be sent away. After the Cultural Revolution, education across the country resumed and schools and colleges started to enrol students again. The Beijing Film Academy reopened in 1978 and the Fifth Generation was among its first post-Cultural Revolution intake.

The Fifth Generation had a different life story from earlier Chinese film directors (Ni, 2002; Dai, 2002; Clark, 2005; Larson, 2011). The future for the urban youths cast away in the countryside was far from hopeful. Those academy students who belong to the Fifth Generation had laboured in fields and quarries alongside peasants for years, and the reopening of the academy symbolised a lifeline for them to return to urbanity (Rayns, 1991, p.106). On the other hand, they were all born after 1949, the year when the People's Republic of China was established, and had no first-hand experience of the feudal society (*ibid.*). By contrast, what they experienced and their predecessors had not, was first-hand experience with peasants and a comprehensive grasp of the 'real-politik' of the Cultural Revolution that had been gained with massive exposure to didactic and monotonous theatre, cinema, fiction and painting during the revolution (*ibid.*). This experience has been shown in their films. For instance, Erxi in Zhang Yimou's *To Live* (1994) paints excellent portraits of Chairman Mao Zedong, so did Zhang himself (Qin, 2010, p.172).

In addition to Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou (*Red Sorghum*, 1987), Tian Zhuangzhuang (*On the Hunting Ground*, 1984; *Horse Thief*, 1985), Hu Mei (*Army Nurse*, 1985; *Faraway from War*, 1987), Zhang Nuanxin (*Drive to Win*, 1981; *Sacrificed Youth*, 1985) and Huang Jianzhong (*Black Cannon Incident*, 1986) were also among the first post-1976 graduates of the academy. The Fifth Generation could begin work as directors almost as soon as they graduated, whereas earlier graduates had waited for a long time until their 40s to direct their first feature (Dai, 2002; Ni, 2002). The reason is that the Fifth Generation were allotted small, regional studios where there were fewer directors waiting for work. Furthermore, the TV industry at that time was burgeoning, which provided work for newcomers to the industry. The older director Wu Tianming became head of Xi'an Film Studio and gave opportunities to young directors too (Dai, 2002; Ni, 2002).

Between 1949, the founding year of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and 1966, the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, this period is known as the Seventeen Years. During this time, major concerns of filmmakers were correct political bearing, the avoidance of restrictions imposed by the authorities and a subtle but noticeable freedom of filmic expression (Ward, 2011, p.93). Films that were popular among the public but politically incorrect or ambivalent could incur severe political criticism and might even lead a filmmaker or a star into imprisonment. For example, *The Life of Wu Xun* (Sun Yu, 1950), a popular and 'controversial' film, was accused of spreading feudal culture (Ward, 2011, p.88). Meanwhile, the films produced then appeared to be generally critiqued for specific features they share:

The new films have been criticised as formulaic in terms of subject matter and of limited artistic quality, suffering from static camerawork, stagey presentation, lack of profound literary content and the avoidance of any potentially confusing features, such as non-linear narratives or unexpected plot twists. (Ward, 2011, p.88)

The predecessors of the Fifth Generation, amongst whom were the Fourth Generation of filmmakers³, had generated an art form out of a search for personal memories in the midst of a political configuration, which is a 'spurious' style but the 'official' mainstream art (Dai, 2002a, p.13). The Fifth Generation, by contrast, portrayed the individual's trauma that was full of symbolic meanings. There is a strong Symbolic Order in the Fifth Generation films (*ibid.*, p.14, original capitalisation). The filmmakers/Sons became fatherless during the Cultural Revolution that witnessed a patricide in the name of the Father (*ibid.*, pp.14-15). The authorities and power-holders that were the Father – the 'capitalist class' - were enemies of the people and were obstacles to building the absolute authority of Mao Zedong and his thought, so these power-holders were overthrown by the Red Guards, who were youths that were motivated by the rebellious slogans and thoughts (*ibid.*, p.15). Even though the Fifth Generation was not in the centre of the Red Guard Movement and belonged to 'five black categories', they, too, 'drew a clear class line' against the Fathers and accepts rights and duties of Patricide (Dai, 2002a, p.17). Hanhan, the boy in *Yellow Earth*, is seen rushing against flows of people, which may metaphorically refer to the Fifth Generation's drudgery of creating a new style and Order (*ibid.*, p.19). However, *Red Sorghum* represents the Fifth Generation's coming-of-age (*ibid.*, p.33). The Grandpa/Hero/Son not only replaces the Father but also becomes a leader in a cultural combat where the national culture wins over the alien/Japanese, and in the process of establishing the New Order, the Fifth Generation looked for a salvation for national memory and culture (*ibid.*, pp.44-45).

³ The Fourth Generation directors refer to the directors who graduated before or during the Cultural Revolution and began to direct films after 1979 (Dai, 2002, p.47).

Chen Kaige once said that he described his interest in filmmaking as that of 'reform' (1995, p.79). The notion of reform tells much in the discussion of Chinese cinema, and derives from what Rey Chow (1995, p.81) calls the 'politics of identity-formation', 'that is a politics that confers upon the "other" the right to exist by a taxonomic differentiation such as is often intended by the ethnic label "Chinese"' (Chow, 1995, p.81). This gives the right to the West to ethnically categorise Chinese landscapes, national memories and culture as simply 'Chinese'. This also naturally assumes that every Chinese-like phenomenon should be instantaneously intelligible for the Chinese audience. Nevertheless, Chinese critics argue that the 'other' is also trapped in the effort to understand the other (Wang, 1989, p.35). For instance, the landscapes in *Yellow Earth* are equally alien, remote and 'other-looking' to the average urban Chinese, whereas the 'Western' mind would identify the ethnic difference as a presumably unified Chineseness, as if the hard work of understanding the Chineseness is immediately resolved with the ethnic label.

The Chineseness is an 'othered' China for the foreign gaze, which looks all the more delicious and tempting, and the truth is that the Fifth Generation films had almost immediate overseas success. After winning awards in various international film festivals, the expensive nature of this form of art pushed those filmmakers to seek investment and financial support from overseas sources (Dai, 2002b, p.50). This, to some extent, resulted in them reconstructing their narrative subjects in order to produce pictures that were palatable and intelligible for international film festival judges (ibid.). Thus, elements like the dye mill in *Ju Dou* (Zhang Yimou, 1990) and the claustrophobic square courtyard in *Raise the Red Lantern* (Zhang Yimou, 1991) that create an exotic, othered Chineseness and the effort to meet the projected foreign expectations caused the Fifth Generation films to fall to another extreme: they display an imaginary pre-industrial China that appear different but not at all alien to the Western gaze (Wang, 1989, p.36; Dai, 2002b, p.50). Previously, thanks to the close relation between the new-born PRC and the former Soviet Union, China to a large extent adopted the ethical and didactic Soviet cinematic tradition, only to aggravate during the Cultural Revolution (Wang, 1987, p.37). There is no doubt that the Fifth Generation filmmakers had been exhausted by the ideological dogmatism and been in search of alternatives to the then cinematic formulae (Wang, 1987, p.37). However, the critics of the Fifth Generation's pursuit of cinematic alternatives which is deplored as imitations of Western cinematic repertoire, are confronted with the fact that, a national cinematic tradition can hardly be rid of the influence of the Warner Brothers or the Soviet Union (Wang, 1989, p.37). Early Fifth Generation filmic texts also represent ambiguity or elusiveness in the ways of reading them (Berry, 1994). *Yellow*

Earth, for instance, contrasts with classic didactic film narrative, but still lead the audience to realise the seeming praise of the CCP army's effect in changing peasants' lives, which is possibly why it passed the Film Bureau's censorship (Berry, 1994, p.102).

The Fifth Generation received higher education in the Academy after China started its social and economic reform, and thus were in the presence of large openness of the world and the Western 'Other' is increasingly felt (Wang, 1989, p.34). As Wang (ibid.) puts it, 'The premise rings true that only when one feels oneself encouraged by a permeating force from the Other is one alert to the integrity of one's Self; and only when one is uncertain about the Self does one feel promoted to self-examination.' The rural, unfamiliar backdrops to an urban intelligentsia in *Yellow Earth*, *On the Hunting Ground* (Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1985), *Horse Thief* (Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1986), etc., are part of the Fifth Generation's exploration and investigation of cultural identity. On the one hand, the overwhelming power and the material affluence of the West might show a future scenario of China. On the other hand, the Chinese sensibility also sought its Self in a more primitive Other within its own geographical realm. The Fifth Generation's early works incessantly looked for a cultural identity engaged in self-examination.

The Fifth Generation were also questioned for their narrative impotence in the Fifth Generation films (Zhu and Robinson, 2010, p.146). The filmmakers' later works like Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou* and *Raise the Red Lantern* as well as Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) all have richer storylines and more evident conflicts. Presumably, the last Fifth Generation film was Tian Zhuangzhuang's *Horse Thief* (1986), which is demonstrated by the portrayal of ethnic minority and rural backdrops, non-commercial nature and state funding (Gladney, 1995/2002, pp.201-202). Tian's documentary-like films failed to become box office successes, which might be related to his claim at the beginning of his career that he was 'making films for the audiences of the next century (Zhu and Robinson, 2010, p.153).'

Berry (1991, p.122) mentions that three audiences have to be satisfied in China: the government, the art world and the ordinary popular audience, which respectively requested 'reform films', 'exploratory' films and 'kung fu' and detective films. It is apparently hard to meet the expectations from more than one side, but some Fifth Generation directors have succeeded in winning the favour of more than one of the three audiences.

Zhang Yimou

Zhang Yimou created an elaborate and expressive national mythology that aimed at superseding the cultural dilemma of allegorical self-entanglement facing the Fifth Generation. (Dai, 2002b, p.52)

Zhang Yimou was concerned with the Fifth Generation's story-telling capacity, and was eager to combine their filmic exploration with a classical plot structure (Zhu and Robinson, 2010, p.146). He made his own move when the Fifth Generation was faced with the Self-seeking journey and the immediate critique of history (Dai, 2002b, p.53). He managed to merge story-telling into a historical narrative (ibid.). In his three early films, *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou* (1990) and *Raise the Red Lantern*, each has an unreasonable, domineering older male figure that manifests feudal oppressiveness, and this morbid oppression is symbolised by the contrast with exquisite colours in the depiction of 'backwardness', for example, the colour red that is almost omnipresent in all three films, not to mention the architecture, furniture, food, utensils and costumes (Chow, 1995, p.143). For instance, *Raise the Red Lantern* was shot in a mansion-turned museum. The lanterns were not only of oriental appeal but a clue of the film narrative (Dai, 2002b, p.58). In some respects, Zhang's three films constituted a new kind of ethnography that offered its research result in the form of cinema rather than books or museum exhibition (Chow, 1995, p.143). Considering that some ethnic practices and customs in his films were invented, his use of things, characters and narratives aims at a collective, hallucinatory signification of 'ethnicity' (Chow, 1995, p.144).

Zhang's early films have been accused of a 'lack of depth' and for some critics, the beauty of Zhang's films is a sign of his attempt to pander to the tastes of foreigners (Wu, 1988, p.85; Li, 1989, p.113; Dai, 1993, p.336; Chow, 1995, p.151; Dai, 2002b, p.57). The strong visual features tend to reach across borders, but the films are only distinctively Chinese for a small percentage of Chinese audiences (Clark, 1989, p.121). This is like the aforementioned unfamiliarity of the loess landscape for urban Chinese viewers of *Yellow Earth*. A similar fact is that general Chinese audiences may not be well-informed of the culture in every part of China or every period of Chinese history represented in a Chinese film. The so-called 'lack of depth' in Zhang's films also shows the contrast to Chen Kaige's depth. Nevertheless, Chow (1995, p.161) argues that, 'Whereas Zhang makes the maximal use of the limited but predominant mode of time on the screen to construct the kinds of images that would be accessible to a large number of people, in Chen's films there is... a fundamental distrust of the positivity of screen images.' Juxtaposed with Zhang, Chen brings in more Daoism thinking and understanding of the presence that symbolises *xu* (虛) or an emptiness (ibid.). 'In Chen's films, blanks signify and

silences speak: this is why they invited *interpretation* (italicised in the source) (Chow, 1995, p.161).’ A philosophical interpretation is requested in viewing Chen’s films and the kind of demanding attentiveness excluded a large crowd of audiences (ibid.). On the contrary, Zhang saves audiences the effort of digging into philosophical depth and the film-viewing becomes a sole enjoyable leisure, which is probably the key to his commercial success.

Zhang’s films demonstrate dazzling colour design and the visuality projects ‘strange’ customs, costumes, architecture and artefacts for both international and Chinese audiences. However, Mayfair Yang (2001, p.40) comments that ‘Zhang makes his tragedies very beautiful in *Red Lantern*.’ The visual elements become dubious for diluting or even aestheticizing the tragedy (Qin, 2010, p.173). Qin (2010) illustrates this suspicion with the foot massage scene in *Raise the Red Lantern*. Although receiving a foot massage represents a power competition among the wives, the main female character Songlian played by Gong Li is seen mesmerised by this competitive service which is only enjoyed by the master’s most desired wife and her face manifests an enjoyable sensual pleasure which may not be highly compatible with the struggle and patriarchal oppression of the women.

Zhang has been taken by some in China as an exemplary instance of the wilful surrender of Third World cinema to the Orientalist gaze, as a classic case of the subjugation of Third World culture to Western hegemony (Chang, 2009, p.10).’ However, since the pattern of ‘othering’ has been used by the non-West to construct their own cultural and historical identity, such arguments assume the self-orientalising and self-othering position and follow a ‘reactive’ rather than an active posture in theorising China-related issues (Beus, 2008, p.310). Despite Chow’s (1995) discussion of the characteristics of Zhang’s film and her categorisation of his works as ‘autoethnography’ or ‘self-anthropologization’, she does not encourage an Orientalist reading of his works (Chang, 2009, pp.17-18). In Chang’s (2009, pp.17-18) interpretation of Chow in ‘Globalized Chinese cinema and localized Western theory’, Chow proposes reading Zhang’s work in terms of cultural translation, which is essential to promote global/local interaction and share cultural products, as cultural translation is not the same as surrendering to Western cultural hegemony or to dissolute local difference. ‘In order for local cultural difference to be understood and accepted, Chinese filmmakers and critics alike cannot insist on their privilege of interpreting Chinese culture for the Chinese, but must learn to expect and appreciate a local conversation with the world in film as well as in scholarship (ibid.).’ Also, in ‘Filming China: Zhang Yimou’s shifting visual politics’, Chan (2013) contends that to argue that Zhang’s self-conscious and self-orientalism is no more than selling out Chinese culture for Western consumption is to neglect the multilateral and multi-dimensional nature of cultural

flows. It is not so desirable to separate what is 'Chinese' from what the West wants to see (ibid.).

Early on from the beginning of his filmmaking career, Zhang publicly announced his interest in finding a middle way between art cinema and the commercial blockbuster (Wang, 1991, p.92). A film like *Red Sorghum* is not only motivated by a historical investigation or cultural and aesthetic visions, but also by a desire to meet the audience's spectatorial approval (ibid.). In due course, contrary to his repressed and introspective nature, his own 'liberation' or 'abandonment' is achieved in the making of *Red Sorghum*. 'My personality is quite the contrary to the mood of the film. I have long been repressed, restrained, enclosed and introspective. Once I had a chance to make a film on my own, I wanted to make it liberated, abandoned (cited in Wang, 1991, p.100).' Zhang's films also display a defiance which is also a sign of resistance against power and his resistance is consistently being externalised (Chow, 1995, p.168). For example, Jiu'er in *Red Sorghum* unfemininely assumes her dead leper husband's distillery and openly allows another man into her widowed life (ibid.). Songlian in *Raise the Red Lantern* fakes her pregnancy and seeks revenge on her maidservant Yan'er who exposes her lie. In exposing Yan'er's own 'illegitimate' secrecy, Songlian's revenge and Yan'er's unapologetic and silently violent defiance causes Yan'er's debilitation and death.

On the other hand, Li (2007, p.298) regards the symbolic patricide in *Red Sorghum* as a deliberate mediation of China's material present of the 1980s rather than Zhang's prehistoric escape outside society.

'If the biological father of Grandma stands for the arbitrary authority of ancient feudalism, the Big Head Li, the Big Boss of the winery, who exists in the name of the Father but never appears on the screen, serves as an invisible trope of historical communism/socialism. Both are patriarchal hierarchies steeped in hereditary succession, whether through actual blood lineage or revolutionary heritage. Like the removal of wild sorghum that stands in Grandpa and Grandma's libidinal fulfilment, the inhumanity and unreason of patrilineal political economies must also be eradicated on their road to heaven (ibid.).'

Li (ibid.) considers the film as Zhang's active participation in the 1980s Chinese cultural reflection from feudalism to socialism while leaving aside semi-colonial and semi-capitalist past. Creating an Oedipal hero in the Chinese context is an unambiguous disavowal of a deeply rooted system as well as an enthusiastic introduction/endorsement of 'a system of transparent commodity exchange based on the voluntary alienation as well as vigorous competition of labor via the boundless market (ibid.).'

Later on, Zhang also made films that reflected social issues, such as *The Story of Qiuju* (1995) and *Not One Less* (1999). These films seem to have avoided pampering to the taste of international audiences, and thus were welcomed by the Chinese authorities (Chow, 2003, p.145). However, the poverty portrayed in them may become another case of oriental exoticism (ibid.). The poor Chinese countryside and the unsatisfactory situation of farmers and their children seem to, once again, prove the scenario which has been titled 'Chineseness'. Interestingly, Ebert (1993) notes that the film would be more obviously humorous if made in America. Silbergeld (1999) also argues that *The Story of Qiuju* seemed to have disappointed audiences and critics in America, not because they missed the mentioning of Chinese law, but the sarcastic tone at moments in the film unobvious to non-Chinese viewers.

Zhang's film of the year 2000, *Happy Times*, according to Li (2007, p.302), is not an allegory of able bodies achieving autonomy in the competitive market. As the fundamental status of ethics in China and elsewhere has been increasingly acquired by neoliberal economics, Zhang is more concerned about the threat to older forms of social collectivity and about the role of cinema in cultivating 'more humane and enabling communities' (ibid.). *Happy Times*, along with *Red Sorghum*, can be juxtaposed with China's developmental trajectory to emphasise Zhang's dilemma about China's opening to global capitalism (ibid., pp.294-295),

The liberalization of the Chinese economy and the revolution of Reagan and Thatcher are not just historical coincidences in different parts of the planet. Rather, they are expressive of an ascending cross-border consensus of culture after the end of the Cold War and the near disappearance of alternative political economies. If the persuasive power of this neoliberal common sense resets on its radical promise of individual sovereignty and ruthless denial of social necessity, the value of Zhang lies in his earnest and often ambivalent mediation of this cultural logic, sometimes through affirmation and assimilation while other times through questioning and opposition. (ibid.)

Thus, Zhang's cinema is a clairvoyant grasp of globalisation in its contradictions, which is also the auteur's framing of liberty and community against his rapidly changing nation (ibid.). However, as Chan (2013) notices, when the film subjects become more realistic and contemporary, the mode of address becomes more dubious. The mode of address of *Happy Times* encourages Chinese audiences to see the gentle and caring relationship between a middle-aged man and a young blind girl and the story is acknowledged by Scott (2002) as 'wise, gentle and sad'. However, Chan (2013) mentions that the narrative is on the verge of discussing social taboos, but it is by no means a Lolita story. In the meantime, Ebert (2002) points out how unimaginable the relationship can be if the film were Hollywood. Considering Ebert's (ibid.) notion of the film being 'creepy beyond all reason' rather than a compassionate

and affectionate comedy, he assumes that the American critics who have praised the film have made concessions to the original culture of the film.

Apart from a focus on social issues, Zhang has long cherished the idea of making blockbusters and/or martial art films, and his blockbuster attempts began with the action films in the late 1980s (Zhu, 2010, p.205). After the mixed reviews of *Codename Cougar* (1988) and *Shanghai Triad* (1995), eventually *Hero* (2002) became a box office success (ibid.). It apparently won the favour of internationally acclaimed director Quentin Tarantino. 'Acclaimed by critics and honoured with numerous international film awards, this motion picture was nominated for both an Oscar and a Golden Globe as Best Foreign Language Film (2002).'⁴ Nevertheless, domestic audiences enthusiastically saw it, but complained about it, as 'the watered-down, "acted-up" fight scenes provoked anger and irreverent laughter among Zhang's domestic audience (Zhu, 2010, p.205).' Many audiences did not appreciate the well-arranged non-linear narrative either (ibid., p.206). Again, *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) received similar box office success and lukewarm response from native audiences (Zhu, 2010, p.206). The two both incorporate lavish visual elements and cinematography. Yet, unlike the intricate plot of *Hero*, the storylines of *House* and *Curse* are thin and over-simple (Zhu, 2010, p.206). The box office success may also be owed to the stars' appeal and successful marketing strategies (ibid.). Since Zhang made a sensational presence in the international market with his 'red' films, he has been conscious of combining art and commerce, and whether he has bridged the gap in between is hard to say (Zhu, 2010, p.206). However, Braester (2005) maintains that filmmakers like Zhang are also considered cultural brokers who erase the distinction between ideological and commercial cinema as well as between art and market-driven media.

The Cultural Revolution has been a topic which Zhang keeps coming back to: *To Live, The Road Home* (1999), *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010) and *Coming Home* (2014). In contrast to the banned *To Live, The Road Home* has no strong political inclination and thus no obstacle in censorship, so it may be considered merely a simple love story for international film festivals. *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is similarly a pure love story set in the chaotic period of time in China. What has distinguished this film from most of the rest of his work is the limited range of colours he has used. The plain and pale colour palette adds up to the overall purity and innocence which characterise the love story *per se*. One criticism of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*

⁴ This is written on the box of the DVD released by Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2005.

is directed towards his story-telling capacity again, as the simplification of a novella into a film script renders the story less convincing (Wang, 2011, pp.100-101).

One of Zhang's latest films, *The Flowers of War* (2011), is situated within the framework of constructing a 'new' image of China for global audiences by Yang (2014, p.247), as the ambivalent reinvention of Hollywood's white saviour tale in contemporary Chinese cinema reflects a cultural anxiety to encompass China's nationalist discourses into an 'all-embracing consumerism'.

At the historical moment when many globally-minded Hollywood studios are incorporating Asian talents and Eastern aesthetics to impress Chinese audiences, Chinese cinema is utilising the classic Hollywood paradigm to 'export' Chinese stories to the world. Nonetheless, its adoption of Hollywood-style storytelling is subject to a postcolonial critique for its possible complicity in perpetuating the West's Orientalist discourses about China. (Yang, 2014, pp.257-258)

The narrative momentum betrays Zhang's self-imposed obligation to pay tribute to Hollywood's tradition of interracial romance, when the character Yu Mo oddly refers to the US as 'home', which implies a spiritual submission to the faraway West (ibid.). Yang (ibid.) also contends that the subjection of a powerful Chinese woman to white masculinity demonstrate the film's ideological manoeuvring, 'which is aimed at pandering to a Western desire for the Oriental.' However, on the other hand, Zhang, undeniably, fulfils the role of a cultural broker again. Selling out or not, he skilfully took his own path to navigate a Chinese story to international audiences and enable the film to cross borders.

Transnationalism and production

In Wang's (2009) re-recognition of Chinese cinema in 'Made in China, sold in the United States, and vice versa', Wang problematizes the epistemological model based on the subject-object, Self-Other binary but refocuses on the interweaving transactions and mutual constitution. The scope of Chinese cinema exhibited to the international audience points to studying the role of western exhibition in reconstituting Chinese cinema (ibid., p.163). The border-crossing that constitutes the conditions of transnational Chinese cinema is seldom neutral or free-flowing but involves border politics (ibid.).

The considerable output of transnational Chinese films in recent years has been accompanied by the studies on transnational Chinese cinema. The debates surrounding the key of re-recognising the 'Chinese' dimension of Chinese cinema as not a national or regional identity, but an element, a style or a signifier that can contribute to the creation of an audiovisual 'recipe' that may maximise a film's marketability (Wang, 2009, p.173). Lu (1997) once

introduces the plural form of 'Chinese cinema' to 'counter any monolithic understanding of Chinese cinema'. By contrast, Berry and Pang (2008) continue with the singular form in order to 'recognize the increasing move away from that monolithic model, but in the form of transnational linkages'. According to Wang (2009, p.173), '...the increasing transnational linkages do not necessarily produce a proliferating repertoire of Chinese cinemas, but rather induce a body of works that intersect with and inflect upon each other. The singular form reconfigures "difference" as interconnectivity, positional difference and situation-specific tactics of differentiation/labelling.'

While the monolithic model of understanding transnational Chinese cinema is obsolete and the existence of transnational linkages is being highlighted, Zhang (2010, p.138) mentions in 'Transnationalism and translocality in Chinese cinema' that what current media customarily promote as transnational blockbusters may be more accurately referred to as translocal productions.

This is not just because companies involved in joint financing and production are simply not national enterprises, but are rather private businesses located in cosmopolitan cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei, Tokyo, and Seoul; this is also because these companies, together with their multinational film crews and cast, do not always represent the nations or national cultures involved. For example, *The Promise* (Wuji; Chen Kaige, 2005) was coproduced by companies based in mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea, but it doesn't necessarily represent these nations; neither does Korean star Dong-Kun Jang represent Korea nor does Japanese star Hiroyuki Sanada represent Japan. Similarly, the film's composer Klaus Badelt does not stand for Germany, nor does his musical score reflect the German tradition. (ibid.)

Therefore, to label a film such as *The Promise* simply as transnational is not without problems.

To conceptualize a blockbuster film like *The Promise* as unproblematically "transnational" is to insist on paying lip service to nationality as a necessary geopolitical marker at a time when the frequent cross-border traffic of capital and people has significantly diminished the centrality of the nation-state and has conversely strengthened connections further down on the geographic scale, at multiple localities. (Zhang, 2010, p.138)

Zhang Yimou's *Hero* also involves the geographical border-crossing of capital and joint production. According to Stringer and Yu (2007, p.241), *Hero* emerges as a Chinese film in dialogue with Hollywood, in regard to the commercial rise of the current PRC film industry, the potential decline of Hollywood or the degree to which the Chinese and US film industries compete or cooperate with each other, the extent to which Zhang has 'sold out' and finally the return of Jet Li to the mainland Chinese film industry. Zhang's *Hero* is not just criticised for selling out, but is also hounded for peddling PRC state-induced nationalism (ibid., p.240). On

the contrary, in spite of the prestige of Zhang as the director and the stellar stars from mainland China and Hong Kong and the diametrically Chinese subject, it is still hard to forget the conspicuous engagement of the personnel from other countries, if audiences do not go as far as to deem the film as unlike any other Chinese *wuxia* film produced before it (ibid., p.248).

What is truly remarkable about *Hero* as a transnational work and a successful one is related to the fact that Quentin Tarantino presented it to American audiences. 'Quentin Tarantino Presents' is clearly written at the top of the US DVD case, the font size of which is the same as that of Jet Li - the leading and internationally known star – and bigger than that of the names of the rest of the main cast, despite their prestige in Greater China. However, the director's name is nowhere to be found on the front of the case. On the back, the short summary of the plot, which mentions 'a warrior', 'an empire' and 'a nation', fails to specify which empire and nation it is. Jet Li's name is the only element that is connected to China.

It is through these kinds of means that Hollywood continues to do what Hollywood has always done – namely absorb world cinema and sell it back to the rest of the world in a new, often more expensive and certainly more 'American' version... Preliminary investigation of research materials suggests therefore that the Chinese marketing of *Hero* emphasises the film's Chinese dimensions, but that marketing in the US erases all signs of national specificity. (Stringer and Yu, 2007, pp.244-245)

In 'Made in China, sold in the United States, and vice versa', Wang (2009, pp.169-170) also states that the film needed someone like Tarantino to mediate and to be introduced to the American audience, and Zhang was aware of the significance and necessity of collaboration, albeit the power inequity. Thus, it is important to contemplate the intricate interactions between the original authorship and Tarantino's 'symbolic' authorship, rather than only consider Tarantino's involvement as a form of neo-colonial appropriation, regarding the extent to which 'such symbolic authorship reshapes Chinese cinema in the transnational theatre (ibid., p.168).'

A similar example of overseas distribution is the Hong Kong film *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar Wai, 1994). Compared to the Hong Kong trailer that showcases the recognisability of the cast, the director and his style, mitigating geopolitical specificity and narrative homogeneity, the US trailer starts with the films' 'Hong Kongness' and proceeds to make it universal, 'legible, digestible and desirable' to American audiences (Wang, 2009, p.165). As the trailer ambiguously eliminates all dialogue, whether the film is subtitled, dubbed or originally in English remains unknown (ibid.). B. Ruby Rich (2004, pp.157-160) refers to this marketing strategy as 'bait and switch' which began with the US marketing of Kurosawa Akira's *Ran* (1985), while the 'no-foreign-tongue trailer' strategy was adopted by Miramax during the

1990s. Rich (2004, pp.157-160) observes that the strategy is mainly driven by two incentives. The illusion is that the film could be in English where there is no need to read subtitles or listen to awkward and distractive dubbing. Audiences can be drawn to the cinema and may stay till the end of the film even if they finally realise the trap. The other reason that Rich mentions is the faster cutting and the music video culture in the 1990s. Therefore, Wang (2009, p.166) believes that the marketing of *Chungking Express* reveals strategic domestication and foreignisation, and Quentin Tarantino and his Rolling Thunder Pictures played an excellent role of the 'surrogate parent' by aligning the film with the 'Euro-American connoisseur taste' and contemporary American cult culture, and by staying independent of Hollywood commercial cinema. Looking back at *Hero*, the official trailer on the website of Miramax includes an English narration, manifesting the story about a warrior who rises up against an empire, its army and deadly assassins. This gives the impression that the film could be originally in English, or dubbed into English at least, despite sounding awkward. Again, the visual exoticism is emphasised, whereas the burden of reading subtitles is minimised.

Dubbing, according to Ascheid (1997, p.33), is a denationalising process.

Dubbing as a practice therefore renders considerations of authenticity and originality in the area of film translation meaningless, as the dubbed motion picture becomes a new and fundamentally recontextualized product in the process. Consequently, the employment of dubbing as a translation technique must be seen as transforming the original into a blueprint, which shifts its status from that of a finished and culturally specific text to that of a transcultural denationalized raw material, which is to be reinscribed into a new cultural context via the dubbing process. (ibid.)

Such a process removes cultural specificity, which is similar to subtitling. Wang (2009, p.170) notices that subtitles of dialogue are almost always in Standard English, leaving many non-Chinese audiences an impression of unity and transparency concerning semantics. While retaining the original audio, subtitling sheds the unpredictability, making a film homogenous, coherent and legible (ibid.). The unprecedented international success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* can be attributed to the domestication and linguistic removal of contradiction, heterogeneity and geopolitical frictions (ibid., p.171). However, the original of Zhang's *Hero* is already dubbed for the mainland Chinese audience, which converges with Miramax's domestication of the film for the US market (ibid.). Therefore, neither non-Chinese audiences nor Chinese audiences is given an opportunity to see China's heteroglossia in the film, and in the meantime, neither version preserves the original but rather 'producing undisrupted audiovisual pleasure, generic appeal and expanded marketability' (ibid.).

As Wang (ibid., p.172) puts it,

In this loop of production and circulation, the Chinese media capital is inevitably folded into a worldwide matrix in which what is 'Chinese' and 'different' about Chinese cinema becomes 'Chinese elements' (*Zhongguo yuansu*) that are extracted and freely combined with other components. The resultant film is a cultural and industrial product that is adapted and sensitive to multiple needs and desires.

A transnational or translocal production like *Hero* carries Chinese aspects that are contained in all Chinese films, while the transnational border-crossing process is marked by a variety of internationalised elements. Culture crosses borders with the film in the transnational life of the film, which also entails a cultural translation process.

Cultural translation and cross-cultural analysis

After the Fifth Generation Chinese films appeared, foreign scholars began their attempt to understand and analyse those films. In 'Problematizing Cross-Cultural Analysis: The Case of Women in the Recent Chinese Cinema', E. Ann Kaplan (1989/2006, p.157) expresses her doubts about applying Western frameworks/theories/ideologies on *the Other*, specifically women, in the Chinese films made in the 1980s. She states her main three concerns. Firstly, Chinese film research has two distinct audiences – American/European community and Chinese intellectuals. She wonders whether Chinese scholars need to discuss films for American/European audiences and Chinese audiences separately in two ways, and what are the actual different critical paradigms between the two audiences. Secondly, when American film theorists analyse Chinese films, do they enforce a new form of cultural imperialism? Thirdly, can theories formulated under particular national/historical/cultural circumstances be directly transferred to the analysis of national/cultural issues in a different context (Kaplan, 1989/2006, p.157)?

Cross-cultural analysis, we know, is difficult – fraught with danger. We are forced to read works produced by the Other through the constraints of our own frameworks/theories/ideologies. ... Are such analyses in danger of becoming 'a new form of cultural imperialism, when ... institutionalized in various college courses on Asian cinema?' or can we learn something from such readings? (Kaplan, 1989/2006, p.157)

What Ning Ma (1989) contends seems to be loosely connected to Kaplan's first concern. Ma (*ibid.*, p.22) mentions the need of a cross-cultural perspective in Asian cinema criticism. In the attempt at understanding Asian tradition/culture via cultural texts, i.e. film, a kind of dialogical engagement with Asian life is required (*ibid.*). Therefore, the horizons of the Western-thinking subject in traditional approach will arrive at a dialogue with those of the Other, so that the interpretation process becomes more comprehensive and perhaps more rational (*ibid.*). Back to Kaplan's deep fear, the 'danger' of cross-cultural reading is manifested in the habit of

interpreting the Third World in regard to 'what it does not have but wants to have'. This makes Third World⁵ texts always confirm what makes sense for the First World and them alone (Chow, 1990, pp.85-86). This also links to the famous 'national allegory' remarks made by Fredric Jameson.

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. ... Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*. (Original italics) (Jameson, 1986, p.69)

Jameson's argument does have an important point. He refers to one of the most renowned Chinese authors, Lu Xun. Since primary school, Chinese students have to learn texts written by Lu Xun. His writing records Chinese history and the life, struggle, dilemma, weakness and hope of Chinese people, as in his short story 'Medicine' (药, yao). That seems to have become a weakness of his writing *per se*, as it condenses allegories of the Chinese nation into the life stories of a few fictional characters, according to Jameson. What is more ridiculing is that this kind of 'national allegorical' writing appears to only apply to a Third World country like China. And yet, it is not to be disregarded that American literature and cinema also refer to romances set during the Civil War or after the Pearl Harbour bombings. The highly applauded American dream is not to be called a type of national allegory, as if only the Third World is subject to a discussion of life struggle, hardship and suffering. This seems to be why national allegory only suits what is not First World but conforms to the pre-existing understandings of the First World.

In Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto's (1991/2006, p.29) opinion, E. Ann Kaplan's cross-cultural analytic essay is nonlinear and reflexive, or in Kaplan's (1989/2006, p.156) own word – tentative, but this tentativeness of informal discourse would be valid if she lived in China and became an expert in Chinese culture, since she mentions Chris Berry is not tentative, as he has lived in China and knows the culture and language. Nevertheless, Yoshimoto (1991/2006, p.30) criticises the model of cross-cultural exchange as what Gayatri Spivak calls typical 'arrogance of the radical European humanist conscience, which will consolidate itself by imagining the other,

⁵ 'First World' and 'Third World' are used in the above discussion, because for all their problems, they imply the ownership of or exclusion from decision-making power and a suppressive or oppressive experience of global development; the dichotomy of North-South is even less accurate owing to the economic and political power of Australia (Shohat and Stam, 1994, p.27). Moreover, 'Third World Cinema' overall refers to the productions from Asia, Africa and Latin America, which is minoritarian in the First World (ibid.), hence the choices of the terms.

or, as Sartre puts it, 'redo in himself the other's project,' through the collection of information.' Other than Kaplan's essay, with the widespread foreign intellectuals' own critical position and distance from the non-Western culture in the postmodern West, postmodern critical ethnography has raised an awareness of 'the "radical European [or American] humanist conscience" that claims to know the Other based on the authenticity of experience and self-claimed deep understanding of the Other's culture (Yoshimoto, 1991/2006, p.30).'

Kaplan's tentativeness makes sense, but not just because she has not lived in China. The difference that living in a particular foreign country makes is that an individual learns to feel what the local people's *de facto* concerns are. Kaplan launched her cross-cultural analysis via new Chinese Women's cinema in the 1980s, particularly *Army Nurse*. Kaplan (2006, p.158) mainly examines her concerns from the perspectives of female desire, sexual difference and subjectivity and whether the Chinese cinema stems from 'the same psychoanalytic desire for replacing the lost object', and 'the right to work, to equal pay, to equal participation in the work force' become part of the problematic subjectivity. However, in 'Chinese Women's Cinema: Introduction', Chris Berry (1989, p.5) maintains that Chinese women's issues in Chinese women's eyes may have a different focus, and feminist concerns are culturally specific. Directors of the Chinese Women's cinema in the 1980s were largely unaware of Western feminism; female director Zhang Nuanxin who directed *Sacrificed Youth* was once surprised to learn that Western women also had difficulties entering the filmmaking profession, which she took for granted in China (ibid.). The prominent issues in the women's films are not equality in the broad social sphere but the reassertion of difference and the valuation of the personal (Berry, 1989, p.6). Therefore, what the experience of living in China tells a Westerner is that, what matters for the West may matter less in China or at least in a different way, and what the West think we need in China may have a different focus from the one they have.

An ineluctable question is whether cross-cultural analysis can really contribute to a cultural exchange between two cultures equally, to the understanding of the Other without making it fit to the assumptions of the scholars' own culture, or to a non-dominating way of knowing the Other (Yoshimoto, 1991/2006, p.29). Cross-cultural exchange between the West and the non-West has never been voluntary, and the shape of relation between the two has always been in political, economic and cultural domination of the non-West by the West (Yoshimoto, 1991/2006, p.31). The notions of cross-cultural analysis/exchange are ideologically problematic, for first, 'the questionable, complicit division of national cinema scholarship between history and theory' has been concealed; and secondly, the 'specular relation between the Western theory and the non-Western practice' is strengthened (Yoshimoto, 1991/2006,

p.32). In regard to the relation between the Western theory and the non-Western practice, Yoshimoto gives the example of the case of Ozu Yasujiro being problematically called a 'modernist' filmmaker by David Bordwell/Kristin Thompson, and maintains that the question of Ozu's modernity cannot be answered unless we carefully take into account the specificities of Japanese cinema, social formations and history. Yoshimoto also mentions Scott Nygren's attempts on cross-cultural exchange between Japan and the West from a 'postmodern perspective'. Nygren proposes a mutual exchange where traditional Japanese culture gave inspiration to Western modernists as much as Western humanism had a deconstructive impact on feudal aspects of the Japanese society. Yoshimoto (1991/2006, p.32) gathers that Noel Burch's construction of Japan as a utopia and Other, and that the supplement status of Japan is safely contained within the epistemological limit of the West. Furthermore, Julianne Burton (cited in Yoshimoto, 1991/2006, p.32) attempts to appropriate Third World cinema to Western critical discourse and labels the former 'marginal' and the latter 'mainstream'. On the one hand, she criticises the *naïveté* of Third World filmmakers who work on unmediated transparency of meaning, while on the other, she plays a mediator that goes between high Western theory and Third-World practice (*ibid.*).

The general question of knowing and understanding the culture of the Other leads us to the pictures of some seemingly much smaller questions. What is the easiest to grasp in a film from an unfamiliar culture are the visual elements, but still many elements on the screen that are culturally familiar and intelligible for Chinese viewers are simply ignored by the non-Chinese. These elements can easily slip through unnoticed, but they can be well related to the theme and plot. In *Ju Dou*, a film character says '子孙满堂' (*zisun man tang*), literally meaning 'children and grandchildren fill the house', but, as a matter of fact, he is also reading the phrase written on the lanterns the listener is holding, and reading to the listener who is old but desperately wants children, as a good wish. The Chinese phrase has been translated into 'Go, make children' in one of the English versions⁶. Maybe this translation was owing to the translator's inability to read Chinese characters or her unawareness of their existence. What non-Chinese audiences see with this translation would be quite a different situation, as the imperative sentence shows an upper-hand-ness from the speaker's side, which is untrue.

Chinese cinema alongside other Third World cinema has been peripheral for decades. Nonetheless, globalisation accounts for a mutual understanding between the 'marginal' and the 'mainstream', be it an unbiased division or not. Hopefully, a cultural translation of Chinese

⁶ *Ju Dou* (Zhang Yimou, 1990).

cinema can carry it through a cultural/ideological/epistemological gap greater than the Pacific Ocean. Filmmakers often refer to Daoist philosophies to explain their films and scholars often mention those philosophies in their analyses. Esther Yau (1987-8/2006, p.203) quotes from Chen Kaige 'Silent is the Roaring Sound, Formless is the Image Grand'⁷ in her '*Yellow Earth: Western Analysis and a Non-Western Text*'. Yau analyses the limited range of colour usage, natural lighting and a non-perspectival use of filmic space with this Daoist notion. Mary Farquhar (2002, p.221) claims that Yau's quote is a mis-quote and she translates it as 'Great music has no sound. The great image has no form'. In her opinion, that particular philosophy calls for a Daoist reading of not only cinematography aesthetics, but also of key symbols and cosmology. However, what we would like to emphasise here is not whether the quote is correct or not, but another appearance of such a Daoist philosophy in a later film of a completely different genre. Most viewers of *Hero* probably remember the frequent fighting scenes and the arrow attack scene with numerous people engaged. Yet, we also doubt how many realise that the main character, the assassin Nameless, makes the same Daoist remark to the King of Qin. The approximate omnipresence of Daoism shows that the philosophies from a culture are inclined to appear more than just once and some pre-knowledge of the culture and the philosophies will do no harm to apprehend a foreign film.

In '*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Cultural Migrancy and Translatability*', Felicia Chan (2003, p.59) identifies the Chinese notion of *jianghu* (江湖) as a main difficulty in the translation of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000). *Jianghu* may be translated as 'a world of knightly chivalry', but the English connotation of romantic chivalry, which reminds people of a beauty desperately waiting to be rescued, is still very different (ibid.). The swords people in *jianghu*, not only men, but women too, are bound by various codes and rules that keep them within integrity and morality, but the codes and rules may not always overlap with laws (ibid.). Li Mu Bai and Yu Shu Lien cannot act out their love, since Shu Lien's betrothed was Li's sworn brother and died to save him (ibid.). Chan (2003, p.61) has also discussed the misreading of the film in a feminist way or the comparison to a screwball comedy 'with lovers expressing their affection through nose-to-nose physicality' (Mitchell, 2000). Also, as the director assembles things together artfully, *Crouching Tiger* is likened to a comedy of manners and *Sense and Sensibility* 'with a body count' (ibid.). Thanks to the fair treatment of the women, their higher importance to the narrative as well as Zhang Ziyi (who played the young female fighter Jen)'s commanding presence, *Crouching Tiger* is also compared to a blood-shed soap opera like *Buffy*,

⁷ The original phrase from *Dao de jing* (*Lao zi*) is 大音希声 (*da yin xi sheng*), whereas Chen Kaige's quote is 大音无声 (*da yin wusheng*). 希 (*xi*) means silence.

the Vampire Slayer and the 'girl-power cool' (ibid.). In response to those misinterpretations, Chan (2003, p.62) argues that 'the lack of cultural knowledge and familiarity can impede the understanding of a cultural text.' Interestingly, the success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* reveals that a literal translation of the film title does not necessarily obstruct the popularity of the film. Few foreign audiences may have realised that 'tiger' and 'dragon' are actually in Lo and Jen's names respectively, which partly explains the meaning of the film title. Also, few may recognise Shu Lien's actual profession as a bodyguard-like treasure deliverer, even though it is obvious that she has a master's grip of martial arts.

While discovering the pitfalls of cross-cultural analysis, Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh (2009) raises the awareness of the use of neologisms in recent Chinese film historiographies to create new approaches to the domination of Western concepts and terms in writing Chinese film history. She argues that it is a new attempt to write Chinese film history to 'bypass' 'dubious' English translations and make Chinese terms and keywords. 'Now that ethnic speakers are in a position to enunciate and give allowance in international scholarship for their preferred vocabularies, the English language must make space for new words from Chinese sources (Yeh, 2009, p.443).' Yeh illustrates her point by comparing the Chinese term *wenyi* and the English substitute melodrama, and concludes that melodrama may not be capable of explaining the complexities of *wenyi* (文艺 or 'letters and art' (Yeh, 2009, p.445)) and its historical and cinematic varieties. To put it simply, it is a time-consuming process for *loan words* to be adopted in a language, but it does happen all over the world. English, like every other language, has its own loan words. After all, it is natural to use Chinese-derived terms for Chinese films if no proper equivalent English terms have so far existed. The newly generated Chinese terms may cause foreign scholars to feel lost in translation, but it will be an inescapable process, since terms that stem from the Chinese language speak the most from China and the best.

Cultural translation, notwithstanding its potential danger and difficulties, undoubtedly contributes to an exchange between different cultures. In the translation of culture, translators shoulder a significant task that cannot be neglected and the production of subtitles can be a major part of the task.

The translator's task and subtitling

Subtitles are an inextricable part of a film's transnational life. Rather than merely consider subtitles within the sphere of translation studies, I would also like to examine subtitling within film studies. A discussion of subtitles in respect to film studies can be started with a brief review of the apparatus theory. According to Baudry (1974-1975, p.42), a primary

characteristic of the ideological nature of the cinematographic apparatus is the 'denial of difference'.

These separate frames have between them differences that are indispensable for the creation of an illusion of continuity, of a continuous passage (movement, time). But only on one condition can these differences create this illusion: they must be effaced as differences. ... Thus on the technical level the question becomes one of the adoption of a very small difference between images, such that each image, in consequence of an organic factor [presumably persistence of vision] is rendered incapable of being seen as such. In this sense we could say that film – and perhaps in this respect it is exemplary – lives on the denial of difference: the difference is necessary for it to live, but it lives on its negation.

However, in *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement*, Eleftheriotis (2010, p.182) argues that the existence of subtitles, the sheer presence on the screen of the lines of the 'symbols imprinted on celluloid', reintroduces indisputable difference. The film's unity referred to by Eleftheriotis as *discours* singles out the spatio-temporal existence of subtitles and reveals the journey that covers geographical and temporal chasms where the foreign film is brought to audiences (ibid.). Subtitles also clearly show the audience how the same film can show itself in different material forms, as the same film can be translated with subtitles or dubbed into different languages while the subtitling/dubbing also display different technical and/or translational competence (ibid.). Apparently, the unmistakable characters on the bottom or top or whichever side of the screen clearly strengthens the 'difference', no matter how viewers or subtitle readers think of them.

However, in *Cinema Babel: translating global cinema*, Nornes (2007, p.155) considers subtitling as a corrupt practice.

They [translators] accept a vision of translation that violently appropriates the source text, and in the process of converting speech into writing within the time and space limits of the subtitle, they conform the original to the rules, regulations, idioms, and frame of reference of the target language and its culture. It is a practice of translation that smoothes over its textural violence and domesticates all otherness while it pretends to bring the audience to an experience of the foreign.

Nornes (2007, p.243) even refers to global cinema as the 'translator's cinema'. Yet, Eleftheriotis (2010, p.182) considers Nornes's assumptions consistent with the apparatus theory's conceptualisation of spectatorial positioning which is entirely determined by the operations of the cinematic apparatus. On the other hand, it seems that there is always something wrong with subtitles, for example, translation errors, problematic timing, etc., which indeed frustrates viewers while making the presence of subtitles more obvious and undeniable (ibid., p.184).

Nornes's notions of the translator's practice also seems to romanticise the original and the fidelity to it. Nevertheless, Eleftheriotis (2010, p.182) deems subtitles as evidence of the fact that texts forge certain relationships with audiences and are experienced differently by different audiences. Furthermore, subtitles reveal the variety of filmic texts and profoundly challenge notions of originality and authenticity (ibid., p.183). In this light, to define a 'mythical' original as the location of ultimate meaning for critical and theoretical objectives is to commit an act of violence, which is also a powerful and 'imperialistic' removal of possibilities and neglects the vivid transnational life of filmic texts (ibid.). The sheer faulty nature of the translated text partly makes the notion of a perfect relationship between spectators and texts politically suspicious and theoretically unacceptable, whereas a limited understanding is the only way to appropriately conceptualise such a relationship (ibid., pp.183-184). In other words, the relationship between spectators and texts are bound to be imperfect and restricted by the nature of the translated text at the very least.

Balfour (2004, p.532) notes that subtitles always mark difference, as written words visibly render the voice of another language and render the foreign from the very beginning in this way. Shohat and Stam (1985, p.41) also maintain that the cross-language film experience is eternally bifurcated, for the language being read from the subtitles is the spectators' own language while they hear another language. Hence, spectators must 'forge a synthetic unity which transcends the heteroglot source material' (ibid.). Subtitles' linguistic mediation apparently influences the film experience, as they can be a normal or expected part of the experience in countries and regions where imported films are predominant (ibid., p.48). 'Literalising the semiotic textual metaphor,' spectators not only see and hear films but read them, and the reading experience invariably distracts them from concentrating on images and sounds (ibid.).

On the contrary, Eleftheriotis (2010, p.184) inverts Shohat and Stam's metaphor and argues that the filmic experience of subtitled films is similar to a semiotic activity of reading which involves a frequent shift in the spectator between the narrative depth of the film and the surface that the subtitles lead to, rather than a literal one:

Far from being sutured into the imaginary, the spectator of the subtitled film constantly resorts to the symbolic in his/her process of making sense of the film. The viewing experience of the subtitled film is marked by a dialectic relationship, a mutual dependence between the soundtrack, the images, the overall conventions of the film and its subtitles. (ibid.)

The interaction with subtitled films requires the spectator to participate in a series of actions and decision-making, and in the meantime, they are acutely conscious of the reduction of details that accompanies subtitles (ibid.). Therefore, they compensate for that loss by studying the image and the sound for clues, because generic conventions, codes of framing, aspects of *mise-en-scène*, styles of performance can all offer information that fills in the gaps in the linguistic understanding (ibid.). In that respect, Eleftheriotis (2010, p.185) regards Nornes's notion of global cinema being the 'translator's cinema' as too narrowly on translation as the most significant mediation between texts and viewers. Moreover, the familiar/strange dialectic does not narrowly correlate with a source/target language binary or with a foreign film/domestic audience opposition (ibid.). The reason is that the scope of familiarity embraces filmic elements, such as images, sounds, conventions, general styles, star image and authorial attributes, which surpass the linguistic barriers and the cultural foreignness of the text (ibid.).

The strangeness vis-à-vis the familiarity is symbolised by subtitles. Subtitles constantly assist spectators to interpret the film but meanwhile serve as an undeniable signifier of the materiality of film (Eleftheriotis, 2010, p.186). The profound 'otherness' of subtitles is that they belong to a different spatial-temporal and representational order from the image, and they signify the film's foreignness but communicate with the audiences in the language that they understand (ibid.). And yet, subtitles can be deemed as a unity that is eternally imperfect, and one of the imperfections is the untranslatable. Nornes (2007, pp.175-176) notes that the untranslatable moments which are a nearly ubiquitous situation for subtitlers, are the time for 'celebration', as they are not only privilege moments with the foreign but are chances for subtitlers to 'ply the highest skills of their craft'. Nornes (ibid.) encourages translators to embrace the impossible but not reject it, and those moments cry for abuse. The demonstration of unbridgeable cultural gaps *per se* is positive for Nornes, but Eleftheriotis (2010, p.188) considers abusive subtitling still as being conceptually confined in an impasse by romanticising fidelity to the original text or culture while admitting that it is beyond reach.

Thus, Eleftheriotis (2010, pp.186-188) proposes a position which embraces subtitles as dynamic interactions between spectators and foreign texts. In this position, a spectator is aware of their own relation to the foreign text/culture and the limitations and imperfect interpretation that it involves. This form of interaction accepts gaps in a film experience and meanwhile, tries to overcome cultural and linguistic hindrances by a semiotic reading of the filmic text as well as the literal reading of subtitles. A cross-cultural critical practice that follows such a model would be highly aware of critics' analytical positions and open to possibility of

errors and misinterpretations, pay painstaking attention to textual and contextual details and acknowledge the value of partial knowledge.

Subtitles ultimately contradict the cinematic apparatus and somewhat disconnect audiences from cinema. They remind audiences that the reality in films are always the reality of other people in other places at other times. Subtitles are not only vital to what the film entails, but also to the film itself as a self-contained and independent entity and existence. To some extent, subtitles are part of a film's own identity. Even a film captioned in its original main language has its own identity and purpose which can be to serve spectators who are deaf or hard of hearing. Subtitles are part of the film's own language that speaks of and strengthens its own identity. They are the personal to the film.

Subtitles can be an inherent feature of every film and part of every film, for films can always be subtitled potentially in one way or another. In fact, subtitles or captions are almost as old as films, as early black and white films employed intertitles to help filmic stories progress and express characters' emotion. The image and sometimes the music were suspended to show audiences the titles, so in a sense, the visual and the audio gave way to the titles.

Contemporary cinema still occasionally adopts captions and titles to clarify structures of a film, to offer quotations at the beginning or in the end, or simply to assume a classic and nostalgic style. This is surely an evidence that manifests texts as part of films' identity or even part of the life of films. Hence, Shohat and Stam's (1985, p.41) so-called distraction by subtitles has a long history, if not exactly as long as the history of films themselves. In the films where visuality and music all stop to display titles, spectators pay all their attention to the distracting texts, which probably sets the texts on a prioritised and privileged position.

As audiences read subtitles not only literally, but also semiotically, it is important to contemplate subtitles while considering filmic elements, especially the visual and the acoustic. While the textual and contextual details and their meaning are still critical, it is not enough to just consider the conceptualised meaning in the sense of translation. That is the reason why how the meaning corresponds to the filmic visuality and acoustics also needs to be pondered, and how images, sounds and texts compensate for each other has to be taken into consideration rather than simply being overlooked.

Whereas the meaning of a film dialogue does not lie only in the texts or the lines but also corresponds to filmic factors, the contextual and textual details of the texts still matter obviously. As Walter Benjamin (1923/2012, p.81) puts it, 'True translation is transparent: it does not obscure the original, does not stand in its light, but rather allows pure language, as if

strengthened by its own medium, to shine even more fully on the original.’ A true translation in Benjamin’s view has to expose the details that are on the surface of the source texts as well as deeply hidden.

The translation of subtitles may be either helpful or not; nevertheless, a word-for-word translation will more often than not be less helpful. As Benjamin (1923/2012, p.81) maintains, ‘In reality, with regard to syntax, word-for-word translation completely thwarts the reproduction of the sense and threatens to lead directly to incomprehensibility.’ A subtitle produced word-for-word may be grammatically correct and make perfect sense, but an informal register may become formal. Thus, not to translate word-for-word is partly not to miss the intention from the text or apparently change the register. ‘...the translator’s task is to find the intention toward the language into which the work is to be translated, on the basis of which an echo of the original is awakened in it (Benjamin, 1923/2012, p.79).’ Moreover, a language can be concise due to its sheer nature or a particular time period, for Old Chinese sentences are evidently shorter than the modern counterparts. However, a complete meaning is still fully embedded in just a few characters. ‘赏千金, 封千户侯’⁸ and ‘赏万斤, 封五千户侯’ may look very similar to non-Chinese speakers except ‘万’ and ‘五’, but there is an apparent difference between the meaning of the two phrases exactly due to the two characters. Therefore, the intention behind the two sentences - a huge increase in remuneration - is a translator’s task to be demonstrated to audiences.

As aforesaid, subtitles are bound to have limits and limitations and the relation between texts and spectators is eternally imperfect (Eleftheriotis, 2010, pp.186-188). Nevertheless, the concern here is that the details in the texts can suffer from obvious reduction and omission in contemporary film subtitling. In many cases, the lost cultural specifics in Zhang’s films are translatable, as it can take no more than one or two extra words to translate them. Benjamin (1923/2012, p.82) contends that, ‘To set free in his own language the pure language spellbound in the foreign language, to liberate the language imprisoned in the work by rewriting it, is the translator’s task.’ It indicates that translators have to create what is a free form in their own language, but also liberate what the source has confined. This involves not only unravelling the so-called meaning that is located in the source texts, but also correlating the textual details with visual and acoustic aspects of films. This is also consistent with the literal and semiotic reading binary raised by Eleftheriotis (2010, p.184), which implies that translating a filmic text is not just literal but semiotic as well.

⁸ The two lines are from *Hero*. The DVD released by Buena Vista Home Entertainment in 2005 provides the same English subtitles for the two Chinese lines.

Spectators' semiotic and dynamic viewing of a subtitled film automatically makes them study filmic elements that correspond to and reflect the texts they read. The visual and the acoustic non-verbal information also communicates with viewers or subtitle readers who are constantly engaged in a dynamic film-watching. Therefore, the objective of this thesis is to point out the lost cultural specificities in the translation of Zhang Yimou's popular films and how the 'light' from the source has been confined. The non-verbal information will also be examined wherever possible, and how it can correlate with filmic contexts and how it might affect subtitle readers' understandings of texts will also be analysed.

Chapter Three

Subtitling humour: the English version of *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (Zhang Yimou, 2009)

When a subtitle translated from a source language fails, it usually does not demonstrate the true meaning of a line, which might be caused by the subtitler's misunderstanding or their unsatisfying mastery of the source and/or target languages. When an English subtitle contradicts the non-verbal information that subtitle readers have access to, they will notice the failure of such a subtitle. The subtitle reader can often detect and recognise the failure with cues from a variety of visual and acoustic elements, although they do not understand the dialogue in the original language. Even when the reader of a subtitle finds it difficult to notice subtler failures or the omission of particularities and specificities, the subtitler has a duty to make sure the reader is well-informed. The reason is that the reader is utterly entitled to a chance to see and understand what is created by a filmmaker, even if the subtitler may find it unimportant or unnecessary. Specificities like humour are among the phenomena that may be considered unnecessary by the subtitler or even sometimes the filmmaker themselves and are prone to omission. The domesticating strategy is frequently adopted by subtitlers, while sometimes examples of domestication are unnecessary, radical or even abusive. Domesticating translation attempts to render the language of the translation similar to the target language, or to make the translation text seem to be deeply rooted in the target culture (Venuti, 2008). While adopting the domestication strategy, the subtitler has to omit cultural references that are practically untranslatable. On the other hand, when the subtitler can easily retain cultural references that have equivalents in the target language or that are very intelligible, it is essential to adopt a comparatively foreignising strategy which tends to retain the foreignness of the original (ibid.) or to balance domestication and foreignisation. One particularity that subtitlers and filmmakers need to remember is that they should never underestimate subtitle readers.

First, I will take *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003) as an example. An American actor played by Bill Murray is in Japan to make a commercial for the Japanese Suntory whisky. The crew only speak Japanese which Murray's character does not speak, so a Japanese interpreter helps him and the Japanese director to communicate. This bilingual scene involves the director's lengthy instruction in Japanese interpreted into a very concise sentence in English by the interpreter in the film. Murray, the receptor/client of the interpreting service in the film, questions if the interpreter has translated the director's entire line. In another scene, a similar situation arises with the lack of communication and translation where Murray fails to

understand the Japanese host of a talk show. Even English-speaking audiences are alienated by the unsubtitled Japanese dialogue. Interestingly, while making the film, Coppola chose to keep the American actors in the dark as to the meaning of most of the Japanese dialogue of the film (Dwyer, 2005), so they would display their confusion in a natural manner and audiences would be amused by their baffled and embarrassed response. Furthermore, without English subtitles for the Japanese dialogue, English-speaking viewers are somewhat confused too. The filmmaker's intentional omission of English subtitles aligns viewers with Murray and his bewilderment, while being amused by his awkward situation. The truth is that *Lost in Translation* (Coppola, 2003) is an American film about the American main characters' alienation in an unfamiliar culture. The Japanese culture more or less simply serves as an abstract concept of an alien culture and provides a setting for the film story to happen. Hence, compared to the humour that arises from Murray's confusion in the foreign culture, the meaning of the Japanese dialogue seems to be less important. In other words, viewers are able to understand his confusion without English subtitles, or they understand it even better without subtitles, because they are to some degree in the same situation as Murray. If the Japanese dialogue had English subtitles, viewers might be distracted by the subtitles or simply ignore the subtle humour of Murray's response in the awkward situation.

Another example, which is not so much related to humour but concerns confusion, is Zhang Yimou's *The Flowers of War* (2012). This film involves three languages and a dialect: Mandarin Chinese, Nanjing dialect, English and Japanese. In one particular scene, three characters each speak in different languages or the dialect, Mo (Chinese woman, Nanjing dialect and English speaker), John (American man, English speaker) and Major Li (Chinese man, Mandarin speaker). John attempts to flirt with Mo and makes offensive remarks about her in English which she understands but Major Li does not. Li then asks Mo if John is really the priest of their residential cathedral in Mandarin Chinese, which John does not understand.

-Is he the priest? Does he belong to the church?

-You can say that.

Mo who understands both languages tells Li that 'You can say that' in Nanjing dialect which sounds almost the same as in Mandarin Chinese and which is an ambiguous answer. Mo's ambiguous answer omits John's flirtatious remarks. But as outsiders, subtitle readers can read the English subtitles of all the Mandarin and Nanjing dialect dialogue and are meant to understand that Mo lies to Li and saves John's face. In this scene, the filmmaker Zhang Yimou and the subtitler have not omitted the English subtitles of the Chinese dialogue, because it is

essential for English-speaking audiences to understand the meaning of the dialogue in this bilingual context. This example contrasts with *Lost in Translation* (Coppola, 2003) where presumably all the Japanese dialogue only serves as a symbol of an alien culture for the main characters, and the significance of its meaning is limited. Therefore, in a specific film, if the meaning of dialogue in a source language is not so valuable to filmmakers, or if the dialogue simply functions as a symbol of the source culture, filmmakers indeed choose not to reveal the meaning of characters' lines in subtitles. However, if most Chinese audiences can understand a scene in a Chinese film, particularly through the meaning of the dialogue, the subtitler and even the filmmaker are not entitled to domesticate or omit information when the film is translated into English.

Unlike the two examples above, *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* involves mainly one language, and the Chinese dialogue is not simply a symbol of the Chinese setting but an integral part of the plot arrangement. More importantly, much of the humour is created by comedic dialogue where the meaning of the dialogue is critical to audiences' perception of the humour. Thus, the function of the dialogue in this film is more similar to that in *The Flower of War*, where the meaning of the dialogue matters, than that in *Lost in Translation*. Owing to the specificities of culture-bound humour in this film, subtitling is a challenging task and several conversations are simply omitted in the English version, which contradicts the significance of the dialogue in this film and is likely to be irrational. Particular translation strategies like *explicitation* are frequently used too. Moreover, the humorous elements are fully embedded throughout the film and refer to Chinese popular culture, such as the song-and-dance duet (a traditional Chinese folk art). Almost half of the film consists of physical acting rather than comic dialogue, which suggests that non-verbally expressed humour is also significant to this film.

Existing writing about translating and/or subtitling humour has been centred on English and European languages with relatively large numbers of speakers, including French, Spanish and Italian (Attardo, 2002; Asimakoulas, 2004; Antonini, 2005; Martinez-Sierra, 2006; Veiga, 2009; Sanderson, 2009; Gil, 2009; Chiaro, 2010; Schaffner, 2012). The research has often been carried out in regard to humour categories, particularly verbally expressed humour (VEH), target language audiences' perception of humour, the translatability of humour, linguistic comparison between the source and target verbal humour and the specifics of wordplay (ibid.). General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin, 1991), which will be mentioned again in this chapter, is frequently employed while discussing humour translation. However, not enough relevant research has been carried out between English and Chinese, and even less

examines Chinese into English subtitling. Although research for this language pair has been undertaken mainly in China, most Chinese scholars are more concerned about the subtitling of foreign films into Chinese (Chen, 2009; Yau, 2010; Sun, 2011). The situation of the language transfer of Chinese films into English remains to be investigated. On the other hand, previous (audiovisual) translation theories are applicable in subtitling humour between Chinese and English. This chapter, therefore, explores subtitling the specificities of humour from Chinese into English with Zhang Yimou's *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009) as a case study. The discussion is based on previous relevant subtitling literature and humour theories, and the strategies that the subtitler frequently adopts will be emphasised. More importantly, this chapter will expound and analyse how existing subtitles have lost humour and what verbal information subtitle readers may be interested in is missing, and will also suggest alternative translations. Furthermore, this chapter will also focus on visual or non-verbal humour that often functionally interacts with verbal humour, and examine how the loss of verbal humour may influence subtitle readers' understanding of non-verbal humour.

This film is set in a noodle shop in ancient northwest China. Boss Wang has been maltreating his unnamed wife for years and she starts an affair with a helper Li, which is discovered by the local policeman Zhang. Irritated, Wang promises Zhang a large sum of money in exchange for the lovers' lives. Zhang initially agrees, but steals the wife's gun and kills Wang instead. Li believes his lover has killed Wang, so he buries the body. When he realises she has not murdered anybody, Zhang also learns Li has buried Wang's body and tries to kill both Li and the wife to cover up his crime. Interestingly, this film, adapted from Coen brother's directorial debut *Blood Simple* (1984), stands out as a combination of a screwball comedy and a film noir.

3.1 *Explicitation and analysis*

Explicitation is one of the most frequently used strategies with regard to subtitling. According to Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), *explicitation* is a term adopted to describe a phenomenon where the target text explicates the original in a more intelligible way, usually by adding explanatory words or including connectives. Therefore, the logical flow of a text and its readability are both enhanced. As a matter of fact, films are more often than not composed of utterances located in contexts which original language audiences can easily recognise and grasp. By contrast, target language audiences may neglect or not be able to interpret significant contextual details, which hinder their understanding. Hence, it is essential to render particular phrases in subtitles more explicit. Hervey and Higgins (1992, p.250) use the term

exegetic translation to define explicit translation where extra details are added and the source text is expanded and explicated. When a subtitle contains culture-dependent references which lack equivalents in the target language culture, the subtitler has to include additional explanation for the sake of target language audiences, especially as references often have an influence on interpretation. Nonetheless, lengthy explanations are not always allowed and the intricacies of culture-bound and other terms cannot always be explained with only one or two more phrases. In this case, another strategy, condensation, is critical. To produce subtitles with acceptable lengths, condensing information is crucial. Condensation and reformulation often go hand in hand and how they are used largely depends on target language norms (Díaz-Cintas and Remael, 2007, p.150). In terms of a particular kind of humour, Bucaria (2008) analyses dark humour dubbing in audiovisual translation and categorises dark humour, based on ‘verbal/non-verbal’ and ‘visual/acoustic’ division. Bucaria demonstrates the most commonly used strategies for translating dark humour, which are close rendering, complete omission, weakening and increased effect. Arampatzis (2012, p.73) also introduces five strategies of translating dialect-related dark humour: levelling or standardisation, conservation of dialect, paralinguistic compensation, explicitation and generalisation. The following examples will illustrate how explicitation is applied.

The noodle shop boss’s wife buys a gun from a Persian businessman, when guns are still rare in northwest China at that time, and she exclaims in Example (1):

(1)

Mandarin Transcription (MT)	我也能 <u>雷</u> ⁹ 倒众生了
Pinyin Pronunciation (PP)	wo yeneng lei dao zhongsheng le.
English Subtitle (EN)	Everyone will be amazed. ¹⁰

‘雷’ (lei) in Chinese, although mostly referring to a thunderstorm or a surname, has gained a new meaning in recent years. The new meaning started from a network usage, indicating a statement or an action that makes others wordless or helpless, or shocks or scares others (Baidu Baike, 2015a). According to the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin, 1991), humour is a result of a mechanism called Script Opposition where incongruity exists between two compatible and overlapping scripts. The new meaning of 雷 became popular only a few years ago and is incongruous in the ancient background, so it produces an

⁹ The underlined character (or phrase) marks humour and the same goes for later examples.

¹⁰ The English subtitles of *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* are from the DVD released by Momentum Pictures, 2011.

amusing effect. The English word ‘thunderstorm’ does not have this connotation, but the meaning is roughly conveyed by ‘amaze’. ‘Amaze’ explicates the surprise and fright that the gun may potentially cause and explicitation is used because of the non-existence of a similar usage of the target language word. Hence, this humour is lost owing to the difficulty of finding an equivalent usage.

The reason why the boss’s wife buys a gun is due to the abuse of her husband, boss Wang. She intends to kill herself if she cannot kill Wang. One scene reveals Wang abusing his wife, including making her act as the son that she fails to bear. He blames her for not being able to bear a child after he bought her ten years ago, and says in Example (2):

(2)

MT	你这破玩意儿就跟长死了一样
PP	ni zhe powanyier jiu gen zhang sile yiyang.
EN	Your womb is like a piece of junk.

What Wang literally says is ‘Your poor thing is almost closed’, meaning her ‘womb’ is useless. ‘玩意儿’ (wanyi’er) is a colloquial phrase that can refer to small objects, folk arts or a person. When it refers to a person, it usually refers to a good person; but it is often used in a negative situation, like ‘不是玩意儿’, meaning not a good person. In this line, the Chinese phrase is an ambiguous reference to a womb. As ‘破’ (po) means ‘poor’, the subtitler makes Wang’s meaning of a poor womb clearer and instantly understandable. The English subtitle has explicitated the original ambiguity but roughly conveyed the black humour in the original Chinese line.

Boss Wang is also abusive to his helpers and has been avoiding paying them for several months. When two helpers Zhao and Chen sneak to the backyard to steal money from Wang’s safe, Example (3) shows Zhao’s dialogue:

(3)

MT	投石问路 打草惊蛇
PP	toushiwenlu, dacaojingshe.
EN	I'm just trying to see if he's in there.

‘投石问路’ (toushiwenlu) describes when one goes out to investigate and throws a stone on the way to see if anyone is around (Lü et al., 1996, p.1272). ‘打草惊蛇’ (dacaojingshe) originally describes hitting grass and alerting a snake in it, implying that one wants to punish

someone but alert others. This idiom is often applied to connote a way of handling a problem that is not cautious enough, but alarms the enemy instead (ibid., p.225). Both idioms, supposed to be applied in a literary situation, indirectly show how Zhao tries to find out if Wang is in. Zhao's using literary idioms to describe his action of stealing is again incongruous and produces a slightly humoristic effect. Zabalbeascoa (1996, p.252) argues that if a joke centres on an institution or culture-related reference that is not in the target language audiences' knowledge, adaptation is needed or humour may disappear. Yet, this English subtitle resorts to omission rather than adaptation. The origins of the two Chinese idioms are omitted, giving priority to audiences' interpretation and sacrificing the idiom-based humour.

Zhao and Chen, both new to stealing, are trying to approach Wang's safe. Zhao appears sophisticated by using tricks to find out if the boss is in. Chen assumes Zhao is experienced, but Zhao says in Example (4),

(4)

MT	别夸我 我也是摸索着前进
PP	bie kuawo, wo yeshi mosuo zhe qianjin.
EN	Don't flatter me. I'm still new to this.

The literal subtitle may be 'Don't flatter me. I'm also trying to feel my way.' '摸索着前进' (mosuo zhe qianjin) literally means 'to feel the way and proceed'. This is a term that describes a situation where a new policy is put into practice and people need to explore the unknown way ahead due to the lack of models to follow (Lü et al., 1996, p.893). 摸索着前进 originally depicts the situation of the newly established People's Republic of China when the Communist Party of China was leading our nation to rebuild our country under a socialist system. As no country had built socialism right after feudalism or semi-colonialism and semi-feudalism, China had almost no model to follow and scarce experience to learn from, but tried hard to blaze its own trail. Thus, this Chinese phrase has a cultural allusion specific to one time period. The subtitler has chosen to overtly reveal that Zhao is 'still new to stealing'. If the English subtitle is 'feel my way', Zhao and Chen seem to be simply walking in the darkness. Therefore, again the subtitler turns to explicitation to explicitly show English-speaking audiences Zhao's inexperience in this illegal 'undertaking', but the humour is lost again. The subtitles in this section all contain cultural information that foreign subtitle readers are unlikely to know about and the subtitler has translated them very explicitly, so that the readers will immediately understand the basic meanings. The consequence of such a strategy is that the humour is lost in the English subtitles.

3.2 Weak subtitles

In ‘Dubbing Dark Humour’, Bucaria (2008, p. 222) introduces her categorisation of verbal dark humour: purely-linguistic, culture-specific, linguistic and culture-specific and non-specifically verbally expressed humour. The four types are, respectively, humour expressed through humorous lines, cultural elements, both humorous lines and cultural elements, and non-verbal channels. ‘The category of “verbal dark humour” comprises cases in which humour is mainly expressed through the verbal channel’ (Bucaria, 2008, p.222). Verbal humour is a prominent part of the film *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* and it contains black humour which is often lost in the English translations. Chiaro (2010, pp.6-7) summarises that verbally expressed humour (VEH) on screen tends to be translated in four ways: left unchanged, replaced with a different instance of VEH in the target language, replaced with an idiomatic expression in the target language or ignored altogether. The VEH in the current film has been mostly ignored altogether or replaced with an English expression that is not conspicuously humorous, thus weakening the humour. This section will list some examples of weak translation of verbal humour where the humour has been domesticated and subtitle readers may not recognise that there is a joke in the original Chinese version.

In Example (5), Zhao makes the following remark after the boss’s wife buys a gun from a Persian businessman:

(5)

MT	你说这老板娘 寻过死 还上过吊 今天差点还买炮
PP	ni shuo zhe laobanniang, xun guo si, hai shang guo diao, jintian chadian hai maipao.
EN	The boss’ wife has always been a piece of work. And today she bought a gun.

Literally, the subtitle could be ‘The boss’s wife has attempted to kill herself by hanging herself. Today she almost bought a cannon.’ The verbally expressed dark humour about suicide and death is apparently lost in the English subtitle. Nida and Taber (1969, p.198) define *communication load* to describe ‘the degree of difficulty of a message’, which is ‘the ratio between the number of units of information and the number of formal units (i.e. words)’. Communication load refers not only to semantic but also to formal elements, which implies that optimally target language texts should be able to continue the form of original language texts, which enhances the difficulty in the case of subtitling. On the one hand in this subtitle, the informational elements are the boss’s wife’s attempts to kill herself and that she almost buys a cannon. This is roughly similar to the English subtitle – she has been a piece of work and bought a gun, although ‘a piece of work’ does not suggest suicide attempts. However, the

Chinese subtitle creates a humorous effect due to the rhyme between ‘吊’(diao) (to hang oneself) and ‘炮’(pao) (cannon) which is a significant formal humorous factor. Unfortunately, the English subtitle only retains the semantic information but not the formal element.

According to Nida and Taber (1969, p.200), *dynamic equivalence* characterises a translation in which ‘the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors’. In relation to this subtitle, if the formal and humorous effect is lost, the English subtitle will not be dynamically equivalent, as receptor language audiences will probably not laugh by reading the English version. Moreover, *gist translation* may be able to illustrate this subtitling. As Hervey and Higgins (1992, p.250) depict, *gist translation* is a translation that condenses information in the source text and is a ‘synopsis’ of the original. The English subtitle deletes the fact that she has been attempting to hang herself but alters it into ‘a piece of work’, so the ‘gist’ is translated.

Since boss Wang has been abusing his wife, she finds comfort and care in her affair with helper Li. Yet, when Li discovers that the police are tackling infidelity, he expresses his concern over their affair and suggests breaking up to save their reputation. She responds with Example (6):

(6)

MT	走自己的路 让他们吐去吧
PP	zou ziji de lu, rang tamen tu qu ba.
EN	It's our life. Let others talk.

This sentence, originally translated from Alghieri Dante’s ‘Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti’, or ‘Follow your own road/course, and let the people talk’ in English, is frequently but amusingly quoted by Chinese in daily life as ‘走自己的路, 让别人说去吧’, to emphasise that ‘I will do whatever I want and ignore others’ comments’. Li is frightened by the thought of people gossiping about the affair which would impose a heavy pressure on them and negatively affect their reputation. Occasionally, ‘gossip’ is expressed by the colloquial phrase that means ‘to spit’ in Chinese, which is the case in this line. The Chinese version of this renowned saying is literally adapted into ‘Follow your own road/course, and let the people spit.’ Even though not all foreign viewers are aware of Dante as the initiator, I suggest the commonly accepted English version of the saying should be used, as the origin of the sentence will be more accessible to English-speaking audiences.

When Wang catches his wife with Li, he violently strikes her. She is resentful that Li only stands by, and comments on Li's cowardice in Example (7):

(7)

MT	你绝对是南坡第一窝囊废 正宗的南坡腕
PP	ni juehui shi nan po diyi wonangfei, zhengzong de nan po wan.
EN	You are such a wimp, the biggest I've ever seen.

‘窝囊废’ (wonangfei) is a wimp and ‘南坡第一窝囊废’ is the biggest wimp in South Slope (南坡, nan po, a made-up place name). It is condensed into ‘南坡腕’ (nan po wan), which is an interlingual homophone of ‘No.1’ as included in the Mandarin subtitle (letv, no date (b)), as ‘腕’ (wan) bears a similar pronunciation to ‘one’. Ironically used by the boss's wife, 腕 refers to an extremely powerful or skilful person. That explains why the English subtitle is ‘the biggest I've ever seen’. In fact, the film targets young Chinese audiences, to whom popular culture is an important and familiar part of life. As young audiences learn English and understand the phrase ‘No.1’, they are quite likely to laugh at the unexpected linguistic cue. Delabastita (1996, p.128) investigates wordplays that involve two (or more) linguistic structures with similar forms and slightly different meanings. Homophones, those with different writings but identical pronunciation, are one of the most common types of wordplay (Delabastita, 1996). Homophones, like homonyms and homographs, are one of the categories of puns (Redfern, 1984, p.17; Okada, 2012, p.164). Hockett (1997, p.262) considers words with similar pronunciations as puns. Puns with identical sounds or similar sounds are distinguished by Hockett respectively as a ‘perfect pun’ or an ‘imperfect pun’. Although ‘南坡腕’ (nan po wan) and ‘No.1’ are not strictly homophones, they bear resemblance in pronunciation interlingually as an ‘imperfect pun’ and this phenomenon creates a humorous effect. This comical wordplay has created difficulties for translation, so only the gist of the original Chinese line has been conveyed.

After Wang's attack, the boss's wife asks Li to return home with her. When he refuses to go back for fear of Wang, she demonstrates her extreme disappointment and contempt in Example (8):

(8)

MT	哪知道是个假肢 还是个次品
PP	na zhidao shi ge jiazhi, haishi ge cipin.
EN	But I was wrong about you.

The reason why the boss's wife says 'I was wrong about you' to her lover is explicated by the filmic context – she thinks she has found a reliable man, with strong shoulders to lean against, as is often said in Chinese. Nonetheless, who she finds turns out to be a wimp, an 'artificial limb' (假肢, *jiazhi*) or a 'fake shoulder', to quote from the original. Not only is he an 'artificial limb', the artificial limb has 'defects', as is manifested by '次品' (*cipin*). The 'prop' in the culture-related situation – an artificial limb, is entirely omitted and only the fact is retained that he is not a strong man whom she can trust. The metaphor linking an artificial limb and a coward is equally novel for many Chinese audiences, and the humour in this metaphor might have been omitted by the subtitler for fear of offending people with disabilities. Even though the humorous metaphor had been literally translated into English, the reader of such a subtitle would not find it amusing due to cultural difference, as English-speakers might associate the humour with an irony against disabled people. Notwithstanding the necessity of omitting or domesticating this black humour, many subtitle readers lose a chance to laugh out loud as most Chinese audiences have.

Example (9) goes back to the helpers approaching Wang's safe. The helper Zhao drags another helper Chen to steal money from boss Wang's safe and Chen refutes:

(9)

MT	什么人跟你这么走下去 那不就犯罪深渊吗?
PP	shenme ren genni zheme zou xiaqu, na bujiushi fanzui shenmyuan ma?
EN	If I dare follow you, that would make me a criminal.

A literal translation of the original is 'Does anyone who dares to follow you ever escape the abyss of crime?' The answer to the original rhetorical question is that one will undoubtedly fall into the abyss of crime and receive harsh punishment if insisting on illegal adventure. However, 'abyss of crime', another culture-based metaphor, is a modern Chinese legal usage for the outcome of continual wrongdoings and life in jail, while the setting of this film is ancient China. Attardo's (2002) development of General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) identifies 'Situation' again as an event or a situation where a joke occurs. The incongruity of a modern formal and legal phrase used in a colloquial context in ancient China produces humour, but the English subtitle seems to be simply a serious complaint. Also, it is unnecessary to omit the seemingly literary expression of 'abyss of crime'. In this English subtitle, both the humour and the literal meaning of the sentence have been altered and the subtitle reader's access to both has therefore been denied. The original cultural and metaphorical reference could have been translated into English. Even though subtitle readers might not expect the relation between

such a metaphor and Chinese law, at least they can understand that crime is compared to an 'abyss' in Chinese. In this section, all the cues of humour have been domesticated and the meaning of the Chinese lines have also been altered or omitted. The omission of such cultural humour and information makes those translations weak and insincere.

3.3 Omitted scenes

The fourth way of coping with VEH summarised by Chiaro (2010, p.7) is ignoring it altogether. In the English version, eight or nine major humorous conversations are omitted, excluding occasional amusing sentences that have not been translated. One of the most outstanding conversations is a debate between Zhao and Chen over whether or not to open Wang's safe to take their long-awaited salary while he is away.¹¹ Being a funny debate thanks to the topic, this conversation presumably has contributed immensely to many Chinese audiences' laughter. Nonetheless, it is a pity that the debate will barely demonstrate the same effect on target language audiences in that it is entirely deleted in English. This debate involves Chinese law and logical thinking of materialist philosophy, like *antagonistic contradiction* and *dialectical materialism*, which are relatively obscure to non-Chinese viewers. If subtitled, the unfamiliar elements will need evident explanation and wordy notes may be needed; yet, particular details are subject to omission because of temporal-spatial constraints. Baker (1992, p.40) mentions if the meaning conveyed by a particular word or expression is not significant enough to the development of a text to justify distracting the receptor with lengthy explanations, translators can and often do simply omit translating the items in question. Indeed, the debate is not vital to the plot, as the two people concerned approach the safe later regardless. Besides, none of the stars in the current film are internationally famous. Thus, omitting or editing out the whole

¹¹ (Chen: 让人知道不被人笑掉大牙?)

Zhao: 笑掉就笑掉呗? 我管它那个呢?

Chen: 有的人那大牙呀 鬼斧神工的 那也笑不掉 就得被撬掉 (These three lines remain in the English version.)

Zhao: 陈七请注意 你的钱放在桌子上 你走过去把它拿起来 放在自己兜子里这能算偷吗? 请回答

Chen: 赵六请注意 你是在偷换概念 钱放在钱柜里 而且是放在带有秘密锁的别人的钱柜里 和放在桌子上意义是完全不同的 回答完毕

Zhao: 陈七请注意 你要认识到问题的主体 主体是什么 钱 你得知钱的主人是谁 不是它在哪里 不管它在哪里 它都要回到主人身边 这叫什么 物归原主 落叶归根 回答完毕

Chen: 赵六请注意 我认为你这种是自私 完全没有社会感的行为 严重点说 你是缺乏基本道德人格的行为 你忘记钱所在的环境 请问你 东西落在别人家 你会在他家没有人的情况下 撬门砸锁把东西取出来吗? 回答完毕

Zhao: 陈七请注意 你忽略了或者故意含糊了这个问题的另一个关键因素 是 我的东西落在别人家了 我的确不应该在人家不知情的情况下 把我的东西拿回来 但我多次提出要回我的东西 他不给我 态度很生硬 有时还挺横 我该怎么办 只能智取 也就这么跟你说吧 我的钱被绑架了 谈判以后没有结果 我只能采取强制性的手段进行解救 回答完毕

Chen: 赵六请注意 我认为你这种比喻依然是不恰当的 甚至是言过其实的 人质被绑架了 面临生命危险 有可能被撕票 但钱是不会的 你是在粉饰你的恶劣行径 回答完毕

Zhao: 陈七请注意 你可以藐视我的行为 但是你能想出更好的办法解救我的工钱吗? 回答

Zhao: 我不回答 此处可以插播广告 不要回来 马上离开

Zhao: 我不离开

scene in the English version will not affect the international appeal of the film, nor hinder the story development. Nonetheless, the debate is crucially linked to the humour creation of the film, as many Chinese audiences are reasonably aware of the eloquence and fast-talking capability of the actor and the actress. The subtitler may subjectively believe that editing out the scene reduces the demand on the target audiences' reading speed, rather than taking account of sacrificing the considerable amount of humour. As is mentioned before, the subtitler is often not authorised to delete scenes or dialogue. However, the subtitler of *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop*, Zhang Mo, presumably had communication with the director Zhang Yimou - her father. This special relationship might complicate the speculation of the reasons behind the omission of the debate. Interestingly, Zhang Mo also engaged in the editing of the film (Anon, no date (b)), so she and the filmmaker might have made the decision to omit the debate together. The director was also likely to have an apparent impact on the subtitler and might have instructed her what to translate or not or what choices of English translations she could have. If the director predicted that the absurdity of this debate would impose too much pressure on the reader of the subtitle, it would be unreasonable, since the sheer absurdity (of the costumes, dialogue, etc.) in the film is one of the most evident features. The absurdity of the costumes and makeup in the film will be elaborated later in this chapter. This substantial omission deprives the viewer of the chance to attempt to understand the debate, domesticates this culture-bound debate, and undervalues the subtitle readers' ability to interpret or comprehend non-verbal aspects of the scene.

One way to tackle subtitling this debate is to simplify the information for the sake of English speakers and omit new knowledge that does not overall affect their interpretation. Despite the risk that target language viewers may still feel puzzled, subtitling the scene reveals more fidelity and respect to the effort involved in creating the original humour. Example (10) is one of Chen's arguments in this omitted debate which I have translated. The first translation is more faithful to the Chinese version, whereas the second is more natural-sounding.

(10)

MT	赵六请注意 我认为你这种是自私 完全没有社会感的行为 严重点儿说 你是缺乏基本道德人格的行为 你忘记钱所在的环境 请问你 东西落在别人家 你会在他家没有人的情况下 撬门砸锁把东西取出来吗? 回答完毕
EN1	Look Zhao. I believe you're very selfish with no sense of society. You lack basic morality and ignore where the money is. If you leave something at others' home, will you break in to take it when they're away?
EN2	Look. You're so selfish and immoral. You pretend you don't know where the money is. The fact is, you can't just break into someone's house to take your own stuff.

This is one of Chen's arguments in the intense debate. It refers to '社会感' (shehuigan), meaning sense of society, relating to China's promotion of altruism and responsibility towards society throughout history. Stealing is evidently a selfish behaviour, to say the least. '基本道德人格' (jiben daode renge) is literally basic moral personality, which refers to the most basic moral standards that people have to meet. These are cultural references and Chinese moral teaching terms that are familiar to most Chinese viewers, yet are possibly not often mentioned in other countries. Again, a sense of society and basic moral personality are modern expressions; when used in this ancient background, they generate an amusing effect.

Another comedic scene omitted in the English version is when the chief police officer enters the noodle shop to investigate the cannon brought by the Persian businessmen and fired to show the boss's wife its power. Four criminals have been arrested previously and shoved into the shop, while Li, the lover of the boss's wife is ordered by the chief to say the names of the objects tied onto the shackle of a criminal. The objects on the shackle are a significant punning wordplay, which are '砖' (zhuan, a brick), '镐' (gao, a pickaxe) and '破鞋' (poxie, a worn shoe). The names of the objects together mean 'always adulterous' as in 专搞破鞋 (zhuan gao po xie). This wordplay is also comedic because Li, who is ordered to say the names of the objects, is also an adulterer and is having an affair with the boss's wife. An absence of such a linguistic and culture-related wordplay in English is called a 'void'. A 'void' is defined by Dagut as 'the non-existence in one language of a one-word equivalent for a designatory term found in another' (cited in Shuttleworth and Cowie, 1997, p.196). Furthermore, the polysemiotic nature of screen products transmits messages by means of diverse codes (Chaume, 2004; Chiaro, 2009, p.43; Chiaro, 2010, p.4), and it makes the verbal elements of filmic products depend heavily on visual components to which they are inextricably related (Chiaro, 2010, p.5). 'With regard to verbal humour, when a joke, a gag or a line is linked to the visuals, translation becomes especially difficult (ibid.).' Therefore, the non-existence of such a similar wordplay and its connection to the visual both make it difficult to reproduce the humour. This scene, as far as I observe, is also omitted partly due to the low-brow humour of the situation, as their crime is 'adultery' and they will receive harsh punishment for it. The reason is as the chief says, 'Our work has been focused on catching infidelity.' Their exaggerated attention to infidelity is humorous for most Chinese viewers, whereas foreign audiences may feel bewildered by the over-reaction to an immoral behaviour. Moreover, the brutal punishment for the criminals, which is an example of black humour, has also disappeared in the English version. 'Subtitling humour requires insight and creativity, but it is also a matter of establishing priorities' (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007, p.214). If a faithful translation may disturb subtitle readers rather

than making them laugh, their feelings should be prioritised, which could explain why that punishment has been omitted.

When an item mentioned in the original Chinese line does have an equivalent in English and the humour is not disturbing, the item ought to be translated. In the beginning scene, a Persian businessman is trying to sell weapons to the boss's wife. After she decides to purchase a gun, he attempts to sell her a cannon too. He tells another Persian man to showcase the power of the cannon. The boss's wife and the helpers are extremely excited to hear the enormous noise and run to the gate of the noodle shop to see how far the cannon ball has reached. When they turn around and look at the man who has fired the cannon, this man's face is completely covered with black ash. All the staff of the noodle shop is amused (see Fig.3.1) and Li says,

妈呀 你是放炮呢还是烧烤呢？

Li's line literally means, 'Goodness, did you fire the cannon or have a barbecue?' Or more concisely, 'Goodness, is this a cannon or a barbecue?' The latter translation will be able to convey the humour in his line which is associated with the black ash on the man's face. However, in the English version, Li's humorous line is deleted and changed into the boss's wife saying

还是买枪吧

The subtitle of this line in the English version is 'I prefer the gun' which is a correct translation. Not only is Li's line deleted, but the noodle shop staff's amused facial expressions are replaced with serious and disappointed faces (see Fig.3.2). Though the visual humour – the ash-covered face - is retained, the verbal humour is lost. I assume the reason why that verbal humour is omitted to be that the subtitler found it difficult to translate. Another reason perhaps is that the filmmaker and/or the subtitler might have underestimated English-speaking viewers' ability to correlate Li's humorous line with the dirty face. And yet, subtitle readers should not be underestimated, as the cause and effect relation between the verbal humour and the visual humour is very apparent. Therefore, it is irrational to change Li's witty line into the boss's wife's serious line, or to alter their facial expressions, since clearly the verbal and the visual dynamically produce a comical situation together.



Fig.3.1: The boss's wife and the three helpers apparently look amused.



Fig.3.2: The helpers Zhao and Chen almost completely disappear from the frame, while the boss's wife and Li look sad and disappointed.

3.4 Non-verbal humour study

The examples of humour in the previous three sections consist mainly of verbal humour where the translation of the English subtitles has not been so successful in conveying the humour in the English version. Yet, information does not completely depend on words to be perceived; likewise, humour can be generated without language. Humour appears at various levels and can derive from the interaction between word and image, or a play on words, or become an

inseparable part of a storyline (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007, pp.214-215). Verbal and non-verbal humour both contribute to the amusing effect of *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009). Instead of involving humorous dialogues or monologues, non-verbal humour does not take advantage of language, but rather *mise-en-scène*, which ‘signifies the director’s control over what appears in the film frame’ (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004, p.176). Aspects of *mise-en-scène* include setting, costume, lighting and film figures’ behaviours (ibid.).

As *mise-en-scène* can exceed normal conceptions of realism (Bordwell and Thompson, 2004, p.177), a director is enabled to portray non-verbal humour through ‘unrealistic’ representations. Even without knowing the folk art, foreign audiences will still be able to notice the foreignness and understand the humour in the costume style regarding visual information. Costumes and makeup in this film are intentionally designed to be ‘abnormal’, according to a comment about the makeup of Mao Mao who plays the role of the noodle shop helper Chen in a behind-the-scenes video that explains the costume design and makeup of this film (Anon, 2009). The costumes are all flamboyantly coloured, such as the boss’s wife’s emerald gown, or Li’s bright pink top and trousers. The strong clash between the colours creates a colourful impression on screen. More importantly, the gaudy colours promote the characters as country folks, which is consistent with other folk features in the film, including a dramatized noodle making process. For instance, this film highlights a folk art in China – song-and-dance duet. The duet originated from northeast China, dating back to 5,000 years ago, and is now a nationwide renowned form of art in China (Yuan and Li, 2011, p.62). It involves an actor and an actress in very bright outfits. The actress plays the role of ‘旦’ (dan), a lady, and the actor plays ‘丑’ (chou), a clown or the comic part. While the lady’s costume is gaudily pretty, the clown’s outfit design appears exuberant but amusing (Yuan and Li, 2011, p.63). Male characters in this film can all be categorised as ‘clowns’ and thus are dressed very bizarrely. The well-known Chinese comedian Zhao Benshan who played the cameo role of the chief police officer used to play clowns in song-and-dance duet performances. Decades ago, he started his career as a song-and-dance duet performer. He went onto fame after his sketch performances at the Chinese New Year gala shows in the early 1980s, where he later performed sketches every year for about 20 years. He has also established his own troupes and stages, and the actors and the actress who played Li, Zhao and Chen are among his pupils. In the original Chinese version, Zhao’s enormous front teeth are a makeup sardonically mocked by the chief police officer as a sign of premature aging, since people count livestock’s teeth to tell their ages. And yet the irony is omitted in the English version, and subtitle readers may simply ignore the teeth rather than realise that there is a comical line related to them in

the original version. This is another example where the domestication of a verbal humour may affect the subtitle readers' perception of visual humour.

'Since the beginning of the twentieth century, "slapstick" has been our name for popular, rather than literary, low physical comedy (Dale, 2000, p.1).' Editing, gestures and facial expressions of the actors can all convey visual jokes, and common suspense set-up enables viewers to interpret more than the characters in the film world sometimes (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007, p.227). *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009) is a low-brow physical comedy, as identified by the bright-coloured and 'poor taste' outfits, and the joke that catching infidelity is the central task of the police. Furthermore, slapstick elements make a crucial contribution to non-verbal humour. With regard to this film, Zhao the helper employs a slapstick style of acting, for instance, in the sequence where he drags his love interest Chen to trespass in Wang's backyard in order to claim their salary that has not been paid for long. While entering Wang's room, the couple are tremendously scared, fearing that he may be already back from his trip. To test if he has returned or not, Zhao pretends to say greetings, but receives no response. However, Chen also intends to have a try but bursts into the most impressive and identifiable laughter known to a large number of Chinese audiences as her own brand, which is loud and comedic. Extremely frightened, Zhao slips down and falls onto the ground, and reprimands her for repeating what he has done. Another scene that emphasises slapstick involves the boss's wife and all the helpers in the noodle shop, when the Persian businessman attempts to sell the wife a cannon. Lifting the cloth on top, he unveils the 'high-tech' weapon to everyone. Surprisingly, a Persian beauty is sitting on it and as she descends, enthusiastic music is played and she begins a belly dance. People in the noodle shop, possessed by the strong music, start moving along to the beat. The businessman, satisfied with his 'magic', waves his hand and the dancer withdraws from the film frame. The boss' wife and others suddenly come back to reality and become embarrassed for their inappropriate behaviour. This scene performs excellently at the service of non-verbal humour. Certain universality exists in gestures and mime, as is shown in the international success of *Mr Bean* (1990-1995) (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007, p.227). Nonetheless, this scene is edited out in English, the reason for which is supposedly that an intrusive belly dance is not inextricably significant to the plot but would possibly slow down the pace of the film and interrupts the storyline. However, the pace of the film is not very fast, as it does not have much dialogue and the second half consists primarily of physical acting. Also, the scene is consistent with the absurdity of the entire film. Hence, the omission of the visual humour related to the belly dance is not quite reasonable.

This chapter has investigated the subtitling of humour in *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009) in regard to the explicitation strategy, weak subtitles and omitted subtitles, and has speculated the reasons why those strategies or treatments have been resorted to. Humour in *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009) is largely subtitled with the explicitation strategy. The subtitler renders very humorous utterances explicit, or even plainly monotonous. That also causes a loss of amusing implications and possibly renders the original humoristic intention mundane. Certain subtitles are unsatisfactory, either due to the trouble of recreating an interlingual homophone or the utter disappearance of culture-based metaphors. I have highlighted those subtitles with an explanation of the weaknesses and given alternative suggestions for some of them. Yet, in terms of humorous scenes that are considered highly amusing, explicitation is not resorted to but complete omission is. The cause of the omission has also been discussed. A disadvantage for English-speaking audiences is that omission has led to weakened humoristic effect several times, especially for scenes that keep Chinese viewers' laughing. As far as I observe, omitting scenes is partly driven by Chinese philosophical terminology uncommon in English-speaking countries. Also, wordplays omitted may be difficult to make sense in English. Those culturally-bound phrases, what Leppihalme (1997, p.197) calls 'culture bumps', are more often than not baffling or impenetrable for receptor text readers. Compared to verbal humour, non-verbal humour bears a certain degree of mutuality and universality between the cultures of China and global cultures. Visual humour, as a major type of non-verbal humour in this film in particular, reaches English-speaking viewers effectively via costume design and physical performance - two main aspects of mise-en-scène. Visual humour in the film is characterised by song-and-dance duet, a folk art that stemmed from northeast China but has become popular nationwide. Slapstick performance is well integrated, and has enhanced the whole film's comedic atmosphere. Therefore, non-verbal humour is conveyed more effectively thanks to visual presentation.

However, not only is verbal humour reduced in the English version, but some of the visual humour is also edited out. The belly dance mentioned before is an example. Also, Li's line at the beginning that compares firing a cannon with having a barbecue is also altered. Although Li's line is verbally expressed humour, his words are closely related to the visual humour – the dirty face, and reducing the verbal humour may somewhat distract subtitle readers from recognising the visual humour. Therefore, apart from amusing Chinese lines being altered, omitted or domesticated, visual humour has also been subject to evident alteration and reduction. This seems to suggest that the filmmaker has attempted to make the film less

comedic or more serious. However, as aforementioned, actors' costumes and performance clearly give away the features of a comedy. On the other hand, a meticulous subtitle reader will be able to notice that the boss's wife, one of the only two women in the film and the only main female, does not even have a name, or her name is never mentioned. Meanwhile, all the other characters in the film do have names, but all the given names are numbers, such as three, four, five, six and seven, which have never been serious Chinese names. When their names are translated into English, only their family names are retained. Perhaps that is the optimal way to translate those names, but this rendition of the names into English means that subtitle readers' will presumably perceive more seriousness in the English subtitles, whether they recognise the Chinese family names or not. The reduction of humour - be it verbal or visual - and the addition of seriousness have both ended up domesticating the humour. This chapter has not intended to say that every example of original humour or culture should be retained, or a foreignising strategy should always be adopted. Rather, domestication and foreignisation should be balanced. Because subtitle readers cannot be deceived and have the right to fully enjoy a comedy for what it really is, such domestication as explicated in this chapter is very likely to be inappropriate and unnecessary.

Chapter Four

Politeness in subtitling: to retain or not to

The main goal of this chapter is to discuss the phenomenon of politeness in the films of Zhang Yimou by categorising common politeness terms and critically examining the subtitlers' strategies for translating them. Politeness does not just rely on terms of address, but also on body language as part of the performance, so this chapter will also investigate the non-verbal representation of politeness in four of Zhang Yimou's films. Subtitle readers need to understand that when politeness is not revealed by performance, it might be demonstrated verbally. Instead of creating adequate translations of politeness, subtitlers tend to omit politeness features of the source language or replace them by politeness strategies that are closer to the notions of politeness in the target readers' cultures. As politeness is an inextricable part of a nation's culture, the omission of politeness phenomena in an English version of a Chinese film is a domestication of cultural references.

For thousands of years, China has maintained a tradition of politeness. Over 100 idioms about polite concepts and traditions exist in Chinese vocabulary, and there are numerous relevant anecdotes and proverbs. Politeness is shown in practically every Chinese film. In regard to subtitling politeness, four of Zhang Yimou's films will be introduced and analysed, which are *To Live* (1994), *Hero* (2002), *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) and *The Flowers of War* (2011). *To Live* (1994) is a film featuring an ordinary Chinese family's difficult life over 30 years in the midst of Chinese historical tumult and instability from the 1940s to the 1970s. The story of *Hero* (2002), by contrast, occurs in the ancient Warring States period (c. 476/453/403-221BC), before the first dynasty Qin (221-207BC) was established. A warrior's story of attempting to assassinate a king is told. *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) portrays a fictionalised story of conflicts and cruelty in the royal family in 928AD during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907-960), adapted from a contemporary Chinese drama of a similar theme. *The Flowers of War* (2011) is about prostitutes saving teenage convent girls in the Nanjing Massacre. The four films show China in different historical periods; in each of them, politeness is revealed with a different focus. Three of them use a large number of address terms like kinship terms or work-related titles and all four embrace self-denigration as an aspect of politeness. This chapter will investigate how the politeness-related terms are translated in the English versions of the films, or whether the terms are translated or not. As politeness is also visually portrayed in the films, the chapter will also briefly explain how politeness is depicted visually. This chapter will involve two versions of English subtitles of *Hero* (2002); one version is

from the DVD released by Buena Vista Home Entertainment in 2005, while the other is available at <http://subsmx.com/subtitles-movie/hero-2002/ni>.¹²

4.1 Address terms

Gu (cited in Gu, 1990) proposes seven politeness maxims with reference to Leech's (1983, p.132) Politeness Principle, among which is the Address Maxim. This maxim means to 'address your interlocutor with an appropriate term' based on the notions of respectfulness and attitudinal warmth (Gu, 1990, p.248). Kinship address is one of the most obvious types of address in Chinese politeness. Kinship address is a vital part of daily discourse for the Chinese, as children are taught by their parents and other relatives to address people with appropriate terms. The extensive system of Chinese kinship terms manifests intricate family or clan structures and relationships, which enabled ancient China to maintain a stable social structure and hierarchy (Wang, 2007). The kinship terms in this section are often omitted in the English subtitles, although some are retained. Some kinship terms are found to be retained in a certain context, but omitted in another, so there is a lack of consistency in the treatment of particular terms.

Instead of saying 'I', Chinese people often mention themselves with the kin terms that mark their roles in the family network. This politeness phenomenon is especially conspicuous when children address their elderly relatives, such as grandparents. The aim is to reduce the 'emotional' distance between the people concerned or ease the tension. In Example (1) below from *The Flowers of War* (2011), Shu is one of the girls held captive in the cathedral in Nanjing by the Japanese and her father Mr Meng begins working for the Japanese to bet on a chance to help Shu escape.

(1)

MT	<u>爸爸</u> ¹³ 一定会想办法
PP	baba yiding hui xiangbanfa.
EN	I will find a way.

¹² The English subtitles of *To Live* (1994) are available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZB7HYhUpDz8>, accessed 20 April 2013. The English subtitles of *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) are from the DVD released by Universal Pictures in 2007. The English subtitles of *The Flowers of War* (2011) are from the DVD released by Revolver Entertainment in 2012. This chapter will involve two versions of English subtitles of *Hero* (2002); one version is from the DVD released by Buena Vista Home Entertainment in 2005, while the other is available at <http://subsmx.com/subtitles-movie/hero-2002/ni>, accessed 26 July 2015.

¹³ All the underlined phrases mark politeness.

‘爸爸’ (baba, dad) is a kinship term used by Mr Meng. In this scene, Shu feels ashamed and furious that her father is a so-called ‘traitor’ and involved with the Japanese. Guilty of Shu’s rage, Mr Meng begs her for understanding and assures her of escape. He calls himself ‘dad’ that emphasizes their father-daughter relationship in order to gain his daughter’s understanding. Possibly, the source subtitle can be literally translated as ‘Dad will find a way’, though it sounds as if the speaker is mentioning the interlocutor’s father rather than himself. In the English translation, the subtitler obliterates the self-referential kinship term, presumably because she assumes pronominal specification is needed to clarify the identity of the speaker. Yet, subtitle readers can see that Shu is talking to her father. There is no inconsistency between the image and the subtitle of the dialogue, but ‘I will find a way’ does sound more natural than ‘Dad will find a way’. This domestication/omission of the original kinship address term is unavoidable, but not all address terms need to be domesticated or omitted.

Royal kinship address

Distinct from average people’s kinship terms nowadays or in the past like the previous example, specific address words were particular to the royal family. Nobody except royal members were permitted to say those terms, otherwise people could risk their lives using a word exclusive to the supreme family. *Modernisation* is a major strategy of coping with archaic terms like royal kinship address terms that might have no equivalents in English.

In Example (2) below from *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), the emperor unexpectedly directs his royal escort to an official inn where his second son Prince Jai is staying. He has been sent away from the palace as a punishment. Upon meeting his father, Jai says:

(2)

MT	父王御驾亲临 儿臣不胜惶恐
PP	fuwang yu jia qinlin, erchen bu sheng huangkong.
EN	I am honored by Father’s personal visit.

‘父王’ (fuwang) literally means ‘father emperor’ or rather ‘emperor father’ and is exclusively used by princes and princesses. In comparison, princes refer to themselves with ‘儿臣’ (erchen), or ‘courtier son’, though princes did not necessarily have a position in the court. ‘驾’ (jia) is a kind of chariot pulled by six horses which is again entitled only to the emperor (Lü *et al.*, 1996, p.610). ‘The emperor’s chariot is pulled by six horses, vassals five, ministers four, higher scholar-officials three, scholar-officials two, common people one.’ (Wangduji of Yili (《逸礼·王度》), translated by myself.) This tradition dates from the Zhou Dynasty (c. 1200-

256BC) or even earlier. ‘御’ (yu) in the original subtitle is ‘royal’ (Lü *et al.*, 1996, p.1544), so ‘御驾’ is the ‘emperor’s royal chariot’. The prince politely says ‘the emperor father’s royal chariot visits personally and your courtier son is very awed’. 儿臣 which Jai uses to call himself is altered into ‘I’ in the English subtitle, which is similar to the previous example. On the other hand, the acting also demonstrates politeness between the royal father and son, as Jai folds his two fists and bows to the emperor, which is an ancient way of paying tribute. When the emperor enters the room, Jai takes the same action and kneels over on one knee, which is a more polite gesture.

The emperor immediately tests Jai’s martial art skills after they meet. Having secured his upper hand in the combat, the emperor teaches Jai a lesson and commands him to return to the palace. Soon after his arrival, Jai visits his empress mother with whom he has an affectionate and loyal relationship. Upon entering the empress’s house, Jai folds his fists and kneels down for her - a traditional polite gesture to pay strong respect. In Example (3) below, he calls himself ‘儿臣’, i.e. courtier son, and thus it is translated into ‘your son’:

(3)

MT	儿臣拜见母后
PP	erchen baijian muhou.
EN	Your son kneels before the Empress.

The foreignness of this unfamiliar kinship address in the English subtitle helps foreign viewers feel the antiquity in the film, and the polite gestures and address term collaborate to convey the politeness. The literal meaning of ‘母后’ (muhou) is ‘mother empress’ or rather ‘empress mother’ who was considered a phenomenal mother. She was not a common mother, but ‘mother of the nation’ (国母, guo mu). Yet strangely enough, average people were probably forbidden to call this supreme mother ‘empress mother’. Hence, ‘empress mother’ is a restricted kinship term but can be simplified into ‘the Empress’. However, in this English subtitle, 儿臣 or ‘your son’ is not replaced by the self-addressing ‘I’ as in the previous example, so the translation strategy is inconsistent. The reason for this inconsistency might be the subtitler’s negligence.

In Example (4), tears come out of the empress’s eyes as she meets Prince Jai for the first time after three years. She asks if he has suffered and he replies that:

(4)

MT	孩儿不辛苦
PP	haier bu xinku.
EN	I am fine.

A literal translation of the source subtitle is ‘(your) child didn’t suffer’. ‘孩儿’ (hai’er) is used both by the supreme family and common ones by a child to refer to themselves to their parents. This might be an exceptional term for the royal family, for they rarely used common people’s address vocabulary. Unlike the previous example, the self-addressing 孩儿 is once again translated into ‘I’. I suggest this subtitle should be translated as ‘your son is fine,’ as ‘your son’ appears in other subtitles in *Curse of the Golden Flower* as aforementioned, and employing this translation throughout will be more consistent and reveals the old speech register of a Chinese royal family. The image clarifies the mother-son relationship to subtitle readers too.

In Example (5), the empress advises Jai to meet his brothers, and thus he approaches his elder brother Crown Prince Wan’s house in the palace, when his younger brother Prince Yu happens to be there too. Upon seeing Wan, Jai says:

(5)

MT	元杰参见王兄
PP	yuanjie canjian wangxiong.
EN	Jai bows to his First Brother, the Crown Prince Wan.

The striking feature of this English subtitle is that its length is more than twice of the source. Literally, the original is ‘Jai bows to the elder royal brother.’ ‘王兄’ (wang xiong) means ‘elder royal brother’ which is translated into ‘First Brother’. Besides, the original does not mention ‘Crown Prince’ or his name, since the Chinese hereditary system would make the first-born son the Crown Prince and it used to be impolite for a younger brother to call an elder one by his name. Subtitle readers will also grasp that the first brother is the Crown Prince in later sequences. Therefore, an unnecessary addition strategy is adopted in English and an extra burden of reading is imposed on subtitle readers. Interestingly, the English subtitle also shows Jai’s different respectful gesture towards the Crown Prince from that to the empress. Jai kneels down for her, but bows for his elder brother.

The Chrysanthemum Festival, which is the 9th September in the Chinese lunar calendar, is an ancient festival for families to reunite. A scene shows on this day, the emperor has a banquet prepared for his family to celebrate. Nevertheless, the seeming harmony fails to cover the

tension between various family members. The emperor, a patriarchal husband and father of a feudal society, forces the empress to take medicine that contains poison. The emperor bears a grudge on his wife who has been having an affair with the Crown Prince, a son born to the emperor's former lover. He begins poisoning his wife secretly ten days earlier, which she senses and has confirmed after a secret investigation. At the celebration, her maid reports her leaving two sips of the medicine (a liquid from boiled traditional Chinese medical herbs), which enrages the emperor, so he forces her to finish the leftover. The third son and the Crown Prince approach her and kneel down to urge her not to exacerbate the situation but finish the medicine, while the emperor claims in Example (6):

(6)

MT	母后不喝 你们就跪着
PP	muhou bu he, nimen jiu guizhe.
EN	Remain kneeling ...until your mother drains the cup.

'If your mother doesn't drink (the medicine), you'll remain kneeling.' In this subtitle, the emperor refers to her with the royal kinship term 'empress mother' while speaking to the sons, similar to a father saying '(your) mum' to his children in English. The subtitle has translated the general meaning of the address. In this section, the ancient royal kinship terms have been modernised by the subtitler in a way which will be easily understood by subtitle readers. In the historical setting of *Curse of the Golden Flower*, polite address has contributed to the expression of antiquity in the film, as royal kinship address itself is an archaic phenomenon. The royal kinship address terms in this section have been faithfully translated in certain cases, but are replaced by self-addressing pronouns in other cases, so the translation strategy is inconsistent. This could be attributed to the subtitler's negligence. This section has also mentioned actors' polite gestures as a visual portrayal of politeness; visual politeness will be analysed later in this chapter.

Extended kinship address

Throughout history, kinship terms are widely used to address people of a specific network. In modern times, these terms have even more extended and generalised use (Gu, 1990, p.250). In politeness theory, an unavoidable part of interaction is face-threatening acts (FTA), and in communication, people's major concern is to preserve their own face (Goffman, 1981) as well as that of their interlocutors. However, in general Chinese polite practice, more significance is attached to saving the interlocutor's face. While interacting with people, a number of face-threatening acts may occur and politeness strategies that mitigate such situations are

necessary. The relative authority/social status/power of people in a conversation and distance between them have to be considered in these strategies (Gartzonika and Serban, 2009, p.242).

In Example (7) from *The Flowers of War* (2011), the prostitutes fail to enter the overly crowded refuge, so they resort to the cathedral for protection. Ling, one of these ladies, has served the cook of the cathedral in return for permission to hide there. Nonetheless, he has irresponsibly escaped and George the little butler denies them entrance. Hence, Dou and two others climb the wall and beg him:

(7)

MT	小哥哥你行行好 好歹放我们进去
PP	xiao gege ni xingxinghao, haodai fang women jinqu.
EN	Please, have some mercy and let us in.

Dou addresses George as ‘little brother’, which is a common politeness usage, especially when a person is looking for help. The purpose of extended kinship terms is to reduce the distance between complete strangers so as to obtain help. However, no similar use exists in English, which leads to the omission of the term and replacement by ‘please’ that is a typical polite or begging interjection. As ‘functional equivalence’ is the choice of a target language word/phrase not due to its formal similarity to the source but the clearer contextual understanding it gives to the target readers (Nida, 1964), the word ‘please’ probably functions as a word of politeness in the English subtitle too.

At dusk, Major Li secretly enters the church yard and forces George to carry the unconscious Pusheng into the cathedral. The Japanese army have banned civilians from hiding Chinese soldiers, and thus Li threatens George in order to find Pusheng a warm place to stay before his death. Example (8) shows, scared by Li’s knife at his neck, George begs:

(8)

MT	大哥 日本人传单说 留当兵的 枪毙
PP	dage, ribenren chuandan shuo, liu dangbingde, qiangbi.
EN	The Japanese have posted a notice, whoever harbors soldiers will be shot.

Referring to Li as ‘大哥’ (dage, big brother), George is obviously begging for understanding, since he cannot risk the convent girls’ lives by harbouring soldiers. Therefore, compared to the previous example where an extended kinship term begs for mercy, the one here is used in a similar social interaction situation as a politeness strategy to claim closeness (Pan and Kadar,

2011, p.1534). The choice between ‘big brother’ (大哥) and ‘little brother’ (小哥哥) is determined by the addressees’ ages; Major Li is older than George while George is younger than Dou in the aforementioned subtitle. However, the address term is inappropriately reduced. A closer rendition may replace ‘big brother’ with a functionally equivalent ‘sir’ which is a polite address term for an unfamiliar man.

The convent students are coerced to sing in a Japanese celebration where they will probably be inhumanely violated by officers and soldiers, so they are determined to jump off the drum tower to save their dignity. Example (9) reveals that John the American mortician and ‘resident priest’ as well as the prostitutes try very hard to urge them to abandon the suicidal idea:

(9)

MT	小妹妹你不要胡闹了!
PP	xiaomeimei ni buyao hunao le!
EN	Don't do anything foolish!

‘小妹妹’ (xiaomeimei, little sister) is an extended kin term that can signal solidarity and familiarity (Pan and Kadar, 2011, p.1534). Adopting the term in this situation is to persuade the addressee(s) into taking an action or not to. Another situation in the same film portrays a prostitute fawns over a student to access their bathroom where she also addresses her as ‘小妹妹 (little sister)’ to declare familiarity. Nonetheless, the girl denies her polite effort, refuting ‘哪个是你妹妹? (Don’t call me sister!)’ Her response reveals that an addressee will reject a signal of solidarity or familiarity if they are reluctant to accept the speaker’s demand. As the prostitute’s politeness demonstration prepares for the girl’s rejection of the polite approach in the next subtitle, that ‘little sister’ is actually subtitled in English. The subtitler may have doubted the significance of the extended kinship in the current example, so ‘little sister’ suffers from omission. Nevertheless, persuading someone to avoid a self-destructive action is much more important than that of gaining entrance to a bathroom. Hence, this ‘little sister’ may have to be maintained in the English subtitle.

In Example (10), after the prostitute Mo suggests going to the Japanese celebration for Shu the leader of the students, her colleagues echo the suggestion to take the girls down from the high balcony of the drum tower, and promise them:

(10)

MT	要杀要剐姐姐们挡着
PP	yao sha yao gua jiejiemen dangzhe.

EN	We will protect you.
----	----------------------

A literal translation of this example will be '(If they) want to kill (you), big sisters will defend you.' '刚' (gua) is an extreme ancient death punishment. The ladies call themselves 'big sisters' to win trust and exhort the girls to stop their attempt. They reduce the relational distance between the girls and themselves, similar to 'little sister' in the previous subtitle. At the end of the film, Shu regrets her previous inappropriate attitude towards Mo and addresses her as 'big sister', which dramatically symbolises her recognition of Mo's kindness and generosity. Thus, Shu's 'big sister', supposed to mean more in relation to her change of attitude, is translated into English by the subtitler, whereas that in the subtitle (10) is omitted. This kinship term may have to be retained, which will help target language audiences understand why Shu's later address of Mo as 'big sister' has a deeper meaning.

In Example (11) below, explaining her reason for volunteering to sacrifice herself for a student at the Japanese party, Mo tells her companions not to fear, as the Japanese simply want pleasure and:

(11)

MT	姐妹们都是干这一行的
PP	jiemeimen doushi gan zheyihang de.
EN	That's what we do.

'We sisters do that as a profession.' The English subtitle not only makes their profession more ambiguous, but also deletes the kin term that makes her rationalisation smoother. The term '姐妹们' manifests solidarity and familiarity as well as the particular way of address in brothels. Female bosses who ran brothels were named '鸨母' (baomu) in which '母' (mu) means 'mother'. Prostitutes called their boss 'mother', although she was absolutely not their mother but a retired prostitute who made money from them. In modern times, bosses of hidden brothels are still called '妈妈桑' (mama sang) in Chinese, which derives from Japanese and originally means a middle aged or elderly woman or a female boss of a pub or a brothel (Wu, 2015). Also, prostitutes mostly came from lower-class families. Since they were involved in the same profession and supervised by the same 'mother', they were accustomed to calling each other 'sisters'. In other countries, brothels may not have this culture, so the address term is omitted in English.

In Example (12) from *To Live* (1994), after an arranged appointment, Erxi and Fengxia are willing to marry each other. Erxi politely asks Fengxia's parents Jiazhen and Fugui for permission:

(12)

MT	我跟凤霞的事二老还有什么意见
PP	wo gen fengxia de shi erlao haiyou shenme yijian?
EN	What do you think about Fengxia and me?

The literal meaning is 'What do you two think of the marriage between Fengxia and me?' '二老' (erlao), meaning 'two elderly people', always implies parents. As Erxi is asking Fengxia's parents for permission to marry their daughter, he adopts this politeness kin address to claim familiarity and closeness. Even though it is difficult to translate the kin term, the English subtitle could convey the deference encoded in the kin address more adequately through rendering the request more explicitly, like 'Would you allow me to marry Fengxia?'

In Example (13) from *To Live* (1994), Chunsheng, who has been previously caught in the Civil War (1945-1950) together with Fugui, accidentally and indirectly kills Fugui and Jiazhen's son. Jiazhen has been holding a grudge against him since then. For all that Chunsheng visits Fugui several times and attempts to compensate, Jiazhen refuses his apology, even when he brings a wedding gift for Fengxia. He disappointedly says:

(13)

MT	嫂子 我知道你还是不想见我
PP	saozi, wo zhidao ni haishi buxiang jian wo.
EN	Jiazhen, I know you don't want to see me.

Chunsheng addresses Jiazhen as '嫂子' (saozi), i.e. big sister-in-law. He and Fugui have been through drastic events in China and forged a brotherly relationship. Thus, Jiazhen is similar to a sister-in-law; this use of kin address for a non-kin relationship operates as a *keqi* (politeness) strategy (Feng, 2011, p.56). However, the English subtitle would be confusing if 'sister-in-law' were used. Although first name terms are lacking in respect in many occasions in China where a polite kin term should be used, they indeed demonstrate a close relationship and may be a proper choice. The extended kinship terms in this section have largely been omitted or replaced by the characters' names or corresponding pronouns, whereas some terms which are of importance to the situations could have been easily translated and retained, so that subtitle

readers would see the polite attitude demonstrated in the kinship terms. It is especially significant to maintain the consistency of the translation strategy of kinship terms in one film.

Occupational address

Most occupational titles in Chinese can be a way of address, although their English equivalents have not necessarily the same usage (Gu, 1990, p. 250). A typical example will be ‘王老师’ which means Teacher Wang, though the family name always comes before the title like ‘Wang Teacher’. Furthermore, certain titles are also used as occupational address terms on their own, such as ‘老师’ (teacher), ‘教授’ (professor), ‘局长’ (bureau director), ‘医生’ (medical doctor) and ‘师傅’ (skilful worker). This section will analyse how some examples of occupational address terms are translated, or whether they are omitted or retained.

In Example (14), Fugui and Jiazhen are discussing the potential son-in-law Erxi with whom they are not familiar, and imagine he is vandalising their house. Fugui realises that:

(14)

MT	没听 <u>镇长</u> 说他是个组织头头
PP	mei ting zhenzhang shuo ta shi ge zuzhi toutou.
EN	Mr. Niu said he was a Red Guard.

‘镇长’ (zhenzhang) is a mayor of a borough, which is a governmental as well as an occupational title. The title alone, without any family name, is already a polite address term. The subtitler ignores his title but simplifies it into the functionally proper ‘Mr Niu’ to show people’s respect to him. ‘Mayor’ can possibly be another choice that lays an emphasis on Niu’s occupation and his support of Fugui’s family with the advantage of his position.

Example (15) demonstrates that during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Mayor Niu is taken down as a capitalist from his post, which astounds Fugui and Jiazhen, as he has cared for their family for over two decades. Noticing his forced smile and his wife crying, Fugui comforts him:

(15)

MT	<u>镇长</u> 您把心放宽 多保重
PP	zhenzhang, nin ba xin fangkuan, duo baozhong.
EN	<u>Niu</u> , don't let it get to you. Take care!

The inappropriateness of the English version is the omission of ‘Mr’ contrasting to ‘Mr Niu’ before. In Chinese, Fugui still addresses him as ‘mayor’ as in previous sequences, which

manifests their respect and gratitude to him despite the social tumult and the loss of his governmental position. Nonetheless, the subtitler disregards Fugui's unchanged attitude towards Niu and manipulates the title address term into simply his family name, which infers a non-existent changed notion towards Niu's reduced social status. Hence, the English subtitle seems to attempt to mislead subtitle readers about Fugui's true feeling. 'Mr' should be retained in this case to make Fugui's attitude consistent. On the other hand, politeness is also culture-based, as words and phrases deemed impolite in one culture may not be face-threatening in another (Gartzonika and Serban, 2009, p.242). Similarly, first name terms, a common way of address, might be impolite or not polite enough in another culture. The inconsistency in this address can be noticed by an observant subtitle reader and it might occur to them that there is a change of honorific.

In Example (16) from *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), Prince Jai is appointed by the emperor as the Commanding Officer of the Chrysanthemum Festival night who will guard the palaces of the emperor's wives. On this night, Jai commands the guarding soldiers to enjoy a feast, as he will keep the palaces under surveillance instead. The head soldier receives Jai's order and extends their gratitude on behalf:

(16)

MT	末将得令 拜谢 <u>执令官</u>
PP	mojiang de ling, baixie zhilingguan.
EN	Orders received. We thank our gracious Prince.

'执令官' (zhilingguan) is literally 'commanding officer', which is an ancient occupational title serving as a polite address without a family name. The English subtitle alters the source address term into 'gracious Prince'. The simplification of politeness explicates the identity of the commanding officer, when the prince is standing right beside the head soldier and a previous sequence also shows the emperor's appointment. Therefore, it is not highly necessary to emphasise that the prince is the commanding officer in this subtitle. A suggestion for the subtitle might be 'Order received. We thank the Commanding Officer.' The occupational address in this section has all been altered, which is acceptable. Yet again, consistency has to be maintained if an address term appears more than once, so that there will be no attitudinal changes that contradict the filmic context.

4.2 Self-denigration

Apart from the Address Maxim explained in the previous section, Gu has also proposed the Self-denigration Maxim. This section will illustrate the phenomenon of self-denigration with examples from the films mentioned above. Gu's Self-denigration Maxim comprises 'two clauses or submaxims: (a) denigrate self and (b) elevate other' and this maxim 'absorbs the notions of respectfulness and modesty (Gu, 1990, p.246).' Breaching the two submaxims by denigrating the other or elevating oneself is perceived as being impolite, rude, arrogant or boasting (ibid.). The concepts of 'self' and 'other' extend to physical conditions, mental states, properties, values, attitudes, writing, spouse, family, relatives, etc., that constitute the sphere of self or other (ibid.). However, the extensive concept of self or other is not intrinsically politeness-sensitive *per se*, but the acts of self-referring and other-referring is. The self-referring and other-referring acts are responsible for the denigrative and elevative use of expressions to be examined below. Also, the distance between self-denigration and other elevation in ancient China was much larger than in modern China (Gu, 1990, p.247), and self-denigration in contemporary times and in the past encompasses distinct vocabulary. At the beginning of *To Live* (1994), Fugui has been constantly gambling and the accountant informs Fugui of his one more loss in Example (17):

(17)

MT	福贵少爷，您又输了
PP	fugui shaoye, nin you shule.
EN	You've lost again.

The accountant addresses him as '少爷' (shaoye) which is 'young master', as Fugui's family is rich and owns a huge house craved by the winner Long'er. Both the accountant and the winner flatter him so as to entice him to continue gambling and ultimately lose his house. The other-elevating strategy implies the plot behind the polite remarks. Yet, the pronoun 'you' can be used in any situation, which is not specific enough. Therefore, the English subtitle may have to add 'master' or 'young master' or 'Master Fugui' as in the original instead of total omission or domestication.

Ancient self-denigration

The difference between self-denigration and other elevation in ancient China is much more evident, and some archaic terms will sound overly denigrating or elevating nowadays (Gu, 1990, p.247). As the social system has changed, some terms do not apply to the current Chinese society any more.

In Example (18) below from *Hero* (2002), the swordsman Nameless is summoned to the King of Qin's palace to report his method of defeating three most dangerous assassins, Sky, Flying Snow and Broken Sword. According to him, he has beaten them individually, taking advantage of their secret affairs unknown to the King, as he declares:

(18)

MT	臣想方设法才获此秘情
PP	chen xiangfangshefa cai huo ci miqing.
EN1	It took your servant much effort to uncover this secret.
EN2	I went to great lengths to uncover it

'Your servant' in the first English subtitle replaces '臣' (chen) which is a courtier at a court, or generally a man who serves his master, be it a king, an emperor, an official or a scholar. Originally, 臣 means a male slave (Xia *et al.*, 1999, p.5193), and the first subtitle chooses to render the self-denigrating expression explicit with 'your servant'. Yet, the second version omits the politeness usage and produces a more natural-sounding translation.

Nameless depicts in Example (19) below that he travels to the calligraphy school in the Kingdom of Zhao to find Broken Sword and Flying Snow, where he requests Broken Sword's calligraphy. When asked about who he is by the master of the school, he claims to originate from the place Yi of Zhao:

(19)

MT	在下赵国易县人
PP	zaixia zhaoguo yixian ren.
EN1	I am from a small province in Zhao.
EN2	I'm from Yi County/in the Kingdom of Zhao

Nameless introduces himself to the master and trainer of the calligraphy school where Broken Sword has been hiding. This self-denigrating and self-addressing pronoun '在下' (zaixia) literally means 'down under', which further implies the denigration of oneself and other elevation. Similar denigrative honorifics are too obsolete and humble to be used today (Gu, 1990, p.248). Since self-denigration is not so apparent in English-speaking culture, the honorific is omitted due to the lack of an equivalent application. Regarding the accuracy of the translation of the place name, the second version is more precise, where separating this utterance into two shorter subtitles might help to reduce the pressure on the viewers.

In Example (20) below, Nameless declares his request for a piece of calligraphy in order to fulfil his deceased father's dying wish:

(20)

MT	先父临终留下遗愿 求贵馆一份墨宝
PP	xianfu linzhong liuxia yiyuan, qiu guiguan yifen mobao.
EN1	My father's dying wish was to acquire/a scroll from <u>your prestigious school</u> .
EN2	My father's dying wish/was for one of your scrolls

The meaning of the adjective ‘贵’ (gui) is ‘your prestigious’ that shows the speaker's respect towards the interlocutor. This other-elevation expression of politeness is still in use in modern days, although it sounds evidently literary and old-fashioned. ‘贵姓’ (your prestigious family name), ‘贵校’ (your prestigious school) and ‘贵方’ (your prestigious party) still appear in formal discourses and documents. More interestingly, ‘墨宝’ (mobao) is also an addressee-elevating term owing to its literal meaning - ‘ink treasure’. This Chinese phrase is used to refer to the addressee's excellent calligraphy work. It is deemed as highly self-conceited and inappropriate to use the phrase about oneself. Because of the non-existence of an equivalent usage in English, ‘墨宝’ has to be simplified, but ‘your prestigious school’ in the first translation can manifest enough respect from Nameless to the school. By contrast, the second translation shows no apparent politeness and appears slightly plain. Compliments are a type of politeness that are heavily affected by a text reduction process during subtitling, as they belong to the realm of expressivity but do not carry strictly factual information (Bruti, 2009, p.230). The obliteration of complimenting politeness is assumed to be due to the lack of significance of interpersonal and textual cues over an entire film (ibid.).

Example (21) below shows that when Broken Sword asks Nameless about the Chinese character he wants for the calligraphy, Nameless says ‘剑’ (jian) or ‘sword’, which surprises Broken Sword and his maid. They sense Nameless' unknown goal of his sudden appearance, and become slightly alert. Broken Sword's question shows his concern over the guest's aim, as he asks:

(21)

MT	客人是爱剑之人?
PP	keren shi ai jian zhi ren?
EN1	My honoured guest is fond of swords?
EN2	You are fond of the sword?

‘Honoured’ in the first English subtitle unfortunately does not originate from the source, as the source simply says ‘客人’(keren, (my) guest). While ‘客人’ is respectful and polite, the level of politeness is much lower than ‘honoured’ in English. Therefore, respectfulness is intensified in the first subtitle. The second version, again, does not show politeness. With regard to the level of politeness of the speaker, the translation may be just ‘my guest...’

Broken Sword makes an enquiry to Nameless about the scroll dimension of calligraphy he prefers, and he replies ‘八尺’(ba chi, eight feet of old Chinese measurement) that demands ‘朱砂’(zhusha, cinnabar) for maintaining the colour of the calligraphy. Broken Sword sends his maid to borrow ‘朱砂’ from Flying Snow, so his maid says to Flying Snow in Example (22):

(22)

MT	有客人求字 主人特向小姐借朱砂一用
PP	you keren qiu zi, zhuren te xiang xiaojie jie zhusha yi yong.
EN1	Master wishes to borrow some red ink from the mistress.
EN2	My master has asked me/to borrow some red ink

In the first translation, she addresses Broken Sword and Flying Snow respectively as ‘主人’(zhuren) and ‘小姐’(xiaojie), which literally mean ‘master’ and ‘young lady’/‘mistress’. These other-elevating terms symbolise the hierarchal society of ancient China when a maid was inferior to her master and mistress, and had to employ respectful address. The terms are almost no longer in use in mainland Chinese families, but the translation of the first subtitle is faithful. The second one omits the honorific for Flying Snow, which may be owing to the contextual detail where the maid is in fact impatient and only pretends to be polite.

Before the calligraphy is finished, Qin army commence their arrow attack. Nameless volunteers to fend off arrows from entering the school and wounding the students, only to discover that Flying Snow arrives at the door at the same time. In Example (23) below, he says to her:

(23)

MT	是流水先生吗?
PP	shi liushui xiansheng ma?
EN1	You must be mistress Flying Snow.
EN2	Master Springbrook

The literal meaning of the source is ‘Are you *Mr Liushui*?’ ‘流水’ (liushui) (running/flying water) is Flying Snow’s alias, and is combined with Broken Sword’s alias ‘高山’ (gaoshan, high mountains) to refer to a piece of ancient classic music and allude to empathetic bosom friends. In modern Chinese, ‘先生’ (xiansheng, Mr) is used to address an unfamiliar man or a man of a higher position politely, whereas decades ago, especially during the period of the Republic of China (1912-1949) on the mainland, it could refer to any well-educated person with a fairly high social status, including women. Yet, in the Warring States period when the film is set, this usage was still absent, but it reveals Nameless’ respectful and admiring intention. This obsolete honorific helps to express antiquity in the historical setting. That explains why the second version uses ‘master’, which is the same polite address of Nameless for Broken Sword. The old usage ‘mistress’ in the first translation also represents his respect towards the renowned swordswoman.

In the last part of the film, the King finally unravels the cooperative scheme of Nameless, Sky, Broken Sword and Flying Snow. Nameless expresses his admiration and compliment in

Example (24) below:

(24)

MT	大王见识过人
PP	dawang jianshiguoren.
EN1	Your majesty is most perceptive.
EN2	Your Majesty is perceptive

‘大王’ has two pronunciations in Chinese: ‘dawang’ means a king, which is ‘Your Majesty’ in English; or ‘daiwang’, the leader of a mob of bandits who used to reside on a mountain. The first applies to the original in Example (24). If the speaker is inferior with regard to political power, profession, knowledge, age as well as certain other factors, they usually initiates talk exchanges by addressing the superior first (Gu, 1990, pp.250-251). The address serves as the subject of the sentence. This self-denigration rule applies to many other examples in this part.

The King articulates his assumption of the truth where Nameless would have a duel with Broken Sword or more likely Flying Snow. The general of the Qin army commands to arrest Flying Snow immediately, but Nameless has promised to combat with her alone and states in Example (25):

(25)

MT	如在下不能取胜 再有劳将军援手相助
----	-------------------

PP	ru zaixia buneng qusheng, zai youlao jiangjun yuanshou xiangzhu.
EN1	If I am unable to succeed, / please feel free to step in.
EN2	Should I be unable to defeat her/please apprehend her

The verb ‘有劳’ (youlao) is to bother others while asking for help, which is an other-elevation. ‘Giving deference is a typical *keqi* strategy that reflects the sense of social hierarchy of the Chinese people (Feng, 2011, p.55).’ Nameless is a prefect of an area of only ten square *li* (a Chinese measurement that equals 500 metres), and is inferior to the general of the Qin army. Also, ‘援手’ (yuanshou, helping hand) refers to the interlocutor’s help, which is also a deferential term. The English subtitles largely lose the literary, formal as well as respectful register. A suggestion may be ‘If I fail, your generous help will be needed.’

In Example (26) below from *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), the maid Jiang Chan of the empress brings medicine to her, when she makes this salutation:

(26)

MT	奴婢拜见王后
PP	nubi baijian wanghou.
EN	Your servant kneels before the Empress.

‘奴婢’ (nubi) refers to female servants in the past. It used to be very critical for servants to be self-denigrating so that the social and familial hierarchy was maintained. Particularly in this film, the inferiority of sons to their emperor father and that of a wife to her emperor husband are highlighted by the emperor’s emphasis of ‘rules’ and obedience and his oppressive treatment of his wife. Thus, the superiority of the ruling class has to be stressed, and the English subtitle well conveys the servant status of the maid for subtitle readers.

In another scene from *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), the emperor enhances his imperial doctor’s rank and awards him with a higher post to govern a city which, in reality, is a trap where his whole family are murdered later. Unaware of the conspiracy, the doctor appreciates the emperor’s award in Example (27) below:

(27)

MT	微臣感激不尽
PP	weichen ganjibujin.
EN	My gratitude is without bounds.

The ancient term for courtiers to refer to themselves when addressing an emperor is ‘微臣’ (weichen), or ‘humble courtier’. Power is a crucial variable of politeness analysis, and power differences between interlocutors have a major influence on choosing politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The subtitler has simplified the doctor’s power-submissive deferential phrase, but the exaggerated gratitude in the translation may compensate for the respect conveyed by the source self-denigration.

After his rank increases, the imperial doctor goes to the city that he will govern, bringing his daughter Chan, the empress’s maid. Chan was visited by her lover, the Crown Prince, which happens to be discovered by her mother, so the doctor introduces her to the prince in Example (28) below:

(28)

MT	太子殿下 这是贱内
PP	taizi dianxia, zheshi jiannei.
EN	Your Highness, may I present my wife.

‘殿下’ (dianxia) is a royal address term for the emperor’s family members, literally meaning ‘(people) under palace doorsteps’, which indicates that people could only talk to the interlocutor under the steps of their palaces. In different dynasties, the term refers to different members, including princes, the empress and the empress dowager. ‘Your Highness’ is an appropriate replacement for this other-elevating address. ‘贱内’ (jiannei), which means ‘humble wife’, is an obsolescent usage to refer to one’s wife. This use is extremely self-denigrating, as it is in fact denigrating the wife in order to humble himself. Thus, it is right for the subtitler to omit such a term without an equivalent in English. Most self-denigration terms in this section are from *Hero* (2002), and the two versions of English subtitles both more or less retain those terms. In comparison, one of the self-denigrating terms from *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) might be omitted because the term is overly denigrating.

4.3 Non-verbal politeness

Compared to the non-verbal humour in the previous chapter, politeness is manifested non-verbally in Zhang’s films too. As polite gestures or body language are more common in films that portray the ancient times than those that are set in modern times, *Hero* (2002) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) demonstrate more polite body language than *To Live* (1994) and *The Flowers of War* (2011). In *Hero*, non-verbal politeness is shown mainly by Nameless to the King of Qin. Since his entry into the palace, he has been kneeling before the King (see Fig.4.1).

He is awarded for annihilating the assassin Sky with land and gold as well as the right to drink with the King. After his elimination of two more assassins - Broken Sword and Flying Snow - is announced, he is awarded with more land and gold, and is permitted to get closer to the King. He advances towards the King and kneels down again (see Fig.4.2). The shortened distance between Nameless and the King is revealed by the lengthened distance between him and the gate of the palace (see Fig.4.1 and Fig.4.2). Kneeling is an extremely polite gesture which is much more common in the past than today. In the past, people used to kneel and kowtow to their senior relatives. Film productions and drama series often depict the prosecutor, the accused and the witness kneeling in front of the authorities in court too. The ultimately polite gesture is ‘三拜九叩’ (sanbaijiukou), which is to bow for three times and kowtow for nine times (Xia *et al.*, 1999, p.2052). 三拜九叩 was to show politeness to emperors or when worshipping ancestors. The polite gesture of kowtow is noticeable in *Curse of the Golden Flower*, as all three princes have to kowtow to the emperor.

Another example of ancient polite body language is ‘拱手’ (gongshou), which was used when people of the same generation or a similar class met or bid goodbye to each other. 拱手 is to half-fold two hands (Xia *et al.*, 1999, p.1962) and often bow gently at the same time. In *Curse of the Golden Flower*, there is one scene where the second prince Jai returns to the royal palace and meets up with his two brothers. Jai bows to his elder brother, the Crown Prince Wan, and 拱手 at the same time (see Fig. 4.3). Meanwhile, Jai’s younger brother Yu shows a similar polite body language to Jai (see Fig.4.4). If we have a closer look at Fig.4.3 and Fig.4.4, we will notice that Jai and Yu bow to a similar angle, whereas Wan almost stands still. The reason is probably that Wan is the oldest brother and Crown Prince, and is superior to his two younger brothers. Therefore, standing up and half-folding his hands demonstrate enough politeness to Jai. These politeness gestures assist subtitle readers in understanding the politeness that the inferior needed to demonstrate to the superior. If particular subtitles had been translated into rude lines, subtitle readers would have been able to detect the mistake due to the presence of non-verbal representation, so subtitle readers will not be misled.

According to Goffman (1967, p.477),

The acts or events, that is, the sign-vehicles or tokens which carry ceremonial messages, are remarkably various in character. They may be...gestural, as when the physical bearing of an individual conveys insolence or obsequiousness; spatial, as when an individual precedes another through the door, or sits on his right instead of his left.

In ancient China, left is a higher position than right, so the official who stood to the left of a king had a higher position than the official on the right. The idiom ‘虚左以待’ (xuzuoyidai) means to vacate the seat on the left to wait for the guest (Xia *et al.*, 1999, p.5256), which is from the story of the ancient statesman and military strategist Xin ling jun (信陵君) (? - c.243 BC) recorded in the *Records of the Grand Historian* (《史记》, shiji) written by the great historian Sima Qian (司马迁). In Fig.4.4, we can see Wan stands to the left of Yu, because Wan has been sitting to Yu’s left, until Jai appears. After the three brothers politely greet each other, Yu gives his seat to Jai, while he stands up and Jai seats to the right of Wan. During the whole scene, Wan has been sitting or standing on the left, because left is the superior side.

Polite gestures can probably be understood universally, even though foreign subtitle readers may not be familiar with common Chinese polite traditions. Non-verbal information tends to be transmitted more smoothly than verbal information. More importantly, non-verbal polite body language serves to compensate for the verbal politeness that is unfortunately lost in translation sometimes. Whenever audiences see a bow, kneeling and kowtow in films set in ancient China, they will presumably apprehend the polite attitude from those gestures immediately, no matter where they are from. By contrast, in modern China, polite gestures have become fewer than in ancient times, while the most common gesture is hand-shaking, which is from abroad. Thanks to the possibly universal intelligibility of non-verbal information, honorifics which have no equivalents in English, or cannot be translated due to textual constraints such as line length, can be left untranslated, in those contexts where polite body language is enough to convey politeness.



Fig.4.1: Nameless kneels down in front of the King.

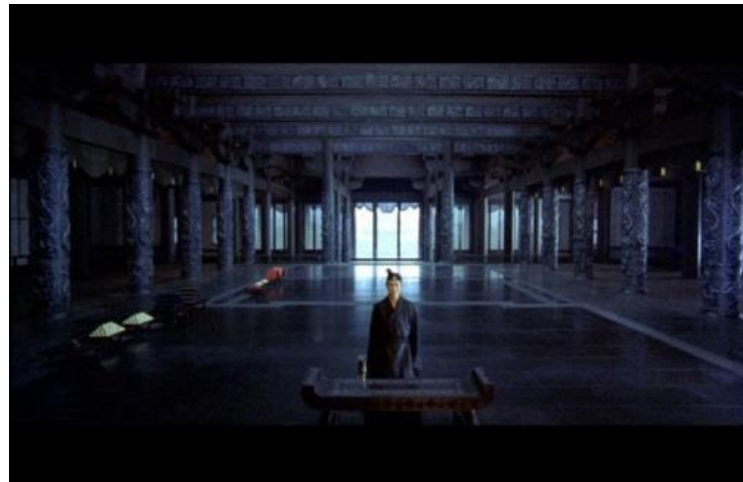


Fig.4.2: Nameless advances for 20 steps and kneels down again.



Fig.4.3: Jai bows to the Crown Prince Wan.



Fig.4.4: Wan and Yu make polite gestures to Jai.

This chapter has investigated specificities of politeness in subtitling from Chinese into English, with representative examples from four films of Zhang Yimou, which are *To Live* (1994), *Hero* (2002), *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) and *The Flowers of War* (2011). On the basis of Gu's (1990, pp.245-252) Address Maxim and Self-denigration Maxim, politeness strategies have been categorised into address terms and self-denigration terms, which sometimes overlap. Address terms were further divided into kinship terms and occupational titles. Certain forms of kinship address have to be simplified and specified with the names of the people concerned, while other forms of address are unnecessarily domesticated and omitted in those films. Even if particular kinship terms do not have equivalents in English, a compensating strategy can be adopted to reproduce the polite attitude. Self-denigration is mainly analysed from contemporary and ancient perspectives; it is needed to subtitle ancient denigrative or elevative terms using a modernisation strategy. In a nutshell, particular politeness terms lack equivalents in English, which can be handled by means of simplification, modernisation or compensation strategies; other terms indeed bear similarity to relevant usages in English, and thus the source Chinese terms have to be transferred into English accordingly. Consistency has to be maintained while subtitling politeness, especially if particular terms constantly appear in a film.

To watch a film from a foreign country is also to observe and capture a fairly unfamiliar culture. Politeness is an inextricable part of a culture and society. Although polite address terms may not carry actual meanings, they have prominent social functions in the original culture. While watching a foreign film, we usually do not intentionally pay attention to the politeness of the original culture. However, we more often than not notice politeness habits which are different from that of our own culture. This is especially true regarding cultural differences as evident as those between China and many other countries. When politeness is represented in the dialogue of a source Chinese film, there may be no equivalent address terms or similar usages in English. And yet, when there are equivalent terms that produce a similar polite attitude, the English subtitles should not attempt to domesticate or omit the politeness in the dialogue. Politeness address terms might have significant contextual implications, as an extra usage of a polite term can indicate a change of a character's attitude. Imagine that two men are on first-name terms, but one suddenly starts to call the other 'Mr...' It is very likely that something has happened between them, so their relationship has become less close. This example is not very

different from the example from *The Flowers of War* where the student Shu finally acknowledges Mo's kindness and calls her 'big sister'. This chapter has not intended to maintain that every single example of verbal politeness in a source Chinese film should be recreated in the English subtitles, but at least, a subtitler ought to try to find words or phrases that functionally display a similar level of polite attitude as in the original dialogue.

I also speculate that the tendency for the subtitlers to simplify and domesticate source politeness could be a sign of the subtitlers' attempt to provide 'special care' for subtitle readers. This 'care' is largely based on the assumption that foreign viewers are unfamiliar with the common Chinese institution of politeness, so they will have much difficulty in comprehending the politeness-bound terms and expressions. Nonetheless, even if subtitlers domesticate or omit polite expressions, gestures and acting will enable ordinary foreign subtitle readers to discover non-verbal politeness. The non-verbal politeness *per se* is an alien element embedded in a subtitle reader's film-watching experience. If the terms of politeness are translated into English, there will only be one or two extra words in the English subtitles, so subtitlers probably do not need to be overly concerned about the foreignness that stems from the one or two extra words. The verbal and non-verbal politeness correlates with each other to convey the polite attitude in a filmic context. Therefore, there is no need for subtitlers to fear that alien politeness terms may baffle subtitle readers, for they should never be underestimated. Again, consistency ought to be maintained in coping with the same polite term in order to retain the same polite attitude. Moreover, a term of polite address should be translated in an earlier scene if it makes a difference in a later scene, so the particularity behind the term will be more evident and intelligible. Ultimately, it is most natural that every culturally distinct country has its distinct politeness traditions in speech as well as gestures. As a translation ought not to stand in the light of the source or obscure it (Benjamin, 1923/2012), politeness, an element that might 'shine' in the source, should be translated wherever necessary.

Chapter Five

Dialect in subtitling: *The Flowers of War* (Zhang Yimou, 2011)

When we watch a film in our native languages, we will more often than not notice the geographical setting of the film, or the actors' and actresses' accents, or that they are trying to act as if they are from a specific region. Obviously, all this information can be reflected by one specificity – dialect. Audiences sometimes complain that certain American actors/actresses' English accents are terrible, or vice versa, and they cannot help but notice it. When we watch a film in a language that we understand, it is very easy to notice an actor's/actress's proficiency in a dialect, if we know they are not from the regions of the dialect. When it comes to watching a foreign language film, presumably far fewer audiences will think of dialect as an issue again, perhaps because they are less familiar with or sensitive to foreign accents or they do not understand the original dialogue but rely on subtitles. Not many people will ask questions like 'Is the main language of the film a particular dialect variation? Are the actors/actresses native speakers of the dialect? If not, are they doing a good job?' As we all know, Hollywood films cast British stars and British films cast American stars too. They are most likely to have performed the required dialects satisfactorily after training, although there are exceptions of course. Sometimes, actors/actresses can speak their native dialect, or a standard variation of the dialect, maybe because the filmmaker regards it as an interesting idea. Chinese dialects are no less varied than any other country. Chinese films are constantly set in various regions in China where specific dialects are spoken. *Eat Hot Tofu Slowly* (《心急吃不了热豆腐》, Xinji chi bu liao re doufu) (Feng Gong, 2005) is set in a county in Hebei, China, as all the performers allegedly learned to speak with the local dialect. *Aftershock* (《唐山大地震》, Tangshan da dizhen) (Feng Xiaogang, 2010) is set in Tangshan, China and the performers were, allegedly, trained to speak the dialect of Tangshan.

As the term 'dialect' will appear frequently throughout this chapter, I would like to distinguish 'dialect' from 'accent' first. According to Hughes, Trudgill and Watt (2012, p.3),

A dialect, in the strict sense of the word, is a language variety distinguished from other varieties by differences of grammar and vocabulary. Standard (British) English is therefore a dialect of English, just as the other standard dialects of the language (Standard Scottish English, American English, etc.) are, and all the non-standard dialects of the language too. Accent, on the other hand, refers just to variations in pronunciation. Many people, including a lot of linguists, do not draw a sharp distinction between the meanings of the two terms, however.

Although dialects might mean little to foreign viewers, a filmmaker must have an intention when they include a dialect in a film, often to take advantage of the stereotype of the dialect,

which makes it necessary, if not important. Subtitlers should understand this intention. As the aims a spoken language fulfils are mostly either to communicate information or to establish social relationships with listeners, the way a person talks often reveals more than what they say when people initially meet (Trudgill, 2000, p.1). When a dialect is pinpointed in a social and geographical picture in a target culture, the subtitler has to identify the role of this dialect in the audiovisual production in question (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007, p.191). On the other hand, a linguistic variant is spoken all the way through a film, but sometimes only specific characters in this film use it; also, the function this variant fulfils also needs to be evaluated (ibid.). Even though dialects are included in films usually with specific purposes by the creators of the films, it can be hard to transfer them from the original language to the target one. If target language dialects are adopted in subtitles, the reader of those subtitles can be confused, as dialects within one country may not always be mutually understandable. Zhang Yimou's *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* which has been discussed in Chapter Three mainly involves a northeastern dialect which has a reputation of being comic in China, especially in the north of China. As aforementioned in that previous chapter, this dialect became known for being comedic about two decades ago due to the Chinese comedian Zhao Benshan who is from the northeast, and has also become more renowned in recent years thanks to the popularity of Zhao's pupils like Mao Mao and Xiao Shen Yang who are from the same dialect region. The dialect in *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* has also been discussed in Chapter Three with regard to its humour. Most performers in that film are originally from the northeast, hence native speakers of the dialect. Zhang aimed to create a hilarious dark screwball comedy, and it is apparent that the performers' native dialect contributes to the humour of the film.

Dialects in films can carry plenty of information. When a film with a dialect is subtitled into a foreign language, when the translation does not show any dialect, the subtitle reader ends up missing ample information that they may be interested to know. And yet, there might be no better solution sometimes. A major objective of this chapter is to highlight a dialect in another film of Zhang Yimou, *The Flowers of War* (2011) and the translation strategies that the subtitler has frequently adopted, with a view to summing up a general rule of coping with dialect subtitling. This rule is that most subtitles with the original dialect have to be altered into the standard variation of the target language. However, when the dialect in the subtitles is also linked to references of the original culture, the strategy of domestication should be carefully used, because cultural references are inclined to be more translatable than dialects and ought not to be simply domesticated. While investigating the dialect and its translation, this chapter

will also try to discover what specific information eludes subtitle readers and will provide my alternative translations that can retain more of the original cultural information.

5.1 Dialect in subtitling

Zhang Yimou's *The Flowers of War* (《金陵十三钗》, Jinling shisan chai) (2011), one of the highest invested Chinese films, was a box office success in China after its official release in December 2011. Zhang as well as his crew devoted a few years to preparing the film script, targeting the international market, and they also involved a Hollywood star Christian Bale's appeal and international special effect and other technical support teams. Moreover, 40% of the film is in English (Sandell, 2011), so foreign audiences will be able to understand the English dialogue and only need to read English subtitles for the non-English dialogue. The Nanjing Massacre (December 1937 – February 1938) portrayed in the film, also known as the Rape of Nanjing, refers to the massive killing, rape, arson and looting committed in Nanjing, the then capital of the Republic of China (1912-1949), by Japanese militaristic armies during the Anti-Japanese Aggression War (1937-1945). About 300,000 people were raped, killed or buried alive in this city during the six weeks of the slaughter. In order to render optimally genuine wartime scenes in the film, the director recruited the majority of teenage or adult performers, in Nanjing. Because Mandarin Chinese is the language of education at school in big cities, the teenagers who probably speak Mandarin in daily life had even been given an assignment before shooting commenced: to practise speaking the most original Nanjing dialect of that age (yellow Sub, 2011). Nanjing folk artist Xu Chunhua trained the young performers to speak the Nanjing dialect of the time of the Massacre (Anon, 2011; Liu, 2012, p.22). Apparently, this dialect is a prominent linguistic feature of this film.

The Flowers of War is characterised by the Nanjing dialect. This dialect demonstrates nuanced grammatical difference from Mandarin, as Liu and Pan (2008) have illustrated the difference between the VVR sentence structure in the Nanjing dialect and the VR structure in Mandarin. 'V' represents a verb, and 'R' is the result of the verb, or a verb complement, i.e. the word or phrase that comes after the verb (ibid). A verb has to be of certain types in order to form a VVR structure in the dialect, while VVR structures show different semantic features from the counterpart VR structure in Mandarin (ibid.). That is also why I employ the expression 'Nanjing dialect' rather than 'Nanjing accent'. On the other hand, like Mandarin, Nanjing dialect is tonal, but the tones can be different from Mandarin (Sun, 2003). The Nanjing dialect also has the 'entering tone' (Sun, 2001; Sun, 2003; Song, 2009), which does not exist in Mandarin anymore and which makes 去 (to go, qu) sound like 'key'. Nonetheless, the entering tone is disappearing

in the Nanjing dialect, as the teenage actresses in the film had to learn to pronounce it from the basics (Anon, 2011). Also, the Nanjing dialect does not distinguish alveolar and velar nasal sounds (like 'sin' and 'sing') (Xing, 2011). Considering the conspicuous difference between the dialect and Mandarin, Zhang Yimou required the artist and Nanjing dialect teacher to provide various versions of dialogue in the dialect and gave up the obscure lines, presumably to choose the most intelligible version (ibid.). And yet, the dialect still sounded unusual for native Nanjing audiences, and might be difficult to understand for audiences from other parts of China (Xiang, 2011). To make it clear, unlike the Mandarin subtitles of other Zhang Yimou's films that have been transcribed from the audio, the Mandarin subtitles in this chapter are from an online version of *The Flowers of War* available on the Chinese website letv.com.

The film is set in Nanjing during the Japanese aggression. Some teenage girls in a Catholic convent have missed the boat to escape from Nanjing and have to run back to their cathedral. To the students' resentment, some prostitutes from a local brothel, who have failed to get into the refuge, trespass on the cathedral in order to seek protection from the Westerners inside. The only Westerner in the cathedral is an American mortician John Miller (Christian Bale) who is disguised as the resident priest in order to seek refuge. After witnessing the atrocities committed by the Japanese invaders, especially the attempted rape of the convent girls, he decides to remain disguised as the priest to protect them. However, the girls are detained by the Japanese, and eventually coerced into agreeing to sing in a Japanese celebration of conquering Nanjing, where they will be inhumanely violated. The prostitutes, in order to correct their historical reputation of being indifferent to the country's suffering, volunteer to go to the celebration instead of the students. John manages to make the women resemble the students with his mortician skills and sees them off onto a Japanese truck. He then restarts the long-abandoned truck in the church yard and drives the students out of Nanjing.

This film was suspected of being an attempt to please Western audiences (Yin, 2012), aiming to win the first Oscar Award for China (Yu, 2013; Chen, 2012). Not only is Christian Bale the star, but also the role was exclusively created for him, a character that symbolises a white American as the 'saviour' of the Chinese (Yin, 2012, p.22). This role did not exist in the original novel under the same name and its creation evidently lengthened the scriptwriting time. Also, almost half of the film dialogue is in English, which will benefit foreign viewers but will require subtitles for most Chinese audiences. Furthermore, the translation of the original title '金陵十三钗' is clearly lacking in Chinese cultural allusions. The Chinese title adopts '钗' (chai) that is a

traditional female hairpin and serves as a metonymy for women, but is simplified into ‘flowers’ that functionally match the metonymy. ‘金陵’ (Jinling), the ancient name of Nanjing, completely disappears and is generalised into ‘war’. The number of the highlighted women, 13, a presumed unlucky number in Western countries, is also removed. Hence, 13 women from a specifically cultural and historic place merely dwindle into ‘some flowers in some war’, disregarding the fact that the title mirrors twelve ladies of Jinling from the classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (《红楼梦》, honglouloumeng) by Cao Xueqin (1715-1763). In comparison, the American blockbuster *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009) can be phonetically translated as ‘阿凡达’ (a fan da) in Chinese which is by no means a normal Chinese name, and ‘Shawshank’ in *The Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont, 1994) can be phonetically translated into ‘肖申克’ (xiao shen ke). Allegedly, many Chinese translators are more daring to reduce the titles of Chinese films, whereas they are more willing to retain unfamiliar information in the titles of foreign films or are more conservative when reducing them (Meng, 2012; Wang and Wang, 2013).

Translating a dialect into a target language is not a straightforward task. The connotations of target culture dialects will not be the same as the source culture dialects translated. Furthermore, language develops and all dialects change over time; a dialect spoken 30 years ago will surely be different from that at present. Again, if the source dialect is transferred into a target dialect, target language viewers may have trouble understanding it, as it is highly unlikely that a speaker of any language will know all the variants of the language (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007, p.191). A phenomenon that Mayoral Asensio (cited in Arampatzis, 2012, p.71) points out is that people or fictional characters pretend to speak a dialect different from their native ones. The reason may be the speaker’s purposes of covering their origin or creating a joke where social or behavioural stereotypes are evoked by the dialect for the interlocutors. Mayoral Asensio (ibid.) also argues that a dialect appears in a codified or a non-codified way; a codified dialect raises the speech recipients’ awareness of the linguistic features of the dialect, while a non-codified one is simply a dialect that is mentioned in a statement. To be more exact, a codified dialect refers to a particular dialect that is reflected in someone’s speech. But if someone says ‘All the actresses in *The Flowers of War* speak the Nanjing dialect’, the Nanjing dialect will be a non-codified dialect.

Arampatzis (2012, p.73) introduces five strategies of dubbing a dialect that renders humour: *levelling or standardisation, conservation of dialect, paralinguistic compensation, explicitation and generalisation*. While a particular character’s dialect perhaps demonstrates stereotyping

aspects of a specific personality, one used by almost everyone in a film presumably does not tell much about their characteristics. In dubbing, a quality shown by a dialect can be compensated with other paralinguistic features related to voice, such as pitch, tone, intensity, which is defined by Aramatzis (2012, p.73) as *paralinguistic compensation*. Faking an English accent to pretend to be ‘posh’ can be reproduced in dubbing with a ‘snooty’ voice (ibid.). Nevertheless, voice or other paralinguistic marks will not be manifested in subtitling, unless in brackets which are not always welcome. All those issues above add to the challenge of subtitling a dialect, as they cannot be simply transferred into a dialect in the target language and paralinguistic features can barely be taken advantage of.

In contrast to subtitles for the general public, ‘Subtitles for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing’ (SDH) are ‘subtitles in the source language of the video that also include important non-dialogue audio sound effects and speaker identification (Bond, 2014)’. Even though SDH mainly serves to explain sound effects and identify speakers in the source language, the sound cues and different colours for different speakers in SDH can be useful in dialect subtitling. There can be brackets in English subtitles that reveal whichever variation of Chinese that a speaker is speaking, for example, ‘But if he hides here, he's a coward. [Nanjing dialect]’ (当兵的躲在这算什么东西). On the other hand, in the current film, there are only a few moments when certain film characters speak Mandarin, while the majority of the Chinese-speaking part is in the Nanjing dialect. In this light, if brackets are used to indicate this dialect, a large number of brackets will be needed. Or brackets might be used for Mandarin Chinese and a very small number of Japanese lines, so that fewer brackets will be necessary. But at the beginning of the film, there should be a note which explains that subtitles without brackets are all in the Nanjing dialect. Another option is to employ different colours for the Nanjing dialect, Mandarin and Japanese lines. For example, if all the English subtitles translated from the Nanjing dialect are white, the subtitles translated from Mandarin lines could be yellow and Japanese lines blue. However, coloured subtitles for hearing audiences are not commonly used in practice.

5.2 Standardisation

As is mentioned before, the Nanjing dialect can be both grammatically and phonetically different from Mandarin (Liu and Pan, 2008; Sun, 2001). It can be a little challenging to understand for both Nanjing natives and other Chinese audiences (Xiang, 2011; Xing, 2011). In Chinese cinemas, audiences could watch this film with Mandarin subtitles, in case they could not understand the dialogue in the dialect. In terms of the English version, *standardisation* is a

strategy that the subtitler, Zhang Yimou's daughter Zhang Mo, has frequently adopted, so this section will explicate how she has translated the English subtitles with standardisation.

Standardisation or levelling is defined by Aramatzis (2012, p.73) as 'all dialect markers that appear in the source text are eliminated, and therefore the translated message is expressed in the standard form of the target language.' The Nanjing dialect is used in *The Flowers of War* as the primary spoken form of Chinese, in order to generate an authentic situation in the city where extreme Japanese atrocities occurred. Thus, it is rational to assume that the dialect in question has very limited relation to individuals' personalities or certain social or political issues. When the difference between the dialect in a subtitle and Mandarin is only a pronunciation nuance, the dialect may be treated the same as a Mandarin subtitle. That is why the target language subtitles, i.e. English subtitles, have not presented any particular dialect.

In an early scene of the film, the prostitutes appear for the very first time right in front of the convent students and John. Ling is a prostitute who does not know English, George, a teenage orphan raised by the late European priest who does chores in the cathedral. Ling enviously asks George what John and Mo, the top girl in their brothel, have been discussing. Mo overhears her question and gives the answer in Example (1), which is not true but embarrasses her:

(1)

Mandarin Subtitle (MS)	<u>没说什么</u> 人家问你的 <u>价码</u> 呢 ¹⁴
Pinyin Pronunciation (PP)	mei shuo shenme, renjia wen nide jima ne.
English Subtitle (EN)	Nothing. He's asking your price.

This original subtitle is said with the Nanjing dialect which may not be entirely understandable for the Chinese audiences who do not know the dialect. Nevertheless, mainland Chinese audiences, wherever they are and whichever dialects they speak, will be able to read subtitles in Mandarin in a cinema, which will be of great help. Although Aramatzis' (2012, p.73) adoption of standardisation refers to dubbing, it can be utilised appropriately to subtitling in a similar way where specific tones as a dialect marker are removed. The original dialect is standardised into normal written English and the meaning is retained.

¹⁴ The Chinese subtitle is in Mandarin, which is from an online version of the film available at <http://www.letv.com/ptv/vplay/1488765.html?ref=baiduletv>. The same goes for other Chinese subtitles. The English subtitles of *The Flowers of War* (2011) are from the DVD released by Revolver Entertainment in 2012. The underlined characters and phrases are pronounced with dialect tones. The same goes for other examples.

Dou is a young prostitute who plays the *pipa*, a traditional Chinese instrument over 2,000 years old. She and her colleagues are requested by Major Li, the last Chinese soldier, to look after the young dying soldier Pusheng. Dou takes the major responsibility of caring him and feels affectionate towards him, as he reminds her of her little brother. She plays the *pipa* for him and asks in Example (2):

(2)

MS	喜欢听吗?
PP	xihuan ting ma?
EN	Do you like it?

The source dialect line ‘还喜欢听’ (hai huanxi ting) has been altered into Mandarin for the majority of Chinese viewers. In Mandarin, a modal particle ‘吗’ (ma) is added that shows the question nature of this sentence. By contrast, Dou’s line in the film is a question with no particle but a rising tone. The dialect verb is also slightly different from the Mandarin one, as ‘欢喜’ (huanxi) is reversed ‘喜欢’ (xihuan). Hamaida (2007) has explored how to subtitle dialects and slang in *La Haine* (Kassovitz, 1995) into the target language, which involves the transfer of a language variation of an original language in a spoken form into possibly a language variation of a target language in a written form. But what often happens in subtitling a particular dialect is that a form of a spoken dialect will be standardised into a written form of the target language (Bruti, 2009, p.230). The English subtitle of this dialect line is appropriately formulated into Standard English.

After trespassing in the cathedral and hiding in the cellar overnight, the women ask to access the convent girls’ bathroom to wash up. A quarrelsome girl angrily rejects their request and blocks the entrance, so Ling, one of the women, attempts to negotiate politely. She promises as below in Example (3) in order to gain permission to enter the bathroom:

(3)

MS	你说我们不拉不撒行吧?
PP	ni shuo women bu la bu la xingba?
EN	We won’t shit or piss in there.

Traditionally in China, ladies in brothels were more often than not from poverty-stricken families or areas and undereducated, as in many other countries. Thus, the above coarse utterance becomes part of Ling’s speech. Dialect usually refers to a variety of language that is related to subsets of users in a geographical area but also to a social group (Wales, 1989,

pp.119-120; Trudgill, 2000, p.2). The second type is also called a ‘sociolect’, a term used in sociolinguistics to refer to a language variety of a particular social class or group (Wales, 1989, p.424). Trudgill (2000, p.2) categorises the two types of dialect respectively as ‘social dialect’ and ‘geographical dialect’. Hamaida (2007) declares that the use of a dialect offers clues to a person’s identity and personality, while a regional dialect implies one’s geographical origin and possibly sense of belonging with the concerned area. Therefore, Ling’s dialect can be deemed as both a social and geographical dialect that represents her social group and geographical origin. On the other hand, ancient literary works showcase exceptional examples where the top prostitutes were eminent in poetry, music and painting, and were more empathetic for male sorrows than women outside the profession. For instance, Kong Shangren’s (1648-1718) drama *The Peach Blossom Fan* (《桃花扇》) depicts Li Xiangjun as a beautiful, talented and patriotic prostitute. In the current film, the leader and most popular lady is Mo who has received education as a child and speaks English. Still, her colleague Ling is not as educated and makes rude remarks with her dialect tones to refer to urination and defecation. The English subtitle continues the crude style and introduces coarse vocabulary, which produces a successful and effective translation.

Later in the film, the convent students are compelled to sing for the Japanese in celebration of conquering Nanjing. The women decide on saving the girls and going to the celebration. They have each accumulated income or jewellery, and are aware that their belongings will all end up with the Japanese if they bring them along. Thus, they all give their precious possessions to the girls. The chubby prostitute Hua regrets not trusting or leaving the brothel previously with a man who has given her a pair of expensive jade bracelets, admitting her stupidity. Ling makes the comment in Example (4):

(4)

MS	你要是真拿着这副镯子去见小日本 才真叫傻呢
PP	ni yaoshi zhen nazhe zhe fu zhuzi qu jian xiaoriben, cai zhen jiao sha ne.
EN	You would be even more stupid wearing them to meet the Japs.

The Chinese character that marks the dialect is ‘呆’ (dai) which is ‘傻’ (sha) in Mandarin and means ‘stupid’. In English, the original verb that symbolises a dialect is replaced by a Standard English word again. Moreover, the subtitler has reversed the conditional sentence in the original and the sentence order of the English subtitle is reformulated, because a literal translation of the original is ‘If you wear them to meet the Japs, you would be more stupid.’ In regard to subtitling companies in the audiovisual translation industry, even a single space in a

line of subtitle matters. If the English subtitle follows the original sentence order, it will be of the same length if punctuations and spaces are counted in; it will also be more faithful to the original; subtitle readers will not be faced with the minor burden of reading a reversed sentence. Thus, the reformulation is perhaps slightly excessive. In the Chinese subtitles for general Chinese audiences, the standard Mandarin character ‘傻’ is used instead of the dialect character ‘呆’ which is actually used by the speaker. This implies a ‘translation’ of the Nanjing dialect into Mandarin just like in Example (2), ‘还喜欢听’ and ‘喜欢听吗’. Likewise, the dialect mark has to be standardised in English, so foreign subtitle readers will understand the utterance just like Chinese audiences who are not familiar enough with the dialect and have to occasionally read the Chinese subtitles. The examples in the above section have reflected that in general, dialect marks in the source dialogue are necessarily translated into Standard English subtitles for the sake of foreign subtitle readers.

5.3 *Explicitation*

The standardisation strategy can be considered as having standardised the grammatical and phonetic specifics of the Nanjing dialect, while *explicitation* is adopted by the subtitler to translate certain other lines, particularly cultural-bound references. According to Arampatzis (2012, p.73), *explicitation* in dialect dubbing is ‘the reference to a non-standard variety is replaced by the explicit mention of the stereotype that it represents in a given context.’ An example he refers to is ‘a British accent’ translated as ‘a snooty accent’ (ibid.). In this section, the Chinese subtitles with dialect tones are not only standardised, but the cultural references are also explicitated. The loss of cultural expressions in the English subtitles is not extremely radical and the readers of the English subtitles will receive a clearer version of the original information.

At the beginning of the film, when the women walk up from the cellar and meet John face to face for the first time, he actively philanders with Mo and is described by another woman Chun as a ‘playboy’. In Example (5), the nosy prostitute Mosquito responds to Chun’s comment with a remark imbued with innuendoes which enables her to stand out as she often does:

(5)

MS	洋人留胡子 随便脱裤子
PP	yangren liu huzi, suibian tuo kuzi.
EN	Westerners with beards are the horniest!

‘Westerners with beards, often take off trousers.’ This is not a well-known saying in China, but might be famous in red-light districts at the time setting of the film. In fact, this sentence is perhaps not easy to understand for many Chinese audiences owing to the dialect, particularly considering its obscurity. As is noted by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), explicitation is ‘a procedure that consists in introducing in the target text language information that remains implicit in the source language, but that is apparent from the context or the situation’. The English subtitle has omitted the original rhyming ‘couplet’ (子 zi/子 zi) but provided a simple utterance with an explicit meaning.

When the women walk up from the cellar for the first time, Mo is the last to appear from the cellar and she gracefully interacts with John with a view to mesmerising him to help them leave Nanjing. Ling’s envy is gradually aroused by his responsive flirtation with Mo and Ling ironically tells Mo in Example (6) to try as hard as she can to seduce him:

(6)

MS	玉墨 用劲笑
PP	yumo, yong jin xiao.
EN	Mo, use all of your skills.

Literally speaking, Ling is telling Mo to ‘smile as hard/attractively as she can’ (用劲笑, yong jin xiao) with her native dialect. The ‘world’s oldest profession’ used to be referred to as ‘selling smiles’ in China, as those ladies smiled and behaved as alluringly as possible in order to obtain customers. While Mo has been conversing with John about each other’s names and professions in English, Ling becomes envious. The subtitler eliminates the Chinese reference of prostitutes’ customer-winning method and chooses to explicate it as just a ‘skill’. ‘Mo, show him all your smiles’ could be another choice that is faithful, and conspicuously exposes Ling’s envy.

At dusk, Major Li carries the wounded young soldier Pusheng to the cathedral and commits the women to taking care of him until he dies. Dou, compared to her companions, reveals a more loving attitude to him, partly because of his resemblance to her brother. Nevertheless, in Example (7), a companion jokes about her seeming sisterly or maternal love and warns her against falling for such a young boy:

(7)

MS	人家小麻雀还没长全呢
PP	renjia xiao maque hai mei zhang quan ne.

EN	He doesn't even have hair down there!
----	---------------------------------------

Noticing Dou's affectionate attitude towards Pusheng and compliment on his handsome face, a nameless prostitute mocks Dou to 'cool herself off', since he is evidently too young for her, despite the fact that Dou might be the youngest among the group. 'His little sparrow is not yet fully grown,' says she. The speaker uses a metaphor that might be commonly understood in the region around Nanjing to indicate the immaturity of a boy. Interestingly, over 20 idioms in the Chinese language are relevant to the sparrow (BaiduBaiké, 2014). The vulgarity of the source metaphor is recreated in English, though the metaphor with the dialect is not preserved. I suggest 'His sparrow isn't fully grown down there' as the English subtitle, so the metaphor can still be retained.

Towards the end of the film, on the night before the women go to the Japanese celebration, they start putting on students' uniform, but Hua cannot button hers up due to her plump figure. Yet, Example (8) reveals that she is complaining about having lost weight due to the hunger during the refuge days in the cellar:

(8)

MS	我这还是饿的呢
PP	wo zhe haishi e de ne.
EN	I am already skinnier from starvation.

'饿' ('e' in Mandarin pinyin, hungry) in the dialect has a different tone from in Mandarin. As aforesaid, the Nanjing dialect is not a particular characteristic of one or two characters in this film, but is spoken by most actresses to reveal their regional identity rather than any stereotype. That is the supposed reason why explicitation has been adopted to subtitle this utterance. Therefore, the original meaning 'I'm like this after being hungry' is rendered explicitly into 'skinnier from starvation' in the English subtitle. This explicitation is considered appropriate and rational.

At first, only Mo volunteers to go to the Japanese celebration to save a girl, so she urges her fellows to undertake the great task as well. While trying to convince them, Mo cites an ancient poem *Moored on the River Qinhuai*¹⁵ (《泊秦淮》, bo xinhuai) written by Du Mu (杜牧) (803-c.852) of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). 'Prostitutes never care about a falling nation...' (商女不

¹⁵ On the surface, the poem criticises prostitutes' callousness to the fate of the country and nation, but beneath, it condemns the men who frequented brothels but disregarded the fate of the nation.

知亡国恨, shang nǚ buzhi wangguo hen), says Mo. Hua responds immediately and offers the next line ‘they sing and dance while others are dying (隔江犹唱后庭花, ge jiang you chang houtinghua).’ Since Mo is reputed as the most learned among all but Hua is not, colleague Chun is impressed by Hua’s knowledge and comments in Example (9):

(9)

MS	美花真不是个绣花枕头
PP	meihua zhen bushi ge xiuhuazhentou.
EN	You are not so airheaded after all.

Chun is impressed and comments that Hua is not at all ignorant. The source dialect phrase which may be confusing is ‘绣花枕头’ (xiuhua zhentou) that is also in Mandarin Chinese, meaning an embroidered pillow. Traditionally, Chinese pillows are stuffed with hay, husks or particular seeds, especially hay. A hay pillow (‘草包’, caobao) is a bag of hay that is a pun of a stupid person in Chinese. Exquisite as it is, an embroidered pillow is no more than a good-looking idiot. This Chinese idiom explains why the English subtitle uses ‘airheaded’, since Hua is not just a pretty face but also has a mind. ‘You’re not just a pretty face’ perhaps demonstrates the underlying meaning of ‘dumb beauty’ better. The subtitles with dialect marks in this section mostly include cultural-bound phrases and have all been translated with the strategy of explicitation into natural-sounding English sentences. However, the application of explicitation is not always necessary and some subtitles could have been translated while retaining the cultural references.

5.4 Domestication

Apart from standardisation and explicitation, another strategy that the subtitler has employed is domestication. As is mentioned previously, *domesticating translation* or *domestication* is defined as a transparent and fluent style which is introduced in the target language version in order to minimise the unfamiliar foreignness of the source text (Venuti, 2008). A domesticating translator adapts the translated text and prepares the target text to conform to target language conventions. As in previous chapters, the examples of domestication in this section risk depriving subtitle readers of information that could have been translated more faithfully. A cultural reference in the subtitle ought not to be secretly domesticated, especially if it has an equivalent in English. Whether the translator is intentional or not, a correct but domesticating translation will still deprive subtitle readers of the access to the original cultural references. The reason behind the domestication is probably that the translator has underestimated foreign subtitle readers’ capability of understanding the original cultural references.

At the beginning of the film when the prostitutes enter the cathedral on the first day, one of the convent girls obviously knows more about their city and explains to her classmates where the women in shiny apparel come from and what their profession is. She tells her classmates in Example (10):

(10)

MS	都是钓鱼巷的
PP	doushi diaoyuxiang de.
EN	They're from the red-light district.

‘钓鱼巷’ (‘Diaoyu Lane’, diaoyu xiang) in Chinese literally means ‘Fishing Lane’ which for centuries has been the location of prostitution in the historic city Nanjing. 钓鱼巷 is not only a dialect marker, but also has a strong historical and cultural connotation. Nanjing was the capital city of China for six dynasties, which has witnessed enormous prosperity, heart-breaking decay and colossal suffering. In particular, the lane, a red-light district, saw more extravagance and hardship during centuries of history. 钓鱼 (diaoyu, fishing) also indicates the nature of prostitution that is to lure rich officials or business men in the ancient times to endlessly squander time and money in the red-light area. Lü and Wu (2012, p.37) are positive about ‘Fishing Lane’ being translated into ‘red-light district’. However, ‘Fishing Lane’ with a native dialect needs not to be domesticated into a phrase well known to English speakers, because there is an immediate follow-up question and an answer in the film that expounds what is Diaoyu Lane or ‘Fishing Lane’. Even viewers from China may rely on the girl’s later explanatory answer to understand what the lane is renowned for. As the answer will appear instantaneously afterwards, the name of the lane in the current subtitle can be faithfully translated in English and should not be domesticated, otherwise foreign subtitle readers would realise the nature of the lane earlier than Chinese audiences.

Before the teenage soldier Pusheng dies, he mutters about hearing rain in the cellar. From old supernatural beliefs, hallucination before death is owing to the ghost messengers Black and White Impermanences (黑白无常, heibai wuchang) sent by the King of the Underworld (阎王爷, yanwangye) to collect the dying person’s spirit. Thus, people used to say ‘the King of the Underworld is crying for him/her’ as what Mo says in Example (11):

(11)

MS	是阎王爷在哭你呢
PP	shi yanwangye zai ku ni ne.
EN	It's death weeping for you.

Besides Dou who demonstrates affection towards Pusheng at first sight, Mo is the woman that cares about him most. Her tears roll down her cheeks while saying that death is weeping for him. The dialect in 阎王爷 or the 'King of the Underworld' like Hades in Greek mythology is not conspicuous, and it is simplified into 'death'. Subtitle readers will find it easier to comprehend the grieving moment and receive the message of a young life being deprived by death and war. 阎王爷 is translated differently in the next example.

After the Japanese colonel commands that the girls all go to perform for the Japanese, the girls attempt to jump off the cathedral tower to save their purity and dignity. In Example (12), John, Mo and other women endeavour to exhort them not to commit suicide, since countless people have died by then. Dying people's spirits would be locked up and collected by the messengers of the King of the Underworld and carried to the underworld. This can be compared to the myth where the souls of the dead descend to Hades' realm. According to this belief, the victims of Nanjing in the war would go to the underworld that will be replete with souls. Therefore,

(12)

MS	阎王爷都来不及收
PP	yanwangye dou laibuji shou.
EN	Even hell is packed.

That is why Mo urges the girls not to give up their lives and add to the crowd down under. The Chinese King of the Underworld is domesticated into hell that is not foreign or strange to English-speaking subtitle readers in the least. However, in spite of the current example and the previous one, domestication seems to be not always adopted while handling culture-related usages. The Chinese line '安全区哪里有地方 蛆都钻不进去' (anquanqu nali youdifang, qu dou zuan bu jinqu) is translated as 'The refuge doesn't even have space left for maggots.' 'Maggot' constitutes an unpleasant image, but is still retained by the subtitler. It is interesting to discover that the subtitler has chosen to keep particular cultural images and eliminate others.

Mo has decided to sacrifice herself to go to the Japanese party and is trying to persuade and convince Ling and other companions to do the same. After Mo's illustration of the aforementioned poem and the girls' previous protection of them, Ling makes up her mind and

decides on joining Mo. However, Ling is initially reluctant, as she has always been a losing opponent of Mo and the two are never on good terms. She complains in Example (13):

(13)

MS	我跟你在一条花船上待了三年 你足足压了我 36 个月
PP	wo gen ni zai yitiao huachuan shang daile sannian, ni zuzu ya le wo sanshiliu ge yue.
EN	We were working together for three years, and you were always more popular than me.

In Ling's utterance, she admits that she has been on the same 'flower boat' with Mo for three years and outshone by her the whole time. A 'flower boat' or 花船 (huachuan) was once the venue of prostitution in ancient Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Guangzhou Provinces. 'Flower' or 花 (hua) connoted prostitutes in the past as in 花柳 (hualiu, i.e. flower and willow) and 花街柳巷 (hua jie liu xiang, i.e. flower and willow lanes). The prostitutes in the three southern provinces worked on huge boats which were splendidly decorated and equipped with all the necessities where prostitutes performed and served their clients. The historical implication of flower boats is simplified into 'working together'. My suggestion is 'working on the same brothel boat' that can perhaps both clarify a boat as a brothel venue and keep the image of a boat.

While the women are excited about changing their haircut to appear more youthful and pass as students, they are disturbed and hesitant when John asks them to lie down since he is accustomed to handling bodies. Yet, Ling truly desires to resemble a pretty young schoolgirl and does not mind his profession as a mortician. She states in Example (14):

(14)

MS	对 管他红事白事呢
PP	dui, guan ta hongshi baishi ne.
EN	Whatever, who cares,

What Ling says with her dialect is 'Wedding or funeral...', implying that she does not care about a mortician working on her. '红事' (hongshi, 'red business') and '白事' (baishi, 'white business') in the original are folk terms meaning weddings and funerals. In China, red is an auspicious colour and newly-weds' bedrooms and costumes in weddings used to be all red and are still very much so now, particularly in the Chinese countryside. By contrast, white is the colour for death and funeral venues and relatives of the deceased are often in white, if not in black. It is

unacceptable for guests to dress in red in a funeral, although nowadays brides¹⁶ and grooms are often in white. The red and white colours in Ling's remark are both reduced to 'whatever'. 'Wedding or funeral, who cares' may be more culturally specific. The subtitler's translation is possibly on the edge of radical omission. Subtitle readers' ability is underestimated, because the film characters' chagrin about a mortician handling their hair is very obvious.

At the very beginning of the film, the convent girls are running back to their cathedral because they have missed the boat to escape, and they are confronted and chased by the Japanese soldiers. Major Li and his fellow Chinese soldiers defend the girls and some even sacrifice their own lives to bomb Japanese tanks, so Shu narrates in Example (15):

(15)

MS	因为缺少打坦克的有效武器 ¹⁷
PP	yinwei queshaoda tanke de youxiao wuqi,
EN	The Chinese army didn't have adequate weapons
MS	那个时候的中国军队
PP	nage shihou de zhongguo jundui,
EN	to destroy the enemy's tanks,
MS	会用一种原始的方法
PP	hui yong yizhong yuanshi de fangfa,
EN	so they employed an ancient tactic.
MS	以战友的身体来做掩护
PP	yi zhanyou de shenti lai zuo yanhu,
EN	They formed a human shield
MS	让爆破手尽量靠近坦克
PP	rang baoposhou jinliang kaojin tanke.
EN	to get a bomb close to a tank.
MS	当时的中国人
PP	dangshi de zhongguoren,
EN	At that time, the Chinese people
MS	不愿意忍受当亡国奴的耻辱
PP	buyuanyi renshou dang wangguonu de chiru,
EN	couldn't bear the shame of losing their country,
MS	往往就用命去拼
PP	wangwang jiu yong ming qu pin.
EN	and such selfless sacrifices were not uncommon.

¹⁶ In a Chinese wedding, if the bride dresses in white initially, she may still change into red later.

¹⁷ The English subtitles in Example (15) are translated by myself. In the English version, the subtitles of the narration have become 'Because Major Li's men were so outnumbered,/ almost all of them were killed./ They could have fled the city and returned home./ Instead, they sacrificed their lives for us./ This was the last battle in Nanking,/ and its story has been passed down/ from generation to generation.' (Revolver Entertainment, 2012)

These lines are a retrospective monologue of Shu, the narrator of the film and the leader of the girls. This sequence has been strikingly altered in the English version. The Chinese soldiers' fight against the Japanese soldiers and tanks accompanied by Shu's narration runs for about five minutes and ten seconds in the original Chinese version, and yet this sequence has dwindled into only about 25 seconds in the English version. The English version has only a few shots of the original and a much shorter narration. The especially moving depiction of the soldiers covering each other to approach and bomb a tank has become much simpler and less dramatic. This alteration can be considered an extreme example of domestication, not just in the sense of words, but in that even the non-verbal or visual representation has been reduced and domesticated. The domestication of the non-verbal is probably conducted by the filmmaker rather than the subtitler, perhaps because an elaborate portrayal of a cruel war and Chinese soldiers' resolute and courageous fight is unnecessary in the English version for foreigners. The filmmaker's postulation may be that such a sequence will not interest most non-Chinese viewers who are inclined to be unfamiliar with the history in the film and less concerned, and it will slow down the pace of the film too. Nevertheless, considering this is very likely to be the only altered and condensed scene, the extreme domestication does not show very much respect to the soldiers who fought in similar ways during the war. On the other hand, the subtitle readers of the English version will not realise they will miss a sequence that might well render a Chinese audience to tears. Cultural references in the examples of this section are mostly said with the Nanjing dialect, but have almost all been domesticated and reduced. Yet, despite the intricacies of translating a dialect, most of those references could have been translated and retained. Again, the subtitler has presumably underestimated average subtitle readers' capacity of comprehension or their interest in Chinese cultural expressions.

The Flowers of War (2011) is unique in the way that a genuine Nanjing dialect of this most historic city in China is presented by natives. The translation of the Nanjing dialect in *The Flowers of War* (2011) has been tackled by the subtitler with primarily three strategies: standardisation, explicitation and domestication. The phrases with dialect pronunciations are apt to have been standardised into English. Those that also bear cultural references are translated with explicitation strategies to produce simple and understandable English versions. Nonetheless, other culture-related terms with the dialect are domesticated into English

equivalents possibly to reduce the foreignness to foreign audiences, or even simply omitted. Generally speaking, the dialect has largely disappeared after the subtitling process.

Because of domestication, cultural references are evidently sacrificed and thus the target text becomes natural-sounding. A native target-language-speaking subtitler of a comparatively dominant culture may remove source culture-bound terms or even impose target cultural values with the aim of meeting the target culture preferences and providing a 'narcissistic experience' (Venuti, 2008, p.16). The 'underworld' replaced by 'hell' can be an example. On the contrary, if domestication is adopted by a native source-language-speaking subtitler, as in the case of the current film, it can be attributed to a lack of cultural confidence or/and an eagerness of wooing the target language audiences and market. I would call this type of unconfident strategy 'submissive translation' which is when a native source language-speaking translator submits to the target culture preconceptions and preferences in order to 'court' target language readers. China has experienced periods of normal cultural self-esteem, self-confidence, self-conceit and then loss of cultural confidence, which is ascribed to a series of historical reasons (Zhou, 2012). The cultural confidence of the Chinese nation allegedly dropped to the lowest level after a series of wars, including the Opium Wars (1840-1842, 1856-1860), Sino-French War (1883-1885) and Sino-Japanese War of Jiawu (1894-1895) (Du, 2011). The lack of cultural confidence still exists in China (Du, 2011; Zhou, 2012). The lack of cultural confidence is also reflected in Chinese literary criticism of the past century, as traditional Chinese literary critique has been muted and marginalised and the dependence on Western literary criticism has suppressed the creativity in traditional Chinese literary criticism (Cao and Li, 2013). An effort is being exerted to improve the Chinese nation's cultural awareness and confidence, but is absent in the subtitling of the current film concerned as well as many others. Even though target language subtitles must sound natural, I would suggest subtitlers retain terms with cultural elements more often. If the Chinese terms never appear in the English versions of Chinese films, foreign audiences will never become familiar with them, to say the extreme. Markets of widely speaking languages may have to welcome and expect more source culture in film subtitles.

The Flowers of War targeted international audiences and a long-awaited Oscar Award. With, allegedly, the highest budget ever in the Chinese film industry, this allowed the director to involve an Oscar-winning Hollywood star as well as an international crew and technological

team¹⁸. Nonetheless, the film did not gross satisfactorily in other countries in comparison to China but was badly criticised by certain American critics (Levy, 2011; Ebert, 2012; Xiao, 2012). Therefore, the submission of subtitles did not achieve the goal and is presumed not to have pleased foreign viewers. China is no longer as culturally conceited as in the 16th to the 18th centuries, but rather has to raise cultural awareness and confidence (Zhou, 2012). This confidence requires emphasis on subtitle translation, aiming at retaining enough Chinese cultural aspects in the target language version. Strictly speaking, the standardisation and explicitation of expressions and words in the Nanjing dialect are frequently necessary and inescapable. They cannot simply be translated into a specific variation of spoken English, since the connotation will be different, and subtitle readers from a background of a different variation may struggle to understand the subtitles. Nonetheless, domestication in the English subtitles might have been adopted more than necessary. When a subtitle reader highly relies on subtitles to understand film characters' lines, the translator has to be faithful and responsible for providing an authentic transmission of information and culture from the original film. The translator has to avoid underestimating the reader, assuming that they do not understand a word of the source language or might not be interested in the original culture. When a person shoulders the responsibility of crossing a bridge from one side of a river to tell stories to people on the other side, they should tell the stories honestly. Otherwise, they would risk being accused of deception.

¹⁸ For example, Andy Williams, the special effects supervisor of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015), was the special effects supervisor of the current film too (Xiao, 2012, p.14).

Chapter Six

Historical subtitling: archaisms and the unstable decades of contemporary China

According to Monk (2002, p.177), ‘...films and television dramatisations set in the past form an established, enduringly popular and reliably exportable strand of British moving-image culture’. Similarly, film and TV productions about China in the past are highly popular in China and some of them have been exported too. History, as a narrative retelling the past, is now perceived as a structuring of the temporal which negotiates with the anxieties and desires of the present (Muraleedharan, 2002, p.144). Zhang Yimou’s films, which to some extent negotiate the past with the present, often involve a social-historical background, be it ancient or modern times. At the beginning of the 21st century, Zhang turned his attention to martial arts and directed three martial art films in a row: *Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) all depict China in ancient times. Although the three films date from different dynasties, the speech register is similar in creating the archaic and literary effect. In film productions set in centuries ago, the dialogue generally adopts an old-fashioned style to imply the antiquity, in spite of the difference between the pronunciation and the speech register of different dynasties.

However, other than specific linguistic features of Old Chinese, the dialogue of these films generally sounds modern. That is to say, film dialogue does not reveal the authentic Chinese speech of the era a film portrays as, overall, Old Chinese is much briefer than the modern version and intensive learning is essential for a modern Chinese audience to understand it. Also, in *The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1956) and *Juanrez* (William Dieterle, 1939), the past turns into an allegory of the present and the historical topic is presented in the guise of a modern speech treatment (Stubbs, 2013, p.42). Since film dialogue cannot be genuinely historical, the responsibility of conveying the antiquity of a Chinese film sometimes falls on non-verbal channels. According to Stubbs (2013, p.41), in many historical films, the past is embodied by ample realistic and visible details rather than by ‘social relations, ideology or other essentially invisible forces’. In *Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers* and *Curse of the Golden Flower*, costumes appear conspicuously obsolescent and distinct from modern apparel. *Hero* also imitates the palace and buildings of the Kingdom of Qin, an arrow attack as well as chariots that showcase transport from over 2,000 years ago. *Curse of the Golden Flower* manifests the splendour of the palace of the Tang Dynasty. In the case of visual presentation, it is precisely the authentic and approximately ‘gratuitous’ details which almost pass unnoticed that will confirm the historical reality of the image (Bann, 1984, p.57). All three films display

martial art combats intertwined with battle scenes. Music in these films is not to be disregarded either; the archaic instruments and melodies are noticeably distinctive for average Chinese audiences. Foreign audiences that are fairly familiar with traditional Chinese music will presumably find it easier to identify the classic effect.

Zhang Yimou has explored historical themes in different films over decades of his filmmaking career. *Red Sorghum* (1987) and *The Flowers of War* (2011) portray the Anti-Japanese Aggression War (1937-1945), for instance. *To Live* (1994) and *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010) depict the Cultural Revolution. *The Road Home* (1999) and *Coming Home* (2014) are also set during the Cultural Revolution. The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution or the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) is a controversial decade after the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949 with Mao Zedong as Chairman. The disputed revolution was initiated by Chairman Mao with the aim of eliminating the revival of capitalism within the Chinese Communist Party and in China. Yet, it was taken advantage of by four Party members called the 'Gang of Four' to satisfy their lust for the utmost power as they promoted radical policies and political decisions. The decade witnessed turmoil and hardship experienced by the CCP and Chinese people. Social, economic and cultural life was tremendously and negatively affected.

Discussion of historical films often involves their analogy or relevance to the present (Craig, 1991, p.12; McKechnie, 2002, p.220; Stubbs, 2013, p.43) or their accuracy (Stubbs, 2013; Rosenstone, 2001). Despite the 'accuracy debate' on the representation of historical truth and events, the key to convince audiences to trust the 'historical truth' appears to rely on reproducing accurately the look of the period portrayed (McKechnie, 2002, p.218), which depends highly on visuality and aesthetics. However, how film dialogue and on-screen texts contribute to historical reality has been more often than not ignored. Archaisms have been researched in literary and linguistic realms. However, archaisms in subtitling, especially the subtitling of Chinese archaic words and phrases, have been under-researched. Moreover, terms that derived from the chaotic decades of the 20th century China have not been investigated in terms of subtitling. What also remain to be examined are strategies frequently adopted by the subtitler when handling history-based vocabulary. This chapter, thus, intends to look into subtitling historical vocabulary with example subtitles from Zhang Yimou's films. Also, this chapter will discuss whether the translations of subtitles that contain archaic and other historical expressions have failed, and what archaisms and historic meaning the subtitle reader will miss after the subtitles are translated, even though they cannot be misled by problematic translations.

6.1 Archaisms in films about ancient China

Archaism is defined as ‘in RHETHORIC, literary criticism, and PHILOLOGY, a style that reflects the usage of an earlier period (*literary archaism*) and an out-of-date or old-fashioned word or phrase (*a lexical archaism*)’ (McArthur and McArthur, 2005, p.162) (original capitalisation and italics). Literary archaism appears when a style imitates older works in order to revive earlier practices or produce a desired effect (ibid.), which archaisms in film subtitles fall into. In literary translation, obsolescent language is translated deliberately with an archaizing strategy with the purpose of recreating the archaic feature of the text that seems to date from years ago (Steiner, 1992, p.366). A translator may even turn out a target text with the language of the same historical period as the original which can be unintelligible for modern, target-language, native speakers (ibid.). Furthermore, the translator risks producing an inconsistent archaizing translation that is a hybrid of both archaisms and contemporary usages (ibid.). However, the advantage of an archaism strategy is to give the illusion that the translation is firmly rooted in the target language culture (ibid.). Ji and Song (2007) mainly adopt three strategies, condensation, reductive paraphrasing and deletion, to analyse the subtitling of *Hero* (2002). ‘Condensation refers to translating only the essence of the original information; reductive paraphrasing is to translate the original meaning into a shorter sentence; deletion of course is complete omission (Li, 2001, translated by myself).’

Hero (2002) is a story of assassinating the King of the Kingdom of Qin, before the first dynasty Qin (221-270BC) was established; *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) tells of the cruelty and conflicts of a royal family in 928AD during the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. The plots of the two films have been summarised in previous chapters. The story in *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) is set in 813AD in the midst of the Tang Dynasty. It is a love story entangled in the conflicts between the corrupt government and an anti-government organisation. A policeman and a girl from the antagonistic organisation fall in love, which can be likened to *Romeo and Juliet*. The plot begins as Mei is the top dancer of an entertainment place in Chang’an (now Xi’an, capital of the Tang Dynasty) who is rumoured to be the blind daughter of the late leader of House of Flying Daggers, the Robin Hood-type organisation. Mei is arrested after attempting to kill police captain Leo. Captain Jin pretends to rescue her from the prison, but is actually conspiring to follow her to the headquarters of the House. Nevertheless, Jin finds out as soon as they arrive that not only the leader and the ‘headquarters’ are fake, but Mei is neither blind nor the so-called daughter. They fall in love regardless and Mei releases him despite the command of execution. When Mei is determined to flee with Jin, she is

attacked by Captain Leo who is in reality a spy of the House under cover and deeply in love with Mei. She eventually dies, leaving Jin to grieve.

6.1.1 Nouns

One of the most common type of archaisms is nouns. *Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) all show an abundance of nouns, including out-of-date government official titles and venue names. However, the obsolescence of the titles and venues may be assumed to be insignificant to the film story in regard to foreign viewers. Thus, they are concisely modernised and simplified, so space will be saved and the general meaning conveyed. Baker (1993) defines simplification as one of the four translation universals, which means translators' tendency to produce texts that are simpler and easier to follow. On the other hand, modernisation enables the smooth transfer of the source archaisms to English which renders the correspondent target version instantly accessible. Yet, although simplification and modernisation have reduced antiquity, the meaning of most references can still be - and should be - accurately translated rather than simply domesticated and omitted. This chapter will involve two versions of English subtitles of *Hero* (2002); one version is from the DVD released by Buena Vista Home Entertainment in 2005, and the other is available at <http://subsmx.com/subtitles-movie/hero-2002/ni>.¹⁹

In *Hero* (2002), Sky, one of the deadliest assassins from the Kingdom of Zhao, appears in an area of the Kingdom of Qin governed by Nameless. Sky defeats the Qin fighters and is about to leave, before being stopped by Nameless. Example (1) is Sky's response:

(1)

Mandarin transcription (MT)	小小亭长 有何贵干?
Pinyin Pronunciation (PP)	xiaoxiao tingzhang, you he guigan?
English Subtitle Version 1 (ENV1)	The local Prefect. What can I do for you?
English Subtitle Version 2 (ENV2)	What can a minor official do?

Nameless' title '亭长' (tingzhang) is equal to a village head nowadays in China. In the Qin and Han Dynasties, a 亭长 was in charge of ten square *li* (traditional Chinese measurement, i.e. 500 metres) which was a small piece of land (Zhao, 2008). Hence, the title was of a very low rank. As is mentioned in Chapter Four, titles are often used as address terms, which is called

¹⁹ This chapter will involve two versions of English subtitles of *Hero* (2002); one version is from the DVD released by Buena Vista Home Entertainment in 2005, and the other is available at <http://subsmx.com/subtitles-movie/hero-2002/ni>, accessed 26 July 2015. The English subtitles of *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) are from the DVD released by 20th Century Fox in 2005. The English subtitles of *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) are from the DVD released by the Universal Pictures in 2007.

‘Address Maxim’ in Chinese polite phenomenon (Gu, 1990, p.248). This means to ‘address your interlocutor with an appropriate term’ based on the notions of respectfulness and attitudinal warmth (ibid.). Sardonicly, Sky refers to Nameless as 小小亭长 (xiaoxiao tingzhang), which means ‘small village head’. The title in the first translation is faithful, but the second part is too polite, since Sky’s arrogance is ignored. In the second translation, the title is simplified and *explicitated* into the abstract ‘minor official’, but the arrogant attitude is obvious and retained. Even though subtitle readers can see the indifference and arrogance on Sky’s face, it is better to keep his attitude in the English subtitle like the second version.

After killing Sky and two other assassins, Nameless is summoned to the court of Qin to be awarded, and he receives further awards for annihilating Flying Snow and Broken Sword.

Example (2) refers to the awards:

(2)

MT	赏千金 封千户侯
PP	shang qianjin, feng qianhuhou.
ENV1	...will be awarded 1,000 pieces of gold and authority over 1,000 households.
ENVI	...will receive gold and land
MT	赏万金 封五千户侯
PP	shang wanjin, feng wuqianhuhou.
ENVI	...is awarded 10,000 pieces of gold and authority over 5,000 households.
ENV2	...will receive gold and land

A major difference between ancient and modern Chinese is that the former is briefer than the latter. ‘千金’ (qian jin) in modern Chinese will be ‘一千两黄金’ (a thousand *liang*²⁰ of gold). ‘千户侯’ (qianhuhou) was a prefect in charge of a thousand households in one area, which is another ancient official title and higher than ‘亭长’. The land where they were located would also be part of the award. The two awards are simplified and generalised in the second translation into ‘gold and land’, but the increased amount of gold and land is domesticated and not clarified. Although the awarded land cannot be seen in the film, subtitle readers’ active film watching will help them predict that the gold of the second award is several times of the first. However, it can still be useful if the English subtitle keeps the exact awards rather than generalise them.

At the beginning of *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), the police receive news that the new blind dancer in the following venue is supposedly the daughter of the late leader of the House, so policeman Jin goes to the venue in Example (3) to investigate this suspicious dancer:

²⁰ One *liang* equals 50 grams.

(3)

MT	牡丹坊·舞伎馆
PP	mudan fang wuji guan
EN	Entertainment House Peony Pavilion

Young girls used to dance and sing in this type of venues to entertain male customers. ‘牡丹’ (mudan) is peony; ‘坊’ (fang) used to be a venue of the governmental musical organisation (Zuo, 2007). ‘舞伎’ (wuji) refers to a person who has excellent dancing skills. Both phrases are archaisms that are only used in historical texts. ‘Dancing’ (舞, wu) is specified in the original on-screen Chinese text and the main female character performs two major dances in this venue. Thus, ‘entertainment’ in the translation appears to be vaguer than the source and ‘Peony Dancer House’ may be more explicit and informative.

In *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), Example (4) shows that Prince Yu expounds to his empress mother that Prince Jai has not yet arrived at the palace:

(4)

MT	听说在天福官驿候旨
PP	tingshuo zai tianfu guanyi houzhi.
EN	I hear he stopped at the Official Inn to await orders.

‘天福官驿’ (tianfu guanyi) is a real official inn (‘官驿’) named Tianfu (‘天福’) that was built in 619AD. 驿 started mainly as an ancient service stop for postmen to change horses, but later began to provide accommodation (Cai and Yu, 2007, p.79). In real life, this inn has been renovated in recent years to reveal the original appearance with the greatest resemblance possible (Baidu Baike, no date). In the translation, this inn’s name ‘天福’ (tianfu) or ‘heavenly bliss’ is simplified into the nature and function of the building, whereas normally a transliteration strategy, or ‘Tianfu’ should be employed. ‘旨’ (zhi) is an imperial order from the emperor, certainly an archaic term. ‘旨’ is non-existent nowadays except in jokes, but the implication of supremacy is unnecessarily simplified and domesticated in the English subtitle. I suggest ‘His Majesty’s’ should be added before ‘order’.

In *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), minor police officers greet Captains Leo and Jin, the central characters in this film. Example (5) reveals how they address them:

(5)

MT	刘捕头 金捕头
----	---------

PP	liu butou, jin butou.
EN	Captain Leo, Captain Jin.

‘捕头’ (butou) was the ancient equivalent to present-day policemen, but the difference is that ancient Chinese police are often portrayed to be equipped with martial art skills in order to fight against criminals in case of physical conflicts before guns and other weapons were invented, as in *House of Flying Daggers*. Lower rank officers addressing their interlocutors with their titles is a polite usage. However, ‘captain’ in English gives reference to a military officer of a fairly high rank, in contrast to policemen’s low official rank in ancient China, as three generations of policemen’s offspring were not allowed to sit the imperial civil servant exam (Xiao, 2015). On the other hand, while policeman Jin’s family name is retained, Liu’s family name is overly and phonetically translated into ‘Leo’ (Fan, 2008). Fan (2008) recognises such a translation as an over-domestication which has been employed in the translation of characters’ names, place names and many other Chinese references. Retaining this common and short family name will not critically impose excessive reading or memory pressure on subtitle readers. Moreover, ‘Liu’ being translated into ‘Leo’ is inconsistent with the treatment of ‘Jin’ and the main female character’s name ‘Mei’. The translation of ‘Liu’ and the omission of ‘Tianfu’, the name of the official inn in the previous example, might both be considered ‘submissive translation’ again, as the subtitler might have assumed that subtitle readers would not be pleased with alien names, which might not be true. On the other hand, since ‘Wong’ is perceived as a commonplace Chinese family name worldwide, the same could happen to ‘Liu’ in the long run, if it appears on the screen often enough.

Example (6) shows that after the policemen leave the headquarters, Captains Leo and Jin discuss their new task from a higher office:

(6)

MT	州府限我们十天之内查获飞刀门新帮主
PP	zhou fu xian women shitian zhinei chahuo feidaomen xinbangzhu.
EN	The provincial office has given us 10 days to catch the new leader...

‘州’ (zhou) was an administrative division of ancient China which was similar to current provinces, but its size was different in different dynasties (Anon, no date (c)). ‘帮’ (bang) is often an underground association, while ‘帮主’ (bangzhu) is the leader. Those groups are less common now, so consequently these terms are less often used. The English translation has appropriately modernised the obsolete phrases. *Minimal modernisation* is one of the most

common choices of translators in coping with time-specific texts; it is ‘retaining the past text world; Target Language and often genre are broadly present-day, without being marked for a specific year/decade (Jones, 2006, p.191, original italics).’

Jin and Leo’s new task is also to investigate the new dancer Mei who pretends to be blind.

When she attempts to murder Leo, she furiously shouts in Example (7):

(7)

MT	你们这些官府狗贼我见一个杀一个
PP	nimen zhexie guanfu gouzei wo jianyige shayige.
EN	Government-running dogs, I wish to kill all of you!

Local authorities in feudal China were called ‘官府’ (guanfu), compared to ‘政府’ (zhengfu, government) now in use. The archaic phrase ‘狗贼’ (gouzei) has been translated into ‘running dogs’. Interestingly, ‘running dog’ is an English phrase translated from Chinese to refer to ‘one who is subservient to counter-revolutionary interests in communist terminology or a lackey’ (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1989, p.276 (Volume XIV)). This is contrary to the traditionally positive perception of dogs as human beings’ friends in the West (Chen, 2008). This translation is distinguished from common domestication of source references, as more often than not Chinese originals are domesticated. The Chinese cultural and historical implicatures are often replaced by ‘preferable’ native target cultural references. For example, foreign names may be translated into very strange-sounding phrases in Chinese, but Chinese names and other cultural references will be simplified and domesticated extensively and obviously (Fan, 2008). On the contrary, the metaphor between a servile follower and a dog in this subtitle surprisingly preserves the Chinese sarcasm, which does not underestimate subtitle readers’ capability of understanding.

Towards the end, Captain Leo turns out to be a House member under cover to plot against the corrupt government. He is deeply in love with Mei and they eventually receive a chance to talk in privacy. Mei expresses her gratitude to him in Example (8):

(8)

MT	盾牌兵一战 你又一次救了小妹
PP	dunpai bing yizhan, ni youyici jiule xiaomei.
EN	You saved me during the battle with the soldiers.

In an earlier scene, Leo is the mysterious helper who throws a dagger and saves Mei's life in the battle with the shield soldiers. These soldiers each wield a shield and a Chinese machete, so foreign audiences can easily notice their specialties. Therefore, the subtitler might have assumed that demonstrating the specialties of the soldiers is not of great importance and 'shield soldiers' is simplified into 'soldiers'. Nonetheless, the film also portrays other battles where soldiers use spears or bamboo sticks. Consequently, 'soldiers' in the English translation is not specific enough. However, subtitle readers cannot be deceived by this incomplete translation but will remember the only scene where a mysterious dagger saves Mei. But still, 'the soldiers' is better replaced by 'the shield soldiers' in order to remind viewers of the specific battle. After all, subtitlers are responsible for producing accurate subtitles as much as they can. The type of soldiers might again be an alien Chinese element that is omitted in a submissive translation.

In *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), the emperor raises Doctor Jiang's court rank and awards him with a deployment in a town. The empress's maid Jiang Chan follows her father to his new deployment, and her lover Prince Wan visits her secretly. She innocently informs him in Example (9) of an extremely critical matter that suggests the empress's plan to usurp the emperor:

(9)

MT	王后让陈公公交给吴侍郎
PP	wanghou rang chen gonggong jiaogei wu shilang.
EN	Her Majesty had them all delivered to General Wu.

Chan literally says 'Her Majesty told Eunuch Chen to deliver them to Deputy Minister Wu'. 'Them' implies embroidered chrysanthemums, i.e. the 'golden flower' in the film title. When the empress attempts to dethrone the emperor, whoever wears this flower in the coup is on the empress's side and will survive. 'General' is translated from the official title '侍郎' (shilang) or deputy minister, whereas a minister is '尚书' (shangshu) (Dong and Jing, 2013, p.141). This title applied to all six departments of ancient Chinese central government, including organisation, agriculture/finance, education/foreign affairs, defence, justice and water resources/construction (ibid.). The reason why Deputy Minister Wu is subtitled into General Wu is explained by Prince Wan's subsequent enquiry after the current subtitle, which is '是兵部的吴侍郎?' or 'Deputy Minister Wu of the Ministry of Defence?'²¹ It turns out the deputy

²¹ The correspondent English subtitle in the film is 'Of the state army?'

minister whom Chan and Wan mentions works for the state army or Ministry of Defence who is in charge of weapons and armies. If this minister obeys the empress's orders, the emperor's ruling will be threatened. The subtitler has chosen to reveal General Wu's military responsibility immediately in the current example. To slightly create suspense and be more effective, the subtitler might use 'Minister Wu' in Chan's remark first and specify Department of Defence in Wan's enquiry, like

-Her Majesty had them all delivered to Minister Wu.

-General Wu of the state army?

Perhaps many Chinese audiences may not even realise 侍郎 refers to a military general, so this information which is not so conspicuous in the source is treated with a *particularizing translation* where details that are not explicitly expressed in the source are added to the target text (Hervey and Higgins, 1992, p.95). The obsolete nouns in this section are mostly translated with strategies of simplification and modernisation. While modernisation is necessary to produce immediately intelligible subtitles, some cases of simplification are not necessary but have domesticated essential information and make the translations less precise. It implies that the subtitlers might have underestimated subtitle readers' ability of understanding, but the domestication of information is less evident than in some of the examples from the previous chapters.

6.1.2 Idioms

While examining the three films set centuries ago, a variety of archaic markers are discovered. Archaic sentence structures, obsolete nouns, verbs and idioms are all features of obsolescence, while idioms are especially noticeable. While comparing two Chinese translations of *Don Quixote*, Ji (2009, pp.61-62) argues that the figurative language of archaism is 'transmittable and traceable' when rendered into the target language. 'When a Castilian proverb or idiom is translated into modern Chinese, it may well take on the form of a Chinese metaphor, metonymy or hyperbole, or vice versa (Ji, 2009, p.62).' She maintains that idiomatic expressions are perceived as archaisms by contemporary Mandarin Chinese readers (*ibid.*), possibly because idioms usually originate from ancient classics. Explicitation is frequently adopted to cope with the translation of the Chinese idioms in the three films; Blum-Kulka (1986, p.19) views explicitation as inherent in the process of translation and a translation will be explicitly more cohesive than the source.

In *Hero* (2002), swordsman Nameless pretends to be from the Kingdom of Qin and have killed assassins Sky, Flying Snow and Broken Sword from the Kingdom of Zhao. The news of

Nameless' elimination of the assassins travels across Qin. He is hailed a hero and the prime minister speaks his relief out in Example (10):

(10)

MT	从此我王可以高枕无忧了
PP	congci wo wang keyi gaozhenwuyou le.
ENVI	From now on his majesty can once more sleep without fear!
ENV2	His Majesty can finally sleep at night!

‘高枕无忧’ (gaozhenwuyou) indicates to pile pillows up and sleep tight, for there is nothing to fear. The focus is to sleep without fear and piling pillows high is a sign of relief. Thus, the idiom explicates the peace and safety that the King gains after the death of his fatalist enemies and that he ‘can finally sleep at night’. Both English versions explain the original meaning, but the weakness of the first subtitle is the length, since ‘from now on’ is directly transferred from ‘从此’. Given that 从此 is an adverbial which is self-evident in the context but not culturally specific, it might be reasonable to omit it.

In front of the King of Qin, Nameless recalls his duel with Sky where the elderly blind musician nearby is daunted and leaving, but Nameless pays him to play more. He explains to the King that martial arts and music are different but share a similar principle, which is the phenomenon in Example (11):

(11)

MT	都讲求大音希声之境界
PP	dou jiangqiu dayinxisheng zhi jingjie.
ENV1	Both rely on merging the power of the wrist with the spirit in the heart.
ENV2	Both stress attaining a supreme state.

‘大音希声’ (dayinxisheng) is a concept from *Dao De Jing* (or *Laozi*) written by one of the most renowned ancient Chinese philosophers Laozi (c. 571-471, or ‘Lao Tzu’ in Wade-Giles Romanisation spelling of Chinese). The idiom implies that the most overwhelming and beautiful music is often serene or approximately silent, i.e. the sublime is intangible (Zou and Li, 2006). Referring to this abstract notion, Nameless means, like the tranquillity of supreme music, the highest martial arts avoid emphasis on lethal fighting. The Chinese philosophy of ‘武’ (wu) or to fight or martial arts is significant in understanding why martial arts novels, films and TV dramas fascinate many Chinese people. The character 武, observed carefully, consists of two characters, ‘止’ (zhi) and ‘戈’ (ge) (Mrccc2012, 2014). 止 is to stop and 戈 is an ancient

weapon, so 止戈 or 武 is to stop using the weapon or cease a fight. The philosophy of ‘止戈为武’ (zhi ge wei wu) is simply ‘to put down the weapon is true martial arts’. The most beloved characters in the most popular martial art novels are often those who have supreme fighting skills but decide to stay away from fights but protect people who are in need. Therefore, martial arts is not to fight in order to win, but to lay down the weapon, cease the war and embrace peace, says Kong Qingdong (Mrccc2012, 2014). 止戈为武 is also a strategy to rule a kingdom, and was first mentioned in the ancient *Commentary of Zuo* (《左传》, zuozhuan) which recorded history from 722 to 468BC. Therefore, the philosophy of 大音希声 expounds why Nameless associates supreme music with supreme martial arts, as the former is not loud or noisy and the latter is not battle or killing. Later the film also manifests that Nameless has not killed any of the three assassins and decides not to kill the King for the sake of the fate of the entire land. In the second English subtitle, the supremacy in music and martial arts is stressed and explicitation produces an intelligible translation, whereas the first translation more or less only displays the superficial meaning.

When the King interrogates Nameless about his method of subjugating all three assassins, he claims in Example (12) to have taken advantage of a trivia of the three’s relationship:

(12)

MT	因飞雪与长空有一夜之情 使残剑耿耿于怀
PP	yin feixue yu changkong you yiyezhiqing, shi canjian genggengyuhuai.
ENV1	Flying Snow had an affair with Sky. Broken Sword took this to heart.
ENV2	Flying Snow had an affair with Sky. Broken Sword never forgave her.

‘耿耿于怀’ (genggengyuhuai) is to feel concerned or annoyed and find it difficult to forget something. Nameless declares that the affair between Flying Snow and Sky has infuriated Broken Sword, and later results in the conflict between Flying Snow and Broken Sword and eventually their death. The affair and its consequence turn the three assassins’ scheme rational and credible. The lengths of the two translations are about the same, and both demonstrate that Broken Sword bears a grudge against Flying Snow and Sky and are accurate translations.

Nevertheless, Example (13) demonstrates that the King questions Nameless’ claim and denies the affair among the three enemies, and tells his own opinion about them:

(13)

MT	在寡人看来这二人光明磊落 气度不凡 绝非小人之辈
----	--------------------------

PP	zai guaren kanlai zhe erren guangmingleiluo, qidubufan, jue fei xiaorenzhibei.
ENV1	I found them both honourable and exceptional, hardly the narrow-minded people you say.
ENV2	I was impressed by their valor and dignity

‘光明磊落’ (guangmingleiluo) is being very frank and honest with nothing shameful to hide. ‘气度’ (qidu), though not an idiom, refers to a person’s bravery or tolerance towards difficult situations or other people’s mistakes. ‘小人’ (xiaoren), superficially meaning ‘little people’, is a person who has no 气度 and behaves contemptibly and meanly. The first English subtitle is long, although very faithful and unequivocal. In comparison, with regard to brevity, the second version is concise and explicit, but it has seriously reduced the original implication and the King’s disagreement. Such merger of two sentences, a main kind of *reformulation* (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007, p.161), is apparent in this translation, though this merger is primarily between phrases.

In *House of Flying Daggers*, Jin visits Peony Dancer House to entertain himself as well as to investigate the suspicious new dancer Mei who is rumoured to be the daughter of the deceased House leader. Jin is immediately enthralled by Mei and behaves inappropriately under the influence of alcohol, so his colleague Leo comes to arrest them both for immorality. The female boss of the venue says to Leo in Example (14):

(14)

MT	捕头大人高抬贵手 刚才都是那位客人酗酒闹事
PP	butou daren gaotaiguishou, gangcai doushi nawei keren xujiu naoshi.
EN	Please spare the girl, captain. That man was drunk.

Literally meaning ‘lifting your precious hand’, ‘高抬贵手’ (gaotaiguishou) is to forgive someone generously. The English subtitle can be deemed as a direct translation of a modern Chinese explanation of the idiom and also a brief explicitation. This section has analysed examples where the explicitation strategy has been adopted to translate the Chinese idioms. As idioms are usually concise but rich in meaning, it is necessary to adopt explicitation strategy to translate them. Compared to the translation of nouns, the adoption of domestication in translating idioms is not obvious.

6.1.3 Adverb

Nouns and idioms are usually crucial to the conveyance of meaning in a sentence, whereas adverbs might contain less substantial information. Yet, adverbs are still functional, so this

subsection will investigate archaic adverbs and the strategies to cope with them. Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007, pp.150-161) have examined condensation and reformulation at word levels and clause/sentence levels in subtitling. In the Chinese dialogue of the three films, out-of-date adverbs are noticed, which are reformulated and combined with verbs. It is also likely that they are simply ignored and completely omitted, as they generally demonstrate no evident meaning, and are considered redundant. Even though subtitle readers are constantly engaged in a dynamic reading of English subtitles, it will barely occur to them what the adverbs and the verbs are like in the source Chinese dialogue and subtitles. Hence, this section intends to present the original adverbs and analyse how they are reformulated.

In *Hero*, Nameless informs the King of having discovered Flying Snow and Broken Sword in a calligraphy school who have been using their aliases, which is mentioned in Example (15):

(15)

MT	高山先生便是残剑
PP	Gaoshan xiansheng bianshi canjian.
ENV1	Broken Sword's power was immediately apparent to me.
ENV2	Highcliff was Broken Sword

The second subtitle shows the real meaning of the source, whereas the first subtitle has added extra information into the sentence and deleted Broken Sword's alias. The mark of archaism in this Chinese utterance is the adverb '便' (bian) that does not imply any explicable meaning. 便 is combined and reformulated with the verb '是' (shi) to mean 'was' in this subtitle, but 是 itself also means the linking verb 'be'.

In *House of Flying Daggers*, Example (16) is from a conversation between Jin and Leo after Mei attempts to kill Leo and is arrested. While scheming with Leo to win Mei's trust to get to the headquarters of House of Flying Daggers, Jin comments on Mei's appearance:

(16)

MT	这小妹颇有姿色
PP	zhe xiaomei po you zise.
EN	This girl is a rare beauty.

'颇' (po) is an obsolete adverb which means 'very', while '有' (you) means to have/own; '姿色' (zise) refers to beauty. The meaning of 颇 is combined with the following phrase '有姿色' (have beauty) to be translated into 'a rare beauty', so no word class shift happens in this

reformulation. Only beautiful appearance is translated into a beauty. According to Catford (1965, p.73), a 'shift' is a departure from formal correspondence in the process of going from the source language to the target language.

As the scheme of the police goes, Jin rescues her from the prison and flees with her to the headquarters of the House. He attempts to seduce Mei, and yet to his disappointment, she is hesitant and eventually refuses his advance. He comments in Example (17):

(17)

MT	我原以为小妹是团烈火
PP	wo yuan yiwei xiaomei shi tuan liehuo.
EN	I thought you were hot as fire.

‘原’ (yuan) literally means ‘originally’ or ‘in the past’. Compared with Western languages, Chinese verbs and verbal phrases do not conjugate but all seem to be the same as present tense, because the Chinese language relies on adverbs or adverbial phrases to reveal tenses. Thus, ‘thought’ in the English translation does not infer the past tense of the source verb, but rather the adverb ‘原’ suggests the past. In the translation, the adverb has been reformulated with the verb. Although subtitle readers cannot be deceived by problematic subtitles, without knowledge of the Chinese language, they would probably assume Chinese verbs have conjugation and past tense. This has no influence on the subtitle reader’s understanding of the film plot and might be the only way to translate the adverb, but causes an illusion that Chinese is similar to English in terms of tense.

The headquarters Mei and Jin arrive at is actually a fake one. The fake House leader meets Leo in private who has been disguised as a police captain. Leo voices his discontentment at Mei’s task of luring Jin, as Leo is deeply in love with her. Example (18) indicates that the ‘leader’ is sympathetic and allows him to meet her briefly:

(18)

MT	索性你见见小妹
PP	suoxing ni jianjian xiaomei.
EN	I will let you see Mei.

With no real meaning, ‘索性’ (suoxing) signifies an immediacy or directness without hesitation. The vagueness of the meaning of the phrase leads to its omission in the English translation which clearly demonstrates the House leader’s sympathy and permission. This section has

primarily discussed adverbs in the source Chinese subtitles. The adverbs may imply the past tense or have no meaning, so they have either been combined with the verbs or omitted due to their redundancy.

6.1.4 Four-character phrases

Other than nouns, idioms and adverbs, another apparent feature of archaism is four-character phrases. Four-character phrases are a significant linguistic phenomenon of the Chinese language. People in modern days still use them, especially in literature. This style of speech sounds particularly literary and disciplined. Nonetheless, English is so different that retaining the original style with four words or syllables is almost impossible. While certain cases of four-character phrases again require condensation and reformulation, others can be transferred with fidelity, so subtitle readers can receive complete information from the source.

At the beginning of *Hero*, Nameless goes to the calligraphy school to find assassins Broken Sword and Flying Snow. Before Broken Sword finishes the calligraphy requested by Nameless, Qin's army have arrived and started an arrow attack. Example (19) is Nameless' summary of the attacking model of Qin's army:

(19)

MT	大王军队每到一处 必例行放箭 试探敌情 威慑四方
PP	dawang jundui mei dao yichu, bi lixing fangjian, shitan diqing, weishesifang.
ENV1	Wherever they venture their reputation precedes them.
ENV2	The Qin archers are like artillery, intimidating the enemy.

‘例行放箭’ (lixing fangjian), ‘试探敌情’ (shitan diqing) and ‘威慑四方’ (weishe sifang) are three four-character phrases that respectively mean ‘routinely arrow attack’, ‘try out the enemy's capacity’ and ‘overwhelm all’. This sentence describes Qin army's model of attack and its power. Both English subtitles have condensed and reformulated the source, and domesticated the purpose of such an arrow attack – to test the enemy's capacity. The first translation also omits the element of arrow attack, whereas the second is closer to the source meaning. If the subtitlers of the two versions both separated the Chinese line into two subtitles, the meaning could have been translated more completely.

In *House of Flying Daggers*, at the beginning, the drunken Jin is tempted by Mei's appealing dance and beauty and becomes indecent and nearly tears off her costume. Leo arrives to arrest them and declares:

(20)

MT	酗酒闹事 衣衫不整 成何体统
PP	xujiu naoshi, yishanbuzheng, cheng he ti tong.
EN	You're drunk. And you're indecently dressed.

Leo's line is to specify Jin's and Mei's offences. Again, there exist three four-character phrases in the current sentence. The two English subtitles are translated from the first two Chinese phrases. '酗酒闹事', '衣衫不整' and '成何体统' respectively mean 'become drunk and cause trouble', 'thinly clad' and 'lack of decency or morality'. Three phrases are appropriately reformulated and condensed into two short sentences that each reveals Jin's and Mei's offences.

In *Curse of the Golden Flower*, when the emperor asks his sons if they understand the reason why he always holds a banquet for the whole family on the Chrysanthemum Festival, the youngest prince Yu replies with the line in Example (21):

(21)

MT	禀父王 九月九日 两九相重 日月并阳
PP	bing fuwang, jiuyue jiuri, liang jiu xiang chong, riyue bing yang.
EN	Father, on the ninth day of the ninth month.../the sun and the moon unite.

'九月九日' and '日月并阳' are both translated into English. The untranslated four-character phrase in the original is the second one '两九相重' (liang jiu xiang chong) which means two 'nines' go together. Chrysanthemum Festival is the 9th of September in the Chinese lunar calendar. '九' (jiu, nine) is a homophone of '久' (jiu) that suggests longevity or long-lasting happiness. Therefore, nine is an auspicious number in China. Families used to reunite and worship their ancestors on that day too. The omission of that phrase is probably caused by the non-existence of this cultural reference in English.

The patriarchal emperor has been compelling his empress to take medicine for years, and he expounds his excuses in Example (22) to her:

(22)

MT	你肝火过盛 脾胃虚寒 阴阳失调 脾气焦躁 遇事毫无兴致
PP	ni ganhuo guosheng, piwei xuhan, yinyangshitiao, piqi jiaozao, yushi haowuxingzhi.
EN	You have excess bile.../poor digestion.../Yin and Yang are out of balance./That is why you are fractious,/ listless and lethargic...

The four phrases ‘肝火过盛’ (ganhuo guosheng), ‘脾胃虚寒’ (piwei xuhan), ‘阴阳失调’ (yinyangshitiao) and ‘脾气焦躁’ (piqi jiaozao) are separately translated into English faithfully. The emperor always speaks calmly and sedately, with a noble manner, so his speed of speech is slower compared to other characters. That allows the subtitler to provide correspondent English subtitles for all the original phrases. Hence, the possibility of translating archaic phrases also depends on the speech speed. The four-character phrases in this section have mostly been translated with the strategies of condensation and reformulation, while archaisms are unavoidably lost. If the speech speed permits, one Chinese line can be translated into multiple English subtitles and the meaning of the source can be more entirely retained.

This section has analysed archaisms in film subtitling, which is exemplified by subtitles from three of Zhang Yimou’s films. *Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006) all tell stories dating from different dynasties of ancient China. Archaisms reflect usages from earlier periods, and those identified in the three films have been categorised into four groups: nouns, idioms, adverbs and four-character phrases. Different translation strategies have been applied to subtitle those archaic elements. Modernisation and simplification have been frequently adopted to handle nouns. Chinese idioms, like those in other languages, often contain interesting and intricate specifics and often need to be explicitated for the sake of instantaneous intelligibility. Owing to the lack of genuine meanings, adverbs have often been omitted, or reformulated with other elements in the sentences. It is often difficult to retain the archaic tone of four-character phrases – those features distinct to the Chinese language – in target language subtitles. Condensation and reformulation have been used in particular utterances, while direct faithful translation that retains the original meaning has been possible, especially when the speaking speed is slow.

Archaisms in the Chinese dialogue imply more of an ancient style of speaking than a culturally specific way of expression. Therefore, even though there is obvious modernisation and explicitation as well as certain cases of omission of references related to Chinese cultural elements, extreme domestication and reduction have not been noticed. In spite of some minor reduction, the English subtitles have mostly retained the meaning in the sources. Objectively speaking, although subtitle readers can hardly feel antiquity in the English subtitles, visual representation and music convey significant obsolescence to the readers. *Hero* showcases a calligraphy school where Broken Sword and Flying Snow as well as the master and the pupils practice calligraphy with bamboo sticks and sand. They use a thin and long bamboo stick to

write in a shallow layer of sand in a tray, and then scrape the sand smooth and write again, which saves ink and paper. In *House of Flying Daggers*, two pieces of classic Chinese solo dance have been beautifully presented. Zhang Ziyi performs *Beauty in the North* (《北方有佳人》, beifang you jia ren) and *Immortal Points Direction* (《仙人指路》, xianren zhilu). The first one involves gentle and graceful movements, whereas the second is more energetic. She wears dance costumes in an ancient style which have two long sleeves. The sleeves will be flung gently or with strength to express different emotion. Interestingly, although the star Zhang Ziyi was a graduate of a dance college, Zhang Yimou employed two doubles for her in order to achieve the optimal effect of the two dances (Shang, 2005). On the other hand, both dances are accompanied by traditional Chinese instruments, including *pipa* (琵琶, a Chinese lute) and three types of drums. Therefore, archaic visual and acoustic elements above all can compensate for the loss of antiquity in the film subtitles and subtitle readers will not be misled but notice it.

6.2 Subtitling the turbulent age of the 20th century China

As this chapter examines historical subtitling of Chinese films, the Cultural Revolution is a controversial decade of history that this chapter will refer to. Quite a few Chinese films have explored this particular period of time. *To Live* (1994) is Zhang Yimou's most controversial film which has been banned for years and has never been released in cinema, particularly due to its depiction of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Sixteen years later, he was inspired by a novel based on a true story, *Hawthorn Tree Forever* (Ai Mi, 2009) (《永远的山楂树》, yongyuan de shanzhashu), so he returned to the topic of the Cultural Revolution and adapted it into a film. *To Live* (1994) is about Xu Fugui's family story of over thirty years. Fugui loses all the family fortune due to gambling and becomes a shadow play performer. During the civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang/KMT) in the 1940s, Fugui, along with his helper Chunsheng, is seized by the Nationalist army. Later, as the only survivors, they surrender to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the CCP and he finally returns home. Yet, Fugui's ailing mother has died and his daughter lost her voice due to a fever, and his wife Jiazhen makes a living by delivering water for the neighbourhood. The gambler and owner of Fugui's previous property Long'er is now classified as a 'landlord', i.e. a proletarians' enemy, and is executed. In the 1950s, the Great Leap Forward commences and everyone is involved in smelting steel, while Fugui performs shadow play for the workers. Tragically, his son is accidentally killed by Chunsheng, the then district chief. In the 1960s, the Cultural Revolution begins and Chunsheng is accused of being a capitalist. When Fugui's mute daughter Fengxia is about to give birth, the family desperately

look for experienced doctors who have all been accused of being reactionary and locked up by the Red Guards. Fengxia delivers a child but dies of bleeding.

Under the Hawthorn Tree (2010) concentrates on the end of the Cultural Revolution. Jing is a high school student sent to the countryside to learn the history of a village to compile a textbook. She meets a young man called Sun who works in the geological exploration unit and falls in love with him. While Sun's father is a senior official, both of her parents are under political watch. Nonetheless, they keep seeing each other in secret, even after she returns to the city, until Jing's mother discovers their relationship. Worrying about Jing's potential employment at school after graduation and considering her family's unfavourable background, her mother stops her from meeting him. Thereafter, Jing hears about Sun's ailment and rushes to see him, only to find that he is alright. Nevertheless, the next time Jing meets Sun, he is dying in hospital due to leukaemia. Zhang Yimou's recent film *Coming Home* (2014) is adapted from Chinese American author Yan Geling's novel *The Criminal Lu Yanshi* (2011) (《陆犯焉识》, lu fan yan shi). The story in the film comes from the final chapters of the novel. During the Cultural Revolution, prisoner Lu Yanshi escapes while being transferred to another prison. He sneaks home but his wife Feng Wanyu does not open the door for him. He leaves her a note, asking her to meet him at the railway station with food the next day. However, their daughter Dandan discovers his plan and reported it to a Party director in order to gain the role in a propaganda dance performance that she desires, and does not allow Feng to meet Lu. The next day, Feng rushes to the station, but cannot find Lu. In a hurry, Lu shouts out Feng's name to find her, but alerts the Party police who has come for him. Lu is arrested again in front of Feng who is hurt on the head while struggling to reach Lu. A few years later, Lu is seen walking out of the same station, released, and met by Dandan. Lu is eager to meet Feng, but Dandan seems hesitant and evasive. When he returns home, he discovers that Feng cannot recognise him anymore due to trauma and psychogenic amnesia. Then he becomes a piano tuner and a letter reader to approach her and look after her. She later begins to trust him, but still goes to the station once a month to wait for him to come home, with his and Dandan's company.

Zhang comments that *To Live* (1994) focuses on ordinary, unexceptional people and embraces several layers of hidden meanings (Mungur, 2011, p.520). Family catastrophes are deliberately presented as coincident with political campaigns, which is more ambiguous in the source novel (Qin, 2010, pp.170-171). Compared to the plot of the novel, a man or a family's fate in the film symbolises a nation's story, and repercussions of national politics and historical periods are further highlighted (ibid.). Cultural elements that not only suggest the significance of national

politics but also avoid overtly direct political critiques are also integrated into this film (Qin, 2010, p.171). Chinese shadow play is not mentioned in the novel but plays a significant role as a cultural as well as historical symbol in this film (ibid.). Moreover, according to Zhang himself, films about this historic period of China are often very sombre and heavy which attach emphasis to people's suffering and intellectuals' difficulties (Niogret, 1994, p.58). However, he contends 'I wanted to show things from a different point of view with this addition of humor and the absurd, so the public would experience something else (ibid.).' He indeed creates humour and absurdity while portraying the particular period of history, as very bitter happiness is constantly noticeable throughout the film. While exploring Daoist cosmic discourse and socio-political forces, Shi (1999, p.2) discusses the challenge of translating the Chinese title of *To Live* (1994), '活着' (huo zhe). 'None of these translations (i.e. *To Live*, *Living* or *To Remain Alive*) alone, however, fully denotes the semantic ambiguities or cultural connotations of the original (Shi, 1999, p.3).' 活着 shows a helplessness in life, a will to survive, the hardship of existence and beyond. In this film, social and political environment is intertwined with and responsible for individuals' twists and turns in their lives (ibid.). The family's temporary fortune and tragedies bear Daoist principles, as fortunes and misfortunes are contained and inferred in each other (ibid.). Klawans (1995, p.14) deems the film to be an evidence of average Chinese people's flexibility and adaptability to the environment which are a virtue of necessity for the sake of surviving. Sheldon Lu (1997, p.122) maintains that the film celebrates faith in the future. By contrast with the sad ending in the original novel of the same name, the film adaptation ends with a family reunion where characters look forward to a better era that surpasses the locality of time and space (Lu, 1997, p.122).

As for *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010), Wang (2011, pp.100-101) argues that compared to the original novel, the film has reduced, split or even twisted the story and added a sequence that could not occur in real history. These weaknesses render the film problematic to some extent, and fail to strike a chord with both elderly audiences who experienced the impact of the socio-political situation and young people who may feel the characters' naive morality is pretentious (ibid.). Although the film aims to depict a pure and innocent love story, Chen (2010) declares that the presentation of the main male character's death is shallow and brutal to his love interest, against the intention of portraying a lovable tale; the love story turns awkward due to several intrusive intertitles too. The narrative meets older Chinese audiences' expectation of chaste love and a nostalgic complex which are integrated into political and cultural reflection (Miao, 2011, p.155). Yet, characters' inner worlds are not presented regarding historical memories, which cause the film to be reduced to simply a consumerist entertainment (ibid.).

Zhang Yimou's most recent film *Coming Home* (2014) symbolises his return to art house cinema after years of effort to succeed in commercial cinema and balance between both art house and commercial cinemas (Chen, 2014; Tang, 2014). The light coloured cinematography and the slow paced and emotional narrative remind people of the poetic films of the Fourth Generation art house films (Chen, 2014). It also demonstrates Zhang's return to the themes of the Cultural Revolution and humanity (Tang, 2014). However, the plot and style of this film might have excluded many viewers, especially younger generations, which may be a sacrifice of returning to art house cinema (Chen, 2014). On the other hand, Zhang's adaptation is questioned again regarding his omission of most of the novel, retaining only the ending (Tao, 2014). His dramatic change of the novel renders some plotlines difficult to understand and dilutes the deepest reason behind Lu's tragedy which concerns Lu Yanshi's personality (ibid.).

22

The following sections will investigate how the Cultural-Revolution-related expressions in the film dialogue are translated with the simplification and explication strategies. The English subtitles of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010) are from <http://www.moviesubtitles.org/subtitle-67504.html>

6.2.1 Simplification

The above films portray the disputed times of modern China where characters' dialogue often encompass terms unique to that period. Foreign audiences may know some of the history behind those words, but are presumably unfamiliar with the historical specificities and references. Owing to the spatial-temporal constraints, these references can only be simplified with very few target language words. Interestingly, the politics and history-bound terms in *To Live* and *Under the Hawthorn Tree* are translated entirely faithfully on the surface, but the implications they convey to target language receptors are essentially reduced and simplified. Simplification is conceived as 'the idea that translators subconsciously simplify the language or message or both (Baker, 1996, p.176)', and is one of the translation universals that are prevalent in translations between various source and target languages, especially technical texts (Mihăilă, 2010). On the other hand, *skopos* theory focuses on translation as an activity with a clear purpose and the aim of translation is to meet the purpose in the target text for the target language reader (Nord, 1997). If the 'purpose' is to produce a simple and clear translation for subtitle readers, the strategy of simplification is consistent with *skopos* theory. From a *skopos* theory perspective, Wu (2012) examines the application of domestication,

²² Zhang Yimou's 1999 film *The Road Home* also concerns the Cultural Revolution, but will not be discussed in this section of the chapter.

condensation and other strategies amongst the subtitles of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*. The following section will illustrate how Cultural-Revolution-related terms seem to be ‘faithfully’ translated while being simplified.

In *To Live*, Fugui is unwillingly and accidentally involved with the Nationalist Army in the Civil War. Then, he is captured by the CCP’s army but is eventually released when the war ends and returns home. Soon afterwards, he hears about the public trial of Long’er who has tricked him out of his family house and occupied it by gambling. Example (1) is the reason why Long’er is accused:

(1)

Mandarin Transcription (MT)	还不因为你家那院房给龙二定了个地主 ²³
Pinyin Pronunciation (PP)	hai bu yinwei nijia na yuan fang gei longer ding le ge dizhu.
English Subtitle (EN)	Because of the family home, he's been sentenced a landlord.

Literally speaking, ‘地主’ (dizhu) is a person who owns land. Nevertheless, the ‘landlord’ here is one of the five class divisions during the Cultural Revolution. During the Revolution, people in the Chinese countryside were classified into ‘landlord’ and five types of farmers in accordance with the ownership of land and its size. Landlords were accused of oppressing farmers and their land was confiscated. By contrast to a British landlord, the Chinese term carries a politically negative connotation which is secretly lost in translation and disappears after subtitling. The subtitle reader might find it difficult to imagine the danger of being classified a ‘landlord’.

What has happened to Long’er is that the government has attempted to confiscate Long’er’s (and previously Fugui’s) house. He violently rejects the edict by not only attacking the Party official but also burning the house up, which turns his response into the ‘crime’ in Example (2):

(2)

MT	这不成了反革命破坏了嘛
PP	zhe bu chengle fangeming pohua le ma.
EN	Classic counterrevolutionary sabotage.

²³ The English subtitles of *To Live* (1994) are available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZB7HYhUpDz8>, accessed 20 April 2013. The English subtitles of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010) are from <http://www.moviesubtitles.org/subtitle-67504.html>, accessed 15 July 2015.

‘反革命破坏’ (fan geming pohuai) is ‘a “crime of counterrevolution” that refers to any act that is committed with the aim of overthrowing the political power of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the socialist system and endangers the People’s Republic of China (Anon, no date (d)).’ Long’er’s action is categorised as counterrevolutionary sabotage which is a severe offence. The English subtitle is directly translated from the Chinese line in spite of viewers’ unfamiliarity with Chinese historical legal knowledge, leaving the term implicit, but subtitle readers can still notice the political nature of the term and the uniqueness of the era in the film.

After the Cultural Revolution begins, old traditions and arts are perceived as ‘reactionary’. Mr Niu, head of the township, strongly recommends Fugui and Jiazhen they should burn up the shadow play puppets, because they are what Example (3) refers to:

(3)

MT	这是典型的四旧
PP	zheshi dianxing de sijiu.
EN	Classic feudal types.

‘Feudal types’ in the English subtitle stems from ‘四旧’ (si jiu, four ‘olds’) that refers to ‘old thoughts, culture, customs and habits’ during the Revolution (Li, 2012, p.121). Those that fell into the four types were labelled ‘old’ and eradicated according to the call from the central government. Since Chinese shadow play traditionally portrays only emperors, officials, scholars and beauties (帝王将相, 才子佳人), it was considered old and reactionary. ‘The older, the more reactionary (越旧的东西越反动),’ as Chairman Mao Zedong noted. That explains why Fugui has to destroy the puppets reluctantly later. The reason why four olds had to be removed was not only their association with feudal society, but also the intricacies of the political and social situation back then. Thus, ‘feudal’ may be too narrow but can be altered into ‘reactionary’ that is consistent with other subtitles and more inclusive.

Head of the township Mr Niu has been taking care of Fugui’s family for two decades, but because of the social and political chaos, Example (4) reveals that he is finally accused of being a capitalist too:

(4)

MT	他们说我是镇上的走资本主义道路当权派
PP	tamen shuo woshi zhenshang de zou zibenzhuayi daolu dangquanpai.
EN	They say I’m a capitalist.

‘走资本主义道路当权派’ in Chinese is often shortened into ‘走资派’ (zouzipai) in daily usage during the Revolution. It referred to cadres within the CCP or generally people in authority that were following a capitalist path (He, 2009, p.5). A commonly used English translation is ‘capitalist roaders in authority within the Party’ that first appeared in a 1965 Party document related to the socialist education movement in rural areas (cited in Chan, 1979, p.77). Mao Zedong preferred open criticism and the involvement of people to rectify the ruling class and framed that solution as a campaign between the proletariat and the ‘reactionary’ bourgeoisie (Spence, 1999). Party members and academic experts of high positions were deemed as bourgeois capitalists, for arguably, their ‘authoritative’ behaviour did not fit the socialist system and the proletarian dictatorship, and thus should be attacked. In the English translation, the long phrase is reduced and simplified into ‘capitalist’ that is opposite to socialist or communist, so subtitle readers can immediately see the severity of such a charge.

After the accusation, Example (5) shows that Niu is also required to attend a certain class where he will:

(5)

MT	明天还去学习班交代问题呢
PP	mingtian haiyao qu xuexiban jiaodai wenti ne.
EN	I have to confess my crimes.

The literal meaning of Niu’s utterance is ‘I’ll report my mistakes in the class tomorrow’. The class where Niu will report his mistakes or ‘confess his crimes’ is ‘学习班’ (xuexi ban). It is short for ‘毛泽东思想学习班’ which is ‘Mao Zedong thought class’ or ‘Maoist thought class’. This class was held across the country on a varying scale during the Revolution, intended for discovering and removing ‘rightists’ or ‘capitalists’ (Dai, 2011; Baidu Baike, 2015b). Initially in this class, while learning Mao’s essays, Party cadres and citizens were encouraged to criticise each other and to self-criticise in order to correct political mistakes and be more united. Later during the Revolution, attendees in the class were more likely to be ‘capitalists’, and had to read newspapers and policy documents and discover their own mistakes (Baidu Baike, 2015b). ‘Class’ has been simplified and omitted in the English subtitle and the subtitler has only kept what the class involves, so the English subtitle is concise and easy for subtitle readers to read.

Approaching the end of the film, Fengxia is about to go into labour, but ‘reactionary academic authorities’ have all been locked up. Her husband Erxi, a Red Guard leader of his factory, collects ‘reactionary’ gynaecological Professor Wang Bin from a temporary prison. In order to

convince the Red Guards of the hospital to let Wang stay while Fengxia is giving birth, Erxi has to say the line in Example (6):

(6)

MT	让他看着我们红色江山后继有人
PP	rang ta kanzhe women hongsejiangshan houjiyouren.
EN	To show him the heirs of this new, Red world.

Erxi lies that Wang has humiliated his wife that she cannot bear children. Hence, he sincerely suggests ‘forcing’ Wang to witness his wife giving birth successfully. A baby ‘worker’ will be another heir of the ‘Red world’, a country ruled by working proletarians. ‘江山’ (jiangshan), literally ‘rivers and mountains’, refers to the land of the country. ‘红色江山’ (hongse jiangshan) or a ‘red’ country is a socialist country ruled by proletarians (Anon, 2005). The English subtitle has not simplified ‘red’, assuming subtitle readers are familiar with the relation between red and Communism, especially when the film has demonstrated several Mao’s portraits where red is a major colour.

At the beginning of *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, main female character Jing is going to the countryside with fellow high school students, where they pass a hawthorn tree nicknamed the ‘Tree of Heroes’. Their teacher Luo explains the reason in Example (7):

(7)

MT	是因为它在如火如荼的抗日战争年代里
PP	shi yinwei ta zai ruhuorutu de kangrizhazheng niandai li
EN	During the Second Sino-Japanese War
MT	见证了无数革命先烈
PP	jianzheng le wushu gemingxianlie
EN	our soldiers showed heroic devotion here
MT	为祖国为人民英勇献身的可歌可泣的场面
PP	wei zuguo wei renmin yingyongxianshen de kegekeqi de changmian.
EN	and became revolutionary martyrs.

This utterance is divided into three subtitles, considering the fairly slow talking speed as well as its length. As a teacher, Luo’s words are informative, descriptive and literary. His line is a typical hyperbole with multiple modifiers in one sentence. Adjectives are the majority of these modifiers among which are four-character phrases. ‘如火如荼’ (ruhuorutu) derives from the historical record *Guoyu* or *Discourses of the States* (《国语》, written over 2,400 years ago) which originally means ‘as red as fire, as white as the flowers of *tu* (a typical weed)’. Nowadays,

it depicts enthusiasm or events happening on a large scale, so here it demonstrates the scope of the Anti-Japanese Aggression War. ‘可歌可泣’ (ke ge ke qi) means a person’s story is so touching as to almost cause people to cry. ‘无数’ (wushu) means countless; ‘英勇’ (yingyong) is to be very valiant and courageous. Except that the meaning of 英勇 is integrated into ‘martyr’ in English, two other four-character adjective phrases are simplified or omitted, which domesticates the line into a natural-sounding subtitle in English. The simplification of all the praising phrases Luo uses might imply a conservative attitude to reveal how heroes in the war have been admired in China. This can be attributed to the lack of cultural confidence, because Luo’s admiration of heroes would be true to the time period and it is hardly surprising that heroes are highly respected in any nation. It possibly falls under submissive translation too, as the subtitler might have attempted to avoid making subtitle readers feel odd about Luo’s attitude. However, subtitle readers can still see the significance of the tree from Luo’s enthusiasm on his face and in his voice as he tells the story. This section has investigated examples of terms related to the Revolution that have been simplified. These terms seem to have been fairly faithfully translated, or at least the basic meaning of them has been translated. However, because the terms are specifics of the Cultural Revolution, they might be harder to translate with very few words than most other cultural references but prone to domestication.

6.2.2 Explication

Another strategy that is adopted to translate the Cultural Revolution-related terms is explication. Toury (1980, p.60) puts it that it is an ‘almost general tendency – irrespective of the translator’s identity, language, genre, period, and the like – to explicate in the translation information that is only implicit in the original text.’ Plenty of nouns associated with that time period have been explicated with a view to creating immediately intelligible subtitles for the readers, which will be expounded with the following examples.

Example (8) demonstrates that Mr Niu, head of the township in *To Live*, sets Fugui’s mute daughter Fengxia up with her future husband Erxi, and tells Fugui and Jiazhen about Erxi:

(8)

MT	人家在厂里头大小也是个组织的头
PP	renjia zai chang litou daxiao yeshi ge zuzhi de tou.
EN	He is the leader of the factory's <u>Red Guards</u> .

‘Red Guards’ in the English subtitle is translated from ‘组织’ (zuzhi, organisation), short for ‘红卫兵组织’, i.e. Red Guards organisation. Red Guards were not soldiers but students or youths

who were enthusiastic and radical and worshiped Mao Zedong; their appearance is due to the particular historical background (Li, 2012). At that time, old thoughts, culture, customs and habits were called 'Four Olds' which were condemned by the Party top leaders. Red Guards enthusiastically followed the policies by destroying anything that was labelled old. They were also misled by the problematic class labelling and involved in magnifying the class struggle (Bu, 1994, p.32; Chi, 2009). However, their enthusiasm further turned to attacking authorities in many local government organisations, schools, factories, etc. Their radical movement caused widespread social chaos. The English version renders the original more explicit and 'Red Guards' is repeated in the subtitles on several other occasions, which enables audiences to familiarise themselves with this term.

In *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, Jing is from a politically unfavourable family. Her father is categorised as a rightist and her mother is under political watch at her school. Yet, she is finally permitted to remain at school as a teacher after her graduation. Her teacher Luo encourages her to behave favourably during her probation as in Example (9):

(9)

MT	希望你不要辜负 <u>组织</u> 对你的信任
PP	xiwang ni buyao gufu zuzhi duini de xinren.
EN	I hope you won't let the <u>Party</u> down.

Then, Jing vows to overcome the challenges of the probation and try her best to impress school leaders favourably. She even volunteers to participate in extra work during the summer holiday. In this example, Luo's demand is made on behalf of the Communist Party members at school. The source phrase in the current example 组织 is the same as in Example (8). However, 组织 or 'organisation' in the current subtitle refers to the Chinese Communist Party organisation and is explicitated as such, while 组织 in Example (8) means 'Red Guards' organisation. The ambiguity of different meanings of the same source phrase is more comprehensible for primarily Chinese audiences only and needs to be rendered explicit for average foreign audiences.

Jing begins a secret relationship with Sun. She eagerly asks her friend to teach her how to weave a goldfish key holder for Sun, while her friend becomes suspicious and mischievously enquires with the question in Example (10):

(10)

MT	你是找到 <u>组织</u> 了吧
----	-------------------

PP	ni shi zhaodao zuzhi le ba?
EN	You're in love, aren't you?

In this example, 组织 or 'organisation' is mentioned again like in Examples (8) and (9). The literal meaning of the original is 'You've found the organisation, haven't you?' In the current subtitle, 组织 refers to the Party organisation on the surface but as a matter of fact, it insinuates a boyfriend. This might be a metaphor for young people to shyly discuss their love life in private, which is not used any more. Perhaps because the Party is critical and powerful and creates policies for people to follow, love will lead people to behave in a certain way too. The interesting metaphor can make sense with an explicitation strategy, but the indirect enquiry has to become direct in the English version.

When the romance between Jing and Sun is discovered unexpectedly by Jing's mother, she frankly tells them both her negative notion towards the relationship. Jing's father is categorised as a rightist and is imprisoned and her mother's situation is not positive either as in Example (11):

(11)

MT	我也在学校劳动改造
PP	wo ye zai xuexiao laodong gaizao.
EN	I'm under political watch at school.

'劳动改造' (laodong gaizao), or labour transformation, means that criminals in prison have to take on a large amount of work where they learn skills, correct their mistakes and make contribution to society (Ji, 2011, p.35). Jing's mother is in a similar situation, but works excessively at school rather than a prison. The film manifests that she is under watch and subject to constant criticism by school leaders. Thus, the subtitler uses explicitation to reduce the source and emphasise the political aim of the watch, and keep the English version brief with an explicit meaning. The above four examples of explicitation have revealed how subtitlers have rendered the Revolution-related terms more explicit than the source and easier to understand, particularly with the three translations of the same source phrase.

The above section has focused on the subtitling of politically and historically bound references in two of Zhang Yimou's films, *To Live* and *Under the Hawthorn Tree*. The time period in the former expands from the 1940s to the 1970s, which includes the Civil War and the Cultural Revolution. The latter concentrates on roughly the last two years of the Revolution. As terms

with political and historical origins exist in fairly large numbers and some repeatedly appear in one film, the subtitlers have primarily adopted two strategies. Simplification generally simplifies the abundance of meaning in those terms from that era, while explicitation renders the obscure terms unambiguous or explicit. The Chinese register of using excessive modifiers is also simplified into brief, straightforward English. Even though the source lines are simplified or explicitated, the sense of political controversy has largely been retained. Subtitle readers will also notice the distinct socio-political context of those films owing to the slogans, the songs, the portraits of Mao Zedong, which might be foreign for general subtitle readers but are historically true to China.

This chapter has investigated historical subtitling and exemplified subtitle examples from Zhang Yimou's films. As a main characteristic of films set in ancient China, archaisms have their own significance. Many archaisms have been identified in *Hero* (2002), *House of the Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006). On the one hand, audiences in both China and abroad are able to interpret the antiquity from mise-en-scène which portrays the total otherness of ancient times, including their costumes, settings and music. What foreign viewers are inclined to ignore is the source archaic vocabulary. Archaisms have been categorised into four groups in this chapter, nouns, idioms, adverbs and four-character phrases. First, archaic nouns are often place names and titles which may not exist in modern China or have equivalents in English. These archaisms are often modernised and simplified in order to accelerate audiences' understanding. Second, Chinese idioms, like those of any other country, often contain allusive connotations that foreigners may not know, so subtitlers have handled them with explicitation so that the meaning will become explicit and accessible. Third, adverbs usually have little real meaning, and thus are combined with other elements in an utterance or simply deleted in the translations. Fourth, four-character phrases are a significant feature of archaic Chinese and need to be condensed and reformulated into a natural and brief English sentence. Slower speech might allow them to be translated more faithfully to the original. The lack of cultural confidence is spotted in the translation of some examples in this section, and some of the Chinese cultural references that have been omitted make the translations submissive too.

Zhang has also manifested his capability in showing historical events in films, especially in *To Live* (1994). This film has embraced the Civil War, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, whereas *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010) has been limited to the end of the Revolution. Vocabulary about the particular historical, social and political situation has been discovered in both films. Simplification has been adopted frequently by the subtitlers. While the translations are literally faithful, meanings and connotations of the terms will have been reduced if target language audiences lack knowledge of the particular period of China. Certain nouns related to class divisions and political crimes have been simplified and condensed from long source phrases. Excessive modifiers have been handled with simplification as well. Chinese terms from the specific historical period that are evident for ordinary Chinese viewers need to be explicitated for foreign subtitle readers. Explicitation has rendered the meaning of the sources evident with a fairly small number of words, as word count is a significant spatial constraint in subtitling. Domestication is less frequently adopted in the translation of the subtitles in this chapter than previous chapters. This might be because the subtitlers found it easy to translate the historical terminology into English with very few words.

As Stubbs (2013, p.39) puts it,

‘...the distinction between cinema and writing is nonetheless valid, and as a consequence historical films almost always contain large amounts of period detail, regardless of how serious they are about representing the past authentically. To put it another way, the majority of historical films carry a high information load in terms of the material detail they put on display, even if they chose to avoid other types of information about the past.’

All the details in film sets are utilised by the filmmaker to make history visible again (ibid.), and foreign film viewers discover history visually through the details which also render the film watching historical. On the other hand, what Stubbs mentions as ‘avoided’ types of information might include historical details in film dialogue and on-screen texts, as it is almost impossible to make film dialogue completely authentic to the time period a film portrays, as the language of the period can be so obsolescent or even extinct that modern viewers can barely understand it. Therefore, a slightly old-fashioned style might be archaic enough to represent history and correlate with all the visible details in a film. Yet, no matter how insignificant the language style in a historical film is, it still contributes to conveying history just like visible cues such as the furniture in a room and a character’s clothing.

Although history is more likely to be demonstrated through cinematic representation, occasionally filmmakers historicise film dialogue as well, as in *The Assassin* (Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 2015). Even if the visual and the acoustic portray antiquity and history, film dialogue and

subtitles can still play the role of depicting particular ages to some extent. When one film character uses more archaisms than others, it is quite possible that this character is nostalgic and longs for the past. An example is Torunn, Thor's daughter in *Next Avengers: Heroes of Tomorrow* (Oliva and Hartle, 2008) who often says 'aye'. In this case, the archaism usage indicates Torunn's difference from her fellows who are less nostalgic. On the other hand, even if archaisms and a historic language are used all through a film, they ought not to be deemed entirely the same as modern dialogue in subtitling. Total modernisation could generate an illusion that the original dialogue is utterly contemporary. Despite the necessity of modernising and simplifying archaic lines, a respectful and formal style of translation should be employed and colloquialisms should be avoided, which is the most basic strategy of handling historical translation. Such a translation style together with a historical filmic representation can convey antiquity to a larger degree.

Chapter Seven

The subtitling of songs and the Peking Opera in Zhang Yimou's films

In *Cría Cuervos* (Carlos Saura, 1976) (*Raise Ravens*), there is the renowned scene of the three sisters dancing to the song *Porque te pas*, written by José Luis Perales. We see young Ana's (Ana Torrent) melancholy face and the gentle movement of her lips while she sings along. Meanwhile, we hear the singer Jeanette's emotional voice and the emotional melody. The song correlates with Ana's loss of her mother. The chorus line '*porque te vas*' is repeated a few times, but there are no subtitles for this song (Leon, 2009). As a song is 'a direct line to the emotions' (Monk, 1976, p.56), *Porque te pas* is still very likely to affect subtitle readers although they do not understand the lyrics. According to Dyer (2012, p.2), the body, the mind as well as the physical and psychological have their way of working which is outside culture, but when it comes to utterances, communication becomes indirect due to culture. We may still apprehend a song as a line to the feelings, which renders it something magical (ibid.). And yet, if subtitle readers have no knowledge of Spanish and rely on English subtitles to watch the film, they probably will feel enlightened to learn that '*porque te vas*' means 'because you're leaving'. If there were subtitles for the lyrics, subtitle readers might better see how the song is attached to the film context and the character Ana. Without subtitles, audiences might still feel the emotion beneath a song; but with subtitles, audiences will possibly better understand the connection between a song and its filmic context, the image and the sound. Without subtitles, the song is just a melody and an unfamiliar language, but with subtitles, it becomes vivid and self-explanatory. That is why subtitles of songs might be of considerable help to viewers.

Songs or operas are not only forms of art on their own, but also are functionally and aesthetically critical in other forms of art too, for example films. In Zhang Yimou's films, the lyrics of the songs are specially written and the songs composed to fulfil the functions that existing classic or pop music cannot. Moreover, the Peking Opera, the most influential type of Chinese operas, is much influenced by Chinese history, culture and literature, which might play a prominent role in a film. In this chapter, I will discuss specificities in the subtitling of the songs from Zhang's films based on existing research on song translation, and I will analyse the possible solutions for subtitling one untranslated Peking Opera scene in one of Zhang's films. Regarding the cross-cultural power of songs and operas, subtitle readers who do not understand the Chinese language would not be confused, as the 'direct' entity of music like melody, rhyme and rhythm would surpass the 'indirectness' of culture as in the content of a song. However, the power of music does not mean the content of a song can be left

untranslated, as again, subtitle readers deserve to know the meaning of the lyrics and might be interested in knowing the meaning too. Hence, other than examining the difficulties of recreating rhyme and rhythm of a source Chinese song or a piece of the Peking Opera, this chapter will emphasise the significance of translating the lyrics of a song or an opera and analyse how the translation of them might contribute to subtitle readers' understanding of the visual and the acoustic in the representation. Despite all the intricate Chinese cultural and historical references in songs and the Peking Opera, their meaning should not be simply reduced or domesticated.

7.1 The translation of songs

In China, the history of song translation began many years ago. According to the *Chinese Translation Dictionary* (Lin, 1997), the history of translation in China dates back to 58-75AD during the Eastern Han Dynasty, while the history of song translation in China only began at the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1908 (Xue, 2001, p.13). The most famous song translated from a foreign language used to be Eugene Pottier's *The Internationale* (ibid., p.14). In the 1920s, three foreign songs were translated into Chinese and had tremendous influence on the Chinese nation, which are *La Marseillaise* (Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle, 1972), *The Internationale* (Pottier, 1871) and *The Song of Volga Boatmen* (Mily Balakirev, 1866) (Xue, 2001, pp.13-14). These songs encouraged the Chinese nation to stand up against the shame caused by the invasion of the imperial countries (ibid.). Since then, a variety of foreign songs from many countries have been translated into Chinese (ibid., p.15).

However, the history of song translation in China might have started from much earlier than 1908. The ancient poem *Song of the Yue Boatman*²⁴ (《越人歌》, yuerenge) from over 2,500 years ago could allegedly be the oldest translated poem/song. This was a love song sung by a boatman of Yue origin to Prince Zixi from the state of Chu who was on the boat (Zhang, 1986). Zixi who did not understand the song had it translated from the ancient Yue²⁵ dialect into the dialect of Chu. Yet, it is a much rarer phenomenon for a Chinese song to be translated into a foreign language and research on how to translate a Chinese song into a foreign language is uncommon even in China. Moreover, while English pop songs can be popular throughout the

²⁴ The poem/song is as follows: 今夕何夕兮搴舟中流, 今日何日兮得与王子同舟. 蒙羞被好兮不訾诟耻. 心几烦而不绝兮得知王子. 山有木兮木有枝, 心悦君兮君不知. My translation is 'What a lovely night is tonight, I'm rowing the boat on the river. What a lucky day is today, I'm on the same boat as the prince. I'm so grateful that he doesn't look down upon me. My heart is beating so fast that I get to know the prince. Mountains have trees and trees have branches. I admire you but do you know it?' '枝' (branch) and '知' (know) are both pronounced 'zhi' and make a rhyme as well as a pun.

²⁵ The ancient Yue dialect is 越语, not to be confused with 粤语 (yueyu) or Cantonese.

world, songs in other languages are usually popular only in the countries where the languages are widely spoken and optimally some neighbouring countries. Therefore, it is assumed that Chinese songs are not popular in countries where Chinese people are not ethnically dominant. However, there are a few Chinese songs that have been translated into English. *Goodbye Kiss* (《吻别》, wenbie) was adapted into English as *Take Me to Your Heart* by Danish singer-songwriter Jascha Richter (Anon, no date (e)). Swedish singer Sofia Källgren has adapted at least 11 Chinese songs into English (Suifengerxing, 2009). Interestingly, both singers are from northern Europe. By contrast, Chinese singers revel in adapting foreign songs into Chinese. Many have adapted Japanese singer Miyuki Nakajima's songs and some even found their earliest fame with Nakajima's songs. Besides, the climax of Angela Chang's *Fable* (《寓言》) is from the traditional Christmas carol *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen*.

Research has touched upon the translation of songs for resinging. Peter Low (2003, p.87) maintains that creating singable translations of songs is an intricate undertaking, chiefly because the target text has to be compatible with the existing music. Low (ibid.) identifies 'the pentathlon principle' – singability, sense, naturalness, rhyme and rhythm, which have to be balanced on purpose. However, song translation in film subtitling is different from singable song translation. Subtitles of film songs in the target language are usually not to be sung again, and thus the demand of singability on the translation can be lower. Also, whether a song in a film is subtitled or not is largely decided by customer instructions or subtitlers' access to the lyrics from the dialogue list (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007, p.208). If the lyrics are in a different language from the rest of the film, it will be translated only if it is also translated in the original film (ibid.). If the source language of a song is linguistically close to the target language and target language audiences are expected to understand it without translation, the lyrics will need no translation (ibid.). Again, there might be intellectual property right issues in regard to translating a pop song in film subtitles. If a song plays at the beginning or end or when characters are conversing, the subtitles of lyrics might overlap with the credit or the dialogue subtitles, and priority will be given to the text on screen or the speech (ibid., p.208). Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007, p.211) also emphasise content, rhythm and rhyme of a translated song. Specifically, transferring the atmosphere or emotion in the lyrics is more crucial, so a rigid translation of the original meaning is unnecessary (ibid.).

7.1.1 The Songs in Zhang Yimou's films

Songs always contain plenty of elements and specifics. As Susam-Sarajeva (2008, p.190) puts it, 'Few of us with a background in translation studies can effectively deal with meanings derived not only from text, but also from melody, pitch, duration, loudness, timbre, dynamics, rhythm,

tempo, expression, harmony, pause, stress or articulation in music.’ Songs can be crucial in particular film contexts and might be more effective than dialogue. Film composer Bernard Herrmann (cited in Gorbman, 1987, p.67) maintains that, ‘The real reason for music is that a piece of film, by its nature, lacks a certain ability to convey emotional overtones. Many times in many films, dialogue may not give a clue to the feelings of a character...’ Music is a special form of art that can access viewers’ emotion in a way that dialogue cannot, and compensates for the depth of emotion that is beyond verbal representation (Gorbman, 1987, p.67; Garwood, 2006, p.103). Music itself is already a plethora of information in different forms, not to mention that most songs in Zhang Yimou’s films are properly performed in the film world. In other words, not only the musicological elements matter in those situations, but the representation of the performances is also an indispensable part of the film story. Furthermore, songs are not only performances, but also bear cultural and historical significance that the filmmaker Zhang Yimou desires to convey to his audiences. The following section will provide some examples of the songs that Zhang has created or taken advantage of and briefly analyse his possible purposes of involving those songs.

For instance, a song can be an old ritual dedicated to nature and harvest and worships ancient traditions and the love of life, as in the case of *Red Sorghum* (1987). The distillery workers stand in a line and each holds a large bowl of sorghum liquor high towards a portrait of the imaginary Chinese God of Wine. They sing *Song of the God of Wine* (《酒神曲》, jiushen qu) with strength and passion which praises the magical power of sorghum liquor. In *Shanghai Triad* (1995), the main female character is a singer in the nightclub run by her patron and lover who is also the boss of a triad, and her professional performances are intertwined with her love, hatred, sorrow and rebellion. She enjoys singing *Blooming Flowers and Full Moon* (《花好月圆》, huahao yue yuan) for her true lover who works for the boss of the triad, but often has to sing *Prudish* (《假惺惺》, jiaxingxing) for the boss’s lecherous business partner. The former song represents her joy and contentment whereas the latter shows her being patronised and manipulated. She craves singing the former forever but eventually gets involved in her true lover’s riot against the boss which fails.

In *To Live* (1994) and *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010), the same song is used but in different contexts for different purposes. The song *Party’s Benevolence Is Greater Than Heaven and Earth* (《天大地大不如党的恩情大》, tian da di da bu ru dangde enqing da) was a folk song from just before the Cultural Revolution and ‘Party’ and ‘Chairman Mao’ are repeatedly mentioned in the lyrics. It appears in the former film during the wedding of a Red Guard

worker and is sung by his wife's neighbours. With a massive portrait of Mao at the background of the shot, the ubiquity of the Party is undoubted. Compared to the neighbours singing in the wedding in *To Live*, in *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, students sing the same song and dance at the same time, which makes a more choreographed performance and the propaganda effect is more obvious. In *The Flowers of War* (2011), the prostitutes sing before they go to the Japanese celebration on their conquering Nanjing. They will sacrifice their lives to save the convent girls while embracing and paying tribute to their beauty and life. In these songs, the representation is no less important than the melody of the music and makes conspicuous contribution to the conveyance of characters' emotion. The following three sections will focus on the rhyme, rhythm and content of various songs from Zhang Yimou's films, and investigate how the three factors have been treated in the existing English versions of the films. The visuality of the performances will also be analysed.

7.1.2 Rhyme

The first of the three factors to be discussed is rhyme and the section below will reveal how Chinese lyrics often rhyme. 'To the question "Do song-translations need to rhyme", the first answer must be: "Not if they are not intended to be sung" (Low, 2008, p. 1).' Approaching the end of *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), Prince Jai and the empress exert an effort to dethrone the emperor, but the uprising is ruthlessly suppressed. After the disruption, everything goes back to the suffocating 'normality', and the Chrysanthemum Festival celebration commences regardless, where a tremendous choir praises the prosperity of the country and the excellence of the royal family. This song is not subtitled in the DVD released by the Universal Studios in 2007. The English translation of the song below is from <http://www.moviesubtitles.org/subtitle-4744.html>.

(1)

Mandarin Transcription (MT)	Pinyin Pronunciation (PP)	English Subtitle (EN)
凤昭祥	feng zhao xiang	The phoenix spreads its wings. ²⁶
日月光	ri yue guang	Sun and moon shine bright.
四海升	sihai sheng	The four seas rise.
开域疆	kai yu jiang	Frontiers push back.
仁智信	ren zhi xin	Humanity, wisdom, trust...
礼义忠	li yi zhong	Ritual, righteousness, loyalty...
敦厚德	dun hou de	Deep virtue pervades.

²⁶ This song is left unsubtitled in the DVD released by the Universal Studios in 2007. The above English translation of the song is from <http://www.moviesubtitles.org/subtitle-4744.html>, accessed 28 July 2015.

列圣王	lie sheng wang	Father to son... Wise kings all.
承天道兮	cheng tiandao xi	Follow the Heavens' way.
寿永昌	shou yong chang	Peace and glory above...
昊天成命	hao tian cheng ming	Rain down...
化万邦	hua wan bang	On all nations below.

The lyrics of the above song manifest the virtues of the royalty and pray for harvest and long span of the reign, whereas under the surface of the discipline and the newly regained peace is tyranny, incest and power competition. The content of the song contrasts all the intense conflicts and praises the admirability of an imminently failing reign. In terms of rhyming, according to Low (2003, p.96), if the source text is a rhymed quatrain, the most important rhyme is the final one. Whether this final line rhymes with Line 1, 2 or 3 does not matter much (ibid.). In many cases, lyrics resemble poetry in terms of rhyming, but the rhyme of songs may not be as strict as in poetry. However, the songs in Zhang's films are often strictly rhymed. In the above example, '祥' (xiang), '光' (guang), '升' (sheng), '疆' (jiang), '王' (wang), '昌' (chang) and '邦' (bang) all rhyme and each has an 'ang' sound, except 升 (sheng) that is slightly different. By contrast, as is seen in the English translation, no rhyme is recreated, possibly because reproducing a rhyme is challenging and time-consuming. Each line of the original Chinese version has just three characters while only one has four, and all the lines involve condensed and archaic expressions, so the archaisms and the brevity of the English subtitles are also a remarkable feature. Overall, the English translation is faithful to the meaning of the source Chinese lyrics, while the rhyme has not been recreated. However, this song is not subtitled in the English version of *Curse of the Golden Flower* that this study has employed and is yet another extreme domesticating treatment possibly by the subtitler. This might have been because the subtitler has speculated that the song is unimportant to the film context, but the song precisely demonstrates the supremacy of the emperor, showing that neither the empress nor any prince is in a position to question his rule in any way. Also, the subtitler might have failed to translate the song for the lack of time or competent translation skills.

The cinematic representation of the current song might have impressed audiences much more than the rhyme of the lyrics. Fireworks are set off from the ancient palace as the music starts (see Fig.7.1). Servants in the same uniform and numerous courtiers line up and walk at exactly the same pace towards the foot of the palace. People of such a large number stand neatly after one another and form up square patches in front of the palace. A considerable amount of light covers the palace, making it splendid in the darkness of the night. The visuality creates an overwhelming atmosphere of a luxurious royal celebration and the acoustics adds up to the

solemnity of the emperor's supreme power which is again emphasised by the massive choir of tenor and bass. In ancient Chinese belief, an emperor was the 'Son of Heaven', which the choir and the song reflect. The accessibility of visual and acoustic information renders the song more approachable to audiences. The rhyme of the song might have been overridden by the lyrics and the representation, which might also be the reason why subtitle readers can probably understand the purpose of the song: to praise the emperor.



Fig.7.1: The Chrysanthemum Festival celebration begins with fireworks and a choir.

The following lines are the first two verses of the ending theme song of *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006). The song consists of four verses and a refrain that is sung twice. The song, composed and sung by the actor and popular singer Jay Chou, is speculated to be about the empress and the rebellious prince portrayed by the actor/singer himself in the film. This song is altered into an orchestra followed by a chorus in the DVD released by the Universal Studios in 2007. The subtitles below are available at <http://subscene.com/subtitles/curse-of-the-golden-flower-man-cheng-jin-dai-huang-jin-jia/english/1114484>

(2)

MT	PP	EN
你的泪光	nide leiguang	Your tears ²⁷
柔弱中带伤	rouruo zhong dai shang	Glisten, laced with pain
惨白的月弯弯	canbai de yue wanwan	The crescent moon/Hangs in the past
勾住过往	gouzhu guowang	Pale with sickness

²⁷ In the DVD released by the Universal Studios in 2007, this song is altered into a piece of orchestra music that precedes a chorus. The above translation is available at <http://subscene.com/subtitles/curse-of-the-golden-flower-man-cheng-jin-dai-huang-jin-jia/english/1114484>, accessed 3 August 2015.

夜太漫长	ye tai manchang	Cool night, too long
凝结成了霜	ningjie chengle shuang	Turns to frost
是谁在阁楼上	shishui zai geloushang	Who is on the tower
冰冷地绝望	bingleng de juewang	Frozen in despair?
雨轻轻弹	yu qingqing tan	The rain drums lightly
朱红色的窗	zhuhongse de chuang	On a crimson pane
我一生在纸上	wo yisheng zai zhishang	My destiny is written on paper
被风吹乱	bei feng chuiluan	Fluttering in the wind
梦在远方	meng zai yuanfang	Distant dreams
化成一缕香	huacheng yilü xiang	Rise like incense
随风飘散	suifeng piaosan	Melting into night
你的模样	nide moyang	Is your image

This ending song is like a melancholy monologue accompanied by the slow and sad melody.

Almost every line in the two verses is rhymed. ‘光’ (guang), ‘伤’ (shang), ‘往’ (wang), ‘霜’ (shuang), ‘上’ (shang), ‘望’ (wang), ‘窗’ (chuang), ‘上’ (shang), ‘香’ (xiang) and ‘样’ (yang) mark the rhyme ‘ang’, while the only loose rhymes are ‘弯’ (wan) and ‘乱’ (luan).

Coincidentally, the previous example has the same rhyme as the current one. Again, the subtitler decides to focus on the sense of the lyrics rather than the phonetic features, and transfers the meaning without reproducing a rhymed verse. Like the previous example, the English translation does not show obvious rhyme. Only the first lines ‘Glisten,’ ‘laced with pain’ and ‘The crescent moon’ seem to rhyme slightly. I assume that the subtitler might have been aware of the rhyme of the source lyrics and attempted to recreate another rhyme, but might have found it challenging. However, the English translation manages to continue the sorrow expressed in the rhyme and the meaning of the song, as can be seen from ‘Frozen in despair’ and ‘Distant dreams’, and most lines of translation are also concise just like the source lines. Interestingly, this song has been altered into a piece of orchestra music followed by a chorus. It seems that the English version has intentionally attempted to render the ending more internationally oriented, as the orchestra and the chorus are much more European than Chinese. Thus, if the filmmaker has agreed on this alteration, the urge to be successful overseas and the lack of cultural confidence could have been the reasons. There might be again shyness to directly transfer that song which was once so popular in China to the English version as well as to the international audiences.

At the end of *The Flowers of War* (2011), the prostitutes are about to go to the Japanese celebration on their conquering Nanjing and sacrifice their own lives to save the teenage convent girls. They perform the most popular and well-known song of their brothel for the girls who will remember them at their most beautiful and elegant moment.

(3)

MT	PP	EN
我有一段情呀	wo you yiduan qing ya	"I have a story," ²⁸
唱给诸公听	changgei zhugong ting	"and let me put it into song."
诸公各位	zhugong gewei	"I hope every one of you"
静呀静静心呀	jing ya jing jing xin ya	"can listen to me patiently."
让我来	rang wo lai	"Allow me"
唱一支秦淮景呀	chang yizhi qinhuaijing	"to sing the legend of the Qin Huai River,"
细细呀道来	xixi ya daolai	"slowly and passionately,"
唱给诸公听呀	changgei zhugong ting ya	"for each one of you."
秦淮缓缓流呀	qinhuai huanhuan liu ya	"Ever since the ancient era,"
盘古到如今	pangu dao rujin	"the river has been flowing gracefully."
江南锦绣	jiangnan jinxiu	"it is the beauty of the South,"
金陵风雅情呀	jinling fengya qing	"the elegance of Nanking."
瞻园里	zhanyuan li	"Walk in the famous Zhan Palace,"
堂阔宇深呀	tang kuo yu shen	"enjoy the spectacular architecture."
白鹭洲	bailuzhou	"Look at the Colony of Cranes"
水涟涟	shui lianlian	"with water rippling all around."
世外桃源呀	shiwaitaoyuan ya	"What a paradise this is."

As is discussed in a previous chapter, the women and the girls in the current film speak the Nanjing dialect. Even the song in this example reveals features of the dialect. The rhyme of the source song is slightly loose, with ‘情’ (qing), ‘听’ (ting), ‘心’ (xin), ‘景’ (jing), ‘听’ (ting), ‘今’ (jin) and ‘情’ (qing) as markers. The loose rhyme of the source song in this example is completely lost in the English version, but the subtitler has managed to keep the translations as terse as the Chinese lyrics. However, the lyrics involve too many cultural and geographical references unfamiliar to even many Chinese audiences in other parts of China, not to mention viewers abroad. For instance, ‘白鹭洲’ (bailuzhou), which literally means the ‘Colony of Egrets’, is a prestigious garden in Nanjing, and used to be the home of General Xu Da (1332-1385) of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) (Ni and Zhang, 2004). The garden is famous for a small island in an artificial lake, from which ‘colony’ (洲, zhou) derives. ‘瞻园’ (zhanyuan) is a garden that belonged to the same general and 瞻 means to look reverently. The garden is renowned for the delicate rockeries. Therefore, the rhymed lyrics contain a wealth of beauty and history which might be translatable but difficult to convey. The current translation is more faithful than imagination-provoking.

²⁸ The English subtitles of *The Flowers of War* (2011) are from the DVD released by Revolver Entertainment in 2012.

Considering the acoustics of the song, the performers' voices are sweet, gentle and luring, which is apparent without subtitles. These graceful prostitutes have countless anecdotes in the history of the area around Nanjing, and have become a cultural icon (Wang, 2003). The scene where the women sing begins after they fit themselves into the girls' convent uniform, but it morphs into an imaginary scene in the image below in the student narrator Shu's memory and imagination. The long, medium shots and close-ups in this scene also show their posture, demeanour and elegance. In Shu's imagination, they, again clad in beautiful *qipao* dresses, elegantly approach their 'audiences', i.e. the girls, while singing under soft and mild light (see Fig.7.2). According to McMichael (2008) and Susam-Sarajeva (2006, p.275; 2008, p.192), 'both the musicians and audiences may indicate a preference for remaining ignorant of the meaning of original lyrics.' The mise-en-scène of this song might be more important than the lyrics and thus the rhyme, so whether this song is translated or not could be less significant to subtitle readers. The main purpose of a song is to contribute to what a filmic context expresses, which the film representation of a song can convey, to some extent. The examples in this section demonstrate that rhyme is barely recreated in the translation of the songs in Zhang Yimou's films, and rhyme might be considered less significant, especially if the mise-en-scène of a song is more prominent to the film context.



Fig.7.2: Shu imagines the women singing the song in *The Flowers of War*.

7.1.3 Rhythm

Other than rhyme, rhythm is another specific of songs. As Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007, p.211) put it,

...the melodies of film songs are important too. Subtitles that respect the rhythm of a song are easier to read because of the parallelism or synchrony between words and soundtrack. Balancing content against rhythm is therefore important. ... whereas smooth parallel rhythm schemes that differ from the original ones, may attract too much attention.

This section will discuss the rhythm of some source Chinese songs from Zhang Yimou's films and whether the rhythm is recreated in the English translation. The following song is from *To Live* (1994). The main character Fugui's mute daughter Fengxia is getting married to a lame worker who is a Red Guard leader during the Cultural Revolution. Neighbours and guests are delightfully singing the song below at their wedding:

(4)

MT	PP	EN	Numbers of characters (including spaces)
天大地大不如党的恩情大	tian da di da buru dang de enqing da	Nothing compares/to the Party's benevolence ²⁹	43
爹亲娘亲不如毛主席亲	die qin niang qin buru maozhuxi qin	Chairman Mao is dearer/than father and mother	45
千好万好不如社会主义好	qian hao wan hao buru shehuizhuyi hao	There's nothing as good as socialism	36
河深海深不如阶级友爱深	he shen hai shen buru jieji youai shen	No ocean as deep as class feeling	33
毛泽东思想是革命的宝	maozedong sixiang shi geming de bao	Maoist Thought/is revolution's treasure trove	45
谁要是反对他谁就是我们的敌人	shuiyaoshi fandui ta shuijiushi women de diren	Whoever opposes it, we take as our enemy	40

A literal translation of the first four lines is, 'big heaven, big earth, not as big as the Party's benevolence; dear father, dear mother, not as dear as Chairman Mao; nothing is as good as socialism; deep river, deep sea, not as deep as the love among proletarians.' This song is an enthusiastic praise of Chairman Mao and the Communist Party he was leading. '大' (da, big), '亲' (qin, dear), '好' (hao, good) and '深' (shen, deep) are respectively in the first four lines and appear three times in each line. In the Chinese language, repetition is a vital method of emphasis, and repeating the same word is deemed emphatic. In the first line, 大 appears three

²⁹ The translation of the above song is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZB7HYhUpDz8>, accessed 16 August 2015.

times and the first two times are at the same pitch. This is the same for the other three repeated characters. The repetition and the pitch enable Chinese audiences to catch the rhythm of the song. In my literal translation, four adjectives 'big', 'dear', 'good', 'deep' are repeated to reveal emphasis, but English is not a language as repetitive as Chinese. The subtitler has used the structure 'as...as' in the third and fourth lines, and this quasi-repetition might convey a similar emphasis and produce a rhythm, if also used in the translation of the first and second lines. Therefore, another translation for Line 1 and Line 2 with repetition and rhythm is 'Heaven and earth are not as great as the Party's benevolence; father and mother are not as dear as Chairman Mao.'

The mise-en-scène of this song is also closely related to the lyrics with regard to the praise of Chairman Mao. In '*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: Characterization in the Musical Episode of the TV Series', Bosseaux (2008, p.355) analyses the French dubbed version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with linguistic as well cinematic parameters, such as shot composition, rhymes and voice quality (e.g. tone, intonation and pitch of voice). Bosseaux's (2008) analysis manifests that shots and close-ups reinforce the information in the lyrics. Garwood (2006) has also investigated how characters' action and shot composition correlate with the rhythms of songs. This scene in *To Live* is composed of a few medium shots and close-ups. The mayor's wedding speech is treated with a medium shot. Mr Niu, mayor and Party representative of the town, stands on a stool, above the bride and the groom as well as the crowd. He gives a brief speech, which is devoted to Chairman Mao and the Party and precedes the song. The song begins with a sideways medium shot over the crowd, facing a wall with Mao Zedong's portrait and the slogan 'The proletariat rule everything' (工人阶级领导一切, *gonren jieji lingdao yiqie*), painted by the groom and his workmates (see Fig.7.3). With the mayor enthusiastically conducting the crowd, the shot turns from the mayor to the couple and we see the joy on their faces. Soon afterwards, the mayor alone is in a medium shot again, which is followed by a shot of the crowd with the painting of Mao as the background again. Towards the end of the song, the bride has a close-up. Her delight is accompanied by a slight disappointment of being mute and partially deaf without the ability to sing. The scene also manifests that the mayor's conduction correlates with the rhythm of the song, and the rhythm corresponds to and emphasises the praise of Mao and the Party, so the acoustics and the visuality are closely intertwined in showing the political and social reality during the Revolution.



Fig.7.3: Mr Liu and other neighbours are singing at Fengxia and Fugui's wedding.

Interestingly, Zhang Yimou employed the same song again in a later film, *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010). The English subtitles from <http://www.moviesubtitles.org/subtitle-67504.html>, is a new version as follows:

(5)

EN	Numbers of characters (including spaces)
Our political party is greater than heaven and earth.	53 ³⁰
Chairman Mao loves the people more than parents love their children.	68
Nothing in the world compares with the goodness of communism.	61
An ocean's depth can't compare with the depth of friendship within our class.	77
Chairman Mao's principles are the treasure of the revolution.	61
Whoever is against Chairman Mao will be our	50

³⁰ The English subtitles of *Under the Hawthorn Tree* are from <http://www.moviesubtitles.org/subtitle-67504.html>, accessed 3 September 2015.

enemy!	
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As is noticeable from the character counts, every line of the second translation appears to be longer than in the previous one. It seems that the second subtitler tries to convey the meaning of the lyrics as clearly and accurately as possible, which causes the translation to be as elaborate as a literal translation of a normal reading text rather than the lyrics of a song in a film. For instance, the second line goes as 'Chairman Mao loves the people more than parents love their children.' It is understandable that the subtitler attempts to clarify the exaggeration and comparison, but the translation ends up slightly wordy for a subtitle. The same goes for the fourth line 'An ocean's depth can't compare with the depth of friendship within our class'. Although 'Chairman Mao loves people' and 'parents love their children' have the same structure and seem to create a rhythm, the second translation has not used the phrase 'as...as' like the first translation, and the rhythm appears even weaker.

On the other hand, in *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010), the mise-en-scène is slightly different from in *To Live*. The song is part of a song-and-dance rehearsal that the main character Jing participates in. The dance is called '忠字舞' (zhongziwu), or 'Loyalty Dance', which was common among young people during the Cultural Revolution. The dance expresses the loyalty to and the admiration and adoration for Chairman Mao and the Party. In the wedding scene in *To Live*, a crowd of people are singing while standing still. By contrast, the students' dance in *Under the Hawthorn Tree* is carefully choreographed. The dance commences with a long shot of the stage where the students will perform (see Fig.7.4). We see on the two sides of the stage two large slogans that entirely occupy the wall and read 'The core force that guides our causes is the Communist Party of China' (领导我们事业的核心力量是中国共产党, lingdao women shiye de hexin lilian shi zhongguo gongchandang) and 'The theoretical foundation of our thought is Marxism-Leninism' (指导我们思想的理论基础是马克思列宁主义, zhidao women sixiang de lilun jichu shi makesi lening zhuyi). The performance is then portrayed with a stream of mostly medium shots of the whole group as well as a few medium close-ups of the character Jing and another leading dancer. Again, like in *To Live*, a large portrait of Mao is at the back of the stage which is visible throughout the rehearsal. The dance ends with a shot of the whole group with Mao's portrait on central right. Besides, throughout the rehearsal, a performer is dancing around while waving a red flag with 'No.8 Academy Artistic Propaganda Group of Mao Zedong Thought' (八中毛泽东思想文艺宣传队, ba zhong maozedong sixiang wenyi xuanchuandui) on it. The style and colour of clothing at that time were extremely monotonous, so compared to the students' largely army green, navy blue or grey outfit, the

red portrait and the red flag stand out and draw much more attention. Significantly, the dance is choreographed according to the rhythm of the song, as the students tend to hop, stamp their feet, raise their arms or look up when they sing 大, 亲, 好 and 深. The representation of the performance and the emphasis on the portrait of Mao is combined with the rhythm of the song to manifest young people's passion and loyalty to the Party and Mao Zedong, just like the name of the dance, Loyalty Dance.

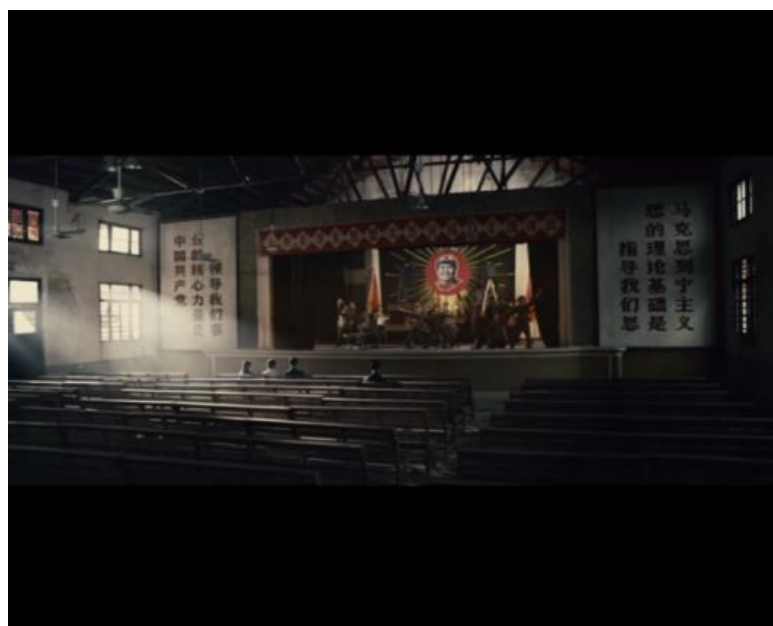


Fig.7.4: Jing and her school mates are rehearsing their song-and-dance performance.

However, important as it is to retain a rhythm in a translation, such a rule is constrained by the gap between different language pairs. Different language systems can be so different from each other and keeping the same rhythm between two languages of different systems will be particularly challenging and time-consuming. Translating Chinese songs into English is apt to cause the rhythm to be lost, and vice versa.

The song below from *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), *Beauty from the North*, or 《北方有佳人》(beifang you jiaren), is an ancient Chinese poem/song dating back to over 2,000 years ago during the Western Han Dynasty (202BC-9AD). In this film, the main female character performs this song-and-dance in an entertainment place.

(6)

MT	PP	EN	My Suggestion
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北方有佳人	beifang you jia ren	A rare beauty in the north ³¹	
绝世而独立	jue shi er duli	She's the finest lady on earth	
一顾倾人城	yi gu qing ren cheng	A glance from her the whole city falls	A glance from her, a city falls
二顾倾人国	er gu qing ren guo	A second glance Leaves the whole nation in ruins	A second glance, the nation in ruins
宁不知倾城 与倾国	ning buzhi qingcheng yu qingguo	There exists no city or nation That has been more cherished	No city or nation is more cherished
佳人难再得	jia ren nan zai de	Than a beauty like this	

Evidently, almost each source line consists of only five Chinese characters, and it takes about the same period of time to sing each line in the film. It would be natural to translate the six lines into six English subtitles. Nonetheless, the third, fourth and fifth lines are all broken into two subtitles, so it might take foreign audiences more time to read and has changed the original rhythm obviously. It might also distract the audience. As subtitles are a supportive translation and should not attract too much attention (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007, p.211), the translations of the three lines might unnecessarily distract audiences from the visual and the acoustic. The two subtitles for Line 3 and the two for Line 4 are both fairly short, and it might be reasonable to combine the four subtitles into two, which is more consistent with the original rhythm. The examples in this section demonstrate that creating a rhythm in the subtitles is rather challenging, so most of the source rhythms are lost and the English subtitles do not show obvious rhythms. Yet, English phrases like 'as...as' might be able to convey some rhythm.

7.1.4 Content

Apart from rhyme and rhythm, content is another critical element of a song. While discussing whether or not a foreign song needs translation, Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007, p.208) maintain that if audiences are expected to understand a foreign song in a film, the song thus will not need translation. 'A film in Catalan, for instance, may not subtitle an Italian song, because the audience can be expected to understand it, but that same song would have to be subtitled in a German subtitled version (ibid.).' Compared to the similarity between Catalan and Italian, the difference between Chinese and English is so apparent that it might be

³¹ The English subtitles of *House of Flying Daggers* are from the DVD released by the 20th Century Fox in 2005.

impossible for a non-Chinese English-speaker to understand the content of a source Chinese song.

Plot-pertinent songs serve as a ‘narrative device’ (Garwood, 2006, p.93). ‘They are narrative elements just like characters, objects, settings, shot composition and editing, and thus contribute to characterization and plot development’ (Bosseaux, 2008, p.344). ‘In some cases, rendering the atmospheric quality of the lyrics will do and an accurate translation may not be required (Díaz Cintas, 2007, p.211).’ The songs in Zhang Yimou’s films are not simply cuing the atmosphere of a situation, but also correspond with the film context, because he himself or others write lyrics and compose the music for these songs. Therefore, the lyrics are critical as they may enable the audience to apprehend more of the film story that is being told. For ordinary Chinese audiences, the melody, the dance and the plot context of a song in a film all help understand the song, even if they may not receive every word in the lyrics correctly. Particularly, when they hear a familiar tune, they can follow it and hum along without lyrics, because they might have grown up with the tune and embrace memories which it brings back. Nonetheless, if an audience has no adequate knowledge of Chinese and non-verbal information of a song does not convey enough messages, lyrics will have to explain the content and meaning of a song when music features are not competent enough to do so. Lyrics contribute very much to the function of a song. Understanding lyrics might well enable subtitle readers to correlate the melody, rhyme and rhythm of a song to the visual and acoustic filmic context, and the verbal information interacts with the non-verbal in reaching out to subtitle readers.

In *Red Sorghum* (1987), 《酒神曲》 (jiushen qu) or the *Song of the God of Wine*, is sung by all the workers of the distillery in the film. The song is devoted to an imagined Chinese ‘God of Wine’.

(7)

MT	PP	EN
九月九酿新酒好酒出在咱的手 ³²	jiu yue jiu niang xinjiu haojiu chuzai zan de shou	ninth the lunar September,/we make out the fresh and nice wine
好酒	haojiu	nice wine
喝了咱的酒	he le zan de jiu	in drinking our wine
上下通气不咳嗽	shangxia tongqi bu kesou	no one will choke or cough
喝了咱的酒	he le zan de jiu	in drinking our wine

³² The English subtitles of *Red Sorghum* above are from the DVD distributed by Guangzhou Xinsheng Culture Spread Co., Ltd., no date.

滋阴壮阳嘴不臭	ziyin zhuangyang zui buchou	both men and women get restorative without smelly mouths
喝了咱的酒	he le zan de jiu	in drinking our wine
一人敢走青杀口	yi ren gan zou qingshakou	one stands on the Qingshakou
喝了咱的酒	he le zan de jiu	in drinking our wine
见了皇帝不磕头	jian le huangdi bu ketou	no one needs to kowtow to the king
一四七三六九	yi si qi san liu jiu	one, four, seven, three, six, and nine
九九归一跟我走	jiu jiu gui yi genwozou	with everything going back to one,/please go with me
好酒好酒好酒	haojiu haojiu haojiu	nice wine, nice wine

Dionysius in Greek mythology is the god of wine, indulgence and madness (Feder, 1980). By contrast, the imagined Chinese God of Wine in *Red Sorghum* (1987) represents strength, liveliness and courage, which can be seen from all the benefit sorghum liquor offers, especially the bravery of not 'kowtowing' to the king or rather emperor, as they courageously fight against Japanese invaders later in the film. Characters in this film also inherit the personality of this god. A portrait of the god is hanging on the wall. It may be hard for foreign audiences to associate the song with an imagined god of wine or predict the spirit of this god. Hence, it is vital to translate the content of this song. Although subtitle readers are aware that the characters are paying a tribute to the deity on the portrait who is evidently important to them, the personality of the deity which the people admire and crave is more accessible to subtitle readers if the lyrics are translated. Yet, the English translation seems not very fluent, as can be seen in 'ninth the lunar September'. The first letter of each subtitle is not capitalised either. The fairly poor quality of the subtitles might be because the translation dates from a few years ago when the standard of English subtitles might have been lower than now.

There might be certain contexts where subtitle readers may not need to understand the lyrics, but they might prefer to know what a song sings about, especially when it is a performance in the film, as in *The Flowers of War*. If such a song is not subtitled, subtitle readers might feel they are less engaged in the film-watching or the subtitler have been negligent and irresponsible, because a number of words are not translated. Moreover, the complete omission of the subtitles of a song can be considered an extreme case of domestication of the Chinese language and cultural elements, which is disrespectful to the filmmaker's ingenuity of employing the song concerned. Also, compared to rhyme and rhythm, content might be much easier to translate.

7.2 The Peking Opera in *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991)

The Peking Opera is another element that Zhang Yimou has involved in his films. *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) is a film about patriarchal and Confucian hierarchy and oppression in traditional Chinese families in the past. The film is adapted from Su Tong's novel *Wives and Concubines* (1989) (《妻妾成群》, qiqiechengqun) which is set in the 1920s. Songlian is a 19-year-old college student, but has to quit studying and marry a rich but much older man under the pressure from her stepmother. After she enters her new home as the fourth wife, she realises the vicious competition among the wives to win their husband's favour. The third wife Meishan, a former Peking Opera singer, is originally an enemy of Songlian, but is later revealed to be sincere and honest. On the contrary, the seemingly lenient second wife Zhuoyun is sophisticated and wicked. To secure permanent care from the husband, Songlian pretends to be pregnant, only to be exposed by her maid and Zhuoyun, and utterly loses her husband's favour. The distraught and drunken Songlian unintentionally tells of Meishan's affair with the family doctor to Zhuoyun, which soon causes Meishan to be hanged according to the family rule. The guilt from the accident and the patriarchal suffocation renders Songlian insane within a year, while the husband marries his fifth wife.

Zhang Yimou takes advantage of Meishan's profession as a Peking Opera singer, and inserts six pieces of opera. Different scenes portray different wives' distinct moods and feelings. Two scenes show Meishan in Peking Opera costumes and singing in person, while the others are either heard by Songlian from far away or played on a gramophone. The portrayal of her singing in person is beautiful, although she is not wearing the elaborate makeup of a formal performance (see Fig.7.5 and Fig.7.6). Her voice, posture, movement and demeanour can still reach the audiences through the visual and the acoustic channels. Nevertheless, the Peking Opera singing was not subtitled at all (yfeme, 2013). I presume there might be three reasons. Firstly, none of the opera scenes is significantly long, and all last about one minute. Secondly, the subtitler might have assumed the meaning of the lyrics would not matter to the audience. Thirdly, subtitling an opera is more difficult than subtitling normal dialogue, as the opera also has similar specifics to songs that are hard to translate. In the following section, I will discuss some literature about opera *surtitling*, expound the Chinese cultural specificities in one of the Peking Opera scenes and analyse how this scene might be translated into English.



Fig.7.5: Meishan sings at her courtyard in *Raise the Red Lantern*.



Fig.7.6: A close-up on Meishan.

7.2.1 A brief introduction to the Peking Opera and opera translation

The Peking Opera fully developed in the 18th century and was well received in the 19th century (Guo, 2012, p.51). Combining music, vocalisation, impersonation, dancing and acrobatics, the Peking Opera is the most representative and influential opera among about 300 types of operas in China (Wang and Zhao, 2004, p.45). There are four major types of the Peking Opera roles, which are respectively 生 (sheng, male), 旦 (dan, female), 净 (jing, painted-face) and 丑 (chou, comedian), and every type of role has sub-types (Guo, 2012, p.52).³³ Translating the types of roles involves both Chinese and English specificities and intricacies. Transliteration

³³ Another division of the roles in the Peking Opera is 生, 旦, 净, 末 (mo) and 丑, while 末 has been included into 生 in recent years.

with Chinese *pinyin* spelling will be confusing for Anglophones, as an opera role type is supposed to provide basic information to audiences about the role. When the types of roles are translated into English, some mistakes have been made owing to the lack of English knowledge (Guo, 2012, p.53). For instance, 花旦 (huadan), who is a young, cheerful girl, was translated as ‘flirtatious girl or coquette female character’ (ibid.). ‘Flirtatious’ and ‘coquette’ are apparently not positive adjectives for the type of role that generally brings joy to an opera scene (ibid.). Moreover, superficial translations do not help foreign audiences to understand the characteristics of a role either. A type of male is called 红生 (hongsheng) that literally means ‘red male’, which is because the character’s face is painted red. The red face represents righteousness and integrity (ibid.). If this role is translated directly as ‘red-faced male’, foreign audiences will hardly grasp the positive connotation of the face colour, when red may symbolise danger and irritability in the West. Also, when the Peking Opera roles, to some extent, overlap with particular types of non-Chinese performance, translation needs to avoid misleading foreign audiences with stereotypes (ibid., p.53). 丑 (chou) is often the comedic role, which is similar to a ‘clown’. Nonetheless, compared to clowns that act ‘silly’ or ridiculous, 丑 is not only amusing, but alert and cheerful, or cunning and selfish, depending on specific characters of 丑 (ibid.).

In 1983, the Canadian Opera Company first used surtitles which were projected onto a screen above the stage (Bosseaux, 2011, p.192). Surtitling opera has become more popular since then, perhaps because it is cheaper than singable translations (Mateo, 2007b, cited in Bosseaux, 2011, p.192). Peking Opera performances can have captions on the two sides of the stage too. The lyrics of Peking Opera are abundant with historical, cultural and literary allusions, and also refer to images of nature (Yeung, 2009, p.225). Elaborating all the references in one line of surtitle might produce a lengthy translation. Therefore, translators face a challenge of discriminating against the less important items for the sake of the more crucial ones. According to Yeung (ibid.), ‘images that can evoke the most intense physical sensation’ should be placed higher on the hierarchy concerned, and those images include ‘sharp colours or scents’ and ‘concrete images of flowers and birds’ (ibid., p.226).

In the debates about opera surtitling, ‘it is commonly thought that translations by surtitling are usually informative texts, for which the source text is considered to be the libretto (Bosseaux, 2011, p.193).’ Nevertheless, this opinion has been challenged by Virkkunen (2004, p.95), who maintains that the source text should be a complete stage performance rather than the libretto *per se*, as words are inseparable from music with regard to an opera. Therefore, when

translating a song in an opera, a multimodal analysis is essential where verbal, non-verbal, visual and auditory signs are taken into account altogether, and the text or libretto as well as the context or other semiotic modes have to be both considered (Bosseaux, 2011, p.193). In his translation of the Peking Opera scripts, American scholar A. C. Scott (cited in Cao, 2011b), who emphasised the performability and all opera dimensions of the translated scripts, has included all action as well as music effects in his translation. American scholar Elizabeth Ann Wichmann (cited in *ibid.*) also contends that translating those Peking Opera scripts have to see performability as the purpose, and the singing and talking in the translation should be optimally approximate to the original style. In this regard, the Peking Opera is a holistic system with libretto and music (*ibid.*). The singing shows unique rhythm and tone as well as acting. Thus, arguably, both the Peking Opera singing as well as the *mise-en-scène* should be the source text of surtitling. English surtitles are often longer than Chinese ones, as English words take more space than Chinese characters, but images and cultural items that Chinese audiences are often familiar with still have to be explained in English. A possible solution is,

...in order to limit the length of the English surtitles and the frequency of their changeover, functional and grammatical words are sometimes omitted, especially when the lines are spoken or sung very quickly in very fast-paced episodes. (Yeung, 2009, p.225)

Also, the Peking Opera singing can linger on the same character for a few seconds, which is much slower than normal dialogue. Thus, the subtitles of the Peking Opera in a film might be reasonably longer, or a single line of singing might be translated into more than one subtitle. Opera surtitles stay on the screen for an average of ten seconds (Bosseaux, 2011, p.193), but the subtitles of an opera in a film might not stay overly long, so that audiences have time to read the subtitles and then observe the performance and the visuality. On the other hand, Han (2012, p.90) maintain that the Peking Opera lyrics are largely colloquial, so the translations should also be colloquial in the target language. Nevertheless, the lyrics might appear colloquial only for the time when the opera was created, but many words and phrases are literary and obsolete nowadays, which are not colloquial for present-day Chinese audiences any more. Still, colloquialism in the translation can be a rational choice, as it will facilitate subtitle readers' reading and understanding, so the translation will not distract them too much.

7.2.2 Yubei Pavilion (御碑亭)

The Peking Opera in *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) is a way for the third wife Meishan to cope with her boredom, to attract her husband as well as a tool for the filmmaker to manifest the wives' emotion. The film shows Meishan singing in two particular scenes. She has not painted

the Peking Opera makeup on her face or worn full accessories as in a professional performance. She also sings early in the morning to kill her time. At the end of the film, the main character and fourth wife Songlian is distressed after losing the favour of her husband owing to the fake pregnancy. Songlian watches and listens to Meishan singing and learns that Meishan will secretly meet her lover Dr Gao afterwards. Drunk, she unintentionally tells of Meishan's affair with Gao to the second wife Zhuoyun. Meishan is immediately caught and hanged. Guilty and regretful, Songlian goes to Meishan's room and plays a recording of her previous performance on a gramophone. The lyrics are as follows:

(8)

MT	PP	My Attempted English Translation
自幼父母娇生养	zi you fumu jiao sheng yang	Parents spoiled me for long.
盈盈十五嫁王昌	yingying shiwu jia wangchang	At 15 I married Wang Chang.
既读诗书不思量	ji du shishu bu siliang	You read but don't use your mind,
奴岂是柳絮就随风扬	nu qishi liuxu jiu sui feng yang	imagining I go wild like catkin in the wind.
风雨难测人难量	fengyu nan ce ren nan liang	Storms are hard to expect, people hard to know.
暗室何必日月光	an shi hebi riyue guang	A dark house has no sunlight.
阴谋毒计良心丧	yinmou duji liangxin sang	Heartless husband lost his conscience.
休书好比杀人场	xiushu haobi sharenchang	The divorce paper makes me hopeless.
手摸胸膛想一想	shou mo xiongtang xiangyixiang	Look into yourself, think it over.
无义的王魁比你强	wuyi de wangkui bi niqiang	Who else is crueller than you!

This piece is from an opera called 《御碑亭》 (yubei ting), or *Yubei Pavilion*. The story goes as a young wife Meng Yuehua hides from rain at Yubei Pavilion on the way home. Later, a young scholar Liu Shengchun also stops by the pavilion, but politely stands outside without disturbing Meng. Sadly, when Meng's husband hears Meng and Liu have been at the same pavilion, he suspects Meng has cheated on him and divorces her. The piece above is about Meng being resentful and heart-broken. Generally speaking, Peking Opera scripts derive from classic historical romance, legends and literature, and will bear feudalism values and morality. In ancient China, men and women had to follow very strict behaviour institution so as to keep their good reputation. Liu does not even say a word to Meng, which is the utmost polite attitude to a lady, but Meng's husband Wang still suspects her. This piece of the Peking Opera is very appropriately used in the film, as Meishan has been found unfaithful. However, the

difference is that Meng in the original opera receives an apology from her regretful husband, but Meishan receives a familial death punishment - a lynching.

The Peking Opera begins to play in Meishan's room. As she has been killed due to infidelity and her room shut and lanterns covered with black cloth, servants reckon that it is Meishan's ghost singing the Peking Opera. When they enter the room, they see the eerie red light of all the lanterns and massive Peking Opera masks that make them more scared and run out (see Fig.7.7). The camera returns to Meishan's room and finds Songlian blowing off a lighter. A long shot focuses on Meishan's bed, while all the lanterns on the tables and on the ceiling draw our attention again. Then the camera moves outside to the yard and slowly zooms in through the door of Meishan's room, and finally closes up on Songlian's face that looks young and beautiful but numb and expressionless. Meanwhile, the sound effect renders Meishan's solo like a chorus, which expresses the fury and protest in the lyrics more evidently, as if multiple singers are voicing Meishan's and/or Songlian's feelings. The visual effect, such as the eerie red light in the room, can be associated with the lyric '暗室何必日月光', which is 'A dark house has no sunlight.'



Fig.7.7: The red lanterns in Meishan's room are lit again.

This piece of Peking Opera is strictly rhymed, as can be seen from the last character of each line. When translating this piece, simplification is hard to avoid. Take '盈盈十五' (yingying shiwu) as an example. '盈盈' generally has three meanings, clear (water), elegant (gait) and poor digestion (Anon, 1987, p.2185; Xia et al., 1999, p.4791). Here it refers to Meng's beauty and elegance when she gets married at 15. Moreover, the phrase '盈盈' has a very feminine pronunciation and connotation, which also reminds many Chinese audiences of the well-

known female character ‘任盈盈’ from Jin Yong’s prestigious martial art novel *The Smiling Proud Wanderer* (《笑傲江湖》, xiaobaojianghu). This is only one of the Chinese cultural references in this short piece of the Peking Opera. As it has not been subtitled, the references end up being domesticated and omitted. Subtitle readers probably can only observe the visuality and try to imagine the meaning of the lyrics by interactive and dynamic film-watching. Even if 盈盈十五 were translated, it probably could only have been reduced and simplified into the age 15.

During two centuries, the Peking Opera has included the essence of traditional Chinese art, music and literature, and reflected traditional values and aesthetics (Guo, 2012, p.52). Confucianism and Daoism, the two leading sources of Chinese values and thoughts in thousands of years, have infiltrated literature and art works as well as the Peking Opera (ibid.). Patriotism, righteousness, diligence, honesty, etc., have become Chinese people’s ideal virtues, and have been reflected in the Peking Opera (ibid.). In the aforementioned piece *Yubei Pavilion*, ‘奴岂是柳絮就随风扬’ literally means ‘I am not catkin that goes wild with wind’. ‘柳絮’ (liuxu) is catkin that is easily blown away by the wind, and metaphorically indicates women’s changeability and easy virtue. In ancient China, women had to keep a distance from men in general. The Confucian classic *Mencius* (《孟子》, mengzi) recorded that ‘男女授受不亲’ (nannüshoushoubuqin), which means men and women should not touch each other when they give and receive things. When Meng’s husband hears of Meng and Liu sharing one shelter, he imagines they have been intimate and accuses her of infidelity and easy virtue. Literally, ‘风雨难测人难量, 暗室何必日月光’ is translated as ‘storms are hard to expect, people hard to know; a dark room cannot pretend to be bright’. This line implies that a husband can be so unpredictable that he can lose his trust of his wife so easily. Such a sentence involves another analogy, and the underlying meaning might have to be explained in the English version. As the opera voices fury and is sung fast, the sentence structures of English subtitles may have to be simplified, and functional and grammatical words may have to be omitted as in Yeung’s (2009, p.225) suggestion. If a line of opera involves too many cultural references to be translated into a subtitle within a reasonable length, for example more than in *Yubei Pavilion*, references like 盈盈 might have to be simplified too. The definition of ‘universals of translation’ by Baker is ‘features that typically occur in translated texts rather than original utterances and which are not the result of interference from specific linguistic system’ (Baker, 1993, p.243). Simplification, under this general definition, is perceived as ‘the idea that translators subconsciously simplify the language or message or both’ (Baker, 1996, p.176).

Apart from simplifying culture-bound items, extra notes in subtitles may be another choice, as singing speed is slower than the speed of normal dialogue. Nonetheless, film subtitles cannot stay on screen for as long as ten seconds. Lengthy notes will add to subtitle readers' reading pressure and distract them from enjoying the performance on the screen, so notes should only be used very carefully and should not cover too much of the screen, when subtitles are usually no more than two lines. Therefore, the common appropriate way of handling the Peking Opera performance in a Chinese film is to simplify the lyrics, if necessary, and optimally avoid providing notes. Besides, Low (2002, p.109) argues that the best approach for devising opera subtitles is based on *Skopos*, i.e. 'the specific purpose and function of the TT (target text) must govern the decisions taken'. Four priorities of surtitlists are:

1. First and foremost, to help the audience follow the plot of the opera; 2. To enhance audience understanding of the predicaments and emotions of fictional characters; 3. Also (where possible) to fit in with the concept of a particular opera production; 4. At the same time to remain relatively unobtrusive. (ibid.)

In *Raise the Red Lantern*, the 'Skopos' might be to make the target language audiences understand how the character Songlian feels through the lyrics of the opera. If simplification can better transfer the meaning of the lyrics to meet the Skopos, it can be adopted. Meanwhile, as an opera is a multimodal entity (Bosseaux, 2011, p.193), subtitle readers' dynamic film-watching enables them to receive information from film characters' acting as well as the singing. And yet, if simplification is absolutely essential, audiences can still benefit from the simplified subtitles, which are more helpful than complete omission or domestication, as they can always understand the correlation between the image, the sound and the plot more thoroughly. Compared to simplification, the extreme domestication of a piece of the Peking Opera leads to a loss of cultural particularities and is definitely not the best solution to deal with the opera.

'Pleasurable and uncanny, song is also a particularly rich semiotic mix for the statement of feeling. Because they have words, songs can name and ground emotions; because they involve music, they can deploy a vast, infinitely nuanced range of affects; because they are vocally produced, they open out onto physical sensation.' (Dyer, 2012, p.4)

This chapter has examined the translation of songs and the Peking Opera in Zhang Yimou's films. The first section has investigated the translation of the songs from five of Zhang Yimou's films, respectively *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), *The Flowers of War* (2011), *To Live* (1994),

House of Flying Daggers (2004) and *Red Sorghum* (1987). The songs have been discussed from three perspectives: rhyme, rhythm and content. Source Chinese songs tend to rhyme, but English subtitles that this section has analysed do not show obvious rhyme. The reason why rhyme disappears is possibly because the English subtitles are not designed to be sung again, as recreating rhyme is more important for singable translations. Creating a rhymed translation probably takes longer time, and requires an outstanding grasp of the source and target languages. In terms of rhythm, English translations are inclined to lose the original rhythm. The wide gap between Chinese and English renders it difficult to retain the original rhythm. Again, since film subtitles just intend to help foreign audiences understand the songs and the film contexts, rhythm appears to be less significant. Compared to rhyme and rhythm, the content of the songs has been more satisfactorily transferred. The content translation of a song is particularly critical when the context is important, so translating the meaning of the lyrics with accuracy is prominent in assisting subtitle readers' interpretation.

The second section of this chapter has concentrated on the Peking Opera in Zhang's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991). The Peking Opera has absorbed the essence of Chinese culture and literature, while reflecting the Confucian social values too. The piece of opera analysed in this chapter has become a demonstration of film characters' thoughts and protests against the suffocating patriarchal and oppressive traditions. Presumably because the opera scenes are all fairly short and translating obsolete opera texts is inclined to be more complicated due to the cultural references, the opera scenes in the current film have not been subtitled. In the attempt to subtitle one of the opera scenes, I have also analysed opera subtitling for a film. Simplification might be an indispensable strategy while handling opera translation owing to the existence of a large number of Chinese allusions, idioms, proverbs, etc. All the above are difficult to be translated sensibly with two lines of film subtitles, even though opera singing is slower than normal dialogue.

On the other hand, Garwood (2006) contends that the relationship between pop songs as a narrational device and characters and other elements of the fictional film worlds can be deliberately detached or attached. In Zhang Yimou's films, most songs are diegetic and intentionally written and composed and represented with choreography, so they are closely attached to the on-screen emotion of the characters and the film worlds. The same goes for the Peking Opera, even if it is pre-existing. Therefore, the significance of all those songs and the Peking Opera is not to be ignored and foreign viewers need to observe the *mise-en-scène* while listening, in order to apprehend the filmmaker's purpose of employing the songs and the opera. The lyrics are also often closely related to the visual and the acoustic. Probably, subtitle

readers can surmise the underlying depth of emotion of the songs and the Peking Opera and their 'inside-out' operation that expresses characters' feelings (ibid., p.159), yet subtitles can still assist in and facilitate their interpretation. Be it songs or the Peking Opera, the non-existence of subtitles appear to be an extreme and unnecessary domestication of them as well as the source culture. Especially in the first section, the non-existence of English subtitles in terms of Example (1) in an English version of the film has been a case of extreme domestication. The alteration of the song in Example (2) into an orchestra and a chorus is likely to have involved the lack of cultural confidence that has caused the urge to make the film ending less Chinese and succeed with international audiences.

Although particular cultural specificities may not survive the process of translation, translating songs and the Peking Opera definitely display a respectful attitude to the filmmaker who has decided to include them in a film as well as to the songwriter and the composer who have taken the effort to create them. Subtitlers should at least exert an effort to translate the songs and the Peking Opera, as their content is always inextricably linked to the image and the sound in the filmic contexts.

Chapter Eight Conclusion

The objective of the thesis has been to investigate the phenomenon and the strategy of domestication in the translation of cultural references in Zhang Yimou's films. I have examined the domestication of specific perspectives of Chinese culture, particularly humour, politeness, dialect, history, songs and the Peking Opera. I have also analysed the non-verbal or the visual and acoustic representation of the films that correlates to and interacts with English subtitles, and therefore subtitle readers are enabled to comprehend more information than what is expressed in the subtitles. In this final chapter, I will contemplate my research questions and the findings of this research project and its contribution to the relevant area and will also point out some limitation of this study which would constitute topics for future research.

Findings and contribution

This thesis set out to analyse the subtitle translation of the renowned Chinese director Zhang Yimou's films and discover the application of the domestication strategy that was employed to translate culture-bound references and the occasional employment of the omission strategy. There were five main categories or aspects of Chinese culture that I explored. I also investigated whether there were other alternative translations that might better retain the cultural references than the existing translations. Another issue that was examined was the non-verbal information such as the visual and the acoustic, as film subtitles sometimes refer to visual and acoustic cues.

As Fan (2008) has pointed out, which was mentioned in Chapter Six, there is an inclination of over-domestication in Chinese-English subtitling. These include the over-domestication of film characters' names, place names and many other cultural terms. The domestication of Chinese culture-related references and expressions is widely present in the English versions of Zhang Yimou's films that have comprised the case study of this thesis. For instance, regarding the subtitling of humour in *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* (2009), the domesticating strategy has been adopted to translate the comedic source Chinese lines. The consequence is that certain cultural references have been evidently reduced and humour weakened, if not completely lost. Omission has been another strategy that has been employed to cope with humour translation. Surprisingly, a number of humorous scenes have been entirely deleted and the conversations lost in an English version of the film, which was possibly relevant to a particularity of the editing of the English version, that the subtitler was also an editor of the film and the filmmaker's daughter. The complete omission of the comic scenes has been an

extreme case of domestication in the humour translation of that film, while the employment of domestication has been prevalent in all the films of Zhang Yimou that this thesis has studied.

The loss of Chinese cultural references might be ascribed to the challenges of translating cultural specifics. However, while some of the terms and expressions would hardly make sense even if translated, most of them could have been translated and the essence retained. Thus, I have given alternative translations in my analyses. In fact, retaining culture-related specificities might only require one or two extra words, or do not need any extra word at all but a slight alteration of vocabulary. Hence, translating Chinese cultural elements in film subtitles do not necessarily render the subtitles apparently longer or cover more space on the screen. Another issue that I have pointed out is that the same reference might have been altered or omitted in one case, but translated in another. This inconsistency has been speculated to be due to the subtitler's assumptive different significance of the references to the film scenes concerned. In Chapter Four, a particular polite kinship term was omitted in one scene but translated and retained in another. The subtitler might have assumed the term was more crucial in one filmic context than the other, and yet I have argued that the kin term was equally critical to the scene where it was omitted too, if not more. Thus, consistency should be maintained in coping with the same reference terms at least, unless the same reference really has different connotations in different scenes or contexts.

On the other hand, Venuti's (2008, p.15) description of domestication reveals that the culture of the target language can be monolingual and unwelcoming to the foreign. Nonetheless, the domestication strategy in Zhang Yimou's films has often been adopted by certain Chinese translators. I have mentioned before that the domestication of Chinese cultural specifics in the subtitles carried out by a Chinese translator is what I call 'submissive translation' in Chapter Five which discussed the dialect subtitling of *The Flowers of War*. A Chinese translator's employment of domestication is especially suspicious of being 'submissive' to the speculative expectations of the target language.

I have assumed the intention of submissive translation is to be accepted by the target language audiences. However, the reception of *The Flowers of War* might not have been as positive as expected, so probably the submissive attitude did not make a huge contribution to the positive reception among the international audiences. Moreover, behind the phenomenon of submissive translation, I have speculated that the lack of cultural confidence of the Chinese nation might be a cause (Zhou, 2012). I believe Chinese translators need to be more aware of the necessity to be respectful to the source Chinese text, even if they do not endeavour to

reproduce every single Chinese reference in the source text. The domestication and omission of source Chinese cultural references is a violent abuse of the text and the film, as it seems that the translator has not respected their significant role and responsibility but have become biased and abusive. This is not fair to the source cultural aspects either, especially when it is the translator's own culture.

The reasons behind the common application of domestication are manifold. Subtitling is restrained by the limited space allowed on the screen as well as the limited time that the subtitles can stay on the screen for subtitle readers to read. Therefore, it might be an excuse for translators to omit Chinese cultural references, as it might lengthen the subtitles if the references are translated from Chinese into English. On the other hand, subtitlers also might assume that if the Chinese culture-bound terms and expressions are translated into the target language for subtitle readers to read, the subtitle readers might find them confusing. Long (2006) contends that the domestication strategy has been successfully used to produce natural or native-like flow of language in the English subtitles. This is likely to indicate that subtitle readers need special care and cultural specificities need to be removed from the English subtitles, so they will not be confused. Thus, the domestication strategy has been deemed as a special care that the translator has sought for the readers.

Nevertheless, I have speculated that subtitle readers might have been underestimated, as they presumably can understand more than the information contained in film subtitles. The multimodal nature of films enables subtitle readers to be accessible to various sources of information, so they can see the image on the screen and hear the sound. Subtitle readers see the image and correlate characters' behaviour and conversations with what they read, so they can notice errors in subtitles. This has been exemplified with scenes from *Red Sorghum* (1987) in the introduction. On the other hand, the sound is a vital source of information for subtitle readers too. The acoustic features of sound embrace valuable information, and a seemingly unimportant noise could explain the story within a filmic context. A scene from *Raise the Red Lantern* (1990) in the introduction is an example. In Chapter Seven, I have discussed the songs and the Peking Opera in Zhang Yimou's films. The songs and the Peking Opera were often carefully choreographed performances *per se* in the diegetic world given by film characters. These performances were again a plethora of visual and acoustic specificities that contributed to subtitle readers' comprehension of filmic contexts together with film subtitles, and they showed characters' emotion to subtitle readers even more fully.

However, in Chapter Seven, I have pointed out that there is a song in *Curse of the Golden Flower* that has not been subtitled in the English version of the film used for that study, and the Peking Opera scenes in *Raise the Red Lantern* have not been subtitled into English at all either. The missing English subtitles of Chinese songs ignored not only the significance of the meaning of the lyrics, but also the connections of the lyrics with the non-verbal, or the visual and the acoustic. The verbal and the non-verbal are not separate media in a diegetic world, but dynamically interact with each other in reaching the subtitle readers. However, without knowing the meaning of the lyrics, subtitle readers can still apprehend the significance the songs convey, as visuality and the sound are still available to them. Yet again, the non-existence of a translation has indicated Chinese cultural elements being domesticated and omitted. Also, the ending theme song in *Curse of the Golden Flower* was changed into an orchestra and a chorus, which implied an urge to render the film ending less Chinese so as to be positively received abroad. This urge was likely to have been sparked by the lack of cultural confidence, especially if the filmmaker had agreed on the change.

The visual and acoustic representation is also vital in historical films. Chapter Six referred to that history is portrayed in visual elements such as characters' costumes, furniture and buildings (Stubbs, 2013). Obsolete music and instruments are acoustic elements that leave a historical impression on subtitle readers. Besides, history is conveyed verbally too and archaic marks are prevalent in the dialogue of films that are set in a historical background. Chapter Six investigated how the four main types of archaisms – nouns, idioms, adverbs and four-character phrases – and the terms related to the Cultural Revolution were translated into English. Archaic nouns were often modernised and idioms were explicitated in the English subtitles, whereas adverbs were omitted or reformulated with verbs. The four-character phrases, a primary feature of obsolete Chinese, were condensed and reformulated in translation. The Cultural Revolution-bound terms and expressions were translated with the simplification and explicitation strategies. The historical words and phrases appeared to have been domesticated and reduced less compared to the humour discussed in Chapter Three and the Peking Opera analysed in Chapter Seven. Still, specific character or place names were over-domesticated and omitted in some films set in ancient China that the thesis explored.

In the literature review, I drew upon Benjamin's (1923/2012, pp.81-82) 'The Translator's Task' which contends that a true translation does not obscure the source text or stand in its light, but to set free and liberate the language that is imprisoned and spellbound in the original, and

to make it shine even more fully. This would be achieved by finding the intention of the language that is to be translated and awakens the echo in it in the meantime (Benjamin, 1923/2012, p.79). Between the division of domestication and foreignisation (Venuti, 2008), domestication is inclined to fail the task of the translator proposed by Benjamin, as the source culture and light are usually shadowed in the translation. As some Chinese scholars have often been aware of the over-domestication of English-speaking culture-related terms and expressions in the English-speaking films (Meng, 2012; Wang and Wang, 2013), there seems to have been less concern about the reduction and loss of Chinese cultural aspects in the translation of some Chinese films into English. However, I sided with Fan (2008) that there was often obvious domestication of Chinese cultural references in the English version of some Chinese films, especially when it was not even necessary at all.

However, the domestication of cultural specificities in the Chinese films was not so rare, which did not seek to demonstrate the spirit and the light that was confined in the source text, but made it even less visible and more imprisoned in the translation text. The intention of the pure language embedded in the source was ignored too. This failed to fulfil the translator's task and disobeyed the purpose of translation which was to reveal the source to the target text and to bridge the gaps between the source text and the target language reader as well as between the source culture and the target culture. The omission of the source cultural references, which was a deviation from the translator's task, could be considered an extreme case of domestication, as the light and spirit in the source text was 'murdered'. What can also be reduced with the references is filmic elements like images and sounds. This ignores viewers' semiotic reading of the text while they study non-verbal information for clues that correspond to the text (Eleftheriotis, 2010, p.184). The domestication of Chinese cultural references also happened to the references that had been said with the Nanjing dialect in *The Flowers of War* (2011), as was examined in Chapter Five. Some words and phrases with Chinese cultural features in the Nanjing dialect were domesticated and lost the culture hidden behind. All the features of the Nanjing dialect were standardised into standard everyday English, while some expressions with the dialect were made more explicit by the explicitation strategy.

These findings could be of interest to many Chinese translators who translate Chinese films into English. As the translator's task is to reveal what is expressed but also confined in the source, translators might have to be careful when they employ the domestication strategy, as the Chinese cultural references that shine in the source text will be dimmed once reduced. That will also be disrespectful to the source text. The deeper reason behind the adoption of the domestication strategy might be the lack of cultural confidence that is still fairly common

among the Chinese nation. Thus, many Chinese translators need to boost their cultural confidence and manifest the cultural references, whether they are proud of them or not, and allow themselves a second thought when they consider a reference 'domesticatable'. On the other hand, they ought not to underestimate average subtitle readers, but trust that they can be prepared to be engaged in a dynamic film watching as a film progresses and that they can grasp the non-verbal cues in filmic contexts and associate the non-verbal with the subtitles as they interpret the contexts. Moreover, Chinese translators also need to believe in the validity of the function of translation that is to bridge the gap between cultures and assist the cultural specificities to survive the process of translation, which is an ultimate task they should fulfil, but rather not to hide information or to prevent the information from reaching the target language audiences. That is a way to honour the task of being a translator.

Reflection on the methodology and future work

This thesis drew upon several of Zhang Yimou's films and made use of the English subtitles of his films. I chose Zhang Yimou's films, as he is allegedly the most critically acclaimed Chinese filmmaker and his films have been widely researched in China and abroad (Clark, 1989; Dai, 2002; Qin, 2010). Zhang's films were set in various historical periods in China, from the Warring States period (475-221BC) to the modern times. These films that span thousands of years manifest different linguistic and cultural features of China. Also, the wide range of genres of Zhang's films reflects distinct speech or dialogue registers and provided diverse examples. I compared the source dialogue with the English subtitles mainly by explaining the Chinese cultural references and giving literal translations of the Chinese lines as well as my alternative translations that retain cultural references better. I also mentioned that there had probably been more research about the subtitling of foreign films into Chinese than the subtitling of Chinese films into other languages. Worse still, many Chinese scholars were more aware of and more conservative and critical about the domestication or over-domestication of English-speaking references (Meng, 2012; Wang and Wang, 2013), and the five aspects of Chinese culture - humour, politeness, dialect, history, songs and the Peking Opera - had not been thoroughly researched either. Thus, cultural references from those perspectives were involved in my approach.

As this thesis has been based on theoretical and textual analysis and speculated how subtitle readers might or could have understood English subtitles, it would be productive to investigate audience perception of an existing English version of a selected Chinese film in order to test my assumptions. English-speaking audiences who do not understand Chinese would be

recruited to watch the film. They can be invited to participate in surveys, focus groups or fill in questionnaires about how they comprehend particular filmic contexts which involve Chinese specificities or if they understand specific English subtitles. On the other hand, another version of English subtitles of the same film can be produced, and optimally, the new version of English subtitles should be translated while retaining source Chinese references or the essence of the references as often as possible and adopting the domestication strategy as little as possible and should be natural-sounding too. Then a different group of participants can be invited to watch the film with this version of subtitles who can take part in the same survey, focus group or fill in the same questionnaire. The results of the two studies can be compared to find out if ordinary non-Chinese-speaking viewers can interpret specific references that have been rendered into English and if they feel it difficult to read the subtitles that keep the source cultural terms and expressions. Moreover, it would be worthy of studying if the domestication of source culture-related words and expressions often happen in the translation of Chinese films into foreign languages other than English. For example, *A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop* has been dubbed into German (Tiberius Film, 2011).

During the recent months while the thesis was being completed, several Chinese films entered British cinemas. These include *Lost in Hong Kong* (Xu Zheng, 2015) (港囧, gang jiong), *Ex Files 2: The Backup Strikes Back* (Tian Yusheng, 2015) (前任 2: 备胎反击战, qianren er, beitaifanjizhan), *Our Times* (Frankie Chen, 2015) (我的少女时代, wo de shaonü shidai), *Surprise* (Yi Xiaoxing, 2015) (万万没想到, wanwan meixiangdao). In 2015, particularly the last quarter of 2015, at least the above four films were screened by the mainstream cinema operator Cineworld. *Ip Man 3* (Wilson Yip, 2016) (叶问 3, ye wen san) was released in January 2016 too. By contrast, the only Chinese film that was screened by Cineworld in 2014 was probably *The Grandmaster* (Wong Kar-wai, 2014) (一代宗师, yi dai zongshi). There seems to be an increase in the import of Chinese films into the UK, although the audiences might have been mainly Chinese people residing abroad. Therefore, as the films that have constituted the case study of this thesis are older, the most recent one being *The Flowers of War* made in 2011, it would be productive to study the English subtitles of those newer Chinese films to see if there are cultural references that fall under the five categories in this thesis and if those words or phrases were still handled with the domestication strategy. If the references are frequently and unnecessarily domesticated, it will imply that there is still a trend to domesticate Chinese cultural specifics into the target language. If the subtitlers were Chinese translators, they might have to be encouraged to keep more cultural references from the source contexts, also to promote the cultural confidence of the Chinese nation. The English versions of the films can

also be compared with the original versions to find out if the source versions had been altered before they were shown overseas. If there is alteration or even omission of specific scenes, it would be interesting to investigate the reasons behind the alteration or omission.

This thesis concentrated on the domesticating treatment of Chinese cultural references in the English versions of some of Zhang Yimou's films. Domestication was found in the translation of humour, politeness, dialect, history, songs and the Peking Opera. Not only were a number of culture-bound words and phrases evidently domesticated, but certain scenes were also utterly omitted, which was deemed as an extreme form of domestication. In my study, I discovered that many cases of domestication were unnecessary, and that the source lines with cultural terms or expressions could have been retained with about the same number of English words. The domestication and omission of Chinese cultural specificities clearly opposed the task of the translator introduced by Benjamin (1923/2012), as it stood in the light of the original text and context rather than set it free from the imprisonment within the context. Also, the translator's adoption of domestication seemed to be depriving the source cultural elements of the right to be transmitted to the target language subtitle readers. It was a distrust of the capability of the activity of translation, not trusting that translation is able to honour the task of bridging the gaps between cultures. Nevertheless, the presence of the non-verbal or the visual and acoustic would enable subtitle readers to receive and grasp more information than by only reading the text, and the non-verbal usually corresponds to the verbal. Again, the Chinese films were often translated by Chinese translators who resorted to the domestication strategy, which implied a lack of cultural confidence. Therefore, this thesis has intended to encourage Chinese translators to be more careful about domesticating Chinese cultural elements and to think twice before they reduce cultural references.

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Filmography

Zhang Yimou

A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop (《三枪拍案惊奇》) (Zhang Yimou, 2009)

Codename Cougar (《代号美洲豹》) (Zhang Yimou, 1988)

Coming Home (《归来》) (Zhang Yimou, 2014)

Curse of the Golden Flower (《满城尽带黄金甲》) (Zhang Yimou, 2006)

Hero (《英雄》) (Zhang Yimou, 2002)

House of Flying Daggers (《十面埋伏》) (Zhang Yimou, 2004)

Ju Dou (《菊豆》) (Zhang Yimou, 1990)

Not One Less (《一个都不能少》) (Zhang Yimou, 1999)

Raise the Red Lantern (《大红灯笼高高挂》) (Zhang Yimou, 1991)

Red Sorghum (《红高粱》) (Zhang Yimou, 1987)

Shanghai Triad (《摇啊摇，摇到外婆桥》) (Zhang Yimou, 1995)

The Flowers of War (《金陵十三钗》) (Zhang Yimou, 2011)

The Road Home (《我的父亲母亲》) (Zhang Yimou, 1999)

To Live (《活着》) (Zhang Yimou, 1994)

Under the Hawthorn Tree (《山楂树之恋》) (Zhang Yimou, 2010)

Other films

Aftershock (《唐山大地震》) (Feng Xiaogang, 2010)

Army Nurse (《女儿楼》) (Hu Mei, 1985)

Avatar (James Cameron, 2009)

Black Cannon Incident (《黑炮事件》) (Huang Jianzhong, 1986)

Chungking Express (《重庆森林》) (Wang Kai Wai, 1994)

Drive to Win (《沙鸥》) (Zhang Nuanxin, 1981)

Eat Hot Tofu Slowly (《心急吃不了热豆腐》) (Feng Gong, 2005)

Ex Files 2: The Backup Strikes Back (《前任 2: 备胎反击战》) (Tian Yusheng, 2015)

Faraway from War (《远离战争年代》) (Hu Mei, 1987)

Farewell My Concubine (《霸王别姬》) (Chen Kaige, 1993)

Horse Thief (《盗马贼》) (Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1986)

In the Mood for Love (《花样年华》) (Wang Kar Wai, 2000)

Ip Man 3 (《叶问 3》) (Wilson Yip, 2016)

Juanrez (Willam Dieterle, 1939)

Kung Fu Hustle (《功夫》) (Stephen Chow, 2004)

La Haine (Mathieu Kassovitz, 1995)

Lost in Hong Kong (《港囧》) (Xu Zheng, 2015)

Lost in Translation (Sofia Coppola, 2003)

- Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015)
- Next Avengers: Heroes of Tomorrow* (Jay Oliva and Gary Hartle, 2008)
- On the Hunting Ground* (《猎场札撒》) (Tian Zhuangzhuang, 1985)
- Our Times* (《我的少女时代》) (Frankie Chen, 2015)
- Raise Ravens* (*Cría Cuervos*) (Carlos Saura, 1976)
- Ran* (Kurosawa Akira, 1985)
- Sacrificed Youth* (《青春祭》) (Zhang Nuanxin, 1985)
- Surprise* (《万万没想到》) (Yi Xiaoxing, 2015)
- The Assassin* (《刺客聂隐娘》) (Hou Hsiao-Hsien, 2015)
- The Grandmaster* (《一代宗师》) (Wong Kar-wai, 2014)
- The Life of Wu Xun* (《武训传》) (Sun Yu, 1950)
- The Promise* (《无极》) (Chen Kaige, 2005)
- The Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont, 1994)
- The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1956)
- Yellow Earth* (《黄土地》) (Chen Kaige, 1984)