A Comparative Analysis of Translated Plays in the Chinese Theatre of the Post-Cultural Revolution Period

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Abstract

This dissertation examined the influence of socio-political and cultural factors on the translation of Chinese theatre, with a focus on avant-garde works from late 1970 to 2000. This study is organized into three time periods: late 1970 to 1988, 1989 to 1992, and 1993 to 2000, analysing three representative translated Chinese avant-garde theatrical works within each period through the lens of theatre translation, considering the socio-political and cultural contexts of the time and the requirements of text users.

The dissertation comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 provides historical background, outlining the development of Chinese theatre and the emergence of avant-garde theatre from the late 1970s, establishing the research context. Chapters 2 a theoretical framework, methodologies used in analysing three translated playscripts. The theoretical framework mainly introduces the cultural turn in terms of Andre Lefevere's poetics and ideology theories, translation concepts of Hans J. Vermeer's Skopos theory together with Lawrence Venuti's domestication and foreignisation, emphasising the impact of cultural, social, and text-user factors on theatre translation. Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 are textual analyses of three selected Chinese avant-garde works which are *Death of a Salesman* (1983), *Hamlet 1990* (1990) and *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* (1998) which are translated and adapted from foreign theatrical works. These three chapters investigate translation decisions and their associated influential factors concerning language, theme, and play structure, drawing on theatre translation theories. Finally, the concluding chapter summarises the general trends in Chinese avant-garde theatre translations from 1980 to 2000. Using the three

case studies, this study highlights how translations are influenced by varying socio-cultural-political factors to meet the requirements of the target culture and text users.

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DECLARATION

I, Nannan Zhang, declare that this dissertation is an original work of my research, and

I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge no part of this thesis

has been published anywhere else in the past.

Introduction

There has been a growing number of Chinese *Xianfeng* (avant-garde) theatre plays, with many of these oeuvres being translated from Western plays, theatrical forms, and concepts. Contemporary research on Chinese avant-garde theatre has primarily focused on the innovation and subversion of performance, often at the expense of research on the translation of play scripts. Noting the imbalance in current research, this dissertation concentrates on exploring the translation strategies employed in the translations of Chinese avant-garde theatre to achieve the vanguard features of those plays during the period of late 1970s and 2000. The time frame is detailed into three periods, which are late 1970-1988, 1989-1992 and 1993-2000. Three plays, one for each corresponding period, are selected for case study. Moreover, the strategies and methods made in translation are inextricably linked to the cultural and social environments, which has been pointed out by many scholars, stating a play is culture-relevant and is always bound to the target culture and audience at a specific point in time. Concomitantly, this research will examine the translations of Chinese avant-garde theatre within the Chinese socio-cultural context during a specific period under certain sociocultural circumstances based on cultural turn, Poetics and Ideology, Skopos theories, domestication and foreignization, along with supportive culture and target audience related translation views.

This dissertation shall put forth the argument that translated works of Chinese avant-garde theatre between the late 1970s and 2000 were produced by inexorably absorbing the cultural and artistic characteristics of American and European plays, whilst also being infused with, and bearing, a heavy influence from the contemporaneous Chinese socio-political environment, together with the impact of the participants in terms of theatrical practitioners. To be more detailed, the translator,

director, even performers and relevant government departments which are involved in issuing permission of staging plays or providing locations for staging (these specific details will be discussed more in the Chapter 1) all influence the translation of a play. In order to facilitate a comprehensive investigation into the translated and adapted Chinese avant-garde plays from both linguistic and socio-political perspectives, this research has identified three Chinese avant-garde translations/adaptations which shall be utilised as case studies. In conducting a narrow and deep analysis of these case study source texts, this dissertation endeavours to answer the primary research question:

> How have Chinese socio-cultural and political contexts between the late
> 1970s and 2000, influenced the production and reception of translated
> Chinese avant-garde dramas?

To answer the main question, this dissertation will reveal the translation methods and strategies used in the translated scripts of three plays selected, and more importantly, dig into the social-political and cultural influencers behind these methods. To achieve this research aim, each play, as an example selected during its corresponding period among these three periods, will be analysed in light of the translation theories and theatre translation views.

Theatrical scripts and plays offer a unique analytical lens, insofar that the socio-cultural and political circumstances are reflected in many translated works during this time period. The current focus on three selected translated/adapted Chinese avant-garde plays draws upon representative texts of the period under analysis, with the aim of contextualising the historical background of Chinese avant-garde theatre between the late 1970s and 2000. Specifically, these plays are *Tuixiaoyuan Zhisi* (*The Death of a Salesman*), *Hamuleite 1990* (*Hamlet 1990*), and *Sanjiemei Dengdaigeduo* (*Three*

Sisters Waiting for Godot). These three plays have been selected due to their diverse perspectives, each originating from three different periods of Chinese socio-political development between the end of the 1970s and 2000. The translation of each play is influenced by its corresponding period of time. Their translations and adaptations are reflective of the circumstances in history, as they were influenced by the Chinese socio-cultural and political environment, while also retaining some of the original Western theatrical traditions; this will be discussed in more detail below.

To address the research question, this dissertation shall examine theatre translation theories and associated academic discourse, with a primary emphasis on target culture, which is Chinese culture, and the individuals involved in the process of translating foreign plays into Chinese avant-garde plays between late 1970 and 2000. Theories and concepts considered herein include those discuss the participants in the translation process as having an influence on translation, such as poetics and ideology by André Alphons Lefevere; theory discussing translation is to achieve a certain purpose such as Skopos Theory by Hans Vermeer, and domestication and foreignisation by Lawrence Venuti; and also schools of thought, or academic arguments stating that translation is inseparable from the socio-cultural environment including Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt's work *Page to Stage: Theatre as Translation*, while Terry Hale and Carole-Anne Upton's *Moving Target: Theatre Translation and Cultural Adaptation* will also be discussed.

This dissertation shall commence with a concise introduction to the emergence and development of Chinese *Huaju* (spoken drama) and Chinese avant-garde theatre in Chapter 1, including a discussion of the evolving socio-political context in China from the late 1970s to 2000. Subsequently, it will cover translation studies, theatre translation discussions, methodologies, and data collection in Chapter 2. In the dissertation's second section in terms of Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, the translation and

adaptation of the three plays will be comparatively introduced alongside the original foreign plays. This analysis will explore how they were translated and adapted, which symbolic features of Chinese avant-garde theatre were manifested, and the defining characteristics of the socio-political context in which they were produced. With the support of theatre translation theories, the three selected plays, authored at three pivotal moments between late 1970 and 2000, will illustrate that the translation of Chinese avant-garde theatre was shaped by the prevailing socio-political climate and by the contributors to the translation process. Furthermore, a textual analysis of the three texts will elucidate how the translations were influenced in the main body.

CHAPTER 1. Contextualization of Chinese *Xianfeng Xiju* (Avant-garde Theatre)

This chapter aims to provide a historical background of Chinese avant-garde theatre, outlining its origins and evolution. Chinese avant-garde theatre is widely recognised as a distinctive form within the broader spectrum of Chinese theatre. As Chen Jide (2004) observed in his book *Contemporary Chinese Avant-Garde Theatre 1979–2000*, this art form represents a unique type of Chinese theatre that emerged during a specific historical period in China. Since Chinese avant-garde theatre developed as a derivative of Chinese *Huaju* (Spoken Drama), it is crucial to begin with a brief overview of the latter.

1.1 Chinese *Huaju* (Spoken Drama)

Chinese *Huaju* (spoken drama), a genre distinguished by the translation and adaptation of Western works into Chinese, emerged in the early 20th century.

Before the 20th century, Chinese theatre was predominantly characterised by Chinese *Xiqu* (Chinese song-dance theatre[1]) (Song 2013). The initial experimental performances and translations of European and American dramas, such as Chinese troupes performing Shakespeare's plays, culminated in the genesis of this novel Chinese *Huaju* theatre style in the early 20th century. In 1911, the Chinese Revolution successfully overthrew the autocratic Qing Dynasty monarchy, leading to the establishment of the Republic of China. This period preceded the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Drama was introduced to China during the New Culture Movement in the mid-1910s following the end of Qing dynasty and early 1920s, a period marked by a shift from traditional Chinese culture to modern culture. Notably, 1907 signified the onset of the era of Chinese spoken drama with works like

the Chinese adaptations of Alexandre Dumas' *La Dame aux Camellias* (*The Lady of the Camellias*) and *The Black Slave's Cry to Heaven* (*Heinu yutian lu*), based on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which garnered widespread recognition from Chinese theatrical scholars (Song, 2014). From 1907, Chinese theatre transitioned into a new epoch, blending song-dance theatre with spoken drama, which represents *Huaju* started during the 1910s and has grown ever since (Song 2013; Fu, 2014). From 1919 to 1929, the post-war era was marked by significant tensions between imperialism and nationalism, as well as conflicts between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party. Despite turbulent social conditions and widespread poverty, the attainment of equal international status inspired hope among the Chinese populace for a better future. These aspirations were vividly reflected in the drama of the time. Consequently, Chinese spoken drama sought to address themes of national independence, personal liberation, and societal and cultural reconstruction, with a pronounced emphasis on improving living standards (Teon, 2017). Between 1930 and 1948, in the context of the Japanese invasion, the primary focus of spoken drama inevitably shifted towards war-related themes (Song, 2013).

From the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to 1966, play production was influenced by the Ibsen-Stanislavsky system and restricted to realistic dramas focusing on revealing the darkness of society and expressing the theme of resistance to oppression. The period of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 saw stringent governmental control over all cultural and artistic forms, mandating that all literary and artistic works, including drama, primarily serve to extol and support the political regimes. Despite the creation of new drama forms, such as *Geming Yangbanxi* (Revolutionary Model Opera), theatrical productions were rigorously confined to

adhering to the Three Prominences principles. [2] This restriction hindered the development of Chinese spoken drama, as *Geming Yangbanxi* became the dominant form, with its thematic focus primarily centred on glorifying the government and political parties.

Following the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the introduction of Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening-up policy has become the formative (an incrementally progressive economic and social policy whereby the Chinese government attempted to maintain its commitment to socialism while concurrently taking a position to actively introduce foreign capital and technology in order to achieve economic progress. This policy marked the beginning of an incrementally more open society in terms of societal discourse, which included a cautious embracing of foreign culture and views (Garnaut, Song, and Cai 2018). As a result, the cultural and artistic environment for creators became somewhat more liberal, albeit within the legal restrictions of the time. Creators were afforded the liberty to engage in creative endeavours, albeit within the constraints of the realistic drama framework of the Ibsen-Stanislavsky model. In the early 1980s, owing to socio-political factors and challenges within the Chinese theatre, a new form of theatre arose: Chinese avant-garde theatre, whose process of emerge and development will be discussed detailed in the following section.

1.2 Chinese *Xianfeng Xiju* (Avant-Garde Theatre)

This section provides context for the emergence and evolution of Chinese avant-garde theatre during the initial post-Mao period, reflecting not only a departure from the artistic constraints of the Mao era but also a natural progression influenced by the

social, political, and cultural environment between 1980 and 2000. The discussion begins with a comparison of features that are both similar to and distinct from the 'avant-garde' movements that originated in European and American contexts, as debates persist regarding the distinctions between Chinese avant-garde theatre and its Western counterparts. Chinese scholars such as Zhou Wen (2009, 3–5) argued in his doctoral dissertation that this form of theatre in China should be referred to as experimental theatre or exploratory theatre rather than avant-garde theatre. However, a contrasting perspective is presented by Meng Jinghui (2000, 350), one of the most prominent directors associated with this movement, who suggested that the naming holds minimal significance in relation to the pioneering qualities of the plays themselves. While the terminology used to describe this form of theatre is not the primary focus of this dissertation, the analysis operates on the premise that the works in question possess vanguard characteristics. Moreover, the subsequent textual analysis will explore how these innovative features manifest within the translations of the plays and how they relate to the socio-political and cultural context of the time. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce both Chinese avant-garde theatre and its Western antecedents for a comprehensive understanding. The following content systematically explores the emergence and development of Chinese avant-garde theatre within its socio-political and cultural framework, dividing the timeline into three phases: the post-Mao and exploration era (late 1970s to 1988), the period of persistent exploration yet artistic ambiguity (1989 to 1992), and the phase of further experimentation and innovation (1993 to 2000).

To offer a background on the genesis of Chinese avant-garde, as the specifics will be elaborated in the latter part of this section, it is critical to acknowledge the radical shift in China's art policy post-1976, marking the end of the Cultural Revolution. In 1978, pivotal conferences on art and literature policy proposed a departure from the previous era's excessive interference in artistic works. This change stipulated that as long as artworks did not contravene the Four Fundamental Principles or delve into vulgarity, artists should be granted the freedom for unlimited exploration and experimentation in artistic form and content. In this increasingly open artistic environment, scholars such as Gongming Chen and Jide Chen (1998, 59-75) engaged in discussions on the relationship between art and politics. This dialogue expanded the avenues of discourse available to artists and creators, offering them a broader platform to critique the notion that the arts should primarily serve political agendas. Theoretical debates in theatre challenged the notion that 'art is a tool of politics' and advocated for theatre to mirror social life—practices that had been predominant during the Cultural Revolution—to critically reflect on the past. The focus of playwrights also shifted towards the connection between individuals and the commonality of human experience in plays. Within this liberated cultural context, domestic theatre scholars and dramatists came to recognise that theatre need not function as a tool for political service. Between 1976 and 1978, Chinese theatre returned to its pre-Cultural Revolution form, with social and realist dramas once again dominating the theatrical landscape. The reform and opening-up policy of 1978 further transformed Chinese theatre by introducing an unprecedented array of foreign theatre genres and theoretical frameworks, facilitating

the exploration of innovative dramatic forms.

The Reform and Opening-up Policy, introduced in 1978, not only catalysed economic expansion but also encouraged the assimilation of foreign ideas and technologies across various sectors, including literature and the arts, which actively incorporated foreign concepts and methodologies. For instance, in the visual arts, Realist themes, including Impressionism, Fauvism, Dadaism, and Postmodern art forms like Pop Art (Gladston, 2016), were introduced. In literature, Chinese audiences were exposed to Western Modernist Literature, Stream of Consciousness techniques, and Magical Realism from the 1960s and 1970s, alongside French *Nouveau Roman* works influenced by Joyce, Beckett, and Proust (Liu, 2015). In the theatrical sphere, diverse Western artistic movements, such as Surrealist theatre represented by Jean Cocteau, the Theatre of Cruelty developed by Antonin Artaud, and the Absurd Theatre exemplified by Samuel Beckett (Shi, 2015), gained traction, introducing concepts of experimentalism, radicalism, and Postmodernism to Chinese dramatists.

These newly introduced artistic concepts and schools of thought did not merely provide Chinese playwrights with alternative themes and forms for direct translation or adaptation during the early 1980s. They also encouraged a departure from the realist and social dramas previously restricted to conflict-based narratives addressing social realities. Moreover, these influences inspired Chinese performers to engage more directly with the audience, moving beyond character immersion—a departure from the Ibsenian model. Furthermore, they motivated theatre practitioners to prioritise humanistic themes, the expression of individual needs, and the exploration of the

human spirit within society. This conceptual shift, in addition to the domestic academic dialogues already mentioned, catalysed the creation of innovative theatrical works that distanced themselves from overt political messaging.

The introduction of avant-garde theories and artistic works into China, facilitated by the reform and opening-up policy of the late 1970s, inspired Chinese playwrights and laid the foundation for the emergence of Chinese avant-garde theatre in the early 1980s. This new theatrical form, which evolved from Chinese *Huaju* (spoken drama), continued to influence the development of Chinese avant-garde theatre throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Song, 2013). Drawing on concepts derived from Western plays, Chinese avant-garde theatre imbued contemporary Western artistic ideas with its own historical and cultural connotations, reflecting the unique socio-political context of its emergence and growth. As a result, Chinese avant-garde theatre exhibits characteristics of both Western avant-garde traditions and its own original expressions.

Features of Avant-garde Theatre Originating from European Countries and Features of Chinese Avant-garde Theatre

As a form of theatre influenced by European and American avant-garde art and merged with the social and cultural milieu of its own country, Chinese avant-garde theatre is inevitably marked by both commonalities and distinctions with Western avant-garde art. 'Avant-garde theatre', as generalized by Christopher Innes (Wang and Song, 2018), is attributed to any theatrical piece or phenomenon that appears innovative in style or even merely enigmatic. Similarly, Ferrari (2011, 7-15) describes avant-garde

as possessing a cyclical nature, a relentless pursuit of innovation, an overt disdain for accepted aesthetic norms, and crucially, a specific ideological endeavour, which are fundamental elements defining an avant-garde. Calinescu (1987, 275) highlighted the 'two-fold' logic of avant-garde, perceivable as both destruction and reconstruction. More precisely, the avant-garde signifies not only a deliberate overthrow of tradition and the iconoclastic renunciation of the past but also a resistance to contemporary civilisation and politics, disdain for the status quo, and a contemptuous ridicule of the prevailing fashions and trends of the times (Ferrari 2017, 8).

Based on these definitions and the inherent antagonism, Chinese avant-garde theatre was imbued with similar characteristics, namely, a departure from the previous theatrical system, through experimentation, addressed a range of differing themes, and subversions in play scripts. "Negating existing definitions of drama and breaking through existing performance models may be what is known as experimental drama," stated Zhou (2009, 73-125), a professor at the Central Academy of Drama. Specifically, Chinese avant-garde theatre challenged the long-standing dominance of the *Sitanni Tixi* (Stanislavsky system) while rejecting the ideological constraints imposed by *Geming Yangbanxi* (Revolutionary Model Operas), which had peaked during the Cultural Revolution with works such as *Zhiqu Weihushan* (*The Taking of Tiger Mountain*). From both performance and thematic perspectives, Chinese avant-garde theatre diverged significantly from past conventions. For example, between 1980 and 2000, it reduced the physical and conceptual distance between performers and audiences by embracing diverse venues, such as small theatres, garages, and even factories, rather than

exclusively state-owned theatres. Throughout this twenty-year period, the thematic focus shifted away from the realist tradition associated with Stanislavsky's model and propaganda works designed to glorify the "Party" and its leaders. Instead, Chinese avant-garde dramatists prioritised themes exploring the experiences and spirits of ordinary individuals. Playwrights such as Lin Zhaohua and Mu Sen advocated for reducing the dominance of the play script within their original works (Chen   2003, 163-172). Furthermore, both original Chinese texts and translated scripts from this period prominently featured fragmentation and montage techniques, the use of multiple narrative threads, non-linear temporal structures, intertextual collages, and the association of independent structural and semantic units—stylistic elements that had been largely absent in earlier spoken drama forms.

However, introducing Peter Burger's assessment of avant-garde art as 'anti-institution' in his *Theory of the Avant-garde*, signifying opposition to bourgeois values and norms, and 'autonomy', indicating the avant-garde's independence from society and estrangement from the praxis of life, highlights the distinctions between Chinese avant-garde theatre and imported avant-garde concepts (1974). Contrary to being anti-bourgeois, Chinese avant-garde theatre can be seen to have opposed the revolutionary concepts and discourses that dominated the ideological landscape during Mao's chairmanship, with revolutionary model theatre, the dominant form of theatre during the Cultural Revolution, is the best example, as noted by Liu Kang (1997).   Moreover, Chinese avant-garde theatre has always maintained its connection with grassroots society, striving to bridge everyday life with art. For instance, the first play analysed in

Chapter 3, *Death of a Salesman*, explores themes closely associated with achieving success and wealth—aspirations that reflected the collective hopes of the nation and its people during the early 1980s when the play was performed in China (1983). Another distinctive aspect of Chinese avant-garde theatre is its anti-collectivist stance. Prominent practitioners such as Gao Xingjian explicitly embraced 'no-ism', emphasising and advocating for an expansive concept of personal freedom in his artistic creations. Similarly, Lin Zhaohua's works are characterised by a quintessential and undeniable 'no-ism' or targeted school.   Such a feature is also consistent with the notion that the themes of Chinese avant-garde works are centred on the individual, stemming from idiosyncratic and social-discursive contemplations and critiques from within the individual artist themselves.

Thus, it is evident that Chinese avant-garde theatre has absorbed the core of the European and American 'Avant-garde'—that is, opposition to tradition, subversion, innovation, and non-mainstream theatrical forms, as well as a rejection of mass popular culture—while also endeavouring to depoliticise its works to focus more on art and humanity. However, Chinese avant-garde theatre from 1980 to 2000 differentiates itself from its Western counterparts in significant ways, particularly by not adopting an anti-bourgeois stance, as anti-bourgeois discourse has historically been central to Chinese political narratives. At various stages of its development, Chinese avant-garde theatre has opposed different elements. For example, during the late 1970s and mid-1980s, it primarily challenged the revolutionary operas from the Cultural Revolution era. In the 1990s, it opposed elements of popular culture, while throughout the entire period, it

resisted the longstanding dominance of both Stanislavsky's and Ibsen's dramatic models, which had significantly shaped Chinese theatrical traditions. Additionally, Chinese avant-garde theatre is deeply intertwined with society and inseparable from life. This connection provides a solid basis for the main argument of this research: due to its inseparability from society, Chinese avant-garde theatre is inevitably influenced by the socio-political and cultural context of its development. Hence, the impact at the level of script translation becomes a primary objective this dissertation aims to elucidate.

The subsequent sections will continue examining the evolution of Chinese avant-garde theatre between the late 1970s and 2000, tracing its progression through the exploratory post-Mao period, the era of artistic uncertainty and repression following political tensions, and a phase of renewed innovation. While a comprehensive review of every historical detail within this timeframe is beyond the scope of this chapter, the discussion will focus on the most significant historical phases shaping the development of Chinese avant-garde theatre.

Drawing from Fu Jin's historical study of Chinese theatre from ancient China to the end of the 20th century (2014), Ferrari's analysis of avant-garde and experimental theatre, Sun (2023) study on the translation of foreign plays into Chinese during the post-Mao era, and He Guimei's research on the socio-political and cultural climate for literature and the arts in the 1980s and 1990s, the evolution of Chinese avant-garde theatre can be divided into three distinct phases. The first phase, from the late 1970s to 1988, was marked by rapid experimentation, curiosity, and cultural optimism (2006).

The second phase, from 1989 to 1992, was defined by artistic disorientation, yet creative exploration persisted despite the repression following the Tiananmen Square event. The final phase, spanning 1993 to 2000, reflected opposition to mainstream popular culture and incorporated critical reflections from the post-Tiananmen period, along with the promotion of humanistic discourse before 1995 and the relaxation of cultural policies thereafter, which sparked a resurgence of creative innovation.

These three periods can be categorised as follows: the late 1970s to 1989 as the post-Mao exploration era, 1989 to 1992 as the period of persistent exploration amidst confusion, and 1993 to 2000 as the phase of further experimentation and innovation. Accordingly, this dissertation structures its analysis of Chinese avant-garde theatre development into these stages, with the subsequent sections examining how the theatre evolved in response to the corresponding social, political, and cultural conditions during each period.

1.2.1 Late 1970s – 1989- The Post-Mao era of Exploration

The Emerge of Chinese Avant-Garde Theatre

Although the origins of avant-garde theatre in China are commonly attributed to 1980, the socio-political developments of the late 1970s were closely intertwined with its emergence. Therefore, this section will also examine the socio-political climate from the late 1970s to provide a more comprehensive historical context for the study of Chinese avant-garde theatre's development. Following the 'Reform and Opening up'

policy (*gaige kaifang*) implemented by Deng Xiaoping at the Third Plenary Session of the XI Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in December 1978, associated policies targeting the arts were announced. The 'Four Modernizations', 'Two Hundreds' (*shuangbai*), and 'Liberate Your Thinking and Search for the Truth in Facts' (*jiefang sixiang, shishi qiu shi*) significantly liberalised thought, facilitating the formal rehabilitation of intellectuals with the reduction of conformity requirements from the government and creating increased opportunities for entrepreneurial ventures.[3] In response to these intentions, contemporary and innovative art productions and exhibitions emerged in a climate of 'humanist enthusiasm' (*renwen reqing*) in the late 1970s.

According to the detailed record of Wang and Song's overview of Chinese avant-garde art, during the time of 1979 and 1981, artists, predominantly from the fine arts and literary sectors, mobilised in pursuit of greater influence over public discourse (2018). On 1 October 1979, coinciding with National Day, they organised a protest march beginning at the Democracy Wall, proceeding through central Beijing, and culminating at the Beijing Municipal Committee headquarters. Hundreds of radicals participated in this significant demonstration, demanding "political democracy" and "artistic freedom," as well as adherence to the constitutional right to hold independent art exhibitions. The protest was unexpectedly successful, partly due to the endorsement of several prominent Chinese artists (Wang and Song, 2018). In August 1980, the

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[3] Noted by Paul Gladston (2016, p. 149) in his work *Deconstructing Contemporary Chinese Art Selected Critical Writings and Conversations, 2007-2014*; by Chen Jide (2003, pp. 11-13) in his *Contemporary Avant-Garde Theatre.in China 1979-2000.*

Beijing Art Museum hosted what was regarded as the most progressive exhibition in modern Chinese history, showcasing experimental works by amateur artists that had not been publicly displayed since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The exhibition attracted at least 140,000 visitors. Its thematic message declared, "We are no longer children. We want to dialogue with the world in a new, more mature language". The artistic content was equally diverse, with some artists drawing inspiration from prominent Western styles, incorporating techniques from Expressionism, Fauvism, and Minimalism. Others experimented with blending Chinese and Western art forms, exploring abstraction, surrealism, and feminism—concepts that had been either suppressed or unpopular for over a decade (Wang and Song, 2018).

Only a limited number of artists, such as Wang Keping with his wooden sculptures, directly challenged political authority. His controversial work *Icon* merged the facial features of Mao Zedong and Buddha, prompting debate over the intersection of politics and art. Despite ongoing discussions on this topic and the subsequent emigration of many artists, this period marked China's initial openness to experimental art. Though Chinese avant-garde theatre had yet to establish a significant presence, this environment offered a newfound freedom for artistic experimentation, enabling avant-garde theatre practitioners to create with greater expressive liberty (Wang and Song, 2018).

Another catalyst for the emergence of Chinese avant-garde theatre was the audience's aesthetic fatigue - the uniform thematic mode of drama had become monotonous and tiresome. By the end of this period, audiences were eager for something new, exciting, fresh and relevant to the reality of their daily living. From

1976 when Cultural Revolution was ended to 1979 when some Chinese plays started showing vanguard features which will be mentioned in the following context, which is the post-Cultural Revolution, dramas predominantly reverted to an Ibsen-Stanislavsky model reminiscent of the 1950s-60s with monotonous realistic themes and performances, focusing mainly on resisting the glorification demands for political parties under the Cultural Revolution. However, four years later, the popularity of such monolithic themes and forms was challenged by a mass cultural expansion of film and television. Since the late 1970s, around the year 1979, the development of Chinese theatre had decidedly stagnated (Bai, 2016) as audience numbers sharply declined, ticket sales fell, and an increasing number of troupes disbanded, marking the start of theatre crises of the 20th Century (Song, 2014).

The crisis in Chinese drama began in 1980 and persisted until the mid-to-late 1990s. In 1982, only 30 tickets were sold for a dramatic performance in Guangdong. By 1984, the number of drama performances across China had declined to its lowest point since 1976. Similarly, in 1992, fewer than 20 audience members attended a Shanghai production of *Getting Close to Mao Zedong*. Chinese theatre experienced multiple crises at various points between 1979 and 2000, each driven by different underlying factors. However, the persistence of these challenges over time profoundly influenced both the emergence and stylistic evolution of avant-garde theatre, contributing to its distinctive characteristics during various stages of development (Gui, 2005).

The primary cause of the theatre crisis between 1979 and 1982 was the resurgence of social realist drama from 1976 to 1979, a genre that had become structurally rigid, limited in creative expression, and predominantly focused on societal issues rather than individual experiences. This stylistic repetition led to aesthetic fatigue among audiences

who, during the early years of the reform and opening-up period, had been increasingly exposed to Western modernist and postmodernist artistic movements. Consequently, Chinese audiences found themselves disengaged from these conventional productions, which no longer resonated with their evolving artistic expectations. As a result, theatre practitioners began to explore alternative creative directions from the late 1970s onwards.

The emergence of Chinese avant-garde theatre can be divided into phases, with the first stage occurring between 1979 and 1981. During this period, numerous works emerged that exhibited vanguard qualities, representing early efforts to experiment with innovative theatrical forms. Many productions during this time incorporated Western avant-garde theories and artistic principles while creating original Chinese works with experimental features. A key example is *Hot Currents Outside* (*Wuwai you reliu*, 1980) by Ma (2000), a play influenced by stream-of-consciousness fiction and absurdist theatre. The narrative allows the souls of deceased characters—non-corporeal entities—to be represented on the stage, challenging conventional dramatic realism. These spectral figures can pass through walls and drift away, blending elements of reality and fantasy. The play introduced a novel approach to performance by intertwining physical and metaphysical elements, marking a significant stylistic shift in Chinese theatre. This early wave of experimentation demonstrated remarkable artistic innovation within the intellectually open and reflective atmosphere of China's cultural sphere at the time.

Alarm Signal (*Juedui Xinhao*), collaboratively produced in 1982 by Lin Zhaohua and Gao Xingjian, is widely celebrated as a landmark in the development of Chinese avant-garde theatre (Zhou 2009; Ferrari 2012). Notably, it was the first play to be staged in a 'small theatre' rather than a state-owned performance venue, where Chinese dramas

had traditionally been confined. By selecting an alternative performance space, *Alarm Signal* broke away from the constraints of state-affiliated theatres, initiating a trend in which Chinese avant-garde plays from 1982 onwards were performed in unconventional venues, such as small theatres, warehouses, and factories. In terms of dramatic structure, Lin Zhaohua disrupted the conventional narrative hierarchy by relegating the central event, a hallmark of the Stanislavski model, to a minimal position within the plot. Instead, he emphasised the direct engagement of characters with lighting, sound, and props to convey their inner emotional landscapes and interpersonal relationships. This innovative approach shattered the traditional constraints of time and space in dramatic performance, achieving a significant structural breakthrough that redefined theatrical expression in China.

Such a form of stage presentation was unprecedented at the time (Song 2013, 409). *Alarm Signal* was an innovative work in terms of performance style, production structure, and stage presentation, marking the beginning of a new era for Chinese avant-garde theatre (Song, 2013; Zhou, 2009; Fu, 2020). Despite the general decline in theatre development during that period, *Alarm Signal* was performed hundreds of times over six months, demonstrating its popularity and confirming the cultural significance of these pioneering works. Its success provided renewed hope for the progression of Chinese theatre during a challenging period.

Social Political Context for the Development of Chinese Avant-Garde Theatre between 1982 and 1988

Following the emergence of *Alarm Signal*, Chinese avant-garde theatre entered a period of intensive exploration between 1982 and 1988. This creative surge can be attributed to the continuation of the relaxed political and cultural atmosphere

established after the reform and opening-up policy in 1978. Throughout the decade leading up to 1988, Chinese society became increasingly receptive to new cultural influences from the West. This openness fostered the growth of artistic experimentation, culminating in a peak in artistic activity around 1985, when both arts and cultural expression reached a high point. During this phase, artists and intellectuals produced a significant body of work characterised by technical innovation and critical thought. This artistic momentum became associated with the '85 New Wave' (*bawu xinchao meishu yundong*), a movement primarily linked to the visual arts, including drawings, paintings, and photography. The works created during this time adopted new artistic standards, deliberately incorporating visual appropriation, and styles influenced by Western modernism and postmodernism. These experimental approaches laid the groundwork for the adoption of montage and collage techniques in theatrical works, which were fully realised in the 1990s. In this evolving socio-political and cultural context, Chinese avant-garde theatre became a platform for bold innovation and artistic experimentation, driven by relaxed cultural policies and Western artistic concepts. However, two critical moments during this period must be noted—1983 and 1987. Events during these years significantly influenced the creative trajectory of Chinese avant-garde theatre, leaving a lasting impact on its development in the years leading up to 2000.

In a significant moment for Chinese avant-garde theatre, one year after its emergence in 1982, Deng Xiaoping launched the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign (*fan jingshen wuran*) in mid-October 1983. This initiative aimed to combat what were described as "obscene, barbarous, or reactionary materials, vulgar taste in artistic performances, [and] indulgence in individualism," as noted by Barme (2013). Barme

(2013) further argued that the campaign stemmed from governmental concerns regarding the ideological influence on Chinese intellectuals and scholars, some of whom had previously been considered ideological opponents. The bold artistic demonstrations and avant-garde exhibitions from 1979 to 1981, which attracted over 140,000 attendees and explored prohibited themes such as feminism and satire directed at past political figures, signalled a cultural shift towards greater intellectual freedom. However, this ideological openness caused unease within the political establishment, which perceived it as a threat to the stability of the socio-political order following the lifting of major restrictions. Although initially expected to be prolonged, the campaign ended by January 1984, lessening its long-term impact. Nevertheless, it resulted in the dismissal or demotion of several intellectuals, with some films and theatre productions facing censorship or criticism. Numerous artists and scholars received public reprimands. A prominent example was *Bus Stop* (*Chezhan*, 1983) by Gao Xingjian, which faced harsh criticism and condemnation for allegedly contributing to spiritual pollution. The play was accused of failing to provide audiences with a constructive and uplifting perspective on life, instead prompting doubt about societal structures and creating confusion regarding life's prospects (Tang, 1985). In retrospect, I consider that this criticism was closely tied to the broader national objective of the reform and opening-up policy, which aimed to promote collective prosperity, stability, and improved living standards. The themes of *Bus Stop*, which questioned social progress rather than affirming it, were seen as contradictory to the government's ideological vision.

In 1987, Deng Xiaoping launched the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalisation Campaign (*fan zichanjieyi ziyou*). Deng believed that whether it initially emerged as an ideological trend or gradually evolved into a political movement, its ultimate aim was to undermine the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), reject the socialist system, and promote the uncritical admiration of Western countries—an outcome the government considered unacceptable. This is akin to the campaign of 1983, emerged but similarly had limited impact. Despite these setbacks, the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign of 1983 and the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalisation Campaign of 1987 underscored the government's intent and capacity to regulate theatre development, posing challenges to the advancement of Chinese avant-garde theatre in its initial phase. Nonetheless, the socio-cultural atmosphere of the 1980s was predominantly favourable. Many playwrights continued to explore theatrical innovation and engage in experimentation and subversion, with creative zeal and innovation peaking post-New Wave in 1985. Additionally, the period was characterised by a relaxed social and cultural environment, and the translation of theatrical works surged.

The Development of Chinese Avant-Garde Theatre between 1982 and 1998

The development of Chinese avant-garde theatre during this period thus represents an important context for analytical focus, and can be summed up into two aspects. On the one hand, the pluralistic discussion among theoretical scholars, and on the other hand, the plays which emerged during this formative period.

Discussion over Theatrical Theories Introduced to China (1982 – 1998)

In the 1980s, over two hundred foreign plays were translated and published in journals and books, including Selected Works of Modern Foreign Literature[4], Selected Works of Absurdist Plays, and Foreign Literature in Translation (He 2017, 73 - 95). According to Zhang (1996, 86), these translations introduced a diversity of European and American genres to Chinese avant-garde theatre practitioners, along with Western modernist drama techniques related to performance and expression.

The discourse surrounding theatre theories gained momentum from 1981, as numerous Western ideas and artistic trends entered China, including Symbolist theatre, which evokes emotional responses through ambiguous events and characters. The emotions elicited are not tied to the sadness of sorrowful characters or the joy of cheerful ones but rather provoke a more complex or even indefinable emotional state. Expressionist theatre, another prominent influence, employed techniques such as inner monologue, dream sequences, masks, and subtext to convey characters' internal thoughts and emotions. Similarly, Stream of Consciousness theatre and performance styles emerged, focusing on monologues, free association, and the blending of reality and fantasy on stage.

Among these theoretical movements and schools, Chinese scholars and critics primarily concentrated on introducing the concepts and forms associated with Brechtian theatre. Brechtian theatre, a narrative style, is characterised by its open dramatic structure, consisting of multiple scenes with significant leaps in time and frequent shifts in location. The experiences and fate of the protagonist serve as the central narrative

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[4] My translation.

thread, while each scene presents a short, self-contained story reflecting aspects of the protagonist's psychology and character. Each scene can stand independently while also contributing to broader social themes, thereby constructing a comprehensive reflection of societal realities. This theatrical consciousness both meets the aesthetic needs of audiences during a particular historical period and strives to provoke emotional engagement by "shocking the hearts of the audience". Meanwhile, the theory and artistic value of Absurd theatre received considerable attention and scholarly debate. Absurd theatre intentionally rejects traditional character development and dramatic conflict, instead employing fragmented visual stage design, unconventional props, disjointed dialogue, and chaotic thought patterns to reflect the grotesque and disturbing aspects of reality. It explores themes of existential pain and despair, ultimately achieving a heightened sense of abstract absurdity (Wu 2005, 91–99).

In addition, the Theatre of Cruelty, introduced by Antonin Artaud, became a significant subject of discussion. Artaud's theory aimed to immerse the audience in the centre of the dramatic experience, compelling direct emotional engagement on a primal level. By eliminating aesthetic distance, Artaud sought to confront audiences with the performance's raw intensity, forcing them into direct interaction with the performance (Wu 2005, 91–99). The exploration and introduction of these diverse theatrical concepts not only enabled Chinese theatre to break away from outdated and conventional dramatic forms but also transformed the audience's theatrical experience. Innovations in structure, themes, stagecraft, performance styles, lighting, and props provided a dramatic departure from the Ibsen-Stanislavski model that had dominated Chinese theatre for decades. Could these foreign innovations be absorbed and integrated into Chinese avant-garde theatre? The answer is unequivocally yes. Since its inception in 1982, Chinese avant-garde theatre, influenced by the currents of European and

American theatre, has offered a critical platform for Chinese dramatists to challenge and reconsider their longstanding commitment to the Stanislavski system. These international influences continued shaping Chinese avant-garde theatre's development until 2000.

Chinese Avant-Garde Plays during the Period of 1982 and 1988

The pioneering drama of this period was nourished by these Western trends of thought. Despite two brief periods of political oppression, it flourished as a whole, constantly exploring new drama forms and themes. The overall characteristics of the pioneering drama of this period were constant innovation in drama form and structure, a shift from focusing on plot to focusing on exploring the inner world, a focus on direct communication between actors and audience, an emphasis on bringing more visual impact to the audience, and an extraordinary emphasis on the exploration of personal consciousness, personal value and the meaning of personal existence.

This period witnessed the emergence of several significant works and playwrights. Among the most influential figures were playwright Gao Xingjian and director-playwright Lin Zhaohua, whose collaborative masterpieces include *Absolute Signal* (1982), *Station* (1982), and *Savage* (1985). Their works focus on the fusion of poetic language and dialogue, often employing stream-of-consciousness techniques rather than traditional narrative structures. They further experimented with symbolic and absurdist techniques to manipulate time and space on stage, as exemplified in *Station*. Their plays also emphasise the psychological depth of characters, exploring personal

consciousness and inner reflection while encouraging audiences to contemplate themes

of history, reality, and the essence of human nature, as seen in *Savage*. In addition, in

1984, Gao Xingjian first proposed incorporating elements of traditional Chinese opera

into avant-garde theatre. Although he later went into exile in France in 1990, Lin

Zhaohua continued to explore and realise this innovative performance approach, as

reflected in works from the 1990s, including the third case study, *Three Sisters Waiting

for Godot*. Due to the revival of Chinese traditional culture in the 1990s (Guo and Liao,

2018), Lin Zhaohua put his efforts in integrating Chinese traditional opera in his avant-

garde works. The creative contributions of Gao and Lin laid the foundation for the

development of Chinese avant-garde theatre in the 1990s, influencing the works of later

dramatists such as Mou Sen and Meng Jinghui.

Due to my limitations of word count and analytical scope of this thesis, it is not

possible to present a comprehensive account of all Chinese avant-garde plays and

theatre practitioners from this period. However, the artistic characteristics evident in

the works of these prominent figures illustrate how the socio-cultural context of 1980s

China—prior to 1989—was marked by cultural enthusiasm, intellectual dynamism, and

political optimism. This climate fostered a golden age for the development of Chinese

avant-garde theatre.

While there are references to structural innovations in avant-garde plays from this

period, detailed discussions on their artistic evolution remain limited. Since theatre is

ultimately a performative art, much of the existing research has focused primarily on

performance aspects rather than playwriting techniques. However, during the same

period, avant-garde literature experienced a clear linguistic transformation,

characterised by experimental narrative forms, unconventional modes of expression, and a break from conventional discourse. It is argued here that avant-garde playwrights sought similar freedom of expression in their scripts, rebelling against mainstream literary norms by challenging established structures, themes, and linguistic conventions to achieve creative breakthroughs. Though advancements in language use were also evident in avant-garde scripts, this aspect has received limited scholarly attention. Consequently, the innovation and linguistic experimentation present in these plays will be a focal point in the first textual analysis section of this research.

1.2.2 1989–1992: The Era of Persistent Exploration Amidst Uncertainty

As outlined previously, during the period from the late 1970s to 1989, despite the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign of 1983 and the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalisation Campaign of 1987, which represented suppressions within a liberal context, Chinese avant-garde theatre experienced diversification and innovation in plot, staging, and thematic elements. However, the suppression of intellectuals during the Tiananmen Incident of 1989 significantly altered the artistic developmental landscape across China.

The intellectuals involved in the 1989 Tiananmen Incident may have believed their protest demonstration would proceed as smoothly as the earlier 1979 march in Beijing. However, they failed to recognise the significance of the two earlier attempts in 1983 and 1987, when the political system sought to curb ideological shifts it deemed excessive, foreshadowing the events of 1989. This incident marked the collapse of a modernisation ideology once shared by the government, the intellectual community, and the general public—an ideology that had, until then, allowed for a significant degree of democratic freedom.

Between 1989 and 1992, political censorship of artworks was reinforced, making

experimentation and innovation in theatre challenging once again. Additionally, post-crackdown purges impacted numerous theatre artists, including playwright Ruocheng Ying, who resigned from his position due to alleged involvement in the Tiananmen Incident, and theatre director Wang Peizhong, who was arrested for purportedly financially supporting a student leader involved in the Tiananmen event. Following the crackdown, numerous dramatists were interrogated, forced into exile, or ceased producing plays while awaiting the eventual normalisation of the cultural environment (Garnaut 2018). Several other forms of artistic expression were also subjected to bans. For example, *Sunless Days*, a 90-minute documentary produced by Hong Kong director and critic Shu Qi in 1990, was among the first major works attempting to offer an in-depth examination of the Tiananmen Incident. Similarly, the film *Ju Dou*, the first mainland Chinese production to receive an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Language Film, depicted themes of familial tragedy and unfulfilled romance within a feudal ethical framework, with Confucian values contributing to the protagonists' tragic outcomes. Some critics argued that the film intentionally catered to Western curiosity, portraying Chinese culture in a negative light.

Between 1989 and 1992, the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident led to a renewed dominance of political discourse in artistic expression. This shift was evident in the resurgence of formulaic social problem plays and government propaganda dramas from 1990 to 1992, as theatre reverted to its former role of serving political narratives. During the early 1990s, themes of theatrical works increasingly revolved around politically charged topics such as earthquake relief and public service, reflecting a state-driven agenda. Consequently, the Tiananmen Incident inflicted profound damage on the development of Chinese avant-garde theatre, becoming a primary factor in the theatre crisis of this period.

The decline in experimental theatre, however, was not solely due to the renewed political orientation of dramatic works. The broader cultural landscape was overshadowed by a politically repressive climate, with both artistic content and the personal actions of theatre practitioners subject to intensified censorship. For instance, Gao Xingjian, previously mentioned, publicly expressed his discontent with the Tiananmen Incident in 1990. As a result, he was dismissed from his public office, expelled from the Communist Party, and had his residence in Beijing confiscated. Gao subsequently declared he would never return to mainland China, citing a lack of artistic freedom, and has remained in official exile in France ever since. Amid this climate of repression, many playwrights chose silence rather than conforming to the era's "unspoken rules," which required theatrical works to serve as propaganda tools reinforcing socialist values and endorsing official policies. Consequently, experimental production largely stagnated during this period. For example, the previously discussed theatre artist Mou Sen refrained from producing any new works between 1990 and 1992, reflecting the artistic paralysis caused by this political crackdown. As a result, few writers navigated the complexities and ambiguities of the era, pushing the boundaries and persisting in avant-garde theatre exploration despite the pressure of external controls.

In this environment, tragedy and trauma emerged as dominant modes of aesthetic expression. Artists and intellectuals faced a climate of uncertainty and dilemma, and Ferrari (2011, 3-54) concludes that their work during this period can be characterised as a response to the events, replete with expressions of uncertainty and anomie. The themes often involved self-reflection and contemplation on the existential condition. Notably, Lin Zhaohua continued to create avant-garde works throughout this period, despite the broader cultural stagnation. The reasons for his sustained output have not

been publicly detailed in interviews or autobiographical accounts, as the events surrounding the political climate during those years remain rarely discussed in China. However, the fact that he consistently produced avant-garde plays every year between 1989 and 1992 is significant.

For instance, his production *Hamlet* (1990) stood out for its innovative qualities in both script and stage performance. The play continued experimenting with language styles, with each actor repeating the iconic line "To be or not to be," prompting audience reflection on personal values. More significantly, the work diverged from the original theme of revenge, instead integrating Lin's reflections on the social environment and artistic challenges of the time. As this play has been selected for textual analysis in the second phase of this study, its linguistic and thematic innovations will be explored in relation to the corresponding socio-political and cultural context.

During this brief three-to-four-year period, the development of Chinese avant-garde theatre cannot be described as having ceased entirely, yet it undeniably suffered a significant regression compared to the preceding decade. Firstly, the number of Chinese avant-garde plays produced during these years was minimal, prolonging the already fragile state of the theatre industry. Secondly, many theatre practitioners began to abandon the field, opting for career changes due to the declining opportunities. The repercussions of this downturn continued into the subsequent stages of theatre development. The societal confusion and personal identity crises experienced during these years persisted in influencing avant-garde theatre works throughout the next decade. Themes of self-reflection, personal ambition, and re-evaluation of individual values remained deeply embedded in the artistic expressions of this evolving genre.

Additionally, as theatre practitioners were still grappling with the disruptions caused by this period, they were soon confronted with new challenges.

1.2.3 1993-2000 - Further Experimentation and Innovation Era

The initial fifteen years of Chinese avant-garde theatre were shaped by a conditionally liberal socio-cultural environment, coinciding with China's rapid economic growth, increasing globalisation, the rise of a middle class, and growing wealth and luxury. These developments, however, stemmed from unpredictable policy shifts and the continued crisis within the theatre industry. Between 1993 and 2000, the most pressing challenge for Chinese avant-garde theatre arose from the swift advancement of commodification and marketisation driven by the expanding market economy. Although the crisis in experimental theatre had originated in the 1980s, the overwhelming proliferation of popular culture in Chinese entertainment preferences during the mid-1990s resulted in a state of discursive paralysis. Avant-garde theatre struggled to maintain relevance, with experimental performance increasingly perceived as futile (Ferrari 2011, 85; Liu, 2018). In response to the threat of avant-garde theatre being subsumed into a highly commercialised art scene—one that risked diluting its critical and disruptive qualities—many intellectuals and artists tried to find ways to preserve the integrity of experimental theatre. These efforts mainly involved advocating for a renewed focus on the "humanistic spirit" and resisting the dominance of popular culture in artistic expression.

By 1993, the rapid expansion of popular culture had a profound and far-reaching

influence on daily life, particularly within the literary arts and theatre industries. While popular culture is a broad concept, within the context of the arts and literature, it primarily refers to the increased availability of entertainment options in everyday life. These included the growing influence of television programmes driven by rising television ownership, memorable television commercials, live broadcasts, and direct purchase hotlines. Additionally, cinema expanded with more sophisticated film productions, while consumer culture flourished through diverse leisure activities, celebrity gossip, and widely available lifestyle publications sold in street kiosks (Dai 2018, 53-63). This surge in mass culture significantly diminished the space available for more serious literary and artistic works, prompting intellectuals to engage in discussions about the "humanistic spirit" between 1993 and 1995. During this period, figures in the literary and artistic fields became increasingly sensitive to the social issues emerging from these cultural shifts, particularly concerning the liberation of human desires.

Human desires were categorised into three primary forms: power, material, and sexual desires. As Wang Xiaoming (2004) observed, these forms of desire represented a stark departure from the earlier, more straightforward aspirations for success and prosperity, which had symbolised positive expectations for a better future during the early stages of reform and opening up. The expansion of the market economy intensified material desires, raising ethical concerns and further prompting reflections on social values. These concerns led to broader discussions on the "humanistic spirit," which, as He (2005, 135-146) explained, does not inherently conflict with human

desires but emphasises the necessity for boundaries and ethical constraints. Furthermore, while the pursuit of material desires remains natural, it should not overshadow the deeper search for meaning in life. This concept involves a profound understanding of the "self," reflecting an inner quest for purpose and individual identity. Such self-discovery is seen as essential for personal maturity, as true humanism lies in recognising the unique qualities that define an individual. The exploration of the humanistic spirit during this period was primarily ideological. Therefore, an important question arises: how did these debates influence the development of avant-garde theatre?

Yet, the rise of popular culture during these years, driving public preference towards television and cinema for their greater accessibility and sensory richness, could not be overlooked. Despite the avant-garde theatre's innovative strides before 1993, the unfortunate trajectory of theatre development remained unchanged. Zhou (2009, 17) characterised this era as the unequivocal victory of the market economy and commodification, leading to the avant-garde theatre's struggle and near obliteration amidst the surge of mass culture. The ascendancy of mass culture resulted in theatre falling out of favour, whereby theatre development faced considerable difficulties. For instance, numerous theatre practitioners transitioned to the television industry, with the particularly regrettable case of director Mu Sen, once heralded as a vanguard theatre icon in the 1980s. After presenting his final work, Qingshu (Talking), in 1997, Mu Sen left the industry following the box office failure of seven performances.

The discourse on the humanistic spirit during this period not only fostered resistance against the rising dominance of popular culture within the avant-garde theatre

market but also encouraged avant-garde theatre to persist in its commitment to subversion and creative experimentation. This exploration aimed to inspire audiences to reflect on personal values and the meaning of life. Furthermore, these discussions extended into concerns about the decline of traditional Chinese culture within the literary and artistic sectors, aligning with the concurrent ideological movement advocating for the revival of national studies and cultural heritage.

During this era, Chinese avant-garde theatre entered its most experimental phase (Ferrari, 2011). This period marked the peak of innovative exploration, surpassing the subversions of the 1980s by introducing script collages, montage techniques, the blending of diverse performance styles, and the integration of traditional Chinese opera. These efforts indicated that Chinese avant-garde theatre had reached a point of creative maturity, solidifying its artistic identity in its third phase of development. Lin Zhaohua and Meng Jinghui emerged as the most influential dramatists of this era. Meng's works, primarily original Chinese avant-garde plays, introduced innovative narrative styles, combining poetic dialogue, unconventional acting techniques, and experimental stage designs. His productions boldly examined themes of suffering, resilience, and isolation, reshaping the theatrical landscape. Lin Zhaohua, meanwhile, responded to the intellectual call to revive Chinese cultural traditions by integrating elements of classical Chinese opera with Western theatrical works, adapting them into groundbreaking Chinese plays. His works consistently explored themes of personal spirituality, individual values, and broader social significance, further enriching the avant-garde movement.

It is important to note that discussions on the humanistic spirit, particularly regarding individual experience, rarely addressed class dynamics from a collective standpoint. As privatisation and marketisation progressed, disparities in wealth distribution became increasingly evident, inevitably leading to both beneficiaries and victims of these economic shifts. This imbalance underpinned the emergence of social hierarchies. Within such hierarchies, a dynamic of exploitation often arises, involving both those who benefit and those disadvantaged by structural inequalities. Dai Jinghua has argued that few intellectuals in China have directly confronted this growing class divide, attributing this avoidance to political sensitivities and cultural misconceptions. Consequently, class discourse remained underrepresented in both literature and drama during this period, a gap reflected within avant-garde theatre. The third text, the translation and adaptation of *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*, engages with these themes and will be examined in detail in the textual analysis section of this study.

The 15th National Congress in 1997 advocated for the "emancipation of the mind," which allowed state publishing institutions to officially release several anti-rightist literary works that had previously circulated only clandestinely. Anti-rightist literature broadly encompasses narratives documenting the suppression of intellectuals during critical periods such as 1983, 1987, and 1989, or works that expose and explore the trauma resulting from those events. The formal publication of these texts in 1998 was primarily facilitated by the relatively relaxed political climate at the time. However, their market value also played a significant role, as they bore the imprint of ideological taboo, rendering them commercially appealing. Dai Jinghua (1999, p.77) noted that by

the 1990s, the cultural market had begun exhibiting a trend of "specific political and cultural prying."

Ultimately, the marketability of these works stemmed from their historical taboos and previously censored figures, both of which were transformed into powerful selling points that aligned with the market-driven economy of the time. However, it is crucial to emphasise that the pain conveyed in these works should not be commodified as mere consumer goods but instead recognised as long-suppressed historical accounts and expressions of political trauma. The same dynamic was evident in avant-garde theatre, with Lin Zhaohua's productions exemplifying this trend. Notably, in 1988, he merged *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot*, embedding personal reflections and broader thematic concerns into the performance. As Lin's *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* (1998) has been selected for textual analysis in this dissertation, its thematic depth will be examined in detail concerning the cultural context of the period.

Chinese avant-garde theatre, in its continued effort to resist the rising tide of popular culture, has consistently sought significant breakthroughs within the avant-garde genre, particularly in its focus on social critique. By the early 2000s, avant-garde productions, particularly those by Meng Jinghui, had become the subject of considerable debate, with some critics accusing them of pandering to market preferences and compromising the core principles of Chinese experimental theatre. Scholars argued that many works produced during this period more closely resembled commercial or "pop vanguard" forms rather than the politically and artistically subversive Chinese avant-garde theatre that emerged in the late 1970s. While these debates merit further exploration, they fall beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Nonetheless, they clarify and justify the decision to define the post-Mao period of Chinese avant-garde theatre development from the late 1970s through to 2000 for the purposes of this research. On this basis, the timeframe for the production and evolution of avant-garde theatre can be identified as extending from the late 1970s to 2000.

Although avant-garde theatre across these three periods consistently engaged with Western theoretical frameworks and exhibited distinctive characteristics of European avant-garde movements, the evolving political and cultural contexts in China led to notable variations in the works produced. More specifically, the original Chinese scripts, translated texts, and stage performances from each period were all influenced by the socio-political and cultural environments in which they were created. Therefore, this historical overview of Chinese avant-garde theatre from the late 1970s to 2000 provides essential context and theoretical support for this research's central question: how has the socio-political and cultural environment in China influenced the translation and adaptation of avant-garde theatre during this period?

1.2.4 Contextualisation of Chinese Avant-Garde Theatre and Main Argument

This chapter elucidates the evolving development of Chinese avant-garde theatre across various eras from the late 1970s to 2000. Although Chinese avant-garde theatre shares characteristics with Western avant-garde art, such as opposition to tradition, mainstream aesthetics, and institutional norms, it has been distinctly shaped by the various social contexts in China, particularly by certain pivotal historical events. This has led to the emergence of a uniquely domestic variant of avant-garde theatre that diverges from Western models, rendering Chinese avant-garde works as reflections and encapsulations of specific historical moments. This distinction underscores the inherent connection between Chinese avant-garde theatre and societal dynamics.

The spectrum of Chinese avant-garde theatre from 1980 to 2000 encompasses two primary categories: original works by Chinese theatre artists and translations and adaptations of European and American theatre, literature, and film. As noted by Yang (2017, p. 148), translated plays have substantially augmented the local theatre scene for many years after the advent of spoken theatre as an independent genre. This was especially evident during the 1980s, a decade characterized by China's re-engagement with the global community following the Cultural Revolution (Yang, 2017, p.148).

The investigation of avant-gardism and avant-garde theatre, while not novel or sparse, has a considerable history in Western nations like France, Germany, Italy, and the USA (see Bürger, 1984; Paul, 1991; Chen, 2015). However, scholarly focus on Chinese avant-garde theatre is relatively recent (see Cheung and Lai, 1997; Zhao, 2000; Chen, 2003; Ferrari, 2008, 2010, 2012a, 2012b; Conceison, 2014), encountering distinct challenges in dissecting its historical, aesthetic, or cultural dimensions. Specifically, adapting theatre study methodologies to the contours of Chinese drama implies that conventional benchmarks of performance, stage design, and cultural authenticity become intertwined with the broader, more intricate issue of literary quality. Consequently, any analysis of original Chinese plays is inherently comparative to Western genre historiography, introducing a distinct socio-political context and complicating the evaluation of adaptations/translations from foreign dramas, literary texts, and films (see Lin, 2014; Ni, 2018). Thus, Chinese avant-garde theatre has recently become a focal point of scholarly attention, predominantly when the script is an original Chinese creation; yet, such academic inquiries remain limited in number (see Chen, 2005; Ni and Chang, 2013; Huang, 2013).

To date, research on foreign adaptations and original Chinese avant-garde plays

remains limited. Existing studies primarily concentrate on performance, staging, and design, reflecting a bias towards a theatrical rather than a translational perspective. This focus has resulted in a significant gap in research concerning the translation of Chinese avant-garde plays, particularly when examined through the lens of translation studies and theatre translation studies, under the influence of the socio-political and cultural contexts. The previous analysis of the historical development of Chinese avant-garde theatre confirms that its evolution is deeply embedded in its specific social environment, with avant-garde works shaped by the political, social, and cultural conditions of their time. In this regard, this dissertation aims to explore how the socio-political and cultural environment of China between the late 1970s and 2000 influenced the translation of Chinese avant-garde theatre, focusing on translation methodologies and strategies, thereby addressing the identified research gap.

Given the geographical focus on mainland China, the source languages (SL) of the play scripts under examination will be foreign languages, while the target language (TL) will be simplified Chinese. Acknowledging the impracticality of covering every aspect of the historical introduction of Chinese avant-garde theatre, it would be unrealistic and unproductive to analyse all play translations from this period. Hence, I will select representative plays from each of the three identified phases for detailed analysis. By examining the representative works of specific periods, this study will elucidate the types of influences that have shaped the translations of Chinese avant-garde theatre and the translation strategies employed to support my thesis.

1.2.5 The Rationale for Selecting the Plays

The three plays chosen for case studies are *Tuixiaoyuan Zhisi* (*Death of a Salesman*, 1983), *Hamuleit 1990* (*Hamlet 1990*, 1990), and *Sanjiemei Dengdai Geduo* (*Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*, 1998). These works were selected as they exemplify the artistic achievements and theatrical innovations of their respective periods, showcasing the distinct characteristics of Chinese avant-garde theatre from 1980 to 2000. Before delving into the analysis, the justification for their selection is outlined below.

From the Granular Perspective of Individual Works

Tuixiaoyuan Zhisi (Death of a Salesman) by Ying Ruocheng in 1983. Firstly, this translation was linguistically innovative, pioneering a bold departure from previous translational conventions. It introduced novel rhetorical strategies that not only inspired further experimentation in avant-garde translation but also reflected the socio-political mood of the era, particularly the widespread aspiration for wealth and success. Secondly, the play received widespread audience acclaim. As noted earlier, audience numbers had declined significantly during the early 1980s due to the perceived theatre crisis. However, this work reversed that trend. During its initial performances, the theatre was filled to capacity, with audiences staying through the entire performance and responding with continuous applause. Thirdly, the play achieved substantial academic recognition. It was named among the top 10 classic dramatic works of the 20th century in the review *100-Year Classics of Chinese Drama* and was also selected as one of the top 100 classic literary works in China by *China Reading Daily*. Therefore, both for its literary merit and its trailblazing contribution to the translation of Chinese avant-garde plays, this work is a fitting selection for detailed analysis.

Hamuleit 1990 (*Hamlet 1990*) by Lin Zhaohua created in 1990.

Firstly, the translation of *Hamlet 1990* demonstrated a bold avant-garde approach, with language and thematic elements that reflected experimental shifts of the era. Although relatively few restrictions were placed on theatrical expression during this period, the play's linguistic experimentation and thematic expression were exceptional. Secondly, the work's historical and cultural relevance is significant. Emerging during the rapid growth and artistic liberalism of the first decade of avant-garde theatre, it incorporated various techniques such as stream of consciousness, absurdist elements, and symbolic imagery. Simultaneously, the work bore the imprint of three major episodes of political suppression, adding profound historical significance to its narrative and influencing its translational strategies. Thirdly, *Hamlet 1990* has received extensive academic acclaim. Frequently described as a landmark in Chinese avant-garde theatre, the play not only encapsulated the experimental progress of the previous decade but also set a precedent for the development of avant-garde drama in the following years. Therefore, the combination of historical depth, innovative translation techniques, and lasting scholarly recognition justifies its inclusion in this study.

Three Sisters Waiting for Godot

The avant-garde nature of this translation is particularly significant. The work synthesises the avant-garde qualities developed over the past two decades, making it a mature representation of avant-garde theatre. Although it could not revive the struggling theatre scene of its time and faced polarised academic reception, the play remains a

manifestation of Lin Zhaohua's personal consciousness. As a leading figure in Chinese avant-garde theatre who had engaged with its evolution for over twenty years, Lin's work emerged from a cultural landscape that was simultaneously liberal and conflicted, shaped by the rise of popular culture. This cultural context undoubtedly influenced both the translation and the adaptation processes. Furthermore, this production marked the final prominent example of avant-garde theatre created through translation and adaptation before the genre became entangled in debates surrounding the commodification of theatre. It thus stands as a summative representation of the period and is therefore suitable for detailed analysis as the concluding case study.

From a Macro Perspective. The pioneering qualities of the three selected works across their respective periods demonstrate a progressive trajectory. *Death of a Salesman* (1983) primarily focuses on linguistic experimentation, employing both colloquialism and rhetorical strategies to reflect the social aspirations and personal ambitions of the era. *Hamlet 1990*, produced during the transition from the 1980s to the 1990s, extended this linguistic experimentation while also innovating with the overall rhythm of the text. It integrated influences from various theatrical movements introduced during the 1980s, including elements of stream of consciousness, absurdist theatre, and symbolism. The play also deeply explored personal values and philosophical inquiries, advancing avant-garde principles beyond language alone.

These three case studies illustrate the diverse developmental stages of avant-garde theatre translation across three distinct periods, each aligning with the broader trajectory of avant-garde theatre in China. By examining these works alongside

translation theory and the socio-political contexts of their respective times, it becomes possible to investigate how varying historical conditions influenced the translation strategies employed in avant-garde theatre. The third play, *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*, stands out as a fusion of theatrical deconstruction, innovative performance techniques, and elements of traditional Chinese opera. Moreover, it incorporates a secondary thematic layer derived from the translator and director's personal consciousness, prompting audiences to reflect on deeper philosophical questions. Textually, the play embodies a comprehensive range of avant-garde elements, such as the reduction of characters within the script, arguably serving as a form of evasion from directly addressing social hierarchies, reflecting the socio-political climate at the time—a theme discussed earlier in this thesis.

Through these three case studies, it becomes evident that the translation and development of avant-garde theatre in China followed a trajectory consistent with the broader evolution of the genre. By situating the works within the historical contexts of their production and analysing them through the lens of translation theory, this dissertation will explore how each period's cultural and political conditions shaped the translation strategies employed in avant-garde theatre, addressing the central research question.

Chapter 2. Theories, Methodology and Data Collection

In order to achieve the aims of this research, it is important to evaluate and justify

the relevant theories about translation studies and theatre translation, and articulate the

research methodology and data collection process underpinning this research, prior to

analysing the specific texts. In the forthcoming textual analysis, the translations of the

three selected plays from their respective periods will be examined with reference to

specific translation theories to identify the methods and strategies employed in

producing these avant-garde works. Simultaneously, the analysis will demonstrate how

these translation choices were shaped by the socio-cultural and political contexts of

their time.

This study is dedicated to investigating the factors influencing translation

strategies and methods, particularly those linked to the political and cultural landscape,

the ideological orientations of theatre practitioners, and the expectations of target

audiences within specific historical contexts. As the selected translation theories must

align with these research objectives, this section will engage with Lefevere's Poetics

and Ideology theories, Skopos theory, as well as the concepts of Domestication and

Foreignisation, alongside perspectives on theatre translation relevant to the study.

2.1. Theatre Translation and Relevance Theories

In this thesis, the textual analyses of three selected plays primarily aim to identify

and elucidate the shifts, that is, the 'departure from formal correspondence in the

process of transitioning from the ST (source text) to the TT (target text)' (Catford,

1965/2000, pp. 141-143) and to examine the translation strategies and methods employed that result in such a shift. Furthermore, the reasons and driving forces underpinning or catalysing these shifts, in terms of socio-cultural and political influences, are also among the main research objectives. As descriptive translation study (DTS) strives to depict translation as it occurs and provide an explanation for it (rather than prescribing what translation ought to be or how it should be conducted) (Toury, 1995/2012). The decision to employ a Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) approach arises from the thesis's objective of comparing how the same source texts were rendered differently in the Chinese avant-garde translations versus other commonly used Chinese translations predating the avant-garde adaptations. Rather than focusing on the merits of one strategy over another, the DTS framework is applied here to reveal and understand the socio-cultural and political influences that shaped the translation strategies evident in these avant-garde versions.

This shall concentrate on translation theories along with discussions related to theatre translation studies, and introduce the translation methods utilised in translating certain theatre texts. These theories establish the relevant theoretical foundations for the textual analyses in the subsequent part of the paper to uncover the socio-cultural and political influences on the translation process of selected avant-garde plays. Chapter 2 considers three categories of translation theories, namely first poetics and ideology, and the second *Skopos*, domestication and foreignisation, together with theatre translation discussions and a summary of translation strategies frequently employed in theatre translation practice that seem relevant to my argument in this

dissertation.

2.1.1 Lefevere's Poetics and Ideology

Leading translation theorists in the field of international translation studies, such as Susan Bassnett, André Lefevere, and Lawrence Venuti, have moved beyond the traditional emphasis on linguistic conversion between source and target languages or the comparative analysis of two literary traditions. Instead, they have collectively expanded the scope of translation studies by examining translation through a broader cultural lens. This shift, referred to as the "cultural turn" in translation studies, has become a prevailing paradigm in Western translation theory. The cultural turn has encouraged scholars to look beyond the linguistic transformation within the source and target texts—while acknowledging that this remains a crucial aspect of the discipline—and to explore a range of external factors influencing translation. These include the initiator of the translation (the entity commissioning or advocating for the translation of a literary work), the operator (the translator executing the translation), and the recipient (the audience engaging with the translated work within a specific cultural framework). This expanded focus allows for more comprehensive reflections on the essence, purpose, and positioning of translation within broader socio-cultural contexts.

Within this framework of cultural analysis, Lefevere's theory of manipulation has emerged as a significant contribution. Lefevere (1992) asserts that translation constitutes a rewriting of the original work. All rewritings, regardless of their intention, inherently contain certain ideological and poetic patterns that manipulate literature to

serve a specific purpose within a given society and these patterns can be reflected from translations. He contends that there exists a control mechanism within the literary system that ensures its alignment with the rest of the system. Lefevere not only draws upon Even-Zohar's characterisation of literature as a system but also expands on this with a comprehensive account of the influences the literary system undergoes within the social system. Within the literary system, translation acts as a subsidiary system; thus, literary translation is subject to two types of manipulation within the system of literature, one of which is internal to the literary system which is poetic of translation, and the second is external to the literary system, which is patronage (Lefevere 2004, 26).

Regarding manipulation within the system, it can be interpreted as the poetics of literature, emanating largely from the professional scholars, critics, reviewers, and translators within the literary system. Poetics encompasses, firstly, literary devices, genres, themes, archetypal characters, situations, and symbols, and secondly, the role of literature within the entire social system (2004b). This group of individuals exerts control over how translations should be adapted to the literary milieu of their time of production. Furthermore, the role of the literary system within the social system at that time also impacts the translation and the translator.

Extending Lefevere's concept of poetics to the realm of translation studies, the strategies and methods employed by translators can be likened to "literary techniques," while a translator's theoretical stance and interpretative approach parallel the "role and function of literature within a social system." Translation poetics, therefore, serves as

both a conceptual framework and a practical tool for understanding translation practices. It encompasses not only the techniques and methodologies employed by translators but also the guiding principles and evaluative standards established by specific social groups regarding what constitutes translation and the role it should fulfil. A translator's poetic outlook thus integrates both their strategic approaches and their conceptual views on the purpose and influence of translation.

Translation strategy refers to the translator's operational framework and overarching approach, while translation thought encompasses the translator's broader comprehension, conceptual understanding, and value systems developed during translation activities or practice. This concept involves examining the literary rationale for the existence of the translated text, its cultural value, the methods through which literary meaning is generated, the linguistic prerequisites for translated literature, and the aesthetic frameworks used to interpret it. In translation practice, two texts are present: the original text and the translated text. To ensure fidelity and relevance, the translator must analyse the poetic characteristics and functions of the original, while considering the poetic modifications and constraints inherent in the process of rewriting. Additionally, the prevailing poetics of the time and the influence of classical poetic forms on literary, cultural, and societal transformation must be accounted for. The poetic stance and attitudes of both the source and target contexts act as significant influences in shaping the translation.

Whether a translator adheres to or diverges from dominant poetics directly determines their fundamental translation strategy and shapes their handling of linguistic

and stylistic elements, including conceptual frameworks and cultural norms specific to the original author. This decision ultimately constitutes the translator's unique poetics. In the context of drama translation, the translator's conceptual framework for the translation informs their selection of strategies and methods, ultimately influencing how the play is adapted for the target audience.

The structural differences between English and Chinese, including rhythm, grammar, and sentence construction, necessitate a flexible approach in cross-cultural translation. While ensuring an accurate comprehension of the original text, the translator often needs to restructure sentences according to the preferences and norms of the target language audience while preserving the original meaning. Form and meaning are prominent grammatical distinctions between the two languages. Chinese sentences frequently rely on verb repetition and dynamic expression, whereas English sentences tend to be more static, often employing varied lexical choices to convey the same message. Therefore, when translating from Chinese to English, the translator must carefully adapt sentence structures based on the syntactic conventions of both languages to align with the reading habits of the target audience.

The second type of influence, originating from outside the literary system, is patronage. Patrons are the forces capable of promoting or impeding the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature, including powerful individuals or groups, or organisations and social groups that govern the dissemination of literature, such as religious institutions, political parties, social classes, publishers, and the media (Lefevere 1992, 15). They can be categorised into three types: ideological, economic, and status.

Translation patronage affects translators' translation activities and the reception of translations primarily at three levels: economic, social status, and ideological. Economically, they provide translators with financial support, such as manuscript fees, salaries, and positions, to ensure their livelihood; in terms of social status, they can bestow literary fame, status, and honour; and ideologically, they ensure that the ideas and contents of the works align with the dominant poetic form or the public's expectations. On one hand, the translator must strive not to conflict with the ideology of the target language culture to publish their translation. If the original text conflicts with the ideology of the target language culture, the translator must address the problematic contents of the original text, either by revising them or by omitting them from the translation. On the other hand, the translation needs to be published, marketed, made accessible to readers, and adhere to the poetic vision of the target language culture (Lefevere 2006, 87).

Although 'patronage' is an external factor, the translator remains the primary agent of translation. However, when faced with a range of equally viable choices, the influence of the 'patron' can be pivotal. The translation embodies not only the original author's voice and the translator's interpretation but also the influence of 'patronage' (Bai Liping 2016, p. 302), which, in certain situations, can confront each other and introduce resistance to translation activities. Thus, the patron of translation, by leveraging economic, social status, and ideological support to foster close integration within and outside the literary system, coordinates the relationship between the translator and the publishing agency, ideology, and poetic system. The publication and

circulation of the translation result from the cooperation of many parties. For Lefevere (1992, 39), ideology and poetics assume a more significant role in the translation process than linguistic differences.

In line with Lefevere's perspectives on literary translation, theatre translation is similarly pertinent. Although the current theories of theatre translation have not developed a comprehensive system akin to that of literary translation, the field of theatre translation, as Marinetti (2013a, pp.307-309) posits, should not be overlooked. Indeed, the past two decades have seen a vibrant evolution in theatre translation, evidenced by a range of monographs, theoretical articles, and essay collections. If we apply Lefevere's theory and conceive of theatre as a system, a substantial number of these studies align closely with Lefevere's theories, especially regarding the profound impact of poetics and ideology.

Reflecting the influence of poetics, as per Lefevere, theatrical critics, scholars, and playwrights exert predominant control over the translation process. Brodie underscored the distinction between literary and theatre translation, with the latter placing greater emphasis on performance and the text's users, comprising theatre practitioners (including directors, actors, editors, translators, and audiences) and theatre researchers (Wilson and Maher 2012). It is clear that the participants in the theatre translation process significantly influence the creation of the target text and its performance.

Beyond the crucial roles of the audience and translators, Cristina Marinetti (2013a)

suggested that a holistic approach is necessary, extending the consideration beyond the audience to include the unique roles of all individuals within the theatrical system, such as actors, directors, and designers. Likewise, David Johnston, an academic, playwright, and theatre translator, described translation as a "re-creative art" (Johnston, 2015, p. 2) and highlighted that theatrical recreation is a collaborative endeavour, necessitating the translator's interaction with the source author as well as collaboration with directors and actors (Morini, 2022, p. 61). Johnstone acknowledges the unavoidable reality that translations do not merely extend the original source texts with varying degrees of authenticity but inevitably reflect the perspectives of translators. These perspectives are shaped by their personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and understanding of the target audience and culture. Cristina Marinetti and Enza De Francisci (2022, pp. 250 – 252) emphasised the importance of agents or "text users" (in Brodie's terms), including editors, publishers, critics, and translators, who participate in and contribute to the translation process. This perspective aligns with Johnston's assertion regarding the influence of the translator on the translated work, emphasising that the translator's personal ideology is inevitably embedded within the translation. Furthermore, when translators engage with a text, they are also subject to the expectations of editors and publishers, whose influence, as economic patrons, plays a pivotal role in shaping translation strategies. Finally, the contributions of critics, viewed through the lens of translation theory, also exert significant influence on the translation process, contributing to the shaping of the final work. It is apparent that these insights from theatre translation scholars are in harmony with Lefevere's theory of poetics influence.

Pavis (1984, p. 41) observed that theatre translation is conveyed through gesture and deeply rooted in culture, rather than being merely based on words and letters. Bassnett (1998, pp. 96 – 98) also stressed the linguistic challenge of preserving the original play within a new cultural milieu. She pondered on how to capture the style of Italian lesser nobility without resorting to the 'parodic language of the P.G. Wodehouse variety' and, more specifically, without compromising visual effects. If theatre translation is regarded as a cultural transposition that values the function of the target text and culture, then it must endeavour, in the translation process, to "add or alter" rather than merely "adapt" or differ, as highlighted by Morini (2022, 34).

Bassnett viewed theatre translation as a cultural transposition, valuing the function of the target text and culture as influential in the translation process. However, she advocated for nuanced alterations to the original work rather than drastic changes. Echoing Pavis and Bassnett, Terry Hale and Carole-Anne Upton (2014) in their publication Moving Target: Theatre Translation and Cultural Adaptation, remarked that the cultural transplantation of a foreign play raises issues not addressed in theatre translation studies concerned with whether a source text is domesticated into the target culture or presented as foreign. These debates on culture-related challenges in theatre translation, corresponding with Lefevere's notion of poetics in terms of the role and acceptance of the target text in the target culture, underscore the importance of considering the cultural and social context in theatre translation, paving the way for applying relevant perspectives in textual analyses. Morespecifically, given the

idiosyncratic nature of the Chinese socio-cultural spectrum, and its evolution during the decades under analysis in this thesis, these theoretical considerations are more pertinent in order to arrive as an understanding of theatre production translations which is both comprehensive and accurate.

Drawing upon the ideological paradigms adapted from Lefevere, the ideology of theatrical translators predominantly governs. The term "ideology" was first introduced by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy to describe the "science of ideas." Over time, the term evolved to encompass both a narrow and a broad meaning. In its narrow definition, ideology refers specifically to political beliefs, while in its broader sense, it represents a reflection of societal existence, encompassing thoughts, ideas, and intellectual frameworks. The Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci elaborated on this broader interpretation, describing ideology as "the common-sense conception of the world, which is self-evidently embodied in art, law, economic activity and all the manifestations of individual and collective life" (Howarth, 2000, p.89).

Translation scholars Hatim and Mumday define ideology as a system of assumptions, beliefs, and values shared by members of a social group. Similarly, Lefevere (2004, p.16) characterises ideology broadly as "normative forms of action, customs, and belief systems." Building on this, Lefevere asserts that ideology plays a central role in translation, stating: "Every aspect of the translation process shows that if considerations of language come into conflict with considerations such as ideology and/or poetics, considerations of ideology will always win out" (Lefevere, 2004, p.39). This influence is particularly evident in the formulation and implementation of

translation principles and the establishment of translation models.

The concept of ideology extends beyond political doctrines to include broader societal norms, traditions, and belief systems that influence behaviour. Ideology is inherently a product of society and culture, and where culture exists, a specific ideological framework is invariably present. Wang Dongfeng (2003) emphasises that "translation, fundamentally speaking, is the import of the ideology of a foreign culture into the ideology of the local culture. For the local value system, this is a kind of external cultural infiltration, which means destruction, subversion, and therefore a test of the local culture." Therefore, considering the significant role of ideology, translators must approach expressions linked to ideological content with caution, filtering cultural elements appropriately to minimise potential conflicts arising from differing ideological perspectives.

As Eva Espasa (2000, 49 – 62) underscored in her exploration of theatre translation, beyond the issue of performability, the significance of ideology is crucial in theatre translation studies. Maria Tymoczko (2003, 183) articulated that the cultural background and ideology of the theatre translator exert a significant influence on the target text. Moreover, the cultural and ideological stance of a translator holds more sway than the temporal and spatial position from which they operate in the translation process. In a similar vein, Konstantinos Kritsis (2013, 84 – 85), in his PhD thesis 'Exploring Theatre Translation: The Role of the Translator in the Context of a Stanislavskian Actor', asserted that translators' educational and professional backgrounds, their preferences for works, and their economic circumstances all yield an inevitable

influence on the translation of theatrical works. These factors are perceived as being influenced by patrons in terms of ideology and economic circumstances[5] in theatre translation.

The influence of poetics and ideology on theatre translation is particularly pertinent to this study for several reasons: poetics primarily entails the impact of directors, scholars, critics, and translators of the plays on the plays selected for this dissertation. Initially, the genesis of the translations of these three plays is facilitated through collaboration between the translator and the director (details to be discussed prior to the textual analysis chapters), with the director playing a pivotal role in the rendition of the translations, as noted in the contextualisation section. Chinese avant-garde plays reflect the director's critique of the social and humanistic milieu during those three phases; hence, the social environment's influence on the director will inevitably affect the director's decision-making process. Consequently, the influence of the social milieu on the director will invariably be mirrored in the translated text ultimately chosen by the director under the condition that the director is involved in the translation, and translator remains true and faithful and cognizant of the original intention underpinning the Source Text.

Another dimension of the influence of poetics on the translated texts concerns how the three translated texts are to be assimilated into the target culture, alongside their role and status within that culture. Therefore, the target cultural milieu of the three stages of

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[5] Economics would not be focused in the textual analyses, as according to translator and director's brief, the economic situation did not influence the translation work.

development of Chinese avant-garde theatre was in constant flux, and the roles and statuses during those times varied, leading to the manipulation (influence) of the three texts selected from different periods to ensure their integration into the socio-cultural environment of those times, which constitutes one of the principal research topics of the textual analysis.

The ideology level primarily encompasses the translator's comprehension of the cultural milieu during the translation process, their contentment with society, as well as the rendition of the translated texts in this study. However, the reality is that the translation in this research, pertaining to three chosen plays, arises from the collaborative creation of the translator and the director. The translation of the first Chinese avant-garde play was undertaken by Ying Ruocheng, who also served as both co-director and actor in the production, created during the first period (late 1970s to 1988). The second translation, completed during the second period (1989 to 1992), involved a translator working closely with director Lin Zhaohua. The third translation, developed in the third period (1993 to 2000), was both adapted and directed by Lin Zhaohua himself. In this regard, director of three chosen plays possessed more significant discourse power, hence the ideology predominantly pertains to the director. As previously mentioned, in distinct time periods, the director's reflections on society, which are also depicted in the scripts, indicate that the impact of ideology, intertwined with the social and cultural environment, on the translations of the three avant-garde theatre plays is a principal focus of the study.

Therefore, by amalgamating Lefevere's theory of poetics and the discussions by theatre translation scholars that resonate with this theory, a theoretical framework suitable for achieving the aims of this study can be formulated, enabling a more impartial, critical and comprehensive analysis of the influence of socio-cultural and political contexts on the translations through three case studies. In regarding, in light of this theoretical framework, it can fill in the research gap mentioned in Chapter 1 regarding there are no comprehensive analyses on Chinese avant-garde translation.

2.1.2 Skopos, Domestication, and Foreignisation

While the theories discussed in the preceding section are instrumental in examining the broader socio-cultural impacts on the translation of Chinese avant-garde theatre, the specific objective of the translation act also warrants exploration. '*Skopos*' is a Greek term signifying 'purpose' or 'aim' (Vermeer 2014). Since Vermeer introduced this concept to translation studies in the 1970s, three meanings have been attributed to it: the purpose of the translation process, the function of the *translatum*,reffers to an offer of information in a target culture and language concerning an offer of information in a source culture and source language), and the intention behind the translation method (Vermeer 1989 and2000, 224).

In essence, within translation activities, the aim of translation is the paramount criterion that translators ought to adhere to. This implies that the translator has the liberty to employ their subjective initiative to make omissions and additions to the translated text to fulfil their intended purpose, rather than compromising the primary objective for the

sake of adhering to the original text's form. Once the translation meets the coherence requirement, the translator can then consider its fidelity to the original. The coherence principle mandates that the translation should achieve intra-linguistic coherence, meaning the translation's reader can fully grasp the conveyed information. Conversely, the fidelity principle necessitates the translator's commitment to the translation through a faithful approach. However, when the coherence principle clashes with the purpose principle, the former becomes subordinate. The hierarchy among these principles is such that the coherence and fidelity principles are subservient to the purpose principle.

This implies that the translator must make decisions based on the target text's communicative objective during the translation process. Typically, the individual commissioning the translation fulfils the TT's aim. Conversely, the translator establishes the TT's purpose at the outset of the translational endeavour. The anticipated expectations and requirements of the target audience constitute a significant portion of the TT's purpose, which may deviate from that of the ST. Vermeer's *skopos* theory is innovative insofar that it enables translators to create multiple versions of a single source text, sidestepping the need for equivalence between the source and target languages. Additionally, Vermeer posits that this translational action theory is "universal" in scope and is not confined to any specific language or cultural pair ((Reiss and Vermeer 2014; Christiane and Li 2013).

In theatre translation studies, much of the debate regarding the aim of theatre translation is centred on satisfying the performance's requirements, with the audience naturally

being the primary consideration in achieving this aim. Marco (2002, p. 58) highlighted

the critical role of audience reception in theatre translations. Beyond the audience, his

perspective encompasses the needs of the stage performance, which he categorises into

two facets. Firstly, the translation must be comprehensible to the audience, ensuring

their understanding; and secondly, it should be apt for the actors' stage execution. For

instance, the language's colloquialism level, rhetorical style, and rhythm should align

with the performance demands and effectively transmit the characters' emotions and the

play's themes (Zuo, Syed, and Haw 2023). Zuo, Syed, and Haw (2023) noted that,

unlike literary translations where readers can ponder over unfamiliar languages and

cultures, plays translated for performance present to an audience that lacks the leisure

to digest and comprehend the foreign cultural context of the play. Robert Stock (2022,

p. 49) added that while the significance of the audience has gained increasing

acknowledgment among scholars, many still overlook the audience's influence in

theatre translations, asserting that 'without an audience, there is no theatre.' These

viewpoints can be correlated with my study to investigate whether the translator's

selection of various translation methods aims to accommodate or challenge the

audience's acceptance. Furthermore, it will also examine whether translators influenced

by directors' ideologies accomplish the objective of reflecting the directors' critical

reassessment of those plays in light of differing socio-political contexts in the textual

analysis. Thus, the *skopos* theory proves advantageous for this study in uncovering the

translation strategies deployed in translating the three selected plays at different

development stages by examining the intents of translators and directors within the

socio-political milieu.

Within the context of textual analysis, the discussion inevitably encompasses translation strategies. Lefevere's theory, while articulating translation methods such as 'deletion', 'rewriting', and 'addition', necessitates an extended discussion on the concepts of foreignisation and domestication. The eminent translation scholar Lawrence Venuti (1995, 20) has been a vocal proponent of the translator's invisibility within the translation process. He describes foreignisation as a translation technique that introduces source language realia, crafting a 'non-fluent' or 'alien reading experience' for target readers. This approach intentionally disrupts the cultural hegemony and narcissism prevalent within the target culture, advocating for the preservation of linguistic and cultural nuances from the source text. This, Venuti argues, confronts and challenges the prevailing dominance of the target culture.

Conversely, Venuti (2013)characterises domestication as a strategy aimed at producing fluid translations for the target readership, with the primary goal of diminishing the 'otherness' inherent in the foreign culture of the source text. Contrary to his support for foreignisation, Venuti perceives domestication as a methodology that is "aggressively monolingual and unreceptive to the foreign." This approach invisibly embeds the foreign texts with the values of the target language, thus offering readers a somewhat narcissistic reflection of their own cultural norms within a foreign cultural framework (ibid., 15). However, Venuti later nuanced his stance, acknowledging the inevitability and, to some extent, the necessity of domestication within certain contexts. After revisiting the theories of prominent scholars and translators, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Antoine Berman, Venuti (2013) reconceptualised foreignisation as an ethical translation framework that seeks to honour and convey cultural otherness. He

posited that translators ought to reconfigure cultural disparities within the target language's paradigms (Laera 2020, 50), delineating domestication as a tactic that reduces foreign influences on domestic cultural values, whereas foreignisation strives to maintain the linguistic and cultural distinctions of the source text within the target text (Venuti, 2008).

Furthermore, Johnston (2015) elaborates that the cultural context of the target society and the preferences of the target audience significantly influence the translator's decision to either remain 'detached from' or 'engaged with' the 'complex configurations and multi-layered histories' of the target cultures. This delineation emphasises the nuanced decision-making process in translation, balancing between adhering to and diverging from the cultural expectations of the target audience.

Distinctly differing from Venuti's position, Eugene Nida is often regarded as a strong advocate for domestication. Nida argued for the minimisation of the source text's foreignness to avoid any disruptions caused by the source language within the target text. Moreover, Robinson critiques the "quaintness of foreignised texts" as potentially rendering their authors and the source culture as "childish, backward, or primitive." This perception, ironically, is the very outcome that foreignisation seeks to mitigate. (Hedger 2006, 60). Domestication, therefore, refers to a translation approach that aims for transparency and fluency, reducing the foreignness of a text to make it more accessible to target language readers, while foreignisation embodies a deliberate defiance of target norms, retaining elements of the source text's inherent foreignness.

The incorporation of these two influential translation strategies within this study is necessitated by their application to the trio of case studies examined, each influenced by the Chinese social milieu at the time of translation and the evolving preferences of

Chinese audiences from 1980 to 2000. Furthermore, an in-depth exploration of the social context, alongside the needs and reception of audiences across these diverse epochs, forms a cornerstone of the textual analysis conducted within this dissertation. This intertwining of *Skopos* theory with debates surrounding poetics and ideological impacts illustrates the nuanced overlap between these concepts in theatre translation, particularly regarding audience influence. As articulated by Tymoczko (2003, p. 49), the ideology inherent in translation permeates not only the text but also the translator's voice and stance, extending its reach to audience engagement. Thus, the ideological perspectives of both the translator and the director, who exerts influence over the translator, are of paramount importance, resonating with the socio-cultural backdrop of the era in question.

2.2 Methodology and Data

The purpose of this research is to investigate three emblematic translations of Chinese avant-garde plays, aiming to shed light on the socio-cultural and political dynamics shaping translation practices. As mentioned previously, the exhaustive coverage of all translations falls beyond the scope of this study; thus, a singular representative piece from each identified period has been selected for an in-depth qualitative analysis. This methodological approach combines comparative analysis with an investigation into the context and process, presenting a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter.

In order to achieve a detailed and nuanced comparative analysis within translation studies, the translated piece is designated as the target text (TT), and the original

composition is referred to as the source text (ST). Despite some contention surrounding this terminology, it remains a widely accepted convention in textual analysis (Pym, 2004), and as such, will be employed throughout the analytical chapters of this dissertation. Comparative analysis entails a juxtaposition of the ST and TT, focusing primarily on linguistic alterations encompassing lexical, semantic, and stylistic modifications as identified by Catford (1965). These shifts often stem from grammatical divergences between languages, alongside variations in idiomatic expressions and metaphorical frameworks (Chesterman, 1997). Translators typically navigate between two primary linguistic strategies: adhering closely to the original language's structure and lexicon or modifying words and linguistic constructs to effectively communicate the original text's meaning. The choice of strategy is influenced by myriad factors, including performance requirements, directorial vision, audience expectations, and organisational demands specific to theatre translation. Comparative analysis thus zeroes in on the linguistic and semantic discrepancies between the texts, elucidating the mechanisms behind these transformations.

In the examination of context and process, Glynn (2020) argues that the target text is profoundly influenced by its cultural surroundings. This perspective is in harmony with Venuti's (2012, 69) assertion regarding the significant effect of the target language, culture, and setting on the translation process. Despite Glynn's observation of the lack of a structured model for theatre translation, the impact of the target culture and these pivotal contributors is congruent with the theories explored in this discourse, serving as a foundational element for the detailed textual analysis that follows.

Building upon these analytical frameworks, this investigation will extend beyond a mere comparison of the original texts with their translations among three case studies of Chinese avant-garde translations. Specifically, the analysis will juxtapose the original foreign-language text, its avant-garde translation, and a widely acknowledged translation preceding the avant-garde rendition, which will serve as a benchmark. This methodological choice is driven by the observation that all three selected plays had undergone translation into Chinese prior to the advent of the Chinese avant-garde theatre movement. However, these earlier translations starkly contrast with the avant-garde versions, highlighting the transformations instigated by socio-political dynamics of the era. By selecting a reference Chinese translation for each piece, the study aims to elucidate the manner in which the socio-cultural landscape at the time of the Chinese avant-garde plays' translations influenced the translation techniques employed by translators and directors.

The corpus for this study encompasses the original scripts of the three Chinese avant-garde translated plays, their avant-garde and pre-avant-garde Chinese translations, scholarly works including books, essays, dissertations, collections of essays, and theses focusing on Chinese avant-garde theatre studies. Additionally, autobiographies and memoirs of directors and translators, interviews with theatre practitioners, and academic works on translation studies and theatre translation methodologies contribute to the rich dataset underpinning this analysis.

Chapter 3. *Tuixiaoyuan Zhisi* (*Death of a Salesman*) by Ying Ruocheng, 1983

This chapter investigates the avant-garde features of *Death of a Salesman*, translated by Ying Ruocheng, through a comparative text analysis method. This analytical approach explores the translation strategies that result in avant-garde characteristics, both in linguistic style and the socio-cultural and political influences affecting such choices. The chapter opens with sections 3.1 and 3.2, which introduce the original text of *Death of a Salesman*, the avant-garde version, and a comparative edition to provide background context. This foundation assists readers in understanding the development of Ruocheng's avant-garde rendition. Section 3.3 offers a broad overview of the linguistic elements in Ruocheng's translation, clarifying the selection of textual examples in section 3.5. Section 3.4 comprises a literature review, summarising existing studies on the 1983 Chinese translation of *Death of a Salesman* to identify gaps in textual analysis research related to this version. Building on these elements, section 3.5 applies a comparative text analysis approach, alongside the socio-cultural and political context established in chapter 1 and the theoretical framework discussed in chapter 2, to address those gaps. By focusing on Ruocheng's translation, this chapter illustrates how socio-political and cultural conditions influence avant-garde theatre translations, contributing to the study's central research question.

3.1 Introduction to the Original *Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller*

Arthur Miller is widely recognised as one of the most significant American playwrights of the 20th century. His works combined social critique with moral inquiry, presenting fully developed characters and conveying a deep concern for their personal struggles (Ou and Qian 2013, 57). *Death of a Salesman* is among Miller's most celebrated works, achieving critical acclaim after its premiere in the United States on 10 February 1949. Ultimately, it had a

successful run of 742 performances.

Death of a Salesman narrates the downfall of Willy Loman, a man overwhelmed by misguided ideals, which largely reflect the societal values of his time, and his inability to adjust to both personal and social change. The central themes of the play—denial, contradiction, and the tension between order and disorder—are embodied within Willy's character (Scheidt, 2011). Willy persistently denies his professional shortcomings and frequently contradicts himself. For instance, he refers to Biff as a "lazy bum" only to describe him moments later as "such a hard worker". His inconsistent behaviour extends to his interactions; while he refuses to accept Biff's disrespect, he simultaneously acknowledges their fractured relationship yet clings to positive memories from the past. This retreat into nostalgia actually paralyses him emotionally. By fixating on the past and avoiding reality, Willy constructs a distorted sense of reality to mask his dissatisfaction with the present (Scheidt, 2011). His personality, circumstances, and interpersonal dynamics are reflective of the recurring themes of denial, contradiction, and the tension between order and disorder.

This depiction of Willy Loman as a contradictory and unstable figure is closely tied to the historical context of the United States during that era. When Miller was a teenager, his family suffered significant hardship during the Great Depression, as his father lost his clothing business, forcing them to move into smaller accommodation following the Wall Street Crash. Miller also witnessed the effects of World War II and its aftermath. From his early years through his time as a university student and beyond, his difficult life experiences profoundly shaped his perspectives and creative work. Miller (1949) asserted, "I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing—his sense of personal dignity." The lasting effects of both the Great Depression and World War II had a considerable impact on how Miller's writing examined the hardships faced by particular social groups in American society. He centred his narratives around ordinary, vulnerable people in the US, individuals striving to improve their circumstances—much like himself during his formative years.

Amidst growing urbanisation and technological advancements, Willy was perceived as a representation of 'social tragedy' within a 'mammon-worshipping, hypocritical society', which contributed significantly to his bleak living conditions. He recognised his lack of individual importance in the social structure yet resisted being reduced to a mere insignificant component within it—an echo of Miller's own feelings of invisibility while grappling with poverty. Willy Loman denied reality and rejected societal norms but lacked the capacity to actively resist them. He struggled to cope with the rapid social transformations around him, aligning him with the vulnerable groups Miller frequently highlighted in his work. However, these vulnerable groups comprised the majority of the American population at the time—working-class individuals trying to navigate systemic challenges. Thus, Willy's personal tragedy serves as a broader reflection of the experiences of the common people in the United States during that period (Narayanan, 2015).

3.2 Introduction on the Chinese version of Death of a Salesman

As outlined in Chapter 2, Chinese avant-garde theatrical works that emerged between 1980 and 2000 were shaped by distinct social and cultural contexts of the period. The original *Death of a Salesman* was written during a time when the United States was recovering from the devastation of World War II and the Great Depression, transitioning into a period of economic growth and prosperity during the 1950s and 1960s. In contrast, China, during the post-Cultural Revolution phase, was beginning to open up as a result of the reform and opening-up policy initiated in the early 1980s. Since the social conditions in China during the early 1980s differed significantly from the period when *Death of a Salesman* was originally written, a deeper understanding of the play's selection and translation process is necessary to discuss its Chinese avant-garde adaptation more effectively. The introduction of such a controversial work to Chinese audiences was closely linked to the normalisation of Sino-American relations. Positive diplomatic interactions between China and the US in the late 1970s facilitated increasing collaboration and cultural exchange between theatrical professionals from both countries.

In 1978, Arthur Miller visited China as a guest of the Chinese People's Association for

Friendship with Foreign Countries (the Association). This visit introduced Miller's plays to China and sparked the interest of Chinese dramatists and theatre scholars (Ou and Qian 2013, 58). A year later, in 1979, *The Crucible* (renamed *Salem's Witch* for Chinese audiences) was adapted and directed by Huang Zuolin. It became Miller's first play to be translated and staged in China, achieving notable success with a run of 50 performances (Ou and Qian, 2013, p.58). Building on this achievement, *Death of a Salesman* was translated by Chen Liangting later that same year.

In the autumn of 1982, Ying Ruocheng made his second visit to the United States as a visiting professor, where he explored the possibility of collaborating with Miller on staging another of his plays in China (Ou and Qian, 2013, p.60). Ying was determined to invite Miller to co-direct *Death of a Salesman* with full participation from Chinese theatre practitioners. Miller expressed surprise that no foreign director had previously attempted to direct such a play for both Chinese actors and audiences, a sentiment he recorded in his book *Salesman in Beijing* (1984, p.vii). The introduction of *Death of a Salesman* to China represented a bold artistic undertaking.

However, Miller initially doubted whether Chinese audiences would fully grasp the commercial terminology in his play, given that terms such as "salesman" and "insurance" lacked direct equivalents in the Chinese context. Ying countered by arguing that "a story of persecution wasn't enough anymore, and China's trauma had gone much deeper than the persecution of intellectuals," seeking to persuade Miller that *The Crucible* would not present a fresh concept to Chinese audiences (Ying and Conceison, 2009, p.169). Considering the previously mentioned cultural landscape of the early 1980s, when literary and artistic circles explored new theatrical forms influenced by Western avant-garde trends encouraged by relaxed policies, Ruocheng's remarks can be understood as suggesting that Chinese theatre and audiences during this period no longer required works that solely criticised the Cultural Revolution or centred on themes of oppression, as these no longer captivated the public's interest. Instead, audiences sought innovative forms and novel ideas in drama. In this context, *Death of a Salesman*,

employing stream of consciousness, symbolism, and expressionist techniques, provided the kind of performance Chinese theatre and its audience were seeking in 1983.

Despite his initial reservations, Miller was ultimately persuaded that *Death of a Salesman* could succeed and embraced his role as an artistic mentor, introducing novel approaches to script development and performance techniques that were largely absent from Chinese theatre at the time (Kong 2007,50). Ying Ruocheng's innovative script production focused primarily on the use of colloquial language throughout the translation, incorporating distinctive features such as informal, modernised terms for parental address, bold use of vulgar expressions, and candid articulations of the desire for success. These stylistic elements were absent from earlier Chinese translations of *Death of a Salesman* and had not been previously observed in Chinese theatre before the 1980s.

3.3. Linguistic and Artistic Features of the Translation

Before Ying Ruocheng's adaptation, two Chinese translations of *Death of a Salesman* had been published—Yao Ke's 1971 version and Chen Liangting's 1979 translation, the latter released shortly after Miller's visit to China. Both versions are regarded as significant contributions, with Yao's work being more literary, crafted primarily for publication, while Chen's script was more suited for theatrical performance (Wang 2016, 165). Given the intended purposes of these translations and the limited availability of Yao's script, this dissertation will focus on Chen's version for analysis. Furthermore, Chen's translation has been widely cited in academic studies, as referenced in section 3.4.3. Its relatively straightforward language style, which closely resembles a stage script, was considered more adaptable for live performance and better suited to the expectations of audiences in the early 1980s.

Ying Ruocheng did not use either Yao's or Chen's translations, as he felt their literary style was unsuited for the stage. Instead, he created his own translation, as documented in his autobiography, *Voices Carry: Behind Bars and Backstage during China's Revolution and Reform* (2009). Over six weeks, he developed a more conversational and rhythmically balanced

Chinese script, ensuring it was suitable for both rehearsals and live performance (Ying and Conceison 2009, 168). Referring back to the Skopos theory explored in Chapter 2, Ruocheng's translation was specifically crafted for stage use, with a focus on meeting the expectations of the audience and facilitating ease of use for performers. He adapted the language style by employing domestication techniques, translating the script into natural, everyday language, including idiomatic expressions, informal language, rhetorical devices, and analogies—elements that will be examined further in the textual analysis. Ying prioritised conveying the play's meaning clearly to ensure his audience could better engage with the narrative, leading to the naturalisation of much of the script. His efforts not only satisfied Miller but also earned praise from other theatre practitioners and scholars, including Zuolin (1982), who remarked that Ruocheng's translation left no trace of being a translation. Created in the post-Cultural Revolution era, Ying Ruocheng's version was celebrated for the effectiveness of its relaxed stage dialogue, its use of colloquial expressions, proverbs, four-character idioms, and its enhanced dramatic impact.

3.4 *Literature Review*

Existing studies on Ying Ruocheng's translation of *Death of a Salesman* can be categorised into three areas of focus: historical significance, performative critique, and textual analysis. The first area explores the play's historical importance as the first Western drama translated and introduced to China after the Cultural Revolution. The second area examines elements such as costumes and make-up in performance. The third, which forms the largest body of research, involves textual analysis through a single translation theory, including Skopos theory, domestication, and foreignisation, often employing a case study research approach.

3.4.1 Historical Significance

Scholars Ou and Qian provided a comprehensive overview of the entire process of translating and staging the 1983 Chinese version of *Death of a Salesman*, highlighting its historical significance in the evolution of Chinese theatre, a perspective rarely addressed in

existing research. Through a detailed account covering the selection of the play to its rehearsal stages, they explore the play's influence on cultural exchange between China and the United States, reflecting the significant strides made in Sino-American cultural relations during the early reform and opening-up period, as well as the post-Mao era's contributions to Chinese theatre development. While their study offers essential historical context for the textual analysis in this dissertation, their conclusion—that staging the play in Chinese holds historical and cultural value for the advancement of Chinese theatre—demonstrates the importance of my present research. Associate Professor of Asian Studies and English, Dr Belinda Kong (Brater, 2007, p.37), also acknowledged the significance of the Chinese adaptation. While she critically viewed the Chinese version of *Death of a Salesman* as an ideological tool of American cultural dominance over Chinese perspectives, she further argued that it was strategically utilised by "Chinese artist-intellectuals to navigate dangerous political waters." Despite these critiques, she shares similar views with Ou and Qian, affirming the play's historical importance. Kong emphasised that Miller introduced innovative performance techniques and expressions, such as expressionism and stream of consciousness—two stylistic methods studied and later incorporated by Chinese theatre scholars and practitioners, who adapted them for the Chinese stage as part of a broader effort to revitalise Chinese theatre (Constantinidis, 2008, p.218). Kong (2007, p.40) further noted that the adaptation of *Death of a Salesman* aligned with the broader national agenda of modernisation policies during that socio-political period and was consistent with Chinese theatre's evolving development.

Drawing from Ou and Qian's research, along with Kong's commentary, it becomes evident that the Chinese version of *Death of a Salesman* emerged from Ying Ruocheng's collaboration and communication with Miller, suggesting Ying's instrumental role in the translation process (Miller, 1985, p.27). The play's translation and stage presentation resulted from a cooperative exchange between Chinese theatre practitioners and Miller rather than a one-sided cultural imposition. While I share Kong's observation regarding the alignment with modernisation policies, her statement lacks further elaboration or critical depth.

Based on this absence, my textual analysis will further examine whether the features of social modernisation can be identified within the translated script. Beyond modernisation, I will also explore the presence of avant-garde elements in the translation, supported by Gao Zwien's (2012) research on the historical evolution of Chinese avant-garde theatre, which categorises the Chinese adaptation of *Death of a Salesman* as part of this artistic movement. Notably, none of the previously mentioned scholars directly address the avant-garde characteristics of this play. In my textual analysis of the Chinese translation, I will first examine how the play aligns with modernisation policies and, second, investigate its avant-garde elements to address the identified gap in current research.

3.4.2 Performative Critique

The second major focus of existing studies on the Chinese version of *Death of a Salesman* concerns the staging process. Regarding the play's production for the Chinese stage, Eide (1985, pp.239-240) concentrated on the actors' performances and stage costumes. Her research specifically examined two key challenges encountered by Miller and the Chinese actors during rehearsals: first, whether the production should adapt the narrative of an American salesman to fit the Chinese cultural setting or maintain its foreign context; and second, how to balance performance styles, as Miller noted that failing to retain cultural distance often led to exaggerated acting. According to Eide, these issues became particularly evident in decisions surrounding actors' makeup and performance styles. On the first issue, there were discussions regarding whether the actors should wear wigs and how heavily they should apply makeup on stage. Miller preferred some degree of localisation, believing it would convey universal human experiences, while the Chinese actors tended to prioritise authenticity by preserving the foreign nature of the original play (Eide 1985, 239). The second issue involved the Chinese actors' tendency to overact, attempting to perform every minor detail from the script to ensure the audience comprehended the plot clearly. Conversely, Miller preferred a more introspective performance, encouraging the actors to convey emotional depth rather than focus on literal storytelling (Eide 1985, 240).

I think it is instructive that Edie discussed these two issues. While her analysis of makeup techniques pertains strictly to theatre production and will not be discussed in this dissertation, her observations on overacting raise questions about whether the textual translation effectively conveys the inner emotional worlds of the translator, actors, and original playwright. This consideration is based on the fact that all these participants were directly engaged in the translation and production process, with Miller explicitly expressing his desire for the Chinese version to reflect deeper emotional layers, as noted above. Since this performative perspective appears underexplored, my dissertation will address it further in the textual analysis section. The exploration of emotional expression is significant as it can reflect broader socio-political influences, aligning with Lefevere's theory of how socio-political and personal ideologies shape textual adaptations. Furthermore, examining how these ideologies manifest within the translated and adapted play will be one of the research objectives of this dissertation.

3.4.3 Textual Analysis

The final category of existing research focuses on textual analysis at the linguistic level. While the characters and plot in the original text remain unchanged and there are no significant omissions or alterations in the dialogue of Ying's translation, the primary innovation lies in the linguistic adaptation. Ying Ruocheng (2014, pp. 335-340) observed that earlier translations of *Death of a Salesman* before his version were crafted in a written language style more suitable for publication than performance. As a result, these earlier translations were less effective for stage productions. In his autobiography, Ying (2014, pp. 335-340) explained that one of his key objectives was to produce a more conversational script, incorporating features such as concise, informal language and modern expressions to better suit both performers and audiences in early 1980s Chinese society. Similarly, Huang Zuolin (1983, p.2), in his review of a performance of *Death of a Salesman*, emphasised the significance of this linguistic breakthrough, stating, "I

cannot tell if the actor's lines are translated from another language, which can be considered a real achievement by Ying Ruocheng." Most existing studies examining this linguistic shift have generally concluded that Ying's Chinese translation reflects the influence of Skopos theory and primarily applies domestication strategies, within which various translation methods have been identified.

For instance, in Deng's study, *On Translating Strategy of Cultural Phenomena in Drama from a Skopos Theory Perspective – with Special Reference to Two Chinese Versions of Death of a Salesman* (2011), a comparative analysis of Chen Liangting's and Ying Ruocheng's translations was conducted, grounded in Skopos theory. Deng (2011, pp. 123-130) highlighted differences in the translation strategies employed by both translators, concluding that Ying primarily adopted a domestication strategy, while Chen's version followed a more foreignisation-based approach. This conclusion was drawn by comparing both translators' handling of rhetorical devices, idioms, and cultural references, with Chen leaning towards retaining foreign cultural markers. Another relevant example is presented in Wei's (2014, pp. 179-180) study, which examined Ying's use of domestication by analysing culturally loaded words, idioms, and interjections, providing two examples for each category. Wei (2014, p.180) argued that Ying prioritised creating a conversational style that would be more accessible to Chinese audiences, leading to his preference for a domestication strategy in the translation process. Although both of the above case studies identify the translation strategies used by Ying and Chen, they do not explore the underlying reasons for the choice of these strategies. Wu Wenquan (2005), in his doctoral dissertation *Intercultural Dialogue and Integration: Contemporary American Drama in China*, examined the motivations behind Ying's

domestication choices. Wu argued that Ying sought to produce a translation that aligned with the aesthetic preferences and ideological expectations of early 1980s Chinese audiences, who favoured clearly structured, concise, and spoken lines. Expanding on this idea, Wu further explained that because the play was initially staged in Beijing, one of the central hubs for the development of Chinese avant-garde theatre, Ying adapted the lower-middle-class New York dialect of the original text into the Beijing dialect. While making this adaptation, he retained the original script's structure, linguistic rhythm, and core meanings as closely as possible.

In addition to the audience-focused motivation for employing domestication, Wang (2013, 18-23) identified another objective behind the translator's use of this strategy in his publication, *The Analysis of Drama Translation from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory – A Case Study of Ying Ruocheng's Translation of Death of a Salesman*. Wang (2013, pp. 18-23) argued that Ying preserved elements of foreignness from Miller's original text by incorporating idiomatic expressions and the Beijing dialect through adaptation and addition techniques. Wang (2013, pp. 19-21) further asserted that the psychological expectations of Chinese audiences, specifically their desire for cultural resonance with foreign lifestyles, along with the stagnation of Chinese theatre practices at the time, necessitated reform in the Chinese theatrical landscape. Ying's application of domestication, paired with the socio-cultural context of China during the 1980s, was seen as contributing to this modernisation.

In addition to current research in light of skopos theory, Wang shared a similar perspective when viewed through Nida's functional theory, particularly in terms of achieving the informative, expressive, and operative functions evident in Ying's translation. Analysing the translated script using ten specific examples focused on the use of colloquial language in the

dialogue, Wang (2007) concluded that the informative function was most prominent in Ying's version, while the expressive and operative functions were also present. Furthermore, Wang (2007) emphasised that the core functions of Ying's translation were, first, to create a script suitable for actors during rehearsal and, second, to ensure the language choices aligned with the audience's preferences and expectations.

Existing studies demonstrate that Ying Ruocheng's translations were guided by Skopos theory and primarily adopted domestication strategies, successfully conveying the essence of the original text while resonating with the target audience without creating a sense of unfamiliarity. This approach served two key purposes: first, to convey the original ideas as faithfully as possible, while adapting expressions where direct semantic equivalents were unavailable in the target language. For example, the speech patterns of the American lower-middle class were adapted into the Beijing dialect. The second, perhaps more significant aim, was the use of domestication strategies to align with the preferences and cultural expectations of Chinese audiences. Additionally, existing research has examined the information transmission function achieved in Ying Ruocheng's translation from a functional theory perspective, while also recognising the expressive and operative functions designed to serve both the performers and audience effectively.

The findings of previous research suggest that during the 1980s, China was beginning to engage with new concepts and cultural influences from abroad. However, audiences were largely unfamiliar with many of these foreign elements. For instance, the notion of a "salesman" mentioned earlier had no direct equivalent in Chinese society at that time. Therefore, adapting the language as closely as possible to local expressions helped the audience better comprehend

the narrative. However, it is also important to question whether this strategy compromises the full transmission of the original text's essence by excessively prioritising localisation. Based on the perspectives discussed above, it can be argued that giving precedence to the needs of the target audience and ensuring the informative function of the translation does indeed limit the complete delivery of the aesthetic and literary qualities of the source text. Nonetheless, given the social context of the 1980s—where Chinese audiences were generally unfamiliar with foreign cultures—and the translator's intention to make the text comprehensible, this compromise was both necessary and justifiable.

Building on the analysis of existing research, this study can rely on the well-established Skopos theory while incorporating case analyses from earlier studies to inform the textual examination presented in the following section. However, I contend that the current body of research lacks depth in several areas. First, while existing case studies highlight differences between Ying Ruocheng's version and Chen Liangting's version, they often stop short of providing a deeper comparative analysis. Second, much of the research remains limited to the application of Skopos theory, with only occasional references to functional theory and a minimal focus on target culture perspectives, which results in a somewhat narrow analytical framework.

In my view, the process of creating a translated play for the stage involves multiple participants, including the translator, director, actors, audience, and other contributors, each of whom can influence the final translation beyond the audience alone. Furthermore, as explored in Chapter 2 of this study, avant-garde plays cannot be fully understood in isolation from their social contexts. However, existing research has largely neglected the role of the socio-cultural

environment when considering translation choices, particularly within the framework of culturally-informed translation theories. Therefore, the textual analysis of Ying Ruocheng's translation in the following section will integrate Lefevere's poetics and patronage theory alongside Skopos theory to explore both the translation strategies and linguistic techniques used in his colloquial texts, as well as the socio-political and cultural factors influencing these choices.

3.5 Textual Analysis-*Death of A Salesman* by Ying Ruocheng

To address the gaps identified in current scholarship, this section highlights key innovations introduced by Ying Ruocheng in his translation of *Death of a Salesman* compared to Chen Liangting's version. The focus will be on aspects such as the use of colloquial language, including vernacular Chinese, forms of address, vulgar expressions, and rhetorical techniques, each of which will be examined individually in this chapter. This analysis aims to identify the socio-cultural factors that contributed to the linguistic differences between these translations and to demonstrate the argument that specific socio-political and cultural contexts shaped the avant-garde features of Ying's translation. Ying Ruocheng's version, created during the late 1970s to 1989, has been chosen for its representation of this period, with particular attention given to the influence of the socio-cultural climate on translation decisions during that era.

3.5.1 Appellation in Vernacular Chinese

Colloquial language can be described as informal speech incorporating slang, casual expressions, abbreviations, and other non-formal linguistic features. This section primarily examines the use of vernacular Chinese and forms of address in Ying's translation, comparing

them with Chen's approach to reveal stylistic contrasts and highlight the social influences reflected in the linguistic choices. The three examples selected for analysis are representative of the broader changes Ying introduced in his translation style.

Vernacular Chinese, commonly used in both spoken and written forms in modern Chinese society, was not adopted as a standard written form until the 1920s (Low, 1926, p.313). Before this shift, Classical Chinese dominated literary writing, but the rise of the vernacular movement led to greater accessibility of written language for the general public. Vernacular Chinese is more straightforward, while Classical Chinese tends to be complex, both in its sentence structure and character composition. However, even before 1980, a significant portion of Chinese literary and artistic works still utilised vernacular Chinese, including Chen's translation of *Death of a Salesman*, despite the increasing use of vernacular language in daily conversation.

By contrast, Ying's translation incorporated a substantial degree of vernacular Chinese in the Target Text (TT). This strategy, I argue, was driven by the priority of meeting the expectations of the target audience, including both performers and viewers, while also reflecting the socio-political climate of the time. The following examples (3.1, 3.2, 3.3), which include dialogues between Willy, Biff, and Happy, have been selected to illustrate the differences in language styles adopted by each translator and to explore the socio-political factors influencing these linguistic choices.

Appellation refers to the linguistic changes made in Ying's translation, specifically reflected in the way parental terms such as "mom" and "dad" are rendered in examples 3.1 and 3.2. Ying's choice adopts a more informal, conversational style, using terms that feel natural to

contemporary Chinese speech. Additionally, this shift in translation disrupts the traditional notion of extreme "respect" in China, where children are typically expected to address their parents with formal language, underscoring deference and subordination. I argue that Ying's translation choices for parental appellations were influenced by the socio-cultural climate of the period, which differed significantly from the context in which Chen produced his version. This distinction will be explored using examples 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3, highlighting the contrasts between Ying's and Chen's translation strategies.

Example 3.1:

	Linda: All the <u>mothers</u>—(ST)	BT (Back translation)
Chen (P29)	林达：所凡是做娘的。	Linda: All those who are mothers—
Ying (P28)	林达：所有的妈妈。	(Same back translation)

Example 3.2:

	Biff [offstage]: <u>Whatta ya got,</u> Dad? (ST)	BT (Back translation)
Chen (P17)	比夫 （在后台）：<u>是什么，爹</u>?	Biff [offstage]: <u>what is it, Dad</u>?
Ying (P17)	比夫 （声音来自台外）：<u>什么东西，爸爸</u>?	(Same back translation)

Example 3.3:

	Happy: He wanted to say good night to you, sport. (ST)	BT (Back translation)
Chen (P53)	哈比：真的有趣，他想来跟您请安。	Happy: It's interesting, he wants to come to pay respect to you you.
Ying (P50)	哈皮：他是来跟您说晚安的，老头。	Happy: He is here to say goodnight to you, old man.

Differences between Liangting's and Ruocheng's translations

These three examples specifically focus on the way parents are addressed. When back-translated into English, the differences between the two translations are not immediately obvious, but a comparative analysis of the Chinese texts reveals important distinctions. The first example occurs when Linda addresses Willy, only to be interrupted by an angry outburst from Willy, who is upset with Bernard. The second example takes place when Biff asks about a surprise that Willy has planned. In both instances, Ying translates "mother" and "dad" using the terms '妈妈' ('māma') and '爸爸' ('bàba') in the Target Text (TT), consistently applying this modern, conversational style throughout his translation. Meanwhile, Chen uses the older terms '娘' ('niáng') and '爹' ('diē') in his Target Text, though these do not represent every instance of "mother" and "dad" in his version. Nevertheless, they constitute a substantial portion of his translation.

Both '娘' and '妈妈' translate to "mother," but their usage differs historically. '娘' originates from classical Chinese and was widely used during periods when classical language dominated literary and formal contexts. It remains common in rural northern China. In contrast, '妈妈' reflects a more modern spoken form now prevalent in contemporary Mandarin. The same distinction applies to '爹' and '爸爸,' both denoting "father," with '爸爸' becoming the standard in modern Chinese usage. Ying's translation choices clearly align with contemporary language norms, departing from the more traditional expressions preferred by Chen. Beyond adopting modern language, Ying further modernises his translation by making bolder lexical choices, as exemplified in the language shifts seen in example 3.1.

In Example 3.3, Happy responds to Willy's question regarding Biff's intentions. The translation of 'sport' here conveys an affectionate, informal form of address, portraying Willy as being treated like a child. Chen omits the term 'sport' entirely, while Ying renders it as '老头儿 Laotou' (old man). Ying's use of '老头儿 Laotou' conveys a gentle, conciliatory tone, similar to addressing a young child with affection. In early 1980s China, it was uncommon for sons to address their fathers in such an informal, even slightly irreverent, manner due to the influence of Confucian ethics, which emphasised filial piety and hierarchical respect. However, in American culture, children often use informal nicknames for their parents. As Chinese society opened up, more informal terms like '老头 Laotou' became increasingly acceptable in Chinese spoken language. Ying's choice of this expression reflects an adaptation to contemporary linguistic trends while also introducing Chinese audiences to a more casual, Westernised interaction style. In the third example, Chen translates "goodnight" as '请安 Qingan' (pay respect). The term '请安 Qingan' originates from ancient Chinese customs, where

individuals of lower social status would bow or kneel to higher-ranking figures, such as children to their parents, students to tutors, subordinates to superiors, and servants to masters. This phrase historically conveyed not only a respectful farewell but also a deep sense of hierarchical deference.

Conversely, Ying employs '晚安 Wanan,' derived from the historical expression '请晚安 Qingwanan,' meaning "to offer nighttime respects" but now commonly used in Modern Chinese as a neutral and friendly way to say "goodnight." Ying's translation not only aligns with contemporary language but also eliminates the rigid social hierarchy implied in '请安 Qingan.' These three examples demonstrate that while Chen's translation blends elements of both Classical and Vernacular Chinese, Ying's version aligns more closely with the conversational Chinese spoken in the 1980s. Ying's approach removes the feudal class distinctions still present in Chen's language, focusing instead on a more modern and socially neutral linguistic style from the perspective of the Target Text (TT).

Analyses of Appelletaions

Through the three examples discussed, it becomes evident that both Chen and Ying retained the direct semantic meaning in their translations of "mum" and "dad." However, Ying modernised the language by favouring vernacular expressions with a conversational tone. For the translation of 'sport,' Chen chose omission, whereas Ying rendered it as 'old man'.

While Ying's translation does not fully capture the original text's portrayal of Willy being treated as a child, it conveys a more intimate and casual tone. This suggests that Ying's translation choices were more closely aligned with modern language use and the preferences of

his contemporary audience.

From a poetic perspective, identifying a suitable equivalent for the English term 'sport' in Chinese, the target language, to address a parent in a childlike manner is complex. Since China has long been a patriarchal society, its family structure upholds strict principles of respect and order among relatives, with profound emphasis on reverence for elders. Zhou Xiaohong (2005) notes that traditional Chinese values and social behaviours have been deeply shaped by classical Chinese culture, with Confucianism as a core influence. This philosophy significantly informs parent-child dynamics, as it promotes filial piety, emphasising obedience to parents and discouraging acts of defiance. The Confucian doctrine, by reinforcing the patriarchal system, establishes the expectation that language used to address parents must convey deference and profound respect (Zhou, 2005).

Thus, in this linguistic framework and the Chinese language system, Ying Ruocheng's choice of the term 'old man' diverges from a direct translation of 'sport.' By having Happy use 'old man' instead of a formal parental title, Ying disrupts the traditional hierarchy between older and younger generations. From the perspective of poetic function, this choice reflects both cultural exchange and a creative shift inspired by Western dramatic forms. It embodies the desire among dramatists of the time to produce bold, innovative works. Ying's decision balances Western casualness in familial address with the existing Chinese cultural expectations, as 'old man' still conveys a sense of affection and light-heartedness while slightly challenging hierarchical norms.

From an ideological standpoint, these three examples illustrate how Ruocheng's

translation resonated with the social and cultural shifts occurring in China during the early 1980s. As previously noted, this was a period when the nation was undergoing reforms and opening to modern ideas. Western cultural concepts, including less hierarchical family dynamics and the use of more intimate terms between parents and children, were being introduced through works such as *Death of a Salesman*. Ying, influenced by this cultural influx, adapted his linguistic choices to align with these modern values, making his translation more progressive and accessible compared with earlier Chinese adaptations. His approach reflects theatre translation theories proposed by Marco, specifically the notion that audience comprehension should guide translation decisions during live performances. Ruocheng prioritises clarity and relatability for his audience, ensuring the language resonates with their cultural context. Furthermore, his translation reflects the evolving target culture's aspirations for greater equality and diminishing hierarchical expressions, aligning with the broader societal transformations of the time.

These examples reveal that Liangting translated common terms of address such as '爹 Diē (father)' and '娘 Niáng (mother)' using classical Chinese, a style that was no longer widely used in urban areas of China during the 1980s. This translation choice can be linked to the translator's own linguistic preferences. As Guo Xi (2006) noted, the expressions '爸 Bà (father)' and '妈 Mā (mother)' did not gain widespread usage across China until the late 1990s, reflecting regional linguistic variations. However, since *Death of a Salesman* was performed in Beijing, Liangting's translation did not fully account for the speech patterns typical of the local audience. In contrast, Ying adapted his translation to align with the language spoken in Beijing during the early 1980s, opting for more modern and colloquial expressions. Ying's choice also reflects a

growing openness in Chinese society during this period (see Chapter 2), which shaped his translation approach. I argue that the socio-political and cultural environment of the target audience influenced Ying's use of modern appellations, accounting for the key differences in his version.

3.5.2. Vulgar Language

Chinese culture traditionally places significant emphasis on maintaining politeness in both written and spoken language, with minimal tolerance for vulgarity in literary works. Liangting's translation of *Death of a Salesman* reflects this norm, as he consistently softened or omitted explicit language from the Source Text (ST), replacing it with more culturally acceptable expressions, aligning with the principles of politeness discourse discussed earlier. By contrast, Ruocheng took a bolder approach, opting for a more direct translation of profanities while occasionally intensifying the vulgar language present in the original. His decision not only conveyed the emotional intensity of the characters more powerfully but also challenged the conventions of acceptable language in Chinese theatre of the early 1980s. Such an approach, which involved both preserving and expanding upon the Source Text's use of profanity, can be seen as linguistically disruptive for that era.

I argue that Ying's strategy of directly translating vulgar expressions and expanding the intensity of certain lines was a deliberate effort to challenge conventional speech patterns in Chinese drama. His method reflected personal ideological choices shaped by broader socio-political contexts (see Chapter 2), suggesting a connection between the translator's stylistic choices and the evolving cultural landscape of the time. Since the inclusion of vulgar language

can be subtle, relying on isolated terms would fail to capture the extent of divergence between Ruocheng's and Liangting's translations. Therefore, the following analysis summarises the frequency and distribution of such expressions in the ST and both translators' versions to illustrate their differing strategies effectively.

Differences between Liangting's and Ruocheng's Translations

Example 3.4:

In the original play, the term "hell" appears 24 times. Ying consistently translated this as "他妈的 Tamade (fuck)" in every instance, while Chen opted to omit the term entirely. Other words, such as "mut" were translated literally by both Chen and Ying, but Chen frequently chose softer alternatives like '糟糕 Zaogao (Oh no)' and '见鬼 Jiangui (Damn).' These examples indicate Chen's cautious approach, avoiding direct translations of vulgar expressions, often opting for euphemistic renderings or exclusions instead. Conversely, Ying preserved the coarse language more directly, often intensifying the expressions in his Target Text (TT) by choosing even stronger vulgar equivalents, as illustrated in the following examples.

Example 2:

For terms like "crummy" and "damned fool," Ruocheng translated them as "混蛋 Hundan (bastard)," which carries a harsher connotation compared to Chen's softer renderings, "缺德 Quede (wicked)" and "饭桶 Fantong (good-for-nothing fool)." Ying also amplified Charley's rudeness by adding the phrase "混蛋 Hundan (bastard)" at the beginning of his translation of Charley's line, "I've got some work to do. Take care of yourself. And pay your insurance," enhancing the emotional sharpness of the dialogue.

Analyses of Vuglar language

The summary of vulgar expressions suggests that Chen deliberately avoided directly translating these terms. He instead employed strategies of omission and substitution, which altered the intensity of the Source Text (ST). In contrast, Ying not only retained the vulgar expressions but also expanded their usage, introducing additional coarse language where he felt it strengthened the emotional impact of the dialogue. This conscious choice reveals an attempt to convey the characters' emotional intensity and personal conflicts more authentically.

From a poetic standpoint, the choice to retain and amplify vulgar language demonstrates the possibility of finding culturally appropriate Target Text (TT) equivalents. The prominent use of coarse language not only reflects the linguistic norms of lower-middle-class American speech patterns but also represents a stylistic transformation in the language of Chinese theatre, pushing the boundaries of stage expression for both actors and audiences.

Despite the growing openness of Chinese society during the early 1980s, stage language remained conservative. Performances typically adhered to refined and respectful language conventions, avoiding blunt and repetitive profanity in theatrical productions. Therefore, Ruocheng's more direct translation diverges from these conventions. His approach can be interpreted as an effort to engage with shifting socio-cultural norms, aligning with the ideological shifts of the time. The regulatory landscape during this period also played a role. Cultural authorities (patrons) allowed greater flexibility in artistic expression, including the use of language. During the Cultural Revolution, public discourse had been tightly controlled, with personal expression highly politicised and emotional content suppressed. By the early 1980s,

with the relaxation of these controls, the inclusion of vulgar language in formal theatre symbolised an expansion of freedom of speech. Ruocheng's choice to incorporate such expressions in a major Beijing theatre production reflects this newly expanded linguistic freedom in China's evolving cultural landscape.

The influence of the political climate is evident in determining how vulgar language could be presented on stage. However, the translator's individual perspective also plays a crucial role in the treatment of vulgar expressions. Ying Ruocheng's simultaneous roles as actor, co-director, and translator meant his decision to translate or even amplify the coarse language was closely tied to his personal creative intent. His personal perspective was shaped by the theatrical environment of the time, which aimed to foster innovative and transformative works. Ruocheng's goal was to advance Chinese theatre and engage a wider audience, as reflected in his autobiography (Ying, 2009). His innovative approach proved successful. On 7 May 1983, the Chinese adaptation of *Death of a Salesman* debuted at the Beijing Capital Theatre. The production continued until 18 August with over 50 performances, all selling out completely. The audience applauded enthusiastically for two minutes after the opening night concluded. The bold inclusion of vulgar language likely contributed to this overwhelming success. Thus, compared to the use of colloquial parental terms and the disruption of conventional hierarchical relationships in the first example, the use of vulgarity was even more radical. It challenged deeply rooted norms by dismantling the sense of propriety and "conservatism" traditionally associated with stage language. Ying brought language commonly used in everyday life onto the theatre stage, which both shocked and captivated audiences. Beyond redefining theatrical dialogue, Ying's personal experiences further shaped his translation choices.

As previously mentioned, Ying endured significant physical and psychological persecution during the Cultural Revolution. This traumatic history may have informed his choice to retain and even expand the use of explicit language as a means of artistic expression and emotional release. From the perspective of Bassnett and Brodie's theories on the cultural and political forces shaping theatrical translations, Ruocheng's daring use of vulgar language can be understood not just as a stylistic choice but as a direct response to the evolving social landscape of the time, reflecting a relaxation of political restrictions and conventional norms governing public expression

3.5.3. Rhetoric: Analogy

If the lexical dimension was the initial area of transformation in Ying's translation, the rhetorical strategies employed marked the next stage in adapting the play to its historical context. According to numerous Chinese scholars, including He Guimei (2010), the post-Cultural Revolution era was characterised by a society eager for ideological transformation. As modernisation progressed, engagement with foreign cultures became both necessary and inevitable. During the early stages of China's reform and opening-up, *Death of a Salesman* drew attention for its reflection of social issues such as marital challenges, generational conflicts, family dynamics, child-rearing approaches, aspirations for upward mobility through hard work, and human dignity. These themes resonated strongly with audiences in a developing China of the early 1980s. Chinese citizens were not only aware of their dissatisfaction with the hardships of the previous decade but also had a clear sense of what societal progress required. Many expressions in Ying's translation, particularly those using analogy, reflected the widespread aspiration for prosperity and a brighter future—a sentiment shared by much of the Chinese

public during the early implementation of the reform policies.

To expand further, the pursuit of success was a key aspiration among Chinese people during the early 1980s. At this time, privately owned businesses and entrepreneurial ventures were still emerging in China. However, the economic liberalisation policies that accompanied the opening-up period led to a surge in economic ambition, inspiring many individuals to pursue personal and professional success. Following a performance of *Death of a Salesman*, an audience member stated, "I am encouraged by this play, I want to be successful!" (Miller, 1987, p.185). This direct response illustrates the impact of the translation choices. I argue that, beyond achieving functional equivalence, which seeks alignment between the play's narrative and its core theme of the American Dream, Ying deliberately retained the word "success" to evoke a parallel emotional and cultural aspiration for personal achievement in the Chinese audience. His use of analogy, combined with this literal rendering, effectively stirred emotional identification and positive audience reactions.

Example 3.5:

	Happy: Sure, Oliver is very <u>big</u> now. (ST)	BT (Back translation)
Chen (P15)	哈皮：那还用说，奥利弗现在<u>可了不起了</u>。	Happy: Sure, Oliver is very <u>extraordinary</u> now.
Ying (P14)	哈皮：当然记得，奥利弗现在是<u>大人物</u>了。	Happy: Sure, Oliver is a very influential man/mogul now.

Example 3.6:

	Biff: No, with a ranch I could do the work I like and still <u>be something</u>. (ST)	BT (Back translation)
Chen (P15)	比夫：不，有个大牧场我就可以干我称心的活，仍旧当个<u>体面</u>的人物。	Biff: No, with a ranch I could do the work I like and still be a <u>decent man.</u>)
Ying (P14)	比夫：有个畜牧场我能干我喜欢的活儿，我也能<u>出人头地</u>。	Biff: No, with a ranch I could do the work I like and I can <u>succeed.</u>

Example 3.7:

	Willy: Don't be a pest, Bernard! [To his boys] What an <u>anemic</u>! (ST)	BT (Back translation)
Chen (P21)	威利：别讨厌了，伯纳德！（对着孩子们）脸色多苍白，<u>一点血色也没有</u>！	Willy: Don't be a pest, Bernard! [To his boys] Your face look pale! <u>What an anemic</u>!
Ying (P20)	威利：别招人讨厌了，伯纳德！（对自己的孩子）这么<u>没出息</u>！	Willy: Don't be a pest, Bernard! [To his boys] <u>Don't look like a loser</u>!

Example 3.9:

	Linda: I just thought you'd like a change… (ST)	BT (Back translation)
Chen (P40)	林达：只想知道事情还有个<u>转机</u>罢了。	Linda: …… Just to know that the <u>turning point will appear</u>.
Ying (P39)	林达：总想知道事情还有个<u>盼头</u>。	Linda: …… Just to know that <u>there's still something to look forward to</u>.

Difference in Rhetoric

The examples cited above clearly demonstrate how Ying Ruocheng employed analogies to reflect the audience's aspirations for success in early 1980s China. For instance, the word "big" in the source text was translated by Ruocheng as "大人物 Darenwu (mogul)". When translating "be something," Chen opted for "体面 Timian (decent)", whereas Ruocheng chose "出人头地 Churentoudi (to succeed)". Similarly, "anemic" was rendered more conventionally by Chen, while Ruocheng translated it as "没出息 Meichuxi (not promising)". For the phrase "better things," Chen's version was "转机 Zhuanji (turning point)", while Ruocheng translated it as "盼头 Pantou (something to look forward to)." Each of Ruocheng's choices— "大人物 Darenwu (mogul)", "出人头地 Churentoudi (to succeed)", "没出息 Meichuxi (not promising)", and "盼头 Pantou (something to look forward to)"—conveys ideas closely linked with success. His translations reflect a domesticated approach, focusing on implied meanings in the source text that directly resonated with the audience's desires during that period.

Analyses of Translating Rhetoric

Ruocheng's strategy involved a domestication approach, directly translating concepts associated with success and wealth. This method was shaped both by the translator's intentions and the socio-cultural context of the time. From a poetic standpoint, his translation effectively communicated the original text's core themes of prosperity, career ambitions, and personal achievement to the target audience. By presenting the ambitions of the average American in a transparent and relatable manner, his work fulfilled a critical cultural exchange function between China and the United States.

Given the economic stagnation resulting from the Cultural Revolution, China entered a phase of economic recovery during the early 1980s. The guiding principle of the reform and opening-up policies was national prosperity, which influenced public consciousness. Citizens aspired to improve their economic standing and achieve personal success in a more relaxed and progressive social climate while engaging with emerging global ideas. Thus, the central themes of *Death of a Salesman*—the pursuit of success and personal advancement—strongly aligned with China's socio-political climate of the early 1980s, reinforcing the text's relevance and resonance with its audience.

Furthermore, Ying's personal consciousness significantly shaped his translation choices, as evidenced by expressions that convey an urgent desire for success in a bold and unambiguous manner. Against the backdrop of suppressed personal ambitions during the Cultural Revolution, Ying's translation serves not merely as an outlet for his own internal struggles but as a broader representation of collective emotional release for the Chinese people, many of whom had

experienced profound hardship. His version did not simply reflect personal expression but addressed the needs of a society emerging from political repression, aligning closely with the audience's cultural context and the prevailing aspirations of the early 1980s. At that time, Chinese audiences were primarily driven by the desire for personal achievement, wealth, and social distinction—values that Ying's translation powerfully mirrored.

Summary of the Textual Analysis of *Hamlet 1990*

This chapter argues that Ying Ruocheng's translation of *Death of a Salesman* in the early 1980s successfully balanced poetic and rhetorical demands with the innovative artistic trends required by the cultural climate of the time. His linguistic style and rhetorical choices reflected modern, dynamic forms suited to the needs of the Chinese theatre landscape during a period of cultural transformation. From both an ideological perspective and a functionalist approach, the changes made in Ying's translation addressed linguistic and rhetorical shifts while considering audience comprehension and expectations. Importantly, the adaptation reflected both the preferences of the audience and the translator's vision. His work challenged traditional Chinese conventions, particularly the rigid, class-bound modes of speech, which were deeply ingrained in the culture at the time.

This shift must be understood within the context of the early 1980s, a period marked by increased openness to European and American cultural influences, as well as the exploration of diverse theatrical forms. Ying's translation broke new ground compared to previous versions, not only in linguistic style but also in challenging traditional socio-cultural norms. These changes were shaped by a more open artistic climate and a greater acceptance of foreign cultural

elements, both of which played a critical role in meeting the expectations of contemporary audiences and theatre practitioners. Consequently, Ying's understanding of the target audience's cultural framework was key in shaping the translation.

Ultimately, Ying Ruocheng's 1983 version of *Death of a Salesman* stands as a landmark in the development of avant-garde theatre translation in China. By introducing a work rooted in realism but enhanced with elements of stream of consciousness and symbolism, Ying transformed the play into a Chinese avant-garde piece through linguistic innovation and the expressive depiction of characters' psychological struggles. Furthermore, Ying (2008) noted in his memoir that the script of the influential 1986 avant-garde play 狗儿爷涅槃 *Gouerye Niepan* (*Uncle Goggie's Nirvana*) shared many stylistic elements inspired by his earlier translation efforts. The 1983 Chinese version of *Death of a Salesman* was not merely a bold and successful experiment but also a foundational text that paved the way for the development of avant-garde drama translation in China, influencing subsequent experimental theatre productions.

Chapter 4 Hamuleite 1990 (Hamlet, 1990) **by Lin Zhaohua, 1990**

This chapter examines the avant-garde elements present in *Hamlet 1990*, translated by Ji Jianmin in collaboration with director Lin Zhaohua, using a comparative textual analysis approach. The purpose is to explore the translation strategies employed that contribute to the avant-garde features observed in the areas of lexis, rhythm, and theme, while also considering the socio-cultural and political influences shaping these translation techniques. The chapter begins with sections 4.1 and 4.2, offering an introduction to the original text of *Hamlet*, an overview of the avant-garde adaptation *Hamlet 1990*, and a comparative version to provide foundational context. This background will support a clearer understanding of how the avant-garde version of *Hamlet 1990* was conceptualised and produced. Section 4.3 presents a literature review summarising existing research on the Chinese translation of *Hamlet 1990* to identify current gaps in the textual analysis of this adaptation. Building on this background, section 3.5 applies a comparative text analysis method, integrating the socio-political and cultural context outlined in Chapter 1 and the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2, to address these gaps. By focusing on Jianmin and Zhaohua's translation, this section explores how socio-political and cultural conditions influenced the translation of avant-garde theatre and how this work addresses the central research question.

4.1 Introduction to the Original Hamlet

Hamlet, the first in Shakespeare's series of major tragedies, was likely composed between 1601 and 1603. Celebrated as one of his most masterful and complete works, *Hamlet* unpacks themes of friendship, madness, love, death, and betrayal. The narrative draws inspiration from several potential sources, including a twelfth-century Latin chronicle of Danish history, a French prose narrative, and Thomas Kyd's *Ur-Hamlet* (Mabillard, 2000). However, unlike the

prince in *Ur-Hamlet*, who feigned vulnerability to mislead his uncle and ultimately achieved successful revenge, Shakespeare's Hamlet is portrayed as a more philosophical character, plagued by hesitation due to uncertainty and moral contemplation.

Hamlet was crafted during a period of significant social and political instability. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, England was transitioning from a feudal society to an emerging capitalist structure. The play was likely first performed in 1602, near the end of Queen Elizabeth I's reign, when she was 68 years old. Her failure to name an heir led to widespread anxiety about the future of the monarchy. Though Elizabeth could have alleviated this instability by designating a successor, her reluctance heightened public concern about the monarchy's continuity, contributing to a climate of uncertainty and unrest (Ma 2020).

After James I ascended the throne, the ruling elite harshly exploited the working classes, intensifying social tensions, deepening corruption at court, and contributing to widespread societal unrest (Liu, 2020). Simultaneously, the Renaissance movement ushered Europe into an age of enlightenment, causing many to question their faith in God. The concept of "individual liberation" became a prevailing theme, justifying a broad spectrum of behaviours and personal choices. While this period marked a turning point for social progress, paving the way for modern civilisation, it also, particularly in the late Renaissance, gave rise to unchecked personal ambitions and societal instability. *Hamlet* reflects Shakespeare's concerns about this turmoil, portraying a world grappling with disorder and ethical ambiguity (Taylor and Thompson, 2015).

Shakespeare made profound contributions to literature through his innovative use of iambic pentameter and verse forms. *Hamlet*'s soliloquies, especially his reflection on the complexities of life and death, continue to be celebrated for their depth and philosophical insight. His exploration of human values, self-reflection, and existential inquiry remains profoundly significant.

The fundamental issues within *Hamlet* revolve around themes of survival and destruction, meaning and purposelessness. During the early seventeenth century in England, societal

disillusionment had grown as faith in ideals, truth, and moral purpose weakened. People experienced a profound spiritual void, becoming detached from their identities and uncertain of their life's significance. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* confronted these dilemmas, sparking philosophical reflection among both historical audiences and modern viewers.

4.2 Production of Chinese Avant-Garde Hamlet, 1990

Hamlet 1990, the first avant-garde adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet staged in China, was initially translated by Li Jianming. This version built upon Zhu Shenghao's earlier translation and was further adapted and revised by Lin Zhaohua, who directed the final stage production in 1990. The adaptation has been described as a radical departure from earlier translations and a landmark in the evolution of Chinese avant-garde theatre (Zhou, 2009).

The adaptability of *Hamlet* allows it to be reimagined across diverse historical, cultural, and political contexts, with contemporary China being just one of many settings for reinterpretation. However, the linguistic and cultural gap between Shakespeare's English and modern Chinese has often resulted in translations that diverge from the source material, creating looser renditions of the original text (Gentzler, 2017).

The history of translating *Hamlet* in China dates back to Hu Shi (1891–1962), a prominent Chinese intellectual, who first advocated for the translation of Shakespeare's works in 1920. However, it was Han Tian (1898–1968) who published the first Chinese translation of *Hamlet* in 1922 through the Zhonghua Company in Shanghai. This translation, though warmly received, also sparked significant debate within Chinese academic, literary, and theatrical circles. Such discussions highlighted *Hamlet*'s global literary and dramatic importance. The translation's impact led to a surge in similar works being published across mainland China. Since then, over 40 prominent translations of Shakespeare's works have emerged in the country.

Zhu Shenghao, Liang Shiqiu, and Bian Zhilin are widely regarded as three of China's most influential *Hamlet* translators (Wang, 2013), whose works have formed the basis for several nationally recognised versions of the play. Liang Shiqiu adhered to a literal translation approach,

which some critics argue compromised the poetic beauty of the original (Liu, 2002, p.224). In contrast, Zhu Shenghao employed a method of "dynamic equivalence," aiming to create a stylistically parallel prose version while maintaining the essence of the original. His work is often hailed as the finest Chinese rendition of Shakespeare's play. Meanwhile, Bian Zhilin retained the poetic qualities of *Hamlet* while deviating from Shakespeare's iambic pentameter (Liu, 2002, pp.226-230). The approaches of Zhu and Bian reflect two distinctive models of Shakespearean translation in China. Before the 1990s, regardless of the method applied (e.g., word-for-word, formal equivalence, or dynamic equivalence), Chinese translators typically strove to reproduce the original play's rhythm and rhetorical qualities, despite the challenge of rhythm being non-transferable to Mandarin.

Since the 20th century, Zhu Shenghao's translation has been widely regarded as the most authoritative *Hamlet* translation in China, blending both prose and verse styles. Scholars have praised it for preserving the aural harmony and literary elegance of the original text while capturing its deeper meanings (Wei, 2009). In a 2010 interview, Li Jianming recalled that his translation was based on English and German versions, alongside Zhu Shenghao's work. His goal was to ensure the language remained performance-friendly, emphasising a colloquial style that would be easily absorbed by the audience. Furthermore, he focused on maintaining a rhythm suited to conversational dialogue while ensuring coherence in the lines spoken on stage.

Zhu Shenghao's enduring influence was so profound that it directly inspired the innovative translation and adaptation work of Li Jianming and director Lin Zhaohua. Although *Hamlet 1990* drew from Zhu's version, the adaptation broke away from traditional norms in both its linguistic structure and performance style, challenging conventions established over the previous seven decades. It diverged from both prose and verse styles, instead employing a modern, unrhymed, vernacular language. Notably, the prince's soliloquies incorporated coarse language, portraying him in a significantly different light compared to the original play's "noble" depiction. Despite the deletion and repetition of certain lines, resulting in a degree of divergence from the original text, the translation retained its core thematic exploration of human

existence and the value of life. More significantly, Lin's *Hamlet 1990* elevated these themes, encouraging broader reflection not just among the characters but also among the audience and Chinese society at large.

In light of this, a comparative analysis of Lin's version and Zhu's earlier translation will focus on two critical aspects: rhythm and rhyme (the written structure) and metaphor in rhetoric (the discursive art).

4.3 *Literature Review*

Current research on *Hamlet 1990*, translated by Li Jianmin and directed by Lin Zhaohua, remains limited, with most existing studies concentrating on themes conveyed through stage performances rather than an analysis of linguistic styles within the translated text. Consequently, the discussion in this study is divided into three focal areas: performance and costume choices, the thematic interpretations derived from the production, and the analysis of the translated script.

4.3.1 Performace and Costumes

In her research on the translation of Shakespearean works in China, Li (2010) highlighted the revolutionary features present in Lin's *Hamlet 1990*, particularly the departure from conventional theatrical practices. She observed the elimination of typical elements such as make-up, wigs, and prosthetic noses commonly used by Chinese actors portraying Western characters in the 1980s. Additionally, Li noted significant changes in speech delivery, with actors delivering their lines at a faster pace and using more colloquial language. However, Li did not offer a detailed explanation for these changes in either costume choices or dialogue speed. The adjustments in costume design, however, suggest a thematic shift within Lin's *Hamlet*, a topic explored more thoroughly by scholars such as Du Pengyuan (1991) and Zhou Wen (2009).

Du (1991, pp. 65-66) argued that the alterations in costume design reduced the opposition between the prince and other characters, positioning Hamlet as an equal rather than a figure of elevated status. Similarly, Zhou (2009, p.27) observed that the prince, dressed in plain, muted-

coloured civilian attire instead of regal garments with a mantle, was portrayed as less distinguished from the other characters. This visual representation conveyed a sense of shared struggle and universal hardship. Both Du and Zhou thus conclude that Lin's reinterpretation introduced a new thematic element, suggesting that "everyone is Hamlet". While this dissertation does not explore costume choices, as its focus lies on script translation, it is worth noting that current research does not thoroughly examine the colloquial nature of the dialogue. Specifically, there is a gap in analysis regarding the linguistic features of colloquialism present in the translation. This will be explored in detail in the following textual analysis section to address the gap identified in existing scholarship.

4.3.2 Derived Theme

The thematic transformation in *Hamlet 1990* is not only reflected in costume design but also in the shifting roles performed during the Chinese adaptation, as noted by Zhou. Zhou (2009, pp. 28-29) describes a formative moment in the Chinese performance where, during the confrontation between Prince Hamlet and King Claudius, Hamlet raises his sword, collapses, and falls to the ground. Immediately thereafter, the actor who portrayed Claudius assumes the role of Hamlet, narrating the prince's life and final testament. A similar role exchange was discussed in Sun's research (2008, pp. 177-183) and further elaborated upon in Zhou's study (2009, pp. 28-29), where Hamlet, the King, and Polonius all deliver the renowned soliloquy "To be or not to be" in unison. This synchronised recitation, coupled with the widely held interpretation of the monologue as a metaphor for societal chaos and moral confusion (Zhou, 2009, pp. 28-29), conveys Lin's assertion that every individual embodies Hamlet and encounters similar existential dilemmas in life. While both Zhou and Sun acknowledge the dilemmas presented in the play, they do not explore them in greater depth. To contextualise the theme of moral uncertainty, Li (2010) offered historical background to clarify the origins of the dilemmas embedded in the performance. Li (2010) argued that both the shifts in costume design and the interchangeable roles in the performance signified a broader critique of a society where moral clarity is obscured. He further linked these creative choices to Lin's profound emotional

turmoil and internal struggles following the tragic events of the June 1989 student protests in Tiananmen Square.

The current body of research concerning the development of this new thematic focus predominantly concludes that the shifts in costume and performance style reflect the theme of existential uncertainty. From a structural standpoint, the role reversal where multiple characters deliver the famous soliloquy already indicates script-level modifications, yet existing studies fail to explore why this line was extended to multiple characters. Moreover, there is limited analysis concerning the broader implications of the dilemma, with most research narrowly attributing it to the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. Consequently, section 4.3.3 will investigate how the translated target text conveys this theme and what translation theories may have shaped its representation. Additionally, a more detailed exploration of the personal consciousness behind this script-level modification will be conducted, examining whether other social and historical influences, beyond the 1989 events, contributed to the inclusion of the soliloquy across multiple characters, thus addressing the gaps identified in current research.

4.3.3 Textual Analysis

In terms of textual structure, Sun (2008, pp. 174-177) and Zhou (2009, pp. 29-30) are among the few scholars who have focused exclusively on the textual features of *Hamlet*. Both scholars observed that Lin shifted the prayer scene from Act III in the original to Act IV in his adaptation, while also incorporating a recurring Gravedigger scene before each act. Sun argued that the repetition of the Gravedigger's dialogue concerning death accentuates the immutable certainty of mortality, serving as a thematic commentary throughout the play. By contrast, Zhou suggested that the placement of the Gravediggers' dialogue at the start of each act adds an additional narrative layer, deepening character exploration while providing the audience with a fresh interpretative lens.

However, while prior studies have primarily examined the thematic variations and structural modifications present in the Chinese adaptation, limited attention has been given to

the linguistic and cultural transformations in the translation process. Examining the script of *Hamlet 1990* from a stylistic standpoint reveals a significant departure from the structured verse and poetic rhythms employed by earlier translators like Zhu Haosheng and Pian Zhilin, instead embracing a colloquial language style. Moreover, from a cultural standpoint, while Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is imbued with overt religious elements, the degree to which such cultural features were retained, modified, or omitted in Ying Ruocheng's translation remains largely unexplored. Additionally, since Li provided the initial translation, which was subsequently adapted by Lin, their collaborative negotiation and compromise inevitably influenced the final presentation of the target text. Despite this, no existing studies have examined the collaborative translation process or the personal ideological influences of both figures in shaping the final text. Therefore, this dissertation includes a detailed analysis of these linguistic, cultural, and collaborative dimensions in the textual analysis section, aiming to address the existing gaps within theatre translation studies.

4.4 Textual Analysis - *Hamlet 1990* by Lin Zhaohua

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has undergone numerous translations, each warranting examination in relation to the original text. These adaptations have been deliberately modified to align with diverse historical and political contexts, including that of contemporary China. *Hamlet* has garnered significant attention from global literary, theatrical, and cinematic scholars, with China being no exception. As Edwin Gentzler (2017) observed, the linguistic and cultural gap between Shakespeare's original context and Chinese audiences often results in translations that prioritise adaptation over textual fidelity, frequently leaning towards what he terms a "tradaptation" of the source material. The *Hamlet 1990* production staged in China in the late 1980s exemplifies this phenomenon. Translated by Li Jianming, adapted by Lin Zhaohua in 1989, and performed the following year, this version has been described as a radical departure

from earlier translations and a significant milestone in Chinese avant-garde theatre (Zhou, 2009). As mentioned in section 4.2, Zhu Shenghao's translation of *Hamlet* was the most widely recognised and influential version prior to the 1990s. Zhu's approach employed a rhythmically balanced target text, incorporating rhyme schemes and localised rhetorical elements to ensure readability and cultural resonance for Chinese audiences. Given the considerable influence of Zhu's translation and its direct connection to *Hamlet 1990*, this comparative analysis will focus on how Jianming and Zhaohua drew from Zhu's text while introducing significant alterations.

Jianming and Zhaohua's translation maintained certain stylistic choices from Zhu but introduced significant changes in the handling of culture-specific terms, rhythm and rhyme patterns, thematic delivery, and line retention. This case study seeks to examine how Lin's adaptation subverted prior Chinese translations of *Hamlet*, particularly those spanning the 70 years since its initial Chinese rendition. Furthermore, this comparison will explore how shifts in the treatment of culturally specific expressions, structural rhythm, thematic portrayals, and decisions regarding line omission and repetition were shaped by the socio-political landscape of 1980s China, which experienced multiple phases of political repression. This supports the research question concerning the impact of the social and ideological context, as interpreted through Lefevere's theory, on Chinese avant-garde theatre translations, with *Hamlet 1990* serving as a focal case study.

4.4.1 Culturally-Loaded Words in the Translated Versions of Hamlet by Lin Zhaohua and Zhu Shenghao

The term "culturally-loaded" describes words or expressions whose meanings are closely

tied to the specific beliefs, customs, and artistic traditions of a given society (Baker, 1992).

Within the original text of *Hamlet*, several culture-specific terms convey ideas and knowledge

deeply rooted in English-speaking cultural contexts. In their adaptation, Jianmin and Zhaohua,

compared to Shenghao, made distinct choices regarding how these terms were translated or

modified. The following analysis reveals that both Shenghao and Jianmin/Zhaohua employed

domestication and foreignisation strategies, with Jianmin and Zhaohua's version leaning more

towards domestication. Therefore, I argue that the choice of translation strategies by theatre

practitioners is often shaped by multiple influences. In Lin's case, the handling of culturally

specific language was shaped by the sociocultural environment of late 1980s China, aiming to

resonate with the audience of the time.

Differences in Culturally-Loaded Words

The first example involves the translation of religious terminology. The Source Text (ST)

contains 27 mentions of 'God' and four instances of 'angel'. In their respective translations, Zhu

and Lin rendered these terms directly as '上帝 Shangdi' (God) and '天使 Tianshi' (angel), both

widely recognised expressions in contemporary Chinese. However, for the Source Text phrase,

"Save me and hover o'er me with your wings, You heavenly guards!", Jianmin and Zhaohua

diverged from Shenghao's interpretation.

Example 4.1

Source text (ST)	Hamlet: Save me and <u>hover o'er me with your wings</u>, You heavenly guards! (Line 80)	Back translation (BT)

Zhu Shenghao	哈姆雷特：天上的神明，救救我，<u>用你们的翅膀覆盖我的头顶</u>	Hamlet: Heavenly guards, save me, <u>cover the top of my head with your wings</u>
Li jianmin Lin Zhaohua	哈姆雷特：天上的神明救救我	Hamlet: <u>Heavenly guards, save me</u>

While both translations varied in word order, Shenghao maintained a fuller rendition, translating it as: *"Heavenly guards, save me, cover the top of my head with your wings (BT)."* In contrast, Jianmin and Zhaohua omitted the phrase *"hover o'er me with your wings"* entirely. Though terms like 'God' and 'angel' had become more familiar to Chinese audiences in the 1980s through exposure to foreign literature and arts, poetic imagery such as *"hover o'er me with your wings"*—which directly evokes Christian iconography—was likely challenging for Chinese viewers to interpret fully. This difficulty arises from fundamental differences between Western and traditional Chinese cosmologies. In Chinese Taoist philosophy, immortals are depicted not as winged beings but as mortals who attain transcendence through the cultivation of life energy, a concept known as *"修炼成仙，得道升天"* *(practice austerities to become an immortal and ascend to heaven)*. Since Taoist immortals do not possess wings but instead gain the inherent ability to fly, Christian references like *"hover o'er me with your wings"* would have been culturally discordant. By omitting this phrase, Jianmin and Zhaohua adapted the text to align more closely with Chinese cultural expectations, facilitating audience comprehension. This adaptation can be understood as a deliberate effort to replace Christian imagery with

culturally familiar Taoist symbolism for improved accessibility and ideological reinterpretation. Consequently, Lin's domestication strategy was clearly shaped by the cultural background and receptiveness of the target audience.

In another instance, following Hamlet's statement to his mother, the Queen, *"I shall in all my best obey you, madam,"* and the King's subsequent satisfaction, Lin added a line to Hamlet's monologue in the target text (TT): *"我的父亲比起现在这个简直是天神和恶鬼之分"* *(My father, compared to the current one, he is like a deity while the other is a malevolent spirit).* This addition is absent in Zhu's version. The phrase *"恶鬼 Egui"* (evil spirit), a term originating from Buddhist thought and frequently appearing in Chinese folklore, would have been culturally recognisable to a Chinese audience. By employing this culturally familiar expression, Lin adapted the text using a domesticated phrase to articulate Hamlet's emotional turmoil, making it more directly relatable to Chinese viewers through a traditional reference point while preserving the intensity of Hamlet's internal conflict.

Analysis of cultural-lodaded words

Jianmin and Zhaohua's translation contains instances of foreignisation, particularly in the direct translation of terms like *God* and *angel*, aligning with Shenghao's approach. However, it is important to highlight that, whereas Shenghao aimed to present as much of the foreign cultural essence as possible, Lin gave greater emphasis to domestication when handling culturally-specific terms. From a poetic perspective, achieving direct cultural equivalence for terms from Shakespeare's period is challenging when translated into Chinese, as the religious and moral frameworks of the source and target cultures differ significantly. *Hamlet* was

composed during the European Renaissance, a period intertwined with the English Reformation, where Protestant ideology heavily influenced literature. Key religious concepts such as divine judgment, the inevitability of sin, moral dichotomies of good and evil, and the belief in heaven and hell are embedded in the play's thematic fabric.

However, China has historically not been dominated by a single organised religion. Moreover, the Chinese audience in 1990 lacked widespread familiarity with Christian doctrines. Despite the Cultural Revolution's anti-traditional campaigns, such as the *Criticism of Lao and Confucianism*, and the cultural openness towards Western ideas during the early 1980s, Confucian principles had long remained the ideological foundation for much of Chinese thought. Based on the examples discussed, it becomes clear that Lin inclined more toward domestication than Zhu, adapting religious references into culturally comprehensible metaphors better suited for the Chinese audience, thereby enhancing the play's accessibility and emotional impact.

In terms of ideology, the prevailing artistic and literary currents during the late 1980s in China generally leaned towards embracing Western thought. However, a parallel trend existed among certain scholars, including Lin, who were committed to the revival and preservation of traditional Chinese cultural elements. While society was increasingly open to foreign concepts, philosophies, and artistic expressions, the general public, having limited exposure to Western religions, found it challenging to fully grasp culture-specific terms from the Source Text (ST). These expressions did not align with the dominant cultural norms in China during that period. Therefore, by incorporating culturally familiar expressions rooted in the local context, the translation made the play more comprehensible and enhanced the viewing experience for

Chinese audiences. This approach ensured that while foreign cultural elements were embraced, the audience could still relate to familiar cultural references during the performance.

As previously discussed, the sociocultural landscape of China in 1989 revealed a scholarly divide. Some intellectuals advocated for the wholehearted acceptance of foreign cultural influences, while others, including proponents of Confucian thought, supported the revival of traditional Chinese values and philosophies. Jianmin and Zhaohua's translation of culture-specific terms reflects this ideological balance, blending foreign and traditional Chinese cultural references. Their approach combined unfamiliar Western concepts with culturally grounded expressions, aiming to harmonise the Target Text (TT) with the audience's cultural expectations. Consequently, the translation can be understood as a form of cultural compromise, attempting to bridge the ideological divide of the time by gradually reintroducing traditional cultural elements while still engaging with modern influences. This approach was reflective of the sociocultural shifts in late 1980s China and differed from the strategies applied in earlier translations.

4.4.2. Writing Form: Rhythm and Rhyme

Another linguistic divergence between Lin and Zhu's translations lies in their handling of rhythm and rhyme. Zhu employed a "dynamic equivalence" strategy, utilising a verse form that conveyed the iambic rhythm through the repetition of *"dun"* sounds and the incorporation of end-rhyme to create a lyrical flow in the Chinese adaptation of *Hamlet*. This method heightened the emotional depth and tone of the characters' expressions. In contrast, Lin completely abandoned the use of rhythm and rhyme, opting instead for a fully colloquial style. I argue that

this shift towards conversational language was a direct result of the sociocultural context in which the translation emerged, reflecting a period where directness and accessibility were prioritised over poetic formality.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is composed primarily in iambic pentameter, a distinctive metrical form characterised by five metrical feet per line. Since Chinese literary forms lack an exact equivalent to this structure, the representation of rhythm in Chinese translations warrants careful consideration. Blank verse, the dominant form in *Hamlet*, does not rely on rhyme but maintains a measured cadence, typically through the use of iambic pentameter. For over a millennium, rhythm and melodic qualities have played a central role in Chinese literary theory and composition. Faced with the challenge of preserving the rhythmic pattern of English poetic feet, modern Chinese translators have experimented extensively and developed the use of *"dun"* (pause) as an approximate equivalent for the poetic foot. Zhu's translation of *Hamlet* reflects this strategy. For example, in his rendering of the line, *"Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,"* he translated it as: *"啊，但愿/这一个/太坚实/的肉体/会融解/、消散/，化成/一堆/露水"* (*Oh, I wish this solid body would melt, dissolve, and turn into dew*).

Zhu Shenghao employed the *dun* pause system, with each pause spanning one to three words, forming both semantic and phonological units. This method balances meaning with the natural rhythm of the Chinese language, replacing the English foot structure. To ensure clarity and emotional resonance, Zhu also expanded on the original text by introducing additional descriptive elements in the Target Text (TT). For instance, he inserted the verb *"但愿 Danyuan"* (*wish*), which does not appear in the original English sentence but effectively conveys Hamlet's yearning. Furthermore, where the English version concludes with *"melt"*, the Chinese

adaptation elaborates on the imagery of bodily dissolution using the sequence *"融解 Rongjie"* (*melt*), *"消散 Xiaosan"* (*disperse*), and *"露水 Lushui"* (*dew*), enhancing the visual and emotional impact for Chinese audiences. This expansion exemplifies the principle of dynamic equivalence by preserving both the poetic intent and the conceptual clarity for the target audience.

In contrast, Jianmin and Zhaohua's version diverges significantly from Zhu's strategy. Linguistically, their adaptation discards both verse and prose conventions, instead opting for a fully colloquial style. This decision marks a sharp departure from the principle of dynamic equivalence. While *Hamlet* primarily employs blank verse, Shakespeare often concluded scenes with rhyming couplets, which serve various structural and dramatic purposes. At times, the couplet appears as a complete thought, such as *"And thou must cure me: till I know 'tis done, Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun."* (IV, iii). In other cases, it functions as a continuation of an earlier idea, for example: *"Take these again; for to the noble mind. Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind."* (III, i).

Zhu Shenghao retained end-rhyme in his translation, incorporating it into 71 sentences throughout the script. He applied end-rhyme not only when translating the original couplets but also extended its use to non-couplet lines from the Source Text, aiming to highlight tone and emotional expression. For instance, Zhu's rendering of *"O, woe is me, T' have seen what I have seen, see what I see! (III, i)"* becomes *"啊！我好苦，谁料过去的繁华，变作今朝的泥土。"* (BT: *Alas, I am suffering greatly. Who would have imagined that past prosperity would turn into today's dust?*). Here, two pairs of rhyming words share the same vowel sound 'u,' which in Chinese, with its narrow and delicate quality similar to 'woo' in English, evokes a sense of

lamentation. This choice not only preserves the emotional intensity conveyed in the Source Text but also aligns with familiar phonetic patterns in Chinese, maintaining a poetic quality for the audience. By contrast, Lin Zhaohua's adaptation of *Hamlet* omits end-rhyme entirely, representing a marked divergence from Zhu's stylistic approach.

From both linguistic and structural perspectives, Zhu integrated Chinese rhythm and rhyme—specifically *dun* and end-rhyme—while simultaneously using additional explanatory elements in the Target Text to ensure that rhythmic and tonal qualities from the Source Text were effectively maintained. While Lin's adaptation followed some of Zhu's core strategies, including a blend of domestication and foreignisation techniques, his approach significantly diverged in the treatment of rhythm and rhyme. Specifically, Jianmin abandoned traditional poetic techniques in favour of a Target Text that mirrored the original's structure without preserving its rhythm.

Analysis of the Changes in Rhythm and Rhyme

From a poetic standpoint, while earlier translations could not fully capture the precise metrical features of the original due to the absence of direct equivalents for English poetic rhythms in Chinese, they nonetheless developed unique rhythmic patterns of their own. Previous translators, whether employing verse, prose, or a blend of both, crafted distinct rhythmic identities. Zhu Shenghao's version is a notable example of this balanced approach, as he sought to harmonise both verse and prose, ensuring that neither form was sacrificed. However, Li Jianming and Lin Zhaohua adopted a distinctly different approach, opting for entirely colloquial dialogue and monologues, diverging significantly from the traditional

Chinese methods of translating the play. As discussed in Chapter 2, this shift toward complete colloquialisation stemmed from the principles of avant-garde performance theory. Theoretical discussions surrounding avant-garde theatre emerged in China as early as 1981 and continued into the late 1990s. Influences from Western avant-garde movements were gradually assimilated into Chinese theatre, ultimately shaping a domestic avant-garde style with defining features, one of which involved dismantling the authority of the script and fragmenting the narrative structure. The unrhymed, everyday language style employed in *Hamlet 1990* exemplifies this feature. While rhythm had traditionally been a significant consideration for translators of Shakespeare's works in China, *Hamlet 1990* marked a departure from this convention by deliberately eschewing formal rhythmic patterns. Jianmin and Zhaohua instead reshaped the linguistic style into conversational expressions, favouring natural speech patterns that actors could deliver fluidly and audiences could easily comprehend, aligning with the evolving trends of Chinese avant-garde theatre.

As previously mentioned, Li Jianming and Lin Zhaohua shared a unified vision regarding the needs of the theatre landscape at the time. They believed that stage performances needed to be concise and direct, adopting a language style that prioritised audience comprehension above all else. Their approach was rooted not only in the literary modernisation that had been ongoing since the 1980s but also in the broader challenges facing the theatrical industry. As alternative forms of entertainment grew in popularity, theatre attendance declined, creating a pressing need for innovative productions that remained widely accessible. Zhaohua explicitly stated that audiences were not interested in watching actors recite poetry or deliver rigid monologues. Instead, they sought emotionally charged lines capable of resonating with their experiences.

The extensive use of colloquial language throughout *Hamlet 1990* was thus both a bold creative experiment and a necessary adaptation driven by audience demands and market pressures of the time.

The analysis above reveals that Zhu aimed to use the linguistic features of the target language to faithfully convey the core meaning of the original text while ensuring the audience's comprehension and acceptance. In contrast, Lin deliberately deviated from this approach. His transformation of the linguistic style responded to the evolving needs of Chinese theatre at the time and reflected a broader trend in Chinese avant-garde theatre, where language conventions were being subverted. *Hamlet 1990* exemplifies this movement. Lin's linguistic innovations were shaped by the socio-cultural context of late 1980s China and aimed to address the cultural demands of that period. The rise of diverse entertainment alternatives had led to a crisis in theatre, which urgently required new creative approaches (refer to contextualisation). This development prompted a transformation in scriptwriting, with *Hamlet 1990* by Jianmin and Zhaohua serving as a prominent example and a substantive development in the evolution of modern Chinese theatre.

4.4.3. Theme expressions and translation of 'To be or not to be'

Zhu retained the original theme, making no structural changes to the lines, while only domesticating certain expressions to improve their accessibility for the target audience. In contrast, Lin altered both the thematic focus and the delivery of lines to some extent. Regarding theme, Lin reduced the prominence of the revenge motif compared to the original. Several monologues and metaphors in his version accentuate Hamlet's emotional turmoil and internal

conflict, including his contemplation of suicide. The excerpt in Example 1 offers a clear illustration of this adaptation. In the dialogue between Hamlet and the ghost of his father, the ghost demands revenge for his murder. However, while the original text emphasises this vengeful plea, Lin's version modifies Hamlet's response significantly. Rather than making a direct vow of vengeance, Hamlet repeatedly states, "I will remember you," emphasising this phrase seven times. Though the ghost insists on retribution, Hamlet's reaction in this version conveys uncertainty, emotional pain, and deep conflict rather than resolve. I argue that this reduction in the emphasis on revenge and the amplified focus on hesitation can be interpreted as a reflection of the creators' internal conflict. Specifically, the Tiananmen Square Incident of 1989, which involved severe repression of intellectuals and restrictions on artistic freedom, left China's intelligentsia feeling disoriented and directionless (refer to contextualisation). Having previously explored artistic expression more freely in the relatively relaxed climate of the early 1980s, by 1989, this group faced uncertainty about their creative future. Therefore, Hamlet's hesitation and internal struggle in this translation mirror the intellectual community's broader sense of entrapment and their difficulty in navigating a restrictive socio-political landscape with unclear prospects for the future.

Beyond expressing their personal confusion, the translators also conveyed their own perspectives on life amidst their contemporaneous social dilemmas, altering lines to resonate with the audience and encourage critical reflection. For instance, Lin adapted and reimagined Hamlet's most famous line, which encapsulates the play's core theme, representing a significant departure from all previous translations.

'To-BE or-NOT to-BE that-IS the-QUEStion   (III. i)'

哈姆莱特：生存还是毁灭。

(Hamlet: Survive or Destroy)

国 王：生存还是毁灭。

(King: Survive or Destroy)

波洛涅斯：生存还是毁灭

(Polonius: Survive or Destroy)

This dialogue recurs four times in Lin's version of *Hamlet*, diverging from the Source Text where "to be or not to be" is presented as Hamlet's introspective query, reflecting his hesitation to exact revenge—a nuance captured faithfully in Zhu's translation. However, Lin reinterprets Hamlet's internal struggle, depicting him not just as hesitant to seek vengeance but as a figure torn between pursuing success or confronting mortality, with the alternative being passive stagnation in despair and grief. Lin transforms this question from a personal reflection into a universal dilemma. He reimagines the phrase from "There are a thousand Hamlets in a thousand people's eyes" into the idea that "everyone is Hamlet." As Lin explained in his autobiography:

"We [are] all Hamlet. Each day, we pass countless individuals. Hamlet's struggle may be the same as ours. The choices others face may echo our own. To be or not to be—survival or death—can be a philosophical question, a major life decision, or even a mundane choice we confront daily. To be or not to be—there is only one choice." Lin's memoir (2014, pp. 98-140) indicates that these modifications were extensively discussed with both the translator and the actors. More importantly, they reflect Lin's intent to convey his artistic and philosophical

viewpoints as both director and editor of the production.

Analysis of the Theme's Expression

I argue that the thematic and textual modifications in this version of *Hamlet* mirror the collective social experience and ideological stance of the entire production team during that period. Their lived reality within the broader socio-political climate significantly shaped the adaptations observed in the play's themes and lines. During this era, the Chinese theatre industry faced a profound crisis. Avant-garde theatre operated largely on its own, with minimal financial backing or material resources, mirroring the economic struggles of the nation at large. Despite these constraints, Lin and his collaborators, as members of a society undergoing rapid yet turbulent transformation, remained committed to innovative theatrical practices. Consequently, "To be or not to be" evolved beyond a literary question into a symbolic reflection of the entire production's experience during the creation of *Hamlet 1990*.

Lin Zhaohua expanded "to be or not to be" into a shared reflection voiced by multiple characters, transforming it into both a philosophical metaphor and an emotional expression for the audience. This reinterpretation reframed the life-and-death question as either a profound philosophical dilemma or a routine personal challenge, mirroring both his personal struggles and those of his collaborators. The modification resonates with the societal uncertainties of late-1980s China, where fluctuating policies and an unpredictable national trajectory created widespread feelings of vulnerability and hesitation. As each character voices "to be or not to be," it becomes both a reflection of their internal struggles and a direct appeal to the audience, encouraging personal introspection. The language choices, layered with uncertainty, align

closely with symbolic theatre traditions, reinforcing the themes of ambiguity and emotional conflict. Therefore, the repetition of this line throughout Lin's production serves as a defining feature of its avant-garde qualities, reflecting both thematic depth and experimental narrative structure.

During the 1980s and 1990s, people often experienced a sense of disorientation, struggling with uncertainty about their life direction and the choices available to them. This period of instability emerged as the market economy gradually replaced the centrally planned system, compelling people to adapt to new socio-economic structures. Anxiety also arose from the widening wealth gap, as disparities between the affluent and the underprivileged grew more pronounced. Moreover, foreign cultural influences began to challenge traditional Chinese ideological norms, contributing to a cultural shift towards individualism and a movement away from collectivist values. As a result, people started expressing personal emotions such as frustration, confusion, and defiance. Simultaneously, concepts like gender equality gained prominence, with increased attention to women's rights and personal autonomy.

This analysis suggests that the adjustments in both thematic content and line delivery in *Hamlet* were a direct reflection of the socio-political conditions of the time. The modifications not only served as creative expressions of the production team's collective struggles but also mirrored the evolving cultural and political landscape that had diverged significantly from the early 1980s. These historical conditions, while presenting creative obstacles, also inspired the team to reshape the play, using their adaptation as a means of expressing personal reflections and broader societal concerns.

Summary of Textual Analysis of *Hamlet* by Li Jianmin and Lin Zhaohua

This case study, employing a comparative analytical approach, reveals that the modifications observed in *Hamlet 1990*—including culturally significant terminology, rhythm and rhyme alterations, thematic shifts, and the repetition of key lines—were closely tied to the socio-political context of late 1980s China. The translation of culturally significant expressions was shaped by contrasting views on foreign and domestic cultures held by different intellectual factions of the period. The deliberate departure from structured rhythm and rhyme in favour of colloquial, subversive language was a direct response to contemporary cultural developments, particularly within the theatrical sphere. The broader socio-political climate of the late 1980s prompted the creative team to express both personal and collective reflections on societal struggles through their adaptations of the play's themes and structure.

Chapter 5 Sanjiemei Dengdai Geduo (Three Sisters Waiting for Godot) by Lin Zhaohua in 1998

Three Sisters Waiting for Godot was adapted by Lin Zhaohua in 1998, blending two Chinese translations: Sanjiemei (*Three Sisters*) by Cao Jinghua and Dengdai Geduo (*Waiting for Godot*) by Shi Xiangrong. The former was translated from Chekhov's original Russian text (*Три сестры*), while the latter was derived from Samuel Beckett's English version. (It is worth noting that Beckett provided versions of *Waiting for Godot* in both English and French.) Consequently, the following sections will first examine the historical and linguistic backgrounds of both original plays for contextual clarity.

5.1 Introduction to the Original Three Sisters and the Chinese versions

The original *Three Sisters* was written in 1900 by the Russian playwright Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) and was first staged in 1901 at the Moscow Art Theatre. The narrative centres on the quiet, unremarkable lives of three sisters, Irina, Masha, and Olga, who live with their brother, Andrey, on the outskirts of a provincial Russian town. The sisters long for the excitement and cultural sophistication of Moscow, holding onto the hope of one day returning there (Senelick, 1997, pp.58-67). Chekhov disrupted conventional elements of Russian theatre, which often relied on decisive actions and clearly resolved conflicts, instead favouring fragmented dialogue, introspective monologues, and significant events occurring offstage (Gilman, 1995, p.108). The characters openly articulate the sources of their emotional turmoil (which could be seen as a redefined form of dramatic action), and these personal reflections drive the narrative structure of the play.

Written during a period of substantial social and economic upheaval in Russia at the turn of the 20th century, *Three Sisters* reflects these tensions. The sisters' social standing as upper-class individuals is threatened by the rise of a newly mobilised lower class, reflecting broader shifts in Russian society. Chekhov and his contemporaries distanced themselves from the popular melodramatic tradition of the time, which relied on heightened emotions and

exaggerated scenarios. Instead, Chekhov's work emphasised realistic portrayals of daily life, conveying a sense of confusion, emotional loss, and interpersonal conflict reflective of the societal transformations taking place (Gerni 2019, 392-394).

Lin Zhaohua's adaptation was drawn from Cao Jinghua's 1945 Chinese translation. Cao's version was noted for its "authenticity," as it sought to replicate both the linguistic and cultural nuances of the original text as closely as possible (Leng, 1989, p.26). Unlike many other translations, Cao's work was directly rendered from the original Russian script, making it a logical and significant choice for Lin's subsequent adaptation.

5.2 Introduction to the Original Waiting for Godot and the Chinese versions

Waiting for Godot is an absurdist play authored by Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), first published and performed in Paris in 1953. The narrative revolves around two central characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who meet near a solitary tree in a desolate, undefined location. They wait endlessly for the mysterious figure of Godot, whose anticipated arrival seems to hold great significance, though it ultimately never occurs (Lawley 2008, 1-3). Beckett's work rejected conventional dramatic structures, including the typical exposition, rising action, and resolution, instead dismantling traditional plot progression entirely (Brady 2010 24).

Beckett and his future wife, Suzanne, were both involved in the French Resistance, a covert movement that opposed Nazi forces during the Second World War. This was around the time *Waiting for Godot* was being written, shortly after the German occupation of France came to an end (Sexton, 2008). Beckett (1956) provided a political reading of the play, describing it as an allegory for the French Resistance against German occupation. He further remarked, "The intrusion of Pozzo and Lucky seems like nothing more than a metaphor for Ireland's view of mainland Britain, where society has ever been blighted by a greedy ruling élite keeping the working classes passive and ignorant by whatever means." From a philosophical angle, *Waiting for Godot* can also be interpreted as an exploration of mortality and the quest for meaning in human existence (Kemp, 2017).

The first Chinese translation of *Waiting for Godot* was produced by Shi Xiangrong in 1965. However, during that period, it was labelled as a 'yellow-cover book', a classification used for restricted texts, limiting access to only a select group of readers (Li, 2016, pp.26-27). With the gradual liberalisation of the theatre scene during the 1980s, Shi Xiangrong's translation was finally published in three sanctioned collections: *Selected Plays of the Theatre of the Absurd* (1981), *Selected Works of the Theatre of the Absurd* (1983), and *Selected Readings from Foreign Modernist Works* (1986). By this point, the initial restrictions on the play had been lifted, making the translation widely accessible to the general public for the first time (Lin & Zhang, 2001, p.416). This version remained the only widely circulated Chinese translation of *Waiting for Godot* until 2006 when Yu Zhongxian translated a new edition from Beckett's original French text (Li, 2019, pp.96-97).

5.3 Producing the Translation

In 1997, while working at the Beijing People's Art Theatre, Lin Zhaohua sought permission to stage *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*. However, even in the late 1990s, rigid state policies continued to regulate productions staged in state-owned theatres. Lin's application was rejected by the funding and approval committee, who maintained that Beckett's and Chekhov's works could be performed individually but combining them would be unacceptable (Lin 2014, p.300). The officials argued that *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot* differed significantly in structure, themes, and cultural contexts, making a merged performance unsuitable and unlikely to succeed (Lin 2014, p.300).

As private theatres operated with fewer restrictions, Lin pursued the production independently through his own company, the Lin Zhaohua Theatre Studio. However, this approach meant that he had to secure private investment, unlike state-approved productions which benefited from government funding (Wu 1998, 16-17). In late 1997, just before rehearsals were scheduled to begin, the sole investor who had committed to financing the production withdrew from the agreement. Consequently, Lin was forced to finance the majority of the production costs himself, with additional financial support from Yi Liming, the stage

director. Much of the funding came from borrowed money, but Lin ultimately managed to stage the production as he had envisioned.

In producing his own translation, Lin Zhaohua was ultimately required to rely on Shi's version for *Waiting for Godot*. Though this was Lin's only available option, *Dengdai Geduo* (the Chinese translation by Shi Xiangrong) is widely recognised as the version that most effectively conveys the linguistic and cultural content of the English source text, making it the most suitable choice regardless. For *Three Sisters*, Lin's translation was grounded in Cao Jinghua's 1945 edition, which has been described as 'authentic' due to its faithful rendering of the linguistic and cultural aspects of the original Russian text (Leng, 1989, p.26). Compared to its contemporary alternatives, Cao's translation was the only Chinese version directly derived from the original Russian source, which made it the logical choice for Lin's adaptation.

5.4 Structure and Features of the Translation

Lin's adaptation fused the works of Chekhov and Beckett into a singular theatrical production—a 'collage' where plot elements from both plays were presented alternately, such as *Three Sisters*, *Godot*, *Three Sisters*, *Godot*, and so forth. In terms of performance style and stagecraft, *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* marked a significant innovation within Chinese avant-garde theatre. Actors assumed multiple roles across both narratives, with the two originally separate plays unfolding simultaneously on the same stage.

As previously established, the dramatic exploration of themes such as death, 'waiting', existential purpose, and material desire had become prevalent in Chinese avant-garde theatre by the 1990s. *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* embodied this focus by addressing the theme of 'waiting' in multiple layers. The ongoing social and political uncertainties of the decade, combined with the emergence and rapid expansion of popular culture, significantly influenced the Chinese theatre landscape. The transition towards a market-driven cultural economy left intellectuals and experimental artists unprepared for the shift, making the production of theatre with avant-garde qualities increasingly challenging.

During this period, debates emerged within the Chinese avant-garde theatre community regarding whether to preserve the purity of experimental theatre or to compromise with mainstream popular culture. The tension between progressive artistic expression and commercialisation presented significant challenges. Lin's combination of two forms of 'waiting' within *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* reflected these tensions by directly engaging with two dominant modes of existence in the 1990s: the intellectual's internal contemplation of purpose and the wider societal confrontation with reality. Additionally, the production explored themes of estrangement and migration ('to go or not to go'), which were directly influenced by the period's socio-political transformations and cultural upheavals.

5.5 Literature Review

Existing scholarship on *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* remains limited, consisting of six academic dissertations, six journal articles, two interviews, and one collected volume of Lin Zhaohua's works. These sources can be grouped into three primary categories: (1) analyses of the play's dual themes in the socio-political context of 1990s China, (2) investigations into the temporal and spatial shifts presented on stage, and (3) critical studies focusing on textual restructuring, such as the collage technique and selective omissions.

5.5.1 Two Themes within the Socio-Political Context of the 1990s

Yu (2018: p.23) argued that Lin's decision to merge *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot* into a single performance arose while he was recovering from illness and revisiting both scripts in mid-1997. Lin recognised that both plays revolved around the concept of 'waiting'—a universally relatable experience—and identified this shared theme as the core link between the two works. Qu (2008) further noted that although the linguistic styles, historical contexts, and interpretations of 'waiting' differ between the plays, a thematic intertextuality is evident in their mutual exploration of this concept. Meanwhile, Peng (2008: p.101) explored how the socio-political climate shaped Lin's adaptation, asserting that Chinese intellectuals in the 1990s were in a state of despair following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests (as previously mentioned).

Despite the oppressive social atmosphere, intellectuals clung to hope for a brighter future while simultaneously grappling with emotional turmoil and the erosion of ideological faith (Peng, 2008, p.101). Unfortunately, neither Qu nor Peng dives deeply into the differences in how 'waiting' is conceptualised across the two texts. Expanding on this, Li (2019: p.101) clarified that the 'waiting' in *Three Sisters* represents a hopeful longing for an improved existence, while in *Waiting for Godot*, it conveys uncertainty rooted in the collapse of ultimate meaning. Gu Fei (2019) noted that Lin, as an intellectual of his time, viewed the two portrayals of 'waiting' as reflective of the dilemmas faced by Chinese literati, thus crafting *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* to capture both hopeful expectation and anguished uncertainty.

Current analyses of the 'waiting' theme remain limited to the general summaries offered in the above studies, with little focus on how the theme materialises within the text itself through dialogue and narrative structure. I argue that this theme must be evident in the adapted text itself, necessitating a more detailed textual analysis. Therefore, one dimension of my textual examination will be to explore how the original texts were restructured to represent both themes of 'waiting' within the adaptation, drawing on theatre translation theory. This analysis will be further elaborated upon later in subsection (iii) of this chapter. Furthermore, Lin's adaptation of *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot* was undoubtedly shaped by Chinese cultural values and the social circumstances of the 1990s, aspects which remain underexplored in the current scholarship. My textual analysis will aim to bridge this gap by focusing on how Lin's adaptation reinterprets both plays' themes under the influence of the socio-political environment, contributing to a deeper understanding of both the play's thematic construction and the cultural context it reflects.

5.5.2 Temporal and Spatial Transformations Displayed on Stage

Gu Fei (2019) conducted a detailed analysis of Lin's stage design, highlighting how Lin employed a dual-performance structure (see Historical Background) to express two distinct themes simultaneously. As Gu (2019: p.20) explained, Lin did not merely merge the two plays but also established two distinct performance spaces on stage: (1) a secluded island surrounded

by water at the back, where the narrative of *Three Sisters* unfolds, and (2) a forward stage area where the plot of *Waiting for Godot* occurs. Two actors alternated between portraying Vladimir and Estragon from *Godot* and the military officers admired by the sisters, effectively blending the two works and presenting their themes in parallel (Gu, 2019: p.20). Additionally, both plays were performed concurrently on their respective sets, realising Lin's dual-performance concept on stage (Gu, 2019: p.20). However, Gu's study does not explore this dual-performance mode in depth. While this dissertation does not focus on the staging aspects, I will examine how the spoken dialogues function within this dual framework, as discussed further in the following sections.

5.5.3 Analyses of Textual Collages and Deletions

Li Yuan (2019, pp.129-133), in his doctoral thesis, explored the collage and deletion techniques applied to the two original texts in Lin's adaptation. He argued (2019, pp.129-133) that, while 'waiting' remained the primary theme, Lin infused the adaptation with a secondary concept: 'waiting' as a continual aspect of life. To assist the actors in varying emotional expressions, avoiding a static interpretation of characters based on Stanislavski's 'I am,' and to highlight the secondary theme, Lin shortened sections of dialogue in both Chinese versions of *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot*. This restructuring led to a pattern alternating between the two plotlines: *Three Sisters → Waiting for Godot → Three Sisters...* (Li, 2019, pp.129-133). Lin Jian (2014, pp.290-310), another Chinese theatre scholar, briefly mentioned this textual collage technique but primarily examined thematic elements rather than delving into the mechanics of the textual modifications. Meanwhile, Taiwanese scholar Lin (ibid., pp.292-300) interpreted the adaptation as an effort to embody Lin's unique theatrical style, characterised by a dual-performance structure integrating traditional Chinese opera techniques alongside a secondary philosophical theme (ibid., pp.292-300). This restructuring also aimed to align with the artistic intentions of both the performers and the director, topics further explored in sections 5.6.2 and 5.6.3.

In contrast to prior textual analyses of *Death of a Salesman* and *Hamlet*, the adaptation of

Three Sisters Waiting for Godot does not appear primarily audience-centred. Lin Zhaohua (ibid., p.288) asserted, "the lines do not need to be understood, the adaptation does not need to cater to the audience, I just want to express what I want to express" (BT). This declaration indicates that audience comprehension was not a primary objective in the adaptation process, a choice that profoundly influences the play's interpretation within translation studies. Nonetheless, existing research has not sufficiently addressed this critical dimension.

The preceding review clearly indicates that prior scholarly research has largely concentrated on the objective features of the adapted text while failing to explore the reasoning behind the collage techniques and textual deletions. Moreover, there is a noticeable gap in research examining the translation processes within the text itself. While avant-garde playwrights of the 1990s, such as Meng Jinghui, Mu Sen, and Lin Zhaohua, sought to challenge the script's dominant role in theatrical productions, Lin (ibid., p.292) emphasised that, unlike Meng and Mu, his works continued to treat the script as an essential component of the theatrical whole. Similarly, as Gu Fei (2018, p.4) noted, the text remained central to conveying themes and guiding stage interpretation. Therefore, textual analysis should not be disregarded in critical discussions of the play.

Regarding the use of collage, textual deletion, and reordering of dialogue, this analysis of *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* in Chinese will examine the translation strategies and theoretical frameworks applied in the adaptation. The study will also explore the rationale for these methodological choices and how they contribute to the presentation of the play's two distinct conceptualisations of 'waiting'.

5.6 Textual Analysis-Three Sisters Waiting for Godot

The 1990s, particularly the mid-to-late decade, as discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, marked a critical juncture for Chinese avant-garde theatre, with an urgent need for creative reflection and structural evolution. In 1998, Lin Zhaohua, a leading figure in Chinese

avant-garde theatre, produced *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*, merging and adapting Samuel

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (premiered in Paris in 1953) and Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's *Three*

Sisters (premiered in 1901 at the Moscow Art Theatre). According to Guo (2014, p.89), this

production introduced significant theatrical innovation during this period, both in textual

translation and stagecraft. Lin's adaptation embodied the dual performance and dual thematic

expressions he had been pursuing since the 1980s (Yan, 2017, p.154; Guo, 2014, p.2). It has

been suggested that *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* significantly influenced the development

of Chinese avant-garde theatre at the turn of the century, not only advancing experimental

theatre practice but also responding critically to the socio-political climate of the time.

Lin's translation of *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* modifies the characters and themes of

the original works through the addition and omission of characters and the expansion of

thematic content, introducing novel dramatic elements such as dual performance and dual

thematic expression. This chapter will examine these modifications, contending that Lin's

translation was a direct response to the socio-political context of the late 1990s and

simultaneously an expression of his artistic goal to redefine avant-garde theatre by merging two

canonical plays into a single cohesive work.

As explored in sections 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3, *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* by Lin Zhaohua

was adapted from Cao Jinghua's Chinese translation *Sanzimei* (*Three Sisters*) and Shi

Xiangrong's Chinese translation *Dengdai Geduo* (*Waiting for Godot*), while also referencing

the original English texts. Therefore, examples from both the English source texts (ST), Cao's

and Shi's Chinese versions, and the target texts (TT) will be included in the analysis below.

This textual analysis is grounded in Lefevere's theory, which asserts that groups such as publishers, media, and political bodies influence translation decisions. Additionally, Mathijssen's view on how a specific social context can lead to the use of deletion, addition, and other translation strategies will be applied, alongside Merino's argument that certain translation methods arise in response to the social environment and the need to satisfy specific requirements.

The analysis of the first two texts, *Death of a Salesman* and *Hamlet 1990*, focuses predominantly on linguistic aspects. The first example addresses the subversion of language-based rhetoric, while the second explores thematic elevation. Both works maintain consistency with the original texts in terms of the number of acts, characters, and the preservation of core themes. In contrast, the translations of Chinese avant-garde plays from the third phase go beyond linguistic adjustments. The adoption of colloquial language and bold expressions is no longer groundbreaking. Instead, more significant innovations emerge, including alterations in character development and thematic content. Therefore, in this third case study, the primary focus shifts from linguistic elements to a more comprehensive analysis of the addition and removal of characters and themes.

This section centres on the adaptation and translation strategies employed in *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*. According to Chinese literary critic Tong Bingqing (2016, p.168), dramatic works convey their themes and character depth primarily through dialogue. Lin Zhaohua (2016, p.50) further noted that his adaptation involved not only reducing the number of characters but also reshaping the thematic focus of 'waiting' by modifying the characters' dialogues in both

Shi's and Cao's target texts. Consequently, this textual analysis is divided into two key parts: (a) the analysis of characters and (b) the analysis of themes, viewed through the lens of translation studies. The analysis will explore the extent to which *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* was adapted, and how the socio-political context and Lin Zhaohua's artistic objective of introducing dual performance and dual thematic expression influenced the translation process, contributing to the evolution of Chinese avant-garde theatre.

5.6.1 Characters

Lin Zhaohua's adaptation of *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* involved substantial modifications to the original scripts by Beckett and Chekhov. As Lin (2014, p.290) and Wu (1998, p.18) observed, one of the primary changes made to *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* was the removal of certain characters and their dialogues from both *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot*. Specifically, Lin eliminated the characters Pozzo, Lucky, and Boy from *Waiting for Godot*, retaining only the central figures, Vladimir and Estragon, in his target text (TT). Similarly, in *Three Sisters*, the roles of Natasha, Kulygin, and others were excluded, leaving the focus on the three sisters, Olga, Maria, and Irina, in Lin's adapted text (AT). As a direct consequence, the dialogue linked with these omitted figures was also removed. The decision to exclude these pairs of characters stemmed from the sensitive nature of their relationships, which were perceived as socially and politically controversial in Chinese literary and artistic productions during the late 1990s. A more comprehensive examination will be provided in examples 5.1 and 5.2 below.

In contrast, Lin introduced an innovative character, referred to as the "aside," who diverges

from the conventional theatrical aside by representing several of the deleted characters, including Boy, Vershinin, and Tuzenbakh, by delivering their lines as narration. Additionally, certain dialogues originally assigned to Vershinin and Tuzenbakh were reassigned to the actors portraying Estragon and Vladimir. Lin himself explained this strategy during an interview (2014, p.195), stating that he abridged the original texts to shorten the performance duration to under three hours, as he believed a longer runtime could diminish the production's appeal and result in audience disengagement.

However, I contend that the hierarchical structures reflected in the characters' relationships and dialogues, which were considered politically sensitive in 1990s China, were the primary motivation behind Lin's decision to omit and replace these figures. During this period, Chinese authorities exercised strict control over artistic and literary works, censoring content that broached politically sensitive issues. For example, the CCTV documentary *Heshang*, released in 1998, was banned for referencing the Tiananmen Square protests and remains prohibited. The reality of class divisions was rarely acknowledged, and terms like 'Jieji' (class/hierarchy) or content reflecting class struggles were systematically excluded from artistic expression, as noted by Dai (1999). Consequently, it can be argued that political influences significantly shaped Lin's reduction of characters and the reallocation of dialogue, a point that will be further developed in the subsequent analysis.

The Deletion of Characters

Example 5.1:

Beckett's ST2 (Act I)	Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed round his neck…Lucky carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and a greatcoat, Pozzo a whip.	
Shi's TT2 (Act I)	波桌及幸运儿上。波桌用绳子拴住幸运儿的脖子。。。幸运儿提着沉重的口袋，一个折凳，一只野餐篮和一件大衣。波桌拿着绳子。	(Enter Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo ties Lucky's neck with a rope… Lucky carries a heavy bag, a folding stool, a picnic basket and an overcoat, Pozzo holds the rope.) (BT)
Lin's AT	This character and his relevant content have been deleted	

As discussed above, the characters Pozzo and Lucky from Beckett's source text (ST) and Shi's target text (TT) were excluded in Lin's adapted text (AT). Lawley (2008, p.60) summarised Pozzo and Lucky as archetypes of a master-servant or tyrant-subject dynamic. Dutton (1986, p.71) argued that while Vladimir and Estragon share a more balanced interdependent relationship, Pozzo and Lucky's connection is defined by dominance and subjugation. Example 1 illustrates this dynamic, where Lucky, restrained by a rope around his neck, is burdened with Pozzo's belongings, clearly establishing an unequal power dynamic

between them. Consequently, both the source text (ST2) and target text (TT2) reveal an imbalanced relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. I contend that this implied depiction of class division was a central factor behind Lin's decision to omit these two characters, as their presence reflected an overt social hierarchy.

Example 5.2:

Chekhov's ST1 (Act IV)	Natasha: First of all I'll have this avenue of fir trees cut down, and then that maple. . . . It looks so ugly in the evening. . . . [To IRINA] My dear, that sash does not suit you at all. . . . It's in bad taste. You need to wear something brighter.	
Cao's TT1 (Act IV)	娜：我要吩咐他们首先把这条林荫道两旁的云杉砍掉，然后，喏，把这棵槭树也砍掉……每到傍晚它那么难看……（对伊莉娜）亲爱的，这条腰带你束着完全不相称……这不美观……应当换一条浅颜色的。	Natasha: first, I' will make the cut down fir trees on the both sides of this avenue, and then, here, that maple… it looks so ugly in the evening… [To IRINA] My dear, that belt does not suit you at all. . . . It is not pretty. You need to replace with a brighter one. (BT)

Lin's AT	The character and her relevant content have been deleted.	

Similarly, the character Natasha from Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Cao's TT1 was also omitted in Lin's AT. Zhang (2016) observed that Natasha's lines in Example 2 were delivered when she had completely asserted control over the household, effectively becoming the dominant figure in the three sisters' family. Her instructions to Irina were issued in a commanding tone, further emphasising her authoritative role. This portrayal positioned Natasha as the head of the family, creating a dynamic of control and subordination akin to the master-servant relationship exemplified by Pozzo and Lucky. Therefore, I argue that Natasha's unequal relationship with the sisters, which similarly suggested a class hierarchy, contributed to her removal from Lin's adaptation in the same way as Pozzo and Lucky were excluded.

Since Lin's adaptation merges two separate works, retaining every plot element and dialogue was impractical. As noted in Chapter 2, the theatrical trend of the late 1990s increasingly marginalised the script's authority in favour of performance-centric staging approaches. Theatre practitioners sought to simplify scripts, leading to inevitable reductions of lines and plot content during the translation process. However, the elimination of entire characters significantly alters the narrative, indicating that such deletions warrant analysis within the context of ideological influences and the impact of patrons.

Analysis of Deleted Characters

The examples above reveal that both the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky in Beckett's ST2 and Shi's TT2, as well as Natasha's authority over the sisters in Chekhov's ST1 and Cao's TT1, reflect hierarchical and oppressive dynamics. These unequal power relations were incompatible with the socio-political climate of 1990s China, which led Lin to omit these characters from his adaptation of *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*. Consequently, I contend that Lin's decision was not merely artistic but rather a reflection of the ideological landscape of the time.

Lefevere (1992a, 15) examined the cultural forces shaping translation, identifying 'patronage outside the literary system' as a key factor. Patrons, including publishers, media, and political bodies, hold the power to either promote or obstruct the production and dissemination of literary works. Similarly, Mathijssen (2007, p.39) observed that the strategy of reduction, which involves the removal of specific characters or lines, is often applied in drama translation to avoid themes deemed culturally or politically sensitive.

Considering Luo Tian's perspective, the characters Pozzo and Lucky play a significant role, as their repeated appearances symbolise both the disillusionment with life and the unchanging nature of the world (2007, 293). Their presence serves as a contrast to the emotional fluctuations and philosophical reflections of Estragon and Vladimir on existence and humanity (Luo 2007, 293). By removing these two figures, the cyclical structure of the original play is disrupted, making the continued waiting of Estragon and Vladimir appear more monotonous and less dynamic (Luo 2007, 293). The impact of excluding these two characters raises questions about whether Lin Zhaohua's decision to delete them was a last resort or a strategic

choice. Additionally, instances of literary works being censored due to hierarchical themes, as well as Jinhua's (2018) observation that literary and artistic creations in 1990s China tended to avoid class-related subjects, further reinforce the argument that the removal of Pozzo and Lucky was a deliberate strategy to circumvent politically sensitive content. The evidence suggests that the political system acted as a form of patronage, imposing constraints on the expression of class structures, which became a prohibited subject. Consequently, Lin employed a reduction strategy to adapt *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*, a decision evidently shaped by the socio-political realities of 1990s China.

The Addition and Replacement of Characters.

Neither Chekhov's *Three Sisters* nor Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* originally included the theatrical convention of asides. However, in Lin's adaptation *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*, asides were introduced to serve multiple functions beyond the conventional role of brief commentary in modern drama. Typically, asides in contemporary theatre deliver short remarks about characters or plot developments, offering the audience insights unavailable to the characters on stage. However, Lin's use of asides in his adaptation performs more complex functions, as illustrated in the examples below:

Example 5.3:

| Chekhov's ST1 (Act I) | CHEBUTYKIN: [reading the newspaper as he comes in]. For hair falling out... two ounces of naphthaline in half a bottle of | |

	alcohol… to be dissolved and used daily…[puts it down in his note-book] … I shall soon be sixty, I am an old man, alone in the world… [To IRINA]…I loved your dear mother…	
Cao's TT1 (Act I)	契（一边走一边读报）治头发脱落的方子……两钱石脑油精加上半瓶酒精……溶解后，天天涂擦…… 契 我不久就要六十岁了，我是个老人，是个孤零零的、不足道的老人……（对伊莉娜）……我爱您的去世的妈妈……	CHEBUTYKIN [reading the newspaper as he comes in]. For hair falling out… two ounces of naphthaline in half a bottle of alcohol… to be dissolved and used daily… [puts it down in his note-book]. CHEBUTYKIN. I shall soon be sixty, I am an lonely, old man… [To IRINA]… I loved your dear mother who has passed away...(BT)
Lin's AT	旁白：医生来了，契不特定医生是一个	Aside: Doctor showed

(Lin, 2014,p. 329)	快六十岁的老头子，他一生没有结过婚。他曾经爱过三姐妹的母亲，现在他爱的是喝酒和读报纸。报纸上说，治疗脱发的办法是二钱樟脑，半瓶酒精溶解开，天天擦。	up. Doctor Chebutykin is an old man who is almost sixty years old, and he has never been married. He once loved the mother of three sisters, and now he loves to drink and read newspapers. The newspaper said that the cure for hair loss is two two ounces of naphthaline in half a bottle of alcohol dissolved open and used every day.

The first line in Lin's adapted text, '医生来了 (Doctor showed up)', exemplifies the aside's fundamental role of guiding the audience through the narrative. Here, the aside provides critical information about the unfolding plot, offering context for the audience. Moreover, Lin restructured Chebutykin's original lines by condensing and transforming them into a third-person narration delivered by the aside, effectively blending the storytelling approach with performance commentary.

Example 5.4:

(Lin, 2014,p. 329)	快六十岁的老头子，他一生没有结过婚。他曾经爱过三姐妹的母亲，现在他爱的是喝	up. Doctor Chebutykin is an

Beckett's ST2 (Act I)	VLADIMIR: You have a message from Mr. Godot? BOY: Yes Sir.	
Shi's TT2 (Act I)	弗拉基米尔：你给戈多先生送信来了？ 男孩：是的，先生。	VLADIMIR: You have a message from Mr. Godot? BOY: Yes Sir. (BT)
Lin's AT2 (Lin, 2014, p. 340)	弗拉基米尔：你给戈多先生送信来了？ 旁白：是的，先生。	VLADIMIR: You have a message from Mr. Godot? Aside: Yes Sir.

In example 2, the aside substitutes the character of the boy, narrating his lines, thus assuming an additional narrative role beyond his primary function as an aside. Lin (2016, p.50) noted that this shift extended the aside's role, transforming it from a mere commentator into a composite figure, merging elements of the deleted characters while simultaneously functioning as a narrator.

The role of the aside in Lin's adaptation aligns with the performance style of *Pingtan*, a traditional Chinese art form characterised by storytelling and ballad singing (Lin, 2014, p.299). In *Pingtan* performances, the actor simultaneously plays both a narrator, who is unseen, and various characters who are visible to the audience, shifting fluidly between the two roles. Similarly, in Lin's adaptation, the aside delivers lines both as a storyteller and as multiple characters, alternating between subjectivity and objectivity on stage (Lin, 2016, p.51).

Examples 1 and 2, previously discussed, demonstrate how the aside mirrors the performative techniques found in *Pingtan*, narrating text from both the source text (ST) and target text (TT) in a dynamic narrative style. The inclusion of the aside introduces *Pingtan*-like narrative elements into the production of *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*, reflecting Lin's objective to incorporate traditional Chinese theatrical techniques. Additionally, the alternation between subjectivity and objectivity performed by the aside contributes to the dual-performance structure Lin aimed for, where actors were not confined to embodying a single character but instead shifted fluidly between roles. This technique served Lin's goal of merging the aesthetic elements of Chinese traditional performance with the thematic framework of *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*. The factors leading to the inclusion of this character can be analysed from the perspective of ideological influence, particularly personal artistic ideology.

It is crucial to distinguish this addition from those identified in earlier textual analyses, where linguistic adjustments, such as the insertion of vulgar expressions or honorifics, were made purely on the lexical level. In contrast, Lin's inclusion of the aside introduces an entire performance element from Chinese theatrical tradition into the adaptation. This choice was shaped by his long-held personal ideology, as revealed in his autobiography and previous interviews, which reflect a sustained appreciation for Chinese opera and a consistent effort to merge it with Western theatre forms (see Chapter 2). This artistic vision was further influenced by the broader socio-cultural climate of the late 1980s, a period marked by a resurgence in traditional Chinese culture. Consequently, it is evident that this cultural revival significantly shaped Lin's success in integrating classical performance techniques into his adaptation.

The addition of characters in Lin's adaptation effectively realised his goal of presenting dual performance, a concept aligned with Brecht's theoretical framework (see Chapter 2). On the one hand, it fulfilled Lin Zhaohua's long-standing aspiration to incorporate elements of traditional Chinese opera into modern theatre. On the other hand, introducing the additional character also enabled the expression of innovative avant-garde techniques, aligning with Lin's creative vision. This decision was shaped by his personal artistic consciousness. However, it is essential to recognise that his artistic intent was closely shaped by the shifting socio-political climate that transformed significantly between the 1980s and 1990s. Throughout this period, Lin witnessed multiple phases of crisis in Chinese theatre (as discussed in Chapter 2) and remained dedicated to revitalising the art form through experimentation with avant-garde methods. Simultaneously, the rise of reform and opening-up policies, combined with the cultural resurgence of traditional Chinese aesthetics during the 1990s, influenced his evolving artistic expression. Therefore, the inclusion of additional roles can be interpreted as a direct reflection of this evolving cultural and ideological landscape over the two decades.

5.6.2 Theme

As discussed in Chapter 4, Lin's adaptation successfully merges two distinct themes of 'waiting' derived from the original source texts, each rooted in differing historical and cultural contexts. Specifically, the three sisters in *Three Sisters* longed to leave their provincial town for Moscow, yet they remained conflicted, torn between the choice of leaving or staying behind. Though they appeared passive, their internal struggle revolved around the hope for a better life, with their hesitation embodying the tension between action and inaction—whether to embark

on their journey or remain stagnant. By contrast, the two tramps, Estragon and Vladimir, in *Waiting for Godot* grappled with the question of "to wait or not to wait" for Godot, a figure who never arrives. I argue that Lin's presentation of these two contrasting themes—one concerning aspiration for change and the other confronting endless waiting—was a deliberate attempt not only to realise the dual performance but also to introduce a new characteristic of Chinese avant-garde theatre: the dual theme. Furthermore, both thematic strands were constructed in direct response to the socio-political context of the late 1990s. The subsequent analysis will examine how both themes were retained from the source texts and how the secondary theme was shaped by the prevailing social climate, using selected textual examples for support.

As noted by Tong (2016, p.168), a play's theme is conveyed through the characters' dialogues and the narrative structure that develops from their interactions. This principle applies equally to how Lin retained the thematic continuity from the source texts. A comparative examination of the translated text (TT) against the source text (ST) reveals that numerous narrative lines spoken by the three sisters, as well as the monologues of Vladimir and Estragon, were preserved in Lin's adaptation. These retained lines directly express the emotional states of waiting experienced by both groups of characters, exemplified in the selected example below. As the examples are the relevant to long-repeated dialogues between characters regarding expressing their internal feelings of waiting as these lines were left occupying most of the dialogue with much of the original context of dialogues removed. In this case, the examples will be presented by showing the main repeated lines and summarized the main ideas for saving the word counts.

Example 1 can be summarised as follows: aside from the aside character who provides a brief description of the doctor, the lines in this section of Lin's adaptation primarily focus on Olga and Irina reflecting on their past experiences while lamenting their present circumstances and expressing a longing to leave for Moscow like repeated for 5 five times of saying "Going to Moscow". The theme present in Chekhov's original text is made explicit through their dialogue. In Example 2, a lot of lines of *Waiting for Godot* and just leaving only the exchanges that focus on the question of "whether or not to continue waiting for Godot" and the lines were kept be repeated. In a manner similar Example 1, the central theme of *Waiting for Godot* is directly presented through the remaining dialogue.

Li (2019, 48) observes in his research that Lin's adaptation emphasises the theme of "waiting" (BT), which, while not fully elaborated in the original, is explicitly revealed through Examples 1 and 2. To merge the two plays while still reflecting their individual themes, Lin adapted both works by foregrounding this shared motif. The analysis of dialogue deletion demonstrates how the removal of supporting characters and symbolic conversational elements indirectly referring to the theme ensures the audience's focus remains on the seven central characters. This reduction serves to intensify the emotional weight of their continuous and unresolved waiting. A further significant feature in Lin's adaptation is his retention of structurally similar moments from both plays. Notably, the thematic ambiguity between speech and action in *Three Sisters* and *Waiting for Godot* is preserved. In *Three Sisters*, the line "到莫斯科去! (Go to Moscow!)" is accompanied by the stage direction "They don't move," while in *Waiting for Godot*, the closing line "我们走吧 (Let's go!)" is followed by the stage direction "They don't go." This parallelism was retained in Lin's adapted text, emphasising the characters'

perpetual state of being trapped in an endless cycle of inaction, thus reinforcing the overarching theme of waiting. Consequently, by simplifying the dialogue, Lin effectively magnified the shared plight of the characters from both source texts, focusing on their passive state and enabling the two themes to coexist harmoniously in his adaptation.

Beyond the coexistence of these themes, Lin actively interconnects them, as demonstrated in the following Example 3. In Example 3, the characters' dialogues have been merged without direct reference to the original source texts, making the interaction more comprehensible. It becomes evident that Vladimir and Estragon reflect on their own predicament while simultaneously commenting on the three sisters' state of waiting, noting, "they are like feathers, leaves, ashes." Lin (2014, 300) clarifies that the tramps' judgement of the sisters arises from their belief that the sisters' passive anticipation is as inconsequential as the weight of a feather when compared to their own experience of waiting for an unknown figure.

As evident from Examples 1, 2, and 3, Lin employs a strategy of deletion, omitting dialogues that fail to convey the central message clearly, thereby emphasising the shared predicament faced by both sets of characters — the two tramps and the three sisters — trapped in futile waiting. On this foundation, he enables the characters from the two plays to engage with each other, as demonstrated in the tramps' self-reflection and their critique of the three sisters. Through this interaction, a thematic link is forged, uniting both narratives by presenting their shared state of waiting.

Gu (2018, 58) asserts that Lin perceived thematic parallels between the two original works and shaped the secondary theme from his own experience of personal struggle. Lin was deeply

committed to the creation of this adaptation but, due to illness, was bedridden and unable to fulfil his artistic ambitions until he recovered. As discussed in Chapter 4, Lin (2014) and his colleagues recounted that while confined to bed, he revisited both works and recognised thematic connections, leading him to believe they could be meaningfully combined. I would argue that the examples cited previously indicate that Lin, while physically incapacitated, identified with the characters' prolonged waiting in both source texts. This parallel inspired him to merge the two original themes into a unified concept — the idea that waiting is a constant aspect of human experience. This dual thematic structure reflected both his artistic vision and the cultural pressures of the period, as the theatre industry was facing increasing competition from alternative forms of entertainment. Theatre professionals had, for the past two decades, sought innovative approaches to revitalise the art form, as evidenced by the earlier case studies presented. However, unlike those prior cases, where linguistic innovation and structural experimentation were the focal points, *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* extended its innovation beyond language and structure by introducing a novel thematic dimension.

In this context, Lin's creative exploration was not solely an expression of personal artistic aspiration but was also influenced by the cultural and social constraints of the era. Consequently, this translation-adaptation can be understood as both a personal achievement and a necessary response to the external pressures facing the theatre industry at the time. The outcome, however, was transformative: Lin's adaptation not only addressed those pressures but also introduced a new form of Chinese avant-garde theatre, contributing significantly to its artistic evolution.

Summary of the translation of *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*

The textual analysis of characters and themes reveals that Lin employed both deletion and addition strategies to adapt Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* into *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot*, aligning with his objective of reforming Chinese avant-garde theatre with innovative elements, while also reflecting the socio-political climate of the late 1990s. Specifically, Lin removed characters with class-related metaphors that were incompatible with the political atmosphere of that period to ensure the production's acceptability. Simultaneously, he applied the addition strategy by introducing the aside character and omitted conversational passages, resulting in a translation with narrative elements drawn from traditional Chinese dramatic forms. The merging and reduction of themes from both source texts (ST) led to the emergence of a secondary theme: *"Waiting is the eternal theme of life."* Through this abridgement and combination of two works originating from distinct historical and thematic contexts, Lin's adapted text (AT) introduced a groundbreaking and disruptive innovation, leaving a lasting influence on both Chinese avant-garde theatre and the broader landscape of Chinese theatre.

Chapter 6. Summary of Dissertation

The first chapter of this research reviews the social, political and cultural background of China from the late 1970s to 2000, which has been divided into three time periods: from late 1970 to 1988, from 1989 to 1992, and from 1993 to 2000. The first Chapter provides a background analysis of the development of Chinese avant-garde theatre, which was born in 1982. Through this analysis, it can be found that the development of Chinese avant-garde theatre in the above three periods is closely related to the changes in the social, political and cultural environment. It leads to revealing the research gap related to the translation of Chinese avant-garde theatre work which the lack of comprehensive research on the impact of the social, political and cultural environment on translations of Chinese avant-garde theatre between late 1970 and 2000. Chapter 2 focuses on the translation theories of poetics and ideology, Skopos, domestication and foreignization, providing a theoretical framework for the textual analyses. On the basis of Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, together with textual analyses, the research question can be answered that Chinese socio-cultural and political contexts between the late 1970s and 2000 have influenced the production and reception of translated Chinese avant-garde dramas.

In summary, 1983 was the early stage after the Cultural Revolution was over when society gradually opened and embraced various foreign culture. Therefore, the avant-garde plays of this period was exploratory, but the breakthroughs achieved were limited. Audiences at this time yearned for the avant-garde breakthroughs in theatrical works but the acceptance was limited to a certain degree. Therefore, the avant-garde characteristics reflected in the translation of *Death of a Salesman* are exploratory and tentative, just as the development of the country at that time. Under the policy of reform and opening up, the country was also developing in a state

of trial and errors. *Hamlet 1990* which was created in year of 1990 was a fusion of all the characteristics that had been borne by the development of avant-garde theatre in the previous decade. From a textual perspective, the playscript's reduced status in the production of work, the obvious symbolism of the lines, and the increase in lines that provoke attention and reflection, first and foremost stem from the translator's response to the current era. This work is a testament to and response to the ten years of vigorous development of avant-garde theatre, and a reaction to and reflection of the three political crackdowns that occurred during the 19 80s. From the audience's perspective, it was intended to provide an innovative and subversive theatrical work for an audience increasingly attracted to mass entertainment, and to provoke the audience to think more about individuals or society rather than indulge in entertainment-only mass culture. *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* in 1998 was Lin's work 20 years after the development of Chinese avant-garde theatre. He completely deconstructed the script, adding and removing characters and superimposing themes, to achieve the greatest innovation at the script level. This work, from a translator's perspective, presents his personal vision of the innovative development of avant-garde theatre over the past 20 years. The recognition of this work by theatre scholars shows that *Three Sisters Waiting for Godot* created through adaptation has also achieved, to a certain extent, the breakthrough that the playwright who has insisted on theatre creation for 20 years has always wanted to achieve.

It is evident that the three translations can reflect the characteristics of the different eras in which they were created. First, these characteristics come from the influence that the social, political and cultural environment of the period in which the play was translated or adapted had on the translator. Although these works were constrained by the tense political environment of

a particular period, it can be seen that the three works reflect the influence of the times on the translators and audiences. In conclusion, Chinese avant-garde plays has continuously brought innovation and breakthroughs through the translation of foreign translations between late 1970s and 2000, meanwhile the influence of the era has also been reflected in these translated works.

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