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Chinese Dreams: (Self-)Orientalism and Post-Orientalism in the Reception and Translation of Liu Cixin's *Three-Body* Trilogy

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Abstract

After receiving the Hugo Award in 2015 for the English translation of *The Three-Body Problem*, Liu Cixin's *Three-Body* trilogy and its translations into a large number of languages have been a massive success, prompting many reactions and much praise. In this article, I attempt to discuss first the global processes of translation and reception of Liu's novels beyond China. I particularly focus on the Orientalist imaginary conveyed by the publication of the trilogy, at a time when Chinese science fiction has become a tool for the Chinese soft power strategy based on the culturalist and nationalist discourse of the "Chinese Dream." I also examine the reception in China of the success of Liu Cixin's translations, and the way in which Chinese media and officials are also engaging in a process of self-Orientalization.

In a the second phase, I try to question the task and the strategy of the translators when confronting these Orientalist projections: how does a translator makes himself or herself an accomplice of these fantasies, and how can she/he engage in a post-Orientalist or anti-Orientalist approach? This reflection is illustrated by concrete examples from my own translation of Liu Cixin's trilogy into French.

Keywords

translation, reception, Liu Cixin, *Three-Body* trilogy, Orientalism, post-Orientalism

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1. Liu Cixin's *Three-Body* Trilogy in the Global Translation Market

In a lecture given in Japan on "Post-Three-Body Chinese science fiction" (*Santi hou de kehuan xiaoshuo* 三體後的科幻小說), writer Chen Qiufan 陳楸帆 (1981–) pointed out that the colossal success (both at the national and international scale) of Liu Cixin's 劉慈欣 trilogy had profoundly changed the literary field of Chinese science fiction, as well as the way media, political, literary and academic spheres perceive the literary genre (Wo 2016). In this article, which is enriched by my experience as a French translator of Liu Cixin's trilogy, I propose to look critically at the context of the translation and the reception of this series, both in China and abroad. Beyond an academic and informative exploration of this topic, I also wish to take this opportunity to reflect on my own practice as a translator and to understand to what extent a translator, as an inner part of the global translation ecosystem, could have a say in the phantasmagoric projections around the work of Liu Cixin.

The *Three-Body* trilogy 三體 has now been translated (if not all three books, at least the first) into some fifteen languages. The vast majority of them—with the exception of the Korean translation—were done after the English release of the first volume, *The Three-Body Problem*, translated by Ken Liu. The Hugo Award received in 2015 for this translated novel has undoubtedly contributed to a massive editorial impulse (760,000 copies sold by the end of 2017 [Mei 2018], while the first volume was number six in the printed best-selling books and number two in the electronic books on Amazon China during the first quarter of 2018 [Ifeng.com 2018]). In addition, the English-language version of the novel (or the novels) continues to serve as a reference for literary agencies that hold the translation rights of Liu's trilogy, whether in terms of the content of the translated version or the paratextual architecture.

The Italian translation of the trilogy was thus made from the English version by a translator who had never translated a Chinese literary work until then. As we will see, beyond the choice of a full translation from English, many other clues allow us to grasp the essential role accorded by foreign publishers (and translators?) to the English translation trilogy. This influence is visible not only in the translation strategies themselves, but also in the paratextual apparatus of these works and, in a broader and

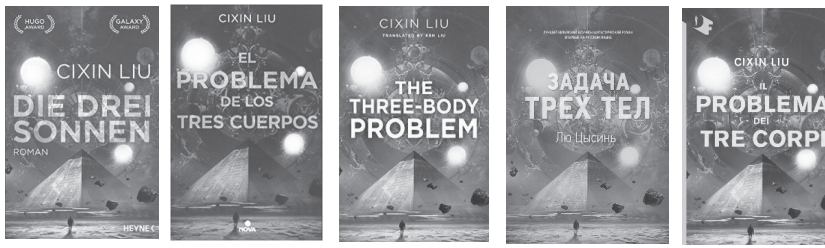
systematic way, in the editorial processes that led to the production of these texts.

In terms of translation strategy, it is, for example, notable that in several translated versions (French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Turkish), the name of the extraterrestrial planet located on Alpha Centauri and which is at the core of the trilogy has been translated as "Trisolaris," as in the English version, while its name in Chinese is more neutral: "Three Body" (*Santi* 三體). To readers who are familiar with the novel's source text, this translation choice is even more peculiar in that it erases all possible references to the original's title. Similarly, the title of the first volume in Chinese is only "Three Body" (*Santi* 三體), while the English translator/publisher chose to add the substantive "problem." This choice has been followed for the majority of other Western language translations. We also note that the Spanish translation title of the third volume—*El Fin de la muerte*—is a translation of the English title—*Death's End*—even if the Spanish version is supposedly translated from Chinese. But the title of the Chinese source text is quite different, and the two translations move away from it: *Sishen yongsheng* 死神永生 (literally: the God of Death lives forever).[1] For the other translations published to date, we can mention the French translation, *La Mort immortelle* (Immortal death), which is more literal, and the Italian one, *Nella quarta dimensione* (In the fourth dimension), which refers more to the content of the novel.[2]

Among the other examples of paratextual standardization, one can also note the reuse of the covers of the American versions for many other foreign editions: For instance, the cover of the first volume (designed by the famous French [but American-based] artist Stephan Martinière) is identical to the English, German, Italian, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Turkish translations (see Figure 1).[3]

Similarly, the order of the family name followed by the first name (e.g. Liu Cixin) is also reversed in these editions, although this is neither the custom in China nor in most translations of Chinese literature in these same countries (Yan Lianke 閻連科 is, for example, always transcribed "Yan Lianke" and not "Lianke Yan" in all German, Italian, or Spanish literary translations).

Figure 1. Covers for Different *The Three-Body Problem* Foreign Translations



The purpose of this contribution is not to analyze how the English translation has influenced or inspired other translations. This question would probably merit a full study. We can only mention here as an example the choice of the same neologism "sophon" in English, German, and Spanish for the Chinese word *zhizi* 智子 (intelligent spy-protons sent to Earth by the Trisolarians), which is a Chinese pun based on the homophony with *zhizi* 質子 (proton) and of the two Chinese characters *zhi* 智 (knowledge) and *zhi* 質 (matter). In French, this neologism has been translated as "intellectron."

More generally, the success of Chinese science fiction beyond its borders also occurs in a context where literary agencies (private, but also semi-governmental, as for example the Science and Fantasy Growth Foundation [*Kexue yu huanxiang chengzhang jijin* 科學與幻想成長基金])[4] play a growing role in the translation and publishing of Chinese literary works in foreign countries. As a result, it is not uncommon that these literary agencies have translators complete English translations even before the translation rights are sold. These translations are used by literary agencies to promote the texts to foreign publishers outside the English-speaking world, who can thus evaluate more easily the texts in their English version, with all the risks that this implies.

This practice is not limited to the English language. In the specific case of Liu Cixin's novels, a French translation of *Qiuzhuang shandian* 球狀閃電 (Ball Lightning) (2005) had been commissioned by the literary agency, even before a French publisher acquired the translation rights of the novel. If this strategy can have benefits, both for the agency (who can sell more expensive translation rights) and for the foreign publisher (who can buy a quasi-ready-made translation, usually at a lower cost, and without fear of delays in the rendering of the translated text), one could nevertheless make some reservations: this type of translation is

generally entrusted to "the highest bidder" (the translator who is likely to offer the lowest rate, and the quickest deadline), without concern for the quality of the final version. One can also wonder about the editorial work carried out by the agency: is correction/proofreading done in the target language? Does the agency keep the right to "modify" the translation before "selling" it? This last point raises of course uncertainties in the case of China, where censorship is an environmental condition of the literary market.

2. Reception and Orientalism

A brief overview of the reception of the translation of the trilogy, both abroad and in China, gives an idea of the culturalist and Orientalist fantasies projected on both the author and his novels.

The first point to note is that most of the time, foreign journal articles and literary reviews present in their titles the fact that the novel and/or the writer is "Chinese," as if this precision implies that this novel must be understood in the light of the nationality of its author. More generally, the reviews of the trilogy regularly show the tendency to associate the novel within the framework of (Chinese) national literature.[5]

The recurrent use of the stereotyped expression "made in China" (*Global Times*, 7 January 2013; *El País*, 26 September 2016; *Le Point*, 18 November 2016) in major newspapers gives the impression that the novel is, just like a manufactured product, a national and collective artifact before being the work of an individual writer. Other reviews also use the industrial metaphor, indicating that Chinese science fiction "makes its mark on the global market" (*Global Times*, 30 January 2018). It is also interesting to note in some American and European media the use of a generic "we" ("we" Europeans/Westerners) and of a rhetoric (especially in headlines) reminiscent of that used during the "Yellow Peril": "The aliens are coming! So are the Chinese!" (*Sandusky Register*, 30 December 2014), or even "Chinese sci-fi prepares to master the universe" (*Space Daily*, 25 August 2016). This rhetoric is even more present today since China has been trying to become a new outer space power for some years now. Media and political speeches outside China do not hesitate to qualify Chinese programs and accomplishments with notions of "conquest," "invasion," and "territory."

Beyond the headlines, the reviews themselves are not out of step with this imagery. In a French journal about the trilogy, the journalist writes:

> It [Liu Cixin's trilogy] helps us decipher the way in which the Chinese prepare themselves for the future. In entrusting the destiny of humanity to a single individual, in this case through a character ready to sacrifice himself, the novelist echoes the tendency of the Chinese to let themselves be guided by one man for better or worse: from the emperor, son of Heaven in ancient China, to communist leaders like Mao or Xi Jinping. (Leblanc 2016 [Author's translation])

Note that the journalist cannot have read the whole trilogy, because it had still not been released, even in English, at that time. So the journalist does nothing but express what he supposes to belong to an imagined Chinese *Volkgeist*, which the novel would embody and reveal.

This particularly eloquent example of (willful?) misreading in order to deduce a general truth about Chinese thought is even more visible with the release of *Liulang diqiu* 流浪地球 (The Wandering Earth), a film adaptation by Frant Gwo 郭帆 of a short story by Liu Cixin.[6] Two good examples are Audrey Jiajia Li's article entitled "China's Blockbuster *The Wandering Earth* Has a Message: Collective Action Tops Individual Freedom in Times of Crisis" (*South China Morning Post*, 16 February 2019) and a "review" (since the author of the article does not seem to have watched the movie) by *The Economist*, laconically entitled "Xi Jinping Thought Saves the World" (*The Economist*, 16 February 2019).

Another French magazine, *Usbek & Rica*, which devoted one issue to the future according to China, including two articles about Liu Cixin's novels (along with profiles of the author and his translator), made the decision to propose a cover offering a maximum of stereotypes around China: a grotesque Xi Jinping porcelain figure (*ciwa* 瓷娃), a panda, a CCTV camera, a sensual young woman, the use of the word "empire," and even a flag planted in the Atlantic Ocean at the borders of Europe (Figure 2). The clichés are so overblown that one can legitimately believe in a conscious staging of an Orientalist imagery. In Mary Roberts' words, here, "the stereotype becomes a masquerade" (2007, 149). However, what Roberts calls "masquerade" (the reversal of Orientalist prejudices by the grotesque reuse of them in a performance in what can only be perceived as a crude staging) refers more to the recovery of these stereotypes by the populations that are targeted by them, which is clearly not the case of *Usbek & Rica*'s coverage.[7]

Figure 2. *Usbek & Rica* Magazine (June 2018), "**Chine : l'Empire no limit**"



Many other articles and columns illustrate the Orientalism and culturalism of the reception of the trilogy. In many cases, as outlined above, the "Chinese" national character of the novels sometimes seems to be used as an argument to insist on the "refreshing" side of the novel, or to illustrate what is and what will become of China (Gaffric 2017).[8]

Is the *Three-Body* trilogy open to interpretations such as a "reflection on today's China" or a "Chinese idea of the future," as reviewers

would hope? Or might this Orientalist outlook, which conveys China's irreducible cultural differences in literary works, ultimately play into the hands of Chinese soft power propagandists? In an interview for National Public Radio, Liu Cixin—perhaps annoyed by the frequency of questions about China's political future—said he hoped "that one day American readers will buy and read Chinese science fiction because it's science fiction, not because it's Chinese" (Kuhn 2015).

3. Reception and Self-Orientalism

Even before obtaining the American Hugo Award in 2015 and, of course, before the release in theaters of the first movie of the saga (which was originally scheduled for 2016 but has continued to be postponed due to post-production problems), 1.2 million copies of the *Three-Body* trilogy have been sold in China, an absolute record for the genre (Kun 2014).[9]

A simple Internet search can measure the extent to which the novel is discussed: the Chinese search engine Baidu 百度 offered nearly 22,000,000 results in October 2018. In the same month, there were nearly 200,000 comments from Internet users posted for the first volume of the trilogy in the "literature" section of the Douban 豆瓣 website. As for the announcement of the Hugo Award, Ruan suggests that it would have been read more than 8.6 million times on Weibo (the first Chinese microblogging site) and 190,000 Internet users would have participated in the discussion during the ten hours that followed the news (2015).

But if it is indeed true that the trilogy had gained considerable success even before winning the Hugo Award, it was nevertheless the day after this victory that the media tidal wave swept all of China. The echo of the award (reinforced by the fact that it was the first time for a non-English speaking author) was roughly equivalent to the one that sounded after the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012 to Mo Yan, vice-chair of the official union of Chinese writers, the China Writers Association. This news sparked a vibrant nationalist self-congratulation, especially in memory of the shot against Chinese power when Gao Xingjian 高行健 was awarded the same prize in 2000.

Just as Mo Yan's reception of the Nobel Prize was hailed in the official media as a belated but salutary recognition of the quality of modern Chinese literature, the success of Liu Cixin's novel was immediately presented as the triumph of a nation (China) more than that

of an author. The mechanism of nationalist propaganda was thus activated. *The People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao* 人民日報) was quick to report the news:

> Chinese writer Liu Cixin has just won the highest international distinction for a science fiction work. This event undoubtedly ends a discriminatory attitude that denied the existence in China of fertile ground for science fiction. In fact, "science fiction" has existed in China since ancient times—although of course not in the current sense of "science fiction." (*Renmin ribao* 2015 [Author's translation])

Of course, the reeditions of the trilogy also highlight the international recognition of the author and the fact that his novels have been praised by "prestige readers," such as Barack Obama, Mark Zuckerberg, or George R. R. Martin. A Chinese 2016 reedition (the complete trilogy in one volume) used the following banner: "The first Asian novel to have received the Hugo Award for science fiction. This novel is from an author who has managed to elevate Chinese science fiction to an international standard." (Author's translation)

We can also have an idea of this nationalist exaltation by consulting the online platform 360doc, a website where scientific and cultural personalities offer analysis of the news. Li Miao 李淼, the author of a popular science book inspired by Liu's novels, very seriously asserted that Liu Cixin may be the equal of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, or Joyce, which the Chinese have been waiting for since Cao Xueqin's *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Thanks to Liu, Chinese literature is finally able to compete with other nations:

> Until now, what was our answer to the *Odyssey*? *Dream of the Red Chamber*; Dante's *Inferno*? *Dream of the Red Chamber*; Shakespeare? *Dream of the Red Chamber*; *In Search of Lost Time*? *Dream of the Red Chamber*; To *Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake*? *Dream of the Red Chamber*; to magical realism? *Dream of the Red Chamber*. [...] Now, thanks to Liu Cixin, before our eyes, is emerging from the ground the myth we so badly needed. (Li M. 2015)

Other bloggers, from the same platform, like Dai Yi, took up the rhetoric of national opposition, claiming that the success of Liu Cixin's novels alone is an act of resistance against Americentrism and

Eurocentrism (Dai 2015). This nationalist discourse is based on the reminder of historical trauma, on the logic of injury, and on the revenge to the world. The official Xinhua news agency also explains the success of the trilogy by the "rebirth" (*fuxing* 復興) and the "glory of the nation" (*guoli fanrong* 國立繁榮), not hesitating to affirm that the award won by Liu Cixin offers Chinese culture a "sense of existence" (*cunzai gan* 存在感) on the international stage (Xinhua 2015 [Author's translation]).[10]

This emphasis echoes in many ways the rhetoric of the "Chinese dream" (*Zhongguo meng* 中國夢) promulgated by Xi Jinping and his administration since 2013. It is also to invite Liu Cixin—as well as the writers of science fiction in general—to promote the "Chinese dream" of Vice President of the People's Republic of China Li Yuanchao 李源潮 meeting Liu Cixin a few days after winning the Hugo Award in the United States. Li indicated that, "Sci-fi writers are expected to inspire the younger generation to be interested in science and stoke their faith in realizing the Chinese Dream" (Xinhua 2015).

In 2016, under the leadership of Li Yuanchao himself, the Association of Science and Technology (*Zhongguo kexue jishu xiehui* 中國科學技術協會) announced that it intends to create a system of awards and funding for science fiction and fantasy literary works. It also discussed the forthcoming creation of an international science fiction festival and a foundation whose goal would be to promote Chinese science fiction abroad (Guan 2016). This project is part of a broader ambition to openly use the cultural and economic potential of science fiction for a soft power policy (Li Y. 2015).

Science fiction writers are therefore expected to put forward a purely Chinese vision of the future. This summation naturally evokes another (complementary) part of the official rhetoric, the insistence on the supposed "Chinese characteristics" (*Zhongguo tese* 中國特色).[11]

Liu Cixin himself seems to adhere, in a less patriotic and less artificial way, to the idea that a science-fiction with Chinese characteristics is desirable (Liu 2013, IV) and that he would like to see the "Chinese dream" incarnated in Chinese science fiction (Ledit 2018). However, it is notable that since the publication of the English translation of the first volume of the trilogy of the *Three Bodies*, Liu Cixin has written almost nothing, except for a short story.

The fact is that now, due to his international recognition, Liu Cixin is associated with improbable scientific and diplomatic projects: from the discovery of new species of dinosaurs to the construction of a giant radio telescope or a space mission to Mars (Gaffric 2017).

It is difficult to say how much Liu Cixin sticks to the imaginary of "Chineseness" that is officially deployed at a time when he is constantly asked to give his opinion on the future of China and the relationship between science fiction and the Chinese dream. A montage made by the Xinhua news agency suggests that Liu considers science fiction a way to respond to the "Chinese dream" (Xinhua 2019), but this is precisely a montage and it would have been strange for Xinhua to highlight another answer. Outside China, where some journalists do not hesitate to advance a comparison (probably a little forced) between the Orwellian society of *Nineteen eighty-four* and Chinese society today, Liu Cixin remains at best evasive (Zeit Magazin 2018).[12]

By looking at the reception of the translation abroad and at the reception of this reception, by boomerang effect, we can become aware of the complicity maintained between a European and American Orientalism based on the fascination and the fear of the Other which is granted, on the one hand, the ambition to take the destiny of the world in hand and embark on a war between irreconcilable civilizations, and on the other, the ambition to pretend to be a futuristic power capable of challenging the United States and the Western cultural hegemony. In this regard, the way science fiction is received reflects this complicity, which of course is to be understood from a wider perspective.

In this respect, it goes without saying that Liu Cixin's Hugo Award is a happy concomitance: China's willingness to make "science fiction" a driving force for its soft power (both internally and externally) inevitably surfs on the success of the trilogy abroad (and in particular in the United States). But it would be reductive to see in the growing interest of foreign media, publishers, and readers for Chinese science fiction the mere result of Chinese propaganda. Similarly, while it is undeniable that an attraction of these actors for an imaginary Chinese vision of the future has undoubtedly contributed to this success, the fact remains that the intrinsic qualities of Liu's works and their translations into different languages have definitely marked a milestone in the history of science fiction.

4. The Position of the Translator

In this perspective, how can the translator position himself/herself in the global system of translation, and in relation to the expectations and fantasized projections that have been discussed above? How is it

possible to question, to deconstruct, or even to fight against these culturalist mythologies?

In a founding article, Chen Xiaoming calls for the need to implement a "post-Oriental perspective" (*hou dongfang guandian* 後東方觀點) that would go beyond Western cultural clichés and Chinese essentialist nationalism. Chen's argument is particularly interesting when he notes that the "Western" recognition of literary and artistic works, and even academic research, very often becomes the indispensable criterion for their success (Chen 2007).

There is, of course, neither guidebook nor infallible strategy that would surely let the translator become post-Orientalist. Whether they want it or not, translators are embedded in a global system that goes beyond them, and they usually do not have the ability to act on the promotion or reception of a text.[13]

Nevertheless, it seems to me that several approaches allow the translator not to be a mere passive performer. The few paragraphs that follow are some lines of thought that I propose in support of my personal experience of translating Liu's trilogy into French. I must specify here that these thoughts are not intended to serve as models, and do not mean that other translators in other languages for this trilogy agree more than I do to the supposed cultural exceptionality of novels. What I would like to do here is only to link some of my translation and writing strategies to an interrogation of the culturalist discourse highlighted at the beginning of this article.

It seems to me first of all that translators must remove themselves from the idea that their role is to act as a simple medium, or a tool of transmission. Admittedly, they cannot be held responsible for an author's ideas (it is true one must write what the author writes, say what the author says without necessarily meaning it), but the practice of translation is not a binary activity that would be to draw a straight line.

Naoki Sakai's work on translation as relational practice and form of address is particularly interesting in this regard. The translator must first understand and assume that the translation is a "*poietic* social practice" that, as Sakai writes, "institutes a relation at the site of incommensurability. This is why the aspect of discontinuity inherent in translation would be completely repressed if we were to determine translation to be a form of communication" (Sakai 2008, 13). To follow Sakai, it is necessary to take into account the translator's uncertain positioning of in-between.

In the same way, the text itself is an uncertain object, with an inherent ambiguity as to its attachment to an organic culture. Just as translation is not a continuous and homogenous bridge from a language A to a language B, it is also not the transposition of a culture A to a culture B.

As Bachmann-Medick points out, a literary text cannot only be seen as "unmistakable, individual identity rooted in its cultural origin" (1996). Even if Bachmann-Medick insists especially on the contradiction carried by this assertion with texts and authors and/or translators coming from multicultural and multilingual contexts, this is true for any type of text, which inevitably fits in a transcultural context, in which the translation itself plays a crucial role. As Bachmann-Medick writes:

> It is necessary to create an area of "oscillation" between cultures outside the individual societies and nations, an area where the productivity of atonal ensembles, of borderline experiences, contradiction, obstacle and conflict can be discovered instead of creating multicultural syntheses or even "symphonies." (1996)

The history of Chinese science fiction as a whole is, for instance, closely linked to the history of the translation of literary works and social science texts in modern China, and has profoundly influenced the creation of the modern Chinese language. Thus, not only is Liu Cixin's contemporary science fiction influenced by his reading (in translation) of foreign science fiction authors (Arthur Clarke, Isaac Asimov, or Jules Verne, to mention only those whose intertextualities are the more obvious in the *Three-Body* trilogy), but the language he uses is itself a hybrid product born and developed with the emergence of science fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in China.

I am not trying here to deny the profound originality of Liu Cixin's novels, but to insist on the fact that, like any science fiction writer, the author is inspired by a set of texts that are hybrid both by their nature (scientific, literary or historical, for example) and by their geographical origin. In this regard, I believe that Liu Cixin's science fiction translator must follow the same trajectory (which does not imply walking in the same steps as the author). In his trilogy, Liu Cixin plays with major science fiction works, ranging from *Star Trek to Foundation*, and from *2001: A Space Odyssey to Rendez-vous with Rama*. In my own translation of the three novels, I also tried to inspire myself with these different texts, as well as other science fiction works that belong to this global science

fiction ecosystem, for the creation of neologisms, the reinvention of certain scientific singularities.

This approach, which consists of drawing inspiration from a partly exogenous common heritage, not only makes it possible to affirm the existence of a common domain of reference, but also to demystify the idea of a strictly Chinese-referential literature, by heterogenizing the language.

Among the key terms of the trilogy are *mianbizhe* 面壁者 and *pobizhe* 破壁者. *Mianbizhe* are individuals invested by the U.N. with almost unlimited resources to think about a secret project to prevent the Trisolarian invasion. Literally, *mianbizhe* means "one who faces a wall." The term also refers to hermit Buddhists who meditated alone and in silence in front of a wall (or a rock). The original term for the "counter-*mianbizhe*" of the Earth-Trisolaris Organization is *pobizhe*, "one who breaks a wall." The English translation has the merit of being transparent: "Wallfacers" and "Wallbreakers," but a correspondent French translation into "Facemureurs" or "Brisemureurs" would have been clumsy and non-elegant. Keeping the English concepts would have not been satisfactory either. After making a list of about fifteen different possible translations for this binomial *mianbizhe*/*pobizhe*,[14] I made the choice of "Colmateurs/Fissureurs," which can be roughly translated into English as Pluggers/Crackers (those who seal, plug a hole in a wall, and those who made a crack in it). Beyond the precise meaning of the words used, the choice of the concept of "Colmateurs" was inspired from a series of French science fiction stories by Michel Jeury, in which this neologism was used to designate a group of people making sure to prevent space travelers from infiltrating between multiple worlds through gaps created between them. The rapprochement is of course somewhat artificial, and it is not a question here of matching Jeury's fictional idea with that of Liu Cixin, but of appropriating existing linguistic strategies.

Beyond this example, I have repeatedly been inspired during my translation process by other classics of science fiction, such as the French translation of Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* for the neologism "hibernautes" (*dongmianzhe* 冬眠者), or that of Michael Moorcock's *Elric: Tales of the White Wolf* for the concept of "porte-épée" (*zhijianren* 執劍人).

I would like to end by mentioning a project that I am currently undertaking—not an academic project, but one which could, perhaps, be constitutive of a post-Orientalist writing process. Liu Cixin's trilogy has already seen several unofficial sequels appear, almost all exclusively

online and in the Chinese language.[15] I am working on writing three short stories in French—or rather in the language of translation, this language that is not Chinese or French—whose narratives are located in the world of Liu's trilogy.

"Le vieux saint dans la forêt" (The old saint in the forest) is a story about the identity upheaval of a Catholic priest at a time when humanity is learning about the existence of an extraterrestrial civilization (at the beginning of the "Crisis Era" 危機紀元); "Les filles du ciel" (The daughters of the sky) tells the story of the formation of an African pirate fleet on the eve of the attack of the droplet (*shuidi* 水滴); and "La mangeoire des astres" (The manger of stars), located in an uncertain time, tells the story of an extraterrestrial civilization that undertakes to record the history of all the stars destroyed by offensives from the dark forest (*hei'an senlin* 黑暗森林).

It may seem unusual in an academic article to rely on fictional writing projects, especially when they are those of the author. I am well aware that this meta-writing has no concrete impact on the Orientalist and self-Orientalist reception of Liu Cixin's novels, but it may modestly propose the possibility to evacuate the presupposition of an organic link between language, nationality and political project.

Every translation participates in (or should aim to participate in) the creation of a new language. It does not transfer meaning from one language in its uniqueness to another language in its uniqueness; it creates a resultant between the two languages which is absolutely new, which escapes the first language, and which escapes the second language. Translation does not contribute to the atavism of a language and a culture; on the contrary, it introduces breaks and bridges between them, and per se, translation is a good way to fight against the idea of an inevitable national destiny.

As Edouard Glissant underscores, a writer writes in the presence of all the languages and literatures of the world (1993, 40). Liu Cixin is no exception to the rule: all his work is crossed by his reading and borrowing from other works, whether science fiction or other genres. The same is true for the translator, who also writes in co-presence: that of the original text, but also all the other texts that are likely to inspire or spur him/her. The translation becomes, as Glissant expresses, "a text ventured to the possibility of another text" (1990, 130).[16] The adventure of translation oscillates between strangeness and familiarity, the exotic and the local. This is probably even more true in science fiction translation, for which

the cognitive estrangement is, according to Darko Suvin (1979), the essential building block.

Notes

1 Translating this as "The God of the Death" would have been too clumsy: in the novel, death is neither personalized nor divinized. Death is what survives everything, which has no horizon, the ultimate lighthouse in the night. One can deduce that the English and the Spanish translations are a misinterpretation of the original meaning (since death is endless); another that, by pushing a little further, we can interpret this title as the translation of the idea of the end of death as the end of the finite (if we understand death as what is closed and definitive). Naturally, it is not for me to judge the relevance of this or that translation. At most, I could say that if the English translation is also a pun with the English expression "dead end," it is not in the Spanish version.

2 It is amusing to relate a particularly telling anecdote: At the time of the publication in French of the third volume, a reader wrote to me to ask why the French title was different from that of the "original version" and wondered whether I had not made a misinterpretation. I must note here that Liu Cixin shared with me his desire to keep the original title, and not to invent a different one. Out of respect for the author, and because I wanted to remain close to the original meaning, *La Mort immortelle* (Immortal death) was chosen.

3 This standardization of covers for different translated versions is very rare in the field of Chinese literature in translation. In the specific case of Chinese literature translated into French and English, I have not—so far—found equivalent cases where the French and English covers would be identical.

4 This foundation, founded in 2015 in Chengdu, aims to create synergies around science fiction and technology, and to promote Chinese science fiction beyond its borders (for example by ensuring the presence of Chinese science fiction, through exhibitions and authors' invitations to foreign festivals).

5 It should be noted, however, that in the field of literary marketing, Liu's trilogy is of course not the only one to be the subject of a projection consisting of seeing Chinese fictional works as "mirrors" of the current Chinese society, including (and especially) when it comes to selling novels as "subversive to the regime." In the case of Mo Yan's (culturalist) reception in France, see the last of chapter of Zhang (2014).

6 This article was under revision when the movie was being released in China, so I could not consider accurately its reception and promotion, both in China and abroad. Nevertheless, it seems to me that, at this stage, many parallels could be made.

7 *Usbek & Rica* is a quarterly French magazine of narrative journalism founded in 2010. Its slogan is "The magazine that explores the future." It deals with cinema, literature, technology, science, or social issues. It is not particularly known for being controversial, but its covers are often voluntarily flashy.

8 The following developments on the reception of the trilogy are partly inspired by this previous article. I am grateful to William Peyton for his help.

9 It should be added here that most of Liu Cixin's works are very easily found online (and accessible for free, sometimes on the fringes of legality). Of course, it is difficult to measure the number of these digital readers.

10 This hope placed in science fiction for the salvation of the nation is of course reminiscent of the role that some intellectuals of the late Qing and early Republican Era wanted to give to the science fiction genre. For more on this issue, see Isaacson (2013) and Gaffric (2017).

11 The question of the common traits and peculiarities of Chinese science fiction is regularly asked by journalists, both to Liu Cixin and to its translators, who usually avoid the question and emphasize the diversity of science fiction in China. See, for example, the following interview with Ken Liu: http://blogs.nature.com/futureconditional/2016/08/20/chinese-sf-and-the-art-of-translation-a-qa-with-ken-liu/.

12 This interview, which appeared in the *Zeit Magazin*, was also sharply criticized by many Chinese netizens on Twitter, some of whom accused the interviewer (a correspondent based in Beijing) of being a "traitor to his homeland" (*hanjian* 漢奸).

13 It must be said that in the specific case of the translation of Chinese literature, translators are often more solicited, and this is obviously the case for translators of Liu Cixin's trilogy, such as Javier Altayó (Spanish translator), Ken Liu (English translator) or myself: we have been interviewed in different media about our translation work, the author, and Chinese science fiction in general. See, for example, the following websites: http://lanacion.cl/2019/01/15/los-autores-recomendados-del-traductor-de-la-trilogia-china-del-momento/, https://www.thenationalbookreview.com/features/2016/9/22/qa-ken-liu-talks-translating-chinese-science-fiction-and-his-own-writing or https://www.sciencesetavenir.fr/decouvrir/livres/liu-cixin-auteur-du-probleme-a-3-corps-par-son-traducteur_127928.

14 I list these different possible translations on my translator's blog: http://gwennaelgaffric.blogspot.com/.

15 As such, it is interesting to note that Bao Shu 寶樹's fanfiction novel *Santi X: Guanxiang zhi zhou* 三體X：觀想之宙 [Three Body X: Aeon of contemplation], which is the only printed sequel to the trilogy, has been translated and published in Spanish and will be soon published as well in English and French.

16 The English translation by Betsy Wing is as follows: "a passage from a risky text to what is possible to another text" (Glissant 1997, 116).

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