

Translating the Implied Author: An Ethno-Narrative Analysis of the English Translation of Li Juan's *Dong Mu Chang*

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study of the English translation of Li Juan's 李娟 narrative nonfiction *Dong Mu Chang* 冬牧场. Through highlighting the translational and ethnographic characteristics of the original Chinese text, it posits that Li assumes the dual role of a translator and an ethnographer in her writing of *Dong Mu Chang* and that translating the book is essentially a meta-translational endeavor. Drawing upon the widely recognized narrative concept of the implied author, the paper makes a comparison between the English translation of *Dong Mu Chang* and its original Chinese version and has discovered that the English translation features an implied author with a more pronounced image of an ethnographer, a manifestation attributed to a succession of paratextual interventions that can be regarded as a strategic approach adopted by the translators to augment the ethnographic essence of the book. This study underscores the richness and complexity of *Dong Mu Chang* as a dynamic object of translation and reveals the potential challenges involved in translating narrative nonfiction with ethnographic characteristics, giving prominence to the narrative concept of the implied author. It establishes an epistemologically important case for narrative nonfiction translation research and hopefully offers implications for the practice of narrative nonfiction translation as well.

Keywords

Li Juan, *Dong Mu Chang*, narrative nonfiction translation,
ethnographer, cultural translator, the implied author

隱含作者之遙譯：李娟《冬牧場》英譯之民族誌敘事學探析

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摘要

本文探討李娟的非虛構敘事作品《冬牧場》的英譯。通過分析原作本身的翻譯和民族誌特徵，指出李娟在《冬牧場》的書寫中承擔了翻譯者和民族誌學者的雙重角色，並認為《冬牧場》的英譯在本質上屬於一種元翻譯行為。基於敘事學經典概念「隱含作者」，本研究通過《冬牧場》中英文本對比發現，英譯本借由一系列副文本干預，呈現出一個更具民族誌學者特質的隱含作者形象，此舉實為譯者強化作品民族誌價值的策略性操作。本研究凸顯了《冬牧場》作為翻譯對象的豐富性與複雜性，揭示了具有民族誌特色的非虛構敘事作品在翻譯中可能面臨的挑戰，同時彰顯出隱含作者概念的重要性，為非虛構敘事翻譯研究提供了一個認識論上的重要案例，並希望為該領域的翻譯實踐提供啟示。

關鍵詞

李娟、《冬牧場》、非虛構敘事翻譯、民族誌學者、
文化譯者、隱含作者

1. Introduction

Li Juan 李娟 is an award-winning contemporary Chinese writer who is well-known for her narrative nonfiction writing. Her representative work *Dong Mu Chang* 冬牧場 (*Winter Pasture*) was initially published in 2012 and republished in 2018 by Xin Xing Publishing in China. *Dong Mu Chang* has been a best-selling book for years and is nearly unanimously regarded as Li's *magnum opus*. In the preface to the 2018 edition of *Dong Mu Chang*, Li candidly articulates her partiality for this particular work within her body of literature. She remarks, "I do not conceal my fondness for *Dong Mu Chang*. It is likely the most significant book I have ever penned... Were I compelled to select one of my books as my 'representative work,' I believe this would be the one." (我從不掩飾自己對《冬牧場》的偏愛。它應該是目前為止自己最重要的一本書吧……非要選一本書作為『代表作』的話，目前我覺得非它莫屬。) (Li 2018, 1)¹

Dong Mu Chang was translated into English by the London-based British translator Jack Hargreaves and the New York-based Chinese translator Yan Yan 嚴嚴 and published by Astra House in the United States in 2021. The English translation is entitled *Winter Pasture: One Woman's Journey with China's Kazakh Herders* (henceforth *Winter Pasture*). This book is Li's debut in the Anglophone world, introduced as "Li Juan's crowning achievement" in *Smithsonian Magazine*. It is also enlisted as one of "The Washington Post's Best Travel Books" and the "51 Favorite Books of 2021" by the *Washington Independent Review of Books*.²

The translation of *Dong Mu Chang* makes an intriguing case for translation studies in that the source text is itself translational in more than one way. The translation of such a hybrid text presents unique challenges to the translators, which also raises significant questions for researchers: How do the translators handle the abundant translational elements embedded in the original text? Does the translation effectively maintain the image of the author as presented in the original text? What strategic approaches do the translators adopt?

This paper first expounds on the intrinsic translational characteristics of *Dong Mu Chang*, emphasizing that the act of translating *Dong Mu Chang* entails translating the translational on both linguistic and cultural levels and that Li is not only the narrator but also plays the dual role of an ethnographer and a translator in the writing of *Dong Mu Chang*.

Acknowledging the close connection between ethnography and narrative, this paper harnesses the concept of the implied author from narrative theory and ventures to analyze how the implied author's image of an ethnographer varies in the English translation of *Dong Mu Chang* from its original Chinese text. The English-language translators' strategic approaches to integrate their ethno-narrative assertions into the translation of *Dong Mu Chang* are also delineated in the hope of potentially illuminating the practice of narrative nonfiction translation.

2. Translating the Translational: *Dong Mu Chang* as a Hybrid Text

Dong Mu Chang chronicles the winter that Li spent with a Kazakh herding family, the Cumas, on the cold and bleak winter pasture in a remote region that stretches from the Ulungur River to the Heavenly Mountains of Xinjiang. In the book, Li has brought the ordinary preoccupations of the day-to-day lives of the Kazakh herders in the harsh environment to the fore, making their experiences both relatable and poignant for Chinese readers.

In 2016, the British translator Nicky Harman published an article on *Literary Hub*, entitled "10 Chinese Women Writers Whose Writing Should Be Translated," in which she highly recommended Li's *Winter Pasture*. In Harman's words, "more than just an exotic travel diary, *Winter Pasture* reflects on the relationships not just between humans and nature in the harshest of environments, but also between the Han Chinese and China's Kazakh minority." (Harman 2016) It is precisely this hybrid nature, characterized by the amalgamation of Chinese and Kazakh elements in *Dong Mu Chang*, that renders the research on the translation of this book highly engaging. As a Han Chinese who speaks Mandarin, Li employs the Chinese language to relate the Kazakh herders' lives in *Dong Mu Chang*, which endows the book with strong translational and ethnographic attributes. According to Michael Richardson (2001), "the role of the translator is analogous to that of the anthropologist: both are to interpret the experience of other cultures for those who lack knowledge of them." (267–268)³ In interpreting the experiences of Chinese Kazakh herders to the Han Chinese readers, Li plays the role of both an ethnographer and a translator.

The translation of *Dong Mu Chang* is about translating the translational on both linguistic and cultural levels. This section will

concentrate on the linguistic endeavors Li has invested in converting from the Kazakh language into Chinese in the original text and will also conduct a corresponding analysis of their English renderings in *Winter Pasture*.

It is easily inferable that during the writing process of *Dong Mu Chang*, Li must have faced numerous situations where she had to determine whether to translate content from Kazakh into Chinese and how to do so. The translational quality of the book is evident through the prominent presence of the Kazakh language in *Dong Mu Chang*, which suggests that even on the linguistic level, Li often plays the role of a translator. For example, on the journey to the winter pasture, Shinshybek, a young Kazakh herder who is one of their companions, attempts to show Li how to say the words for “thermos” and “bowl” in Kazakh:

Source Text (ST): 突然，新什別克開口說：「這個是『暖瓶』。」——他指指暖瓶。又說：『這是『碗』。』——轉動手裏的碗給我看。(Li 2012, 18)

Gloss: Suddenly, Shinshybek opened his mouth and said, “This is *nuanping*.” —pointing to a thermos. He then added, “This is *wan*.” — spinning the bowl in his hand and showing it to me.

Target Text (TT): Suddenly, Shinshybek said, “This is *ter-mos*,” as he pointed to a thermos. He added, “This is *chyny*,” as he presented me the bowl in his hand. (Li 2021, 19)

In the original Chinese text, Li has invisibly completed her translation from Kazakh into Chinese by using the Chinese words “*nuanping* 暖瓶” and “*wan* 碗” for “thermos” and “bowl.” Li’s Kazakh-Chinese translation in this instance might initially mislead the Chinese readers into thinking that Shinshybek communicates with Li in Chinese. However, upon further reflection, readers would come to the realization that it is the author herself who has carried out the translation of Shinshybek’s words into Chinese. Here, Li’s linguistic rendition does not rely on logical reasoning but rather on the readers’ capacity for contextualization. Although it remains impossible to ascertain whether Chinese readers harbor curiosity about the original Kazakh terms for “thermos” and “bowl,” it is evident that the narrative flow is preserved, if not enhanced, and a certain degree of humor is thereby generated. Li’s linguistic translations in her

writing later emerge as the translation choices that the English-language translators must deliberate upon in their translation process. In this case, the translators opt to strip away the Chinese translational vein and revert the two words to their original Kazakh phonetic forms in romanization, rendering them as “*ter-mos*” and “*chyny*,” respectively. Through such an approach, target language readers are provided with a scenario that is more logically accessible, and the foreignness that Lawrence Venuti (1995) has consistently advocated for is preserved as well.

As regards the foreign Kazakh elements in *Dong Mu Chang*, Li’s choice is generally twofold: she keeps some of the original sounds through transliteration but translates others into existing Chinese expressions through domestication. Upon conducting a comparative analysis of the Chinese text of *Dong Mu Chang* with its English translation, it has been discovered that in the English rendition, all Kazakh-related elements are translated invariably through foreignization, and that the translators’ adoption of this foreignizing strategy does not rely on the Chinese ST *per se* but rather on the Kazakh language. It appears that when handling the elements related to the Kazakh culture in the text, the translators are essentially engaging in a process that resembles translating directly from Kazakh rather than from Chinese (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. The Kazakh Terms Transliterated in *Dong Mu Chang* and Their Corresponding English Renderings in *Winter Pasture*

<i>Dong Mu Chang</i>	Gloss	<i>Winter Pasture</i>
巴塔	prayer	bata/namaz
拖依	feast	toy
阿肯	bard	aqyn
蘇魯	beauty	suluv
包爾沙克	fried dough balls	boursak
塔爾糜	fried wheat	tary

Table 2. The Kazakh Terms Translated into Existing Chinese Expressions in *Dong Mu Chang* and Their Corresponding English Renderings in *Winter Pasture*

<i>Dong Mu Chang</i>	Gloss	<i>Winter Pasture</i>
壁毯	wall hangings	tus-kiiz
地毯	rug	tus-kiiz
繡氈	patterned rug	symak
花氈	patterned mat	symak/ tekemet
繡花袋	embroidered bag	ayak-kap
席	mat	dastarkh ā n

奶疙瘩	hard cheese	kurt
抓飯	pilaf	plov
饅頭	flat bread	nan
鍋	pot	kazan pot
三腳架	tripod	sajayaq
《黑走馬》	Black Horse Trot	Kara Jorga
奶奶	grandma	apa

“*Bata* 巴塔” in *Dong Mu Chang* is transliterated from the Kazakh term for *prayer*, with the sound kept and the meaning provided through a bracketed annotation “*daoci* 禱辭.” Its corresponding English translation in *Winter Pasture* is “*bata*,” also a transliteration. However, in another textual context, Li chooses to stick with the term “*bata*” to denote the prayer as it appears in the original Chinese text when the English-language translators refuse to go with the supposedly English translation “*bata*” this time and prefer to use another term, “*namaz*” (the formal prayer), instead. It is evident that the translators do not adhere strictly to Li’s original text; rather, they base their translation of the term on their understanding of Kazakh culture:

ST: 我這才意識到此人要做巴塔了。虔誠的穆斯林每天都會做五次巴塔的。(Li 2012, 199)

Gloss: Not until then did I realize that this man was going to perform the *bata*. Devout Muslims observe the *bata* five times a day.

TT: Only then did I realize that this man wanted to perform the *namaz* (the formal prayer). Devout Muslims observe the *namaz* five times a day. (Li 2021, 210)

Analogous situations arise when the translators engage in the task of translating the names of Kazakh felt textiles into English. In Chinese, Li simply refers to those felt products as “*bitan* 壁毯” (wall hangings), “*xiuzhan* 繡氈” (patterned rugs), “*huazhan* 花氈” (patterned mats), and “*xiuhuadai* 繡花袋” (embroidered bags), while the translators prefer to use the romanized versions of their Kazakh names (*tus-kiiz*, *syrmak*, *tekemet*, and *ayak-kap*; see Table 2). The same applies to the food categories (*kurt*, *plov*, *nan*, *baursak*, and *tary*; see Table 2), for which the translators have used the romanized versions of these Kazakh terms while

Li simply translates them into existing Chinese expressions (see Li 2021, viii).⁴ To translate the translational, it seems that the translators of *Dong Mu Chang* frequently resort to the strategy of back translation, which is believed to be able to “promote the authenticity of the story so that the English readers would believe in the distant nomadic world of Kazakh” (Wang 2022, 184).

Apart from the above-mentioned Kazakh-Chinese translations in *Dong Mu Chang* that manifest the translational quality of this book, there exists another form of Kazakh Chinese that also points to the distinctive translational characteristic inherent in the original text. For example:

ST: 略懂漢語的居麻對「迷路」一詞的說法是「忘了」。說：「今天下午嘛，我又『忘了』。羊在哪個地方，我在哪個地方，這邊那邊，不知道了嘛！」(Li 2012, 31)

Gloss: Cuma who knows a little about Chinese would use “forget” to refer to “get lost.” He would say, “this afternoon, I ‘forgot’ again. Where were the sheep, where was I, here, there, I didn’t know!”

TT: Speaking only a morsel of Mandarin, Cuma says “forgot” instead of “lost.” He would say, “this afternoon, I ‘forgot’ again. Where were the sheep, where was I, here, there, I didn’t know!” (Li 2021, 33)

Transcribing Cuma’s awkward and ungrammatical Chinese in *Dong Mu Chang*, Li reproduces the translational flavor and the special humor in Cuma’s language. This form not only enriches the original text linguistically but also serves as a significant marker of the unique cultural and translational elements intertwined in the narrative. When translating such content into English, the translators are also obliged to take into account the latent layer that is imbedded within the Chinese text. They need to remind the target English-speaking readership that the text they are engaging with is a hybrid construct, permeated with both Kazakh and Chinese elements. This time, through literal translation of the original Chinese content, the English-language translators have effectively replicated the linguistic effect present in the ST and successfully induced an effect of defamiliarization among target readers. This approach not only maintains the pragmatic aspect of Cuma’s words in the ST but also vividly projects the Kazakh ethos of inventive thinking and candid expression.⁵

3. Translation and Ethnography: Li Juan as a Cultural Translator

Translation and ethnography are frequently juxtaposed; as Kate Sturge (1997) notes, “ethnography always involves translation” (21). The two terms are closely associated to the extent that the former has often been employed as a defining concept for the latter (see Valero-Garcés 1995; Wolf 2002; Anderson 2003; Buzelin 2007). The analogy drawn between ethnography and translation can be traced back to 1954, when Godfrey Lienhardt used the term “translation” to describe the central task of social anthropology. To Lienhardt, the word “translation” refers “not to the linguistic matter but the problem of describing others from a different culture” (quoted in Valero-Garcés 1995, 556).

In the preface to the thirteenth anniversary edition of his seminal book *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, Paul Rabinow (2007) begins with the following statements:

Fieldwork has been, and remains, the defining mark of the discipline of anthropology. Or, more accurately, doing fieldwork has been, and remains, the defining requirement for becoming an anthropologist in the twentieth-first century. (xi)

The translational and ethnographic characteristics of *Dong Mu Chang* have reinforced each other and both implicitly state that Li, as the author of *Dong Mu Chang*, is a cultural translator by largely performing the role of an ethnographer. Although Li may not strictly qualify as an ethnographer in its academic sense, she fulfills the defining criteria set by Rabinow in that *Dong Mu Chang* is after all grounded in extensive fieldwork. In 2010, *Renmin wenxue* 人民文學 (*People's Literature*), one of the renowned literary magazines in China, launched a narrative nonfiction writing initiative, encouraging writers to step out of their houses, immerse themselves in real-life settings through fieldwork, and *be there* to draw inspiration for their writing. Li is one of the pioneering authors who received financial support from this endeavor. Motivated by the need to accomplish the project task and driven by a long-standing personal writing agenda, Li decided to accompany a Kazakh herding family, the Cumas, to go deep into the dessert to observe and note “every last detail of nomadic life in the dark and silent winter” (Li 2021, 4). As a narrative nonfiction writer who embarks on a journey to the freezing

tundra to capture a rare look at a vanishing nomadic lifestyle, Li naturally takes on the role of an ethnographer. However, her fieldwork diverges significantly from that of a conventional ethnographer in numerous aspects. In the chapter “What I’m Experiencing,” Li gives serious introspective contemplations on this very subject:

How do I put this [...] my interest in the nomadic lifestyle is one thing, but the need to understand it and describe it is another matter. The more time passes, the more confused I feel. Here, no matter what I do, no matter how hard I try, it is never enough. No matter what I say, it seems impossible to get to the truth or to my purpose. I am, in the end, awkwardly superfluous [...]. (Li 2021, 247)

Li’s longing for truth and anxiety for answers resemble those of an ethnographer, which is again reminiscent of Rabinow’s (2007) reflections on fieldwork; for instance, it is impossible to translate the exotic culture if there is no way of getting to the truth. Nonetheless, Li manages to accomplish her work, not by conforming to the traditional mold of a proper ethnographer, but by deviating from it. She exhibits no possible pretense of being a scholar and refuses to employ a professional and lofty tone to pose high-minded questions. Instead, she chooses to relinquish such an approach and *gives up*:

Unfortunately, in the end I wasn’t the rigorous type and Cuma was unable to express himself rigorously either. Our discussion quickly fell into a muddle, both sides too tired to function ... in the end, I came away with no more than the ideas and fragments I began with. So I *gave up*. Anyway, I write essays, not dissertations, better to stick to the basics [...].(Li 2021, 249)

Ultimately, Li’s cultural translation is not exactly an ethnographer’s. Her translation is not centered on the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge but rather revolves around the conveyance of personal experiences. Instead of emphasizing cultural differences, she focuses on highlighting the commonalities shared across cultures. As Li has confessed in the preface to *Chun Mu Chang* 春牧場 (*Spring Pasture*), another narrative nonfiction of hers about the Chinese Kazakh herders’ life, “[my writing] is just an honest depiction of a certain way of life, without the attempt to judge or the ambition to control. [...] It is more of a profound experience and personal growth of mine.” ([我的寫作] 放棄了

判斷和駕駛，只剩對此種生活方式誠實的描述。[……]更是自己的一次深刻體驗和重要成長) (Li 2017, v) Li recognizes that a multitude of writings has been dedicated to the Kazakh herders in the nomadic region of northern Xinjiang, dealing with their nomadic ways (see Su 1989; Patiman 2008; Chen 2017; among others). However, she asks:

English translation: What difference does it make for the readers to be aware of these matters or remain ignorant of them? All such writings have managed to establish a chasm between *them* and *us*, focusing predominantly on the dissimilarities that set *them* apart. But I am far more struck by the commonalities they share with the broader world—the same joys and sorrows and hopes that are intrinsic to the human experience.

Chinese original: 可是，知道了這些，又和一無所知有什麼區別呢？所有的文字都在製造距離。所有的文字都在強調他們的與眾不同。而我，更感動於他們與世人相同的那部分，那些相同的歡樂、相同的憂慮與相同的希望。(Li 2017, vi)

In these words, Li tries to distinguish herself from the numerous writers and ethnographers who have also written about the Chinese Kazakh herders. According to one of the endorsers of *Winter Pasture*, Rachael Friedman, “Li Juan asks herself what it means to be ‘a passerby’ in the lives of others. Her intimate depiction of a family of Kazakh herders is itself an answer to that complicated travel writer question [...]” (Friedman 2021) Li masterfully portrays the harsh realities of life on the winter pasture, the serene pleasures embedded within the nomadic way of life, the profound wisdom of the Kazakh herders enabling them to endure this brutal cold of the steppe, and their deeply cherished hopes for a better future. By weaving her subjective sensibilities into depictions of the Kazakh nomadic life, Li dismantles the authoritative stance of a conventional ethnographer while resisting the homogenizing tendencies of mainstream pastoral narratives. She observes:

In an environment like this, I was always in a passive position. Not that that was a problem; on the contrary, I depended on being passive. In such an unfamiliar environment, I relied on going with the flow. I had to avoid standing out and avoid causing conflict to gain their trust and feel a sense of security. (Li 2021, 253)

This passage further unveils Li's solution to her bewilderment about how to approach the truth. In the 2018 Chinese edition of *Dong Mu Chang*, Li adds one more sentence to the end of the above passage — “*bing ping ci pingwen de jiejin zhenxiang* 並憑此平穩地接近真相” (And with this, I approached the truth smoothly) (Li 2018, 260), which shows that several years later, in retrospection of her sojourn on the winter pasture, Li has finally gained the confidence to say that she has fulfilled her role as a cultural translator. She has achieved this not by being a proper ethnographer but by “being passive” and “going with the flow.” This way might or might not serve as an antidote to the anxieties that afflict all ethnographers; nonetheless, it represents Li's solution. Li's distinguishing assets are not her knowledge about the Kazakh culture or any rigorously conducted interviews with the Kazakh herders; instead, it is her sincerity, humbleness, and empathetic capacity that help her approach the truth.

Another notable aspect about Li being an unconventional ethnographer is that the power dynamics between Chinese and Kazakh cultures are, to some extent, inverted in her narrative. As a Mandarin speaker, Li inherently embodies the dominant cultural influence within Chinese society when interacting with the Kazakh ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. She is supposedly the agent of mainstream culture and presumably has the alleged tendency to gaze at minor cultures. Nevertheless, the situation is exactly the opposite. In *Dong Mu Chang*, Li is often the one who is gazed at and even mocked by the Kazakh herders. For instance, when probing into the intricacies of nomadic herding, Li's questions would invariably elicit from Cuma not merely terse explanations but playful banter steeped in pastoral wisdom. For example:

I asked Cuma, “Where you go to herd, do you pass by any homes?” “No,” he replied, before saying to Sister-in-law in Kazakh, “She thinks when I herd, I can just pop in at people's houses and have some tea!” They all laughed. (Li 2021, 67)

In the laughter of the Cumas, an unmistakable undertone of mockery can be discerned (a recurring phenomenon in the narrative, yet generally harmless). The subtext of the laughter is that “this Han girl knows nothing about herding.” Subsequently, the anecdote of the “Han shepherd” was recounted by Cuma to further accentuate and broaden this subtext to encompass the entirety of the Han population:

Once, at the Red Flag Dam (a dozen or so miles downriver from Akehara), there was a Han, herding for the first time. He had with him steamed bread, pickled vegetables, and water. He ate the salty pickled vegetables with steamed bread for lunch, and then, when he took the lid off the bottle, the water was frozen and not a drop would come out. He even tried to melt it by wrapping the bottle in layers of clothes. (67)

The anecdote is to show that the Han shepherd is utterly ignorant about how cold it could be herding out in the wilderness of the winter pasture and that it is hilarious for him to even try to melt the frozen water by wrapping it in layers of clothes. “After delivering the punch line, Cuma cackled” (67). At such moments, Li, the Han writer, the ethnographer, the supposed interrogator, observer, and gazer, and the subject, is immediately turned into an ignorant daffy outsider. It is Cuma, the Kazakh herder, who consistently gains an advantage in the power interactions between Kazakh and Han cultures. The inversion of power dynamics between the strong and the weak, the mainstream and the marginalized, and the observer and the observed, as well as the subject and the object, is so striking that it endows Li’s narrative with a distinctiveness from other ethnographic writings. Li has no sense of superiority from the very beginning and demonstrates not even the slightest condescension in her interactions with the Kazakh herders. She lives and works with the Cumas, calls their burrow “our burrow,” and sincerely cares about the welfare of the family. In her own words, “I totally joined a strange family, effaced myself, and explored the emotions and hopes of others with all my heart” (完全進入一個陌生的家庭，熄滅自我，全身心探索他人的情感和希望) (Li 2018, 2).⁶ It is through such an unconventional way of being an ethnographer that Li has managed to perform her role as a cultural translator and approach the truth at last.

4. Ethnography and Narrative: Translating the Implied Author

Mary Louise Pratt (1986) once lamented that “ethnographic writing tends to be surprisingly boring. How could such interesting people doing such interesting things produce such boring books?” (33) Twenty years later, Ruth Behar (2007), writing about the same issue, demands: why is ethnography “an academically safe form of writing?” (154) These queries suggest that ethnographic writing remains a considerable distance from being engaging and that such tensions concerning the accessibility of ethnography seem to

pervade the ethnographic genre, which makes the link between ethnography and narrative readily discernible.

As a kind of response to these complaints, scholars such as Kirin Narayan (2007) and Noah Fikry (2022) contend that narrative techniques and creative nonfiction's toolkit can benefit ethnography. According to Lee Gutkind (1997), "narrative nonfiction applies literary techniques traditionally reserved for fiction (e.g., scene-setting, dialogue, character development) to factual subjects, maintaining strict fidelity to truth while engaging readers emotionally." (7) Indeed, narrative nonfiction is a potent medium through which the objectives of ethnographic storytelling can be effectively realized and Li's *Dong Mu Chang* stands as a prime exemplar that conforms to this *modus operandi*. It might be some scholar's belief that *Dong Mu Chang* is loosely structured, "expressing [the author's] episodic and contingent experiences in fragments" (Wang 2022, 185). However, if we examine *Dong Mu Chang* through the lens of narratology, it becomes evident that the book is far from being loosely structured. On the contrary, it is meticulously crafted, allowing the author's narrative techniques to be fully realized. The chronological thread is made obvious for the readers and the characters are delineated with remarkable vividness throughout the narrative. Li herself also addressed this issue once in an interview. When asked about whether she has harnessed the techniques of narrative fiction, Li candidly admitted that her narrative nonfiction could be construed as fiction, given the presence of her structural configuration, plot progression, and even character development (Li and Leung 2021).

There is no escaping the recognition that ethnography and narrative are intimately and intricately related. When the dimension of translation is incorporated into the discourse, the resulting landscape becomes even more multifaceted and intellectually stimulating.

Within the well-established framework of narrative theory, there exists a well known term: the implied author. This term was first proposed in 1961 by Wayne C. Booth's acclaimed monograph *The Rhetoric of Fiction* to differentiate between the real author and the author implied in the text. In Booth's view, the implied author is "an implied version" of the author "that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works" (71–72). According to Dan Shen (2011), "the difference between the 'real author' and the 'implied author' (the real author's 'second self') is that between the person in daily life and the *same* person in the process of writing with a certain 'air' or stance." (81) In essence, the implied

author refers to the image of the author within the literary work. Booth (1983) points out that “some novelists were discovering or creating themselves as they wrote” (71); Ansgar Nünning (2005) claims, “the term ‘implied author’ has become a household word in the critical discourse on narrative fiction.” (239) Booth (1983) applies the concept of the implied author specifically to *novelists* and Nünning restricts its scope to the realm of *narrative fiction*. Given that narrative nonfiction is based on factual events, the demarcation between the real author and the implied author becomes less distinct. Nevertheless, narrative nonfiction writers are also capable of creating an implied version of themselves within their works.

In Wen Yue’s (2019) perspective, Li’s endeavor in her narrative nonfiction writing is essentially a process of self-creation. As Yue puts it, “in Li Juan’s essays, one can always find diverse ‘implied authors,’ each reflecting a distinct facet of her image. In this sense, Li Juan is not writing about Altay so much as she is creating herself in the way of writing about Altay.” (35–36) Building upon Yue’s argument, this paper contends that the implied author of Li in *Dong Mu Chang* manifests in two images: an experience-centric storyteller and a knowledge-driven ethnographer, and that a discernible divergence exists between the implied author in the English translation and that in the original Chinese version.⁷

As noted in the previous section, Li’s fieldwork keeps evoking the impression that she assumes the role of an ethnographer in her writing of *Dong Mu Chang*. However, her approach leans more towards an experiential than a knowledge-centric orientation. To determine exactly the degree to which Li is an experience-oriented storyteller versus a knowledge-oriented ethnographer poses a significant challenge. Nevertheless, what emerges clearly is that the implied author’s image of an ethnographer is more pronounced in the English translation than in the original Chinese version.⁸ The implied author in *Winter Pasture* appears to be more objective and more knowledge-driven than the implied author in *Dong Mu Chang*. The alteration of the implied author’s image in the English translation is primarily attributable to a succession of paratextual elements, including the title, the translators’ note, an incorporated map, the photographs selected in the book, and the glossary.

In Shen’s (2011) view, the implied author is not only the image that the author creates for himself or herself in the text but also an image of the author that the reader infers from the text (81). This statement acknowledges the reader’s role in constructing the image of the implied

author. According to Kathryn Batchelor (2018), “reading of a text never occurs in isolation from the paratext around it, since a reader never comes to a text, but always to a book.” (8) Integrating the perspectives of Shen and Batchlor, this paper regards paratext as an indispensable component of the book, through which readers infer the image of the implied author. Based on this premise, the paratextual elements that contribute to the alteration of the implied author’s image in the English translation of *Dong Mu Chang* will be analyzed in what follows.

The title of *Dong Mu Chang* has been rendered as *Winter Pasture: One Woman’s Journey with China’s Kazakh Herders*. With the addition of a subtitle, the English readers are provided with one more narrative perspective. In the original Chinese title, it is the author who directly names the book for the readers, yet the English subtitle is obviously from a third-person perspective, effectively introducing both the author and the story to the target language readers. The adoption of the third-person perspective in the English title engenders a heightened sense of distance and depersonalization. “It brings together a plethora of distinct cultural elements, including gender, the Orient, nomadism, and ethnicity, thus situating the book firmly within the conventional framework of Western ethnographic writing.” (Wang 2022, 183)

The translator’s note is a legitimate site where translators can articulate their translation philosophies or expound on their views regarding the original work. It is a form of paratext that is exclusive to translated works. In the “Translators’ Note” of *Winter Pasture*, long passages are devoted to elucidating how the translators have handled the information related to Kazakh culture, predominantly focusing on the translation of Kazakh handicrafts and felt textiles:

Various examples of these felt products feature in Li Juan’s daily life on the winter pasture, spread, hung, and piled throughout the earthen burrow. In Chinese, Li Juan simply refers to them as “wall hangings” and “patterned rugs” or “patterned mats,” depending on which surface they decorate or cover. In this English translation, we have opted to include the romanized versions of their Kazakh names. (Li 2021, viii)

Jack Hargreaves and Yan Yan make it clear in the “Translators’ Note” that unlike Li’s general linguistic renderings of the Kazakh felt products in Chinese, they do not mind going to great lengths to categorize those felt products based on their specific functions and to include their Kazakh

names in the English translation. They even actively “encourage readers to look up how the finished products look.” (Li 2021, viii) It seems that imparting knowledge about the Kazakh felt products is a significant objective for the translators in their translation. This undertaking is likely to leave an impression on readers that the English translation places a strong emphasis on knowledge dissemination and information provision, which, to a certain extent, contributes to the implied author’s image of an ethnographer, as previously contended, and stands in stark contrast to Li’s primary intent.

Immediately after the “Translators’ Note,” there is a map designed to instruct the English readers about the local geographical situation. Once again, it is centered on information provision. In *Dong Mu Chang*, there is no such thing as a map, and Li never intends to emphasize the aspect of information provision, as she has pointed out that there is already a multitude of works performing such a function (see Li 2017, iv). That being said, Chinese readers are still able to acquaint themselves with the Kazakh knowledge via Li’s narration, only in a more immersive and intimate manner.

In comparison with the original Chinese version, the English edition of the book demonstrates disparities in both the quantity and layout of the photographs selected in the book. According to Flair D. Shi (2021):

Paratexts are usually replaced or rewritten when a book gets translated, which suggests two questions for comparative studies: What are the functions and effects of the original paratexts? And how far are these functions and effects retained in translation? (9)

Photographs form an integral part of the paratexts of *Dong Mu Chang*. Li has taken many photographs of the winter pasture, fifteen of which are selected for the 2012 Chinese version, whereas the 2021 English version features twenty-five, marking an increase in their quantity. Moreover, the layout of the photographs has also undergone alterations in the English translation. In the original Chinese version, all fifteen photographs are displayed at the end of the book in a relatively random manner, which resembles an exposition of unprompted personal recollections or an aftertaste of a long and delightful journey. However, in the English version, each of the twenty-five photographs is inserted into different chapters according to the chapter’s content. They are thus

more apt to function as a form of evidence or factual material, thereby enhancing the book's ethnographic credibility.

Glossaries, a specialized form of paratext, typically find a place in academic or professional writings. In *Winter Pasture*, the glossary is the last paratextual component that adds to the book's stature as an ethnographic writing. Twenty-eight entries in the glossary are dedicated to explicating various Kazakh and Chinese terms for the target English-speaking readership. Conversely, in the original Chinese version, Li refrains from elaborating on any Kazakh terms in a distinct section of the book because the majority of the relevant content is seamlessly integrated within the narrative itself.

In short, when compared with *Dong Mu Chang*, all the paratextual elements deployed in *Winter Pasture* are more effectively tailored to serve an ethnographic purpose. Consequently, they have further reinforced the implied author's image of an ethnographer in the English version.

5. Conclusion

The core arguments of this study can be encapsulated in the following three propositions. Firstly, the translation of *Dong Mu Chang* is essentially an act of translating the translational. It involves not only the conversion of words from Chinese into English but also the transfer of the underlying Kazakh concepts and cultural connotations. Secondly, as a narrative nonfiction writer, Li also assumes the dual role of an ethnographer and a translator. In her writing of *Dong Mu Chang*, she conducts an exploration of the cultural and social phenomena of a particular group in a particular region, similar to an ethnographer documenting and interpreting human cultures. At the same time, she translates not only the language but also the complex and often intangible cultural experiences and emotions into a form that can be understood by a wider audience, like a cultural translator bridging different cultural worlds. Thirdly, the English translation of *Dong Mu Chang* features an implied author with more pronounced ethnographic characteristics compared with the implied author in the Chinese ST. This indicates that the translators, either consciously or unconsciously, have emphasized the ethnographic aspects of the work, perhaps to better convey the cultural uniqueness of the original work to an English-speaking readership. This shift in the implied author's traits can have

significant implications for how the book is perceived and interpreted in the target cultural and literary context.

Through shedding light on certain aspects of the English translation of Li's narrative nonfiction *Dong Mu Chang*, this study hopes to stimulate further research on the translation of ethnographic narrative nonfiction, centering around the concept of the implied author, and perhaps to provide implications for narrative nonfiction translation practice in general. Comparative analysis between the translation of narrative nonfiction and narrative fiction with rich ethnographic details can also be a potential area for future investigation.

Notes

- 1 All Chinese citations are translated by me unless otherwise specified.
- 2 Information in this paragraph is all from the publisher's website. (<https://astrapublishinghouse.com/product/winter-pasture-9781662600333/>)
- 3 This article treats anthropology and anthropologist as being, in a broad sense, synonymous with ethnography and ethnographer respectively, without delving into the "terminological fuzziness" as discussed in Blumczynski book chapter. (2016, 136)
- 4 That the transcribed Kazakh words named mainly come from food, crafts, and religious practices is based on textual observation.
- 5 There are two important questions lurking in this section. (1) Does Li Juan's practice of using the Chinese equivalents for the Kazakh terms manifest her tendency of Sinicization of the minority "other"? (2) Does the translators' exclusive choice of foreignization show that the translation is more ethnographically sensitive than the original? The first question concerns much broader issues about Chinese authors' Sinicization of ethnic minorities, around which there have already been discussions (see Bender 2017; Xu 2008; Yao 2010; Liu 2014, 2017). This study finds that Li does nothing but the opposite in *Dong Mu Chang*: the supposedly mainstream culture represented by Li is totally upstaged by the "minor" Kazakh culture (see more analysis in section three). As regards the second question, the answer is affirmative according to what the current study has discovered. The translation of *Dong Mu Chang* seems to harbor a more discernible ethnographic agenda than its original Chinese version. (see more analysis in section four)

- 6 Effacing herself in the daily interactions with the Kazakh herders does not entail Li's loss of "self" in her writing. Li never ceases to promote the growth of her "self" and even endeavors to create her "self" in her writing, the practice of which is reminiscent of the narrative notion of the "implied author." (see more analysis in section four)
- 7 In fact, the implied author in *Dong Mu Chang* (2018) also varies from that in *Dong Mu Chang* (2012) despite the fact that the structure and main content remain the same. Compared with the implied author in the 2012 edition, Li's image of an ethnographer is more prominent in the 2018 edition. This can be substantiated by Li's own statements in the preface to this new edition, in which Li highlights that there is a proliferation of annotations in this updated edition, which, added either as footnotes or bracketed comments, are intended to elucidate the culturally specific Kazakh elements and introduce more Kazakh knowledge to Chinese readers. (Li 2018, 3)
- 8 The English translation of *Dong Mu Chang* is based on the 2012 Chinese edition instead of the revised and annotated 2018 edition.

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