



# Writing Memory : global Chinese Literature in Polyglossia

Martina Codeluppi

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## WRITING MEMORY: GLOBAL CHINESE LITERATURE IN POLYGLOSSIA

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Tesi in cotutela con l'Université Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3:

# WRITING MEMORY:

## GLOBAL CHINESE LITERATURE IN POLYGLOSSIA

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# Écrire la mémoire : littérature chinoise globale en polyglossie

## Résumé :

Cette thèse vise à examiner la représentation des mémoires fictionnelles dans le cadre global de la littérature chinoise contemporaine, en montrant l'influence du déplacement et du translinguisme sur les œuvres des auteurs qui écrivent soit de la Chine continentale soit d'outre-mer, et qui s'expriment à travers des langues différentes. Les quatre romans *Zha gen* (Prendre racine) par Han Dong, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* par Dai Sijie, *The Crazy* (La démence du sage) par Ha Jin et *Rou zhi tu* (Beijing Coma) par Ma Jian seront comparés en tant qu'images des mémoires individuelles de la Révolution Culturelle et du mouvement pour la démocratie qui a eu lieu à Tian'anmen en 1989. Dans la première partie, nous discuterons les nouvelles approches théoriques qui configurent la littérature chinoise contemporaine comme une entité polyglossique et déterritorisée. Dans la deuxième partie, nous nous concentrerons sur deux exemples d'autofiction, à savoir *Zha gen* et *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, en comparant leur représentation du temps figuré comme une évolution identitaire de l'individu. Dans la troisième partie, nous analyserons les deux romans *The Crazy* et *Rou zhi tu*, en mettant en évidence le caractère spatial de la mémoire, transposé en forme de témoignage fictionnel. Finalement, dans la quatrième partie, nous explorerons les interactions entre la littérature chinoise et la littérature mondiale, en plaçant les cas analysés dans une perspective translinguistique. À travers la comparaison entre les versions chinoise, anglaise et française des romans, nous montrerons comment les mémoires déterritorisées sont modulées par la traduction et l'autotraduction.

## Mots clefs :

Mémoire, littérature chinoise globale, Han Dong, Dai Sijie, Ha Jin, Ma Jian

# Writing Memory: Global Chinese Literature in Polyglossia

## Abstract:

This thesis aims to investigate the representation of fictional memories in the context of global Chinese literature, showing how displacement and translingualism affect the works by authors from the Mainland and from overseas, who express their creativity in different languages. The four novels *Zha gen* (Striking Root) by Han Dong, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress) by Dai Sijie, *The Crazy* by Ha Jin, and *Rou zhi tu* (Beijing Coma) by Ma Jian are compared as reflections of individual memories of the Cultural Revolution and of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. The first part of the thesis addresses the new theoretical approaches configuring contemporary Chinese literature as a polyglossic and deterritorialised entity. The second part focuses on the analysis of two examples of *autofictions*, *Zha gen* and *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise*, comparing their representation of time as reflected in the evolution of the individual. The third part explores the two novels *The Crazy* and *Rou zhi tu*, focusing on the spatial character of memory transposed in the form of a fictional *témoignage*. Finally, the fourth part investigates the interactions between Chinese literature and world literature, placing the cases analysed in a translingual perspective. The comparison between the Chinese, the English and the French versions of the novels shows how deterritorialised memories are modulated through translation and self-translation.

## Keywords:

Memory, Global Chinese Literature, Han Dong, Dai Sijie, Ha Jin, Ma Jian

ALLEGRIA DI NAUFRAGI

E subito riprende  
    il viaggio  
        come  
dopo il naufragio  
    un superstite  
    lupo di mare.

(G. Ungaretti, 1917)





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#### NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTION

In this thesis, the Chinese terms have been transcribed using the *pinyin* Romanisation system followed by the Chinese characters and the English translation. For reasons of coherence, the traditional form (*fanti* 繁體) has been adopted even for quotations from novels originally published in simplified characters (*jianti* 簡體). The references to the proper names of the characters of the novels have been made employing their official English translations. Unless otherwise specified, other translations are by the author of the thesis.

## INTRODUCTION





More than two decades have passed since when Jacques Derrida wrote his famous statement “[j]e n’ai qu’une langue, ce n’est pas la mienne”<sup>1</sup> (I only have one language, yet it is not my own). The postcolonial context in which it was generated endowed it with the power to represent its repercussions on the identity of individuals that found themselves ‘in possession’ of a foreign language while, at the same time, being possessed by it.<sup>2</sup> At the turn of the XXI century, the process of globalisation presented new issues in terms of language, identity and, consequently, literature. Migration flows created new artistic generations that not only are faced with the dilemma of whether or not to adopt the language of the country that adopted them in the first place, but also have to deal with the Anglophone trend characterising world literature on a global scale. Amin Maalouf underlined that a language is both an instrument of communication and an identity-defining factor.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, linguistic choices cannot but affect writers’ identities and, consequently, the identity of the literature to which they belong.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l’autre* (Monoliguism of the Other), (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996), 13.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 35–6.

<sup>3</sup> Amin Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières* (Murderous Identities), (Paris: Grasset, 1998), 153.

With the reforms launched by Deng Xiaoping in the first half of the 1980s, China opened its doors to economic and cultural exchange with foreign countries, triggering a wave of migrations that consolidated during the following years. Some students turned into writers after moving abroad because the cultural displacement aroused in them a sense of mission towards their compatriots. Other established authors decided to become self-exiled in the name of a freedom of expression unconceivable in their motherland. Composite identities were born, and new branches of Chinese literature started to sprout from countless different situations. Today, contemporary Chinese literature have become hardly definable by means of territorial borders, and the variety of languages with which it came into contact ended up shaping its theory as well as its practice. Polyglossia is its new, undeniable expression, which has not been fully acknowledged yet, but whose effects are already visible, coded in the multiplicity of its refractions.

Naturally, when dealing with literature, language is not merely an instrument. François Cheng 程抱一 (b. 1929) is one of the most representative examples of a Sino-French cultural melange embodied in an internationally recognised author. He emphasised how, especially when dealing with poetry, language cannot be defined only as a tool, as it is part and parcel of the art of literature.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the polyglossia in which works of Chinese literature are now created deserves to be taken into account as the casket containing nuances generated by their cross-cultural circulation. Indeed, if language works as a code, memory represents the cradle of cultural complexity. Recollections constitute the dimension in which an author search and re-interprets his past in the light of his personal evolution – a bridge over temporal and spatial distances. Is the comparison between literary works created either in Mainland China or abroad, either in Chinese or in foreign languages, possible and effective to outline the

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<sup>4</sup> François Cheng, *Le dialogue. Une passion pour la langue française* (Dialogue. A Passion for the French Language), (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2002), 36.

new concept of global Chinese literature? Is the language in which a literary work is written a determining factor in the expression of a fictional memory? Does translation have the power to modulate their representation with global Chinese literature becoming intertwined with world literature? This thesis will try to answer these questions by analysing four novels by four different writers, which were generated from their personal experiences of specific phases of contemporary Chinese history. The imaginary re-elaboration of their memories, which earned them the adjective 'fictional,' allows the authors to modulate their recollection according to their perception, granting the individual a considerable amount of freedom. The polyglossia characterising the corpus permits to clear the obstacle of linguistic exclusiveness in order to investigate the relationship between the authors' identities and the cultural specificity embodied in their works.

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This study has been inspired by the need to emphasise the connections between different products of Chinese literature in order to map the complexity of the concept as a whole, while the focus of memory permits to investigate the most personal interpretations of the author's identities. Due to the breadth of such an ambitious project, this thesis focused on only four authors: Han Dong 韓東 (b. 1961), Dai Sijie 戴思杰 (b. 1954), Ha Jin 哈金 (b.1956), and Ma Jian 馬建 (b. 1953). These writers have been selected as they are representative of very different positions in terms of geographic location and of the language used for literary creation. They were all born and raised in Mainland China, and they all ended up in 'marginalised' positions. Han Dong always refused to be a part of the established literary system, taking refuge in an independent movement that rejected the dictates imposed from above. Dai Sijie, Ha Jin, and Ma Jian are instead *émigré* writers who left their motherland and established themselves in France, the United States and the United Kingdom respectively. The compared

study of the selected novels by these authors, namely *Zha gen* 扎根,<sup>5</sup> *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*,<sup>6</sup> *The Crazy*,<sup>7</sup> and *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土,<sup>8</sup> is characterised by an overall polyglossia, as the languages in which these works have been written are Chinese, French, English, and Chinese respectively. The *fil rouge* connecting these four novels is memory, providing the basis on which the authors developed their fictional accounts. The experience of the Cultural Revolution – for Han Dong and Dai Sijie – and that of the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 – for Ha Jin and Ma Jian – are re-narrated in their novels that, having all been published after 2000, offer comparable insights into the representation of contemporary China by marginalised voices. Indeed, no matter how far these authors went from their motherland (either physically or metaphorically), their connection with Mainland China is permanent. It is precisely their peculiar combination of Chinese identity and exile that makes them valuable elements of comparison, offering an insight into the diversity of interpretations that defines contemporary literature at a global level.

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This study intends to establish a connection between literature in Chinese and Chinese literature in other languages – a relationship that has often been denied in the name of a linguistic nationalism that by now has become obsolete. Due to the diverse nature of the elements composing the corpus, the following analysis cannot but be conducted using a comparative approach. The comparison between the selected texts permits to emphasise similarities and differences in the authors' fictional representations, stressing the influences of displacement and of translation on their literary portrait of contemporary history.

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<sup>5</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), (Paris: Gallimard, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, (London: Vintage, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 2010).

One of the most significant areas to address when searching the traces of history in literature is indeed that of collective memory. Examples of remarkable works on the literary representation of modern Chinese history from a comprehensive perspective are those conducted by David Wang<sup>9</sup> and Yang Xiaobin.<sup>10</sup> This thesis, however, aims to emphasise the peculiarities of the selected articulations of global Chinese literature, showing their different relationships with the memory they express. Therefore, it is the individual character of the fictional memories to be considered as the most critical feature. In this study, I employ the term ‘articulation’ (of global Chinese literature) to indicate any literary work possessing a fundamental Chinese character, which can derive from the author’s ethnicity or from the content of their works. The articulations that will be compared are defined as such thanks to both these elements. Their exploration allows to investigate the connection between the ‘impossible’ task of identity to bridge “the gap between the act of remembering and the reminded events, feelings and impressions”<sup>11</sup> and the place the same identity occupies in the global picture of Chinese literature.

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This thesis is divided into four parts, each of them addressing a different aspect of the problem. The first part provides a synthesis of the contemporary debate on the issue of Chinese literature in a global context, followed by a proposal for a new interpretation. The first chapter focuses on the theoretical studies that have been conducted in Mainland China in the field of ‘overseas Chinese-language literature’ (*haiwai huawen wenxue* 海外華文文學) and ‘global Chinese-language literature’ (*shijie huawen wenxue* 世界華文文學), illustrating the development of their methodology from a chronological perspective. The second chapter

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<sup>9</sup> David Der-wei Wang, *The Monster that Is History*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Xiaobin Yang, *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-Garde Fiction*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang Müller-Funk, “On a Narratology of Cultural and Collective Memory,” *Journal of Narrative Theory* 33, no. 2 (2003): 207.

explores the birth of the concept of 'Sinophone literature,' its multiple readings, and its repercussions on the international debate. Finally, the third chapter proposes an interpretation of the concept of global Chinese literature that is founded on the heterogeneity of the identities it encompasses and on its intrinsic polyglossia. I will trace its theoretical coordinates through the application of the models of the 'body without organs'<sup>12</sup> and of the 'rhizome'<sup>13</sup> elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari.

The second and the third parts constitute the practical analyses of the selected novels, which are compared in pairs and from two different points of view. In order to capture the essence of the bond between the remembering subject and the object of their recollection, my analysis follows a phenomenological path. The theories elaborated by Paul Ricœur<sup>14</sup> constitute valuable tools to conceptualise the implications of the subject in the process of recollection and vice-versa, emphasising how the structure of memory reflects the complex architecture of the self. Ricœur's philosophical considerations I will employ in my analysis draw on both Henri Bergson's and Edward S. Casey's theories. Bergson's distinction between 'pure memory' (*souvenir pur*), 'image-memory' (*souvenir-image*), and 'perception' (*perception*)<sup>15</sup> underlines the subject's intellectual effort implicit in a reminiscence and will be especially useful in the second part of the study. Casey's reflections on the act of remembering<sup>16</sup> and on the structure of space,<sup>17</sup> instead, will be applied in particular in its third part. Indeed, every articulation of global Chinese literature, is envisaged as

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<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'anti-œdipe* (Anti-Œdipus), (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 51–2.

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (A Thousand Plateaus), (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), 13–9.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Matter and Memory: Essay on the Relationship of Body and Spirit), (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1968), 147.

<sup>16</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study (Second Edition)*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

‘chronotopical,’ as it corresponds to a precise combination of time and space.<sup>18</sup> This feature inspired the subdivision of the textual analysis, whose parts focus on the mnemonic representation of time and space respectively.

The second part compares the novels *Zha gen* by Han Dong and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* by Dai Sijie – two examples of recollections of the Cultural Revolution in the form of *autofiction*. I will focus mainly on time, investigating the reflection of its flow on the remembering subjects. After a presentation of the authors and of the selected novels, the analysis will compare the characters’ paths across that peculiar period of Chinese history and towards their own adulthood. While the writers make time go backwards through their recollection, the plot reproduces the evolution of their fictional alter-egos with the time flying forward. I will argue that the peculiarities of the selected articulations influence the fictional representation of the authors’ memories, especially as far as their marginalised individualities are concerned. The nuances of a narrated *étrangeté* (strangeness) will play a central role in this comparison, and the analysis will investigate how they are coded in the authors’ identities, as well as in their works. In order to do so, Paul Ricœur’s theories will be integrated with those belonging to the field of narratology and literary criticism. I will start from the most general level, addressing the narratological features of the novels by studying the relationship between their structure and the representation of ‘time.’ As the complementary side to such analysis, I will also explore the relationship between the characters and the authors, seen as two facets of the same self. The second step will constitute the textual analysis of the two novels, through which I will examine the reflections of time intended as both temporal coordinates and personal evolution, stressing the link between the remembered historical period and the self. Finally, the third step will correspond to the most ‘particular’ one. The Cultural Revolution and the self will be looked at from the

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<sup>18</sup> In this respect, the articulations envisaged in this study are similar to those theorised by Shu-mei Shih. For further reference see part one, section 2.1. “The Invention of the Concept,” and Shu-mei Shih, “The Concept of the Sinophone,” *PMLA* 126, no. 3 (2011): 717.



perspective of language, shrinking down the unit of analysis in order to examine in depth the features of the polyglossic mix.

The third part will follow the structure of the second one, but the focus will be moved from 'time' to 'space.' The novels *The Crazy* by Ha Jin and *Rou zhi tu* by Ma Jian will be compared as two fictional memories of the Tiananmen protests of 1989 providing two different interpretations of fictional *témoignages*. The representation of the spatial dimension in the novels will be considered as the mirror on which the authors' displacement is reflected, linking their memories to their personal experiences of migration. The analysis of the multiple manifestations of space will show how the distance between the recollecting subjects and their memory influences their literary journey towards an event they lived from different degrees of remoteness. After the presentation of the authors and of their selected works, the exploration will be conducted through three main steps, analogous to those defining the previous part. Firstly, I will start from the narratological level. I will investigate the connection between the authors' displacement and the structure of the novels by addressing both the 'translation' of spatial distance into temporal gaps and the representation of narrative spaces. Secondly, the analysis will address the 'spatialities' through which Ha Jin and Ma Jian represent their recollections of Tiananmen. Built on Casey's theories on memory and space, it will focus on three main interpretations of space, namely the subject's body, the physical places and the imaginary spaces. Finally, the exploration will end once again with the word as its unit of research. Through the exploration of the linguistic features of their memories, it will show how the authors' different identities are interlaced with their use of language, either native or foreign.

The fourth and last part of this study will link the articulations theoretically ascribable to global Chinese literature to world literature and the worldwide readership. The first chapter will address the translingual circulation of the analysed fictional memories from the perspective of translation. By

comparing all the Chinese, English and French editions of the four novels currently available, I will investigate the alterations in the cross-national and translingual representation of memory. The selection of a few examples from the translated texts will provide an insight into the power of language to modulate the authors' recollections. The analysis will draw on the previous sections of this thesis by making particular reference to the categories of time, space, and language. Subsequently, the second chapter will try to locate the works compared in this study in the global context, by situating the authors' identity and ethnicity in different yet similarly marginalised positions. Conclusively, the hypothesis of considering Chinese literature as a global literary space will introduce the final discussion on the compatibility between the concept of global Chinese literature and the theories elaborated in the field of world literature.

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The challenge of this thesis is to envisage a cross-national and translingual connection between the four selected articulations of global Chinese literature, emphasising the role of the individual in the process of recollection and of fictional re-elaboration. My aim is to postulate a synergy between theory and practice that stresses the value of a literary text as a mirror of the complexity characterising contemporary literary scenario. The four selected novels constitute a representative sample of its varied composition, being the result of diverse identities and different linguistic choices. The focus of memory permits to analyse in depth the relationship between the individuals and the history of their motherland, while the fictional character of the texts allows a mediation between autobiographical experience and literary creativity.



PART ONE:

A DETERRITORIALISED CHINESE LITERATURE



## 1. The Position of the Mainland

The research in Chinese literature developed in countries other than Mainland China is a large and composite area of study, dealing with a variety of different geographical areas, from Asia to America to Europe.<sup>19</sup> Each of the branches of this literature stemmed from a different migration flow, which took place against a particular socio-cultural background. Every articulation has therefore evolved under the influence of a specific place in a certain historical context, which played a primary role in the process of literary creation, shaping every combination with unique features. In Mainland China, through nearly forty years of evolution, research in this field has produced a large number of studies, both at the level of theory and at that of practice. The main tendencies in Chinese academia reflect a rather Sinocentric perspective, from which literature created from overseas – especially in foreign languages – is seen as nothing more than a peripheral manifestation deriving from Mainland Chinese literature.

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<sup>19</sup> Overseas Chinese literature is traditionally classified according to geographical criteria. For instance, the content of the 2014 edition of *Haiwai huawen wenxue jiaocheng* 海外華文文學教程 (A Course of Overseas Chinese Literature) edited by Rao Pengzi 饒芃子 and Yang Kuanghan 楊匡漢 (Guangzhou: Jinan daxue chubanshe, 2014), is divided into four categories: South East and North East Asia, North America, Europe, and Oceania.

This chapter summarises the development in Mainland China of the studies on the so-called ‘overseas’ and ‘global’ Chinese literatures. The following recapitulation will present the main features and limitations of these categories, with particular reference to literature generated in France, in the United Kingdom and in the United States, after China’s opening reforms. To avoid falling outside the scope of this study, research concerning other regions or different periods will not be discussed.

### 1.1. *The Formation of the Field*

“Overseas Chinese-language literature” (*haiwai huawen wenxue* 海外華文文學)<sup>20</sup> was born breathing the revolutionary air of May 4th movement.<sup>21</sup> However, it took many decades before this field of research began to take shape in a systematised way. In Mainland China, it was during the late 1970s and early 1980s, after the opening reforms, that the study of overseas Chinese-language literature started to attract scholars’ attention.<sup>22</sup>

The first institutions to be involved were those belonging to the coastal provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, where researchers began focusing on Taiwan and Hong Kong literature and, in a later phase, extended their scope to overseas literature. The first conference concerning this new field, namely the

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<sup>20</sup> In order to better clarify the labels used by Chinese scholars to classify this literature, I chose to adopt the translation proposed by Laifong Leung in the essay “Overseas Chinese Literature: A Proposal for Clarification,” in *Reading Chinese Transnationalism: Society, Literature, Film*, ed. Maria N. Ng and Philip Holden, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 117–27. Her suggestion clears the ambiguity in the adjective ‘Chinese’ by distinguish between ‘Chinese-language literature’ and ‘non-Chinese-language literature’ (*fei huawen wenxue* 非華文文學). Further clarifications on the definitions used by Chinese scholars in this discipline will be discussed in the next sections.

<sup>21</sup> Chen Xianmao 陳賢茂, “Zhongguo xin wenxue dui haiwai huawen wenxue de yingxiang” 中國新文學對海外華文文學的影響 (The Influence of New Chinese Literature on Overseas Chinese-Language Literature), *Wenxue pinglun*, no. 4 (1989): 159.

<sup>22</sup> One of the first landmarks of the development of this discipline was the publication of the short story “Yongyuan de yin xueyan” 永遠的尹雪艷 (The Eternal Snow Beauty) by Bai Xianyong 白先勇 (b. 1937). It was the first literary work written in Chinese by an author based overseas to be published in Mainland China.

first edition of the ‘Scholars’ Forum on Taiwan and Hong Kong Literature,’ was held in June 1982 at Jinan University, in Guangdong province, bringing together several institutions from both Guangdong and Fujian.<sup>23</sup> The second edition of the same forum, held two years later at Xiamen University, although witnessed the participation of several overseas scholars and authors, kept its focus on Taiwan and Hong Kong, and did not cover the area of overseas Chinese-language literature. However, the number of overseas representative writers and scholars grew larger in the third edition of the forum, held in 1986 at Shenzhen University, which was therefore renamed ‘Scholars’ Forum on Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Overseas Chinese-language Literature.’<sup>24</sup> The research was starting to adopt a wider perspective, including literature from United States, Malaysia, and South-East Asia. Nevertheless, the new title revealed the unbalanced nature of the conference, and of the field itself. Indeed, due to historical and geographical reasons, Taiwan and Hong Kong had a long-standing and deeply-rooted bond with Mainland China and, therefore, scholars were keen on giving priority to research concerning these regions. The Chinese title of the conference, Scholars’ forum on Taiwan, Hong Kong and overseas Chinese-language literature (*Tai Gang yu haiwai huawen wenxue xueshu yantaohui* 臺港與海外華文文學研討會), was symptomatic of the organisers’ uneven consideration of the two areas, and reflected the relationship between the main focus on Taiwan and Hong Kong (*Tai Gang* 臺港) and the secondary area of overseas (*haiwai* 海外) literature.<sup>25</sup> Fudan University hosted in 1988 the fourth edition of the forum, while the fifth edition was held in 1991 at Zhongshan University, in Guangzhou. Due to the participation of several representatives of Macanese academy, the 1991 edition adopted the title “Scholars’ Forum on Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and Overseas

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<sup>23</sup> Rao Pengzi 饒芃子, “Haiwai huawen wenxue zai zhongguo xuejie de xingqi ji qi yiyi” 海外華文文學在中國學界的興起及其意義 (The Rise in the Chinese Academy of Overseas Chinese-Language Literature and Its Significance), *Huawen wenxue*, no. 3 (2008): 6.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*



Chinese-language Literature.” Finally, the concept officially reached its global dimension with the 1993 edition of the forum, held in Lushan, Jiangxi province, which was titled “International Conference on Global Chinese-language Literature,” inscribing this transnational field of research in a systematised global perspective.<sup>26</sup> The title was then left almost unmodified for the following conferences which were held all over China – and Taiwan – with a biannual frequency, and nowadays still provide a valuable platform to bring together new ideas and discuss the development of the field.

### 1.2. *A Preliminary Definition*

One of the most crucial theoretical issues of global Chinese-language literature (*shijie huawen wenxue* 世界華文文學) concerns its definition, the interpretation of which is still not uniform among Chinese scholars.<sup>27</sup> This label was used to title the conference of 1993 to reunite Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and overseas Chinese-language literature. Nevertheless, the inequality between the first three sections, viewed as part of Chinese literature, and the fourth, often held as “foreign” literature, was not neutralised. In fact, the former group was still considered the precursor of the latter, since global Chinese-language literature was considered a “historical product” generated by the union of the two. Despite its apparent formal simplicity, the creation of such a broad category revealed a complexity that reached far beyond the mere assembly of four geographical areas.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Liu Jun 劉俊, “Xulun — shijie huawen wenxue: kua quyue kua wenhua cunzai de wenxue gongtong ti” 緒論——世界華文文學：跨區域跨文化存在的文學共同體 (Introduction. Global Chinese-Language Literature: A Cross-Regional and Cross-Cultural Literary Community), in *Yuejie yu jiaorong: kua quyue kua wenhua de shijie huawen wenxue* 越界與交融：跨區域跨文化的世界華文文學 (Border Crossing and Culture Blending: Chinese Literature in the World), (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2014), 1.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 1–2.

In order to analyse the differences on this matter, a few steps back must be taken to clarify, first and foremost, the labels ‘Chinese-language literature’ (*huawen wenxue* 華文文學) and ‘overseas Chinese-language literature’ (*haiwai huawen wenxue* 海外華文文學). Chen Xianmao, in his *History of Overseas Chinese-language Literature*<sup>29</sup> – the first of its kind to be published in Mainland China – states that the concept of *huawen wenxue* is different from that of *Zhongguo wenxue* 中國文學 (Chinese literature), as the latter only includes the literature of Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, while the former comprehends all the works written in Chinese language, no matter their geographical provenience. Its borders can therefore be extended to overseas literature, revealing the global character of the category, and providing a wider area of analysis.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the concept of ‘Chinese-language literature’ concerns explicitly the language used to express an author’s literary creativity, which must be Chinese.<sup>31</sup> Contrariwise, the label ‘literature by Chinese people’ (*Huaren*

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<sup>29</sup> Chen Xianmao 陳賢茂, *Haiwai huawen wenxue shi—chubian* 海外華文文學史——初編 (A History of Overseas Chinese-Language Literature. First Edition), (Xiamen: Lujiang chubanshe, 1993).

<sup>30</sup> Chen Xianmao 陳賢茂, “*Haiwai huawen wenxue de dingyi, tedian ji fazhan qianjing*” 海外華文文學的定義、特點及發展前景 (Definition, Characteristics and Perspectives of Development of Overseas Chinese-Language Literature), in *Haiwai huawen wenxue shi—chubian* 海外華文文學史——初編 (A History of Overseas Chinese-Language Literature. First Edition), (Xiamen: Lujiang chubanshe, 1993), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Chen’s definition is in line with the one proposed by Qin Mu in his foreword to the first issue of the periodical *Huawen wenxue*. He refers to ‘Chinese-language literature’ as a category which is far wider and far richer than that of ‘Chinese literature,’ in the same way ‘English-language literature’ and ‘Spanish-language literature’ are more comprehensive than ‘English literature’ and ‘Spanish literature’ respectively. The increasing interest towards literature written in Chinese outside the borders of Mainland China encouraged, during the 1990s, the launch of several magazines that published works from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and overseas. One year after *Huawen wenxue* was launched, Qin Mu celebrated the first issue of *Sihai: Gang Tai haiwai huawen wenxue* 四海——港臺海外華文文 (Four Seas: Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Overseas Chinese-Language Literature) magazine, which published Chinese-language literature from all over the world, with an equally enthusiastic contribution – Qin Mu 秦牧, “*Dakai shijie huawen wenxue zhi chuang*” 打開世界華文文學之窗 (Let Us Open the Window of Global Chinese-Language Literature), *Sihai: Gang Tai haiwai huawen wenxue*, no.1 (1986): 2-3. The magazine circulated with this title until 1997, when it was renamed *Shijie huawen wenxue* 世界華文文學; Qin Mu 秦牧, “*Zhuhe ‘huawen wenxue’ zazhi chuankang—daifa kanci*” 祝賀《華文文學》雜誌創刊——代發刊詞 (Celebrating the First Issue of *Huawen wenxue*: Foreword), *Huawen wenxue*, no. 1 (1985): 4.

*wenxue* 華人文學) overlooks the issue of language referring to the writers' ethnicity and, therefore, including also Chinese authors who choose to write in a foreign language.<sup>32</sup> Given these preliminary distinctions, Chen then defines the area of overseas Chinese-language literature as comprehending "every literary work created in any region other than China using the Chinese language as a tool of expression."<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, many ambiguities underlie such a straight-line description and during the years immediately preceding the publication of Chen's volume, the debate was still lively. For example, some overseas Chinese writers proposed alternative interpretations of the label, distancing themselves from the linguistic criterion to enlarge the scope of the category.<sup>34</sup> Despite the proliferation of alternatives, the original interpretation of the formulation 'overseas Chinese-language literature' was well received in Mainland China. In line with the popular view presented above, Zhang Jiong clarified the distinction between 'global Chinese-language literature' (*shijie huawen wenxue*) and 'global literature by Chinese people' (*shijie huaren wenxue* 世界華人文學). The first label designates a category that merged those of "Chinese literature" and "overseas Chinese-language literature," comprehending every literary work written in Chinese. Instead, the second formulation indicates literature written by Chinese people, regardless of the language used for their expression.<sup>35</sup> Zhang emphasises the difference in the analytical perspectives, which are that of language versus that of ethnology and anthropology. Given the vast area of intersection between

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<sup>32</sup> Chen Xianmao 陳賢茂, "Hawai huawen wenxue de dingyi, tedian ji fazhan qianjing" 海外華文文學的定義、特點及發展前景 (Definition, Characteristics and Perspectives of Development of Overseas Chinese-Language Literature), 6.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Among them, Liu Yichang stated that the category of *huawen wenxue* should be interpreted in a "broad sense, [...] allowing the inclusion of Chinese authors and sinologists who chose a foreign language as a tool of expression." Liu Yichang 劉以鬯, "Shijie huawen wenxue yinggai shi yi ge youji de zhengti" 世界華文文學應該是一個有機的整體 (Global Chinese-Language Literature Should Be an Organic Whole), *Xianggang wenxue* 80 (1991). Cit. in

<sup>35</sup> Zhang Jiong 張炯, "Guanyu shijie huawen wenxue" 關於世界華文文學 (On Global Chinese-Language Literature), *Sihai*, no. 1 (1994): 157.

the two categories, it is according to the scope of the research that one should choose the most suitable approach.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, these linear distinctions proved incapable of representing such problematical categories without rising theoretical issues, and the demand for a more careful elaboration was soon made clear. To get a glimpse of the complexity behind the label, in 1996 Rao Pengzi and Fei Yong claimed the need to overcome the inflexibility of the logic of language.<sup>37</sup> Bringing the example of authors that emigrated from Mainland China or Taiwan to the United States, and later moved back to their motherland, they demonstrate that every author is a 'whole' which is not only a combination of one time and one space. On the contrary, it is shaped against a complex background made of multiple variants. Therefore, to approach such particular experiences, which are composite from both a geographical and a personal point of view, it is necessary to employ these labels with caution, adapting its borders to those of the related categories of 'Chinese literature,' 'Taiwanese literature,' et cetera.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 157–8.

<sup>37</sup> Rao Pengzi 饒芃子 and Fei Yong 費勇, "Lun haiwai huawen wenxue de mingming yiyi" 論海外華文文學的命名意義 (On the Meaning of the Name of Overseas Chinese-Language Literature), *Wenxue pinglun*, no. 1 (1996): 32.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, 33–4.

### 1.3. *Building a Methodology*

During the initial development of the field, due to the limited access to resources, research lacked a proper methodology. As a consequence, it was confined to the critic evaluation of literary works. Then, starting from the 1980s, scholars' increasing attention towards theories imported from the West resulted in the gradual development of a 'methodological awareness'.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the discipline was still underdeveloped compared to that of contemporary Chinese literature and, therefore, scholars began to concentrate on a methodological revolution.<sup>40</sup>

The most significant contribution came from Rao Pengzi, who proposed the application of a comparative methodology, encouraging the adoption of a cultural perspective of analysis. She underlined the importance of the cultural factor when analysing overseas Chinese-language literature, bringing the example of the gap existing in the cultural condition of different groups of migrants, which depends on both the geographical area of destination (North America, Southeast Asia, etc.) and their personal history (second-generation migrants, international students, etc.). Rao proposed to carry out comparative studies aiming not to "seek similarities"<sup>41</sup> between these authors' unique conditions, but to better understand the dissimilarities existing in the literary category as a whole. Moreover, the adoption of a cultural perspective of analysis drew attention on a few key concepts, such as the authors' 'Chinese

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<sup>39</sup> Zhu Wenhua 朱文華, "Cong fangfalun jiaodu kan shijie huawen wenxue yanjiu de yanjin" 從方法論角度看世界華文文學研究的演進 (On the Evolution of Global Chinese-Language Literature from a Methodological Perspective), *Huawen wenxue*, no. 6 (2002): 7–8.

<sup>40</sup> Zhu Wenbin 朱文斌, "Haiwai huawen wenxue yanjiu fangfa zhuanhuan lun" 海外華文文學研究方法轉換論 (On the Changes in Research Methodology of Overseas Chinese-Language Literature), *Shaoxing wenli xueyuan xuebao* 25, no. 5 (2005): 58.

<sup>41</sup> Rao Pengzi 饒芑子, "Guanyu haiwai huawen wenxue yanjiu de sikao" 關於海外華文文學研究的思考 (Reflections on the Research in Overseas Chinese-Language Literature), *Jinan xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 16, no. 2 (1994): 78.

consciousness<sup>42</sup> and 'cultural identity'.<sup>43</sup> The writers' imaginaries are the product of a condition of 'exile' affected by these common factors, yet shaped in a unique way by their memories and experiences. The composite nature of the body of works that constitute overseas Chinese-language literature allows them to be compared both synchronically and diachronically, within one or more national contexts.<sup>44</sup>

In the second half of the 1990s, scholars developed diverse approaches, introducing multidisciplinary methodologies that started from literary theory and later turned to cultural analysis. Consequently, during the last decade, scholars recognised the need for a better definition of these multiple methodologies, proposing in the first place the restoration of the value of literary theory. Rao Pengzi encouraged a re-valorisation of the aesthetic features of literary works that, due to a dispassionate seek for cultural peculiarities, were neglected by Chinese scholars. The right path to follow – Rao states – is the hybridisation of the two strategies: "The new step that scholars have to do to develop the discipline further is to connect the two dimensions of literariness and culture."<sup>45</sup>

The methodological considerations described above, however, do not step out of the long-standing Sinocentric perspective. Despite the burgeoning of the field, overseas Chinese-language literature is still regarded as an ensemble of peripheral manifestation stemming from Mainland Chinese literature. Nevertheless, they show an increasing maturity *vis-à-vis* new critical possibilities

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<sup>42</sup> Rao Pengzi 饒芃子 and Fei Yong 費勇, "Hawai huawen wenxue de zhongguo yishi" 海外華文文學的中國意識 (The 'Chinese Consciousness' in Overseas Chinese-Language Literature), *Zhongguo bijiao wenxue*, no. 4 (1996): 93–105.

<sup>43</sup> Rao Pengzi 饒芃子 and Fei Yong 費勇, "Hawai huawen wenxue yu wenhua rentong" 海外華文文學與文化認同 (Overseas Chinese-Language Literature and Cultural Identity), *Guowai wenxue*, no. 1 (1997): 27–32.

<sup>44</sup> Rao Pengzi 饒芃子, "Hawai huawen wenxue yu bijiao wenxue" 海外華文文學與比較文學 (Overseas Chinese-Language Literature and Comparative Literature), *Dongnan xueshu*, no. 6 (1999): 9.

<sup>45</sup> Rao Pengzi, "The Overseas Chinese Language Literature in a Global Context," *Revue de littérature comparée*, no. 337 (2011): 110–2.

and can provide a solid foundation on which to build original frameworks. The global dimension reached by Chinese literature can only be grasped in a comparative perspective, which should combine the accurate analysis of literary texts with the critic evaluation of their cultural value. Yet, in order to seize the peculiarities of the works analysed, Mainland Chinese literature and overseas Chinese literature should be considered as even, eradicating any preconceived hierarchy. Moreover, the idea of global Chinese-language literature should be pushed to its limits, allowing the inclusion of literature written in foreign languages.

#### *1.4. Exophone Writing*

The field of overseas Chinese-language literature has always been struggling for success in Chinese academia, and its sub-category of “foreign-language writing” (*fei muyu xiezu* 非母語寫作) represents an even more challenging domain. Despite the general tendency to neglect literary works written in foreign languages by Chinese authors, some scholars did focus on this particular category, advocating its cultural significance and literary value.

Chinese authors who write in a foreign language can be analysed from two main perspectives: cultural and linguistic. On the one hand, by addressing foreign readers directly in their native language, these authors have the power to convey their image of China into the foreign culture, shaping the readership’s perception of their motherland. On the other hand, the challenge of self-translation can enrich an author’s language with unique features resulting from linguistic hybridisation. Language can reveal significant nuances, carrying the marks of the migrant’s experience. Although from a linguistic point of view these works are seldom categorised as ‘Chinese,’ they are indeed characterised by an unquestionable ‘Chineseness.’ One of the most significant features of this literature is the variety of external factors that can bring an author to write in a

foreign language, which translates into the difficult task of elaborating a classification. Migration flows developed differently in every geographical area, creating a constellation of migrant communities, each of which should be considered as a standalone unit.

From a cultural perspective, the issue of classification is addressed by Ni Tingting, who focuses on the category of migrant writers.<sup>46</sup> Ni challenges the tendency to classify literary works according to an author's nationality, stressing the difference between one's citizenship and one's cultural identity.<sup>47</sup> In Ni's opinion, China is these authors' 'creational basis,' multiculturalism is the main value of these works, and they have the potential for enriching contemporary Chinese literature. Therefore they should not be excluded due to the logic that privileges authors' political statuses instead of their cultural and spiritual bond.<sup>48</sup> Taking North America as an example, Jiang Jinyun further elaborates the cultural significance of foreign-language literature by stressing the critical role that these authors have – being at the margins of both the culture of origin and that of their second country – in opening a channel of communication between the two.<sup>49</sup> He explores the strategies they implement to build the image of China in the eyes of American readers, which they can choose to represent from a social, ethnic, or cultural perspective.

From a linguistic point of view, an interesting effect caused by the practice of writing in a foreign language is the interference between the mother tongue and the second language. The fact of living in an environment dominated by a language that is foreign to the author inevitably triggers an inner conflict between the two codes coexisting in his mind, causing the phenomenon of

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<sup>46</sup> Ni Tingting 倪婷婷, "Jiaru waiji de huaren zuojia fei muyu chuanzuo de guilei wenti" 加入外籍的華人作家非母語創作的歸類問題 (The Problem of Categorising the Creations by Chinese Writers with Foreign Citizenship), *Jiangsu shehui kexue*, no. 5 (2013): 202–7.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, 203.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, 205–6.

<sup>49</sup> Jiang Jinyun 蔣金運, "Bei mei huaren yingwen wenxue zhong de zhongguo xingxiang" 北美華人英文文學中的中國形象 (The Image of China in North American Literature in English by Chinese Authors), *Huawen wenxue*, no. 6 (2008): 41.



linguistic hybridisation. Huang Wanhua analyses this peculiarity in both the cases of the Chinese authors who chose to write in Chinese, and of those who decided to express their literary creativity via the second language.<sup>50</sup> He points out that hybridisation (*zajiao* 雜交) does not manifest itself merely through language, but it is reflected in an author's style too.<sup>51</sup> The 'roots' of one's mother tongue, developing in the foreign land, give life to a new personal language. The mother tongue becomes then the author's 'soul language' (*linghun de yuyan* 靈魂的語言), which must communicate and come to terms with its opposite entity, the 'tool language' (*gongju de yuyan* 工具的語言), resulting in the linguistic hybridisation that serves as a fruitful narrative strategy for many 'new migrant authors' (*xin yimin zuojia* 新移民作家).<sup>52</sup> Huang's analysis suggests that these writers are willing to exploit this dualism to compensate for their internal division caused by the migration experience. A similar idea of pluralisation at the linguistic level is postulated by Liu Wei, who highlights the creative potential of self-translation. In particular, he enhances the phenomenon of mutual transformation between the mother tongue and the foreign language: the former is influenced by the cultural filter imposed by the latter. Nevertheless, it also has the power to shape the use of the foreign language itself. This reciprocal adaption results into a variety of 'Englishes' and 'Chineses,' which develop alongside every author's individual experience.<sup>53</sup> Liu's assumption can serve as a starting point to contemplate the uncountable creative nuances generated by the interaction between two linguistic codes once they are channelled towards artistic expression.

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<sup>50</sup> Huang Wanhua 黃萬華, "Huibao muyu ziyang de shengming fangshi — huaren xin shengdai he xin yimin zuojia chuanguo de yuyan zhuiqiu" 回報母語滋養的生命方式——華人新生代和新移民作家創作的語言追求 (A Lifestyle that Replaces the Nourishment of the Mother Tongue: The Pursuit of Language Created by New-Generation and New-Migrants Chinese Authors), *Zhongshan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 48, no. 1 (2008): 47–52.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 49.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 50–51.

<sup>53</sup> Liu Wei 劉偉, "Fei muyu xiezuo yu wenhua fanyi" 非母語寫作與文化翻譯 (Foreign-Language Writing and Cultural Translation), *Minzu wenxue yanjiu*, no. 2 (2011): 12.

The idea of evaluating Chinese literature in foreign languages by means of the different ways in which China materialises in these works, whether it is from a cultural or a linguistic perspective, can be fruitful. Indeed, the multiplicity of the factors involved contribute to blur its borders. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of its many articulations and, more importantly, the recognition of 'Chineseness' as its main creative source, allows us to go beyond the common conception that holds the employ of the Chinese language as a requirement for a literary work to be classified as 'Chinese.'

## 2. Hermeneutics of the Sinophone Model

While in China scholars were developing strategies of analysis entrenched in the central role of the Mainland, western sinology started to elaborate a response. In these respects, among the most influential theoretical concepts developed overseas is that of the 'Sinophone.' From an etymological point of view, this adjective designates somebody who speaks Chinese (standard Mandarin or other variations). However, the revitalisation of the term carried out by Shu-mei Shih was the tinder for an international debate that extended far beyond its denotative function.<sup>54</sup> Serving almost as a political statement against the alleged hegemony of Mainland China, the Sinophone claims the independent nature of diasporic expressions of Chineseness, opening to question the significance of the concept of 'diaspora' itself.

Not only did this assumption have an unsurprisingly powerful impact on the international scene, but it also generated a variety of different interpretations concerning its meaning. This chapter discusses the concept of the Sinophone applied to the field of literature, outlining its original formulation, its main readings, and its reception in Mainland China.

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<sup>54</sup> Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," 711.

### 2.1. *The Invention of the Concept*

The term 'Sinophone' was first employed by Shu-mei Shih in 2004 in her essay "Global literature and the Technologies of Recognition" to define "literature in Chinese by Chinese-speaking writers in various parts of the world outside China, as distinguished from 'Chinese literature' – literature from China."<sup>55</sup> After the attribution of the Nobel Prize to Gao Xingjian 高行健 in 2000, the need for a recognised dignity of such category of literature could no longer be neglected. Shih's paper explores the hypothesis of a global perspective on literature by writing a sharp critic towards the West-centred models that guided the discussion on world literature in the last decades. They are accused of conceiving the assimilation of 'difference' either as a sort of antidote for the western obsession with minorities or as a modulated representation, part of a pre-categorised cognitive system. On introducing the new category of 'Sinophone literature,' Shih stresses the importance of adopting a transnational perspective able to deeply investigate the structure of literature at a global level, transcending the illusion of a perfect correspondence between nation and language, and avoiding blind universalisms.

The heterogeneity of the Sinophone is at the basis of Shih's work of 2007, *Visuality and Identity*,<sup>56</sup> which starts from visual culture to explore the issue of identity, condemning the blurriness of the category of diaspora and Chineseness in general. Shih claims the importance to recognise the different Sinophone articulations, which derive from the diversity of Sinitic languages and are found both in the Chinese communities abroad and in the communities of ethnic minorities in the Mainland, emphasising the need to problematize the different relationships they have with China. The point of departure for Shih's analysis are the Sinophone communities in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and her main concern is

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<sup>55</sup> Shu-mei Shih, "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition," *PMLA* 119, no. 1 (2004): 29.

<sup>56</sup> Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2007).

their ethnic representation. Although she does not particularly elaborate the application of the Sinophone to the literary context, the idea of a transitional category, with margins able to fluctuate according to time and ongoing mutations of language, constitute an approach that can be effective to extend Shih's preoccupation to the realm of transnational and translinguistic Chinese literature.

To be applicable, this model needed a theorisation, which implied the adoption of an Asian perspective, destabilising the traditional vision that conceives the West as the stronghold of theory. When addressing such issue, Shih tries to overcome the dichotomy between the West, seen as the theorising subject, and Asia, generally considered as the object on which to apply theory, first of all by emphasising the existence of an Asian component that played an active role in the definition of western theory.<sup>57</sup> Secondly, she points out how such a preconception was fostered for historical reasons, namely the need of suppressing internal heterogeneities in order to justify hegemonies opposing to western powers.<sup>58</sup> Finally, Shih postulates the possibility for an Asia-based theory, identifying the Sinophone as a potential method to unsettle this binary opposition.<sup>59</sup>

A few years later, Shih conceptualises the methodological use of the Sinophone, exploring its theoretical potentiality also in the literary field. The key-point of her final definition is that the Sinophone is a "chronotope into being, a specific time-place conjunction,"<sup>60</sup> able to explore the diversity of the Sinitic communities around the world by locating them into their temporal and geographical specificity and, therefore, opening for a new perspective of research that overcomes the illusive homogeneity of the diasporic dimension. In her

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<sup>57</sup> Shu-mei Shih, "Theory, Asia and the Sinophone," *Postcolonial Studies* 13, no. 4 (2010): 467.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 469 ff.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, 482.

<sup>60</sup> Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," 717.

introduction to the collection of essays *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*,<sup>61</sup> Shih illustrates the interdisciplinary nature of the Sinophone, clarifying its origins and exemplifying its uses in the different fields of the study of colonial languages, diaspora studies, and ethnic studies.<sup>62</sup> According to her vision, literature is one of the main channels through which Sinophone communities express their composite ethnic identities and, therefore, it was chosen to be the focus of this first attempt to define the border of the new discipline. Moreover, Shih specifies once again that the object of her analysis are the Sinitic communities that, due to historical processes such as continental colonialism, settler colonialism and migration,<sup>63</sup> have found themselves either submitted to Hans' predominance or considered as mere diasporic manifestations of Chinese supremacy. In this context, a necessary condition to articulate the Sinophone discourse is the acknowledgement of its multilingualism,<sup>64</sup> a characteristic that is immediately detectable in the Chinese translation of 'Sinophone literature': *huayu yuxi wenxue* 華語語系文學.<sup>65</sup> Such term implicates a multiple linguistic identity against the unifying connotation of the expression 'Chinese-language literature,' used in Mainland China. The Sinophone is, in fact, made of a multiplicity of minor languages, as well as variations of the standard Chinese, that constitute the concrete manifestation of the complex identity characterising marginalised Sinitic communities. As a result, given the fact that what defines the borders of the Sinophone is language, and not ethnicity, this category is destined to

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<sup>61</sup> Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards, eds., *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

<sup>62</sup> Shu-mei Shih, "Introduction: What Is Sinophone Studies?," in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 1–6.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 11–3.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> This translation was first elaborated by David Wang in 2006 and became quickly the most popular in Mainland China, although not without raising objections. Tang Yonghua 湯擁華, "Wenxue ruhe 'zai di'? — shilun Shi Shumei 'huayu yuxi wenxue' de linian yu shijian" 文學如何'在地'? ——試論史書美'華語語系文學'的理念與實踐 (How Can Literature Be 'Localised'? Theory and Practice of Shi Shumei's 'Sinophone Literature'), *Yangzijiang pinglun*, no. 2 (2014): 59. For further reference see Huang Weiliang 黃維梁 (2013): 106.

disappear along with the integration of marginal communities and their consequent adoption of whichever foreign language.<sup>66</sup>

Shih's concept of Sinophone proved to be a ground-breaking theoretical assumption that provided an excellent starting point for future elaborations. With regard to the present study, it is possible to identify three key assumptions that will serve as a basis for the conceptualisation of global Chinese literature: the autonomy of local manifestations of Chineseness, which are strictly related to the temporal dimension; the intrinsic heteroglossia that characterises the category; and its potential power to turn 'routes' into 'roots.'<sup>67</sup> This last point allows for a reconsideration of the literary expressions scattered throughout the world. Indeed, they are seen not only as a point of arrival of a Chineseness coming from afar, namely the Mainland, but also as the point of origin of new 'Chinesenesses,' shaped by personal experiences, which compose the variety of tiles in the global mosaic of Chinese literature.

However, Shih's original approach is not entirely suitable for analysing Chinese literature from a global perspective, as it presents significant limitations. Firstly, it does not recognise the interdependency between Mainland literature and minor Sinitic communities, which is the most evident manifestation of the globalisation of contemporary Chinese literature. In other words, it substitutes the centrality of China with the centrality of 'everything except for China,' supporting the autonomy of Sinophone articulations by refusing any direct connection with the Mainland.<sup>68</sup> Secondly, despite the claim for its polyphonic and polyscriptic nature,<sup>69</sup> the Sinophone cannot – by definition – include other

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<sup>66</sup> Shu-mei Shih, "Against Diaspora: the Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production," in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 32–3.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, 38.

<sup>68</sup> According to the theorists of the Sinophone, the choice of not engaging with literary, artistic, and cultural production by Han Chinese from Mainland China does not intend to be a "negligence of the center." Contrariwise, it should be understood as a consequence of what Ien Ang defines a process of "inclusion by virtue of othering." (Shih, Tsai, and Bernards, eds., *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, 20).

<sup>69</sup> Shih, "The Concept of the Sinophone," 715–6.

linguistic codes as variations in its scheme. Hence, Shih's model does not adequately attain a cross-language dimension, as it rejects all the expressions of Chineseness perpetuated by means of foreign languages. Instead, such extreme manifestations of a linguistic hybridisation should be included in the new portrait of Chinese literature, which is global and, therefore, should be conceived as transnational also as far as language is concerned. Thus, the scope of Shih's Sinophone is inevitably partial and, when applied to the literary field, it misses the chance to visualise the global character of contemporary Chinese literature fully.

## 2.2. *Multiple Readings*

The concept of the Sinophone was not merely a neologism; it prompted a debate that – more than ten years after its first apparition – is still evolving.<sup>70</sup> The discussion on the application of the Sinophone to the literary field derives from the different interpretations given to such a composite category.

Besides Shi Shu-mei, Jing Tsu's voice was one of the most prominent in addressing this issue. In her book *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*,<sup>71</sup> she explores the disputes around the subject of Chinese language as it shapes literature by diasporic communities. The mythicised idea of 'native speaker' is exploited by what she calls 'literary governance'<sup>72</sup> to promote cultural identity in a literary scenario that has to embrace global dimension. Migration and globalisation created a complex web of interaction between languages that influence the individual as well as the community. Jing Tsu stresses the cooperation between the opposing forces that drive modern Chinese language

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<sup>70</sup> In October 2016, the conference 'Sinophone Studies: New Directions' was hosted at Harvard University, nine years after the Yale-Harvard joint international conference "Globalizing Modern Chinese Literature: Sinophone and Diasporic Writings". It provided a platform for summarising a decade of research conducted worldwide and exploring new possibilities for further development around this theme.

<sup>71</sup> Jing Tsu, *Sound and Script in Chinese Diaspora*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, 2.



and literature, such as language standardisation and reform, national literature, and diasporic writing, redefining their scope and features.<sup>73</sup>

Unlike Shih Shu-mei – who stresses the conflict between the Sinophone and the Mainland – Jing Tsu explores the collaboration between the different articulations of the Sinophone giving them the power to build their ‘governance.’ Tsu’s perspective is not that of post-colonialism anymore; her focus is instead on the mechanics of language seen as the raw material that composes such a worldwide network. On approaching the analysis of diasporic and bilingual writers, Tsu focuses on the Sinophone as a “problem of sound and script, thereby taking the phonics suggested in the word Sinophone seriously as facets of the history and materiality of writing.”<sup>74</sup> From the perspective of migrant authors and their complex and sometimes controversial linguistic condition, “Sinophone writing does not appear to belong to a particular space or national language.”<sup>75</sup> Jing Tsu starts from the variations and external interactions of national language to analyse their effect on a worldwide Chinese literature, dedicating a whole chapter to foreign-language writing and the issue of ‘bilingual loyalty.’<sup>76</sup> She pushes the idea of Sinophone literature at the edges of the Sinophone itself, analysing the process of self-translation as an overcoming of the threshold postulated by Shi Shu-mei.

Tsu’s interpretation and application of the concept of the Sinophone to outline the challenge of global expansion faced by Chinese literature are of primary importance. On recognising the need to “gauge the future direction of global Chinese literature that is not exclusive to one language,”<sup>77</sup> she provides noteworthy reflections on its intrinsic internationality and multilingualism. Such intuitions can be most useful to connect and compare Sinophone and allophone Chinese authors.

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 12–3.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, 14.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, 17.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, 80.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, 111.

On reviewing the last developments concerning Sinophone Studies, David Der-wei Wang states that neither Shih nor Tsu confronted the most critical point concerning this far-reaching project. To him, on exploring Sinophone literature, researchers should not limit themselves to overseas Chinese literature plus Mainland literature by ethnic minorities. Instead, the Sinophone should be applied first and foremost on Mainland China itself, because “to truly subvert the foundation of Chinese national literature, we should no longer consider it apart from the Sinophone literary system.”<sup>78</sup> Wang points out that standardised Han language too is composed of a myriad of variations. Hence, the tissue of Chinese national literature is not different from that of overseas Chinese literature. Indeed, instead of considering overseas literature as an exceptional case, Wang proposes to look at Mainland literature as an exception to the ‘world Sinophone literature.’<sup>79</sup> Besides his re-interpretation of the borders of the Sinophone, Wang attempts to redefine its critical perspective. To create a new angle of analysis, he introduces the concept of ‘post-loyalism.’ As a successor of loyalism – a long-standing idea in Chinese History – post-loyalism is the unsystematic expression of a grief towards the present situation. Eradicating the historical continuum that served as a base for loyalism, post-loyalism loses itself in a confused sense of nostalgia.<sup>80</sup> Wang employs this concept to build a dialectic with Shih’s post-colonialism, situating the Sinophone in the in-between. To him, Sinophone cannot be reduced to either Shih’s resistance, or to Tsu’s governance, which neglects the sentimental implication of such a complex ensemble of spaces.<sup>81</sup>

Wang’s illuminating critic extends the reach of the Sinophone discourse, introducing a new prism through which to analyse the areas object of the study.

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<sup>78</sup> David Der-wei Wang, “Sailing to the Sinophone World.” Lecture given at the Hong Kong University on December 8, 2015.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> David Der-wei Wang, “Post-Loyalism,” in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 102.

<sup>81</sup> Wang, “Sailing to the Sinophone World.”

Nevertheless, he focuses on south-east regions, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and Malaysia, where the dialectic between post-colonialism and post-loyalism can function. Individual migrant authors are characterised by their personal condition and, although they could potentially express post-loyalist sentiments, they are not necessarily situated in a post-colonial environment. Yet, the idea of englobing Mainland literature, and discussing the position of national literature as one of the many manifestations of Chinese literature, is fundamental to carry out a comparative analysis of Chinese literature on a global scale.

### 2.3. *The Reaction of the Centre*

During the first decade of the 2000s, researchers in Mainland China had broadened their view, recognising the need for a more internationalised discipline – an issue with which overseas Chinese-language literature had to cope from many points of view. The inevitability of a cross-national confrontation was made explicit with the rise of the concept of Sinophone literature. The divergences between this new approach and that of overseas Chinese-language literature triggered a number of responses in the Mainland, which either rejected or welcomed Shih's idea and its further elaborations.

Among the first contributions to confront the concept of the Sinophone critically there is Liu Bin's review of David Wang's *Twenty Masters of Contemporary Novel*.<sup>82</sup> Wang was theorising a new perspective that, fleeing the Sinocentric view elaborated inside the borders of P.R.C., integrated Mainland Chinese literature with Chinese literature born outside its borders by means of a more flexible use of the category of language.<sup>83</sup> Besides Wang's choice of authors,

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<sup>82</sup> David Der-wei Wang 王德威, *Dangdai xiaoshuo ershi jia* 當代小說二十家 (Twenty Masters of Contemporary Novel), (Beijing: Shenghuo-dushu-xinzhishijian shidian, 2006).

<sup>83</sup> David Der-wei Wang 王德威, "Huayu yuxi wenxue: bianjie xiangxiang yu yuejie jiangou" 華語語系文學：邊界想象與越界建構 (Sinophone Literature: In-Border Imagination and Cross-Border Construction), *Zhongshan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 46, no. 5 (2006): 6. Cit. in Liu Bin 劉斌, "Goujian yu queshe: huayu yuxi wenxue — ping Wang Dewei 'Dangdai xiaoshuo ershi jia'" 構

which was perceived as uneven and planned to serve the purpose of his conceptualisation,<sup>84</sup> what Liu points out as the main fault of this work is an over-application of western critic, resulting in a “confusing miscellany of theories.”<sup>85</sup>

Zhu Chongke expresses a more welcoming attitude towards the Sinophone approach. On criticising the contradictions intrinsic in the category of ‘New migrants’ literature’ (*xin yimin wenxue* 新移民文學), Zhu compares the two possible alternative labels of ‘Diasporic Chinese writings’ (*lisan huawen xiezu* 離散華文寫作) and ‘Sinophone literature.’ The latter is praised for its tolerant and balanced perspective of analysis against the tendency to enhance Sinocentrism expressed by the former. Nevertheless, Zhu stresses the fragility of its equilibrium, which requires extra caution when applying the concept, to avoid the paradoxical result of using the periphery to replace the centre.<sup>86</sup> Zhu then elaborates a more accurate analysis of the concept of the Sinophone, identifying some of the problems behind the new academic formulation. In particular, Zhu denounces Shih’s overly simplistic vision when discussing the implementation of post-colonial theory, especially as she described Taiwan and Hong Kong after 1997 as colonised territories. Moreover, Zhu continues, her discursive construction fails to understand the historical complexity of Mainland China and the cultural scenario behind the development of its language.<sup>87</sup> While refusing to recognise the central role of the Mainland, she implements the same logic on which the sinocentrism she criticises is based. In conclusion, Zhu acknowledges

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建與缺失：華語語系文學——評王德威《當代小說二十家》 (Construction and Deficiencies: Sinophone Literature——A Review of Wang Dewei’s Twenty Masters of Contemporary Novel), *Huawen wenxue*, no. 4 (2007): 13.

<sup>84</sup> Liu Bin 劉斌, “Goujian yu qeshi: huayu yuxi wenxue——ping Wang Dewei ‘Dangdai xiaoshuo ershi jia’” 構建與缺失：華語語系文學——評王德威《當代小說二十家》 (Construction and Deficiencies: Sinophone Literature——A Review of Wang Dewei’s Twenty Masters of Contemporary Novel), 13.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 15.

<sup>86</sup> Zhu Chongke 朱崇科, “‘Xin yimin wenxue’: ‘xin’ de beimi?” ‘新移民文學’: ‘新’的悖謬? (‘New Migrants’ Literature’: a ‘New’ Absurdity?), *Huaqiao huaren lishi yanjiu*, no. 2 (2009): 25.

<sup>87</sup> Zhu Chongke 朱崇科, “Huayu yuxi de huayu jiangou ji qi wenti” 華語語系的話語建結構及其問題 (The Discursive Construction of the Sinophone and Its Problems), *Xueshu yanjiu*, no. 7 (2010): 149–50.

the potentialities of the Sinophone, which could open the way for a proper internationalisation of Chinese-language literature. However, he stresses the need for the correction of its many liabilities,<sup>88</sup> inviting the readers to be patient, yet leaving them with little hope for future developments of the new-born concept.

Another issue of Sinophone literature, widely debated in Mainland China, is its affinity with other categories such as Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone literatures, et cetera, which are grounded in a colonial past that China does not have. Zhao Xifang states that, although Chinese literature has spread in the world and merged with a variety of socio-cultural contexts, China was never a colony and, therefore, the relationship between Sinophone literature and the Mainland cannot be seen as shaped by colonialism. On the contrary, the colonial menace was represented by western imperialism. Zhao accuses the Sinophone approach of neglecting this passage and of erroneously identifying China as its antagonist, whereas the real opposition is represented by the West – for example in the case of Hong Kong literature.<sup>89</sup> According to Zhao, Chinese-language literature and Sinophone literature constitute in fact two opposite approaches: the former seeking for the Mainland Chinese identity of overseas Chinese literature, the latter looking for its intrinsic heterogeneity.<sup>90</sup>

However, not all the critics were built on political ground. For example, on reviewing Li Fengliang's collection of interviews to overseas Chinese literary critics,<sup>91</sup> Zeng Jun points out that the divergences on the theoretical approaches

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<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, 150–1.

<sup>89</sup> Zhao Xifang 趙稀方, "Cong hou zhimin lilun dao huayu yuxi wenxue" 從後殖民理論到華語語系文學 (On Sinophone Literature from the Point of View of Postcolonialism), *Beifang luncong*, no. 2 (2015): 33.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, 34–5.

<sup>91</sup> The urge for an international exchange on overseas Chinese literature inspired Li Fengliang's work that, collecting a series of interviews to American Chinese scholars, aimed at bridging between the two main poles of contemporary Chinese literary research: Mainland China and the United States. Li Fengliang 李鳳亮, ed., *Bi'an de xiandaixing — — meiguo huaren pipingjia fangtanlu* 彼岸的現代性——美國華人批評家訪談錄 (Modernities Across the Ocean: Nine Interviews with American Chinese Critics), (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2011).

one can adopt when analysing overseas Chinese literature are the reflection of a deeper issue. In truth, the problem lies in the coexistence of two academic environments, the Chinese and the overseas Chinese, and in the challenge of communication they must face.<sup>92</sup> Li Fengliang and Hu Ping took a step forward towards a possible resolution.<sup>93</sup> After depicting the main features of the 'theoretical menace' represented by Sinophone literature,<sup>94</sup> they try to shed new light on the perspective elaborated overseas, describing its virtues *vis-à-vis* the Mainland Chinese approach. In particular, Li and Hu stress the power of Sinophone literature to respect and understand the local features of Chinese literature in each of its particular representations, envisaging a potential fusion of 'localness' (*bentu xing* 本土性) and 'Chineseness' (*Zhongguo xing* 中国性).<sup>95</sup> According to their analysis, the two approaches share the same problems, which could be faced and possibly overcome by means of a cooperation between the two frameworks. Although the synergy envisaged by Li and Hu still seems quite utopian, their paper indeed shows a remarkable open-mindedness towards new theoretical possibilities, which could actively shape the future evolution of Chinese literature.

Despite several scholars' optimism, Sinophone literature and overseas Chinese-language literature are built on opposed principles that make them mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the publication in Chinese of Shu-mei Shih's *Fan lisan* 反離散 (Against Diaspora)<sup>96</sup> is a signal of the need for a mediation between the two poles. Indeed, it should be possible to envisage a connection between Mainland and overseas Chinese literature, and to inscribe them in a

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<sup>92</sup> Zeng Jun 曾軍, "'Huayu yuxi xueshu' de shengcheng ji qi wenti" '華語語系學術'的生成及其問題 (The Birth of the 'Sinophone Academy' and Its Problems), *Dangdai zuojia yanjiu*, no. 4 (2012): 204.

<sup>93</sup> Li Fengliang 李鳳亮, and Hu Ping 胡平, "'Huayu yuxi wenxue' yu 'shijie huawen wenxue': yi ge daijie de wenti" '華語語系文學'與'世界華文文學':一個待解的問題 ('Sinophone Literature' and 'World Literature in Chinese': A Problem to Be Solved), *Wenyi lilun yanjiu*, no. 1 (2013): 53–61.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, 55.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, 57–8.

<sup>96</sup> Shu-mei Shih 史書美, *Fan lisan: huayu yuxi yanjiulun* 反離散：華語語系研究論 (Against Diaspora: Discourses on Sinophone Studies), (Taipei: Lianjing chubun gongsi, 2017).

single framework capable of representing their composite nature as well as their shared origin. An ideal synergy would merge the attention towards the particular articulations advocated by the Sinophone approach with the consciousness of their indissoluble bond with the Mainland, yet without purporting to represent them in any hierarchical order.

### 3. What Is Global Chinese Literature?

It has been shown how language is not the only obstacle to an impartial and comprehensive definition of contemporary Chinese literature. Indeed, the concept of Sinophone literature and that of global Chinese-language literature analyse the problem using different lenses that collide because of a subjacent political statement. With regard to this dualism, an idea of a global Chinese Literature found its place in the debate, confronting the new configuration of Chinese literature with a more flexible approach.

On presenting the third view elaborated within the context of western sinology, this chapter will attempt to contextualise its variables, generated by its cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. Lastly, the concept of global Chinese literature will be defined from a philosophical point of view, finalising the theoretical basis on which the following textual analyses will be built.

#### 3.1. *Systematising Heterogeneity*

The label 'global Chinese literature' has been employed to title the collection of essays published in 2010, in which David Der-wei Wang and Jing Tsu address the issue of the multiple 'tensions' that accompanied the rise of the concept of



Sinophone literature. Their work acknowledges the increasing heterogeneity of Chinese literature from both a theoretical and practical point of view, showing the limits of the post-colonial framework, as well as those of a nation-based idea of modern literature.<sup>97</sup> Diasporas, along with the succession of generations, blurred the borders of literature from both a geographic and a linguistic perspective.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, the idea of migration as a single historical event has been gradually replaced by that of a transnational movement. In a globalised world, location is less and less permanent, it is an incessantly redefined position rooted in the act of migrating itself. In this context, standard Mandarin fails to define the language voicing globalised Chinese literature. Indeed, diasporic communities tend to identify themselves with regional dialects that, having escaped the ‘vernacularisation’ of May Fourth movement, remained the stronghold of distinctive cultural connotations.<sup>99</sup> Given such preliminary remarks, the focus seems to shift, being no longer confined to the plurality characterising the Sinophone itself. The problem becomes that of organising and coordinating the diverse theoretical and critical approaches to a globalised Sinophone, envisaging the “reorientation” of literary studies as a multi-scale practice, which shall be “global, regional, and local.”<sup>100</sup>

The act of opposing to a presumptuous search of a universal definition justifies the vagueness of the label ‘global Chinese literature,’ which hints to a double issue, both geographical and political. The choice of including it in the title of the present study originates precisely from the privilege of its ambiguity. If the roots of contemporary Chinese literature lie in a transnational ground, then it is from a comprehensive and universal perspective that it should be studied. Moreover, the ambitious task of keeping an impartial eye on the works analysed requires a break with the political preoccupation. Hence, the concept of global

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<sup>97</sup> Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang, “Introduction: Global Chinese Literature,” in *Global Chinese Literature*, ed. Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 1.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, 3–5.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, 13.

Chinese literature is employed here with exclusive reference to the literary domain.

To look at Chinese literary production from a global angle would mean to potentially include all works generated within and beyond the borders of Mainland China, in Chinese or in other languages. Indeed, encompassing such a large number of texts would inevitably invalidate any denotative function of the label, making it unemployable as a category. Tsu and Wang focused on the need for a harmonisation of the diverse theoretical possibilities explored hitherto in the field of global Chinese literature, and not on the lack of uniformity of its definitions. Similarly, the present study does not aim to the unattainable goal of defining the cartography of global Chinese literature. Instead, it acknowledges the plurality of its articulations, focusing on their interconnections, as well as on the unique cultural stance that each of them conveys.

### 3.2. *Visions of a Globalised Chineseness*

The concept of global Chinese literature is necessarily entangled with the issue of the globalisation of culture. The quintessence of Chinese culture, the so-called 'Chineseness,' has been widely explored from a variety of perspectives, mainly to show its interrelations with the socio-economic processes that animated the entrance of China in the globalised world. Indeed, a sort of globalised Chineseness is at the basis of a global concept of Chinese literature. Nevertheless, it should not be intended as an abstract and standardised theoretical construction, but rather as an extended framework that allows the differentiation of its multiple manifestations.

Rey Chow anticipated in 1998 the need of reconsidering ethnic differences originating from contemporary processes of dislocation.<sup>101</sup> The variety of languages involved and the complex intertwining of diverse cultural identities

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<sup>101</sup> Rey Chow, "Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," *Boundary 2* 25, no. 3 (1998): 9.

caused by diasporic phenomena pave the way for a rethinking of the concept of Chineseness. Its pluralisation would recognise the possibility for multiple “Chineseness-es,” corresponding to an equal number of Chinese identities.<sup>102</sup> Nonetheless, the idea of identity is itself a problematic one. Allen Chun emphasises its subjective character *vis-à-vis* the wider concept of ethnicity and culture. If it is at the level of the individual that identity is first acknowledged, and therefore born, no universalisms are possible.<sup>103</sup> Every individual builds his or her own identity by assembling the pieces of one’s personal experience, creating a unique mix that is indissolubly linked to a particular time-space configuration. Picturing a flexible and potentially unlimited paradigm for Chinese identity is necessary for establishing a global perspective on the subject. Nonetheless, an unsystematised cluster of Chinesenesses can only be effective when properly contextualised. Ien Ang stated that the purpose should not be to acknowledge the existence of Chineseness, but to investigate how it manifests itself in different contexts.<sup>104</sup> Identities associated with diverse expressions of a literary Chineseness should be contrasted using a specific approach, evaluating the terms of comparison according to every single study. Otherwise, due to the vastness of its borders, the possibility of falling beyond the limits of comparability is an actual menace.

Serena Fusco pointed out that different manifestations of Chineseness imply continuities with Mainland Chinese culture that are the source of its problematic nature.<sup>105</sup> The key for comparing diverse articulations of identity seems to be in the intersection between the global and local dimensions. Indeed, according to Fusco, the study of a ‘global literary Chineseness’ should combine

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<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, 24.

<sup>103</sup> Allen Chun, “Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity,” *Boundary 2* 23, no. 2 (1996): 126.

<sup>104</sup> Ien Ang, “Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm,” *Boundary 2* 25, no. 3 (1998): 227.

<sup>105</sup> Serena Fusco, *Incorporations of Chineseness: Hybridities, Bodies, and Chinese American Literature*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 8.

its contemporary and local concretisations with its relational implications from a historical point of view.<sup>106</sup> This can be regarded as an interpretation of Wang Ning's theory of a 'glocalised' Chinese culture, namely a localisation of globalisation that, on entering China, assumed Chinese characteristics, penetrating simultaneously the global and the local dimensions.<sup>107</sup> Multiple identities generated in the local concretisations of a global Chineseness are represented through literary expressions and reflect the complex issues of hybridised cultures and scattered personalities. This is true not only for physical distance, as in the case of actual diaspora, but also when the detachment is merely emotional, and the marginalisation happens within the borders of the nation.

The concept of identity conveys two meanings: the fact of being identical to oneself, and the sense of belonging to a group.<sup>108</sup> One interpretation does not exclude the other and, especially in a transnational and transcultural context, the proportion between the two reveals an author's relationship with the cultural heritage expressed through his memory. The idea of envisaging Chineseness as a mobile and undefined entity can be assimilated to what Christopher Lee defined as the 'post-identity' turn. Conceiving identity as the expression of the relation between the individuals and their social background gives way to a rupture from the traditional framework.<sup>109</sup> The acceptance of its multiple variables, inconsistencies, and interdependencies could pave the way for a sort of 'post-Chineseness' that, departing from the traditional schemes entrenched in the political context, would serve as a common ground. It would constitute a sort of glue that connects the articulations of global Chinese literature, allowing for compared studies.

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<sup>106</sup> Serena Fusco, "Cinesità letteraria globale: alcuni termini di una questione politica" (Global Literary Chineseness: Terms of a Political Question), *Between* 5, no. 10 (2013): 14–5.

<sup>107</sup> Ning Wang, "Globalisation as Glocalisation in China: A New Perspective," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 11 (2015): 2062.

<sup>108</sup> Emmanuel Fraisse, *Littérature et mondialisation* (Literature and Globalisation), (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012), 148.

<sup>109</sup> Christopher Lee, *The Semblance of Identity: Aesthetic Mediation in Asian American Literature*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 8.

Nevertheless, the vagueness of such concept represents an obstacle to its actual definition. The work by Allen Chun *Forget Chineseness* published in 2017,<sup>110</sup> for example, intends to abandon the idea of Chineseness as a cultural category, aiming instead to depict identity as shaped by political and economic powers. Indeed, the interactions between literature and geopolitical forces are becoming more and more evident with the consolidation of a 'globalised' world literature. In this study, however, Chineseness should be understood as a feature whose definition is based on cultural ground and developed through literature. What allows it to function as a link between varied literary works is the intention of an author to reveal it, in any possible form. On emphasising the unique coordinates of every articulation of global Chinese literature, individual identity prevails over ethnicity. Forcing a literary work into a framework only because of a writer's ethnic origin would be an arbitrary and almost violent choice. Contrariwise, analysing literary depictions aimed explicitly to represent a facet of Chinese identity permits to investigate the heterogeneity of such feature without imposing inflexible labels.

### 3.3. *Polyglossic Perspectives*

Global Chinese literature originates above national borders and, consequently, beyond the constraints of linguistic differences. Therefore, one of its intrinsic characteristics is the plurality in terms of the languages spoken and written by its authors. Such variety is firstly shown in the heteroglossia composing the mosaic of Sinitic languages that shatters the illusion of a standardised Mandarin. David Wang borrowed Bakhtin's term to define the Sinophone as the common ground on which dialects, regional inflexions, and personal idiolects are able to meet, fostering the dialogue between the individuals and their social and

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<sup>110</sup> Allen Chun, *Forget Chineseness: On the Geopolitics of Cultural Identification*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2017).

historical background.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, this feature is proper of the more extended concept of global Chinese literature too. Indeed, the dislocation at the basis of the diasporic experience is the source of a further linguistic differentiation that generates what Yinde Zhang defined “Sinopolyphony”.<sup>112</sup>

Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of a polyphony within the sphere of Sinitic languages is not enough for a global understanding of Chinese literature. The further step shall be the recognition of its undeniable polyglossia. Indeed, the second level showing the linguistic variety of global Chinese literature concerns mainly its overseas manifestations and is constituted by the ensemble of foreign languages intertwined with the migrant writers’ mother tongues. Their impact on the literary text can be confined to the influence of the linguistic environment in which an author lives, or can concretely be employed to voice the writers’ expression directly. The reasons for choosing the latter option can be various, ranging from an insufficient fluency in standard Mandarin to the wish for a political statement against Chinese censorship. In fact, the wish for employing a foreign language to convey the intrinsic Chineseness of a literary work enhances the diversity of global Chinese literature, and contribute to make every writer a unique component of such a variegated whole.

The idea of a global Chinese literature articulated in a polyglossic melange of literary creations permits to envisage a genuinely multi-centred analytical framework, allowing to grasp the features of Chinese identity as it shifts not only between different contexts but also from one language to another.

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<sup>111</sup> David Der-wei Wang 王德威, “Zhongwen xiezuo de yuejie yu huigui—tan huayu yuxi wenxue” 中文寫作的越界與回歸——談華語語系文學 (Writing in Chinese Across the Borders and Back: On Sinophone Literature), *Shanghai wenxue*, no. 9 (2006): 92.

<sup>112</sup> Yinde Zhang, “La littérature chinoise transnationale et la sinopolyphonie” (Transnational Chinese Literature and Sinopolyphony), *Diogenes*, no. 2 (2014): 232.

### 3.4. *A Deterritorialising Process*

The heterogenic nature of global Chinese literature, revealed through the features described above, eradicates it from the national soil, disrupting the cartography on which the categories of Mainland Chinese literature, global Chinese-language literature and Sinophone literature were built. The effect is fragmented, kaleidoscopic, even disorienting. The morphology of this re-conceptualised domain can be pinned down applying the philosophical theories elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari.

Their concept of the 'body without organs' can be employed to represent the relationship between global Chinese literature, seen as a whole, and its parts, namely the texts inscribed in it. For Deleuze and Guattari, the body without organs is not merely a whole derived by the sum of its parts, but a separate product that functions autonomously.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, global Chinese literature is conceptually independent from its articulations. Since its purpose is not to constitute a category but to provide a critical perspective, the connection between the whole and its parts is not necessary, and surely not sufficient. Indeed, the same logic – adapted *ad hoc* in methodology – could also be employed to conduct research in different areas, for example from a cultural or anthropological point of view. Its potential transdisciplinary character keeps it ideally detached from its parts. Moreover, the acknowledgement of the relationship between the whole and its articulations does not guarantee the exploitation of its critical potential. It is only by recognising the transversal connections between the parts as the very essence of the whole that global Chinese literature can show its effectiveness as a theoretical concept. Nonetheless, the schizophrenic nature of this idea does not go against its applicability. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, literature is not a purpose but a process.<sup>114</sup> Likewise, global Chinese literature does not need a predetermined set of goals to function as a model; it is in the act of

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<sup>113</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *L'anti-œdipe* (Anti-Œdipus), 51–2.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, 172.

acknowledging its existence and the influence it exerts on the literary products that its critical value is found. During the last decades, Chinese literature has been changing following the trend of globalisation, and the sense of such transformation can only be grasped by recognising the changeable nature of its margins, as well as of its articulations.

Hence, Chinese literature is by now deterritorialised. There are no predetermined linguistic codes nor territorial borders; it is an entity made essentially of fluxes. Deleuze and Guattari also stated that what historical processes deterritorialise on one side, they reterritorialize on the other.<sup>115</sup> From a certain perspective, this can be applied to global Chinese literature. Indeed, on considering each of its authors as an autonomous articulation, corresponding to a specific time-space conjunction, the materialisation of the territorial dimension is inevitable. Nevertheless, such particular reterritorialization occurs only as a result of the general deterritorialisation of the whole, and it is part and parcel of it. Besides, it is thanks to the reterritorialization of the single texts that global Chinese literature can be deterritorialised. Else, it would result in an empty concept. This 'side effect,' serves as a theoretical grip for implementing comparative analyses that otherwise could not exist.

As a result, the configuration of global Chinese literature appears rhizomatic. Like the model described in *Mille plateaux* (A Thousand Plateaus), it satisfies the principles of connection and heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography and decalcomania.<sup>116</sup> Firstly, any point of the rhizome can be connected to any other, as all the texts being part of it are linked by a transnational Chineseness that functions as the common ground for comparison. However, such Chineseness is a heterogenic entity, that can be traced in the texts under different forms. Literature can be seen as a mirror on which the reflections of Chineseness are concretised not only in language but also in content, by means

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<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, 306.

<sup>116</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (A Thousand Plateaus), 13–9.



of an author's culture and individual memory. The diverse representations of Chineseness permit a multifold analysis, taking into account multiple forms and nuances. Secondly, as outlined above, global Chinese literature is a multiplicity, and not merely a whole made of multiple articulations. Although the whole is conceptually independent from its parts, the interrelation between them alters its nature every time that the ensemble of articulations is modified. Consequently, global Chinese literature is characterised by a liquid nature, which changes constantly, along with the flow of time. Its points are not fixed, they are projected into lines that represent the impermanence of the multiplicity. Thirdly, like any connection inside a rhizome is thinkable, any rupture is also possible. The unique relationship between the whole and its articulations allows the destruction of any link without affecting the integrity of the concept, as from any rupture a new line can be born, building, in turn, new connections. Finally, global Chinese literature shall be considered as a map, and not as a tracing. Its purpose is not to reproduce the interrelations between its parts, but to build them, on the basis of a transnational idea of Chineseness. It is only in a second phase of the analysis that the features of its articulations can be traced, but the connection to the map still must be preserved. Reporting the characteristics of the parts is necessary, however, the very sense of the concept resides in the possibility to envisage, and therefore build, multiple links, throughout a borderless territory and by means of a plurality of languages.

All the peculiarities mentioned above describe global Chinese literature as a powerful theoretical tool. The next chapters will show its implementation in the compared analysis of four of its articulations, which will show the literary representation of different Chinesenesses brought alive through individual memory.

PART TWO:

INDIVIDUALISED RECOLLECTIONS



## **1. Han Dong and Dai Sijie: Between History and Story**

The global conception of contemporary Chinese literature permits to compare a number of authors and literary works that express, each in its peculiar way, their interpretation of modern China contextualised in a transnational perspective. Han Dong and Dai Sijie occupy two apparently opposed positions: the former has always been writing in Chinese and never left his home country, while the latter emigrated to France after the end of the Cultural Revolution and, once abroad, started writing in the language of the country that had adopted him. Nevertheless, although living in Mainland China, Han Dong has never been fully integrated into the national literary environment, and he has always cherished his marginalised position. Contrariwise, despite the distance separating him from his native place, Dai Sijie never really gave up his Chinese identity, which has constantly been a fundamental part of his works. The two authors represent therefore two complementary incarnations of a kind of individualism that floats above national boundaries and takes refuge into the subject's memory.

Time will be the key point of the analysis, which will address the connections between the temporal dimension and the subject's memory through its diverse interpretations. Due to the autofictional nature of the two novels, the personal growth of the individual represents the primary manifestation of the

link between the time and the self, whereas the Cultural Revolution constitutes the historical time that determines the contexts of the stories told by the recollecting individual. The authors' experience of that reality constitutes the autobiographical inspiration on which they built their narrations, although the mediation of the fictional text distorts their memories. Nevertheless, the resulting *autofictions* are the mirror of their identities, which revive their past selves through reinvented accounts.

### 1.1. *A Childhood in Banishment*

Han Dong was born in 1961 in Nanjing, where he currently lives, and experienced the reality of the re-education through labour when he was little more than a child. At the age of eight, Han Dong followed his family in the countryside of Subei, in the northern part of Jiangsu province, where they were banished until the end of the Cultural Revolution. In 1982, he graduated in philosophy from the University of Jinan, in Shandong province, and started to work in academia. After teaching in Xi'an and Nanjing, in 1993 he retired from the academic environment to dedicate himself exclusively to writing.

Han Dong officially began his literary career in 1980, when the magazine *Youth* 青春 published his first poem. In 1985, together with Yu Jian 於堅, Xiao Hai 小海, and a few other poets from his circle, he funded the independent poetry magazine *Tamen* 他們 (Them), which he edited for ten years. *Tamen* was born out of the experience Han Dong made with the magazine *Lao jia* 老家 (Native place), which he had established in Xi'an and edited for three years. At first, *Tamen* developed mainly through correspondence, but after nine issues it was transferred online, incrementing the number of authors and widening the range of publications. Starting from the early 1990s, Han Dong put an increasing amount of energy into the writing of fiction and, since then, fiction and poetry

have been equally nourished forms of the writer's literary expression.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning, his production was limited to short stories and novellas, until 2003 – year in which he published his first novel, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking root).<sup>2</sup> The author's subversive attitude brought him to initiate the *Duanlie* 斷裂 (Rupture) literary movement in 1998, with the cooperation of Zhu Wen 朱文 (b. 1967) and Lu Yang 魯羊 (b. 1963). They diffused a provocative questionnaire among a circle of independent writers, with the intent of manifesting the protest of the 'late generation of authors' (*wan sheng dai zuojia* 晚生代作家) against the impositions deriving from a literary system manipulated by the state. On declaring his neglect of the literary establishment and the rules of market, Han Dong has situated himself at the margins of contemporary scenario, taking advantage of his detached position to focus on the individual dimension.

Being regarded as one of the main exponents of the 'third generation of poets' (*disandai shiren* 第三代詩人), the majority of the studies conducted in Mainland China on Han Dong focused on his poetry. Nevertheless, the research on his fiction – although less conspicuous – has not been neglected, as a consequence of the strong link between the two. Indeed, Wu Yiqin pointed out in his essay that for Han Dong fiction and poetry can be considered as two modalities of expression of the same principles.<sup>3</sup> The 'educated youth' (*zhiqing* 知青) play an important role in Han Dong's prose, being widely present in his novels as well as in his short stories. Nevertheless, the author's interpretation differs from the common features usually associated with this genre, and the

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<sup>1</sup> For the complete list of Han Dong's works, see the dedicated section of the bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Wu Yiqin 吳義勤, "Yu shi tong xing — Han Dong xiaoshuo lun" 與詩同行 — 韓東小說論 (Walking Along with Poetry: Discussing Han Dong's Fiction), *Dangdai zuojia pinglun*, no. 5 (1996): 73–80.

studies by Li Yifei<sup>4</sup> and Liu Wei<sup>5</sup> analysed Han Dong's personal touch when dealing with such theme. Being his first novel on the subject of Cultural Revolution, *Zha gen* was the object of several essays. A detailed analysis was provided by Wang Yuehua, who enhanced the links between the narrative, the author's self and the spirit of his generation,<sup>6</sup> while Wang Ling investigated the features of the author's use of language.<sup>7</sup> Since *Zha gen* was inspired by the author's childhood, several studies, such as those by Wu Congcong and Li Renjie,<sup>8</sup> Gu Haiyang,<sup>9</sup> and Deng Li,<sup>10</sup> explored the relationship between the novel and the author's memory, emphasising the link between Han Dong's real experience and his fictional re-elaboration. In particular, Gong Ailing focused on the optimistic view that *Zha gen* conveys *vis-à-vis* the traumatic historical period in which it is set,<sup>11</sup> which is one of the most evident effects of the child's naivety.

Instead, the western contributions about Han Dong and his writing are still scarce. The features of his poetic have been investigated in several works by

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<sup>4</sup> Li Yifei 李奕霏, "'Lingdu qinggan' xiezuo—lun han dong de zhiqing ticaixiaoshuo" '零度情感'寫作——論韓東的知青題材小說 (Writing Zero-Degree Emotions: On Han Dong's Narrations of Educated Youths), *Wenjiao ziliao*, no. 33 (2012): 82–5.

<sup>5</sup> Liu Wei 劉維, "Jiyi de qumei yu chonggou—Han Dong zhiqing xiaoshuo de xushi celüe" 記憶的祛魅與重構——韓東知青小說的敘事策略 (Disenchantment and Reconstruction of Memory: On Han Dong's Fiction on Educated Youths), *Haerbin xueyuan xuebao* 37, no. 4 (2016): 53–9.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Yuehua 汪躍華, "Fuxie zhi shu: Han Dong 'Zha gen' lun" 複寫之書：韓東《扎根》論 (A Duplicated Book: On Han Dong's Striking Root), *Wenxue pinglun*, no. 3 (2004): 39–46.

<sup>7</sup> Wang Ling 王凌, "Lengse bidiao, danshu renao—Han Dong xiaoshuo 'Zha gen' yuyan fenxi" 冷色筆調，淡書熱鬧——韓東小說《扎根》語言分析 (Cold Tone for a Lively Book: The Analysis of Language in Han Dong's Striking Root), *Dangdai wentan*, no. 4 (2004): 70–72.

<sup>8</sup> Wu Congcong 吳聰聰 and Li Renjie 李仁杰, "Bei guolü de jiyi—yóu 'Zha gen' tán Han Dong wenxue chuanguo" 被過濾的記憶——由《扎根》談韓東文學創作 (Filtered Memory: On Han Dong's Literary Creation in Striking Root), *Zuojia zazhi*, no. 13 (2013): 6–7.

<sup>9</sup> Gu Haiyang 古海陽, "Geti lishi jingyan de chonggou—Han Dong 'Zha gen', 'Xiaocheng haohan zhi yingte maiwang' helun" 個體歷史經驗的重構——韓東《扎根》、《小城好漢之英特邁往》 (Reconstructing Individual Historical Experience: on Han Dong's Striking Root and A Small Town Hero Strides Forth), *Xinyu gaozhuan xuebao* 15, no. 6 (2010): 28–30.

<sup>10</sup> Deng Li 鄧莉, "Jiyi de lijie yu chonggou—du Han Dong de changpian xiaoshuo 'Zha gen'" 記憶的理解與重構——讀韓東的長篇小說《扎根》 (Understanding and Rewriting Memory: on Han Dong's Novel Striking Root), *Dangdai wentan*, no. 2 (2005): 62–3.

<sup>11</sup> Gong Ailing 宮愛玲, "Kunan niandai li de 'qile rongrong'—ping Han Dong 'Zha gen'" 苦難年代裡的'其樂融融'——評韓東《扎根》 ('Unbounded Happiness' at the Time of Distress: on Han Dong's Striking Root), *Changchun gongye daxue xuebao shehui kexue ban* 18, no. 1 (2006): 86–8.

Maghiel van Crevel,<sup>12</sup> whereas his fiction was only partially explored in a few comparative studies.<sup>13</sup> As far as Han Dong's and the literary activism of his group is concerned, their projects were object of a few works concerning both the *Duanlie* literary movement<sup>14</sup> and the independent magazine *Tamen*.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Han Dong's independent voice deserves a more profound investigation as one of the most representative writers of a generation that was pushed to the margins by the increasing power of the literary market against which it stood out. His isolated position is an example of estrangement inside one's own country and, therefore, constitutes a peculiar articulation of contemporary Chinese literature. Once acknowledged the globality of this concept, Han Dong's marginalisation becomes comparable with other 'estranged' voices, regardless of the cause of their detachment from Mainland China.

## 1.2. *A Migrated Youth*

Dai Sijie was born in 1954 in Chengdu, Sichuan province, from a family originally from Putian, in Fujian province. Being the son of a couple of doctors, in 1971 he was sent to the mountain areas of Sichuan, where he was re-educated in a village belonging to the district of Ya'an until 1974. After the end of the period as a *zhiqing*, in 1977 Dai Sijie entered Sichuan University and, subsequently, continued his studies in history of art at Nankai University. In 1983, he was

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<sup>12</sup> Maghiel van Crevel, *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*, (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008); Maghiel van Crevel, "Desecrations? the Poetics of Han Dang and Yu Jian (Part One)," *Studies on Asia Series III* 2, no. 1 (2005): 28–48; Maghiel van Crevel, "Desecrations? the Poetics of Han Dong and Yu Jian (Part Two)," *Studies on Asia Series III* 2, no. 2 (2005): 81–97.

<sup>13</sup> Pamela Hunt, "The Significance of Scatological Humour: A Case Study of Zhu Wen's What Is Garbage, What Is Love and Han Dong's Striking Root." Available from [www.paper-republic.org](http://www.paper-republic.org), 2010; Martina Codeluppi, "Mapping Ideology in Language Han Dong's Zha gen (Banished!) and Ma Jian's Rou zhi tu (Beijing Coma)," *Annali di Ca' Foscari: serie orientale*, no. 53 (2017): 257–80.

<sup>14</sup> Julia Lovell, "Finding a Place: Mainland Chinese Fiction in the 2000s," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71, no. 1 (2012): 7–32; Wang Jifang 汪繼芳, *Duanlie: shiji mo de wenxue shigu. Ziyou zuojia fangtanlu* 斷裂：世紀末的文學事故。自由作家訪談錄 (Rupture: A Literary Incident at the End of the Century. An Interview with Independent Writers), (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> Chang Li 常立, "*Tamen*" *zuoja yanjiu: Han Dong, Lu Yang, Zhu Wen* "他們" 作家研究：韓東，魯羊，朱文 (A Study on the Writers of Tamen: Han Dong, Lu Yang and Zhu Wen), (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 2010).



awarded with a scholarship that allowed him to leave China for Paris, where he specialised in the art of cinema at the IDHEC (Institut Des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques) and started his career as a director.

Dai Sijie's first movie, *Chine, ma douleur* (China, My Sorrow) (1989) was shot in France, after the Chinese government forbid him to carry out the filming in Mainland China. Subsequently, he directed two other films in the Hexagon, *Le Mangeur de lune* (The Moon Eater) (1994), and *Tang le onzième* (The Eleventh Child) (1998), before deciding to channel part of his creativity towards literature.<sup>16</sup> In 2000, he published his first novel, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*,<sup>17</sup> which was written in French. It became quickly a best-seller and was later made into a movie (2002), whose shooting was carried out in Mainland China. Written in French, the novel is largely autobiographic and portrays the author's experience of 'educated youth' transposed into fiction. As a migrant writer, Dai Sijie has become one of the icons of the Sino-French cultural hybridisation. The representation of China carried out by his transnational perspective and tailored to a French audience has been the *fil rouge* of his creative production, for his novels – five in total – as well as for his films.

Due to its international success, Dai Sijie and his novels *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* have been widely investigated, both in China and in the West, and a consistent number of studies focused on Dai Sijie's depiction of the cross-cultural dimension. Among the contribution published in Mainland China, Chen Rongqiang's and Liu Chengfu and Jiao Hongli's papers explored the cultural implications of telling a Chinese story to a foreign readership using a foreign

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<sup>16</sup> For the complete list of Dai Sijie's works, see the dedicated section of the bibliography.

<sup>17</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress).

language,<sup>18</sup> while Tang Yuqing<sup>19</sup> analysed the dialogue between the two cultures intertwined in the novel. The cultural contrasts represented in the novel were also the object of the essay by Flore Chevaillier, which explores the pitfalls of their misinterpretations and the consequent distorted image of both the Chinese and the French cultures.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the representation of the ‘other’ culture often borders on exoticism and orientalism, the reflections of which have been explored by Andrew Watts<sup>21</sup> and Jia Jie.<sup>22</sup>

Not only are the two cultures both reflected in the novel, but they also coexist in the author’s self. Being a migrant writer, Dai Sijie possesses a composite identity, which has been investigated in Chen Siyu’s<sup>23</sup> and Rosalind Silvester’s<sup>24</sup> essays, whereas Sophie Croiset focused on the identity clash implied in its linguistic expression.<sup>25</sup> Western researchers showed a higher degree of attention

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<sup>18</sup> Chen Rongqiang 陳榮強, “Cong fayu zhongguo xiaoshuo dao huayu Faguo dianying——chongsu Dai Sijie ‘Ba’erzhake he zhongguo xiao caifeng’ bu tong xushu moshi de duixiang” 從法語 中國小說到華語法國電影——重塑戴思傑《巴爾扎克和中國小裁縫》不同敘述模式的對話對象 (From a Chinese Novel in French to a French Film in Chinese: Discussing the Different Narrative Models of Dai Sijie’s Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress and Their Interlocutors), *Huawen wenxue*, no. 6 (2013): 62–6; Liu Chengfu 劉成富 and Jiao Hongli 焦宏麗, “Faguo wentan huaren wenxue de jueqi——yi Dai Sijie, Shan Sa wei li” 法國文壇華人文學的崛起——以戴思傑、山峯為例 (The Rise of Literature by Chinese Authors in French Literary Forums: the Case of Dai Sijie and Shan Sa), *Yilin*, no. 6 (2004): 199–203.

<sup>19</sup> Tang Yuqing 唐玉清, “Lun Dai Sijie xiaoshuo zhong de ‘duihua’” 論戴思傑小說中的“對話” (On the “Dialogue” in Dai Sijie’s Fiction), *Huawen wenxue*, no. 3 (2008): 88–93.

<sup>20</sup> Flore Chevaillier, “Commercialization and Cultural Misreading in Dai Sijie’s Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse Chinoise,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 47, no. 1 (2010): 60–74.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Watts, “Mao’s China in the Mirror: Reversing the Exotic in Dai Sijie’s Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse Chinoise,” *Romance Studies* 29, no. 1 (2011): 27–39.

<sup>22</sup> Jia Jie 賈頤, “Zhongfa duzhe yan zhong de ‘Ba’erzhake yu xiao caifeng’” 中法讀者眼中的《巴爾扎克與小裁縫》 (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress in the Eyes of Chinese and French Readers), *Faguo yanjiu*, no. 91 (2013): 77–82.

<sup>23</sup> Chen Siyu 陳思宇, “Faguo huaren zuojia bixia de zhiqing shuxie——yi Cheng Baoyi、Dai Sijie wei li” 法國華人作家筆下的知青書寫——以程抱一、戴思傑為例 (Narrative on Educated Youths by French-Chinese Authors: The Case of François Cheng and Dai Sijie), *Huaihai gongxueyuan xuebao renwen shehui kexue ban* 12, no. 4 (2014): 39–41.

<sup>24</sup> Rosalind Silvester, “Genre and Image in Francophone Chinese Works,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 10, no. 4 (2006): 367–75.

<sup>25</sup> Sophie Croiset, “Passeurs de langues, de cultures et de frontières : la transidentité de Dai Sijie et Shan Sa, auteurs chinois d’expression française” (Crossers of Languages, Cultures, and Borders: The Transidentity in Dai Sijie and Shan Sa, Chinese Authors Writing in French), *TRANS-*, no. 8 (2009): 1–12; Sophie Croiset, *Écrivains chinois d’expression française : typologie d’un champ*

to the issue of language than their Chinese counterparts. For example, Dai Sijie's employ of French language has been explored by Christian Moraru<sup>26</sup> and Karen Thornber,<sup>27</sup> who investigated the causes and consequences of his linguistic choice. Finally, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* has been studied for the value that the author attributes to literature,<sup>28</sup> to which the work seems to be consecrated, and for his wide use of intertextuality.<sup>29</sup>

Although the essays mentioned above grasp different aspects of Dai Sijie's literary expression, the point of view they reflect are quite akin: the author is always approached as an émigré writer. Consequently, he is either considered as a unique case, or compared to other authors sharing a similar condition, such as François Cheng (b. 1929), Shan Sa 山飒 (b. 1972), or Gao Xingjian (b. 1940).

In this study, Dai Sijie's *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is analysed as an articulation of global Chinese literature; therefore, the author and his work are situated in a broader perspective. The parallel with Han Dong's *Zha gen* enhances the multiple shapes that strangeness and foreignness can take according to an author's background and allows for an exploration of the modalities in which they are revealed. The focus on the personal recollection permits to investigate the evolution of the individual contextualised in a specific temporal frame, while crossing the linguistic border to overcome the cultural gap. In this way, an independent Mainland Chinese novelist and poet and a migrant Sino-French

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*littéraire transculturel* (Chinese Authors Writing in French: Typology of a Transcultural Literary Field) [PhD thesis, not published], Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Moraru, "'A Foreign Tongue to Unite Us': Book Traveling with Dai Sijie," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 36, no. 2 (2009): 120–36.

<sup>27</sup> Karen L. Thornber, "French Discourse in Chinese, in Chinese Discourse in French-Paradoxes of Chinese Francophone Émigré Writing," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 13, no. 2 (2009): 223–32.

<sup>28</sup> Yvonne Y. Hsieh, "Splendeurs et misères des mots : Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise de Dai Sijie" (Splendors and Miseries of Words: Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise by Dai Sijie), *Études Francophones* 27, no. 1 (2002): 93–105.

<sup>29</sup> Ian McCall, "French Literature and Film in the USSR and Mao's China: Intertexts in Makine's *Au temps du fleuve amour* and Dai Sijie's *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse Chinoise*," *Romance Studies* 24, no. 2 (2006): 159–70; Beatriz Mangada Cañas, "Dai Sijie: écrire en français pour évoquer dans la distance le pays quitté" (Dai Sijie: Writing in French to Evoke from a Distance the Country He Left), *Cédille: Revista de estudios franceses* 7 (2011): 190–203.

writer and director are envisaged as two related, heterogenic and, to some extent, complementary incarnations of Chinese literature.

### 1.3. *Two Forms of Remoteness*

*Zha gen* and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* share not only the historical setting, but also the ironical tone with which Han Dong and Dai Sijie are able to depict one of the most intense experiences of contemporary Chinese history: the banishment in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. The two novels have been inspired by the authors' personal experiences of banishment and they can be regarded as semi-autobiographical. Nevertheless, despite the truthful source of the writers' reminiscences, these accounts are largely fictionalised. The superposition of memory and narrative that allows the authors to shape their recollection in light of the events that shook their lives, not only at the time of re-education, but also in the subsequent decades.

*Zha gen* is the first of the three novels Han Dong dedicated to the period of Cultural Revolution and the one that describes the author's personal experience from the closest point of view.<sup>30</sup> It tells the story of the writer Tao Peiyi who decides to take his family down the road of the 'Glorious Banishment,' and leaves the city of Nanjing for the rural village of Sanyu, situated in northern Jiangsu. The plot describes the Taos' everyday struggle to adapt to their new life while trying to accomplish the final task of 'striking root' in the countryside. Narrated mainly through the eyes of the child of the family, young Tao, the novel has been inspired by the years Han Dong spent in banishment. The essentiality of the author's prose, together with the authenticity of his point of view, contribute to make *Zha gen* an excellent text through which to analyse Han

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<sup>30</sup> The second novel set during the years of Cultural Revolution was *Xiaocheng haohan zhi yingte maiwang* 小城好漢之英特邁往 (A Small Town Hero Strides Forth), published in 2008 by Shanghai renmin chubanshe, while the third one was *Zhiqing bianxing ji* 知青變形記 (Metamorphosis of an Educated Youth), which came out in 2010, published by Huacheng chubanshe. Both novels portray the everyday life in that period through the description of the protagonists' personal processes of coming of age.

Dong's recollection of the Cultural Revolution. The entanglement of reality and fiction is expressed by means of his terse style, which reflects his attitude *vis-à-vis* literary artifices, whereas his detached approach reveals his peculiar position in the contemporary literary system.

*Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is Dai Sijie's first novel, which was welcomed by the French readership with great enthusiasm. The author's personal re-education provided the main inspirational source for his work, which is also widely autobiographical. The plot narrates the story of two youths, Ma – whose name is never employed, but only suggested through the visual description of characters – and Luo, who are forced to leave Chengdu and undergo a period of re-education on the mountain of the Phoenix of the Sky, in Sichuan province. The discovery of a suitcase full of forbidden books, possessed by an intellectual friend of them, will open their eyes to western literature, changing their perspective on the world in which they live. European literary classics provide them with a tool to engage in the challenge of educating the beautiful young seamstress, with whom they build a relationship on the border between friendship and love. Through the accurate description of their voyage into literature and feelings, Dai Sijie remembers his first-hand experience of re-education, which marked him for life. The fictional work resulting from the recollecting process after many years abroad is, therefore, a double trip in time and space, suitable for the analysis of the impact of migration on the author's re-elaboration of memories.

The two novels provide many elements of comparison, as they constitute two different stories of banishment that, however, share many common features, regarding both their contents and their style.

## 2. Memory and Bildungsroman

After the analysis of the authors' Chinese identity in the context of global Chinese literature, this chapter will now proceed to the compared study of the two novels. *Zha gen* and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* portray Han Dong's and Dai Sijie's experiences in banishment in the form of paths towards an inner transformation, guiding the protagonists' growth throughout the years of Cultural Revolution. The first part of the analysis will address the narratological reflections of the authors' relationship with their recollections, showing the manifestation of individuality in the temporal organisation and in the narrative voice. The second part will deal with the fictionalised description of the historical period, emphasising the traces of the individual perspective. Finally, the third part will explore the features of Han Dong's and Dai Sijie's literary language, to reveal how different kind of marginalisation influence the lexical and stylistic representation of the self at the time of the Cultural Revolution.

## 2.1. Questioning Identity

In order to provide an interpretative framework that reveals the connections between an author's memory and its fictional reproduction, the narrative texts shall be analysed first and foremost as far as their general structure is concerned. The temporal structure of the novels serves as a guideline for the authors' representation of their memory. Moving from Bakhtin's concept of chronotope, the time-place conjunctions defined by the plots of the novels can be explored in their links with the authors' condition at the time of their recollections. The assimilation between time and space theorised by Bakhtin<sup>31</sup> exemplifies the interdependency between the novels' setting and their plots, which are marked by specific features deriving from the historical period in which they take place. Both *Zha gen* and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* develop in the context of a rather popular chronotope: remote villages – either in the countryside or in the mountains – during the Cultural Revolution. Following Bakhtin's idea, such context provides the scene for the concretisation of the events,<sup>32</sup> endowing them with a unique connotation. Nevertheless, this chronotope characterises the world represented in the novel, which should be differentiated from the time and place conjunction that defines the real world at the time in which the literary work has been created. Since the two novels are approached as the products of Han Dong's and Dai Sijie's recollections, the link between the two is a crucial part of the analysis. In fact, the chronotope providing the setting for the stories is situated in the authors' memories and, as a consequence, it depends on their mnemonic re-elaboration of the past they remember. In this respect, the representation of the chronotope by means of the temporal structure can be analysed as symptomatic of the influence that the context of creation had on the final shape of the individuals' memories.

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<sup>31</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, 250.

Although the heart of the plots takes place during the years of the Cultural Revolution, *Zha gen* develops throughout a wide temporal framework. The novel begins with the specification of the date in which the Taos' left Nanjing for the countryside, immediately setting the time and place of the story:

一九六九年十一月，老陶率領全家下放三余。在這之前，他用紅鉛筆在地圖上畫了一個圈。在老陶圈定的地方有一個形狀像破布的湖泊。老陶說：「這是洪澤湖，全國第三大淡水湖，就是我們要去的地方。」<sup>33</sup>

In November 1969 the Tao family was banished, and Tao took them all to Sanyu village. Before their departure, Tao had drawn a circle on a map in red crayon. The place he had circled was a rag-shaped lake. "This is Hongze lake, the third largest fresh-water lake in China. That's where we're going," Tao said.<sup>34</sup>

Most of the narrated events are set in the six-year period the Tao spent in Sanyu. However, the description of the last scene suggests a spatial movement and a time ellipsis of more than twenty years, as the protagonist Xiao Tao is forty years old:

說來也怪，老陶家三余的生活前後相加不足六年，下放六年後就遷往了洪澤縣城。後來小陶去山東讀書，假期回到南京的家裡。大學畢業後他被分配到第三地工作，在那裡已經生活了近二十年。[...] 四十年裡，從南到北，從東到西小陶到過很多地方，曾在各式各樣的房頂下棲身，有過一些完全不同的家。<sup>35</sup>

The strange thing was that the Taos had spent less than six years in Sanyu, after which they had moved to Hongze County Town. Then young Tao had gone to university in Shandong, returning to Nanjing during the holidays. On graduation he was given a job in yet another area, where he had now lived for nearly twenty years. [...] In forty years, young Tao had been to and lived in many different places all over China.<sup>36</sup>

As a result, although the years in re-education are remote in the author's memory, he depicts them as still linked to the present time, emphasising the connection with the protagonist contemporary self.

Contrariwise, the story of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is told by the first-person narrator in the form of a recollection, and the plot develops within a

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<sup>33</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, trans. Nicky Harman, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>35</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 233.

<sup>36</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 237-8.



rather limited time frame. In the first chapter of the novel, the author specifies the year in which the protagonist and his friend Luo had been sent to the mountains of Sichuan to be re-educated, namely 1971:

Nous n'étions ni les premiers ni les derniers des cobayes utilisés dans cette grande expérience humaine. Ce fut au début de l'année 1971 que nous arrivâmes dans cette maison sur pilotis, perdue au fin fond de la montagne, et que je jouai du violon pour le chef du village. Nous n'étions pas les plus malheureux non plus. Des millions de jeunes nous avaient précédés, et des millions allaient nous succéder.<sup>37</sup>

We were not the first guinea pigs to be used in this grand human experiment, nor would we be the last. It was in early 1971 that we arrived at that village in a lost corner of the mountains, and that I played the violin for the headman. Compared with others we were not too badly off. Millions of young people had gone before us, and millions would follow.<sup>38</sup>

The vicissitudes experienced by the two main characters take place during the period they spent on the 'Phoenix of the Sky,' concerning a time length of approximately three years. In fact, there is no specific mark to determine the year in which the story ends. Nevertheless, it can easily be deducted from the temporal indications scattered throughout the text that the final chapter takes place during the winter between 1973 and 1974:

Voilà. Le moment est venu de vous décrire l'image finale de cette histoire. Le temps de vous faire entendre le craquement de six allumettes par une nuit d'hiver.

C'était trois mois après l'avortement de la Petite Tailleuse. Le murmure faible du vent et les bruits de la porcherie circulaient dans le noir. Depuis trois mois Luo était rentré dans notre montagne.<sup>39</sup>

That's the story. Now for the ending. There is just time for you to hear the sound of six matches being struck on a winter's night.

It was three months since the Little Seamstress had had the abortion. The night was dark, and the soft murmur of the wind mingled with the grunts coming from the pigsty. It was also three months since Luo had returned to the mountain.

The novel ends almost abruptly with the departure of the Little Seamstress, leaving the fate of the two youths to the reader's imagination. In this case, the rupture with the present is neat, and the borders of the author's recollection are

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<sup>37</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 14.

<sup>38</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, trans. Ina Rilke, (London: Vintage, 2002), 7.

<sup>39</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 218.

delimited by a sharp line. The emotional detachment accentuated by the experience of migration is reflected in the depiction of his story, perceived as an isolated portion of a memory that is far away both in time and space.

While the general coordinates that determine the setting of the two stories are common to both novels, the way in which they are intertwined with the plot suggests a different relationship between the writers and their memories. *Zha gen* is divided into thirteen chapters, and each of them deals with a distinct subject: “*xiafang* 下放” (Banishment), “*yuanzi* 園子” (The Enclosure), “*Xiao Tao* 小陶” (Young Tao), “*xiao xue* 小學” (Primary School), “*dongwu* 動物” (Animals), “*nongju chang* 農具廠” (The Farm Tools Factory), “*Zhao Ningsheng* 趙寧生” (Zhao Ningsheng), “*jiepi* 潔癖” (The Cleaning Bug), “*wu yi liu* 五一六” (‘516’), “*funong* 富農” (Rich Peasants), “*zha gen* 扎根” (Striking Root), “*zuo jia* 作家” (The Author), “*jieshu* 結束” (Conclusion). Although it is possible to perceive the subjacent flowing of time, the organisation of the text focuses on the themes of the chapters, to the detriment of the chronological order, which is often disregarded causing the overlapping of the events. Contrariwise, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* presents only three chapters, each of which is further divided into a number of untitled subchapters and, from a macro-perspective of analysis, it is narrated chronologically.

Following Bergson’s distinction between the two forms of memory, namely *habitude* (habit) and *représentation* (representation),<sup>40</sup> the building of a literary recollection can be considered as the result of a process of imagination that derives directly from the authors’ intellectual effort. Ricœur pointed out how this mechanism of research carries a certain amount of affection, causing the intertwining of the intellectual and affective dimensions.<sup>41</sup> As a consequence, the structures that the authors chose to unravel the tangle of their reminiscences reveal the marks of their *effort de rappel* (effort to recall). Han Dong’s subdivision

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<sup>40</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l’esprit* (Matter and Memory: Essay on the Relationship of Body and Spirit), 84–5.

<sup>41</sup> Ricœur, *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), 36.

is the product of a child's fragmented, even blurred, memory.<sup>42</sup> Lacking a clear distinction of the events, the individual takes comfort in representing them following a thematic pattern. Moreover, by skipping the narration of meaningless in-between time,<sup>43</sup> this choice increases effectiveness, boosting the reader's focus on the selected subjects. Contrariwise, the ordered succession of actions presented by Dai Sijie carries a stronger diegetic power. Indeed, the distance (temporal and spatial) from which the author recollects the narrated story is compensated by a more incisive intervention on the order in which the plot is presented. As a result, the polished plot appears linear and coherent, without any significant fluctuation.

Besides the general organisation of the texts, the time of narration is also representative of the relationship between the authors and their memory. According to Genette's terminology, the most striking difference between the two novel concerns the category of *fréquence narrative* (narrative frequency), namely the relations of repetitions between the narrative and the diegesis.<sup>44</sup> Han Dong's novel focuses on the representation of everyday life and, consequently, he often describes the habits characterising the daily routine in Sanyu village, making a wide use of what Genette defines "iterative narrative."<sup>45</sup> These narratives concentrate the description of events that take place several times, or even on a regular basis, in a single diegetic segment. Although the iterative narratives are often subordinate to the 'singulative narration' of main episodes (the unique narration of an event happened only once) in Han Dong's novel they

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<sup>42</sup> Liu Wei 劉維, "Jiyi de qumei yu chonggou — Han Dong zhiqing xiaoshuo de xushi celüe" 記憶的祛魅與重構——韓東知青小說的敘事策略 (Disenchantment and Reconstruction of Memory: on Han Dong's Fiction on Educated Youths), 54.

<sup>43</sup> Gu Haiyang 古海陽, "Geti lishi jingyan de chonggou — Han Dong 'Zha gen', 'Xiaocheng Haohan zhi yingte maiwang' helun" 個體歷史經驗的重構——韓東《扎根》、《小城好漢之英特邁往》 (Reconstructing Individual Historical Experience: On Han Dong's Striking Root and A Small Town Hero Strides Forth), 6.

<sup>44</sup> Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1972), 111.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, 115.

are endowed with a particular significance. The following excerpt, for example, describes the Taos' routine after their first year of banishment:

老陶和男勞力一起在田間勞動，犁地、挖溝、割稻割麥、冬天下到屌干的河溝裡撈河泥。他穿著長筒膠鞋，陷在冰凌滑溜的河泥裡，用木合子將烏黑的河泥一合一合地往上撈，看見家裡人從岸上走過也不打招呼。與此同時，蘇群每天傍晚在村子上挨家挨戶的串門，為村上人治病。陶文江在家裡接待客人，給人遞煙。小陶上學，早出晚歸。陶馮氏則管理家務，擇菜做飯。這便是老陶一家下放一年後的生活圖景和大致格局。<sup>46</sup>

Tao worked in the fields with the other men, plowing, ditch digging, cutting the rice and wheat, and dredging the drained waterways in winter. Grasping his wooden shovel, he put on long rubber boots, waded out into the bone-chillingly cold mud, and pitched shovelful after shovelful of inky black sludge up to the top. If one of the family passed by, the person did not get even so much as a "hello" from him. At the same time, Su Qun continued her evening rounds of the villagers' homes, treating their ailments. Grandpa Tao received visitors and handed out cigarettes. Young Tao went to school and was up early and back late. Granny Tao took care of the home and cooked their meals. After one year in the countryside, this was more or less the pattern of their lives.<sup>47</sup>

The attention towards everyday life is part and parcel of Han Dong's poetic,<sup>48</sup> which he expresses through fiction as well as through poetry. The linchpin of the whole process of 'striking root' is precisely the conquer of a new routine, integrated with peasants' life. As a result, the description of habits plays a central role in recounting the evolution of the Taos' settlement in Sanyu. Contrariwise, Dai Sijie makes a wide use of the singulative pattern.<sup>49</sup> The iterative segments, instead, serve rather as a support for the development of the plot, as in the following example:

La nuit, parfois, Luo n'arrivait pas à dormir. Il se levait, allumait la lampe à pétrole, et glissait sous son lit, à quatre pattes, dans la semi-obscurité, à la recherche de quelques mégots qu'il y avait laissés tomber. Quand il en ressortait, il s'asseyait en tailleur sur le lit, rassemblait les mégots moisis dans un bout de papier (souvent une lettre précieuse de sa famille) et les faisait sécher à la flamme de la lampe à pétrole. [...]

De temps en temps, la pluie durait plus que d'habitude et la pénurie de cigarette se prolongeait. Une fois, Luo me réveilla en pleine nuit.

– Je ne trouve plus de mégot, ni sous le lit ni ailleurs.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 40–1.

<sup>47</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 43.

<sup>48</sup> Crevel, *Chinese Poetry in Times of Mind, Mayhem and Money*, 88.

<sup>49</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 146.

<sup>50</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 26.

Luo would sometimes be unable to sleep. He would get up, light the oil lamp, and crawl under his bed to hunt for any stray cigarette butts he might have forgotten about. When he re-emerged from the shadows he would sit cross-legged on top of the bed, and pile the damp butts on a scrap of paper (often a precious letter from his family) and dry them over the oil lamp. [...]

From time to time the rain lasted for days on end, and the lack of tobacco would become increasingly irksome. On one occasion Luo woke me up in the middle of the night.

'I can't find a single fag end.'<sup>51</sup>

In this case, the iterative narratives fulfil their traditional function, namely to provide the reader with background information and prepare him for the narration of the main events.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Dai Sijie's plot follows the development of the relationship between the two youths and the seamstress, while other themes such as the role of literature and the living condition during the Cultural Revolution occupy an apparently subordinate position in the narrative flow. This structure reflects the evident narrativisation of the author's recollection, which brings him to regroup his memories as secondary knots around the main plot.

The tension between the 'experiencing I' and the 'narrating I' is the reflection of the relationship between individual memory and identity. The remembering subject, namely the author, constructs a narrative identity on the basis of his experience, establishing a dialogue with his past self.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, the features of the narrators, seen as the authors' alter-egos, can reveal significant differences about the reminiscing processes. The most evident manifestation of the narrator is the narrative voice, which has the power to shape the story and communicate with the reader. Although author and narrator should be kept as two separate matters, when exploring the reflection of a writer's personal recollection on his work, the potential overlaps between the author and the narrative instance are particularly significant.

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<sup>51</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 15–6.

<sup>52</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 148.

<sup>53</sup> Birgit Neumann, "The Literary Representation of Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 336.

Genette specified how a narrative situation can never be reduced to its situation of writing,<sup>54</sup> however, the writing context in which the narrative instance is created cannot but exert its influence on it. In particular, when the author is building a narrative on the recollection of a past time, the narrator – although a fictional character – is nothing less than a projection of the author's self. Hence, the author's identity becomes intertwined with the narrator's identity, seeping through the features of his voice.

In both novels, the time of narration is subsequent to the time of the story. However, there is no specification of the exact year in which the story is told. In *Zha gen*, a calculation on the basis of the references to young Tao's age permits to determine the time of narration as more or less contemporary to the publication of the novel. In fact, allowing a margin of error due to the discontinuities in education at the time of the Cultural Revolution, the protagonist young Tao might have the same age as Han Dong. Therefore, as he is described as more than forty years old at the end of the novel, the time of narration should be located around 2001. Contrariwise, in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, there is no punctual remark regarding the year in which the narrator tells his story. Nevertheless, several references scattered throughout the text emphasise the many years that have passed by since the narrated events. In the following excerpt, for example, the narrator alludes to the present time, establishing a time gap and, at the same time, underlying the primary role of memory as the creative source of the novel:

Bien des années plus tard, une image de la période de notre rééducation reste toujours gravée dans ma mémoire, avec une exceptionnelle précision : sous le regard impassible d'un corbeau à bec rouge, Luo, une hotte sur le dos, avançait à quatre pattes sur un passage large d'environ trente centimètres, bordé de chaque côté par un profond précipice.<sup>55</sup>

It was all such a long time ago, but one particular image from our stint of re-education is still etched in my memory with extraordinary precision: a read-beaked

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<sup>54</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 226.

<sup>55</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 135.

raven keeping watch as Luo crawled along a narrow track with a yawning chasm on either side.<sup>56</sup>

Contrariwise, the potential identification of the author Han Dong with the protagonist young Tao is accurately hidden behind the illusion of an external reference, namely Tao Peiyi's notebooks. Through several statements as the one exemplified below, the narrator claims to have built his story on the basis of Tao's notes:

讓我們翻開老陶小本子中的一頁，就知道我絕不是在信口開河。<sup>57</sup>

Let me show you a page of Tao's notebook so you can see that I know what I'm talking about.<sup>58</sup>

Aside from their claimed sources of inspiration, the two authors' different relationships with their narrations is particularly evident in the choice of the person. *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is narrated in the first person by the protagonist, who digs up his memories of the Cultural Revolution to tell the story of the Little Seamstress. The process that Dai Sijie emphasises is in fact the projection of his own recollection of the experience as a *zhiqing* and, in doing so, he establishes a close relationship between the narrator and the story, reproducing the link between his memory and the novel. Consequently, the internal focalisation is on the protagonist for most of the novel, allowing only a few variations. The close connection between the narrator and the character is even more overt whenever the latter's most intimate feelings, such as fear, are described:

Un jour, au cours de la montée habituelle sur la longue pente, alors que nous poussions tous le deux le panier chargé de charbon, j'entendis Luo dire à côté de moi :

– Je ne sais pas pourquoi, depuis qu'on est ici, je me suis fourré une idée dans la tête : j'ai l'impression que je vais mourir dans cette mine.

Sa phrase me laissa sans voix. Nous continuâmes notre chemin, mais je me sentis soudain trempé de sueur froide. À partir de cet instant, je fus contaminé par sa peur de mourir ici.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 101.

<sup>57</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 38.

<sup>58</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 41.

<sup>59</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 42.

One day, as we were heaving a full basket of coal up the final steep incline, I heard Luo say: 'I don't know why, but from the moment we got here I've had this idea stuck in my head: that I'm going to die in this mine.'

Hearing this, my breath failed me. We continued climbing, but I suddenly broke out in a cold sweat. I had become infected by the same idea as Luo: from that day on I shared his terror of not leaving the place alive.<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, Han Dong's choice of an extradiegetic, third-person narrator reveals his ambition for a story depicted as truthfully as possible, avoiding any explicit allusion to his identification with the main character young Tao. Nevertheless, although the focalisation fluctuates among the characters according to the narrative sections, most of the time it is fixed on young Tao, and the narration is therefore conducted from the point of view of a child. For example, in the following passage, the description of the child's sense of loss is a clear indicator of the focalisation and, as a consequence, of the identification between the narrator and the character:

他像小時候那樣，抬頭看看這個，又看看那個，但老陶和蘇群並沒有理睬他。[...] 光影之前，老陶和蘇群的面孔變了形，嘴巴翕動着，吐出一個個令人不安的詞彙。小陶心想：要打仗了。他又想：這可怎麼辦呢？想了半天，沒有答案。<sup>61</sup>

Just like when he was little, he gazed up at one, then at the other, but his parents took no notice of him. [...] Between the light and the shadows, his parents' faces seemed to change shape; their mouths opened and shut, and out came those troubling phrases. He thought, "There's going to be a war, and what will we do then?" He thought and thought, but there was no answer.<sup>62</sup>

Apart from the frequent references to the content of Tao Peiyi's notebooks, the illusion of impartiality is strengthened by the fact that the narrator often asserts his ignorance about the facts he writes about, with observations such as the one exemplified above:

這前文已經說過了，不再囉嗦。趕走小花後，蘇群繼續前行，終於抵達了汪集，這是毋庸置疑的。但她是否去了汪集郵局，取了包裹？或者，那包裹是否真的存在？我就不得而知了。<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 50.

<sup>62</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 50–1.

<sup>63</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 149.



We already know what happened to him after that. We also know that Su Qun remounted and finally arrived in Wangji Market, but whether or not she went to the post office for her package or whether it even existed, I cannot tell you.<sup>64</sup>

Contrariwise, the narrator of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, does not conceal the experience he matured during the years that separate the 'narrating I' from the 'narrated I.' Through several remarks like the following one, he enhances his connection with the characters of the story, emphasising the future repercussions of the events on his own life:

Nous n'imaginions pas que cette mine allait laisser sur nous des traces noires indélébiles, physiquement et surtout moralement. Aujourd'hui encore, ces mots terribles, « la petite mine de charbon », me font trembler de peur.<sup>65</sup>

We were not to know that our stint in the coal mine would mark us for the rest of our lives, physically and especially mentally. Even today the fearful phrase 'the little coal mine' sends shivers down my spine.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, Han Dong's and Dai Sijie's narrators are the incarnations of two different strategies: while the narrative instance of *Zha gen* aims to enchant the reader with the illusion of an objective narration, Ma's voice seeks a more direct contact by showing his complete identification with the character.

The relationships that the authors establish between the narrator and the reader are further revealed through the various roles the narrative voice assumes in precise passages of the texts, aside from the unavoidable 'narrative' one. In Han Dong, the most evident function carried out by the narrator, according to Genette's terminology, is the 'directing function' (*fonction de régie*). By introducing metatextual references like in the following example, the author marks the organisation of the novel,<sup>67</sup> underlining the diegetic passages and, at the same time, sketching his own mental recollection:

上文我曾說過，小陶對狗寵愛有加，沒有虐待它們的情況。但我忘記了一件事。<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 150.

<sup>65</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 42.

<sup>66</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 27.

<sup>67</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 262.

<sup>68</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 90.

I have said that young Tao loved his dogs to bits and never ill-treated them, but there is one thing I have forgotten.<sup>69</sup>

先說有富老婆。據說以前是汪集街上的妓女，從良後嫁給有富的。[...] 再說他的兒子。十五六歲的年紀了，還在三余小學讀二年級。<sup>70</sup>

First, let me tell you about Mrs. Youfu. She had apparently been a prostitute in Wangji Market and had then married Yu Youfu and become respectable. [...]

Then there was their son: he was fifteen or sixteen years old and still in the second year of Sanyu Primary School.<sup>71</sup>

While the directive function marks the pace of Han Dong's memory, the narrator's comments on the story reduce the illusionary gap between the extradiegetic narrative voice and the narrated events. Through the so-called 'testimonial function' (*fonction testimoniale*)<sup>72</sup> the narrator manifests his empathy with the characters and, by marking his original contribution to the story, stresses the subjective component of his novel:

我覺得，實在不用為小陶的未來擔憂或者感到悲哀。真正悲哀的是老陶自己。<sup>73</sup>

Forget young Tao and his prospects; personally, I think the truly pitiable figure was Tao himself.<sup>74</sup>

這樣的描寫，從未在老陶的小說裡出現過，在他的那些筆記中更是無跡可尋。如果我不在此記錄下來，就將永遠地不為人知。<sup>75</sup>

A description like this never appeared in Tao's stories and certainly not in his notes. It would have been lost forever had I not recorded it here.<sup>76</sup>

Given the more diegetic character of Dai Sijie's narration, it is not surprising that in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* the narrative function of the voice is widely predominant. Coherently with the features of the text pointed out beforehand, the narrator's primary aim is to provide a smooth narration; therefore, he avoids interrupting his diegesis with directions. Whenever he makes use of such

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<sup>69</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 93.

<sup>70</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 180.

<sup>71</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 180.

<sup>72</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 262.

<sup>73</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 202.

<sup>74</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 202.

<sup>75</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 209.

<sup>76</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 213.

indications, such as in the following example, he does it to seek contact with the reader, pursuing what Genette defined ‘function of communication’ (*fonction de communication*):<sup>77</sup>

Le Binoclard possédait une valise secrète, qu’il dissimulait soigneusement.  
Il était notre ami. (Souvenez-vous, j’ai déjà mentionné son nom en rapportant notre rencontre avec le père de la Petite Tailleuse, sur le chemin qui nous menait chez le Binoclard).<sup>78</sup>

Four-Eyes had a secret suitcase, which he kept carefully hidden.  
He was our friend. (Remember? We were on our way to see him when we had our encounter with the tailor on the mountain path.)<sup>79</sup>

While reawakening the interest of the public, the function of communication also has the power to guide the reader throughout the narration, facilitating him in following the recollection of the events:

Si vous m’aviez vu en ce jour d’été 1973, en route pour la falaise des Milles Mètres, vous m’auriez cru tout droit sorti d’une photo officielle d’un congrès du Parti communiste, ou d’une photo de mariage de « cadres révolutionnaires ».<sup>80</sup>

Had you seen me on my way to the Thousand-Metre-Cliff that summer’s day in 1973, you would have sworn I had stepped out of an official photograph of a Communist Party conference, or out of the wedding portrait of a revolutionary cadre.<sup>81</sup>

In *Zha gen*, the function of communication is of primary importance as well and sometimes overlaps with that of direction. It is mainly carried out by means of rhetoric questions the narrator asks the public, keeping the reader involved with the narration while allowing the narrative instance to reassert his non-omniscience. Probably due to the peculiar tone that rhetoric questions give to the text, in the translated text they were occasionally eliminated, consequently erasing part of the function of the narrative voice:

上文說到，趙寧生和夏小潔有每天傍晚散步的習慣。難道他們在大寨河上散步時不會踩著葛莊的土地嗎？這是不可能的。<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 262.

<sup>78</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 57.

<sup>79</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 41.

<sup>80</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 83.

<sup>81</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 62.

<sup>82</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 119.

Zhao and Xia still went for a walk every evening, but they could not walk along the Dazhai River embankment without treading on Gezhuang soil.<sup>83</sup>

The features of the voice are not limited to the functions, nor to the two types of relationships that each author established between narrator and reader. Nevertheless, the features mentioned above can be regarded as the main threads that connect the authors to the voices of their novels and, consequently, the most evident reflections of their remembering self on the product of their recollection.

## 2.2. *Autofiction and the Cultural Revolution*

The depiction of the historical period that serves as a background for the protagonists' vicissitudes reveals the link between the remembering subjects and the object of their recollections in a number of different ways. The following analysis will compare Han Dong's and Dai Sijie's accounts, emphasising the reflections of their individuality on three levels, which represent four variations of the feature of time. Firstly, it will address the description of the re-education, since the first concretisation of temporal flow in the individual is its own evolution. Secondly, it will focus on time intended as the historical period, investigating the individual perception of the years of the Cultural Revolution. Finally, it will address the intersection between the subject and the setting, addressing the depictions of its emotional reactions to the historic atmosphere.

*Zha gen* and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* are both built around the theme of the re-education through labour, which has been experienced by Han Dong and Dai Sijie during the same years, but under different circumstances. The Re-education symbolises the personal growth that was among the goals of the experience in the countryside. Moreover, its effects constitute the most tangible manifestation of the flowing of time on a banished subject.

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<sup>83</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 122.

In *Temps et Récit*, Paul Ricœur discusses the importance of the trace for the historian's practice. Since it represents a connection with the past, every trace becomes a document potentially able to unveil the mystery of history, provided he possesses an effective method to investigate its value.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, memory – even when fictional – can be explored starting from the role given to specific objects, which function as imaginary documents carrying the traces of a recollection. According to Serça, the relationship between memory and literature can be seen like a dialogue, a fluid exchange. Instead of focusing on the monumental character of a recollection fixed on paper through literature, it is possible to explore the process of its writing by considering it as a movement.<sup>85</sup> Such motion is generated by the dialogue between memory and oblivion, the language of which is articulated through mnemonic traces.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, specific objects described in the texts can be held as traces of the individual's memory, functioning as keys able to open the portals of the authors' recollection. The analysis of the role they play in such process proves Han Dong's and Dai Sijie's different attitudes towards the representation of the characters' first impact with the reality of banishment, which can be tracked down in their description of the objects themselves, as well as of the social interaction they trigger.

In both *Zha gen* and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, the arrival of the heroes in their villages is followed by the reaction of the locals, who immediately perceive the cultural and educational gap between them and their new neighbours. In the texts, this contrast is exemplified through the fascination the villagers feel for specific objects possessed by the people from the city, such as the Taos' mirror and Luo's alarm clock. When describing the local people's

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<sup>84</sup> Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome III* (Time and Narrative. Volume III), (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985), 173.

<sup>85</sup> Isabelle Serça, "Mouvement de la mémoire/mouvement de l'écriture : la figure de l'interpolation chez Proust" (Movement of Memory/Movement of Writing: the Figure of Interpolation in Proust), in *Proust, la mémoire et la littérature* (Proust, Memory and Literature), ed. Antoine Compagnon, (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2009), 137.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, 141.

behaviour, Han Dong and Dai Sijie choose to focus on these particular items, endowing them with both a symbolic value and a specific role in the process of recollection.

In the first chapter of *Zha gen*, the narrator mentions the locals' habit to visit the Taos' house during the months that followed their arrival in Sanyu. The reason was the country people's attraction towards some of the Taos' objects, which they had never had the chance to use or even see:

其中，最讓他們感興趣的是一筐煤球，這是老陶家人完全沒有料到的。

三余人只燒柴草煤炭屬於稀罕之物，何況這做的一般大小烏黑發亮的煤球呢？他們自然從未見過。這樣精緻的東西居然拿來燒，居然也能把飯燒熟，三余人覺得不可思議。[...]

第二件讓三余人感到驚訝的東西是大衣櫥，它被從四五層包裝材料裡拆出來。每拆一層三余人都會發出一陣感嘆，每拆一層下面還有一層。老陶家人如此慎重地對待這件東西讓三余人感到很神秘。好在完全裸露後的衣櫥並沒有讓她們感到失望，甚至比拆開以前更令人驚奇了。

不是因為衣櫥高大，做工考究，也不是因為它是三余人從未目睹過的事物，而是由於那面鏡子。此刻，它映照著眼前的田野。三余人早已熟視無睹的田野，在這面鏡子裡完全不一樣了。還有那些抬頭不見低頭見的鄉親，在鏡子裡就像換了一個人似的。<sup>87</sup>

They were intrigued by everything, especially, to the Taos' surprise, a basket of coal briquettes. The Sanyu villagers burned only straw and other dried vegetation, and coal was a rarity. They had never seen anything like these evenly sized, jet-black shiny balls. It was unimaginable that you could use these finely crafted objects for fuel and for cooking food. [...]

The second object that amazed the villagers, as it emerged from its four or five layers of wrapping, was the wardrobe. They gasped as each layer was removed and there was still another one underneath. It was a mystery to them why the Taos should have wrapped something with such care. Finally the wardrobe was completely relieved of its layers, and far from being disappointed, the villagers were perhaps even more amazed than before. It was not its large size or fine craftsmanship or the fact that they had never seen one before that astonished them but the mirror mounted on the front. Reflected in it, the fields, so familiar to the people of Sanyu, took on a whole new aspect, and neighbors whom they met every day looked like completely different people.<sup>88</sup>

The description emphasises the villagers' naivety when spotting the items that the Taos carried from Nanjing, wrapped in paper and brought to them by a gust of fresh urban air. The visual description of the wardrobe and its unwrapping conveys the feeling of an image etched in the author's memory, like a flash indissolubly linked to his arrival in the country, that is part and parcel of his

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<sup>87</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 14.

<sup>88</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 14-5.

recollection of that very day. Despite the focus on the locals, the people of Sanyu are not the only ones to react. When seeing such an interest in what to them were only ordinary items, the Taos are taken by surprise as well. What seeps from the narration of the scene is the reciprocal curiosity that accompanies the arrival of the family in Sanyu and the Taos' first steps in their new life. However, the inevitable sense of strangeness perceived by both sides does not hamper the interactions with the villagers. In fact, the Taos' peculiar furniture continues to attract the locals, providing an excellent pretext for the Nanjingers to get in touch with them:

大衣櫥在門前的空地上展覽了兩個多小時，直到天黑，這才抬進牛屋去。此後的一個月裡，三余人不斷地到老陶家來串門、參觀，主要是看大衣櫥，看大衣櫥前面的鏡子。來人中以婦女居多。她們打扮得漂漂亮亮的，穿著水藍色的大襟罩衫，梳頭時抹的水還沒有幹呢，有的髮際間還插著從小墩口代銷店裡買的塑料髮卡。她們從不單獨來老陶家裡，總是結伴而行。有時兩三人，有時四五人，有時成群結隊，來到老陶家的鏡子前，推搡打鬧，笑得牙齒畢露。讓老陶沒有想到的是，這只他和蘇群結婚時購買的衣櫥如今成了聯繫群眾的好幫手。後來他和蘇群商量，決定把衣櫥從臥室搬進堂屋（牛屋這時已隔成三間。一間為老陶和蘇群的臥室，一間陶文江和陶馮氏帶小陶住，中間的一間做堂屋），好隨時讓來訪的村上人看照個夠。<sup>89</sup>

The wardrobe remained on display at the Taos' front door for a couple of hours before being moved inside at nightfall. Thereafter and for a month or more, the villagers were always dropping by so that they could look at the wardrobe – or rather the mirror on the front of it. The visitors were mainly women, nicely got up in bright blue jackets fastened diagonally across the front, their hair still wet from combing and sometimes fastened with a plastic hair slide bought from the shop at Xiaodunkou. They arrived in groups of up to five at a time, sometimes even more, and stood in front of the mirror, pushing and shoving and roaring with laughter. Tao had never imagined that the wardrobe, bought when he and Su Qun had married, would become such a handy way of getting to know their neighbors. He and Su Qun talked about it and decided to move the wardrobe from the bedroom to the front room. (Their house had by now been divided into three rooms: their bedroom, the bedroom where the grandparents and young Tao slept, and the main room.) Moving the wardrobe made it easier for visiting villagers to get a good look.<sup>90</sup>

What was initially recollected as the fulcrum of the oddness between two opposite categories of people becomes then a channel of communication, allowing them to overcome their incongruences.

*Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* opens with the inspection of Ma's and

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<sup>89</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 15.

<sup>90</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 15.

Luo's belongings, on the day of their arrival on the Phoenix of the Sky. The first object to capture the attention of the village headman is Ma's violin, which he was about to burn because he considered it "un jouet bourgeois, venu de la ville" (a bourgeois toy from the city).<sup>91</sup> However, after a few negotiations, not only is the protagonist able to save his instrument, but he and his friend Luo further gain the villagers' interest with the alarm clock Luo had managed to take with him when leaving Chengdu. It is precisely thanks to his clock that the two youths start interacting with people, and Dai Sijie immediately underlines how that peculiar object constituted a real attraction, and the reason why locals start to visit their house regularly:

Durant plusieurs années, la résidence de notre rééducation n'eut jamais de meubles, pas même une table ou une chaise, mais seulement deux lits improvisés, dressés contre un mur, dans une petite pièce sans fenêtre.

Néanmoins, notre maison devint rapidement le centre du village : tout le monde y venait, y compris le chef, avec son œil gauche toujours maculé de trois gouttes du sang.

Tout cela grâce à un autre « phénix », tout petit, presque minuscule, plutôt terrestre, dont le maître était mon ami Luo.<sup>92</sup>

Throughout the years of our re-education, the house on stilts remained almost entirely unfurnished. There was not even a table or chair, just two makeshift beds pushed against the wall in a small windowless alcove.

Nonetheless, our home soon became the focal point of the village, thanks to another phoenix, a smaller version, miniature almost, and rather more earthbound, whose master was my friend Luo.<sup>93</sup>

The author proceeds then to the description of the clock, which appears strongly narrativised:

En réalité, ce n'était pas un vrai phénix, mais un coq orgueilleux à plume de paon, d'une couleur verdâtre strié de raies bleu foncé. Sous le verre un peu crasseux, il baissait rapidement la tête, et son bec d'ébène pointu frappait un sol invisible tandis que l'aiguille des secondes tournait lentement sur le cadran. Puis il relevait la tête, le bec ouvert, et secouait son plumage, visiblement satisfait, rassasié d'avoir picoré des grains de riz imaginaires.

Qu'il était petit, le réveil de Luo, avec son coq qui bougeait à chaque seconde ! Grâce à sa taille sans doute, il avait échappé à l'inspection du chef du village, lors de notre arrivée. Il était à peine gros comme la palme d'une main, mais avec une jolie sonnerie,

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<sup>91</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 11.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>93</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 13.



pleine de douceur.<sup>94</sup>

Actually, it wasn't really a phoenix but a proud rooster with peacock-like feathers of shimmering green with flashes of deep blue. Under the somewhat dusty glass cover of Luo's alarm clock it could be seen pecking an invisible floor with its sharp ebony beak, while the second hand crept slowly round the clock face. Then it would raise its head, open its beak wide and shake its plumage, visibly gratified, sated with imaginary grains of rice.

It was a tiny clock and it was no doubt thanks to its size that it had escaped the notice of the village headman when we arrived. It fitted in the palm of your hand, and tinkled prettily when the alarm went off.<sup>95</sup>

The exquisite attention to the details conveys the idea of a fictional image, with the purpose of building a very specific scene in the imagination of the reader. Subsequently, Dai Sijie emphasises how the object quickly became part and parcel of the working life on the Phoenix of the Sky, providing a contact with the local people:

Avant nous, dans ce village, il n'y avait jamais eu ni réveil, ni montre, ni horloge. Les gens avaient toujours vécu en regardant le soleil se lever ou se coucher.

Nous fûmes surpris de voir comment le réveil prit sur les paysans un véritable pouvoir, presque sacré. Tout le monde venait le consulter, comme si notre maison sur pilotis était un temple. Chaque matin, c'était le même rituel : le chef faisait les cent pas autour de chez nous, en fumant sa pipe en bambou, longue comme un vieux fusil. Il ne quittait pas notre réveil des yeux. Et à neuf heures pile, il donnait un coup de sifflet long et assourdissant, pour que tous les villageois partent aux champs.

– C'est l'heure ! Vous m'entendez ? criait-il rituellement vers les maisons dressées de toutes parts. C'est l'heure d'aller bosser, bande de fainéants ! Qu'est-ce que vous attendez encore, rejetons de couilles de bœuf ! ...<sup>96</sup>

Before our arrival, there had never been an alarm clock in the village, indeed there had been no clocks or watches at all. The people had timed their days by sunrise and sundown.

We were surprised to see how the alarm clock seized the imagination of the peasants. It became an object of veneration, almost. Everyone came to consult the clock, as though our house on stilts were a temple. Every morning saw the same ritual: the village headman would pace to and fro, smoking his bamboo pipe, which was as long as an old-fashioned rifle, all the while keeping a watchful eye on the clock. At nine o'clock sharp he would give a long piercing whistle to summon the villagers to work in the fields.

'It's time! Do you hear?' he would shout, dead on cue, at the surrounding houses. 'Time to get off your backsides, your lazy louts, you spawn of bullocks' balls! What are you waiting for?'<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 22–3.

<sup>95</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 13.

<sup>96</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 23.

<sup>97</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 13–4.

The author does not bring the reader's attention towards the cultural and social gap, the existence of which is self-evident. On the contrary, he focuses on the bridging of that gap, on the harmonious conjunction between the *zhiqing*'s clock and the local routine. The strangeness is therefore bypassed, in virtue of the description of the new life that, despite its harshness, the author depicts with a touch of irony. The object is not a hint that brings back the memory of a scene, like in Han Dong's case, but the fulcrum of a routine that lasted for the whole period the protagonists spent on the Phoenix of the Sky. Therefore, the trace it represents is not a point, but rather a continuous line that crosses the author's recollection of his entire banishment.

Han Dong and Dai Sijie, also due to the age gap between them, experienced banishment from two different positions, being them the child of a family of cadres and an educated youth respectively. As a reflection of the authors' experiences, the characters in the novels set different objectives for their re-education, which inevitably influence their behaviour.

In Han Dong's text, young Tao's age is probably the cause of his passive acceptance of his new life. This is revealed in the overall positivity he shows towards the adjustments he is forced to face, avoiding to manifest dissent or resentment. However, when describing the experience of banishment from a macro-perspective, it is not young Tao's point of view that the author adopts, but rather his father Tao Peiyi's, who has the power to make decisions regarding the child's future. As the author explicitly states through the choice of the title, the goal of the Taos' banishment is to 'strike root' in Sanyu, an objective that Tao Peiyi will pursue until the end of his life. The key to realise his dream is young Tao, who should marry a local girl and have children in Sanyu. Tao Peiyi's plan is made clear from the beginning, when the family settles down and starts building their new house:

老陶一家在牛屋裡住了不到一年，第二年秋天他們開始蓋新屋。這件事已經籌劃了很久，按老陶的話說，他們這時要打萬年樁，因此馬虎不得。但老陶家到底要蓋一棟

什麼樣的房子呢？<sup>98</sup>

The Taos lived in the cowshed for nearly a year and began building a new home the next autumn. The project had been in the planning for some time. There was to be no skimping since, as Tao put it, they were to “dig in” here for many generations. But just what kind of a house was this going to be?<sup>99</sup>

但最值得一提的還是老陶家準備採用的支架桁條，不是木頭的，而是鋼筋水泥澆注成的。這一點上，實實在在地體現了老陶打萬年樁的思想。即使多年以後土牆倒塌，瓦頂離析，那水泥桁條也將永遠存在。水泥桁條隱藏在泥牆瓦頂之間，不易為人察覺，也像老陶打萬年樁的想法一樣，不為人知。<sup>100</sup>

The most noteworthy thing about the Taos’ house was that the frame and purlins would not be made of wood but of precast reinforced concrete. That way, Tao’s ambition that they should dig in would be realized. Even if the walls crumbled and the tiles fell off with time, the concrete frame would go on forever. Tucked away between the mud walls and the tiled roof, the frame would be almost invisible, just like Tao’s secret desire to dig in.<sup>101</sup>

The focalisation on Tao Peiyi produces a description that, although accurate, lacks any empathy with the character. The creative component appears predominant, as Han Dong articulates Tao’s plan for a future that was probably inconceivable for a child like he was at the time. In doing so, the author emphasises the distance between his infantile perception of banishment and the challenges it imposed to individuals in a more advanced stage of their lives. In order to progress in the integration process, having built their house, the second phase was to find a way to participate actively in the life of Sanyu, and become part of the villagers’ routine:

他們來自南京，在三余無親無故。從原則上說，他們來此是接受貧下中農再教育的，政治上無任何優越可言。加上蓋了這座新屋，雖然有助於改善生活條件，但不免讓三余人眼紅，有脫離群眾的傾向。因此，打萬年樁的第二步驟可命名曰：聯繫群眾。<sup>102</sup>

They had come from Nanjing and had no family in Sanyu to help them. The idea was that they had come here to “learn from the poor and lower middle peasants,” so politically speaking they were at the bottom of the heap. Added to that, they had built a new house that, although it had improved their living conditions, set them apart from the ordinary villagers and was bound to arouse jealousy. So the second stage of digging

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<sup>98</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 20.

<sup>99</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 20.

<sup>100</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 22.

<sup>101</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 23.

<sup>102</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 33.

in could be termed “getting close to the villagers.”<sup>103</sup>

Such engagement is made necessary by a fundamental contradiction between the desire to strike root and the unconscious need to distinguish themselves from the villagers. Once again, the perception of the gap is very clear, not only in the Tao's general judgement of Sanyu people, but also in a few specific behaviours. For example, Tao Peiyi and Tao Wenjiang decide to stop smoking cigarettes and to substitute them with the traditional pipe, so that they could save money as part of the process of digging in.<sup>104</sup> However, they are unable to break the habit of eating baby corn, no matter how wasteful this was in the eyes of the peasants:

老陶家不關心玉米的收成，他們的目的是為了吃嫩玉米，也就是在玉米還沒有完全成熟時掰下來吃。只有這一種吃法符合他們的口味。而玉米成熟後再掰下，搓下玉米粒挑到機房裡機成玉米面煮粥或攤餅，老陶家人則興趣不大。

他們這種吃法，在三余人看來不免奢侈。因此，玉米雖然長在自家的自留地裡，每次掰嫩玉米時都是偷偷摸摸的。一家人相互告誡，須小心在意，不要走漏了風聲。<sup>105</sup>

The Taos were not interested in the size of their maize harvest. They really wanted the young cobs, which they would break off and eat. That was the only way they liked them. Picking the ripe cobs, rubbing off the grains, and taking them to be ground into flour for porridge or pancakes was not of great interest to them. The villagers considered this grossly wasteful, so even though the maize grew on their own allotment, the Taos sneaked in like thieves to pick the baby corn. They warned each other that they should be very careful and not allow rumors about their wastefulness to spread about.<sup>106</sup>

The double challenge of trying to strike root while repressing their urban self is well exemplified in the representation of such discrepancies. This proves that, although he revalued such dynamics in adulthood, their existence was clearly perceived by his younger self.

Unlike the Taos, Ma and Luo never stop dreaming to go back to the city. Not having any plan to integrate in their village, their thoughts often go to the few possibilities they have to escape the Phoenix of the Sky and return to Chengdu:

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<sup>103</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 34.

<sup>104</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 38.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, 30.

<sup>106</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 32.

Dehors, il pleuvait. Par hasard, ce n'était pas la fine pluie habituelle, mais une pluie lourde, brutale, qu'on entendait frapper les tuiles du toit, au-dessus de nos têtes. Sans doute cela contribuait-il à rendre Luo encore plus dépressif : nous étions condamnés à passer toute notre vie en rééducation. Normalement, un jeune issu d'une famille normale, ouvrière ou intellectuelle révolutionnaire, qui ne faisait pas de bêtise, avait, selon les journaux officiels du Parti, cent pour cent de chances de finir sa rééducation en deux ans, avant de retourner en ville retrouver sa famille. Mais, pour les enfants des familles cataloguées comme « ennemies du peuple », l'opportunité du retour était minuscule : trois pour mille. Mathématiquement parlant, Luo et moi étions « foutus ».<sup>107</sup>

Outside, it was raining. Not the usual fine drizzle as it happened, but a heavy downpour drumming on the tiles overhead. No doubt this exacerbated Luo's gloom: it felt as if we were doomed to spend out entire lives being re-educated. Ordinarily the offspring of average parents, whether workers or revolutionary intellectuals, could rest assured that, provided they stayed out of trouble, they would be reunited with their family after a mere two years of re-education. That was the official Party line. But for the sons and daughters of families classed as enemies of the people, the chances of returning home were infinitesimal: three in a thousand. Statistically speaking, Luo and I were no-hopers.<sup>108</sup>

The depressing perspective of having such a few chances to gain back their freedom is like a burden for the protagonists, which constantly follows them. Indeed, the references to the exiguous number are multiple and they recur throughout the novel, punctually attracting the reader's attention:

Trois sur mille, songai-je soudainement. Il me reste trois chances sur mille, et notre fumeur mélancolique, déguisé en danseur, en a encore moins. Un jour peut-être, lorsque je me serai perfectionné en violon, un petit groupe de propagande local ou régional, comme celui du district de Yong Jing par exemple, m'ouvrira la porte et m'engagera à jouer des concertos rouges. Mais Luo ne sait pas jouer du violon, ni même au basket ou au football. Il ne dispose d'aucun atout pour entrer dans la concurrence affreusement rude des « trois pour mille ». Pire encore, il ne peut même pas en rêver.<sup>109</sup>

'Three in a thousand', flashed across my mind. I had a three in a thousand chance, and our melancholy smoker here, currently disguised as a dancer, stood even less of a chance. Some day, perhaps, once I was an accomplished violinist, some modest local or regional propaganda committee – in the district of Yong Jing, for instance – might open their doors to me, and might even hire me to perform Red violin concertos. But Luo couldn't play the violin, I reflected, and he wasn't much good at basketball or football either. In fact he didn't possess a single skill that might help him to become one of the three in a thousand. He couldn't even dream of it.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 27–8.

<sup>108</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 16–7.

<sup>109</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 29.

<sup>110</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 17–8.

À vrai dire, nous acceptâmes d'entrer dans cette épreuve infernale par envie de « rester dans la course », bien que notre chance de retourner en ville fût dérisoire, ne représentant qu'une probabilité de « trois sur mille ».<sup>111</sup>

To tell the truth, we accepted this infernal ordeal, because we were determined to stay in the race at all costs, even though our chances of returning to the city were no more than the infinitesimal three in a thousand.<sup>112</sup>

Sa famille habitait dans la ville où travaillaient nos parents ; son père était écrivain, et sa mère poétesse. Récemment disgraciés tous les deux par les autorités, ils laissaient « trois chances sur mille » à leur fils bien-aimé ; ni plus ni moins que Luo et moi.<sup>113</sup>

His family lived in the same city as our parents: his father was a writer, his mother a poet. Recently disgraced by the authorities, they had burdened their beloved son with the same dreaded odds as Luo and I faced: the terrible three in a thousand.<sup>114</sup>

Qui pouvait être cet heureux élu, le premier libéré sur la centaine de jeunes rééduqués de notre montagne ? [...] Nous ne parvenions pas à deviner qui était ce veinard, bien qu'ayant énuméré les noms de tous les garçons, à l'exception des « fils de bourgeois », comme le Binoclard, ou des « fils d'ennemis du peuple », comme nous, c'est-à-dire ceux relevant de trois pour mille de chance.<sup>115</sup>

Who could this fortunate person be – the first of the hundred-odd city youths on our mountain to be released from re-education? [...] We had no idea who the lucky boy might be, although we went over and over the names of everyone we thought might be a candidate, excluding those of us who belonged in the three-in-a-thousand category because we were sons of bourgeois parents, like Four-Eyes, or sons of class enemies, like Luo and me.<sup>116</sup>

The pounding effect Dai Sijie recreates gives the idea of the persistence of such thought in the *zhiquing's* mind, reproducing the restlessness that characterised their everyday life. The sudden appearances of this reminder reveal the composite nature of the author's recollection. Ricœur adopts Aristotle's distinction between a simple evocation (*mnēmē*) and the result of an effort to recall (*anamnēsis*)<sup>117</sup> and, following Bergson's elaboration, states that an intentional recollection goes through a number of different planes of

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<sup>111</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 42.

<sup>112</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 27.

<sup>113</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 57–8.

<sup>114</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 41.

<sup>115</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 104–5.

<sup>116</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 77–8.

<sup>117</sup> Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), 32.

consciousness.<sup>118</sup> While the novel is clearly the result of an overall effort to remember the period of re-education, the repeated references to this particular rate suggest random slips into the unconscious dimension, which the author acknowledges and reproduces in the text.

In conclusion, not only are the aims of the narrated re-educations opposite, but their description unveils the different stages at which they are recollected. In Han Dong's case, the naivety of a powerless child cannot but succumb to the author's adult judgement. Indeed, his reflections on the purpose of re-education are reported in the text from Tao Peiyi's perspective. Their rational nature betrays the distance between the author at the time of narration and his younger self. Contrariwise, Dai Sijie's reproduction of the characters' psychological distress is a signal of his identification with the educated youths, testifying his emotional proximity to the psychological evaluations he narrates.

The re-educated's first impact with the reality of the country results in a feeling of strangeness, which however was not a peculiarity of the banished. Although experienced in different ways, strangeness is constantly affecting the relationships between the banished and the locals, and evolving together with the stories.

For instance, the disorientation the Taos perceive on their arrival in Sanyu is reflected in the eyes of the local people as well, whose curiosity brings them together to see and welcome the newly arrived. Despite their bewilderment, the overall positivity with which the Taos are ready to face banishment makes them focus on the bright side of an inevitable disorientation:

得到大隊的通知後，一隊的男女老少幾乎傾巢而出，來到小墩口的公路邊迎接老陶一家。[...] 車下，已經聚集了八九十號人。男勞力帶著扁擔籬筐，是來幫老陶家抬家具的。婦女、孩子和老人則來看熱鬧。他們居然也帶來了鑼鼓傢伙，此刻敲打起來。但從印調上聽，遠沒有歡送下放的鑼鼓來得熱烈，大約只有一面銅鑼。那鼓聲不像是有鼓發出的，也不知道他們敲打的是什麼玩意兒。

儘管如此，老陶還是感到欣慰。一天之中，他們遇見三撥列隊路邊的人群，只是眼前的這些村民讓老陶覺得親切，沒有什麼不踏實的地方。<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, 35.

<sup>119</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 10.

Once news of their arrival had spread, men and women, young and old, from the production team turned out to meet them. [...] When the Taos got off the bus, they were surrounded by eighty or ninety people. The men had carrying poles and baskets to load the furniture into; the women, the children, and the elderly had just come to see the fun. They had brought along a drum player, who now struck up, but since there was only one instrument, it sounded nothing like the bands that had given the Taos their sendoff. It did not sound like a proper drum or indeed like anything much at all, but even so, Tao felt somehow reassured. In one day they had passed three kinds of crowds massed along the roadside, but it was these villagers who seemed to Tao the friendliest. There was no need for anxiety.<sup>120</sup>

Similarly, the opening chapter of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* describes the first impact between the *zhiqing* and the dwellers, picturing an analogous scene of reciprocal awkwardness:

Presque tout le village était là, en bas de cette maison sur pilotis perdue au sommet de la montagne. Des hommes, des femmes, des enfants grouillaient à l'intérieur, s'accrochaient aux fenêtres, se bouscullaient devant la porte. Comme rien ne tombait de mon instrument, le chef approcha son nez du trou noir et renifla un bon coup. [...]

Il fit courir ses doigts calleux sur une corde, puis une autre... La résonance d'un son inconnu pétrifia aussitôt la foule, comme si ce son forçait chacun à un semi-respect.<sup>121</sup>

Just about everyone in the village had come to the house on stilts way up on the mountain to witness the arrival of the city youths. Men, women and children swarmed inside the cramped room, clung to the windows, jostled each other by the door. When nothing fell out of my violin, the headman held his nose over the sound-holes and sniffed long and hard. [...]

He ran his calloused fingertips over one string, then another... The strange resonance froze the crowd, as if the sound had won some sort of respect.<sup>122</sup>

In both cases, the description is strongly diegetic, and the scarceness of dialogues is symptomatic of the authors' focus on the visual features of the scenes. It is in fact from the analysis of the villagers' expressions and reactions that seep their inner reaction to the arrival of the re-educated.

Although the initial feeling is similar in both Han Dong's and Dai Sijie's stories, the development of strangeness follows different paths. The behavioural gap is deeply felt by the Taos who, despite their desire to integrate with the villagers, can never fully adapt to the local habits. Since the beginning, when

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<sup>120</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 10.

<sup>121</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 10.

<sup>122</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 4.



building their house, they choose to employ the traditional materials. However, they provide it with windows that are not only different from the traditional ones, but also superior in number, provoking therefore the villagers' disconcertment:

老陶家的新屋最特別的當屬窗戶。

窗戶是普普通通的窗戶，四四方方，木頭做的窗框，窗頁上鑲嵌著幾塊玻璃。但在三余，這是絕無僅有的。三余人的房子，牆上沒有任何窗戶。[...]

最讓三余人無法接受的還不是老陶家窗戶眾多，他們居然在堂屋背面的牆上，正對著大門開了兩扇窗戶。三余人認為這是很不吉利的，也極其難看。<sup>123</sup>

The most remarkable thing about the Taos' house was its windows. They were just ordinary square windows with wooden frames, into which were set panes of glass. But there was nothing like them in Sanyu; the village houses had no windows in the walls. [...]

What most upset the villagers was not how many windows the Taos had but the two windows they had set into the north wall of the house, directly opposite the front door. They felt this was both unlucky and unsightly.<sup>124</sup>

Aside from the construction standards, the customs to which they find most difficult to adjust are those related to the primary needs of everyday life. For example, they use their own method to pickle their cabbage<sup>125</sup> and, as far corporal functions are concerned, they are unable to behave like Sanyu people, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

小孩子不懂事，有時候會把屎拉在園子外面，因此而招致大人的責罵。老陶家人雖然漸漸地明白了肥水不流外人田的道理，對三余人這一習慣也有了充分的認識，但還是無法效仿。[...]

借著這一話題，我想再囉嗦一下老陶家人的擦屁股紙。他們用染成粉紅色或漂成白色的衛生紙擦屁股，在三余人看來，這是難以理解的。三余人擦屁股用的是隨手可取之物，比如一片樹葉、一把稻草。嚴冬時節，沒有樹葉，他們就用土疙瘩擦屁股。孩子們更是百無禁忌，拉完了，把屁股一擡，嘖嘖嘖喚來一條狗，肛門立刻被舔得乾乾淨淨。[...]

一次小陶也擡起屁股，呼喚小花，被陶馮氏瞅見，不免怒斥一通。在老陶家人看來，這是極其不衛生的。可見，僅僅是在如何上廁所才是衛生的這樣的事情上，老陶家人和三余人的分歧就很明顯，甚至是無法調和的。<sup>126</sup>

Small children who did not know any better sometimes pooped outside the family enclosure and were scolded for it. A Sanyu family's night soil should not go on other people's fields, as the Taos gradually learned. However, even though they understood perfectly well the reasons why things were done as they were, they still could not bring themselves to behave in exactly the same way. [...]

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<sup>123</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 25–6.

<sup>124</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 26.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 99.

<sup>126</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 17–8.

While we're on the subject, I should tell you about the paper the Taos used to wipe their bottoms. They had pink or bleached white toilet paper, something incomprehensible to the villagers. The latter used anything they could find to wipe themselves, like a handful of leaves or rice straw. In the depths of winter, when there were no leaves, they used lumps of earth. The children were even more uninhibited. When they had pooped, they would stick out their bottoms and call over one of the dogs to lick them nice and clean. [...]

Once young Tao stuck out his bottom too and called Patch. but he was caught by Granny Tao and given a thorough telling-off. It was a very dirty habit in the Taos' view. The only thing they and the villagers disagreed on was the most hygienic way of going to the toilet, and on this point they were irreconcilable.<sup>127</sup>

The shift in focalisation allows the narrator to express the villagers' view about the Taos' behaviour, suggesting such reflections to be mediated by the author's adult mind. Contrariwise, the narration of the brief episode involving young Tao reveals the influence of the original 'recollecting I,' seeping from the slight register variation. Indeed, the child's young age makes it easier for him to bypass the cultural gap and merge with Sanyu customs.

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties of adaptation, the lifestyle of the village gradually weasels its way into the Taos' behaviour, occasionally manifesting itself abruptly, like in the case of Su Qun's fit of rage:

蘇群正在解衣服口子，那架勢是活不成了，要投河自盡。她一面解衣服口子，一面向河邊跑去。小陶不顧一切地抱住蘇群的大腿，連聲喊道：“媽！媽！媽！”

他越是這麼喊，蘇群就越是堅決。老陶家人，誰也沒有想到平素溫良馴服的蘇群會來這麼一手，就是蘇群本人也沒想到。到底是下放的時間長了，她的行為舉止竟像是三余的婦女。到了關鍵時刻，不禁模仿起她們。<sup>128</sup>

But Su Qun had had enough. She starting undoing her jacket buttons, as if to end her life by throwing herself into the river. She made for the water, still unbuttoning as she went. Young Tao threw his arms around her thigh and hung on, shouting, “Mom! Mom! Mom!”

But his cries just seemed to make her more determined. The Taos had never imagined that the normally gentle and even-tempered Su Qun could behave like this, and neither perhaps had she. Perhaps she had been in the country so long that she was turning into a Sanyu woman. When it came to the crunch, she did as they did.<sup>129</sup>

The feeling of strangeness evolves day by day, progressively giving way to the formation of a new, composite personality, coherently with the aim of re-

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<sup>127</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 18–9.

<sup>128</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 136.

<sup>129</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 138.

education. The culmination of such process is reached by the end of the novel, when young Tao goes back to Nanjing and feels like a foreigner. The original strangeness is finally reversed, the country has permeated Tao's self and it is now the city to make him feel disoriented:

到達南京時天還沒亮。小陶按蘇群信裡寫的地址向家裡走去。這個家，既不是三余的那棟土牆瓦頂的房子，也不是洪澤縣食品公司的青磚瓦房，更不是洪武路九十六號，小陶一次也沒有去過。加之下放多年，他對南京的地形很是生疏，天又黑，街上沒有可以問路的行人。小陶拿著一張地圖，在市區裡尋找著自己的家。後來他走進一個院子，在一間平房前面站住了。<sup>130</sup>

It was still dark when he arrived in Nanjing. Young Tao made his way home to the address Su Qun had given him in her letter. This home was not a Sanyu mud-walled cottage or a modern brick-and-tile building in the Hongze Foods compound; still less was it their old Nanjing home at 96 Hongwu Road. Home was now a place he had never been to. Added to that, he had been in the country for so many years that he had forgotten his way around Nanjing. It was dark, and there was no one about to ask for directions. Map in hand, young Tao went looking for home. Finally he entered a courtyard and stopped outside a single-storied house.<sup>131</sup>

The transformation is fully accomplished in the protagonist young Tao, whose age allows his personality to adapt more easily to the changes imposed by the life in banishment. The focus on the visual narration of the two scenes, not only indicates the focalisation on the child, but it also emphasises the imaginative nature of such representation. The naivety of the recollecting subject brings the author to shape the description by means of pictorial details, reproducing strangeness as it was originally perceived.

In *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, strangeness is felt by the two protagonists in a completely different way, and its reproduction in the literary text follows a particular scheme. After their arrival on the Phoenix of the Sky, Ma's and Luo's predominant feelings are those of isolation and loneliness, a direct consequence of the foreignness of the new land in which they are forced to live. As exemplified below, the description of their first nights in their stilt house is soaked with melancholy:

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<sup>130</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 228.

<sup>131</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 232.

Une fois, Luo me réveilla en pleine nuit.

– Je ne trouve plus de mégot, ni sous le lit ni ailleurs.

– Et alors ?

– Je me sens déprimé, me dit-il. Tu ne voudrais pas me jouer un air de violon ?

Je m'exécutai aussitôt. En jouant, sans être vraiment lucide, je pensai soudain à nos parents, aux siens et aux miens : si le pneumologue ou le grand dentiste qui avait accompli tant d'exploits avaient pu voir, cette nuit-là, la lueur de la lampe à pétrole osciller dans notre maison sur pilotis, s'ils avaient pu entendre cet air de violon, mêlé aux grognements de la truie... Mais il n'y avait personne. Pas même les paysans du village. Le plus proche voisin se trouvait au moins à une centaine de mètres.<sup>132</sup>

On one occasion Luo woke me up in the middle of the night.

'I can't find a single fag end.'

'So?'

'I feel depressed,' he said. 'Why don't you play me something on your violin?'

I did as he said. Raising my bow, still half asleep, I suddenly thought of our parents, his and mine: if only they could have seen the wavering light of the oil lamp in our house on stilts, if only they could have heard the strains of my violin interspersed with the grunts of the sow ... But there was no one to hear. Not even a villager. Our nearest neighbour was at least a hundred metres away.<sup>133</sup>

The perception of spatial distance is translated into nostalgia, and reproduced in the text across the temporal gap that separates the 'recollecting I' from the experiencing self. Nevertheless, once the trauma of the displacement eased, the feeling of strangeness towards the place of banishment is seldom evoked in the novel. Contrariwise, the two protagonists are so absorbed by French literature that they almost feel at home in the places described in the novels they read:

Malgré mon ignorance totale de ce pays nommé la France (j'avais quelquefois entendu le nom de Napoléon dans la bouche de mon père, et c'était tout), l'histoire d'Ursule me parut aussi vraie que celle de mes voisins. [...] Au bout d'une journée, je me sentais chez moi à Nemours, dans sa maison, près de la cheminée fumante, en compagnie de ces docteurs, de ces curés... Même la partie sur le magnétisme et le somnambulisme me semblait crédible et délicieuse.<sup>134</sup>

In spite of my complete ignorance of that distant land called France (I had heard Napoleon mentioned by my father a few times, that was all), Ursule's story rang as true as if it had been about my neighbours. [...] By the end of the day I was feeling quite at home in Nemours, imagining myself posted by the smoking hearth of her parlour in the company of doctors and curates ... Even the part about magnetism and somnambulism struck me as credible and riveting.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 26–7.

<sup>133</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 16.

<sup>134</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 72–3.

<sup>135</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 53.

The melancholy for their lost home seeks comfort in a faraway country Ma and Luo have never even seen, projecting their feeling of displacement on another dimension, completely disconnected from their world. Such peculiar turn can be regarded as a consequence of Dai Sijie's transcultural and translational imaginary. According to Moraru, in Dai Sijie's works "the strange – the other as strange – does not estrange. On the contrary, it is a go-between."<sup>136</sup> Indeed, the books seem to wipe out spatial and cultural distance, and a fictional France becomes the unexpected key to resolve the conflict between the *zhiqing*'s urban roots and their rural present. The protagonists' hearth and home are re-evoked in the Phoenix of the Sky by means of their identification with a western and unknown country, triggering a nostalgic reaction:

Je décidai de copier mot à mot mes passages préférés d'*Ursule Miroüet*.

[...] Je recopiai le chapitre Ursule voyage en somnambule. J'aurais voulu être comme elle : pouvoir, endormi sur mon lit, voir ce que ma mère faisait dans notre appartement, à cinq cents kilomètres de distance, assister au dîner de mes parents, observer leurs attitudes, les détails de leur repas, la couleur de leurs assiettes, sentir l'odeur de leurs plats, les entendre converser... Mieux encore, comme Ursule, j'aurai vu, en rêvant, des endroits où je n'avais jamais mis les pieds...<sup>137</sup>

Then I was seized with an idea: I would copy out my favourite passages from *Ursule Mirouët*, word for word.

[...] I copied out the chapter where Ursule somnambulates. I longed to be like her: to be able, while I lay asleep on my bed, to see what my mother was doing in our apartment five hundred kilometres away, to watch my parents having supper, to observe their gestures, the dishes on the table, the colour of the crockery, to sniff the aroma of their food, to hear their conversation ... Better still, like Ursule, I would visit, in my dreams, places I had never set eyes on before ...<sup>138</sup>

The author's sensory description endows the representation of Ma's feeling with dreamlike features, simulating an imaginary trip back to his own home, where he would be given the chance to appreciate details that are usually overlooked by someone who is used to live in his own house. Such mechanism can be regarded as the depiction of the melancholy felt during the re-education, yet reproduced after the experience of diaspora and, therefore, shaped by the

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<sup>136</sup> Moraru, "'A Foreign Tongue to Unite Us': Book Traveling with Dai Sijie," 134.

<sup>137</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 74–5.

<sup>138</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 54.

experience of migration. The nostalgia towards the native place merges with the identification of the foreign country as one's new home, blurring the distinction between the two. Although the depiction of a similar feeling of strangeness is common to the incipit of both novels, its development throughout the stories reveals two different outcomes. Han Dong keeps focusing on the details that make the Taos different from the villagers, describing the characters' gradual transformation and the paradoxical overturning of young Tao's sense of foreignness, eventually felt towards his original place of birth. Contrariwise, Dai Sijie's strangeness evolves into nostalgia. The foreignness evoked in his descriptions refers to a remote and unknown context that becomes the unexpected projection of home.

In *Zha gen*, it is the writer Tao Peiyi who starts the process of re-education by choosing to undergo the 'glorious banishment,' and his family followed him as a consequence. Instead, in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* Ma and Luo are sent to the Phoenix of Sky as bourgeois intellectuals who need to learn how to survive rural life. Similarly, while Dai Sijie faced a re-education that was aimed at him, Han Dong received it because of his father. Indeed, such experience affects not only the ones originally conceived as its primary targets – Tao Peiyi and the *zhiqing* – but also the people surrounding them, triggering a process of second-level re-education.

In Han Dong's novel, the child young Tao has to adapt to the rules of everyday life in the country; moreover, he must also learn his father's lessons, which translate into a sort of refracted re-education. The most important virtue Tao Peiyi wants his son to learn is courage, which he believes to be of vital importance in life:

老陶教育小陶要勇敢。他親自從地裡挖了幾塊沙礮，裝進小陶的衣服口袋，對他說：“狗來的時候，就用沙礮砸它們。”老陶告訴小陶，千萬不要跑，越跑狗越追。要站下來，面對著狗，最好向下一蹲，這樣狗就以為你在撿東西砸它了。<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 67–8.

Tao tried to teach his son to be brave. He dug him up some stones, put them in his pockets, and told him, "When the dogs come at you, throw the stones at them." He told him never to run away, as the more he ran, the more they would chase him. He should stand his ground and face them; better still, he should crouch down; then the dogs would think he was going to pick up a stone to throw it at them.<sup>140</sup>

The precision with which the author depicts the scene suggests his identification with the boy, whose memory was so marked by that lesson that he chooses to describe with the most mimetic technique, by reporting his father's exact words.<sup>141</sup> Thanks to Tao Peiyi's teaching, young Tao becomes quickly very brave, so much that he shows no scruples when it comes to killing animals:

蘇群為小陶能自覺地分擔家務而感到欣慰。陶文江亦鼓勵小陶多殺，多殺才能多吃，因為小陶正值長身體的時候。當然，最起作用的還是老陶的看法。他認為小陶的殺生體現了一個男子應有的勇敢品質，而這種勇敢品質對將來在三余生活將大有幫助。<sup>142</sup>

Su Qun was pleased that young Tao was prepared to take over this chore, and Grandpa Tao encouraged him to kill more so he could eat more, as he was a growing boy now. And Tao, whose opinion counted most to the boy, believed that these killing sprees showed the kind of courage that a boy ought to have and that would serve him well in his future life in Sanyu.<sup>143</sup>

Nevertheless, the cultivation of the spirit cannot be separated from that of the body and, therefore, Tao put an emphasis on the development of his son's physical strength and abilities:

除培養小陶的勇敢品質外，老陶也很注意小陶的身體。小陶需要一副強健的體魄，才能適應以後在三余的生活。尤其是他準備當一個農民，作為一個體力勞動者，如此弱不禁風是不行的。<sup>144</sup>

Apart from encouraging his son to grow up brave, Tao also paid a good deal of attention to developing his physique. Young Tao needed to be strong and healthy to survive in Sanyu. It was no good being weak and weedy if he was to be a peasant engaged in manual labor.<sup>145</sup>

The explication of Tao's reasons for turning his attention to the development of his son's physical strength reveals a perceptible shift in the focalisation. Similarly,

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<sup>140</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 70.

<sup>141</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 192.

<sup>142</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 87.

<sup>143</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 89–90.

<sup>144</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 88.

<sup>145</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 90.

it is still with Tao Peiyi's eyes that Han Dong describes how he initiated his son to housework, in order to facilitate his integration in the village:

勞動方面，老陶不僅讓小陶植樹種菜殺雞宰鵝，還讓他學幹家務。幫蘇群下河洗衣，幫陶馮氏刷鍋做飯，協助陶文江打掃衛生。所有女人做的事小陶都得做，老人做事時他也要在一邊幫忙。<sup>146</sup>

Tao not only put his son in charge of the slaughtering, but he also made him learn how to do housework. Young Tao helped Su Qun wash clothes in the river, helped his granny scrub the woks and prepare food, and helped Grandpa Tao with the cleaning. He had to do women's work and be on hand to help the old folks.<sup>147</sup>

Coherently with the principle of banishment, young Tao's second-level re-education is therefore designed around the values of rural life, and the developing of the skills required to be a peasant, however, they were a fundamental part of it. A process started at the national level affects young Tao mainly through the filter of his father's judgement, and it is precisely Tao Peiyi's point of view that Han Dong chooses to narrate the choices it implied.

In Dai Sijie's story, instead, it is the Little Chinese Seamstress to be re-educated at a second level, thanks to the forbidden books the two protagonists read to her. At first, Luo initiates her to literature to mitigate her uncivilised nature that, although attractive, clashes with the educational background to which he and Ma are used. After having read the first book Four-Eyes had lent them, the boy regrets not having the possibility to read it to the seamstress:

Comme nous regrettions de lui avoir rendu le livre. « On aurait dû le garder, répétait souvent Luo. Je l'aurais lu, page pour page, à la Petite Tailleuse. Cela l'aurait rendue plus raffinée, plus cultivée, j'en suis convaincu. »<sup>148</sup>

We bitterly regretted having returned the book. 'We should never have given it back,' Luo said repeatedly. 'I could have read it out, page by page, to the Little Seamstress. That would have made her more refined, more cultured, I'm quite sure.'<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 94.

<sup>147</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 96.

<sup>148</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 77.

<sup>149</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 57.



Nevertheless, after stealing Four-Eyes's secret treasure, reading French literature to the girl becomes quickly part of Luo's routine, and the reason why he undertakes the dangerous trip to reach her, carrying a basket on his back:

Dans sa hotte en bambou, anodine, sale mais solide, était caché un livre de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, dont le titre chinois était *Le Vieux Go* ; il allait le lire à la Petite Tailleuse, qui n'était encore qu'une montagnarde, belle mais inculte.<sup>150</sup>

On his back he carried the inconspicuous, work-soiled bamboo hod in which he had secreted *Old Go*, as Balzac's *Père Goriot* was titles in Chinese – the book he was going to read to the Little Seamstress, the lovely mountain girl in need of culture.<sup>151</sup>

When Luo has to leave the Phoenix of the Sky to assist his mother in Chengdu for a month, Ma becomes the seamstress's guardian, like a policeman in charge of keeping her out of other admirers and of continuing her education:

Soulignons que la hotte en bambou, jadis portée par Luo, était maintenant sur le dos de notre policier. Un roman de Balzac, traduit par Fu Lei, était toujours caché au fond, sous des feuilles, des légumes, des grains de riz ou de maïs. [...]

La Petite Tailleuse ignorait qu'elle se trouvait sous protection, et me considérait seulement comme un lecteur remplaçant.<sup>152</sup>

It is important to note that the bamboo hod, formerly carried by Luo, now rested on the back of our secret agent. As usual it contained, safely stashed under leaves, vegetables, rice stalks or maize cobs, a novel by Balzac translated by Fu Lei. [...]

The Little Seamstress was not aware that she was under surveillance – to her I was merely a substitute reader.<sup>153</sup>

At the end of novel, Dai Sijie describes how the youths' undertaking changed not only the girl's mind, but also her looks, which shows the evident results of her 'Balzacian re-education':

À la voir ainsi transformée, Luo fut submergé par le bonheur d'un artiste contemplant son œuvre accomplie. Il chuchota à mon oreille :

– On n'a pas fait quelques mois de lecture pour rien.

L'aboutissement de cette transformation, de cette rééducation balzacienne, sonnait déjà inconsciemment dans la phrase de Luo, mais elle ne nous mit pas en garde.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 135.

<sup>151</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 101.

<sup>152</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 186.

<sup>153</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 139.

<sup>154</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 223.

Studying her new look, Luo was filled with the happiness of an artist contemplating his finished creation.

‘All that time we spent on reading to her has certainly paid off,’ he whispered in my ear.

That the ultimate pay-off of this metamorphosis, this feat of Balzacian re-education, was yet to come did not occur to us.<sup>155</sup>

In this case, the second-level re-education is not targeted to the author himself. Instead, he assists to the whole process mainly as a spectator and occasionally as an educator. The object of the re-education, the seamstress, belongs to the rural life of which the two youths are supposed to learn the values. Consequently, the means employed to carry out Ma’s and Luo’s project are obviously very different to those chosen by Tao Peiyi, due to the opposite direction of the education. This process is the backbone of the entire novel, which ends with the re-educated seamstress’s final gesture: her departure. The distance between the author, ‘recollecting self,’ and the process of second-level re-education is reflected in his employ of only Ma’s and Luo’s point of view. The girl is depicted as a passive component, while the choice to quote Luo’s exact words suggests the author’s proximity to the character, whose utterances are reported as they were recorded in the protagonist’s memory. Even when, in the final scene, the seamstress pronounces the famous words that explain her transformation, they are still uttered by Luo:

Luo me rejoignit à côté du feu. Il s’assit, pâle, sans une plainte, ni une protestation. C’était quelques heures avant la folie de l’autodafé.

– Elle est partie, lui dis-je.

– Elle veut aller dans une grande ville, me dit-il. Elle m’a parlé de Balzac.

– Et alors ?

– Elle m’a dit que Balzac lui a fait comprendre une chose : la beauté d’une femme est un trésor qui n’a pas de prix.<sup>156</sup>

Luo came to sit with me by the fire. He was very pale. Not a word of complaint of grief crossed his lips. It was a few hours before the auto-da-fé.

‘She’s gone,’ I said.

‘She wants to go to the city,’ he said. ‘She mentioned Balzac.’

‘What about him?’

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<sup>155</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 167–8.

<sup>156</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleur chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 229.

'She said she had learnt one thing from Balzac: that a woman's beauty is a treasure beyond price.'<sup>157</sup>

Therefore, the re-education of the Little Seamstress seems to be at a second-level not only because her educators were themselves being re-educated, but also because her role in the process is only described by means of the *zhiqing*'s words, putting her on a lower level in the story-telling hierarchy.

The final chapters of the two novels mark the end of the processes of second-level re-education, the outcome of which should be regarded as successful in both cases. As a matter of fact, both young Tao and the Little Seamstress prove to have reached the goals which had been originally set for them, namely to strike roots in Sanyu and to reach the intellectual maturity respectively. Nevertheless, the ways in which such purposes are achieved are hardly those initially expected, provoking an effect of surprise.

When young Tao goes back to Nanjing to take part in his father's funeral, the foreignness of the city inspires a reflection on his life, and the place that the village of Sanyu occupies in it. The experience of banishment marked his soul forever, and the memory of the days in the countryside never leaves him. In fact, although he never goes back to the village, he keeps himself attached to Sanyu in the oneiric dimension:

但他那不期而遇的夢境卻很真實。這大概就是扎根的意思吧？

看來扎根並非是在某地生活下去，娶親生子、傳宗接代（像老陶說的那樣）。也不是土地裡埋葬了親人（像陶文江做的那樣）。實際上，陶文江的桑木骨灰盒早已從三余村西的墳地裡取出，換了一個大理石的，重新埋在了南京郊區的一處公墓裡。三余的墓穴早已空空如也。但小陶還是會夢見那裡，夢見那棟泥土牆瓦頂的房子。<sup>158</sup>

Yet those uninvited dreams were very real. Did they not hold the real meaning of Striking Root?

Perhaps Striking Root did not mean living in a place, getting married, having a family, and establishing that place as your family's ancestral residence (as Tao had put it). Nor did it mean being buried in a place, as had happened with Grandpa Tao. (Actually the latter's ashes had been removed from the Sanyu graveyard, transferred from their mulberry wood container to a marble one, and reinterred in a cemetery on the outskirts of Nanjing.) The Sanyu grave was now empty. But young Tao continued to

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<sup>157</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 172.

<sup>158</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 234.

dream of their mud-walled Sanyu cottage.<sup>159</sup>

The focalization on young Tao allows the narrator to express his feelings towards his past life in the country, questioning the real meaning of the concept of *Zha gen*. The roots to strike are not material, but mental, and the bond with Sanyu lies in young Tao's memory, just like Han Dong's experience of banishment. The author's reminiscences and the protagonist's fictional memory are therefore skillfully intertwined, and the latter becomes a reproduction of the psychological mechanism guiding the author's recollection.

Similarly, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* closes with the girl's departure, determining the end of her re-education. The western literature the two youths read to her transformed not only her mind, but also her appearance:

Je faillis ne pas la reconnaître. En entrant chez elle, je crus voir une jeune lycéenne de la ville. Sa longue natte habituelle, nouée par un ruban rouge, était remplacée par des cheveux courts coupés au ras des oreilles, ce qui lui donnait une autre beauté, celle d'une adolescente moderne. Elle était en train de finir de retoucher la veste Mao. Luo se réjouit de cette transformation, à laquelle il ne s'attendait pas.<sup>160</sup>

I scarcely recognised her when I stepped into the house: I could have sworn she was a high school student from the city. The long pigtail tied with red ribbon had made way for a short bob, which was very becoming and modern-looking. She was busy putting the final touches to the Mao jacket. Luo was delighted with her transformation, although he was surprised as I was.<sup>161</sup>

The surprise of her new looks is merely an anticipation of the act of rebellion she is about to commit, turning against her father and the conventional lifestyle of the countryside:

- Ma fille est partie ce matin, au petit jour, nous dit-il.
- Partie ? lui demanda Luo. Je ne comprends pas.
- Moi non plus, mais c'est bien ce qu'elle a fait.

Selon lui, sa fille avait secrètement obtenu du comité directeur de la commune tous les papiers et attestations nécessaires pour entreprendre un long voyage. C'était seulement la veille qu'elle lui avait annoncé son intention de changer de vie, pour aller tenter sa chance dans une grande ville.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Banished! A Novel*, 238.

<sup>160</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 223.

<sup>161</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 167.

<sup>162</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 228.

'My daughter left this morning, at first light,' he announced.

'Left?' Luo gasped. 'I don't understand.'

'Nor do I, but that's what she's done.'

He told us that his daughter had applied to the commune leader behind his back to obtain the necessary forms and documents to undertake a long journey. Not until the previous evening had she told him of her plans to change her life and try her chances in the city.<sup>163</sup>

The shock of her 'Balzacian re-education' is finally acknowledged and reproduced on her very mentors, who stare incredulously at her farewell. Instead of the perpetuation of an emotional bond by means of memory, the seamstress's act represents a rupture with the country routine, and the hope for a new beginning founded on the radical change from her previous condition. Such migration might suggest an affinity with the author's decision to leave China for France; nevertheless, while he will never completely cut ties with China, the Little Seamstress's departure is depicted as an ultimate and traumatic event, which leaves no hope for a coming back.

The epilogues of the two re-educations are founded on two opposite intellectual actions on the characters' past: young Tao's recollection and the Little Seamstress's forgetting. While Han Dong's fictional memory finds its resolution in the mnemonic dimension, Dai Sijie's reminiscence ends in oblivion. However, such oblivion should not be regarded as a "distortion of memory," as a "dysfunction."<sup>164</sup> The seamstress's choice to forget her past life is a necessary condition to undertake the challenge of a different future, which will be grounded on the memory of what she learnt from her re-education. Memory and oblivion are therefore inextricably interwoven, constituting an example of Ricœur's hypothesis that the latter is one of the necessary conditions in order to have the former.<sup>165</sup> Their interrelation recreates the mental process experienced by the author who, when leaving his motherland, had to re-forge his memory on the basis of a pondered act of voluntary oblivion. Contrariwise, Han Dong did

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<sup>163</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 168.

<sup>164</sup> Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), 552.

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*, 553.

not have to eradicate himself from his native soil or go through any comparably traumatic event. Therefore, his memory has been perpetuated throughout the years and eventually reproduced in the text, whose ultimate message reveals the immortality of the protagonist's younger soul. Young Tao's mental act is in fact the same performed by the author himself, who wrote his novel by searching the memories of the child he was when experienced banishment.

The historical moment that provides the background for both novels, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, was the theatre of a series of traumatic events and ruthless practices that marked Chinese people's everyday life. The protagonists adopt different foci to describe such a tense atmosphere and, consequently, the resulting pictures are rather dissimilar. The evocation of the historical context by means of the literary text represents the intersection between memory and history, thanks to which the cognitive function of narrative, as evoked by Paul Ricœur,<sup>166</sup> allows the *autofiction* to reach its historical realisation. Generally speaking, even if the authors do not avoid mentioning the Red Guards' brutal actions, their descriptions are softened by the ironic tone characterising Han Dong's and Dai Sijie's works.

This difficult years of the Cultural Revolution represent a significant wound in the collective memory of Chinese people, which is directly related to the individual one. Therefore, personal memories are part and parcel of the memory of a community. In this respect, Ricœur points out the bipolar constitution of personal identity and communal identity, showing how the traumatic reminiscences of the individual are reflected in both the personal and the public sphere.<sup>167</sup> As a result, the image of a period which has been widely narrated from a collective perspective, once filtered through the eyes of the protagonist, can disclose the unique character of the individual's memory. In both novels, the authors reserve a concise passage with the purpose of immersing

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<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, 311.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*, 95.

the reader in the flavour of the time. The analysis of the modality with which they choose to introduce the Cultural Revolution is symptomatic of their relationship with their recollection.

In *Zha gen*, Han Dong describes the peculiarity of that period through young Tao's eyes and, as a consequence, his narration is filled with the naivety of a six-year-old child:

小陶六歲時，無產階級文化大革命在中國如火如荼地展開，這是史無前例的，也就是從未有過的。當然，年幼的小陶並不明白。對他而言，只是世界的細節變得空前明晰（相對於那顆作為某製片廠圖標的模糊的星球），也更加的豐富多采了。<sup>168</sup>

When he was six, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution swept like wild fire across China. This was an event without precedent in national history. The boy did not understand much of what was going on, but the CultRev did bring the small details of his world into sharper focus and made life more exciting and colorful.<sup>169</sup>

[...]後者和陵居家的孩子成天在院子裡、馬路邊亂竄，不僅看見了許多怪事奇景。

常常有頭戴高帽、掛著牌子遊街的人，站在高高的車斗上。也有的自己走在馬路上，旁邊是穿著綠衣服戴紅袖標的紅衛兵小將，他們手中的紅寶書也是鮮紅鮮紅的。每一次遊街都有喧鬧的鑼鼓伴隨，像過節一樣熱鬧。那些被揪斗的人，有時自己手上也提著一面銅鑼，一面走一面當當地敲打。

如果說紅和綠是時代的流行色，那麼鑼鼓傢伙就是時代的最強音了。只要一見紅綠二色，聽見鑼鼓喧天，小陶就無比激動，忍不住要跑出家門，看看發生了什麼事。<sup>170</sup>

[...] The boy spent all day running around the courtyard and the streets outside with the neighbors' children, and there they saw a lot of weird and wonderful things.

Parades of people passed through the streets wearing tall hats, labels hung around their necks, standing high up in the backs of trucks or walking, marshaled by the young generals of the Red Guards in green uniforms with red armbands, holding bright red copies of the *Little Red Book* in their hands. Every parade was accompanied by drumming, making it as noisy as Chinese New Year festivities. The struggled-against sometimes carried their own small drums, which they beat as they went along.

If red and green were the most popular colors of those years, then drumming was their most powerful sound. As soon as young Tao saw red and green and heard the din of drums, he was seized with excitement and rushed outside to see what was going on.<sup>171</sup>

The little boy looks at the shocking events that are shaking the country from a positive angle, intoxicated by the atmosphere of revolution pervading people's

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<sup>168</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 46.

<sup>169</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 46.

<sup>170</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 47.

<sup>171</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 47.

routine. The author introduces the passage with a remark concerning young Tao's incapability to understand the complex mechanisms behind the Red Guard's interventions. Nevertheless, the choice to adopt the kid's point of view, focusing on the theatricalism of the break-ins narrated by means of a juvenile language suggests the intention to reflect the innocence of the child Han Dong in the adult's look. The depiction of the Cultural Revolution is carried out through a series of scenes, evoking Walter Benjamin's conception of history as made by a succession of images.<sup>172</sup> The adult's critical judgement succumbs to the young's enthusiasm, reproducing the events that marked young Tao's memory as a number of flashes, projected one after another before the reader's eyes.

In *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, the author provides a description of the historical contexts in the very beginning of the novel, immediately after the narration of the first scene. In this case, the protagonist's perspective is that of an educated youth and, therefore, Dai Sijie keeps his focus on the practice of reeducation when presenting his view of the Cultural Revolution:

Deux mots sur la rééducation : dans la Chine rouge, à la fin de l'année 68, le Grand Timonier de la Révolution, le président Mao, lança un jour une campagne qui allait changer profondément le pays : les universités furent fermées, et « les jeunes intellectuels », c'est-à-dire les lycéens qui avaient fini leurs études secondaires, furent envoyés à la campagne pour être « rééduqués par le paysans pauvres ». [...]

La vraie raison qui poussa Mao Zedong à prendre cette décision restait obscure : voulait-il en finir avec les Gardes rouges qui commençaient à échapper à son contrôle ? Ou était-ce la fantaisie d'un grand rêveur révolutionnaire, désireux de créer une nouvelle génération ? Personne ne sut jamais répondre à cette question. À l'époque, Luo et moi discutâmes souvent en cachette, tels deux conspirateurs. Notre conclusion fut la suivante : Mao haïssait les intellectuels.<sup>173</sup>

A few words about re-education: towards the end of 1968, the Great Helmsman of China's Revolution, Chairman Mao, launched a campaign that would leave the country profoundly altered. The universities were closed and all 'young intellectuals', meaning boys and girls who had graduated from high school, were sent to the countryside to be 're-educated by the poor peasants'. [...]

The real reason behind Mao Zedong's decision was unclear. Was it a ploy to get rid of the Red Guards, who were slipping out of his grasp? Or was it the fantasy of a great revolutionary dreamer, wishing to create a new generation? No one ever discovered his

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<sup>172</sup> Ban Wang, *Illuminations From the Past. Trauma, Memory and History in Modern China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 96.

<sup>173</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 13–4.



true motive. At the time, Luo and I often discussed it in secret, like a pair of conspirators. We decided that it all came down to Mao's hatred of intellectuals.<sup>174</sup>

The explanation is given using an almost didactic tone, coherently with the fact that the 'implied reader'<sup>175</sup> envisaged by the author possesses a western education and might need some further information concerning Chinese history. The first paragraph is written in the form of an analepsis, which starts before the beginning of the story and then reaches the time of narration, becoming intertwined with Ma's and Luo's vicissitudes. Subsequently, the informative character of the passage shades off into the narrator's self-questioning, revealing Ma's individuality through the expression of his uncertainties. However, the time gap separating the narrator from his story is visible in the references to the future, and despite the role played by the protagonist's self, such vision of the re-education appears mediated by his judgment in retrospect.

The *zhiqing* are one of the most popular symbols of Cultural Revolution, and both authors chose to describe them taking a few characters as symbolic examples of this peculiar category of people. In particular, it is possible to draw a parallel between Han Dong's character Zhao Ningsheng and Dai Sijie's Four-Eyes, who are depicted in both novels as icons of resistance to the process of re-education. Indeed, none of them accepts the position they are assigned, not only refusing to compromise on their fate, but also plotting secretly to escape and go back to the city.

Zhao Ningsheng is an educated youth from Nanjing who works as a Chinese language and literature teacher at Gezhuang Primary School. Young Tao is a student of him and, thanks to their common origins, the two bond together, becoming quickly close friends:

小陶自然不叫趙寧生趙先生或者趙老師，而是直呼其名趙寧生，有時也隨夏小潔叫他寧生。趙寧生也不叫小陶小陶，像老陶家人一樣，叫他陶陶。提到老陶時，趙寧生口稱陶叔叔。這樣一來，小陶和他就是同輩人了。趙寧生是小陶的好朋友，師生關係倒在其次。

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<sup>174</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 6–7.

<sup>175</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), 150.

[...] 趙寧生如此巴結小陶，唯一的原因，大約是小陶是下放幹部的孩子，也從南京下放來的。<sup>176</sup>

Young Tao obviously did not address his friend as Mr. Zhao or teacher. He called him Zhao Ningsheng or sometimes simply Ningsheng, as Xia did. And Zhao in turn used the family nickname of Taotao. He referred to Tao as Uncle Tao, making himself the same generation as young Tao. In other words, they were good friends first and teacher and pupil second. [...]

The main reason that Zhao let young Tao get away with such a lot was that he was the child of banished cadres and that he was also from Nanjing.<sup>177</sup>

The non-focalised presentation of the character is coherent with the detached tone of the description, which shows the effect of the time separating the story from the narration. Indeed, the observations concerning the terms of the relationship between young Tao and Zhao Ningsheng are hardly conceivable by the mind of a child. Therefore, they are the result of the re-elaboration carried out by the author in a more adult phase of his life. Conversely, Dai Sijie introduces the character of Four-Eyes in the most direct way possible. At the beginning, he is mentioned quickly in the narration of the protagonists' first encounter with the Little Seamstress's father. Subsequently, the voice resumes his depiction, describing in detail the relationship between the three youths:

Un jour, Luo et moi allâmes voir le Binoclard, un ami de notre ville, installé dans un autre village.<sup>178</sup>

Luo and I first met the tailor when we went to visit Four-Eyes, a friend from the old days who had been sent to another village.<sup>179</sup>

Le Binoclard possédait une valise secrète, qu'il dissimulait soigneusement.

Il était notre ami. (Souvenez-vous, j'ai déjà mentionné son nom en rapportant notre rencontre avec le père de la Petite Tailleuse, sur le chemin qui nous menait chez le Binoclard.) Le village où il était rééduqué était plus bas que le nôtre sur le flanc de la montagne du Phénix du Ciel. Souvent, le soir, Luo et moi allions faire la cuisine chez lui, quand on trouvait un morceau de viande, une bouteille d'alcool, ou qu'on réussissait à voler de bons légumes dans les potagers des paysans. Nous partagions toujours avec lui, comme si nous avions formé une bande à trois. Qu'il nous cache l'existence de cette valise mystérieuse nous surprit d'autant plus.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 115.

<sup>177</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 118–9.

<sup>178</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 34.

<sup>179</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 21.

<sup>180</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 57.

Four-Eyes had a secret suitcase, which he kept carefully hidden.

He was our friend. (Remember? We were on our way to see him when we had our encounter with the tailor on the mountain path.) The village where Four-Eyes was being re-educated was situated lower on the slopes of Phoenix mountain than ours. Luo and I often went over to his house in the evening to cook a meal if we had managed to lay hands on a bit of meat, a bottle of local liquor, or some fresh vegetables from the peasants' garden. We would share our spoils, as if we were a gang of three. This made it all the more surprising that he didn't breathe a word to us about his mysterious suitcase.<sup>181</sup>

Despite their close friendship, Four-Eyes is presented as having a specific role: he is the keeper of the secret suitcase that constitutes the centre of the novel. The identification with his function brings the narrative voice to outshine part of the character's personality to emphasise his behaviour when dealing with the banned books. The bias towards forbidden information is a feature Four-Eyes and Zhao Ningsheng have in common and, in effect, their persistent attempts to elude the authorities' control over unauthorised resources are widely described in both novels.

趙寧生有一台陶文江那樣的收音機，每天深夜他都要收聽美國之音。小陶留在那兒過夜時，趙寧生也不避諱。

[...] 剛開始聽的時候，小陶如芒在背，聽得多了便覺得受用無比。說實話，小陶對美國之音說了些什麼倒印象不深（所有的內容事後趙寧生都會向小陶轉述，當然，用的是南京話），讓他如癡如醉的是那與眾不同的軟綿綿的聲音。

每次趙寧生收聽美國之音都十分的謹慎。事先，要把門關好，插上，甚至好得去外面轉上一圈，看看房子前後是否有人。趙寧生尤其注意隔壁于先生的動靜。一切準備就緒，他這才打開收音機，盡量調小聲音，小到將腦袋挨在收音機上才能聽見。收音機放在桌子上，一邊一個腦袋，分別是趙寧生和小陶的。兩只耳朵貼在收音機的外殼上，直到外科發燙。後來他們乾脆把收音機帶到床上，蒙上被子，這樣就萬無一失了。

如此謹慎小心是非常必要的，因為經常有知青因收聽敵台被捕入獄的事發生。一旦聽說這樣的事，趙寧生就會暫停幾天。最多不過三天，他就又忍不住了。<sup>182</sup>

Zhao had a radio like Grandpa Tao's and tuned into *Voice of America* late every night, even if young Tao was staying over.

[...] When he first started listening, young Tao used to fidget, but gradually he came to enjoy the broadcast. In truth, he could not make out much of what *Voice of America* was saying, but Zhao explained it all to him afterward, in the Nanjing dialect of course. What really entranced him were the mellifluous tones of the announcer.

Every time he tuned in, Zhao exercised the greatest caution. First, he shut and bolted the door. Next, he checked to see that there was no one around outside the building, and he especially checked to see what his neighbor Mr. Yu was doing. Only then did he turn on the radio, turning the volume down so low that you could hear it

<sup>181</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 41.

<sup>182</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 120.

only with your head up close. The radio sat on the table, between Zhao and young Tao, who pressed their ears against its case until it became quite hot. Later, they simply took the radio to bed and listened under the covers, where they were quite safe.

Such caution was necessary because there were cases of urblings being sent to prison for listening to enemy radio stations. Every time that happened, Zhao would stop, but he could not keep away for long, and after a couple of days at most he would be at it again.<sup>183</sup>

At the time, the practice to listen to foreign radio broadcasts was popular, despite the risk to incur in severe punishment for committing a counter-revolutionary crime.<sup>184</sup> The focalisation on young Tao when describing how Zhao Ningsheng made him listen to the *Voice of America* allows Han Dong to best convey the child's state of mind during those exciting moments. Moreover, the use of iterative narrative<sup>185</sup> underlines the rituality of such illicit routine, describing the details of the resulting feeling of fear felt by the kid and his friend. The educated youth portrayed in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is a regular consumer of banned information as well, and Dai Sijie chooses to introduce the reader to his forbidden practice by reproducing the mystery surrounding his secret treasure:

[...] [C]'était une valise, que faisaient scintiller quelques rayons de soleil, une valise élégante, en peau usée mais délicate. Une valise de laquelle émanait une lointaine odeur de civilisation.

Elle était fermée à clé en trois endroits. Son poids était un peu étonnant par rapport à sa taille, mais il me fut impossible de savoir ce qu'elle contenait.

J'attendis la tombée de la nuit, quand le Binoclard fut enfin libéré du combat avec son buffle, pour lui demander quel trésor il cachait si minutieusement dans cette valise.

À ma surprise, il ne me répondit pas. [...]

Au cours du repas, je remis la question sur le tapis. Mais il n'en dit pas davantage.

– Je suppose que ce sont des livres, dit Luo en rompant le silence. La façon dont tu la caches et la cadenasses avec des serrures suffit à trahir ton secret : elle contient sûrement des livres interdits.<sup>186</sup>

[...] [I]t was a suitcase. A ray of light bounced off the glossy lid. It was an elegant suitcase, a little worn but made of fine leather, and it gave off a whiff of civilisation.

It seemed inordinately heavy in relation to its size, but I had no way of telling what was inside. It was fastened with locks in three places.

I waited impatiently for the evening, when Four-Eyes would be released from his daily struggle with the buffalo, so that I could ask him what sort of treasure he had

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<sup>183</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 123–4.

<sup>184</sup> Frank Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 291.

<sup>185</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 145.

<sup>186</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 62–3.

so securely hidden away in his secret cache.

To my surprise he didn't answer my question. [...]

While we were eating our supper I broached the subject again. But still he said nothing.

Luo broke the silence. 'I expect they're books,' he said. 'The way you keep your suitcase locked up and hidden away is enough to betray your secret: you've got a stash of forbidden books.'<sup>187</sup>

The accurate description of the suitcase, compared to the scarcity of details the author provides about Four-Eyes's personality, proves that the character's role is subordinated to that of the object he possesses. The theme of the banned books emerges through the memory of the enigma Ma and Luo first encounter when finding the suitcase, and the evasiveness of their friend implicitly refers to the lurking fear of a potential punishment. However, both the educated youths portrayed in the two novels resist the ban of culture imposed during the Cultural Revolution, showing the authors' subjacent rejection of such impoverishing practice.

In both *Zha gen* and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, the *zhiqing* are depicted as unfit for working in the fields, and the authors make an extensive use of irony to underline the sharp contrast between their urban nature and the agricultural context in which they are transposed. For example, Han Dong mentions the vow Zhao Ningsheng makes after becoming a teacher and escaping the farmers' routine:

自從抽到葛庄小學當老師後，趙寧生就再也沒有下過農田，甚至，連以前置辦的農具也都從宿舍裡清理去了，通通給了夏小潔。他發誓不再踏上當地的土地，鞋底上不沾當地的泥巴。

然而這樣做幾乎是不可能的。[...] 別忘了，趙寧生有一輛自行車。他騎在自行車上，卻不點地，就不會踩著經過的地方了。<sup>188</sup>

Once Zhao had become a teacher, he never worked in the fields again. In fact he cleared the house of all his old farm tools and gave them to Xia. He vowed that local mud would never again stick to the soles of his shoes.

This, however, was an almost impossible vow to carry out. [...] But do not forget that Zhao had a bicycle. If he cycled, he could make the journey without his feet touching the ground.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 44–5.

<sup>188</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 118.

<sup>189</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 121–2.

The author underlines the silliness of Zhao Ningsheng's ambition and emphasises the voice's judgement by means of the vocative function. Similarly, Dai Sijie ridicules Four-Eyes's performances in the fields, focalising on his repeated fights with his buffalo:

Le buffle avait une taille normale mais une queue d'une longueur inhabituelle, qu'il remuait à chaque pas, comme s'il faisait exprès d'envoyer de la boue et autres saletés sur le visage de son gentil maître peu expérimenté. Et, malgré ses efforts pour esquiver les coups, une seconde d'inattention suffit pour que la queue du buffle le frappe au visage de plein fouet, et envoie voler ses lunettes en l'air. Le Binoclard lança un juron, les rênes s'échappèrent de sa main droite, et la charrue de sa main gauche. Il porta les deux mains à ses yeux, poussa des cris et hurla des vulgarités, comme brusquement frappé de cécité.<sup>190</sup>

The buffalo was of medium size, but boasted an exceptionally long tail, which it swung vigorously from side to side as though determined to spatter its timid, inexperienced master with as much filth as possible. For his efforts to dodge the relentless lashes, one split second of inattention was enough for Four-Eyes to receive a blow to the face from the buffalo's tail, which sent his spectacles hurtling through the air. He swore and dropped the reins from his right hand and the plough from his left. Clapping his hand over his eyes, he let out a stream of abuse as if he had been blinded.<sup>191</sup>

His struggle with the animal symbolises the difficulties of re-education, while the comic touch with which the author depicts the scene reproduces the light-heartedness of the young protagonist. Although the *zhiqing*'s inadequateness to the life in the country is self-evident in their daily routine, they both carry a material distinctive sign as well: glasses. For Zhao Ningsheng they are a symbol of higher education and, therefore, he wears them despite the lack of an actual need:

尤其是小陶戴上眼鏡之後，趙寧生更是興奮不已。這件讓小陶與眾不同備感孤獨甚至自卑的多餘之物，趙寧生卻讚賞備至。

趙寧生也有一副眼鏡，但是平光的。平時，他總是帶著這副眼鏡。就像對暗號似的，兩人突然就對上了。趙寧生和小陶是葛庄小學裡僅有的兩個戴眼鏡的人，不同的只是，趙寧生的眼鏡屬於裝飾品。趙寧生很欣賞小陶鏡片後面的一圈圈的波紋，並且大有自愧弗如之感。<sup>192</sup>

Zhao was especially excited when young Tao started wearing glasses. Young Tao despised himself for having to wear these objects, which isolated him from everyone else,

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<sup>190</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleur chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 59.

<sup>191</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 43.

<sup>192</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 116.

but they filled Zhao with admiration.

Zhao almost always wore glasses too (with plain glass), so their faces now matched, and the glasses were like a secret sign. Even though Zhao's were purely cosmetic, they made them the only spectacle wearers in Gezhuang Primary. Zhao admired the round ripples visible on young Tao's lenses and felt himself quite inferior.<sup>193</sup>

The dissimilarity with the others that makes young Tao uncomfortable is cherished by Zhao Ningsheng, who fakes myopia just to avail himself of the privilege of wearing such an intellectual mark. Contrariwise, Four-Eyes's relationship with spectacles is more troubled, as they constitute a real handicap, so crucial to him that they even earned him his own nickname. Dai Sijie portrays his total dependence from his lenses, providing once again a comic representation of the unfortunate youth:

Il souffrait d'une grave myopie et, même en écarquillant les yeux tant qu'il pouvait, il était incapable de nous reconnaître à vingt mètres de distance, et de nous distinguer des paysans qui travaillent dans les rizières voisines, et se payaient sa tête.

Penché au-dessus de l'eau, il y plongea les mains, et tâtonna dans la boue autour de lui, en aveugle. Ses yeux, qui avaient perdu toute expression humaine, saillants, comme gonflés, me faisaient peur.<sup>194</sup>

He was very short-sighted and was unable to distinguish us from the jeering peasants in the neighbouring paddy fields.

He bent over and plunged his arms into the water, groping around in the mud. The blank expression in his bulging eyes was disconcerting.<sup>195</sup>

However, in both cases the authors desacralize the glasses as an emblem of culture, either by showing the shallowness behind their symbolic value or by emphasising their implications at a more human level. Lastly, Han Dong and Dai Sijie terminate the iconic depiction of the *zhiquing* with the narration of their final escape from their condemnation, which in both cases is carried out using questionable means. Zhao Ningsheng manages to leave the countryside because of alleged health issues, exploiting one of the less noble ways to gain the right of moving back to the city:

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<sup>193</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 130.

<sup>194</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 60.

<sup>195</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 43.

這以後趙寧生再也沒有去過老陶家。後來，聽說他辦病退回了南京。趙寧生是葛庄人用涼車子抬到小墩口的，從那兒上了去洪澤的班車。他終於沒再踏上葛庄的土地，並且，從今往後再也沒有這樣的可能了。<sup>196</sup>

That was Zhao's last visit to the Taos. They heard that he had been sent back to Nanjing on grounds of ill health, carried by the Gezhuang villagers on a lattice bed to Xiaodunkou and then put on a bus to Hongze. Thus he never had to tread the ground of Gezhuang, either then or ever again.<sup>197</sup>

如此一來就可以辦病退回城了。所以，病退也是繼上大學了、當兵、招工之後的另一條回城的途徑。趙寧生最後走的就是這條路。

也許我說得過於慘烈了一些。既然病退是一條回城的途徑，想辦法詐病的人自然不少，不必要真的累垮了、生病了或者殘廢了。<sup>198</sup>

[...] [T]hey could get sent home on grounds of ill health, and this became a way out too, after a place in university, the army, or a factory job. That was the route that Zhao took in the end.

I may have painted too gloomy a picture. Large numbers of people successfully faked illness to get back to the city, so you did not have to be really exhausted, ill, or disabled.<sup>199</sup>

Even when describing his return to Nanjing, Han Dong refers once again to Zhao's bizarre vow, playing down the atmosphere by adding another touch of irony to the scene. Four-Eyes's bowing out is narrated in a comic way as well. He is the first to leave the Phoenix of the Sky, thanks to his mother who finds him a job at a literary magazine's redaction.<sup>200</sup> Despite the respectability of his future position, Four-Eyes's last apparition in the novel is far from being elegant. On the night of his farewell party, he almost catches Ma and Luo stealing his suitcase but, in the end, he is distracted by an inconvenience:

Quelques minutes plus tard, alors qu'il ficelait la valise, j'entendis le Binoclard crier :

– Merde !

– Tu sais que je n'aime pas les gros mots, mon fils.

– J'ai la diarrhée ! annonça le Binoclard d'une voix souffrante.

– Va sur le seau, dans la chambre !

À notre grand soulagement, nous entendîmes le Binoclard courir vers l'extérieur.

[...]

Quelle chance pour nous que ce futur poète eût la manie de se décharger en plein

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<sup>196</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 123.

<sup>197</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 126–7.

<sup>198</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 124.

<sup>199</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 128.

<sup>200</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 107.



air ! Je peux imaginer la scène d'horreur plus qu'humiliante qu'il nous aurait infligée, s'il avait foncé dans la chambre, tiré en vitesse le seau hygiénique de sous le lit, s'il était assis dessus, et avait évacué le sang du buffle sous notre nez, dans un vacarme aussi assourdissant que la chute d'une cascade impétueuse.<sup>201</sup>

A few minutes later, while he was making a knot in the rope, I heard Four-Eyes exclaim: 'Shit!'

'Mind your language now, my son.'

'I've got the runs,' Four-Eyes wailed.

'Use the bucket in the bedroom!'

To our immense relief we heard Four-Eyes running out of the house. [...]

What luck that this would-be poet preferred to relieve his bowels in the open air! I can just see the horrific, stomach-churning scene that would have been inflicted on us had he chosen to pull the bucket out from under the bed and expel the buffalo blood in a horrible stream, or rather torrent, under our very noses.<sup>202</sup>

Dai Sijie draws the reader's attention towards the scatological epilogue of the scene, completing his depiction of his intellectual character's most human side.

In brief, both authors identify a precise character to represent the educated youths, who plays a central role in the context of the Cultural Revolution. The perspective from which they carry out their description is different; Dai Sijie's experience as a *zhiqing* brings him closer to their condition, whereas Han Dong's point of view is completely external, since he was never part of this category. However, they share a common ironic spirit when portraying the educated youths, suggesting a demystification of their status by bringing into light the naivety of their allegedly educated minds.

The Cultural Revolution brought a wave of restrictions and changes concerning the circulation of literature and the parameters of people's education. When recreating the atmosphere of those years, both authors refer explicitly to the measures adopted by the Communist Party, using their characters' experiences to convey the unease deriving from their application. At the time, the burning of books and objects considered bourgeois was a common practice, carried out by the Red Guards.<sup>203</sup> Han Dong mentions more than once the fact that Tao's books had been destroyed:

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<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*, 132–133.

<sup>202</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 98.

<sup>203</sup> Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976*, 83.

雖然小陶已經可以自己閱讀了，但他從來也沒有看過有關的原著。“文革”抄家時，老陶的藏書大多被投入了熊熊大火。<sup>204</sup>

Although young Tao could read for himself by now, he never looked at the original works. During the CultRev, most of Tao's collection of books had been thrown into the bonfire.<sup>205</sup>

The use of the passive allows the narrative voice to focus only on the object of the action, without specifying the people responsible of those barbarous acts.<sup>206</sup> Such vagueness on agency fits perfectly young Tao's perspective, expressing his naïve ignorance concerning the political turmoil of the time. Contrariwise, Dai Sijie spares no effort in pointing out the culprits of the shameful fire:

– [...] Mais ma tante avait quelques bouquins étrangers traduits en chinois, avant la Révolution culturelle. Je me souviens qu'elle m'avait lu quelques passages d'un livre qui s'appelait *Don Quichotte*, l'histoire d'un vieux chevalier assez marrant.

– Et maintenant, où ils sont, ces livres ?

– Partis en fumée. Ils ont été confisqués par le Gardes rouges, qui les ont brûlés en public, sans aucune pitié, juste en bas de son immeuble.<sup>207</sup>

'[...] But one of my aunts had a few foreign books in Chinese translation. That was before the Cultural Revolution. I remember her reading to me from a book called *Don Quixote*. It was about an old knight errant, and it was a great story.'

'What happened to her books?'

'They went up in smoke. Confiscated by the Red Guards, who promptly burnt them in public, right in front of her apartment building.'<sup>208</sup>

Besides mentioning the Red Guards, the author also expresses covertly his condemnation for this practice, influencing the reader's judgement. Yet, the reference to the burning of the books is not the only allegory of the mutilation of culture that was being carried out at the time. Cultural Revolution caused major upheaval in formal education, classes were at first interrupted and, subsequently, resumed following the new revolutionary agenda.<sup>209</sup> On moving to the

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<sup>204</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 93.

<sup>205</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 95–6.

<sup>206</sup> Bob Hodge and Kam Louie, *The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture: The Art of Reading Dragons*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 80.

<sup>207</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 65.

<sup>208</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 47.

<sup>209</sup> Angang Hu, *Mao and the Cultural Revolution. Volume 2: The Red Guards March for Mao*, (Honolulu, Hong Kong, Beijing and Singapore: Silkroad Press, 2017), 93.

countryside, young Tao must compromise with the education system in vigour in Sanyu, sacrificing part of his curriculum:

下放時，小陶已讀小學三年級，而三余大隊的小學只有兩個年級，一年級和二年級。也就是說，三余小學不能算是一所小學，只能算半所，或者小半所（當時的小學十五年制）。二年級以後，讀三年級得去五里地外的葛庄小學。考慮到葛庄小學離家較遠，他們又是初來乍到，老陶決定，還是讓小陶上三余小學。小陶因此留了一級。

三余小學裡只有一位老師，當地人稱靳先生。他是該小學裡僅有的老師，同時兼任校長。學校裡只有一棟教室，亦是泥牆草頂的，已經十分破敗，但比起老陶家暫住的牛屋來，還是好了許多。<sup>210</sup>

Young Tao had reached the third year of primary school before the family's banishment to the countryside, but Sanyu's primary school only had two classes, the first and second years. So it was not really a primary school, only half of one, or rather less than half of one since primary school then consisted of five years. After the second year students had to go to Gezhuang Primary, just over a mile away. Because of the distance and the fact that the family had only just arrived in the village, Tao decided that his son should go to Sanyu Primary. So young Tao dropped back a year.

Sanyu Primary had only one teacher, a Mr. Jin, who also doubled as its head. There was just the one schoolroom in a mud-brick building with a thatched roof. It was fairly dilapidated, although still in much better condition than the Taos' temporary home in the cowshed.<sup>211</sup>

Dai Sijie also takes advantage of the explicative passage he dedicates to the background of Cultural Revolution to mention the chaos in which schools were thrown during that period, underlining once again the impoverishment of culture that resulted from it:

Il était difficile de nous considérer, sans délit d'imposture, comme deux intellectuels, d'autant que les connaissances que nous avions acquises au collège étaient nulles : entre douze et quatorze ans, nous attendîmes que la Révolution se calmât, et que rouvrit notre établissement. Mais quand nous y entrâmes enfin, nous fûmes emplis de déception et amertume : les cours de mathématiques étaient supprimés, de même que ceux de physique et de chimie, les « connaissances de base » se limitant désormais à l'industrie et à l'agriculture. [...] Ces manuels et le Petit Livre Rouge de Mao restèrent, plusieurs années durant, notre seule source de connaissance intellectuelle. Tous les autres livres étaient interdits.<sup>212</sup>

It was hard to see how the two of us could possibly qualify as intellectuals, given that the knowledge we had acquired at middle school was precisely nil. Between the ages of twelve and fourteen we had been obliged to wait for the Cultural Revolution to calm down before the school reopened. And when we were finally able to enrol we were in for a bitter disappointment: mathematics had been scrapped from the curriculum, as had physics and chemistry. From then on our lessons were restricted to the basics of industry

<sup>210</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 62.

<sup>211</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 63.

<sup>212</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleur chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 15.

and agriculture. [...] For several years it was these textbooks and Mao's 'Little Red Book' that constituted our only source of intellectual knowledge. All other books were forbidden.<sup>213</sup>

In both cases, the critic is sharp. Yet, Dai Sijie's perspective leaves more space to the protagonists' emotional reaction. Intersecting the account of historical vicissitudes with the re-evocation of the feelings they provoked in the narrating subject.

Notwithstanding the severe restrictions applied to the circulation of books during the years of Cultural Revolution, literature still figures in the two novels as an instrument of inestimable value. It is a dangerous privilege for the few, but its power is acknowledged and cherished by Tao, as well as by Ma and Luo. Analogously to the Little Seamstress's case, classics of western literature are employed by Tao to educate his son as well:

小陶稍大以後，大約在老陶家收養小黃的時代，老陶開始講外國文學，主要是蘇俄文學。

他講《復活》，講《安娜·卡列尼娜》，講高爾基的人生三部曲。有時也講巴爾扎克的《高老頭》或者雨果的《九三年》。以防止小陶斷章取義、以偏概全，老陶總是從頭到來。

[...]在老陶的講述中，有所忽略，有所強調，完全根據教育小陶的需要。實際上是在過一個講故事人的癮。他無權自己寫書，只有借講別人的書行創作之實了。因此才會如此的熱情高漲。<sup>214</sup>

When young Tao got a bit older – probably about the time when they had Brownie – Tao began to tell him stories from world literature, principally from Soviet Russia. He told him the stories of *Resurrection* and *Anna Karenina* by Tolstoy and Maxim Gorky's auto biographical trilogy and Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* and Victor Hugo's *1793*. He always started from the beginning so that young Tao would understand the whole picture.

[...] The way Tao told them, some bits got left out and other bits received more emphasis, in line with what he wanted to teach his son. He retold the works of the world's writers not for literary reasons but to teach young Tao about life. As a former writer, Tao had only one kind of teaching skill: to tell his son stories from literature.<sup>215</sup>

Han Dong stresses the creative component in the father's accounts, focusing on the capability of literature to resurrect the man's talent. Moreover, Tao's mediations between the child and the content of western novels is what preserves

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<sup>213</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 7–8.

<sup>214</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 93.

<sup>215</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 95–6.

them from being noxious, filtering the intoxicating fickleness that ends up affecting Ma's courage. As a matter of fact, when facing a dangerous crossing on the way to the Little Seamstress's village, his thoughts go to his favourite character, keeping him from risking his life:

À cet instant, coincé au milieu du passage, je me demandai ce que dirait le vieux Jean-Christophe, si je faisais volte-face. Avec sa baguette autoritaire de chef d'orchestre, il allait me montrer la direction à prendre ; j'imaginai qu'il n'aurait pas eu honte de reculer devant la mort. Je n'allais tout de même pas mourir avant d'avoir connu l'amour, le sexe, la lutte individuelle contre le monde entier, comme celle qu'il avait menée !

L'envie de vivre s'empara de moi. Je pivotai, toujours à genoux, et revins pas à pas vers le début du passage.<sup>216</sup>

I couldn't move, and there, stuck in the middle of the ridge, I wondered what my good friend Jean-Christophe would say if I were to turn back. With an imperious wave of his conductor's baton he would tell me which way to go. He was unlikely to object to my beating a retreat in the face of death, I thought. After all, how could I die now, without having known love or sex, without having taken free individual action against the whole world, as he had?

I was filled with the desire to live. I turned full circle, still on my knees, and crawled back to the start.<sup>217</sup>

Dai Sijie does not refrain from suggesting Ma's desire for living as induced by the proximity he feels with romantic heroes, showing a hint of the negative effect they cause on the protagonist's temperament.

Moreover, both authors depict literature as actually able to subvert some characters' fate. Tao Peiyi dedicated his life to literature, and this cost him and his family persecution and exile. Nevertheless, on Tao's death, after Cultural Revolution has come to its end, the writer's talent is officially recognized and his image regains popularity and respect. On the occasion of his funeral, his good friend Hou Jimin insist on involving some authorities, giving Mr. Yu the honour of doing the elegy, despite the resentment Tao Peiyi was bearing against him before dying. In fact, such decision was made in order to reopen some doors for his son young Tao, hoping to brighten his future:

致悼詞的是省委宣傳部的于部長，級別可觀。此人老陶生前就認識，是靠造反起家的。老陶一向鄙夷此人，住院期間始終拒絕他的探視。因此關於是否接受于部長致悼詞的安

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<sup>216</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 142.

<sup>217</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 106.

排，蘇群和老陶的朋友們一時爭論不下。

最後候機民說：「這不是為老陶，而是為了陶陶，為他的前途作想。老陶如果泉下有知，一定不會反對的。」蘇群這才被說服了。<sup>218</sup>

The eulogy was given by no less a personage than the head of the provincial government propaganda department, a Mr. Yu. Tao had known this man, who had achieved his position as a result of his revolutionary fervor during the CultRev. Tao had despised him and refused to allow him to visit him in the hospital. So Su Qun argued with Tao's friends about allowing him to give the funeral eulogy.

Finally Hou Jimin said, "We're not doing this for Tao; it's for Taotao, for his future. If his father could know what we were doing, I'm sure he would not be against it." And with this Su Qun let herself be persuaded.<sup>219</sup>

By regaining him the long-lost reputation as a prominent writer, literature has the ultimate power to redeem him and to give his family some prospects for the times to come:

其後的幾個月裡，在報紙和文學期刊上經常能看到追憶或悼念老陶的文章。老陶被形容成一柄劍、一團火、一盆盛開怒放的鮮花、一個倒下去的戰士。文章大多出自老陶的那些文人朋友之手，不禁寫得神采飛揚、催人淚下。蘇群把它們一一裁剪下來，貼在一本專門的紀念簿上。遠在山東的小陶，從當地的報刊上偶爾也能發現紀念老陶的文章。蘇群叮囑他將其剪下，寄回家中。

總之，老陶死得很體面。[...]

作為對老陶家屬的補償，老陶家很快分到了新房子。<sup>220</sup>

In the months that followed, many tributes to Tao appeared in other newspapers and literary publications. He was described as a sword, a name, a plant in full bloom, a fallen fighter. Most came from the pens of Tao's literary friends and were written in such glowing terms that they brought tears to the eyes of the reader. Su Qun cut each one out and pasted it into an album. Even young Tao, far away in Shandong, sometimes came across tributes to his father in local literary journals. Su Qun insisted that he cut them out and send them home.

All in all, Tao's death brought him much honor. [...]

By way of compensation, the Taos were soon given a new home.<sup>221</sup>

The novel ends therefore on a sweet note for literature that, from criminal charge, becomes instrument of redemption, contributing to save young Tao's future. Similarly, the Little Seamstress's life ends up being saved by literature as well, which functions as Ma's bargaining chip on trying to convince the doctor to perform an abortion on the girl:

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<sup>218</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 231.

<sup>219</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 235.

<sup>220</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 232.

<sup>221</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 236.

Le visage rouge de honte, je me retournai vers lui, après avoir fait quelques pas, et je m'entendis lui dire :

– Je vous propose un marché : si vous aidez mon amie, elle vous en saura gré tout sa vie, et je vous donnerai un livre de Balzac.

Quel choc pour lui d'entendre ce nom, en pensant une main mutilée dans l'hôpital du district, si reculé, si loin du monde. Il finit par ouvrir la bouche, après un instant de flottement.

[...] Une semaine plus tard, un jeudi, un jour fixé par le médecin polyvalent, amateur de littérature, la Petite Tailleuse, déguisée en femme de trente ans avec un ruban blanc autour du front, franchit le seuil de la salle d'opération [...].<sup>222</sup>

Blushing with mortification I headed for the door, but after a few steps I turned to face him and heard myself saying: 'I have a proposition to make: if you can help my girlfriend she'll be grateful to you for the rest of her life, and I'll give you a book by Balzac.'

It was a shock to hear the French author's name being spoken aloud in this clinical environment, this district hospital in the middle of nowhere. The doctor hesitated briefly, then opened his mouth to speak.

[...] The following Thursday – it was the resourceful physician and lover of literature who set the date – the Little Seamstress, disguised as a thirty-year-old woman with a white band round her forehead, presented herself at the operating theatre [...].<sup>223</sup>

The literary Bildungsroman is the central metaphor of this coming-of-age story, which symbolises the protagonists' sentimental initiation.<sup>224</sup> Yet, the connecting power of literature is depicted and celebrated not only in its romantic refractions, but also in its ability to function as an instrument of social cohesion. Thanks to the magic charm of literature, the Little Seamstress can free herself from the unpleasant result deriving from her succumbing to the same charm, which brought to the relationship with Luo. Hence, she is able to begin the new life she will be conducting treasuring the lessons that the masters of literature have taught her.

In the two novels, the emphasis on the key-role of literature as both cause and solution of the characters' vicissitudes is the reflections of the authors' desire to celebrate this practice. Han Dong and Dai Sijie are able to show the strength of the art at the time of its most severe repression, depicting a ray of light to brighten up the dark years of Mao's tyranny.

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<sup>222</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 214–5.

<sup>223</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 160–1.

<sup>224</sup> Yinde Zhang, "Dai Sijie et son roman d'apprentissage balzacien," in *Littérature comparée et perspectives chinoises*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), 143.

In a politicised era like the Cultural Revolution, the pressure of the measures adopted by Mao and carried out by the Red Guards pervaded every aspect of everyday life. In both novels, some characters' past rifts with the authorities affect the present of their relatives, projecting the consequences of their subversion. In *Zha gen*, Tao Peiyi is criticised for being a writer, and the Red Guards' irruption into his house is well described as one the most marking moments of the years preceding the Taos' banishment to the countryside:

後來那紅綠二色和鑼鼓喧嘩終於逼近了洪武路九十六號大院，破四舊的熊熊火焰在院子裡升起來了。無數的書籍、字畫、賬本、綢緞被投擲到火焰裡 [...]。對此，最得意的莫過於小陶。

不久，那紅綠二色和鑼鼓家伙進入了大樓，上了三層，來到老陶家的門口。穿綠衣的人在他們家的門框上貼上鮮紅的標語，振臂高呼口號。從這些口號中，而不是標語上小陶得知老陶被打倒了（小陶這時還不識字）。貼標語的人對小陶說，老陶之所以被打倒，因為他是一個壞蛋。

「你要和陶培毅劃清界限，以後不能叫他爸爸，只能叫陶培毅！」他叮囑小陶道，後者不禁深敢榮幸。

Finally the red and the green and the drums forced their way into the courtyard of 96 Hongwu Road, and the names of the Smash the Four Olds bonfires leapt into the air, fueled by quantities of books, paintings, account books, silks, and satins. [...] No one was prouder of this than young Tao.

Soon afterward, the red-and-green-clad guards and their drums came upstairs, to the third floor, to the Taos' flat. They pasted bright red posters around their door and shouted slogans. From the shouting, but not from the posters (since young Tao could not yet read), the boy learned that his father had been struggled against. The slogan-shouters told him this was because his father was a "bad egg."

"You should make a clean break from Tao Peiyi. Don't call him 'Dad' anymore; just call him Tao Peiyi!" they told him, and young Tao felt greatly honored.<sup>225</sup>

The naivety with which little Tao looks at the political repression during Cultural Revolution translates into an excitement he never felt before, and the serious implications of such an attack are pushed into the background. Although his case is the most striking one, Tao Peiyi is not the only member of the Taos' family having political problems. His father, Tao Wenjiang, had joined the *Guomindang* before liberation and, although his lack of interest into political matters, his past choices continue to affect his present:

陶文江是老陶家最年長的人，下放那年，已經虛齡七十了。他的身材也是全家最高的，一米七八左右。平時，陶文江的腰桿總是挺得筆直。他的頭髮已經全白了 但仍然

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<sup>225</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 47–8.



十分濃密，一絲不苟地向后梳起，加上沉默寡言、表情莊重，不免讓人肅然起敬。解放前，陶文江做過南京武定門小學的校長，在一次集體儀式上加入了國民黨，一度還擔任過國民黨區分部委員。所以說，他是有嚴重的歷史問題的。<sup>226</sup>

Grandpa Tao, Tao Wenjiang, was the oldest in the family. He was sixty-nine the year they arrived in Sanyu (or seventy, the way country folk calculated it). He was also the tallest, at nearly five feet nine inches, and held himself ramrod straight. He had a full head of completely white hair, which was combed carefully back. Taciturn and with a naturally sober expression, he was a commanding figure. Before Liberation, he had been head teacher of a primary school in Nanjing. He had joined the KMT Party at one of its mass rallies and had served on a local KMT committee. This meant that as far as the present government was concerned, he had serious "historical problems."<sup>227</sup>

Similarly, the influence of Ma's and Luo's parents' problematic past in not only the main obstacle to their hope to move back to the city, but also the first reason of their re-education:

On nous refusa l'entrée au lycée, et on nous força à endosser le rôle de jeunes intellectuels à cause de nos parents, alors considérés comme des ennemis du peuple, bien que la gravité des crimes imputés aux uns et aux autres ne fut pas tout à fait la même.

Mes parents exerçaient la médecine. [...] Leur crime consistait à être de « puantes autorités savantes », qui jouissaient d'une réputation de modeste dimension provinciale, Chengdu étant la capitale du Sichuan, une province peuplée de cent millions d'habitants, éloignée de Pékin mais très proche du Tibet.

Par rapport au mien, le père de Luo était une véritable célébrité, un grand dentiste connu dans toute la Chine. Un jour, avant la Révolution culturelle, il avait dit à ses élèves qu'il avait refait les dents de Mao Zedong, de Madame Mao, et aussi de Jiang Jieshi, le président de la République avant la prise du pouvoir par les communistes. [...] Et voilà qu'un éminent dentiste suggérait comme ça, en public, que le Grand Timonier de la Révolution portait un dentier ; c'était au-delà de toutes les audaces, un crime insensé et impardonnable, pire que la révélation d'un secret de défense nationale. Sa condamnation, par malchance, fut d'autant plus lourde qu'il avait osé mettre les noms du couple Mao au même rang que celui de la plus grande des ordures : Jiang Jieshi.<sup>228</sup>

First we were refused admission to high school, then the role of young intellectuals was foisted on us on account of our parents being labelled 'enemies of the people.'

My parents were doctors. [...] Their crime was that they were 'stinking scientific authorities' who enjoyed a modest reputation on a provincial scale, Chengdu being the capital of Szechuan, a province with a population of one hundred million. Far away from Beijing but very close to Tibet.

Compared with my parents, Luo's father, a famous dentist whose name was known all over China, was a real celebrity. One day (this was before the Cultural Revolution) he mentioned to his students that he had fixed Mao Zedong's teeth as well as those of Madame Mao and Jiang Jieshi, who had been president of the Republic prior to the Communist takeover. [...] And yet here was an eminent dentist stating publicly

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<sup>226</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 128.

<sup>227</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 129.

<sup>228</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 15–7.

that the Great Helmsman of the Revolution had been fitted with new teeth, just like that. It was beyond belief, an unpardonable, insane crime, worse than revealing a secret of national security. His crime was all the more grave because he dared to mention the names of Mao and his consort in the same breath as that of the worst scum of the earth: Jiang Jieshi.<sup>229</sup>

The narration of the parents' crime is permeated with a sharp humour that deviate the reader's attention from the unjust treatment they are forced to bear. The narrator's playful attitude suggests an ironic acceptance of such conditions. In fact, they are elucidated at the very beginning of the novel as they were part of the unanimated setting in which the plot takes place. The almost mocking tone conceals the veiled critic without displaying any overt intention of opposition.

The same ironic spirit animates episodes in which, both Han Dong and Dai Sijie, strip the political characters of their authority by depicting them in a ridiculous situation, enhancing the feebleness of their position. In *Zha gen*, the chapter titled "*wu yi liu* 五一六" (516)<sup>230</sup> provides the richest description of the political repression carried out during the Cultural Revolution. It is entirely dedicated to Hou Jimin's and Su Qun's alleged involvement with a counterrevolutionary group and narrates in detail their capture and their detention. Despite the seriousness of the theme, Han Dong ends the chapter on a funny note. When describing the activity of newspaper-reading Su Qun organised in Sanyu after being released, the authors uses the team leader Yu's character to imply a subtle critic to the officials' power. His ephemeral authority vanishes on the arrival of the party secretary Yu, as he literally edges him out producing a strong comic reaction in the public:

余書記進來時，大伙兒閃開了一條道。他披著一件藍大衣，頭戴一頂三塊瓦的帽子。雖然余書記也姓余，但不住在本村，他住在三余五隊。

[...]一到，就撩開大衣，一屁股坐在桌前的板凳上。余隊長盡量往邊上挪，整張條凳都讓余書記給占據了。余隊長只是在板凳頭上搭了半邊屁股。

見人已到齊，蘇群清了清嗓子，開始念報。她剛念了兩句，余書記嚙地站起來。余隊長毫無防備，板凳一翹，便摔在了地上。村上人哈哈地笑起來。有人說：「胳膊擰不過大腿，他能玩得過余書記？」<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 8.

<sup>230</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 141–163.

<sup>231</sup> *ibid.*, 162.

The party secretary arrived, and the crowd made way for him. He wore a blue greatcoat and a fur-trimmed, three-flap hat. His surname notwithstanding, he did not live in the village but came from Sanyu's Number 5 Team.

[...] Once he had arrived, he opened his greatcoat and sat on the bench at the table. Yu the team leader shifted to one end, leaving the rest of the bench to the party secretary and ending up with only half his bottom actually on the bench.

Since everyone was now here, Su Qun cleared her throat and began to read the newspaper. She had read only two sentences when the party secretary leapt to his feet. The team leader was taken by surprise, the bench upended, and he landed on the floor. There was a burst of laughter. Some one said, "The arm will always be beaten by the thigh. What did he expect?"<sup>232</sup>

While Han Dong describes the team leader Yu's position threatened by a superior authority, Dai Sijie depicts the overturning of power when the chief of the village asks Luo's help to treat his tooth. While Luo operates on the decay, Ma controls the speed of the needle and, hit by an outburst of sadism, slows down on purpose, to make the man suffer as much as possible:

Soudain, comme une éruption volcanique, je sentis à mon insu surgir du plus profond de moi une pulsion sadique : je ralentis immédiatement le mouvement du pédalier, en mémoire de toutes les souffrances de la rééducation.

Luo me jeta un regard complice.

Je ralentis encore, pour me venger cette fois de ses menaces d'inculpation.

[...] L'aiguille s'était transformée en ciseau, en burin haineux qui creusait un trou dans la sombre roche préhistorique, en faisait jaillir de ridicules nuages de poudre de marbre, grasse, jaune et caséuse. Je n'avais jamais vu aussi sadique que moi. Je vous l'assure. Un sadique débridé.<sup>233</sup>

Suddenly, I felt the stirrings of an uncontrollably sadistic impulse, like a volcano about to erupt. I thought about all the miseries of reeducation, and slowed down the pace of the treadle.

Luo shot me a glance of complicity.

I pedalled even more slowly, this time to punish him for threatening to take me into custody.

[...] [The needle] became a chisel, cutting into a ghastly prehistoric rock face and releasing little puffs of greasy yellow dust. I had turned into a sadistan out-and-out sadist.<sup>234</sup>

In this case, the victim of the injustice gets the upper hand on his punisher, and the narration of his vengeance reveals the author's subversive vein. Despite the

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<sup>232</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Banished! A Novel*, 163.

<sup>233</sup> Dai Sijie 戴思杰, *Balzac et la petite tailleur chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 166-7.

<sup>234</sup> Dai Sijie 戴思杰, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 125.

ruthlessness of the act, the narration focuses on the most ridiculous aspects of Ma's revenge, resulting in a comic picture in which power relationships are not defined by means of politics but rather according to the most primitive needs and instincts.

Although humour is a strategy frequently adopted by both authors to depict situations of political pressure, in certain passages it gives way to more serious tones. In *Zha gen*, the description of Hou Jimin's imprisonment leaves nothing to the reader's imagination. The details of his experience are reported by the victim himself and commented upon by Tao Peiyi:

侯繼民說，作為重點審查對象，他長年戴著手銬。為迫使他交代問題，工作組的人用腳拼命地在手銬上蹬踏。說著，侯繼民亮出他的一雙手。只見那手的十指猶如蠟燭般透明，手腕呈灰白色，看上去幾乎比小陶的手腕還要細。這樣的手腕沒有被踩斷真是一個奇跡。老陶證明說，侯繼民的手以前並不是這樣的。他的手以前和自己的手一樣，十分的粗壯有力。<sup>235</sup>

According to Hou, as a key suspect, he had had to wear handcuffs for the entire time. In order to make him confess, his interrogators stomped hard on his handcuffed wrists. He showed Tao his hands: the fingers were translucent, like candles; the wrists were a grayish-white color and seemed thinner than young Tao's. It was a miracle that they had not been broken. Tao told them that Hou's wrists were never like that before; they were like his own, thick and strong.<sup>236</sup>

The harshness of the narration is made possible thanks to the shift in focalisation, which reflects the author's more mature attitude on rethinking the procedures carried out by the officials during the Cultural Revolution. Hou Jimin's recollection is integrated within the narration, overlapping with the author's memory. The effect it generates is a sort of "metamemory," in which the child's look is left aside to leave the place to a disenchanted account. Contrariwise, in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, the description of the process Luo's father had to undergo does not show a change of perspective, as it is recollected by Ma himself, who was present on the scene:

Le terrain de basket bondé grouillait de têtes noires. Il faisait très chaud. Le haut-parleur hurlait. Le père de Luo était agenouillé au centre d'une tribune. Une grande

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<sup>235</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 144.

<sup>236</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 144.

pancarte en ciment, très lourde, était suspendue à son cou par un fil de fer qui s'enfonçait et disparaissait presque dans sa peau. Sur cette pancarte, étaient inscrits son nom et son crime : RÉACTIONNAIRE.

Même à trente mètres de distance, j'eus l'impression de voir sur le sol, sous la tête de son père, une large tache noire, formée par sa sueur.

La voix menaçante d'un homme cria dans le haut-parleur :

– Avoue que tu as couché avec cette infirmière !

Le père courba la tête, de plus en plus bas, si bas que l'on eût cru que son cou avait fini par être écrasé par la pancarte en ciment. Un homme approcha un micro de sa bouche, et l'on entendit un « oui » très faible, presque tremblant, s'en échapper.<sup>237</sup>

The sports ground was a bobbing sea of dark heads. It was a very hot day. Loudspeakers blared. Luo's father -was on his hands and knees in front of a grandstand. A great slab of cement hung round his neck from a wire so deeply embedded in the skin as to be invisible. Written on the slab were his name and his crime: REACTIONARY.

Even from where I was standing, thirty metres away, I could make out a dark stain on the ground made by the sweat dripping from his brow.

A man's voice roared through the loudspeaker.

'Admit that you slept with the nurse!'

Luo's father hung his head, so low that his face seemed buried in the cement slab.

A microphone was shoved under his mouth and a faint, tremulous 'yes' was heard.<sup>238</sup>

The visual elements enhance the authenticity of Ma's account, which is focused on the physical aspects of the trial. His memory of the procedure is the depiction of a *souvenir-image* based on the sensory perception of the event. In this case, irony is not substituted by the author's adult look on political repression, but by the depiction of his sensations and immediate reactions to the recollected episode, reproducing a genuine narration that lack any apparent critical intent. The pressure of politics as perceived by the remembering subject is represented in both novels in different shades, juxtaposing the adult's critical evaluation and the youth's genuine emotions. The ironic perspective serves two scopes: on the one hand, it reproduces the narrator's unmediated reaction to the shocking event. This are the cases in which Han Dong and Dai Sijie give free rein to sensory depiction, almost overlooking the historical context to concentrate on a single traumatic episode. On the other hand, it reproduces a misrepresentation of the original deriving from the authors' reawakened disenchantment.<sup>239</sup> The

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<sup>237</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleur chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 18.

<sup>238</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 8.

<sup>239</sup> Yang, *The Chinese Postmodern: Trauma and Irony in Chinese Avant-Garde Fiction*, 96.

ridiculing of authorities suggests a belated acknowledgment of their actual power, which results in the subversion of conventional relationships. Time is what gives the suffering subject the possibility to revenge his position, and memory is the weapon he uses to relocate himself in the political setting of the Cultural Revolution.

Memory, narrative and identity are three factors closely related to each other. The remembering subject traces the outline of his past self by representing his memory in a fictional form. In the distance between the 'narrating I,' situated beyond the level of the story, and the 'experiencing I,' who is part of the plot instead, a third category can be identified – the 'remembered I.'<sup>240</sup> Still belonging to the level of the story, it is the identity-based representation of the author's past self, the perceiving subject. However, such perception is altered by the present self, and the contrast between the two perspectives generates a double focalisation.<sup>241</sup> Both *Zha gen* and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* are fictional accounts that take their lifeblood from the personal dimension. Han Dong's depiction of historical memory is conducted from the point of view of the individual, and reflects the subjective logic of his literary creation.<sup>242</sup> The focus on the individual is a major theme in Dai Sijie's work as well, represented as one of the two main concepts Ma and Luo extrapolate from western classics (the second being that of love).<sup>243</sup> Therefore, individualism penetrates all the three reflections of the subject. Its manifestations are particularly evident in the most personal aspects of the recollection, which are those related to the emotional and sensory spheres that reflect the interiority of the narrators as well as of the protagonists.

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<sup>240</sup> Astrid Erll, "Narratology and Cultural Memory Studies," in *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, ed. Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer, 2009, 223.

<sup>241</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> Gu Haiyang 古海陽, "Geti lishi jingyan de chonggou — Han Dong 'Zha gen', 'Xiaocheng haohan zhi yingte maiwang' helun" 個體歷史經驗的重構——韓東《扎根》、《小城好漢之英特邁往》 (Reconstructing Individual Historical Experience: on Han Dong's Striking Root and A Small Town Hero Strides Forth): 29.

<sup>243</sup> Silvester, "Genre and Image in Francophone Chinese Works," 369.

Ricœur emphasises the importance of the emotional dimension involved in the “*effort de rappel*” (effort to recall).<sup>244</sup> A recollection implies a certain amount of *pathos*, which is felt at the level of inner conscience and, therefore, strictly connected to the individual dimension. One of the most evident reactions to a traumatic period such as the Cultural Revolution is indeed terror. Indeed, fear and anxiety are represented as natural reactions of the subject on facing emotional distress as well as physical endurance.

In *Zha gen*, it is mostly young Tao who expresses this feeling, and distinctive types of terror reflect the involvement of the subject at different levels. For example, the description of the fear he feels on hearing his parents talking about issues he cannot fully understand reproduces at once the genuine emotion of the ‘experiencing I’ and his recollection of feelings previously felt by his past self, the ‘remembered I’:

老陶和蘇群再次歸來時，又靠在床頭讀書。小陶最後一次坐在他們中間，但感受已不再相同。是小陶長大了嗎？的確，但不僅於此。實際上，老陶和蘇群根本就沒在讀書，他們只是拿著書，裝裝樣子而已。他們在討論問題，神情認真而嚴肅，語調也十分的深沉凝重。

小陶不能完全明白他們在說什麼。老陶和蘇群彼此交換著一些詞，什麼“空襲”、“警報”、“三線”、“疏散”、“原子彈”、“防空洞”。這些詞在小陶的上空，老陶、蘇群的房間裡飛來飛去，讓小陶驚恐不已。

他像小時候那樣，抬頭看看這個，又看看那個，但老陶和蘇群並沒有理睬他。小陶只有抬頭去看燈泡，那裡面的鎢絲像一縷金線般熠熠生輝。看得時間久了再看床單就沒有以前那麼白了，甚至整個房間都暗淡下去。光影之間，老陶和蘇群的面孔變了形，嘴巴翕動著。吐出一個個令人不安的詞匯。小陶心想：要打仗了。他又想：這可怎麼辦呢？想了半天，沒有答案。<sup>245</sup>

When his parents finally returned, they sat up in bed with books in hand once more. That night, for the last time, young Tao sat between them, but it was not the same as before. Was it because he had grown up? Not entirely. Tao and Su Qun were only making a pretense at reading. Instead, they were talking, with solemn faces and in grave tones.

Young Tao understood only part of what they were saying; it was something about “air raids,” “alarms,” “Third Fronts,” “evacuation,” “atom bombs,” and “air raid shelters.” Above the boy’s head, the words flew back and forth between his parents and filled him with terror.

Just like when he was little, he gazed up at one, then at the other, but his parents took no notice of him. Young Tao looked up at the light bulb and at the tungsten filament blazing out like a gold thread. If you looked at it long enough and then looked at the

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<sup>244</sup> Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), 36.

<sup>245</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 50.

sheets, they looked less white than before, and even the room looked darker. Between the light and the shadows, his parents' faces seemed to change shape; their mouths opened and shut, and out came those troubling phrases. He thought, "There's going to be a war, and what will we do then?" He thought and thought, but there was no answer.<sup>246</sup>

In young Tao's representation, fear – either immediately felt or remembered – is associated to visual elements, representing the most unconscious and sensory side of a rational preoccupation for the unknown upcoming events. Senses are the protagonist of the following description of young Tao's anxiety as well, which appears as the authentic reproduction of the boy's emotional reaction to his mother's disappearance:

漸漸的，房子裡也暗了下來，陶文江竟然忘記了點燈。在外面天光的映襯下，門前出現了老陶半躺著的黑影，最後只剩下臉上的兩隻鏡片在隱約閃爍。陶文江也停止了踱步，佇立在堂屋的後窗前面，一動不動的，兩隻鏡片也在閃爍。父子倆背對背，一躺一站，默默無語，就這麼相持著。整個房子裡除了陶馮氏偶爾的叨嘮，就再也沒有別的聲音了。小陶甚至能聽見陶文江粗重的鼻息。過了一會兒，陶文江禁不住唉聲嘆氣起來，並開始跺腳。<sup>247</sup>

Gradually the house darkened too, but Grandpa Tao forgot to light the lamps. Tao's half-reclining shape could be seen against the remaining light in the sky outside, just the glasses on his face glinting in the gloom. Grandpa Tao stopped pacing and stood straight and tall at the back window, his glasses catching the remaining light too. Father and son, back to back, one on a chair, the other standing, silently waiting. Apart from Granny Tao's occasional muttering, there was not a sound to be heard in the house. Young Tao could even hear his grandfather's heavy breathing. Eventually groans and sighs erupted from the old man, and he began to tap his feet.<sup>248</sup>

The description based on sight and hearing shows the most physical aspects of young Tao's recollection. According to Casey, the memory of perceptions can be regarded as a manifestation of the memory of the body<sup>249</sup> which, according to Wang Yuehua, is the key of a child's relationship with the world, and a main theme of the novel.<sup>250</sup> An even more genuine representation of young Tao's

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<sup>246</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 50–1.

<sup>247</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 150.

<sup>248</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 151.

<sup>249</sup> Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study (Second Edition)*, 162. Further details on the concepts of "body memory" and "memory of the body" will be provided throughout the chapter.

<sup>250</sup> Wang Yuehua 汪躍華, "Fuxie zhi shu: Han Dong 'Zha gen' lun" 複寫之書：韓東《扎根》論 (A Duplicated Book: On Han Dong's Striking Root): 45.



feeling of distress is provided through a flashback in which the narrator describes the child's innocent fear of life:

小陶三四歲的時候，一次蘇群抱著他去電影院看電影。前方銀幕深處，一顆星球旋轉而來，上面布滿了醜陋的裂隙和坑窪。小陶被嚇得啼哭不止。 [...]

那顆撲面而來的星球自然是我們的地球了。的確，還有什麼比地球更恐怖的事物嗎？它呼嘯著，旋轉著，不由分說地砸了過來。小陶大約回憶起來到人世的一瞬，難道還有什麼比出生更令人絕望的嗎？據我所知，沒有了。<sup>251</sup>

One day, when young Tao was three or four years old, Su Qun took him to the cinema. In the depths of the silver screen at the front, a globe could be seen revolving, its surface pitted and cracked. Young Tao burst into floods of terrified tears. [...]

The celestial body was, of course, our Earth. And, in fact, what could be more frightening than that? It whizzed round and round, making a shrill sound and threatening to come crashing down. It probably reminded young Tao of the instant he came into the world. And, as I well know, there is no grimmer experience than being born.<sup>252</sup>

Young Tao's panic attack represents an inquietude that, despite the passing time, does never completely fade away. It continues to influence his adult life, reflecting the distress that every individual – including the narrator and the author – has to bear in order to face the difficulties life presents. Such a primordial and almost unconscious sense of terror finds its natural expression in corporal reactions. Indeed, the body is at once the necessary and sufficient condition for life and the ultimate safety valve to release the anxiety caused by its existence. Nonetheless, the link between the reminiscence of fear and the body is not limited to the depiction of the sensory experience of terror. The fact of being the instrument of perception of fear makes it also a potential triggering factor, as the spectre of physical pain brings the subject to be afraid of punishments. As a result, the memory of that feeling is sometimes the essence of a recollection, like in the following passage:

小陶的心裡不禁打鼓。他體格瘦小，在兩個年級中年齡也最小，而且不會幹農活，撿糞也完不成任務。可靳先生從來沒有懲罰過他。靳先生對小陶的態度有些敬而遠之，就像他根本不存在一樣。後者不免感到有些失落。他怕靳先生一旦翻臉，數罪併罰，那時，哭都來不及了。小陶對靳先生始終心存敬畏，又想和他親近，又有些害怕，一時不

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<sup>251</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 45–6.

<sup>252</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 46.

The prospect of being punished scared young Tao. He was small and slight and the youngest in the school too, no good at farm work, and he never produced his quota of manure. But Mr. Jin never punished him; in fact he kept his distance and almost behaved as if he did not exist. Young Tao was afraid that one day Mr. Jin might do an about-face and indict all his punishments in one go, and it would be too late to cry then. He went in fear of his teacher but still wanted to be close to him, so he did not know what to do.<sup>254</sup>

The description of young Tao's days at school is marked by fear, and the terror of physical pain constitutes the centre around which he builds his recollection.

The fear of aching is well represented in Dai Sijie's novel too. For example, it is what concerns Ma the most when the chief of the village accuses him of "spreading reactionary trash."<sup>255</sup> On deciding to sacrifice himself and face the consequences of his act alone to save his friend, his body cannot hide his anxiety:

En prononçant ces mots, je dus faire un effort pour refouler mes larmes. Je vis, dans les yeux de Luo, qu'il comprenait ce que je voulais dire : bien cacher les livres, au cas où je le trahirais sous la torture ; j'ignorais si je supporterais d'être giflé, battu, fouetté, comme c'était le cas, prétendait-on, au cours des interrogatoires dans ce bureau. Tel un captif abattu, je me dirigeai vers le chef, les jambes tremblantes, exactement comme, lors de mon premier combat d'enfant, je m'étais jeté sur mon adversaire pour montrer que j'étais courageux, mais que le tremblement honteux de mes jambes m'avait trahi.<sup>256</sup>

I had to fight back my tears as I spoke. The look in Luo's eyes told me that he had understood what I was trying to tell him: to keep the books well hidden in case I broke down under torture. I wasn't sure I would withstand the beatings and floggings that were said to be standard procedure during interrogations at the Security Office. My legs were quaking as I walked towards the headman. I felt as shaky as when I got into my first fight as a boy: I had lunged at my adversary in a show of bravery, but the shameful trembling of my legs had given me away.<sup>257</sup>

The physical reflex to fear – the shaking legs – triggers an analepsis that brings the protagonist's past self into the picture. This allows the narrator to complete his recollection with all the three perspectives ('experiencing I,' 'remembered I,' and 'remembering I'). The reaction of the body to terror connects all the subjects involved in the process, functioning as a *passe-partout* to bring back old memories.

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<sup>253</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 67.

<sup>254</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 69.

<sup>255</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 160.

<sup>256</sup> *ibid.*, 161.

<sup>257</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 120.

Once again, as connected to the body, senses play a fundamental role in the author's representation of remembered fear. In particular, eyes are described not only as an instrument able to record scary situations, but also as a weapon that can induce terror with the sole power of a look:

Je remarquai trois gouttes de sang dans son œil gauche, une grande et deux petites, toutes de la même couleur rouge vif. [...]  
De nouveau, les trois gouttes de sang de son œil gauche me firent peur.<sup>258</sup>

I noticed three blood spots in his left eye, one large and two small, all the same shade of bright red. [...]  
Again I was alarmed by the three spots of blood in his left eye.<sup>259</sup>

Penché au-dessus de l'eau, il y plongea les mains, et tâtonna dans la boue autour de lui, en aveugle. Ses yeux, qui avaient perdu toute expression humaine, saillants, comme gonflés, me faisaient peur.<sup>260</sup>

He bent over and plunged his arms into the water, groping around in the mud. The blank expression in his bulging eyes was disconcerting.<sup>261</sup>

The encounter of the frightening eye with the frightened one generates a clash that makes the moment memorable. The identification of the source of terror with the organ of its perception reproduces the link between the body and the feeling of fear, which is at the origin of the individual's process of recollection.

As opposed to young Tao's fear of life, in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* what captures the reader's attention is Ma's and Luo's fear of death. The harsh conditions in which the two are forced to work induce them to consider the precariousness of their existence. This illumination is particularly overbearing in difficult moments, such as when Luo's malaria brings him to undergo the villagers' barbarous healing methods:

Les deux branches claquaient dans l'air l'une après l'autre, en alternance. La flagellation, devenue méchante, creusait des sillons rouge sombre dans la chair de Luo. Celui-ci, qui était éveillé, accueillait les coups sans réaction particulière, comme s'il avait assisté en rêve à une scène où l'on fouettait quelqu'un d'autre. Je ne savais pas ce qui se passait dans sa tête, mais j'avais peur, et la petite phrase qu'il m'avait dite dans la galerie

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<sup>258</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 9–12.

<sup>259</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 3–5.

<sup>260</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 60.

<sup>261</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 43.

quelques semaines plus tôt me revenait à l'esprit, résonnait dans les bruits déchirants de la flagellation : « Je me suis fourré une idée dans la tête : j'ai l'impression que je vais mourir dans cette mine. »<sup>262</sup>

The branches whistled through the air as they swung, one after the other. The blows left livid weals on Luo's flesh but my friend underwent the flogging impassively. Although he was conscious, it was as though he were in a dream where it was all happening to someone else. I couldn't tell what he was thinking, but I was very anxious, and the remark he had made in the mine shaft a few weeks before came back to me, reverberating in the cruel whoosh of the branches: 'I've had this idea stuck in my head: that I'm going to die in this mine.'<sup>263</sup>

Unlike in *Zha gen*, in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, fear is not only represented from the protagonist's one-sided perspective. In fact, by quoting a western Jesuit's description of the village, the change in focalisation allows the narrator to amplify the educated youths' fear of the unknown territory of the Phoenix of the Sky:

« Le district de Yong Jing ne manque pas d'intérêt, notamment une de ses montagnes, qu'on appelle "le Phénix du Ciel", écrivit ce Jésuite dans son carnet de voyage. Une montagne connue pour son cuivre jaune, employé dans la fabrication de la monnaie ancienne. Au I<sup>er</sup> siècle, un empereur de la dynastie des Han offrit, dit-on, cette montagne à son amant, l'un des chefs eunuques de son palais. Lorsque je posai les yeux sur ses pics d'une hauteur vertigineuse qui se dressaient de toutes parts, je vis un sentier étroit qui se hissait dans les fissures sombres des rochers en surplomb, et semblait se volatiliser dans la brume. Quelques coolies, chargés telles des bêtes de somme de gros ballots de cuivre, tenus sur leur dos par des lanières de cuir, descendaient de ce sentier. Mais l'on m'a dit que la production de cuivre était en déclin depuis fort longtemps, principalement à cause du manque de moyens de transport. À présent, la géographie particulière de cette montagne a conduit ses habitants à cultiver l'opium. On m'a d'ailleurs déconseillé de mettre les pieds dans cette montagne : tous les cultivateurs d'opium sont armés. Après la récolte, ils passent leur temps à attaquer les passants. Je me contentai donc de regarder de loin ce lieu sauvage et isolé, obscurci par une exubérance d'arbres géants, de plantes grimpantes, de végétation luxuriante, qui semblait l'endroit par excellence où un bandit eût pu surgir de l'ombre et bondir sur les voyageurs. »<sup>264</sup>

'The district of Yong Jing is not lacking in interest,' the Jesuit commented in his notebook. 'One of the mountains, locally known as "the Phoenix of the Sky" is especially noteworthy. Famed for its copper, employed by the ancients for minting coins, the mountain is said to have been offered by an emperor of the Han dynasty as a gift to his favourite, who was one of the chief eunuchs in his palace. Looking up at the vertiginous slopes all around me, I could just make out a footpath rising from the shadowy fissures in the cliff towards the sky, where it seemed to melt into the misty air. I noted a small band of coolies making their way down this path, laden like beasts of burden with great

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<sup>262</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 46.

<sup>263</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 30.

<sup>264</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 20–1.

panniers of copper tied to their backs. I am told that the production of copper has been in decline for many years, primarily due to the difficulty of transport. At present, the peculiar geographic conditions of the mountain have led the local population to grow opium. I have been advised against climbing it, as all the opium growers are armed. After harvesting their crop, they spend their time attacking anyone who happens to pass by. So I content myself with observing from afar this wild and lonely place, so thickly screened by giant trees, tangled creepers and lush vegetation as to make one expect to see a bandit leaping from the shadows at any moment.<sup>265</sup>

On adopting a real foreigner's point of view, Dai Sijie assimilates the two protagonists' condition to that of a western pilgrim, identifying their initial fear as caused by their common sense of 'non-belonging' to the place. This feeling can be regarded as a consequence of the author's experience in exile, which generated a complex identity that can no longer be reduced to a single perspective or an only culture. Moreover, this move reflects the author's overall strategy to bring his story closer to the foreign readership for whom it was originally conceived,<sup>266</sup> providing a perspective to which a western reader can easily relate.

Dreams constitute a parallel dimension that often functions as a mirror on which the remembering subject's individuality is reflected. Consequently, the research of the most intimate aspects of the 'remembering I's' recollection can find enlightening results in the analysis of the characters' subconscious. Indeed, the depiction of dreams reveals hidden sides of subjectivity otherwise impossible to express, showing the author's willing to emphasise the most obscure details of his fictional representation of memory.

In *Zha gen* and in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, the way in which dreams are represented, and the function they have in the context of the plots, are representative of two different roles. In Han Dong's novel, the oneiric dimension is portrayed with warm colours, and almost idealised as a land in which the dreaming subject's desires can be fulfilled. According to every character's need, dreams and imagination constitute a shelter, a hope, or the dwelling place of nostalgia. For example, for both Hou Jimin and Su Qun, the

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<sup>265</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 11–2.

<sup>266</sup> McCall, "French Literature and Film in the USSR and Mao's China: Intertexts in Makine's *Au temps du fleuve amour* and Dai Sijie's *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*," 168.

psychological trauma caused by imprisonment brings them to move away from reality and seek some comfort in dreamlike thoughts. On deciding to commit suicide, Su Qun imagines herself succeeding, but having to face the shame of her choice of method, which would not be considered noble enough for his husband's judgement:

哭也無用，蘇群覺得得想點辦法。她想還是死吧。[...]計議已定，蘇群開始尋找機會。[...]

環顧這間住了二十多天的房子，蘇群第一次發現了屋頂上的那根房梁。上吊！想到此處，她不禁豁然開朗。

蘇群想象自己像孫廠長一樣地吊在房梁上，頭歪向一邊，嘴巴裡吐出血紅的舌頭。她仿佛聽見老陶痛心疾首地說：「阿群，你怎麼會變成這個樣子？像個農婦一樣，用褲帶把自己吊在房梁上 樣子真難看！要死也得換個方式啊！」

蘇群辯駁道：「這間房子裡又沒有刀，我不能割腕自殺。也沒有安眠藥，吃了以後就像睡著了一樣。也沒有煤爐，把門窗關好，就可以讓自己煤氣中毒。房子裡只有這根房梁，你讓我怎麼辦！」<sup>267</sup>

But crying was no use. Su Qun had to think of something else. She decided to take her own life. [...] Having made up her mind, she began to look for an opportunity. [...]

Looking around the room she had lived in for three weeks, Su Qun saw the ceiling beams for the first time. Inspiration struck. She would hang herself!

Su Qun imagined herself hanging from a beam like Sun the factory director, head askew, bright red tongue protruding. And she could almost hear Tao saying sorrowfully, "Qun, what a way to end up! Just like a village woman, hanging yourself from the beams by your belt. So ugly! At least find another way to kill yourself!"

"But there's no knife here for me to cut my wrists with, she protested. "And no sleeping pills that would make me look like I'd gone to sleep. No stove so that I could seal the doors and windows and gas myself. There's only the beams. What do you want me to do?"<sup>268</sup>

Despite the tragic theme, the woman's thoughts are reported in a humorous tone, reproducing the spontaneity of the dialogue between husband and wife, like it was taking place in a common, everyday context. In this way, the drama is veiled and what is emphasised is instead the positive outcome of her suicide attempt. A similar seek for pleasant feelings is expressed in Hou Jimin's dream of being back to his country village, reconciled with his son:

給小陶的這張小報上，有一首七律，寫的是侯繼民半夜做夢，夢中他又回到了下放的那個地方。侯繼民和他的兒子在小河裡游泳嬉戲，醒來時發現自己仍身陷獄中，於是侯繼民不禁淚水沾襟。可見，侯繼民家下放的地方也有小河，他也經常帶領兒子去河

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<sup>267</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 156–7.

<sup>268</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 157.

裡游泳。不同的是侯繼民的兒子學會了游泳，至少在侯繼民的夢中是這樣的。<sup>269</sup>

In one of the poems, Hou described a dream in which he returned to the place to which he had been banished. He and his son had gone to the stream to enjoy a swim. Awakening to find himself in his prison cell, Hou soaked his pillow in tears. He, like the Taos, had a river in which he swam with his son. The difference was that his son had learned to swim. At least in Hou's dream he had.<sup>270</sup>

In this case, the emotional clash between dream and reality produces an intense shock, which inspires the character to write a poem in order to anchor his memory on paper. The decision not to quote the literary work but to narrate it allows the author to add the background details, which would otherwise remain invisible to the reader. In this way, Han Dong highlights not only the contrast between prison and freedom, but also the effect it produces on the suffering subject. The scene represented in the dream is strongly idealised and becomes the portrait of an unexpected nostalgia for the place of banishment. Such feeling is shared by the protagonist as well, whose melancholy towards the village of Sanyu continues to haunt him even in adulthood:

夜裡，小陶做了一個夢，夢見自己回到了三余。地形完全變了，但老陶家泥牆瓦頂子卻一如當年。一家五口在裡面活動，幹著各自的事。油燈如豆，映照著頂上的望席。這樣的夢，小陶後來又做過多次。他總是千辛萬苦地回到了三余，回到那棟熟悉的房子裡。在夢中，老陶和陶文江總是活著的，就像他們生活在三余時一樣。隨著時間的流逝，小陶也已大學畢業，結婚生孩子了。但在夢中他始終是一個孩子。老陶和陶文江也年齡不變。小陶從沒有夢到過死去的父親、爺爺，沒有夢到過衰老的老陶。甚至，當小陶的年齡已經超過了下放時的老陶，在夢中後者仍然時值壯年，有著農民一樣的健壯的身板。時光被固定在某一時期。<sup>271</sup>

That night young Tao dreamed that he went back to Sanyu. The place looked completely different, but the Taos' old house, with its mud walls and tiled roof, was just as before. The five of them were inside, each going about his or her own business. The bean-sized flame of the oil lamp lit up the mailing that covered the rafters.

Afterward young Tao had the same dream a number of times. Each time he managed with great difficulty to get back to the village and to that familiar house. In the dream his father and grandfather were still alive, looking exactly as they had when they had lived in Sanyu. Time passed, and young Tao graduated, married, and had a child. But in the dream Tao and Grandpa Tao never grew older, and he was always a boy. Young Tao never dreamed that they were dead, nor did he dream of his father as a frail old man. Even when young Tao himself was older than Tao had been when they were banished to Sanyu, in his dream the latter was still in the prime of life, as hale and hearty

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<sup>269</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 147.

<sup>270</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 148.

<sup>271</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 232–3.

as any peasant. His dreams were frozen in a particular moment of time.<sup>272</sup>

The description of young Tao's recurrent dream represents the intersection between oneiric and mnemonic dimensions. The recollection of the time spent in Sanyu is the source from which his dreams are generated. Yet, it is also thanks to these repeated imaginary trips that the memory of young Tao's banishment is able to remain vivid. The mental connection he established with the place is the symbol of an inner change, that is in fact the real outcome of the process of 'striking root.' The scene is surrounded by an almost mystical atmosphere, given by the supernatural feature of the partial absence of time. This oneiric representation of Sanyu symbolises the immutability of young Tao's memories of the years spent in banishment. The bright side of those times still lives in his present, remembering him of the ground in which his mental roots will lie forever.

In *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, the oneiric dimension is constituted by a subconscious representation of fear more than by an idealised portrait of nostalgia. The content of Ma's dreams is completely fictional, yet their meticulous depiction endows those scenes with an extraordinary realism. For example, on having decided to steal Four Eyes' suitcase, Ma dreams of being caught by his mother. The shock of finding himself face to face with the woman brings him to flee in panic:

Un ou deux jours avant notre cambriolage, je rêvai que Luo me confiait le passe-partout. [...] J'ouvris la porte, mais à peine eus-je pénétré dans la maison que je restai cloué sur place. Quelle horreur : la mère du Binoclard était là, devant moi, en chair et en os, assise sur une chaise, derrière une table, et tricotait tranquillement. Elle me sourit sans mot dire. Je me sentis rougir à en avoir les oreilles brûlantes, comme un garçon timide à son premier rendez-vous galant. Elle ne cria ni au secours ni au voleur. Je bafouillai une phrase, pour lui demander si son fils était là. Elle ne me répondit pas, mais continua à me sourire ; de ses mains aux longs doigts osseux, couvertes de taches sombres et de grains de beauté, elle tricotait sans une seconde de répit. Les mouvements des aiguilles qui tournaient et tournaient, émergeaient, piquaient, repiquaient et disparaissaient, éblouissaient mes yeux. Je fis demi-tour, repassai la porte, la fermai doucement derrière moi, remis le cadenas et, bien qu'aucun cri ne retentît à l'intérieur, je décampai à une vitesse folle, et courus comme un dératé. Ce fut à cet instant que je me réveillai en

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<sup>272</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 237.



One or two days before the break in, I dreamed that Luo had entrusted the master-key to me. [...] I pushed open the double doors, but hardly had I stepped inside when I froze in horror: there, perched on a chair behind a table was Four-Eyes's mother, calmly knitting. She smiled, without speaking. I felt myself blushing and my ears turning red-hot, like a teenager on his first romantic assignation. She didn't seem in the least alarmed. I stammered something about a message for her son, to find out where he was. She went on smiling, but didn't reply. The knitting needles flew in her long bony fingers, and I noticed she had liver spots on the backs of her hands. I was mesmerised by the clicking needles twisting and turning at breakneck speed in, round, through, off to knit row upon row of stitches. I retraced my steps, slipped outside, shut the two halves of the door quietly behind me, and replaced the padlock. Although there was not a sound from the house, I turned and fled as if my life depended on it. It was at that point that I woke up with a start.<sup>274</sup>

The woman's repeated movements capture Ma's attention, and their extremely detailed description reproduces the effect of his momentary confusion, marking the rhythm of the narration. The reported dream functions as a potential premonition, by means of which the protagonist recollects the uncontrollable reflection of his fear on the most hidden side of his self. Nevertheless, the protagonist's fear is not merely represented in his dreams as a form of anxiety linked to a specific action. Sometimes, Ma's subconscious expresses a general distress concretised in a dreamlike scene, such as that of the Little Seamstress's death:

Il sembla me crier quelque chose, tourné vers le fond du précipice, mais je n'entendis rien. Je me précipitai vers lui, sans savoir d'où me venait le courage de courir sur ce passage. En m'approchant de lui, je compris que la Petite Tailleuse était tombée dans la falaise. Malgré l'inaccessibilité presque absolue du terrain, nous descendîmes en glissant à la verticale le long de la paroi rocheuse... Nous retrouvâmes son corps au fond, blotti contre un rocher où sa tête, complètement rentrée dans son ventre, avait éclaté. L'arrière de son crâne présentait deux grandes fissures, dans lesquelles le sang coagulé avait déjà formé des croûtes. L'une d'elles s'étirait jusqu'à son front bien dessiné. Sa bouche béante était retroussée sur ses gencives roses et ses dents serrées, comme si elle avait voulu crier, mais elle était muette et exhalait seulement une odeur de sang. Quand Luo la prit dans ses bras, le sang jaillit conjointement de sa bouche, de sa narine gauche, et d'une de ses oreilles ; il coula sur les bras de Luo, et se répandit goutte à goutte sur le sol.<sup>275</sup>

He seemed to be calling out, but I couldn't hear a sound. Inexplicably, I found the courage to run over the ridge towards him. As I drew near it dawned on me that the Little

<sup>273</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 114–6.

<sup>274</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 85–6.

<sup>275</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 145–6.

Seamstress had fallen over the side. In spite of the almost sheer drop we slithered down the steep slope to the bottom, where we found her body on a bed of rock. She had folded double on impact, and her head had cracked wide open. There were two great gashes in the back of her skull, around which the blood was congealing. One of the gashes extended all the way to her finely turned forehead. Her mouth was twisted, the lips retracted to expose pink gums and clenched teeth, as if she was screaming, but there was no sound, only the smell of blood. When Luo took her in his arms I saw that he too was bleeding. Blood poured from his mouth, his left nostril, and one of his ears; it trickled down his arms and dripped onto the ground.<sup>276</sup>

Once again, senses are the key of the author's description, which focuses in particular on sight and smell, emphasising the immediacy of the recollection. The reported dream is a subconscious re-elaboration of Ma's fear to cross the sheer passage to reach the Little Seamstress's village, and her death can be regarded as a symbolic representation of the failure of the two youths' great undertaking. Their ambitious project to break the rules and educate the girl is the cause of their perpetual anxiety, which in the protagonists' memory cannot be separated from the experience of re-education. A less macabre yet still scary consequence of Ma's interaction with the Little Seamstress is the dream in which he falls into temptation and has an intimate encounter with the girl:

Je me voyais alors détaché par cette fille aux ongles rouge vif, teints par la balsamine. Elle me laissait fourrer ses doigts dans ma bouche, et les lécher de la pointe de ma langue sinueuse et brûlante. Ah ! le jus épais de la balsamine, cet emblème de notre montagne coagulé sur ses ongles étincelants avait un goût douceâtre et une odeur presque musquée, qui me procuraient une sensation suggestivement charnelle. Au contact de ma salive, le rouge de la teinture devenait plus fort, plus vif, puis il se ramollissait, se muait en lave volcanique, torride, qui gonflait, sifflait, tournoyait dans ma bouche bouillonnante, comme un véritable cratère.

Puis le flot de lave entamait librement un voyage, une quête ; il s'écoulait le long de mon torse meurtri, louvoyait sur cette plaine continentale, contournait mes tétons, glissait vers mon ventre, s'arrêtait à mon nombril, pénétrait à l'intérieur sous les poussées de sa langue à elle, se perdait dans les méandres de mes veines et de mes entrailles, et finissait par trouver le chemin qui le conduisait à la source de ma virilité émue, bouillonnante, anarchique, parvenue à l'âge de l'indépendance, et qui refusait d'obéir aux contraintes strictes et hypocrites que s'était fixées le flic.<sup>277</sup>

Then I imagined myself being untied by the mountain girl with her crimson, balsam-stained nails. She allowed me to take her fingers in my mouth and to lick them lovingly. How sweet the taste was! The thick balsam juice coating her glossy nails gave off a musky fragrance, which roused my carnal instincts. Moistened by my saliva, the

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<sup>276</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 108–9.

<sup>277</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 195.

crimson dye blazed even more brightly, and then, like an erupting volcano, it softened and liquefied into a flow of hissing, red-hot lava sliding over my tongue, overflowing my lips.

Once unleashed, the lava rolled down my chin, forming rivulets on my bruised shoulders, lingering on the flat stretch of my chest, circling my nipples, snaking down towards my -waist, pausing at my navel before entering me and meandering through my veins and entrails, licking and probing its way to the seat of my manhood where the blood boiled, anarchic and self-willed, in total disregard of the tight restrictions which the secret agent had so mistakenly imposed upon himself.<sup>278</sup>

In this case, fear derives from the forbidden aspect of the relationship that can be read, in fact, as another representation of the illegal practice in which they are involved. The fascination for an unattainable object must coexist with the high costs of its potential conquest. The implied consequences are not only those imposed by the law, but also those deriving from the changes triggered in the subject's mind. The implacable thirst of forbidden literature is comparable to the desire for the unapproachable girl. The richness in physical details provided in the description of the dream emphasises the intimate involvement of the individual, whose mental stimulations are represented through the imagined movements of the body.

### 2.3. *Variations in Discourse*

As the main instrument of representation of a fictional recollection, language is the mirror of the authors' relationships with their memories, which they also represent through their lexical and stylistic choices. These features do not merely constitute a dimension external to the story, as language can play a most important role also as far as the plot itself is concerned. In both novels, the linguistic level is repeatedly intertwined with the narrated vicissitudes, affecting the characters' interactions as well as the voice's communication with the reader.

One of the most striking features of the language employed in both *Zha gen* and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is the use of politically connoted

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<sup>278</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 146.

expressions and lexical elements that reproduce the atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution. The attention to the political calibration of words constitutes a less spontaneous side of the mnemonic representation, and should be regarded as the result of memory conceived as an 'exercise,' namely the meeting between cognitive and pragmatic dimensions.<sup>279</sup>

Han Dong's account is richer in political language than Dai Sijie's. Indeed, the plot of *Zha gen* develops around the process of striking root in the countryside, which is a consequence of the policies promoted during the Cultural Revolution, whereas the focal point of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is forbidden literature and the yearning for unexplored feelings. *Zha gen* is strewn with the revolutionary lexicon, starting from the frequent quotations of slogans that accompany the descriptions of the characters' persecutions:

他們振臂高呼，喧囂聲響徹整個樓道，但口號內容已經完全不同了。之後，這伙人撕下老陶家門框兩側已經泛白的紅紙標語，刷上漿糊，貼上嶄新的標語。這嶄新二字不僅因為墨跡未乾，紙張血紅，根本差異還在於內容，用語已從“打倒”、“炮轟”、“火燒”、“油煎”變成“熱烈歡送”和“光榮下放”了。<sup>280</sup>

They punched the air and shouted until the whole building echoed, but this time the slogans were quite different from the time before. They tore off the faded red posters on either side of the Taos' door, brushed on some glue, and stuck on a brand new pair of posters. And this pair was completely different from the previous ones, not just in appearance (the ink still damp on the bright red paper) but also in content. Instead of saying, "Down with Tao," "Bomb him," "Burn him," or "Fry him," the new ones read, "Give the Taos a warm send-off!" and "The Taos are doing the Glorious Banishment."<sup>281</sup>

小陶來汪集的當天，農具廠就召開了批判孫廠長的大會。人死了還怎麼批判呢？照批不誤。主席臺前的旗杆上掛著一幅孫廠長的遺像，自然是倒著掛的，上面用紅顏料畫了一個叉。橫幅上寫著“批判混進黨內的走資本主義道路當權派貪污分子孫福全”。<sup>282</sup>

The day that young Tao arrived in Wangji Market, the whole factory was called to a meeting to criticize Mr. Sun, the factory director, even though the man was dead. A portrait of Mr. Sun hung from the flagpole on the rostrum, upside-down of course and with a big red cross drawn over his face. A banner overhead read, "Down with Sun Fuquan, corrupt member of the clique taking the party down the road to capitalism!"<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), 67–8.

<sup>280</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 2–3.

<sup>281</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 2.

<sup>282</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 101.

<sup>283</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 104.

The choice to quote directly the Red Guards' slogans endows the narration with a particular vitality, reproducing the pounding effect of politics typical of those times. Also, Han Dong further emphasises the origin of those tyrannies by quoting Mao Zedong's words as Tao Peiyi's source of inspiration for the education of his son:

老陶經常找小陶談話，總是不失時機地教育小陶。比如，在養狗的問題上灌輸節約的必要性。老陶說，他們要在三余打萬年樁，如此的鋪張浪費是不行的。毛主席號召深挖洞，廣積糧，不稱霸，一個國家尚且如此，作為一個家庭就更得這樣了。<sup>284</sup>

Tao talked a lot with his son and never lost an opportunity to educate him. For instance, he urged thrift in the treatment of their dogs. If they were to settle properly here, they could not afford to be wasteful and extravagant. Mao Zedong had called on everyone to "Dig deep tunnels, store foodstuffs everywhere, and not seek hegemony." If this applied to the whole country, it applied even more to individual families.<sup>285</sup>

Tao Peiyi's total devotion to Mao's teachings is symptomatic of the high ideological pressure the characters have to bear, reproducing the sense of inferiority probably experienced by the author himself during his banishment.<sup>286</sup> A peculiar feature of Han Dong's account is his overt acknowledgement of the specificity of the lexicon he employs, expressed through a warning he addresses to his readers:

"五一六"是一個神秘莫測、令人望而生畏的詞。和這個時代的另一些詞，如"一打三反"、"五湖四海"、"八二七"一樣，事過境遷，人們便不解其意了。這些詞，大都和數字有關。另一些數字無關的詞。如"上山下鄉"、"下放戶"、"可教育子女"，讀者朋友或可望文生義。而那些以數字標記的詞則成了考據學上的問題。詩人楊黎堅信"語言即世界"，也許他是正確的。一個奇特的謎一樣的世界（或時代）往往被奇特的謎一樣的詞語所籠罩、包圍和裝飾，或者就是這個世界（或時代）的特徵、本質和值得一提之處。另外一點，世界（或時代）越是奇特、扭曲和貧乏，其詞語的發明和生長就越是旺盛。"十年文革"（又是一個詞）期間便是如此。[...]因此讀者朋友在閱讀此書時，有必要準備一本專門的詞典，免得我煩加解釋（如何謂"右派"？"下放幹部"？"知識青年"？"赤腳醫生"？"革委會"？"武鬥"？"忠字舞"？"早請示晚彙報"？"五七幹校"？"造反派"？"走資派"？"紅衛兵"？等等等等）。<sup>287</sup>

"516" was one of the strange and frightening catch phrases common in that era, like the One Strike, Three Antis (campaign), the Four Corners (of the world), and the date

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<sup>284</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 91.

<sup>285</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 93.

<sup>286</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the influence of ideology in *Zha gen* see Codeluppi, "Mapping Ideology in Language Han Dong's *Zha gen* (Banished!) and Ma Jian's *Rou zhi tu* (Beijing Coma)."

<sup>287</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 143.

8/27, which, once past and gone, meant nothing to anyone. Most of them were linked to numbers. Other catch phrases without numbers-like (going) Up Mountains, Down Country (for banishment to the country), banished families, and educable youth – my readers will be able to figure out, but these number phrases present problems to anyone doing textual analysis. The poet Yang Li maintains that “Language is the world” and he is probably right. An essential characteristic of weird and baffling worlds (or epochs) is that they are enshrouded in, and embellished by, weird and baffling language. Furthermore, the more baffling, distorted, and culturally impoverished such a world or epoch, the more such invented language flourishes. The Ten-Year CultRev (another number phrase) is one such period. [...] My readers really need a specialist dictionary when they read it to save me the trouble of explaining expressions like rightist, banished cadre, urbling, barefoot doctor, revolutionary committee, armed struggle, loyalty dance, morning instructions, evening reportback, May 7 Cadre School, capitalist roader, and Red Guard.<sup>288</sup>

This passage not only clarifies the characteristics of the expressions used at the time of Cultural Revolution, but it also synthesises the interpenetration between the two dimensions of language and reality and, as a consequence, between language and the memory of a past reality. This indissoluble union incarnates Han Dong’s position on the matter of language, which for him is like a “ray of light” that allows us to “see” the world.<sup>289</sup> Words can go beyond the function of representation and become a dimension of meaning, the ultimate conjunction between the individual’s cognitive experience and his subjective verbalisation. Politically-connoted expressions are intrinsically related to the author’s memory of Cultural Revolution; therefore, that atmosphere seeps from the pages of his recollection in the same way it originally marked his mind.

In *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, the use of military lexicon is not emphasised by the voice and, in general, it plays a less important role in the context of the plot. Nonetheless, the language employed to describe the characters’ vicissitudes still carries the marks of the times it narrates. The peculiarity, in this case, is the fact that such terms, generated in a specific national context, appear in a French translation performed by the author himself, and are addressed to a western audience:

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<sup>288</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 143.

<sup>289</sup> Han Dong 韓東, “Guanyu yuyan, Yang Li ji qita” 關於語言、楊黎及其它 (On Language, Yang Li, and More), *Shige yuekan*, no. 3 (2003): 71–2.

Deux mots sur la rééducation : dans la Chine rouge, à la fin de l'année 68, le Grand Timonier de la Révolution, le président Mao, lança un jour une campagne qui allait changer profondément le pays : les universités furent fermées, et « les jeunes intellectuels », c'est-à-dire les lycéens qui avaient fini leurs études secondaires, furent envoyés à la campagne pour être « rééduqués par les paysans pauvres ».<sup>290</sup>

A few words about reeducation: towards the end of 1968, the Great Helmsman of China's Revolution, Chairman Mao, launched a campaign that would leave the country profoundly altered. The universities were closed and all the 'young intellectuals,' meaning boys and girls who had graduated from high school, were sent to the countryside to be 'reeducated by the poor peasants.'<sup>291</sup>

The foreign readership is not necessarily able to seize the cultural and historical implications hidden behind certain expression; therefore, Dai Sijie chose to attract the reader's attention with quotation marks and, occasionally, integrate the text with a brief explication of their meaning. Nonetheless, after dedicating a paragraph to the clarification of the historical context at the beginning of the novel, the narrator continues to make use of specific lexicon, marked by quotation marks:

Nous ne parvenions pas à deviner qui était ce veinard, bien qu'ayant énuméré les noms de tous les garçons, à l'exception des « fils de bourgeois », comme le Binoclard, ou des « fils d'ennemis du peuple », comme nous, c'est-à-dire ceux relevant des trois pour mille de chance.<sup>292</sup>

We had no idea who the lucky boy might be, although we went over and over the names of everyone we thought might be a candidate, excluding those of us who belonged in the three-in-a-thousand category because we were sons of bourgeois parents, like Four-Eyes, or sons of class enemies, like Luo and me.<sup>293</sup>

As in the case of *Zha gen*, the setting of the novel dictates the rules of lexical choices. Yet, even though Dai Sijie emphasises the foreignness of the terms he employs, the result is a harmonic integration in the French text, without the need of further paratextual apparatus. Therefore, paradoxically, the strangeness the individual feels *vis-à-vis* the lexicon typical of the times of his recollection is more evident in Han Dong's novel. The temporal gap that separates the author from

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<sup>290</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 13–4.

<sup>291</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 6.

<sup>292</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 104–5.

<sup>293</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 77–8.

the memory of his childhood is reproduced through the protagonist's unfamiliarity with certain 'adult's words.' Contrariwise, Dai Sijie's migration in terms of both space and language does not create the need for a strong intervention of cross-language and cross-cultural mediation. The background position occupied by politically-connoted language permits a smoother interaction between the two contexts and, consequently, the sensation of strangeness is less evident, and less perceivable by the reader.

As an instrument for human interaction, not only has language the power to connect people, but it can also serve as an indicator, highlighting the level of incommunicability between different categories of people. The two novels provide a striking example of the social clash experienced by the educated youths on being thrown from the city into the radically different context of the countryside. This contrast is represented first and foremost through the description of cultural differences such as customs, traditions and habits. Also, it is also reflected in the linguistic gap with which city dwellers have to cope in order to be successfully integrated in their new environment.

In *Zha gen*, mastering the Sanyu dialect constitutes a difficult challenge for the Taos. It generates a linguistic barrier that separates them from local people, and it is occasionally used as a pretext to make a mockery of the newly-arrived neighbours:

九月子說，一次蘇群對他說：「天氣真熱 啊！」九月子說：「熱哪，白天不熱，晚上熱。」蘇群說：「晚上熱，白天也熱。」

在三余話裡，熱與日同音。聽九月子說話的人嘿嘿地笑起來，他們對小陶說：「晚上日，白天也日。」

他們重複了很多遍，並且不懷好意地笑著，感到很滿足。最滿足的當然是九月子，因為這件事是他說出來的。蘇群說「晚上日，白天也日。」也是對他說出的。<sup>294</sup>

September was telling them a story about Su Qun. One day she had said to him, "It's so hot today!" To which he had said, "Not during the day, but it gets hot at night." And Su Qun had responded, "It's hot at night and hot by day too!"

In the Sanyu dialect, "hot" and "fuck" sounded the same, and the boys all burst out laughing. Looking at young Tao, they said, "Fuck at night, and fuck by day too!" Very pleased with themselves, they repeated this, laughing spitefully. September was the most pleased of all since he had made it up. They kept telling young Tao that Su Qun had

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<sup>294</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 60.



said, "Fuck at night, and fuck by day too!"<sup>295</sup>

Su Qun's unawareness of the homophony between the two words puts her in a vulnerable position and exposes her to the local boys' tyranny. Their behaviour reflects Sanyu villagers' hostility towards external people, perceived as 'foreigners,' and exemplifies the dividing power of local languages. Contrariwise, the Sanyu dialect does not represent such an obstacle for young Tao who, thanks to the mental flexibility typical of his age, manages to learn it perfectly. This passage allows him to complete his transformation into a country boy, and to become part of his new community.<sup>296</sup> Having 'migrated' from one dialect to another, young Tao experiences an identity shift as well, and sometimes he finds himself between two fires, as his fluency in Nanjing dialect brings him closer to unwelcomed acquaintances, such as his teacher Li:

有好幾次，她當著眾人的面拉著小陶的手，問長問短的，什麼「在三餘生活得習不習慣？」、「雜糧好不好吃？」、「爸爸媽媽身體好嗎？」等等，不一而足。問的時候，小李說的是南京話。小陶的回答盡量簡短，並且他說的是三余話。<sup>297</sup>

On several occasions, she grabbed his hand in front of everyone and bombarded him with questions like, "Have you settled in?" "How do you like the food?" "Are your mom and dad well?" And so on and so forth. She spoke to him in the Nanjing dialect. Young Tao made his answers as brief as possible and gave them in the Sanyu dialect.<sup>298</sup>

However, it also constitutes a common ground that brings him to bond with another teacher, Zhao Ningsheng, who will then turn into a true friend. For Zhao, Nanjing dialect represents an identity he is not willing to give up, and finds in the Taos a sort of safety valve for his nostalgia:

據小陶說，趙寧生講課時完全不用當地方言，也不講普通話。他堅持講南京話，不管學生們是否可以聽懂。趙寧生和小陶交朋友的一個理由是：終於可以和一個人講講南京話了。<sup>299</sup>

According to young Tao, when Zhao was teaching, he did not speak in the local dialect or even in standard Chinese. He persisted in speaking in the Nanjing dialect,

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<sup>295</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 62.

<sup>296</sup> *ibid.*, 100–1.

<sup>297</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 69.

<sup>298</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 71–2.

<sup>299</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 118.

regardless of whether the students could understand him. In young Tao, he had finally found someone with whom he could speak in the Nanjing dialect; hence their friendship.<sup>300</sup>

In short, the identification of the characters with their dialect is a constant feature in Han Dong's novel, and the emphasis on linguistic differences allows him to portray the feeling of strangeness caused by the traumatic migration. Nonetheless, the Sanyu dialect is not mythicized by the Taos as an unachievable goal for striking root. Indeed, although Tao Peiyi always shows great respect for his mission of integrating in Sanyu, he is still able to recognise the villagers' ignorance, revealed by their scarce linguistic competences:

他們奔走相告，說是林禿子帶了一群老婆坐飛機逃跑，周總理從小櫃子裡拿了一個“搗蛋”往天上一擲，飛機就爆炸了。林禿子摔下來，跌斷了三叉骨。三余人說的有鼻子有眼，雖說有些玄乎，但距事實真相也差不了多少。

林禿子自然是指林彪。他現在已經不是林副主席，而是林禿子。因為頭上無毛，是個禿頂，所以是林禿子。一群老婆是老婆葉群的誤傳。他們乘坐的飛機機型是三叉戟，三余人聽成了三叉骨。“搗蛋”即是導彈。老陶不無興奮地說：「老百姓的語言就是生動！」為這些有趣的說法，老陶家人關起門來偷偷地樂了很久。<sup>301</sup>

They gossiped excitedly about how Baldie Lin and his bevy of wives had fled in a plane and Premier Zhou had gotten out his 'troublemaker' and shot the plane down and it had burst into flames. Then Baldie Lin had tumbled out and broken his trident bone. They added their own touches, and the story became rather fantastic, but they were not too far from the truth of the matter.

Baldie Lin, of course, was Lin Biao, who was no longer deputy chairman of the Chinese Communist Party but Baldie Lin, a man with not a hair on his pate. He and his (only) wife, Bev, had left in a Trident plane, which the peasants had heard as "trident bone." And the "troublemaker" was a guided missile. Tao was quite excited when he heard them talking. "Ordinary people's language is so vivid!" He exclaimed, and the family secretly enjoyed these unusual expressions for a long time after.<sup>302</sup>

The news of Lin Biao's death reaches the villagers' ears in a distorted form, due to their misinterpretation of certain homophonies. Their twisted words sound humorous to Tao Peiyi, who cannot refrain from commenting "ordinary people's language." The author's self, divided between his urban origins and the country that adopted him, expresses his eternal duality in the linguistic contrasts portrayed in his recollection. Despite his genuine identification with the Sanyu

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<sup>300</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 121.

<sup>301</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 157.

<sup>302</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 158–9.

dialect, the tinge of irony towards the villagers' inferior education is symptomatic of the adult's critic look, as well as of his indelible educational background.

In *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* the linguistic gap between Ma and Luo and the mountain dwellers is not as wide, since in the novel they all share the same dialect, namely the Sichuanese. Nonetheless, the two youths' fluency in Mandarin Chinese is higher than the villagers', due to their urban origins. Mastering the official language gives them an advantage on mountain people, which they exploit according to their needs. When they make a deal with Four Eyes to collect old mountain songs in exchange for some of his books, they have to pay a visit to the old miller. In order to gain his respect, Ma decides to pretend to be a revolutionary cadre who does not understand Sichuanese dialect, and speaks only Mandarin Chinese:

Je lui dis bonjour, non pas en sichuanais, le dialecte de notre province, mais en mandarin, exactement comme dans un film.

– Il parle en quelle langue ? demanda-t-il à Luo d'un air perplexe.

– Dans la langue officielle, lui répondit Luo, la langue de Pékin. Vous ne connaissez pas ?

– C'est où, Pékin ?

Cette question nous donna un choc mais, quand nous comprîmes qu'il ne connaissait vraiment pas Pékin, nous rîmes comme des bossus. Un instant, j'enviai presque son ignorance totale du monde extérieur.

– Péping, ça vous dit quelque chose ? lui demanda Luo.

– Bai Ping ? dit le vieux. Bien sûr : c'est la grande ville du Nord !

– Il y a plus de vingt ans que la ville a changé de nom, mon petit père, lui expliqua Luo. Et ce monsieur à côté de moi, il parle la langue officielle de Bai Ping, comme vous l'appellez.<sup>303</sup>

I greeted him, not in the Szechuan dialect of our province, but in Mandarin, as if I were an actor in a film.

'What language is he speaking?' the old man asked Luo, puzzled.

'The official language,' replied Luo. 'The language of Beijing. Don't you speak Mandarin?'

'Where's Beijing?'

We were taken aback by his question, but when we realised he was speaking in earnest we couldn't help laughing. For a moment I almost envied him his complete ignorance of the outside -world.

'Peiping, does that ring a bell?' Luo asked.

'Bai Ping?' the old man said. 'Certainly, it's the big city in the north!'

'They changed the name twenty years ago, little father,' Luo explained. 'And this

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<sup>303</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 85.

gentleman here, he speaks the official language of Bai Ping, as you call it.<sup>304</sup>

The man's scarce knowledge of Mandarin reflects his general ignorance, and the linguistic gap between him and the two educated youths, although simulated, still functions as a filter that separates the two categories of people completely. Otherwise, differences in language are expressed throughout the novel by means of the different accents the characters have when speaking Sichuanese dialect, which function as a mark for immediate identification:

Je lui demandai, en imitant l'accent local, si elle avait logé la veille dans l'hôtel de la ville. Elle confirma d'un simple hochement de tête, puis reprit son tricot. [...] Je décidai de changer de prononciation.

– Voulez-vous goûter une grillade montagnarde ?

– Vous avez l'accent de Chengdu ! me cria-t-elle, et sa voix était douce et agréable.<sup>305</sup>

Using the local accent, I asked her if she had spent the night at the hotel in Yong Jing. She nodded her head in confirmation and resumed her knitting. [...] I decided to switch to another accent.

'May I offer you a taste of mountain roast?' 'You speak with a Chengdu accent!' she exclaimed. Her voice was gentle and melodic.<sup>306</sup>

As for the choice between official language or dialect, the decision to adopt the local accent or that of the city changes the way in which the character is perceived by his interlocutor. The use of Chengdu gains Ma the woman's trust, which results in a radical change of attitude. As a matter of fact, despite all the efforts the protagonists make juggling with linguistic variations, trying to identify with one or another social group, their identity is indissolubly linked to the city of Chengdu, and consequently to its dialect:

Soudain, une voix s'éleva dans mon dos, qui exagérait ridiculement l'accent de la ville :

– Ah ! La Petite Tailleuse, permettez-moi de faire la lessive pour vous.

Je rougis, comprenant sans aucune ambiguïté qu'on m'imitait, me parodiait, se moquait de moi. Je tournai la tête, pour identifier l'auteur de cette vilaine comédie : c'était le boiteux du village, le plus âgé du groupe, qui agitait un lance-pierres comme une baguette de commandement.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 63–4.

<sup>305</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 106.

<sup>306</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 78–9.

<sup>307</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 190.

The silence was broken by a jeering voice behind my back, exaggerating the city accent: 'Please Little Seamstress, let me wash your clothes!'

I blushed and turned my head to see who was parodying me: it was the village cripple, the eldest in the group. He was brandishing a catapult.<sup>308</sup>

The description of the character's hurt feelings shows the author's emotional bond with the boy's urban self, which can be regarded as a fragment of his memory of banished youth. As in *Zha gen*, also in Dai Sijie's novel the banished character's different origins are both the cause of their social marginalisation and a pretext for cultural elevation. At the end of the novel, in fact, the Little Seamstress's transformation into a city girl is completed with her attempt to imitate her mentors' accent:

– Sa nouvelle obsession, m'avait dit Luo, c'est de ressembler à une fille de la ville. Tu verrais, quand elle parle maintenant, elle imite notre accent.<sup>309</sup>

'Her latest obsession,' Luo continued, 'is to be like a city girl. Next time you hear her talk you'll find she's adopted our accent.'<sup>310</sup>

Like young Tao, whose process of striking roots is partly realised in his proficiency in the Sanyu dialect, the Little Seamstress seeks her new identity emulating the different intonation typical of the people from Chengdu. In both cases, the overcoming of the linguistic gap, and of the cultural and social distance it reflects, marks the accomplishment of the two characters' *Bildung*.

Unquestionable differences in the use of language are not the only markers of the characters' identification with particular categories of people. A less evident, yet not less effective, indicator of a person's social and educational background is the appropriation of a certain register. Indeed, the analysis of the characters' speeches reveals the authors' careful reproduction of the cultural differences, even in outwardly neutral contexts and situations.

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<sup>308</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 142.

<sup>309</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 221–2.

<sup>310</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 166.

In Han Dong's novel, the author's identification with the child of the family, young Tao, is evident due to his choice of focalisation. As a consequence of the author's choice to adopt a kid's point of view, the text provides multiple hints that reveal the presence of a young voice behind the narration, and that are concealed in register. Young Tao's naïve spirit is particularly manifest in passages focusing on episodes in which children act as protagonists, such as the one explaining their habits in taking care of their personal hygiene:

借著這一話題，我想嘍嗦一下老陶家人的擦屁股紙。[...]孩子們更是百無禁忌，拉完了，把屁股一擰，嘖嘖嘖喚來一條狗，肛門立刻被舔得乾乾淨淨。一次小陶也擰起屁股，呼喚小花，被陶馮氏瞅見，不免怒斥一通。<sup>311</sup>

While we're on the subject, I should tell you about the paper the Taos used to wipe their bottoms. [...] The children were even more uninhibited. When they had pooped, they would stick out their bottoms and call over one of the dogs to lick them nice and clean. [...]

Once young Tao stuck out his bottom too and called Patch. but he was caught by Granny Tao and given a thorough telling-off.<sup>312</sup>

This excerpt shows an informal use of language, which in this case is ascribable to a young person, namely the protagonist young Tao. Indeed, he often employs expressions typical of a low register such as *ca pigu* 擦屁股 (to wipe one's bottom), which emphasise the spontaneity of the narration at the detriment of the literariness of the text. Moreover, the use of the colloquial verb *choujian* 瞅見 (to see) endows the passage with an informal nuance, accentuated by the simpering repetition of the adjective *gan gan jing jing* 乾乾淨淨 (neat and tidy). The decision to adopt such a style reflects the author's identification with young Tao, and allows Han Dong to represent his memories through the text and by means of the same language in which they were originally acquired. Similarly, the language employed by the two protagonists in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is the image not only of their age, but also of their social rank. Ma's and Luo's use of swear words is not as recurring as it happens for other young people, and also

<sup>311</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 18.

<sup>312</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 18–9.

colloquial expression are employed with parsimony:

Je cherchai tous les jurons que je connaissais, mais je débordais tellement de colère, j'étais tellement à bout de nerfs, que je n'arrivai pas à en « gueuler » un.<sup>313</sup>

I racked my brains for something to say, but I was so enraged, so utterly stunned, that I couldn't come up with a suitably damning imprecation. I was shaking all over, and close to tears.<sup>314</sup>

– C'est une traduction de Fu Lei, murmura-t-il. Je reconnais son style. Il est comme ton père, le pauvre, un ennemi du peuple.

Cette phrase me fit pleurer. J'aurais voulu me retenir, mais ne le pus. Je « chialais » comme un gosse.<sup>315</sup>

'The translation is obviously by Fu Lei,' he murmured. 'I can tell from the style. He's suffered the same fate as your father, poor man: he's been labelled a class enemy.'

His remark brought tears to my eyes. I tried desperately not to cry, but could not help myself, and there I was, snivelling like a kid.<sup>316</sup>

The two passages show Ma's use of expressions belonging to the colloquial register, namely *gueuler* (to yell) and *chialer* (to snivel). The author's choice to emphasise them by means of quotation marks functions as a sort of justification for their appearance in the literary text, since their meaning is perfectly transparent for any general reader. The need for such a validation of the language employed by the narrative voice originates from the relationship the latter has with the main character Ma, who is in fact the narrator himself at a younger age. While Han Dong formally denies any personal connection between the voice and the characters, Dai Sijie's first-person narrator clarifies himself to be the protagonist of his recollection. Yet, paradoxically, the use of focalisation in *Zha gen* generates in a text permeated with a juvenile tone and informal expressions. Contrariwise, in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, the voice hints constantly at the experience he gained throughout the years, which puts him in a superior position compared to his previous self depicted in the story. This results into the author's continuous attempt to mediate between the voice's and his character's languages,

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<sup>313</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 191.

<sup>314</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 143.

<sup>315</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 215.

<sup>316</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 161.

as the register they use is not identical, and the above passage exemplifies the encounter between the two.





PART THREE:  
DISPLACING REMINISCENCES



## 1. Ha Jin and Ma Jian: Re-Narrations in Exile

The phrase ‘fictional *témoignage*’ may be regarded as an oxymoron since, as stated by Ricœur, a *témoignage* is something that “starts from declared memory, passes through the archive and the records, and ends with documental proof.”<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, a fictional work born from an author’s individual memory whose protagonist witnesses the same historical event the author recollects could fit in the category. Sometimes, the authenticity of the memory is not lost in fiction; on the contrary, it is enhanced. Narrative tools allow the authors to reflect their perceptions of the events of their stories, generating a complex work in which individuality, memory, history and fiction are inextricably linked to each other. Ha Jin’s *The Crazy* and Ma Jian’s *Rou zhi tu* work as fictional *témoignages* of a historical event that marked contemporary Chinese history: the 1989 Tiananmen Square student protests. While the Cultural Revolution addressed in the previous chapter constituted a long historical phase, these novels focus on an incident that is more punctual both in time and in place.

Ma Jian’s novel is an example of a meta-recollection, as the protagonist Dai Wei’s recollection of the days of the protests is embedded in the plot. Contrariwise, in Ha Jin’s work the act of remembering is performed mainly by

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<sup>1</sup> Ricœur, *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), 201.

the author, expressing himself by means of the narrative voice. Nevertheless, in both cases, these memories are fictionalised, since none of the writers was physically present in the square on June Fourth, them being situated at different latitudes.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, they indeed witnessed their subsequent impact directly, both in China and abroad, amplified by their condition of exile. Since spatial distance is what inspired these accounts, and what determined their features, this chapter will address the fictional representation of space, showing its multifold interconnections with the authors' memories.

### 1.1. *Voicing Freedom from Elsewhere*

Jin Xuefei 金雪飛, universally known by his *nom de plume* Ha Jin, was born in Jinzhou, in Northeast China, in 1956. During the Cultural Revolution, he enlisted in the People's Liberation Army and was sent to the Soviet border, where he spent several years conjugating military duty with the individual study of literature and politics. When universities reopened, Ha Jin was assigned to the English department of Heilongjiang University in Harbin. Subsequently, after completing the graduate school in Shandong University, in 1985 he left his native soil for the United States to pursue a PhD in American literature at Brandeis University. Despite his original plan to return to China after completing his doctorate, the massacre of June 4<sup>th</sup> made him decide to leave the P.R.C. for good. In 1997, due to his post-Tiananmen overt criticism, he was not able to renew his passport, and authorities never allowed him to cross Chinese borders again, even as an American citizen. Therefore, Ha Jin decided to become an exile *tout court*, not only to a foreign country, but also to a foreign language. He elected English as the primary tool for his literary creation, which is not limited to fiction but it

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<sup>2</sup> Ha Jin was already in the United States, whereas Ma Jian was in Beijing and took part in the protests. Nevertheless, he left before June Fourth to visit his ill brother and therefore he was not present during the night of the crackdown. Ma Jian 馬建, "Zixu" 自序 (Preface), in *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 2010), 13.

also includes poems and nonfiction. Currently, he is a professor at Boston University, where he directs the Creative Writing Program.

After his first collection of poems *Between Silences*,<sup>3</sup> which came out in 1990, Ha Jin started publishing fiction, initially by writing short stories, and later also novels.<sup>4</sup> *The Crazy* is Ha Jin's third novel, published several years after the award-winning *Waiting*.<sup>5</sup> Due to its explicit references to the Tiananmen facts, the Chinese censorship never authorised its translation and circulation in Mainland China, yet a Chinese edition was published in Taiwan two years after the original version came out.

The issue of language has always been a key feature of Ha Jin's writing and it is a widely debated theme in his essay *The Writer as Migrant*.<sup>6</sup> The author figures the migrant writer as an individual forced to struggle incessantly in order to survive the displacement which weakens him,<sup>7</sup> and the choice of writing in a foreign language does to some extent constitute a betrayal "that alienates him from his mother tongue and directs his creative energy to another language."<sup>8</sup> Yet, the author never believed in the one-way unconditioned love towards a country that turned against its own people. Ha Jin's decision to devote himself to writing in English has two origins: the fact of having become a persona non-grata to the Chinese government and the necessity of proving himself able to survive without the support of his own country.<sup>9</sup> The desire of freeing his literature from the political yoke has pushed him away from his mother tongue, but without discouraging him from keeping China and Chinese people as the main focus of his artistic creation. The intertwining of the mother tongue and the acquired

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<sup>3</sup> Ha Jin, *Between Silences*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> For the complete list of Ha Jin's works, see the dedicated section of the bibliography.

<sup>5</sup> Ha Jin, *Waiting*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999). The book won both the National Book Award for Fiction and the PEN/Faulkner Award.

<sup>6</sup> Ha Jin, *The Writer as Migrant*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>9</sup> Ha Jin, "Exiled to English," in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 123.

language creates a linguistic hybridisation that constitutes a distinctive trait of Ha Jin's novels. The author's instrumental use of language generates a Chinese-flavoured English, by which Ha Jin is able to fully convey fundamental elements of his native culture, without depriving his 'foreign' texts of the *Chineseness* intrinsic in his creativity.

Such unique combination of the two languages earned his writing the label of "translation literature,"<sup>10</sup> and the peculiarities of his style have been the object of a number of studies, published in Chinese as well as in western languages. For example, Hang Zhang's<sup>11</sup> and Gong Haomin's<sup>12</sup> papers explored the main features of his linguistic innovation, emphasising its connections with the author's identity, seen as the result of a process of cultural blending. Xiang Jiahao analysed in detail Ha Jin's writing as an example of the so-called *fanyishi xiezu* 翻譯式寫作,<sup>13</sup> while Yan Zhang took it as an example to show the value of hybridisation in language.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Isabelle Perrin analysed Ha Jin's biculturalism from a translational perspective, highlighting its implications in the process of translation to a third language.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the reflections of the author's double heritage are to be found not only in his language, but also in his depiction of the 'other side,' especially as he has the power to mediate between his native country and his foreign readership. Liu Jun investigated Ha Jin's work from a cultural perspective when addressing the peculiarities of first-generation

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<sup>10</sup> Haomin Gong, "Language, Migrancy, and the Literal: Ha Jin's Translation Literature," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 40, no. 1 (2014): 147–67.

<sup>11</sup> Hang Zhang, "Bilingual Creativity in Chinese English: Ha Jin's in the Pond," *World Englishes* 21, no. 2 (2002): 305–15.

<sup>12</sup> Gong, "Language, Migrancy, and the Literal: Ha Jin's Translation Literature."

<sup>13</sup> Xiang Jiahao 向佳豪, "Cong Ha Jin xiaoshuo de yuyan lai kan fanyi shi xiezu" 從哈金小說的語言來看翻譯式寫作 (Analyzing Translational Writing Starting from the Language in Ha Jin's Fiction), *Yingyu guangchang* 6 (2015): 1–3.

<sup>14</sup> Yan Zhang 艷章, "Wenhua fanyi zhong de 'tiaohe jianrong' — Ha Jin fei muyu wenxue chuanguo dui zhongyi wai de qishi" 文化翻譯中的'調和兼容' ——哈金非母語文學創作對中譯外的啟示 (Retaining Otherness in Cultural Translation: What C-E Translators Can Learn from Ha Jin's English Fiction Writing), *Waiyu jiaoxue lilun yu shixian FLLTP*, no. 3 (2010): 71–75.

<sup>15</sup> Isabelle Perrin, "Diglossie et biculturalisme littéraires: le cas de A Free Life, de Ha Jin" (Diglossy and Literary Biculturalism: the Case of Ha Jin's A Free Life), ed. Isabelle Génin, *Palimpsestes: Revue de traduction*, no. 24 (2011): 1–14.

Chinese-American writers<sup>16</sup> and the literary representation of Mainland China as it is re-evoked by means of migrant authors' memory,<sup>17</sup> whereas Ouyang Ting focused on Ha Jin's depiction of his motherland and the alterisations deriving from an exile's perspective.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the representation of the author's diasporic identity has been the object of Melody Yunzi Li's study,<sup>19</sup> which focused on its influence on the creation of Ha Jin's fictional characters, and of Codeluppi's article, dedicated to the issue of the author's resistance to his own country.<sup>20</sup> Ha Jin has also been investigated as a literary case by a few scholars. Among them, King-Kok Cheung analysed his interpretation of the concept of the migrant writer,<sup>21</sup> while his peculiar position of in the context of global literature has been explored by Lo Kwai Cheung,<sup>22</sup> who stressed the need for a rethinking of the concept of Chinese literature towards a broader perspective.

Due to the restrictions imposed by censorship, the Chinese contributions on Ha Jin's novels are focused on the works that can freely circulate in Mainland China. As a result, the articles including references to *The Crazyed* are scarce, and their scope restricted. For example, Chen Yanqiong's analysis underlined the

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<sup>16</sup> Liu Jun 劉俊, "Diyidai meiguo huaren wenxue de duozhong mianxiang — yi Bai Xianyong, Nie Hualing, Yan Geling, Ha Jin weili" 第一代美國華人文學的多重面向——以白先勇、聶華苓、嚴歌苓、哈金為例 (The Multifacetedness of the First-Generation Chinese-American Literature: the Case of Bai Xianyong, Nie Hualing, Yan Geling, and Ha Jin), *Changzhou gongxueyuan xuebao shekeban* 24, no. 6 (2006): 15–20.

<sup>17</sup> Liu Jun 劉俊, "Lun beimei huaren wenxue zhong de guguo lishi he geren jiyi" 論北美華人文學中的故國曆史和個人記憶 (On the History of the Motherland and Individual Memory in North-American Chinese Literature), *Jinan xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)*, no. 9 (2014): 89–94.

<sup>18</sup> Ouyang Ting 歐陽婷, "Liusan zuojia Ha Jin de zhongguo xiangxiang" 流散作家哈金的中國想象 (China as Imagination in Diasporic Writer Ha Jin's Writing), *Zhongnan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 20, no. 6 (2014): 266–70.

<sup>19</sup> Melody Yunzi Li, "Home and Identity en Route in Chinese Diaspora - Reading Ha Jin's A Free Life," *Pacific Coast Philology* 49, no. 2 (2014): 203–20.

<sup>20</sup> Martina Codeluppi, "Inner and Outer Resistance to China: The Pursuit of Freedom in a Free Life and the Dark Road," *TRANS*, no. 20 (2016): 1–12.

<sup>21</sup> King-Kok Cheung, "The Chinese American Writer as Migrant: Ha Jin's Restive Manifesto," *Amerasia Journal* 38, no. 2 (2012): 2–12.

<sup>22</sup> Lo Kwai Cheung, "The Myth of 'Chinese' Literature: Ha Jin and the Globalization of 'National' Literary Writing," *Working Paper Series*, 2004.



presence of Bakhtin's carnival factor in the novel,<sup>23</sup> yet without providing a full analysis of the themes addressed by the author. In the West, instead, the studies on *The Crazy* have been conducted from a broader perspective, although there is still a limited amount of them. Jerry Varsava investigated Ha Jin's depiction of Chinese State's monopolisation of the public sphere in post-Deng New China providing the socio-political setting of the novel.<sup>24</sup> With specific reference to trauma, Birgit Linder analysed the novel in a comparative perspective, as an example of the representation of madness in Chinese literature,<sup>25</sup> and in Belinda Kong's study,<sup>26</sup> *The Crazy* is investigated, together with Ma Jian's *Beijing Coma*, as one of the main literary responses to June 4<sup>th</sup>. Finally, Clara Juncker focused on the topographical dimension in *The Crazy*, analysing the metaphorical depiction of the different spaces in the novel.<sup>27</sup>

Ha Jin's bicultural and bilingual creativity constitutes a brilliant outcome of the internationalisation of contemporary Chinese literature, and the studies mentioned above contribute to locating him in its evolving multicultural fabric. As an articulation of global Chinese literature, Ha Jin projects in his writing not only the foreignness of the language he employs, but also the remoteness of his position in terms of physical space.

## 1.2. *A Self-Exiled Mind*

Ma Jian was born in Qingdao, Shandong province, in 1953. After the interruption of his education during the Cultural Revolution, he trained as a painter and as a

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<sup>23</sup> Chen Yanqiong 陳燕瓊, "Jianxi 'fengkuang' de kuanghuanhua tezheng" 淺析《瘋狂》的狂歡化特徵 (Carnival Factors in *The Crazy*), *Yilin*, no. 12 (2012): 77–83.

<sup>24</sup> Jerry Varsava, "Spheres of Superfluity in Ha Jin's China Fiction," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 26, no. 2 (2015): 128–49.

<sup>25</sup> Birgit Linder, "Trauma and Truth: Representations of Madness in Chinese Literature," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 32, no. 4 (2011): 291–303.

<sup>26</sup> Belinda Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Clara Juncker, "Placing Ha Jin: *The Crazy* and Nanjing Requiem," in *The West in Asia and Asia in the West: Essays on Transnational Interactions*, ed. Elisabetta Marino and Tanfer Emin Tunc, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015), 92–105.

photographer in Beijing. Subsequently, he traveled across China for three years as a photojournalist and during, his journeys, he gathered the material and the inspiration that allowed him later to write the collection of short stories *Liangchu ni de shetai huo kongkong dangdang* 亮出你的舌苔或空空蕩蕩 (Stick Out Your Tongue)<sup>28</sup> and the travel account translated in English as *Red Dust: A Path Through China*.<sup>29</sup> In 1986, after Deng Xiaoping started the opening reforms, Ma Jian left Mainland China for Hong Kong, where he met his current wife and translator Flora Drew. When the P.R.C. resumed its control on that area in 1997, he manifested his opposition by joining the writers' and artists' protest against the handover. In the end, he decided to leave again and, after first moving to Germany, he eventually settled down in London, where he still lives with his family. In 2017, he moved temporarily to Berlin as the guest of the year of the German Academy Exchange Service. Ma Jian's overt critics to the Chinese government stopped the free circulation of his books, which – apart from *Red Dust* – are all banned in Mainland China and their Chinese versions only published in Taiwan.<sup>30</sup> Ma Jian left his native country spontaneously, declaring himself in self-exile, at first occasionally flying back to Mainland China, where his first wife and his daughter lived. However, in 2011, after the publication in Taiwan of his highly political novel *Rou zhi tu*, Ma Jian's violent denunciation of the Tiananmen incident prevented him from re-entering China, and he became officially an exiled author.

Ma Jian did not grow as fond of English language as Ha Jin did. Although living in London for years, he is still not particularly confident with the foreign language, and Chinese has remained the only means of his literary expression.

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<sup>28</sup> The novel was published in Mainland China in 1987, but its circulation was soon forbidden by Chinese censorship. Its English translation came out almost twenty years later, in 2006. Ma Jian, *Stick Out Your Tongue*, trans. Flora Drew, (London: Chatto & Windus, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Ma Jian, *Red Dust: A Path Through China*, trans. Flora Drew, (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001). Two Chinese editions of the book are available. In the P.R.C. it was published as *Langji Zhongguo* 浪跡中國 (Wandering in China), while in Taiwan it came out one year later with the title *Feifa Liulang* 非法流浪 (Wandering Illegally).

<sup>30</sup> For the complete list of Ma Jian's works, see the dedicated section of the bibliography.

He chose to exile himself from Mainland China, but he could not cut ties with his mother tongue. As a result, for Ma Jian, English translation is not merely a passage necessary to reach a broader readership. The close collaboration with his translator has contributed to shaping his literary work until a perfect synchronism between the two artistic sources was attained. In fact, while Drew's translations played a central role in attracting the western audience – also due to their own literary value –, Ma Jian opened his literary creation to a direct cooperation with the translator. He concretely allows her to adapt and change the original Chinese texts to best fit the scope of the English versions, generating a phenomenon of 'overlapping of authorship'.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike the proliferation of interviews available on the web, the academic studies dedicated to Ma Jian's work are not many. Damgaard explored his literary production contextualising him among other Chinese exiled writers,<sup>32</sup> whereas Codeluppi's studies focused on his controversial relationship with Mainland China<sup>33</sup> and on the influence of ideology on his literary language.<sup>34</sup> His work *Rou zhi tu* has been the object of several studies, conducted from different perspectives. From a socio-cultural point of view, Loh analysed the novel as the author's epic portrayal of Neocolonial China,<sup>35</sup> while Shuyu Kong explored the protagonist's depiction as the expression of Ma Jian's intellectual nomadism.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, *Rou zhi tu* has been compared to Ha Jin's *The Crazy* in Belinda Kong's work as a representation of the Tiananmen incident in Overseas Chinese

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<sup>31</sup> Nicoletta Pesaro, "Authorship, Ideology, and Translation: The Case of Ma Jian," in *The Ways of Translation*, ed. Nicoletta Pesaro, (Venezia: Cafoscarina, 2013), 165.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Damgaard, *Visions in Exile. Inroads to a 'Counter-System' of Contemporary Chinese Literature* [PhD thesis, not published], Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Codeluppi, "Inner and Outer Resistance to China: the Pursuit of Freedom in a Free Life and the Dark Road."

<sup>34</sup> Codeluppi, "Mapping Ideology in Language Han Dong's Zha gen (Banished!) and Ma Jian's Rou zhi tu (Beijing Coma)."

<sup>35</sup> Lucienne Loh, "The Epic Spirit in Ma Jian's Beijing Coma and the 'New' China as Twenty-First-Century Empire," *Textual Practice* 27, no. 3 (2013): 379–97.

<sup>36</sup> Shuyu Kong, "Ma Jian and Gao Xingjian: Intellectual Nomadism and Exilic Consciousness in Sinophone Literature," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 41, no. 2 (2014): 126–46.

literature.<sup>37</sup> Finally, Pesaro analysed Ma Jian's novels from a translational perspective, emphasising the particularities of Flora Drew's translation as the reflection of the unique relationship between the original text and its universally known English version.<sup>3839</sup> Due to the ban imposed by Chinese censorship on Ma Jian's books, no academic studies concerning his oeuvre were retrieved from the national database.

The contributions mentioned above served as a background for the present study, in which Ma Jian's *Rou zhi tu* is compared to Ha Jin's *The Crazy*. Their narrations of the Tiananmen incident, conducted from a spatial perspective, create a connection between the places described and the authors' personal reminiscences.

### 1.3. *Recollections of June Fourth*

Ha Jin's *The Crazy* and Ma Jian's *Rou zhi tu* provide two different points of view on the theme of the Tiananmen Square protests, each of them dealing with this crucial issue in a unique and exquisitely personal way. While Ma Jian recounts in detail the organisation of the students' activities and the evolution of their crusade, Ha Jin portrays their repercussions on the academic environment and their effect on a previously disinterested mind.

*The Crazy* narrates the vicissitudes of Jian Wan, a young student who is assigned to look after his mentor and future father-in-law, professor Yang, after he had a stroke and started intertwining reality and delirium in his hospital bed. The story is set in the spring of 1989 and Tiananmen protests provide the background to the protagonist's struggle between the "disintegration and death of intellectualism in post-Mao period" and the challenges of his personal growth,

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<sup>37</sup> Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*.

<sup>38</sup> Pesaro, "Authorship, Ideology, and Translation: The Case of Ma Jian."

<sup>39</sup> Nicoletta Pesaro, "Between the Transnational and the Translational: Language, Identity, and Authorship in Ma Jian's Novels," *Cadernos de Tradução* 38, no. 1 (2018): 106–26.

“in classic bildungsroman style.”<sup>40</sup> The focus of Ha Jin’s novel is mainly on the academic life and on Jian Wan’s relationship with Professor Yang. However, the influence of the turmoil happening in Beijing, although miles away from where the novel is set, inevitably reached Shanning University, and their minds as well. While witnessing from a distance this historical event, Jian Wan absorbs the radiations of madness emitted by his teacher and starts questioning not only his own future, but also that of the whole country. The story reaches its climax with Jian’s decision to join the protest the day before the military crackdown, which he will see only partially, not being able to reach the square. Ha Jin’s approach to the recollection of the massacre provides a significant example of interpretation and personal elaboration, filtering an event he never personally experienced through the eyes of a young and disenchanting migrant student.

*Rou zhi tu* is narrated by Dai Wei, a PhD student at Beijing University who was shot in the head during the June Fourth crackdown and, consequently, fell into a coma. The story is split into two parallel dimensions: the comatose patient’s memory of the student’s protests and his everyday life during the following ten years. The author bravely recounts the events of the spring of 1989 in painstaking detail, overcoming the safer choice of allegory and metaphor often took by Chinese writers when dealing with Tiananmen facts, while providing an account of the pressures and controversies animating post-Tiananmen society.<sup>41</sup> The levels of narration are continuously switched, reproducing the fragments of memory as they flash before the patient’s closed eyes. Moreover, the reader’s attention is often drawn on Dai Wei’s body, which represents both the cage imprisoning his present self and the casket enshrining his reminiscences. The protagonist gradually re-discovers his forgotten last days as a normal human being, while he senses the substantial social changes taking place around his iron bed. Ma Jian’s work is a milestone in Tiananmen fiction, which skilfully overlaps

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<sup>40</sup> Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*, 92.

<sup>41</sup> Shuyu Kong, “Beijing Coma by Ma Jian,” *MCLC Resource Center Publication*, August 2009, <http://u.osu.edu/mclc/book-reviews/beijing-coma/>.

a detailed account of the students' death with the description of China's ascending economic power in the new millennium.<sup>42</sup>

The comparable features of *The Crazy* and *Rou zhi tu* are not limited to the representations of their common theme. They also have in common the physical dimension to which their re-narration of the facts of 1989 is firmly anchored. First and foremost, the pivotal role attributed to the body and to the ill mind, seen as the corporal responses to such a chaotic period of Chinese history. Secondly, the indissoluble link between the protagonists' accounts and the physical places in which they occur. It is precisely on the basis of space delimitation that the following analysis will be conducted. The spatial distance that separate Ha Jin and Ma Jian from their motherland is reflected in their articulated representation of space. Its exploration provides a new interpretation of the novels, seen as particular concretisations of a Chinese literary space extended at a global level.

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<sup>42</sup> Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*, 184.

## 2. Tiananmen History through Memory

Before getting to the heart of the analysis, the different meanings of 'space' and 'place' should be clarified with reference to this specific study. Merleau-Ponty illustrates how Kant tried to identify space with a sort of ethereal entity, thanks to which things are able to position themselves in the real world.<sup>43</sup> In line with this logic, space is here considered as a medium, and analysed in its interconnections – either tangible or abstract – with Ha Jin and Ma Jian fictional memories. The first part of the analysis will be dedicated to the authors' interpretation of narrative space, implied in the novels' narratological frameworks. The second part will address the different codifications of Tiananmen spatialities as perceived by the remembering individual. Finally, the third part will explore the linguistic level, revealing how the authors' lexical choices reflect their transnational identities.

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<sup>43</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Phenomenology of Perception), (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 281–2.

## 2.1. Narration in Situ

The authors and their fictional *témoignages* of 1989 are paradoxically bound together by distance, both spatial and temporal. The authors' fictional recollections of the Tiananmen incident required imaginary journeys down their memory that resulted in complex narratives, not only from the perspective of time, but also from that of place. The spatial movement that marked the authors' lives influenced their accounts in terms of temporal structure, modality, and narrative spaces.

Besides the natural lapse of time separating them from the spring of 1989, physical displacement too was an issue that influenced their recollection at different levels. Due to their status of exiled writers, Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's novels were written from outside China and, in Ha Jin's case, also the incident itself has been lived – and remembered – from the United States. This distance not only provided them with “a creative space of sheltered from political censorship,” and with “an alternative perspective on literature, identity, and their homeland,”<sup>44</sup> it also influenced the narratological features of the novels directly. In particular, the architecture of their temporal structure reproduces the authors' displacement, translating remoteness into scattered time.

The first distinction to consider is the one between what Genette called the time of the ‘thing told’ and the time of the narrative or, in other words, the “time of the signified” (*temp du signifié*, the story time) and the “time of the signifier” (*temps du signifiant*, narrative time).<sup>45</sup> *The Crazyed* and *Rou zhi tu* do not share an equal story time, although the description of the last phase of the protests - from Hu Yaobang's death to the military crackdown - refers to the same time frame: April to June, 1989. Although this final stage represents the core moment of the narration in both novels, the two authors choose different temporal paths to

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<sup>44</sup> Kong, “Ma Jian and Gao Xingjian: Intellectual Nomadism and Exilic Consciousness in Sinophone Literature,” 127.

<sup>45</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 77.



reach their narrative climax. In order to properly investigate the authors' use of time as a tool to disclose their memory step by step, the analysis of narrative 'anachronies' is here particularly useful. This Genettian category, which comprehends the various types of discordance between story and narrative,<sup>46</sup> allows to detect and compare the representation of the Tiananmen's protests as they are intertwined with the main characters' vicissitudes.

The temporal structure of Ha Jin's novel follows the chronological order of the story, and the narration is carried out after the end of the story it narrates, although the length of the delay is not specified. The novel begins with the news of Professor Yang's stroke, and the incipit marks clearly the temporal coordinates of the narration:

Everybody was surprised when Professor Yang suffered a stroke in the spring of 1989. He had always been in good health, and his colleagues used to envy his energy and productiveness - he had published more than any of them and had been a mainstay of the Literature Department, directing its M.A. program, editing a biannual journal, and teaching a full load.<sup>47</sup>

This temporal coordinate can be defined as "first narration" (*récit premier*), that is to say, the starting point, the temporal level of narrative that defines anachronies.<sup>48</sup> The author often makes use of anachronies to evoke a variety of episodes of the past throughout the text and within a wide range of time. Particularly interesting are those related to the protests, as they play a central role in the shaping of the recollection. The beginning of the most intense phase of the students' movement – after Hu Yaobang's death – is first mentioned in the novel in Meimei's letters, which the protagonist Jian Wan reads with several days of delay. This particular form of anachrony is named 'analepsis,' since it evokes an event that happened earlier in the story:<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, 79.

<sup>47</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 90.

<sup>49</sup> Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 40.

May 6, 1989

Dear Jian,

I hope my father is getting better. Tell him that I'll be back as soon as I'm done with the exams. Actually at this moment it's unclear whether the exams will be given on time. Things are in chaos here. Hundreds of students from my school have gone to Tiananmen Square a few days in a row to join the students of other colleges already there. Together they demand a dialogue with the premier. I just heard that the exams might be postponed. If so, I'll come home sooner.<sup>50</sup>

The letter contains a supposition about facts that are probably already happened by the time the information is received, so Ha Jin builds a 'prolepsis' – evoking in advance an event that will take place later<sup>51</sup> – within the analepsis. The time gap reproduced in this way emphasises the deferral of information, which is a direct consequence of the protagonist's displacement. The similarity with the author is blatant. Indeed, it is highly likely that Ha Jin himself, while studying in the United States at the time of the protests, felt the distance separating him from his compatriots. Therefore, the delay of information he expresses might be the fictional transposition of a real situation, and Jian Wan's unawareness of the facts a reproduction of Ha Jin's psychological state.

The issue of displacement is also perpetuated in the following references to the evolution of the protests in Tiananmen, which are narrated through the news broadcasted by 'The Voice of America.' Once again, the delay in information is inevitable, as it is a natural consequence of the distance interposed between the events happening in the square and the foreign media narrating them. It is only in the last part of the novel, when the protagonist decides to join the protests in Beijing, that this time gap is eventually neutralised. The penultimate chapter is a reconstruction of Jian Wan's journey towards a square he never reaches, built on his description of the events occurring during the night between June Third and June Fourth. From this point on, the narration continues smoothly, shadowing the protagonist's movement and reporting his impressions as he enters the capital and throws himself into chaos.

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<sup>50</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 157.

<sup>51</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 82.

In Ma Jian's text, the temporal structure is completely different, and the narration proceeds along two different time scales at the same time. The first one follows the memory of the comatose patient Dai Wei, with its first narration being the spring of 1989, while the second one coincides with the narrative time, and it is located in the following years until his awakening in 1999. The novel switches systematically from one temporal dimension to the other, alternating the description of Dai Wei's feelings and physical reactions and his memories of the past, the majority of which regard the final phase of the student' protests. The shift is marked by short paragraphs isolated from the main text, printed in a different font in the Chinese edition and in italics in the English one. In these excerpts, the author alternates descriptions of Dai Wei's psychophysical condition in the form of interior monologue, and images from *The Book of Mountains and Seas* – the protagonist's favourite literary work, often recurring throughout the narration. The longest of these passages describes the moment Dai Wei regains the control of his body and it is reported twice, at the beginning and at the end of the novel:

透過砸開的陽臺，你看到了被推倒的老槐樹正慢慢的站起，這就很明顯地預示，從今天清晨，生活將變得嚴肅了。 [...]

現在你的血液熱了，眼輪匝肌不斷收縮，很快，眼球積滿了淚水。唾液由齶腺湧到軟齶，你不由自主地把喉頭和軟齶碰在一起，是口水沿喉管流下去，停止了多年的氣管軟骨隨著就動了。

很快，生物電像條光帶在腦神經中樞接通了神經元群。

這不再是靠回憶活下去的一天了，也不是迴光返照。<sup>52</sup>

*Through the gaping hole where the covered balcony used to be, you see the bulldozed locust tree slowly begin to rise again. This is a clear sign that from now on you're going to have to take your life seriously. [...]*

*Your blood is getting warmer. The muscles of your eye sockets quiver. Your eyes will soon fill with tears. Saliva drips onto the soft palate at the back of your mouth. A reflex is triggered, and the palate rises, closing off the nasal passage and allowing the saliva to flow into your pharynx. The muscles of the oesophagus, which have been dormant for so many years, contract, projecting the saliva down into your stomach. A bioelectrical signal darts like a spark of light from the neurons in your motor cortex, down the spinal cord to a muscle fibre at the tip of your finger.*

*You will no longer have to rely on your memories to get through the day. This is not a momentary flash of life before death.<sup>53</sup>*

<sup>52</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu 肉之土* (Beijing Coma), 14; 610.

<sup>53</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, trans. Flora Drew, (London: Vintage, 2014), 1–2; 666.

The double employ of this passage inscribes the narration in a memory circle that begins and ends with the reconquest of consciousness. The extremely accurate description – enriched with medical terms – emphasises the immediacy of the narration by addressing the reader directly through the use of the pronoun *ni* 你 (you). The effect is an almost perfect temporal correspondence between narrative and story.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, these sections constitute a third temporal dimension, fragmented and scattered throughout the text, which fulfils the function of either taking the reader back to contemporaneity or sending him in a remote and fantastic dimension. This last example is the case of the quotations from *The Book of Mountains and Seas* that often serve as prophecies for the forthcoming events:

在大種國的東郊  
人們叫它歐絲之野  
有個變成蠶的女子跪在樹上  
她不停地唸著：歐絲，歐絲.....<sup>55</sup>

*In the east corner of the Land of Big Heels is a place called the Cocoon Wilderness. A woman who has turned into a silkworm kneels on the branches of a tree there, muttering 'Cocoon, cocoon' under her breath.*<sup>56</sup>

再往北二百里      是空桑山...山上有野獸      身形似牛      毛紋如虎  
牠吼叫聲像人在呻吟      這野獸一出現      天下則有災難.....<sup>57</sup>

*On the Mountain of the Empty Mulberry Tree two hundred li north lives a wild beast that resembles an ox, but has the markings of a tiger. Its roar sounds like a human groaning in pain. Whenever this beast appears, a disaster will befall the land.*<sup>58</sup>

This continuous zigzag can be regarded as a symptom of a mental displacement, the consequence of a perpetual division between several different times: an idealised past, a biological contemporaneity, a painful memory, and a sedated present. The author found himself travelling back and forth during the years of the student' protest, first to Hong Kong, then to Beijing, then to the United

<sup>54</sup> Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, 36.

<sup>55</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 209.

<sup>56</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 224.

<sup>57</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 563.

<sup>58</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 612.

Kingdom, and his psychological condition was probably similar to the effect he recreated in his novel. Naturally, everyone of these separate time scales contains its own anachronies. Nevertheless, the most remarkable feature of the temporal structure it is the mastery of the parallel dimensions, which endows the novel with a unique and multifaceted blend of confusion, tension, inebriation, and contemplation. Nevertheless, this effect of 'crossing distances' refers to both the mnemonic effort of reminiscing and the physical movement of travelling, experienced by Ma Jian in real life, and by Dai Wei through imagination.

The peculiarity of the authors' position vis-à-vis their narration is not only expressed by means of the temporal structure reproducing the gap between the present and their memories of June Fourth. Also the features of 'mood' (*mode*)<sup>59</sup> reveal a connection with Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's exiled identities. The authors' diverse 'points of view' influence the modalities of narration, which reflect the different foci of the two novels.

Ha Jin's account of 1989 develops by means of Jian Wan's narration of the facts happening in the capital and of their repercussions on his provincial everyday life. Tiananmen protests have an important role in the context of the novel, but the description of the democracy movement is minimised and limited to the 'narrative of events' (*récit d'événements*).<sup>60</sup> Since the protagonist cannot see with his eyes the evolution of the movement, its salient steps are only summarised in the accounts he gets from other sources. As a result, the protests are evoked in their most diegetic representation, by recounting the news already filtered through the media:

That night my roommates and I listened to the Voice of America again. Martial law had been declared in Beijing. Thousands of hunger-striking students had occupied Tiananmen Square for days; some of them began to collapse and were being shipped to hospitals to be put on IVs. We could hear the sirens of ambulances screaming in the background. It was disturbing to learn that several field armies had assembled on the outskirts of Beijing, ready to implement martial law.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 183.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, 186.

<sup>61</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 213.

Together with the temporal gap separating the protagonist from the facts happening in the square, this double narration reproduces also the migrant's state of isolation, which is both physical and mental. The multiplicity of factors influencing the flow of information merges with the author's personal memory, resulting in a narrativised reminiscence able to convey the individual's inner response to external upheaval. Contrariwise, Ma Jian chooses to describe the vicissitudes preceding the military crackdown by reporting the long dialogues between the students, which played a vital role in the organisation of their movement, through the extensive use of the 'narrative of words' (*récit de paroles*):<sup>62</sup>

軻希不顧一切地擠過去抓起話筒：「誓死保衛天安門廣場，我們要與人民英雄紀念碑共存亡！……」他就激動得暈倒在保鏢懷裡。

陳迪拿過話筒：「呼叫救護車和氧氣筒，柯希同學又——暈過去了。」

「……同學們，不許睡覺，準備好毛巾，不要亂走，不要離開廣場中心。」老傅雖然不是總指揮，關鍵時他還是老大哥，能穩定軍心。<sup>63</sup>

Ke Xi snatched the microphone from the student's hands and said, 'We will defend Tiananmen Square to the death! We will stay on the Monument to the People's Heroes until the bitter end ...' He worked himself up into such a frenzy that he fainted into the arms of his bodyguard.

Chen Di took the microphone. 'We need an ambulance and an oxygen canister. Ke Xi has fainted again.'

'Fellow students, you must stay awake and make sure you all have wet towels to hand,' Old Fu announced. 'Don't leave the Monument. Everyone must stay in the centre of the Square.' His calm, mature voice eased the mood.<sup>64</sup>

The reported speech allows the author to give free rein to the students' voices, creating a mimetic effect that almost projects the reader onto the scene. The hotchpotch of opinions generates a disquieting ambience, transmitting the feeling of confusion and dismay that the author is likely to have experienced during his stay in the capital in the spring of 1989.

Although the two novels develop through different degrees of diegesis, they show similar features as far as focalisation and perspective are concerned.

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<sup>62</sup> Genette, *Figures III* (Figures III), 189.

<sup>63</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 573.

<sup>64</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 623–4.

Both *The Crazy* and *Rou zhi tu* are narrated from an inner point of view, with the narrator being the hero of the story. Consequently, the focalisation is predominantly internal, as though to show the authors' spiritual bond with the object of their fictional recollections. Jian Wan's and Dai Wei's eyes provide the most direct means by which Ha Jin and Ma Jian can recount their versions of the June Fourth massacre, emphasising the emotional dimension implied in the intellectual effort of remembering.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the focalisation is hardly constant, and the alterations in point of view modulate the protagonists' personal involvement with the stories. This reaches its maximum level with the direct transposition of the hero's thoughts, as in the case of Dai Wei's recollection of the moment when he was shot:

我多次在大腦的枕葉部分如倒帶機器般往過去搜尋；那個死亡之謎。可惜，經歷總是停在子彈擠進腦裏之前。由於最後的所見還未判斷，更來不及記憶，末尾還是那個像媚媚的白色連衣長裙姑娘，槍響之後……<sup>66</sup>

Inside my parietal lobes, I often rewind to those last moments before I was shot, trying to work out what I saw. But a few seconds before the bullet hits my head, there is a loud gunshot and the image of a girl, in what looks like A-Mei's white skirt, falling to her knees. Then the scene breaks off.<sup>67</sup>

The vividness with which the protagonist recalls the intense instants in the streets reflects the author's mental connection with the atmosphere he experienced in those days. The details of his depictions convey clear images that seem to come from real memories and, therefore, concentrate on the students' actions. By contrast, Ha Jin's narration of Jian Wan's thoughts mostly focuses on the people and the events marking his campus life, and the description of the protests is left in the background:<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), 36.

<sup>66</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 390.

<sup>67</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 424.

<sup>68</sup> The author stated that the first version of the novel was completed in 1988, before the Tiananmen incident, therefore it did not contain any reference to the student protests. Nevertheless, the impact of June Fourth was so strong that he felt the need to change the plot to tell the story of the democracy movement. Ha Jin 哈金, "Yi ben xie le shi duo nian de xiaoshuo" 一本寫了十多年的小說 (A Novel that Took more than Ten Years to Write), in *Fengkuang* 瘋狂 (The Crazy), (Taipei: Shibao chuban gongsi, 2004), 299–300.

*Cheap nostalgia, I thought. Yesterday is always better than today, but who in their right minds can buy this kind of sentimental stuff?* If he had been in his senses, Mr. Yang would have commented on the poem in more analytical language. Clearly his mind could no longer engage the text penetratingly, and his critical discourse had partly collapsed.<sup>69</sup>

Jian Wan's concerns are primarily about his feelings and those of people he loves. It is only when he starts to project on the democracy movement his desire for a personal revenge that the protests begin to capture his attention concretely. Nevertheless, even when the protagonist decides to set off for Beijing, he never reaches the square and Tiananmen remains a virtual symbol of rebellion.

The distinction between Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's approaches is a consequence of the space separating the heroes' minds and the protests, and it also reflects the real distance between the two authors and their memories of 1989. In both cases, the narrator turns the reader's attention towards a particular aspect of the movement – the one the author regards as the most striking. For Ma Jian, being in Beijing at that time meant personally breathing the atmosphere of that mayhem. This caused the need to reproduce as much as possible the individual's participation in his fictionalised account. However, the wish to convey the subject's involvement coexists with the desire to criticise the historical incident, and his act of denunciation is realised through detailed descriptions that recreate a cinematographic effect. As a result, in the passages devoted to the students' dialogues, the protagonist's feelings give way to the apparent neutrality of the historical reconstruction. Instead, Ha Jin's strategy is more coherent in its purpose to communicate the detachment separating the narrator from the events taking place in the square. Even when, on arriving in Beijing, the content of the letters Jian Wan received from his girlfriend is borne out of the facts, the protagonist's eyes are only able to describe the scene through a visual depiction that conveys a general sense of coldness and estrangement. Indeed, the Tiananmen square protests left a stain of blood on Chinese contemporary history,

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<sup>69</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 124.



and they also changed the everyday life of students and civilians, in China as well as abroad. Ha Jin's peripheral vision of the political turmoil is generated by his condition of exile, therefore, the connection between the author and the hero is evident. The Tiananmen Square protests affect Jian Wan's personal life, yet without concretely striking him, in the same way they caused the author's banishment from his own country, although he never concretely took part in them.

As fictional *témoignages* of the Tiananmen Square protests, the two novels are extremely punctual in space. Nevertheless, as individual memories, their spatial structure extends far beyond the square, and reveals a personal subtext behind the story. In *Story and Discourse*, Chatman states that space is the dimension containing the 'existents' of a story, and distinguishes between 'story-space' and 'discourse-space.'<sup>70</sup> Comparing *The Crazyed* and *Rou zhi tu*, the gap in terms of textual space dedicated to the recollection of the protests is glaring, since the former is much more concise than the latter,<sup>71</sup> and the different foci of the two novels extend further this disparity. Nevertheless, some similarities between the two reveal the authors' analogous aim in portraying a multifaceted picture of China ten years before the turn of the century. 'Space,' considered from a narratological point of view in its literal acceptance, defines the "textual spatialities" of a literary work, including a number of levels beyond the intuitive concept of "setting."<sup>72</sup>

Generally speaking, *Rou zhi tu* is richer in 'places' than *The Crazyed*, despite the fact that – being a comatose patient – Dai Wei is not able to move. The narration of the present is normally carried out from his iron bed, but it is intertwined with other spaces, the most relevant of which is that of his memories. His recollections concern mainly the student protests and, therefore, they are

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<sup>70</sup> Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, 96.

<sup>71</sup> The 2002 edition of *The Crazyed* has 323 pages (in English), whereas the 2010 edition of *Rou zhi tu* has 621 pages (in Chinese).

<sup>72</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, "Space," in *Handbook of Narratology*, ed. Peter Hühn et al., (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 420–1.

usually set in Beijing University and in Tiananmen Square. However, the occasional appearance of unexpected memory flashes takes the reader not only back in time, but also far in space, for example when he recounts of the trip to Guandong and then to Wuxuan county he took with his girlfriend A-Mei. On that occasion, Dai Wei talks to Dr Song, who tells him about the atrocities that place witnessed in the past:

這兒可不是因為餓，是因為恨才吃人。

敵人槍決了不就完嗎，為什麼要吃呢。

中央訂了二十三種人是敵我矛盾，當時又是文革武鬥階段，把那二十三種人吃了就證明對敵人是刻骨仇恨了，開始是殺完一批人都要煮上一大鍋人肉混在豬肉裏吃，後來要處死的人太多了，就主要吃大腿肉、心和肝，還有腦子和男人的生殖器。<sup>73</sup>

'Here in Guangxi it wasn't starvation that drove people to cannibalism. It was hatred.'

I didn't know what he meant.

'It was in 1968, one of the most violent years of the Cultural Revolution. In Guangxi, it wasn't enough just to kill class enemies, the local revolutionary committees forced the people to eat them as well. In the beginning, the enemies' corpses were simmered in large vats together with legs of pork. But as the campaign progressed, there were too many corpses to deal with, so only the heart, liver and brain were cooked.'<sup>74</sup>

Ma Jian exploits the spatial span to denounce the crimes committed in the country during the Cultural Revolution, using a second-degree narrative that strengthens the impact of the witness. Extra "story space"<sup>75</sup> creates the occasion for speaking out what Dai Wei is not able to reveal. Moreover, the quotations from *The Book of Mountains and Seas* expand further the borders of the narration, stimulating in the reader allegorical associations with the reported facts. Finally, in one occasion the narrative instance, Dai Wei, is able to move concretely and to continue his recollection from Sichuan, where his mother takes him for treatment. In a small hospital on the Qingcheng Mountain, a qigong healer tries to make Dai Wei access his forgotten memories and, therefore, the change in geographical coordinates becomes the trigger for a temporal journey inside his own brain,

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<sup>73</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 65.

<sup>74</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 62.

<sup>75</sup> Ryan, "Space," 422.

which translates into new spaces for the reader. Moreover, like the trip to Guanxi, this trip provides an occasion to report a criminal fact:

她手抓報紙又離開床沿把橘子皮扔出了窗外，一陣橘子皮味畫過了空氣。  
.....看，人心變得這麼黑，二十四名臺灣遊客，在千島湖玩，全被當地人推到船倉裏澆上汽油燒死了，媽呀。<sup>76</sup>

She picks up the newspaper lying on the bedside table and tosses the tangerine peel out of the window. A strong citrus scent darts through the air.

'Listen to this. Twenty-four Taiwanese tourists were killed in a pleasure boat on Qiandao Lake. Local bandits raided the boat, robbed the tourists of their money, locked them inside a cabin then set fire to the boat to destroy all evidence of their crime. How can people be so evil? ...'<sup>77</sup>

Ma Jian's extension of narrative space allows the reader to explore contemporary China beyond Beijing and to understand the depth of the author's social critic. The journeys Ma Jian made across the country strengthened his "nomadism,"<sup>78</sup> providing him with the consciousness necessary to condemn openly the turpitudes of contemporary Chinese history.

In *The Crazy*, the narrative space is mainly divided between Shanning, where the protagonist lives, and Beijing, which at first he explores through Meimei's letters and subsequently sees with his own eyes. However, in one occasion the narrative instance has the chance to explore a third place, namely when Jian Wan is sent to a country village to collect information about a colleague's political past on behalf of the Party Secretary. Unlike Ma Jian, Ha Jin does not exploit this opportunity to express an explicit political discontent, focusing instead on the poverty of the area visited by Jian Wan. When he is offered a cup of local tea by the member of the Party in charge of answering his inquiry, the protagonist is suddenly struck by the effects of the imbalance of national economy:

Many years ago I had heard that some country people were so poor they couldn't afford to drink tea, so they used some kinds of tree leaves instead. Call this stuff whatever

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<sup>76</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 405.

<sup>77</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 440.

<sup>78</sup> Kong, "Ma Jian and Gao Xingjian: Intellectual Nomadism and Exilic Consciousness in Sinophone Literature," 129.

you liked, it wasn't tea at all. They might just want the brown color from pomegranate leaves. Heaven knew whether this substitute actually could help relieve internal heat like real tea. What astonished me was that never had I imagined that people here still drank this stuff. I tried to appear unsurprised, lifting the mug and taking a sip again.<sup>79</sup>

To reinforce his statement on the problem, he also points out episodes of affluent people making profits from ordinary people's desperation:

My head started throbbing as I tried to control myself. Never had I thought these people could be so poor that for a pittance of one yuan they'd allow that director to do whatever he wanted with them.<sup>80</sup>

Although his criticism is less straightforward than Ma Jian's, Ha Jin too introduces other narrative spaces to attract the reader's attention towards less known realities. The author's effort responds to the mission he had envisaged for himself of being the spokesman to the world on behalf of Chinese people.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, his comparison is not limited to the P.R.C., since the western world is included in the novel as the symbol of a prosperity unattainable for a professor like Mr Yang. After travelling to Canada for a conference, he tells his colleagues the favourable conditions that academics enjoy in Vancouver and in the United States:

The previous winter when he returned from Canada, he had told me excitedly that scholars in the West lived more like intellectuals. [...] He explained to me over Dragon Well tea, "My friend at UC-Berkeley said that in his department nobody coveted the chair, because they all wanted more time for research. Contrary to this darned place" – he knocked the dining table with his knuckles as if it were the desk in his office. "Here to become a departmental chair is the pinnacle of a professor's career. But scholars abroad are more detached and don't have to be involved in politics directly, so they can take up long-term research projects, which are much more valuable and more significant. Oh, you should have seen the libraries at Berkeley, absolutely magnificent. You can go to the stacks directly, see what's on them, and can even check out some rare books."<sup>82</sup>

The exaltation of the West as an idyllic environment for intellectual growth underlines the excessive political pressure existing in China. The employ of a foreign space to describe domestic issues provides easier access for the foreign

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<sup>79</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 242.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, 249.

<sup>81</sup> Ha Jin, *The Writer as Migrant*, 3–4.

<sup>82</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 104–5.

readership Ha Jin addresses. In this case, western narrative spaces not strictly related to the plot are a consequence of the author's transnational identity, although his westernised look on China has cost him accusations of self-orientalism.<sup>83</sup>

## 2.2. *Places and Spatialities*

With the subject as the main focus of the analysis, the bodily dimension is the first to explore since the 'first space' an individual occupies is indeed that of their own body. Nevertheless, Casey quotes James J. Gibson to point out that people "do not live in 'space,'" <sup>84</sup> but in places.<sup>85</sup> Hence, the analysis will then address the representation of spatial dimension in the authors' recollection of 1989 to investigate the individual's relationship with specific places in the light of their diasporic experience. Finally, it will drift away from the physical level and explore space as an ideal entity, whose abstract representations constitute the link with the remembering subject's individuality.

Body and space are inextricably linked to each other. As pointed out by Casey, any knowledge of a place begins with the individual being bodily in a place.<sup>86</sup> It is only by being in a place as – and in – his body that the experiencing subject is able to interact with the space surrounding him.<sup>87</sup> In other words, individuality needs to be embodied in order to be. Nevertheless, not only does the body constitute the translation in terms of space of one's subjectivity, but it also represents the first and only channel the subject has to explore and feel the

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<sup>83</sup> Liu Jun 劉俊, "Diyidai meiguo huaren wenxue de duozhong mianxiang — yi Bai Xianyong, Nie Hualing, Yan Geling, Ha Jin wei li" 第一代美國華人文學的多重面向——以白先勇、聶華苓、嚴歌苓、哈金為例 (The Multifacetedness of the First-Generation Chinese-American Literature: the Case of Bai Xianyong, Nie Hualing, Yan Geling, and Ha Jin): 20.

<sup>84</sup> James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, (New York: Psychology Press, 2015), 27.

<sup>85</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), xiii.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, 46.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, 50.

space surrounding him. Without the body, any awareness or experience of space would be impossible. Therefore, in this interaction between the subject and space, the body is at once “the necessary and the sufficient condition of being (located) *here*.”<sup>88</sup> The inevitability of the body paves the way for the analysis of its representation as a means to convey the individual’s perceptions in the present. In this respect, Merleau-Ponty emphasises that the body has a spatiality of its own, it is itself “a space of expression”<sup>89</sup> of one’s willing. Consequently, the transposition of the image of the body in the literary text can be explored as a reflection of the individual’s inner self and of its perceptions.

Being the point of depart of any knowledge, the body is also the cradle of memory, which is engraved in our brain and transmitted through our synapses. Casey stated that “[t]here is no memory without body memory,”<sup>90</sup> meaning that the reminiscences of the body itself, such as automatised movements, are the first form of recollection. However, “body memory” does not coincide with the “memory of the body,” which refers instead to “those manifold manners whereby we remember the body as the accusative object of our awareness.”<sup>91</sup> Such double interaction makes the body at once the subject and the object of reminiscences. Its depiction can therefore represent both the recollection of the narrator’s perceptions and the evocation of his memories as they are related to the bodily dimension. In the following analysis, the body will not be addressed as the proof of the biopolitical power exerted by Post-Mao China, like in Belinda Kong<sup>92</sup> and David Wang<sup>93</sup> have masterfully done with reference to the Tiananmen massacre. Instead, it will be held as a spatial entity and as a vehicle through which the individual is able to explore the space and the memories

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<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, 51.

<sup>89</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Phenomenology of Perception), 171.

<sup>90</sup> Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Second Edition), 172.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, 147.

<sup>92</sup> Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*.

<sup>93</sup> David Der-wei Wang 王德威, “Ma Jian de ‘Rou zhi tu’” 馬建的《肉之土》 (Ma Jian’s Beijing Coma), in *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 2010), 5–9.

pervading it. Due to the fictional nature of the narrated recollections, the involvement of the bodies in the novels cannot be considered a direct consequence of proper traumatic memory.<sup>94</sup> However, the description of human perceptions constitutes a reproduction on the physical level of the authors' remembered feelings.

The body is a central element in Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's narrations, serving the function to express the recollection of the authors' feelings as well as their perception of the remembered space. Both *The Crazyed* and *Rou zhi tu* open with a reference to the body, which introduces the reader to the plot. The first lines of *The Crazyed* set the context of the narration, introducing Mr Yang's condition and identifying him with the image of an ill person.

Everybody was surprised when Professor Yang suffered a stroke in the spring of 1989. He had always been in good health, and his colleagues used to envy his energy and productiveness [...].<sup>95</sup>

After a few pages, the description of the professor's body follows, emphasising how the communicative power of Mr Yang's corporeity strikes the narrator to the extent of playing a pivotal role throughout the whole novel:

Mr. Yang stirred a little and opened his mouth, which had become flabby since the stroke. He looked a few years older than the previous month; a network of wrinkles had grown into his face. His gray hair was unkempt and a bit shiny, revealing his whitish scalp. Eyes shut, he went on licking his upper lip and murmured something I couldn't quite hear.

[...] His eyes, cloudy with a web of reddish veins, moved toward the center of the low ceiling, stopped for a moment at the lightbulb held by a frayed wire, then fell on the stack of Japanese vocabulary cards on my lap.<sup>96</sup>

Jian Wan spends most of the spring of 1989 assisting his professor in the hospital, and his memory of those times are therefore directly related to his illness. Ha Jin chooses to stress the protagonist's peculiar perspective by providing a visual

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas Fuchs, "The Phenomenology of Body Memory," in *Body Memory, Metaphor and Movement*, ed. Sabine C. Koch et al., (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012), 17.

<sup>95</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 3.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, 7.

description of Mr Yang's body that captures the reader's attention. The professor's physical decay marks the development of the plot until his death, in the final portion of the novel,<sup>97</sup> and it is precisely from the depiction of that body that Jian Wan begins his narration.

Similarly, at the beginning of *Rou zhi tu*, Ma Jian provides almost immediately the description of Dai Wei's body at the exact moment when he begins to regain sensibility towards the surrounding environment, even though he is still in a coma:

那自己也如父親般橫陳在病床上了，那麼我——戴偉，是他去世了留下的活種子，還有，我正在記憶？那就是還活著，或者是從往事廢墟中忽隱忽現地消逝？不，我聽見了聲音，而死亡是寂靜的，我從潛伏狀態中又返回來了。

裝死.....這小白菜盡是沙，怎麼吃啊。母親不知對著誰說話。

那是說我了，而我就在一個聲音近處，誰的乙狀結腸正在運動著，叫著。

.....嘴呢？臉呢？感覺眼前昏黃一片，但感覺不到病房氣味了，似乎還有嬰兒哭叫，在遠處，陣陣灌暖水瓶的聲音也時有時無。<sup>98</sup>

I'm lying on a hospital bed, just as my father did before he died. I'm Dai Wei – the seed that he left behind. Am I beginning to remember things? I must be alive, then. Or perhaps I'm fading away, flitting, one last time, through the ruins of my past. No, I can't be dead. I can hear noises. Death is silent.

'He's just pretending to be dead ...' my mother mumbles to someone. 'I can't eat this pak Choi. It's full of sand.'

It's me she's talking about. I hear a noise close to my ear. It's somebody's colon rumbling.

Where's my mouth? My face? I can see a yellow blur before my eyes, but can't smell anything yet. I hear a baby crying somewhere in the distance and occasionally a thermos flask being filled with hot water.<sup>99</sup>

This passage, explicitly focusing on the physical dimension, is located in the first page of the actual plot, which begins after a short excerpt, separated from the rest of the novel. Despite both authors choose to start their narration with the description of a body, their approach is different. In the first case, professor Yang's body is described as an object in the narrator's visual field, a part of the surrounding space. In the second example, instead, the narrator describes his first impressions after regaining awareness of his own body, due to the recovery of

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<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, 260.

<sup>98</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 16.

<sup>99</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 3.



his sensibility. The body represents the only channel through which the protagonist, although incapable of real interaction, can experience the outer world.

Either seen as an object in the protagonist's visual field or as an 'embodiment' of the narrating subject, the body is in both cases the key-point in the representation of the characters' memory. The focus on the physical dimension is reconfirmed at the end of both novels, almost as inscribing Jian Wan's and Dai Wei's stories in a circle that begins and ends on the characters' bodies. In Ha Jin's novel, the craziness symbolised by the professor, displayed concretely through his damaged brain, by the end of the novel comes to affect the protagonist himself. Overwhelmed by the reaction of the government to the student protests, Jian Wan decides to turn his back to both his past and his future, and start a new life with a different identity. The radical change of perspective is underlined by the depiction of its visible consequences, namely the decision to transform his physical appearance in order to fit a new state of mind:

Done with the fruit, I noticed a barbershop at a street corner in the northwest, its signboard displaying a scissors, a hair clipper, and a pot of steaming water. With a black-headed match I burned my student ID, then rose to my feet and went to the shop to get a crew cut. Without my long hair my face would appear narrower, and from now on I would use a different name.<sup>100</sup>

The protagonist's body constitutes the materialisation of his identity, and the changes Jian Wan makes on his aspect function as a benchmark of his evolution. At the beginning of the novel, the body at the centre of the subject's memory is mainly Mr Yang's, reflecting the protagonist's devotion to his mentor. Yet, Jian Wan's path towards inner growth makes him gradually conscious of his individual value, and this change is symbolised by the shift of attention towards his own body.

In *Rou zhi tu*, the cyclical dimension is made even more explicit by the repetition of the excerpt recounting Dai Wei's reawakening at the beginning and

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<sup>100</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 323.

at the end of the novel. The passage is one of the portions of text scattered throughout the novel that break up the narration of the plot by providing sudden and detailed descriptions of the protagonist's physical condition:

現在你的血液熱了，眼輪匝肌不斷收縮，很快，眼球積滿了淚水。唾液由齶腺湧到軟齶，你不由自主地把喉頭和軟齶碰在一起，使口水沿喉管溜下去，停止了多年的氣管軟骨隨著就動了。

很快，生物電像條光帶在腦神經中樞接通了神經元群。

這不再是靠回憶活下去的一天了，也不是迴光返照。

那麼，這是一個開始.....<sup>101</sup>

Your blood is getting warmer. The muscles of your eye sockets quiver. Your eyes will soon fill with tears. Saliva drips onto the soft palate at the back of your mouth. A reflex is triggered, and the palate rises, closing off the nasal passage and allowing the saliva to flow into your pharynx. The muscles of the oesophagus, which have been dormant for so many years, contract, projecting the saliva down into your stomach. A bioelectrical signal darts like a spark of light from the neurons in your motor cortex, down the spinal cord to a muscle fibre at the tip of your finger.

You will no longer have to rely on your memories to get through the day. This is not a momentary flash of life before death. This is a new beginning.<sup>102</sup>

The focus on the anatomic process emphasises the centrality of the bodily dimension, which has for Dai Wei a special value because, being a comatose patient, his body is the only space he can actively occupy. The impossibility to take action in the space and time in which Dai Wei lives brings him to repeatedly concentrate on the only movements he can feel, those of his own body. During his coma, Dai Wei's life and memories have been dictated by his biological rhythm, and waking up implies a traumatic change of course. The uncertainty for the future is emphasised by the question that, added at the end of the repeated paragraph, closes the novel:

那麼，離開這肉牢，你又能到哪裡.....<sup>103</sup>

But once you've climbed out of this fleshy tomb, where is there left for you to go?<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu 肉之土 (Beijing Coma)*, 14; 610.

<sup>102</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 1-2; 610.

<sup>103</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu 肉之土 (Beijing Coma)*, 610.

<sup>104</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 666.

The reawakening sets him free from his “fleshy tomb,” yet, the repetition of the description suggests a paradoxical reluctance to leave his prison, confirmed by the last sentence. His consciousness must move back to the real world and accept a new state of affairs, like Ma Jian himself had to do when he felt compelled to leave his country.

In Ha Jin’s and Ma Jian’s narrations, the body is represented in all its fragility and perishability, stressing the physiological implications of the characters’ mental condition. Jian Wan’s recollection of the days in the hospital is closely linked to the evolution of Mr Yang’s health, which determined the rhythm of his life at the time. Similarly, Dai Wei’s memories of the transformations of Chinese society that he, being immobilised on a bed for a decade, experienced passively are inevitably connected to the changes taking place in his own body. In both cases, the images of the hospitalised patients emphasise the subjects’ subjugation to their disability. The most evident characteristic of these depictions is rawness, due to the copious details aiming to tickle the reader’s sensibility. Indeed, the natural consequences of being a stalling living body are rather unpleasant in terms of sensory perception. The authors provide nitid depictions of these aspects of the bodies, which convey a striking sense of reality. Both authors often choose to portrait corporal functions, revealing their characters’ vulnerability:

My goodness, he was wobbling like this because of a full bladder. [...] I removed the blanket, raised the upper part of his body to make him sit up, and separated his legs. From under the bed I took out the flat enamel chamber pot and placed it between his thighs. Then I untied his pajamas, but he couldn’t urinate in such a posture. [...] Having pulled down his pajamas, I helped him spread his legs so that a little cave was made under his abdomen. Thank heaven, he wasn’t too fat; a larger belly would have left no room for the chamber pot. I moved the mouth of the pot under his penis, which had shrunk almost to nothing, a mere tiny knot with a ring of foreskin. Then slowly came out a line of yellowish urine, falling into the pot with a dull gurgle.

I had helped him relieve himself before, which hadn’t bothered me much, but today somehow it revolted me. I felt giddy and like vomiting. Look at this mountain of anomalous flesh! Look at this ugly, impotent body!<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 222–3.

In the scene in which Jian Wan helps Mr Yang relieving himself, the narrator lingers over the details of the movements of the man's body throughout the whole process. The focus on the visual dimension underlines the distance between the narrator and the professor's body, which is portrayed as an almost inanimate component of space. The narrator concentrates on the mechanical difficulties, without showing any empathy with the suffering man. The only reaction he displays is the revulsion against his professor, who in this scene is seen as a "mountain of flesh" rather than a human being. On the contrary, Dai Wei's perspective is always internal, since the disgusting body inhabiting his memory is his own. Moreover, because of his impossibility to see, he concentrates on other senses rather than sight. For example, he often refers to the urine he feels on the skin and through smell and that has become an omnipresent companion of his:

母親能把掉在床底的尿布拿走就好了，那是她上星期丟下的，雖然快乾了，依舊是堆尿鹹味。嗅覺恢復以後我最討厭自己的臊味。<sup>106</sup>

If only my mother would remove the incontinence pad that's fallen underneath my bed. She dropped it last week. Although it's almost dry now, I can still smell the urine. Ever since my sense of smell returned, the odours that have repelled me the most have been my own.<sup>107</sup>

小客廳裏塞滿了哭聲和母親的勸說，還有杯子在玻璃板上推來求去的聲音，我的尿如霧氣散開了.....<sup>108</sup>

The sitting room fills with the noise of Zhu Mei's weeping and my mother's attempts to comfort her. I feel my urine spread through my cotton sheet. [...] <sup>109</sup>

Although he is disgusted by the constant stench surrounding him, after having spent years in such condition, he has learnt to accept leaks of excrements as a part of his life. Despite the obnoxious odours it produces, Dai Wei's body is never alienated from his identity. On the contrary, the protagonist seems to celebrate the functions it still manages to perform through their accurate description,

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<sup>106</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 160.

<sup>107</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 168.

<sup>108</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 295.

<sup>109</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 321.

expressing the close connection between the self and the body. Indeed, even if both Professor Yang's and Dai Wei's bodies are the centres of the recollections, the different relationship between subject and object results in a different attitude towards the ill body, reflecting that of the authors *vis-à-vis* their characters. While Mr Yang is a completely fictional character, Ma Jian has probably shaped his Dai Wei drawing inspiration from his brother who, like the protagonist of the novel, fell in a coma and became a vegetal during the last weeks of the student protests.<sup>110</sup>

The poor condition of the bodies described in the novels is caused not only by their own corporal function, but also by the lack of care resulting from their carers' neglect or absence. When Meimei, Mr. Yang's daughter and Jian Wan's fiancée, comes to pay a visit to her father, she criticises Jian Wan and starts repairing his damages:

Meimei removed a tiny safety pin from the waist of her pants and pierced the head of her father's boil to drain the pus. She then wiped the abscessed area for a good while with a cotton ball soaked with alcohol. After that, she went on to squeeze a few pimples on his back. Following her orders, I fetched two thermoses of hot water. Together we took off Mr. Yang's pajamas and set about scrubbing him with warm towels. Lying facedown, he moaned with pleasure while steam rose from his pinkish flesh. Done with his back, we turned him over to rub his front. His eyes narrowed as a contented smile emerged on his face. After we helped him into clean clothes, Meimei began brushing his teeth. He opened his mouth, displaying his diseased gums, which were ulcerated in places and bleeding a little. His tongue was heavily furred.<sup>111</sup>

Although the protagonist's intentions were good, his limited experience in the field results in negligence. Once again, the description of the cleaning procedure is sterile and detached. The narrative voice depicts the man's body as a cold object, the movements of which seem to be caused by exclusively by external factors, rather than by the individual it contains. A similar situation takes place when Dai Wei's mother is arrested for taking part in Falun Gong activities, leaving him alone. As a result, his body starts to deteriorate rapidly:

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<sup>110</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, "Zixu" 自序 (Preface), in *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua, 2010), 13.

<sup>111</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 59.

前天的大雨把窗臺以及下面床單全淋濕了，屋裏就散著潮腐味，我也浸泡在自己的尿和屎中，皮膚就開始泡爛發出的臭味令麻雀不敢落下。成群的蚊子吸著我的血，蒼蠅在鼻孔和嘴裏鑽著，而只要心跳結束，體內細菌就變質，幾天之後，我將成為一堆肉蛆，把自己吃光。<sup>112</sup>

The heavy rainstorm two nights ago soaked the covered balcony's windowsill and the cotton sheets lying on the ground below it. The air smells dank and mouldy. I myself am soaking in my own urine and excrement. My skin is beginning to decay. Swarms of mosquitoes are sucking at my blood. Flies are crawling into my mouth and nostrils. The moment my heart stops beating, my internal bacteria will multiply and begin to ingest me from within. A few days later, I will be no more than a heap of maggots and bones.<sup>113</sup>

Dai Wei goes by the three senses he can still use, namely smell, touch and hearing, to describe his condition and that of the room he lives in, showing a complete awareness of his body. A touch of melancholy seeps from his words, revealing the uneasiness of letting go the last stronghold of his sensibility. In both cases, the main cause of the characters' physical decay is abandonment, and the damaging of the body derives from an interrupted personal connection. The individual who starts to perish when neglected or forsaken can be regarded as an extreme metaphor of the negative effects of exile. On losing contact with their motherland, one's intimate relationship with their roots begins to fade and, if that bond is not replaced, the consequences can be devastating.

Despite their common dependence on others for the cure of their damaged bodies, Mr Yang's and Dai Wei's situations are opposed. The comatose patient is completely unable to move and to interact with the surrounding environment actively, yet his mind is clear, and his recollections become more vivid along with the progression of the novel. His stable consciousness is reflected in the extraordinary precision with which he is able to assess his condition, proving capable to perceive every change affecting his body:

那麼，我也必須在餓死之前想一想自己的處境了……

現在我脈搏穩定，生物回饋機能也上升了，也能感到身體在床上的位置。只要往胃管裏灌入牛奶和菜湯，我也會排出便和尿。

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<sup>112</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 541.

<sup>113</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 588–9.

而腦細胞除了運動功能喪失了，記憶和情感中反而鞏固了很多。那舉槍的秘密任務本是讓我肉體死掉，但肉中的思想並沒有中槍，還在苟活著，也許是唯一沒寫「擁護黨中央平暴」而喘氣的公民。<sup>114</sup>

Before I slowly die of starvation, I must try to take stock of my predicament. My pulse is stable, my organs are functioning well. If someone were to pour milk or vegetable soup down my feeding tube, I would be able to produce some urine. Although my motor cortex has atrophied, my synapses have been strengthened through continual use. My cognitive ability has improved and my memories have been consolidated. The plain-clothes officer who shot me destroyed my body, but he didn't destroy my mind. I'm probably the only citizen still alive in this country who hasn't yet signed a statement supporting the government crackdown.<sup>115</sup>

Dai Wei's body is completely objectified, as if the bullet interrupted the connection between the intellectual and the physical dimensions. The peculiar relationship between the protagonist's body and mind, the first being clearly subordinated to the second, exemplifies Merleau-Ponty's vision of the body as an object. Perception are triggered by stimuli, and they both depend on mind.<sup>116</sup> This hierarchic order allows Dai Wei not only to stay in control, but also to develop his awareness towards his own physiological deficits. Contrariwise, the professor's body is perfectly able to function. His mind, however, is alienated from reality, and it is precisely because of his deliria that his life has been shattered. At first, craziness only affects Mr Yang's mind, being a consequence of a stroke. Subsequently, Jian Wan's psychotic reaction to the current events, concerning his personal life more than the country, pushes him towards Tiananmen Square in an altered mental status. In the final part of the novel, the tanks in the square seem to be driven by a similar madness, unleashing their irrational fury on the protesting students, symbolising an insanity that affected the whole nation:

He sang hysterically, beating time with his tiny fists, one of which had a battered knuckle. Nobody listened to the song, which had been long out of fashion. But today his crazed voice grated on my nerves, so I cried, "Shut up!"<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 539.

<sup>115</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 586–7.

<sup>116</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Phenomenology of Perception), 89.

<sup>117</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 91.

I was driven by desperation, anger, madness, and stupidity. [...] I was crazed, unable to think logically, and was possessed by an intense desire to prove that I was a man capable of action and choice. So I set out for the capital with a feverish head.<sup>118</sup>

The vehicles started snarling one after another, then lunged forward as people swung away, struggling to avoid being crushed. All the personnel carriers and trucks began rolling, unstoppable like a crazed dragon.<sup>119</sup>

Kong argues that Jian Wan's confusional state of mind is a consequence of his passivity and "imperception," which manifests repeatedly throughout the novel.<sup>120</sup> From this perspective, his conceptual myopia towards the 1989 sociopolitical turmoil and Dai Wei's hyper perception at the physical level exemplify two opposite reactions to an imposed distance. While Dai Wei uses his mind trying to fill the temporal and spatial gaps separating him from his life and his memories, Jian Wan often takes advantage of his isolated position, avoiding the abrupt confrontation with reality until his final decision to reach the square. The relationship between body and mind is depicted in the two novels with different tones. Ha Jin stresses the moral superiority of mind and spirit by representing Mr Yang's yearning for spiritual redemption through his battle cry "I must save my soul."<sup>121</sup> This motto inspires also his disciple who, after the man's death, fights to defend his ideas against his colleague Banping's material vision:

I realized it was impossible to make him see the monstrosity of our teacher's death, because he thought of suffering only in the physical sense. What a callous mind he had! As an educated man, why did he seem to have no spiritual dimension in his mind at all? He had heard Mr. Yang sing songs and recite poems and had witnessed his struggle to save his soul, but nothing could touch him deeply or enable him to commiserate with our teacher beyond the level of bodily pain. He only understood the suffering of the flesh.

According to Jian Wan, "flesh" is merely a space with the purpose to contain his soul. Therefore, its sufferings are secondary to those of the spirit, as they were a

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<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, 295.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, 303.

<sup>120</sup> Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*, 105–7.

<sup>121</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazed*, 107; 162.



mere reflex. Therefore, his memory of the professor's agony is obscured by the recollection of his spiritual torment. Ma Jian's depictions of physiological processes reveal a mechanical conception of the body as well, represented in particular in small portions of text that break up the narrative flow. Yet, they also underline the importance of physical support in carrying on intellectual activities. This is especially exemplified in Dai Wei's scientific description of recollection, which conveys a disenchanting vision of its outcomes:

……拿著系旗去遊行的場景出現在大腦枕葉，但神經細胞分散了，慢慢才結成群體開始往顳葉區運動——<sup>122</sup>

An image of me setting off for the New Year's Day demonstration, with my red cloth and cut-out characters in my bag, passes through my occipital lobe. The neurons disconnect for a second, then reconnect and transmit the image to my temporal lobes.<sup>123</sup>

The act of remembering is seen as a biological process requiring physical functions. Memory is intertwined with the channel that conveys it and, therefore, soaked with perceptions of the subject's body. Indeed, the protagonist's recollections are often triggered by sounds or smells, emphasising the power of senses on the mind.

The decay of body and mind constitute a fundamental part of the authors' reminiscences, and its description reveals a divergence between their visions. Ha Jin makes his character take refuge in a damaged intellectual dimension, as well as in a comfortable spatial isolation. Contrariwise, Ma Jian concentrates on the connections that are still functioning, and that keep Dai Wei alive and in touch with both the surrounding space and his own consciousness.

The difference in the authors' relationships with the body is also reflected in their representation of sex. The descriptions of the characters' sexual encounters or stimuli constitute fictional accounts of what Casey defines "erotic body memory,"<sup>124</sup> representing particular cases of narrated reminiscences. Ha

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<sup>122</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 103.

<sup>123</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 106.

<sup>124</sup> Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Second Edition), 157.

Jin and Ma Jian present two different attitudes towards the theme of sex, whose role in the novels are opposite. From a general point of view, *Rou zhi tu* is soaked with sex, either lived or imagined, past or present. From Dai Wei's narration of his sexual awakening at puberty, to the recollection of his experiences when he was a university student, to the description of his fortuitous sexual encounters as a vegetable, this theme appears to be skillfully interwoven with the main plot of the novel. Indeed, being Dai Wei's only sign of active interaction with the outer world, sperm is the symbol of Dai Wei's vitality.<sup>125</sup> Contrariwise, Ha Jin seldom refers to Jian Wan's sexuality, and sex is often presented as a double-edged weapon, able to ruin people's life. However, although roughly depicted, sex still constitutes an important factor in the development of the plot, haunting Mr Yang's thoughts and determining his mistress's fate.

Despite the authors' divergent views, it is possible to identify two kinds of erotic scenes described in both novels: sexual encounters, either real or imagined, and unsatisfied arousal. The authors' representations emphasise either physical contact or mental desire.

In line with Ma Jian's style, Dai Wei's erotic memories provide a meticulous description of movements and sensory perceptions, expressing his emotional attachment to a bodily pleasure he is no longer able to reach. While lying motionless in bed, he remembers having sex with Tian Yi:

「最遠的山是淡藍色，比天空還淺。」我說完從後面抱住了她的腰。她就抖了一下低下頭，我就吻她脖子和下巴，她也閉上眼張開了嘴。

「小心……」她使勁推我的手，但沒用，我順著她內褲觸到了溼滑的一片，她雙腿軟了，也使手指更深了……我看了看四周，除了風和山下有點車喇叭聲，沒有人。便摟緊她移到樹下，就從後面插進了，來不及多撞幾下，就漲得泄了，但流了很久。她臉和頭髮貼在抓著樹幹的手上，雙眼看著空氣，我雙眼看著她兩瓣屁股在我手掌之中閃著又白又圓的嫩，真想再做一次，有個女伴真好。<sup>126</sup>

'The ridges at the horizon are even paler than the sky.' I stood behind her and put my arms around her waist. She lowered her head. I kissed her neck and her chin. She closed her eyes and opened her mouth. 'Be careful ...' she whispered, trying to push my hand away, but I moved it down into her knickers and touched the dampness between

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<sup>125</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 498.

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, 467.

her legs. Her knees buckled a little, allowing my fingers to move inside her. I glanced around. There was no one about. All I could hear was the wind in the trees and a few car horns beeping at the foot of the mountain. I held her closer to me, lowered her onto the ground, then entered her from behind. After six or seven thrusts I ejaculated. Her hand and cheek were still pressed against the tree trunk. I looked down at her pale buttocks and immediately wanted to make love to her again. I thought how wonderful it was to have a woman by my side.<sup>127</sup>

The details of his depiction allow the readers to set the spatial coordinates of the scene, to rebuild it in their mind in the same way the protagonist does. Contrariwise, Ha Jin never describes actual intercourse, and sexual references either seep through Mr Yang's ravings<sup>128</sup> or are hinted at in Jian Wan's imagination. In the following example, the description of Jian Wan's dream recreates the atmosphere of a moment probably preceding sex, but his sudden awakening leaves the epilogue of the scene open to interpretation:

She shed her shirt, poplin skirt, and anklets. She was now in red panties and a white cotton bra; a birthmark the size of a mulberry was under her right breast. Her belly was almost flat; her hips were shapely, concave on the side, each hollow resembling a giant dimple. She lay down and nestled against me. As she touched my forehead, I shuddered — her hand was ice-cold.<sup>129</sup>

Ha Jin's visual depiction conveys an idea of distance, almost as Jian Wan was watching the scene as a spectator, without really living his oneiric experience. The female body is represented as part of the surrounding space, which interacts with that of the protagonists only on its own initiative, without any reciprocation. The woman seems to be an object to be contemplated, and not a living being to be touched and felt like in Ma Jian's excerpt.

Besides the overt references to sex, erotic allusions appear occasionally in unexpected contexts in both novels. For example, on walking her colleague Weiya home, Jian Wan is surprised by the urgency of desire:

I glanced at her. She looked pale in the moonlight, but her face glowed with a soft shine. Her footsteps were springy and vigorous. For some reason I was suddenly gripped by the desire to touch her, my right hand, so close to her waist, trembling a little. I thrust it

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<sup>127</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 505.

<sup>128</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 47.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, 76.

into my pants pocket and focused on watching our shadows mingling on the ground. Probably it was the grief and madness jammed into my chest during the afternoon that drew me closer to her.<sup>130</sup>

Dai Wei has an equally unexpected reaction when Tian Yi visits him during his coma. Her proximity triggers his craving for affection:

真渴望你擁抱我，天衣，你的呼吸我在吸。我如果突然死去是不會有恐懼的，但有你在旁邊活著，而且很快就走，那我就怕死了。[...]

這片刻天衣伸手觸到了我的腳，手指還使勁捏了幾下，然後努力把腳踝旋轉著。她軟弱無力，但我真幸福，感到自己在暈眩了——<sup>131</sup>

I wish I could hug you, Tian Yi. I'm inhaling your breath. Until this moment, I wasn't afraid of dying. But now I know that you're here and will be leaving any moment, the thought of death terrifies me. [...]

Tian Yi stretches out her hand and touches my foot. She squeezes it, then tries to swivel it around at the ankle. Although she can't turn it very far, the touch of her skin gives me so much joy that I could faint ...<sup>132</sup>

His arousing thought leads to an erotic memory that merges with the narrative flow. In Jian Wan's and Dai Wei's descriptions, it is possible to identify two distinct "*sources of bodily pleasure as remembered*,"<sup>133</sup> namely sight and touch respectively. The first excerpt depicts a visual scene that does not lead to any action; there is an insurmountable distance between the character and the object of his desire that prevents him to give in to the temptation and involve other senses. Contrariwise, in the second passage, the source of imagined lust is Tian Yi's touch on Dai Wei's motionless body, which triggers the recollection of a long-lost physical pleasure. Ha Jin's detached and almost refrained narration opposes to Ma Jian's raw and vivid description, reflecting once again their different attitudes. Memories of perceptions are a particular form of memory of the body, and their narration encompasses the body as both subject and object. Nevertheless, Ma Jian's emphasis on the character's participation reveals a physical strength that in Ha Jin's story appears to be muffled.

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<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, 38.

<sup>131</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 172–3.

<sup>132</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 181–2.

<sup>133</sup> Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study (Second Edition)*, 158.

While erotic memories evoke a state of pleasure, traumatic memories are often connected to physical pain and distress. Sex and trauma are interconnected in the sense that, in fictional accounts of traumatic experiences, the close relationship between pleasure and pain is sometimes challenged and “the body itself [can be seen] as the site of negotiation and/or of battle.”<sup>134</sup> Dealing with the shocking events of 1989, *The Crazy* and *Rou zhi tu* have been associated to trauma,<sup>135</sup> however, the visions of Tiananmen incident the authors convey in their novels do not share the ‘traditional’ approach of collective memory, relying instead on an individual perspective. Ha Jin’s and Ma Jian’s accounts are also very different from each other, in terms of both the characters’ role in the protests and, consequently, of the amount of space dedicated to them in their plots. While Ha Jin narrates the impact of the protests as far as the protagonist’s personal and academic life are concerned, Ma Jian fully surrounds the reader with the atmosphere of that time, providing a great deal of fictional yet absolutely credible details. Nevertheless, both novels approach the sensitive issue from a particular perspective that avoids dealing with the influence of Tiananmen incident on the whole nation and on the citizens’ psychology.<sup>136</sup>

The focus on the body, consequence of the self-centred point of view, is reflected in Dai Wei’s and Jian Wan’s description of crucial moments marking the night between June Third and June Fourth as well. These scenes coincide with the peaks of tension in both novels, and they are characterised by exceptional rawness and ruthlessness. Death and suffering are the main components pervading the atmosphere, and bodies – either wounded or dead – constitute the direct representation of such distress. Jian Wan’s ultimate decision to join the protest takes him to the capital, where he tries to reach Tiananmen square. However, his attempt is not successful and, eventually, he finds himself blocked

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<sup>134</sup> Michael Berry, *A History of Pain*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 18.

<sup>135</sup> Linder, “Trauma and Truth: Representations of Madness in Chinese Literature”; Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*.

<sup>136</sup> Perry E. Link, “Le 4 juin : mémoire et éthique” (June 4th: Memory and Ethics), *Perspectives chinoises*, no. 2 (2009): 12.

at a hospital packed with injured and corpses. Ha Jin's depiction concentrates on the bodies lying around, almost as they were the subjects of a hyper-realistic and blood-curling painting:

The tiny morgue happened to adjoin the garage, and three nurses were in there, busy listing the bodies and gathering information about the dead. An old couple were wailing, as they had just found their son lying among the corpses. Most of the dead were shot in the head or chest. I saw that a young man had three bayonet wounds in the belly and a knife gash in the hand. His mouth was wide open as though still striving to snap at something.

But the garage was an entirely different scene, where about twenty bodies, male and female, were piled together like slaughtered pigs. Several limbs stuck out from the heap; a red rubber band was still wrapped around the wrist of a teenage girl; a pair of eyes on a swollen face were still open, as though gazing at the unplastered wall. A few steps away from the mass of corpses lay a gray-haired woman on her side, a gaping hole in her back ringed with clots of blood.<sup>137</sup>

The narration is rather static, with the protagonist stressing the appearance of the disturbing scene without referring to his own feelings. In line with his character, Jian Wan continues to witness the historical event from a distance, even if reduced. Besides never actually setting foot on Tiananmen square, his cold attitude restrains him from fully empathising with the protesters. Indeed, the massacre flashes before his eyes marking his visual memory, but without triggering any immediate response. Like for Mr Yang, the bodies are seen as a component of space, and the sight of them is not more traumatic to the character at the narrated time than it is to the reader when reading his account. Contrariwise, Ma Jian chooses a straightforward approach. When remembering the last moments of the crackdown, Dai Wei describes one of the most stirring scenes of the novel: on fleeing from the tanks, he stops to look at two crushed bodies and finds out they belong to two friends of his. The emotional charge is striking, and it is almost like the accuracy of the description allowed the reader to borrow the protagonist's eyes:

煙霧漸漸散開了些，前面的情景是我眼球都炸亮了……剛被輾過的路面上，在壓扁的自行車之間，散著一片無聲息了的軀體肉塊。我先是見到了白玲依稀可辨的黃白條紋衫與被血漿浸濕了的紅旗，她的臉被壓平，嘴也拉長陷在黑髮中，一隻眼球跳在血漿之上，

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<sup>137</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 309.

胸前是黑漆電喇叭片，幾條白屎腸子還冒著氣，剩下的手臂倒在了柏油地上，有兩個手指在慢慢地收縮，以證明他剛才還活著。

王飛正用胳膊去撐頭，手上的皮帶把壓扁的喇叭片從變大了的白玲的肉堆中拉了出來，他腿骨頭斷茬如砸扁的爛竹子，血和褲子絞成了一片肉泥緊黏著白玲，我掃了一眼不動的坦克，履帶鍊條上還絞著他一部分腿和褲子。<sup>138</sup>

As the smoke cleared, a scene appeared before me that singed the retinas of my eyes. On the strip of road which the tank had just rolled over, between a few crushed bicycles, lay a mass of silent, flattened bodies. I could see Bai Ling's yellow and white striped T-shirt and red banner drenched in blood. Her face was completely flat. A mess of black hair obscured her elongated mouth. An eyeball was floating in the pool of blood beside her. Wang Fei's flattened black megaphone lay on her chest, next to a coil of steaming intestine. Her right arm and hand were intact. Slowly two of the fingers clenched, testifying that a few moments before, she'd been alive.

Wang Fei was lying next to her. He propped himself up on his elbow, tugged the strap he was holding and dragged his flattened megaphone away from Bai Ling's chest. The bones of his legs were splayed open like flattened sticks of bamboo. His blood-soaked trousers and lumps of his crushed leg were stuck to parts of Bai Ling. I glanced at the stationary tank and saw pieces of Wang Fei's trousers and leg caught in its metal tracks.<sup>139</sup>

Dai Wei's reference to the reaction of his eyeballs expresses his shock, and the details scattered through the text reveal the subjectivity of his point of view. Ma Jian's portrait, like Ha Jin's, focuses on visual description, yet the relationship between the spatial elements is different. Here the crushed bodies are not merely a part of the setting. Although death pervades the whole scene, Dai Wei's focus on a few details stresses the human character of the girl who just lost the breath of life. The position of the two bodies represents the romantic relationship between them, while the description of the movement of her fingers expresses the mortal helplessness towards the ephemerality of life.

Both scenes are "saturated with the evidential force of a photograph,"<sup>140</sup> but the types of trauma they convey by means of the description of dead bodies are diametrically opposed. For Ha Jin's character, trauma is provoked by the sight of many dead bodies, piled up in an almost inhuman way. For Ma Jian, it is instead the scene of his friends' bodies being crushed by a tank that marks his memory in a traumatic way. In the first case, trauma is a space filled with death, while in the second one, it is the void left by one lost life and another one ruined

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<sup>138</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 601–2.

<sup>139</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 656–7.

<sup>140</sup> Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*, 222.

forever. What these depictions have in common is the way in which the characters share the scene with the bodies. Casey points out that there are different modes of “here-being,” which involve the body at various levels. In this case, Jian Wan and Dai Wei’s accounts are based on what he calls “interpersonal here,”<sup>141</sup> namely the kind of spatial presence involving bodies other than the subject’s. In particular, it is the close relationship with those bodies that causes the trauma, as what determinates the dead and the living on the battlefield, and what later separates the survivors from the corpses, is nothing more than a handful of centimetres.

It has been shown that the body can be considered as the primary location of memory, stressing the importance of bodily dimension as the first level of interaction between the subject and the surrounding space. Given this premise, memory can be considered as an “embodied”<sup>142</sup> entity with spatial coordinates. Indeed, the process of recollection is directly connected with the body enacting it, but it is also linked to a specific place. Ricœur points out that actions such as moving or orienting oneself make “the remembered ‘things’ [...] intrinsically related to places.”<sup>143</sup> In particular, different places fulfil different functions: some of them provide the physical context in which a memory is built, like dwelling places, while others have the power to trigger *souvenirs* by means of various mental associations.

In *The Crazy* and *Rou zhi tu*, it is possible to identify two key places marking the main events of the plot: the sickroom (Mr Yang’s and Dai Wei’s) and Beijing (the streets and Tiananmen Square). In *The Crazy*, the passage from the first setting to the second one occurs only once and follows the chronological order of the narrated events. Contrariwise, in *Rou zhi tu*, the narration constantly fluctuates to one setting to another, keeping Dai Wei’s room and Tiananmen

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<sup>141</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 53.

<sup>142</sup> Sabine C. Koch et al., “Introduction,” in *Body Memory, Metaphor and Movement*, ed. Sabine C. Koch et al., (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012), 2.

<sup>143</sup> Ricœur, *La mémoire, l’histoire, l’oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), 49.



Square as two parallel temporal and spatial dimensions. Consequently, the way in which these distant and distinct places are related to the subject's memories are different. For Dai Wei, Tiananmen Square is where his memories take place, whereas his room provides the spatial context of the reminiscing process happening in the following years. Contrariwise, both Mr Yang's room and Beijing are part of Jian Wan's recollection of the spring of 1989, and no further detail is provided about the time and place in which the narration of his memories is carried out.

On investigating the connection between memory and space, it is possible to distinguish various degrees of the subject's familiarity with places that can condition the structure of memories. After the body, the most intimate space inhabited by the individual is their dwelling place, which provides the main context for the daily interaction between body space and environmental space.<sup>144</sup> In the case of fictionalised memories, a special attention should be paid to the meaning of 'dwelling place,' with reference to the particular narrative object of the study. Indeed, the most intimately described spaces do not necessarily correspond to the narrative voice's house, but they are more likely to be the places that the voice (or the protagonist, if different) inhabits the most. For example, in the narrative context of *The Crazy*, Mr Yang's room could be considered as Jian Wan's dwelling place, due to the long time he spends every day keeping watch over his professor. Contrariwise, in *Rou zhi tu*, the place the author describes as the most familiar one is Dai Wei's sickroom. The peculiar temporal structure of the novel collocates it in the first of the two levels of memory, namely the one in which Dai Wei narrates his convalescence during the coma. In the second level of recollection, situated in the spring of 1989, Ma Jian does not provide a significant description of the protagonist's room, since the fulcrum of the narrated events is located in Tiananmen Square, where the individual's private space was minimised in order to serve the students' cause.

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<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, 184.

The two places play different roles in the protagonists' lives, and correspond to different degrees of familiarity. While Dai Wei knew his home very well before being confined to his iron bed, Jian Wan is not used to the building in which his professor is hospitalised. However, the relationship gradually changes in both cases, and the description of those places mutates in the process.

In the first pages of the novel, Ha Jin provides a detailed depiction of Mr Yang's hospital room. On stepping inside for the first time, Jian Wan immediately describes the site in which his professor is forced to live due to his stroke:

The room was a makeshift place, quite large for one bed, but dusky and rather damp. Its square window looked south onto a mountain of anthracite in the backyard of the hospital. Beyond the coal pile, a pair of concrete smokestacks spewed whitish fumes and a few aspen crowns swayed indolently. The backyard suggested a factory — more exactly, a power plant; even the air here looked grayish. By contrast, the front yard resembled a garden or a park, planted with holly bushes, drooping willows, sycamores, and flowers, including roses, azaleas, geraniums, and fringed irises. There was even an oval pond, built of bricks and rocks, abounding in fantailed goldfish.<sup>145</sup>

The most striking feature of this excerpt is the apparent detachment with which the protagonist looks at the room, focalising on the elements outside the window rather than on the atmosphere inside. Despite the importance of this site in the novel and the large amount of time the protagonist spends in it, at the beginning the author avoids portraying explicitly the interaction between the space and the subject. Although dwelling places imply bodily activities,<sup>146</sup> Ha Jin chooses a less overt way to integrate the protagonist's body into the description of the room, namely by using sentences like "[t]he backyard suggested a factory" or "the front yard resembled a garden or a park." The partial view hints at Jian Wan's physical limitations, yet his 'bodily' presence is not enhanced any further.

Contrariwise, Ma Jian's description of the protagonist's room is a lot more personal. Despite his incapability to move, Dai Wei interacts with the surrounding environment by means of the senses he is still able to use:

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<sup>145</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 6.

<sup>146</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 116.

環境的變化大概對我有好處，周圍的聲音更清晰了。天氣大概晴朗的很，窗外的風帶著點樹皮味吹進，把牆壁和父親骨灰的腐味沖淡了些。那麼，我應該恢復了嗅覺，味道都很熟悉，它們貼在我肉裏，也貼在四周的角落，而且還有暖氣烤了鞋墊和洗完的襪子、內褲、手套以及偶然掉進暖氣縫裏的饅頭皮、塑膠筆帽、包過了油餅、燒雞或者朝鮮辣白菜的紙味，也就是家味了，當然，最明顯的是母親在走動和酒精的氣味……<sup>147</sup>

The change of location seems to have had a beneficial effect on me. The noises around me sound clearer and my sense of smell has improved. I can smell the scent of tree-bark in the breeze blowing in through the window and the stale odours in the flat. These odours are the familiar smells of home: my father's ashes; the insoles, socks and gloves drying out on the radiator; all the things that have fallen behind the radiator, such as scraps of steamed bread, plastic caps of ballpoint pens, the bits of paper that once wrapped meat pies, fried chicken or pickled cabbage; my mother's clothes and skin, and the disinfectant she sprinkles over the floor.<sup>148</sup>

床頭櫃上開著的檯燈，大概正照著玻璃針筒，瓶蓋都閃著齷齪的亮斑。這些畫面我很熟悉，聞著味道就等於看見了。<sup>149</sup>

Irritating sparks of light flash across my closed eyelids. The lamp on the wooden chest at the end of the bed is probably shining onto the glass syringes. I know this room so intimately that when I breathe in I can see everything laid out before me.<sup>150</sup>

The 'image' of his room is provided by means of specific noises, smells, light variations that he can detect through his eyelids, and guesses he is able to make by relying on his memory. The relationship Dai Wei has with 'his' place is deeper than the one Jian Wan has, and Ma Jian's depiction shows a higher degree of involvement of the subject with the space he occupies. In both cases, the subject's body is presented as motionless, but while Jian Wan's description is voluntarily limited to the visual level, Dai Wei tries to interact as much as possible, conveying the singular portray of a room as perceived by a comatose patient.

The two rooms fulfilling the function of fictional dwelling places are part of more complex buildings, namely Mr Yang's hospital and Dai Wei's flat. Surprisingly enough, both authors show a change of attitude when describing these places, emphasising aspects that were overlooked in the description of the rooms. For example, Ha Jin minimises the visual depiction of the building and stresses other senses such as smell and hear:

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<sup>147</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 89.

<sup>148</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 88-9.

<sup>149</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 173.

<sup>150</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 182.

I loitered in the hospital building, just to while away an hour. There were so many patients that outside some offices people waited in lines to see doctors. Numerous patients were lying on planks or stretchers on the floor. Nurses in white robes and caps passed by like ghosts, most of them wearing broad gauze masks. A chair with ill-oiled wheels was pushed past, in which sat a disheveled young woman moaning vaguely, her legs encased in plaster. The air stank of a mixture of urine, phenol, and Lysol; there was also a whiff of decaying flesh. At the end of the hall a man was quarreling with a woman doctor, calling her a harridan, while she yelled back at him. Some people gathered there to watch.<sup>151</sup>

The author lingers over the people animating the corridors of the hospital, conveying a lively portrait of a way of 'being in place' that implies interpersonal communication. Moreover, the description of sensory perceptions reveals a participation that was absent in the previous excerpt. Contrariwise, Ma Jian provides a description of Dai Wei's flat that appears rather cold compared to his usual style:

家裏的兩間房一大一小。進門的走廊算是客廳，兩隻沙發擺好就滿了，吃飯只好用折疊桌子。我正躺著的鐵床比小房間還大，它勉強擠進了大間，假如不是母親懷舊，早就送拍賣行了。我和小弟都討厭鐵床，因為只要躺下去它就嗡嗡地響。<sup>152</sup>

Our flat has two bedrooms: one a little larger than the other. When you walk through the front door there's a narrow passageway that serves as our sitting room. It's just large enough to hold a small sofa and a tiny fold-up table. The iron bed I'm lying on is too big to fit in the smaller bedroom, and takes up most of the space in this room. If my mother wasn't so sentimental about it, I would have taken it to the auction room years ago. My brother and I hated the bed because, as soon as you lie down on it, the metal springs start squeaking.<sup>153</sup>

Here the description does not involve the active participation of the recollecting subject's body and it is carried out by means of his memory. In particular, this passage shows the power of reminiscence in portraying the geographical coordinates of a living space, made possible thanks to the peculiar relationship between the individual and the inhabited place pointed out by Gaston Bachelard. Dai Wei's flat is "physically inscribed"<sup>154</sup> in him, as the geography of his house

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<sup>151</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 190.

<sup>152</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 100.

<sup>153</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 102.

<sup>154</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (The Poetics of Space), (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961), 32.

shaping his everyday life before the coma becomes even more oppressing once he is confined to his iron bed.

It cannot be stressed enough that the nature of the spatial memories described above is essentially fictional, therefore they do not exactly correspond to the authors' 'Tiananmen recollections.' But they were produced under the influence of those recollections, so what they provide is a narrative mirror in which Ha Jin and Ma Jian reflect their original experiences. In *Rou zhi tu*, the descriptions of space are largely based on sensory perceptions when dealing with his current sickroom, and on visual depiction when Dai Wei draws on his memory to narrate past episodes. Instead, in *The Crazy*, the detached portrayal of the room, initially new to him, evolves into a more 'felt' depiction of the surrounding environment, as it becomes gradually familiar. Although they are chronologically inverted due to the different temporal structures of the novels, these tendencies are alike, since both authors tend to amplify the range of the senses described as the characters become more intimate with their 'dwelling' environment. Indeed, the sense of unfamiliarity is a fundamental ingredient of the diasporic experience, and this kind of sensibility towards the process of familiarisation with a new place might be regarded as an indirect consequence of their personal background. Merleau-Ponty emphasises how the subject's experience precedes their perception of space, as perceptions in general imply necessarily an elaboration of one's past.<sup>155</sup> In this case, the connection between the author's past feelings and the changing perceptions of familiar and unfamiliar places they describe in their novels is subtle, yet it is eloquent if considered a tribute to a recovered receptivity. Once the individual emigrated, their recollections of the abandoned home start to fade, and the sensory perceptions related to it become increasingly dull. However, this spatial shock is marked by a reborn sensibility, which activates sensory receptors and starts a process of cognitive exploration of the new environment.

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<sup>155</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Phenomenology of Perception), 325–6.

The way that leads to the memories of June Fourth follows a different path for the two protagonists. At first, Jian Wan shows little interest in the protests, since his concerns for his professor's condition and for his own future leave no space for further worries. Contrariwise, Dai Wei is involved in the demonstration since the beginning of the story, and soon he decides to concretely join the protest in Tiananmen Square. A fundamental factor determining this divergence is the actual distance separating the two characters from the pulsating heart of the democracy movement, located in the centre of the capital. Jian Wan's university is situated in Shanning, which is about twelve hours by train from Beijing, whereas Dai Wei is a student at Beijing University and therefore he has the chance to actually breathe the atmosphere that generates the protests. Consequently, their journey is both mental and spatial, and this duality is reflected also in the authors' description.

The first significant contact the characters have with the student protest corresponds to the moment in which they become fully aware of the protesters, and this happens under different circumstances for each one of them. The first encounter between Jian Wan and a crowd of demonstrators takes place on the street, while he is on his way to the hospital. Ha Jin's description of the scene is very detailed:

On my way to the hospital for my afternoon shift, I was stopped by a traffic jam at May First Square. About six hundred students from the Yellow Plain Mining College, the City Institute of Industrial Arts and Crafts, the Teachers College, and our school — Shanning University — were demonstrating there. They held up large banners with slogans written on them, such as PUNISH CORRUPT OFFICIALS! DOWN WITH PARASITES! SAVE OUR COUNTRY! LONG LIVE DEMOCRACY! GIVE ME FREEDOM OR DEATH! Some of them wore white headbands as if they belonged to a dare-to-die team, though they were all empty-handed except a thickset fellow toting a lumpy bullhorn. As they marched, drums and gongs thundered between rounds of shouted slogans.

On the eastern fringe of the square, near the Second Department Store, stretched a line of workers, three or four deep, all in white Bakelite helmets, which had the name STEEL PLANT printed on them. Every one of these men carried a wooden cudgel across his back. They looked lighthearted and once in a while cursed the demonstrators loudly. Despite their role as law enforcers, they seemed spoiling for a fight, waiting to wreak mayhem. [...] Meanwhile, thousands of onlookers gathered along the sidewalks; some gave the students the thumbs-up, and a few even joined the procession moving northeast. With both hands raised above her head, an old woman displayed a white neckerchief

bearing the word WRONGED! Apparently she was seizing this opportunity to air her grievances.<sup>156</sup>

On finding himself in the middle of a protest, Jian Wan is forced to face the crowd of students and the cause they represent. The description of that moment starts at the level of space, with the character providing the name of the square in which he saw the demonstration, namely May First Square. Subsequently, his eyes shift towards the people shouting for democracy, and he continues depicting their appearance as well as their behaviour. Then, he portrays the workers in charge of controlling the protesters and, finally, the casual onlookers. In both cases, they are first and foremost located in the surrounding space – “[o]n the eastern fringe of the square” and “along the sidewalks” – and only later described. However, this sequence seems to fulfil a purely informative function, aimed to guide the reader’s imagination, rather than underlining the spatial coordinates of the specific memory. In *Rou zhi tu*, Dai Wei comes into contact with the protest at their very early stage in 1986 and follows their development through the years. Nevertheless, the beginning of his real experience in the movement of 1989 can be identified with the moment he decides to join an attempt of protest in Tiananmen Square on New Year’s Eve, before the final wave of April. On arriving on the square, the protagonist depicts the panorama before his eyes:

——中午到達歷史博物館，天安門廣場已經戒嚴了……警察和便衣在幾輛等待抓人的大小麵包車周圍走來走去，凍得亂跺腳。而後面就是廣場中心的紀念碑了，小時候的兒童節我曾經隨學校去那兒為革命烈士獻過花圈。人民大會堂如沉重的貨櫃堆在遠處，右邊的紅色天安門城牆襯著下面幾輛如爬蟲般微小的警車，令我想到了紀念碑後面的毛澤東停屍房，他會隨時會[sic]站在城樓上檢閱他的軍隊，這廣場是他的墓地，我不敢相信，我們來到這聖地抗議他創建的黨。<sup>157</sup>

At noon, I joined the crowd of students huddled below the steps of the Museum of Chinese History, and looked over at the vast Tiananmen Square spread before us. This enormous public space, the size of ninety football fields, was completely empty. The authorities had ordered it to be cordoned off to prevent our demonstration from going ahead. A few police vans were parked on the road separating us from the Square, ready to take troublemakers away. Police officers and undercover agents paced back and forth nearby, stamping their cold feet on the ground.

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<sup>156</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 145–6.

<sup>157</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 103–4.

Behind them, in the centre of the Square, rose the granite obelisk of the Monument to the People's Heroes. When I was a kid, my class used to be taken to the Monument every year on Children's Day to lay wreaths to the revolutionary martyrs. Beyond the Monument was the Great Hall of the People, the home of the National People's Congress. The tawny concrete building sat on the eastern side of the Square like a huge shipping container. I looked north to the red walls of Tiananmen Gate, the entrance to the Forbidden City where China's emperors used to live. From a distance, the police vans parked beneath it looked like tiny beetles. In 1949, Mao stood on Tiananmen Gate and declared the founding of the People's Republic. His giant portrait now gazed down from it, and his embalmed corpse lay in a memorial hall to the south. The Square was Mao's mausoleum. I couldn't believe that we'd dared venture onto this sacred site to express criticism of the Party he created.<sup>158</sup>

Ma Jian enhances the spatiality of the view, providing a portrayal in which human characters are perfectly merged into the topographical description of the square. Here it is possible to associate this image with the warp and woof of memory, since Ma Jian is likely to have witnessed a similar scene when he was in the capital at the time of the protests. This passage shows the great evocative power of the square, which is connected to multiple types of memory, namely individual, collective, and fictional. First and foremost, Tiananmen Square is a remembered place for the author, associated with his participation to the movement. Secondly, it is a square loaded with historical meaning, especially since the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and therefore part of the Chinese collective memory. In this excerpt, both the historical and personal values are made clear, and the author underlines the connection between the place and the protagonist's childhood, which represents the third mnemonic function of the square. Dai Wei recollects his school trips to the square, providing an example of fictional recreation of individual memory. Each of these three levels displays the most evident link between place and memory, being the square remembered as a site 'lived' by the author, the character, and – in terms of emotional participation – by all the Chinese people.

The characters' first 'real' contact with the protesters takes place in a square in both Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's accounts. However, Jian Wan's distance

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<sup>158</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 106–7.



compared to Dai Wei's involvement implies a different scale of evaluation, which also reflects the authors' different situations at the time of the protests. The place marking the beginning of Dai Wei's participation in the movement is in fact Tiananmen Square, which is already filled with a universally recognised meaning, and not merely a combination of spatial coordinates like Ha Jin's May First Square.

Despite the difference in their approach to the student demonstrations, in both novels the protagonists end up joining the protests in the spring of 1989. After Hu Yaobang's death, Beijing University students decide to set off to Tiananmen Square, starting the final protest which would last until June Fourth. Dai Wei is one of them, and his depiction provides valuable insight on the dynamics of that march:

前面是空黃昏暗街道，偶然有下了夜班的人看著我們走過。  
快到黃莊路口才碰上兩輛公安局的車。我有點害怕，萬一被抓，媽又會怪我[...]。  
遊行隊伍如火車，滾動著流過了那警車，他們沒阻攔。  
來到人民大學門口時，劉崗領著大家齊喊：人大的同學們下來！  
很快，可以看見宿舍樓燈開始亮，有的開了窗喊：北大的同學，我們跟著你們！  
等一會兒，穿上衣服！  
不等了，先走吧，他們會跟在後面。柱子走近說。  
夜長夢多，必須一氣走到天安門。曹明一身黃軍裝，挺給我們壯膽。[...]  
剛離開了人民大學路口，隊伍就被一百多名警察和十來輛警車擋住了。  
看過去對面如綠牆，路燈照亮了車頭的玻璃和一些大蓋帽。陳迪爬上了垃圾筒，  
用望遠鏡看了看宣佈：空著手，沒有電棍子。<sup>159</sup>

The dark, empty street stretched before us. Occasionally, someone returning home from a late shift would stop on the pavement and watch us pass.

At the Huangzhang intersection we saw two police vans parked on the side of the road. I became anxious. I knew that if I got arrested a third time, my mother would never forgive me. [...]

Our procession surged forward like a train, rolling straight past the two police vans. The officers standing outside didn't try to stop us.

When we reached the gates of People's University, we shouted out to the students inside to join our march. Lights came on in the dorm blocks. Students opened their windows and shouted, 'We'll come with you, Beijing University! Just give us a moment to get dressed!'

'We can't wait for them, Dai Wei,' Zhuizi said, walking up to me. 'We must keep moving. They'll soon catch up with us.'

'Yes, we must keep going until we reach Tiananmen Square,' Cao Ming concurred. The khaki military suit he was wearing boosted our morale. [...]

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<sup>159</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 158–9.

After we crossed the next intersection, we saw about a hundred policemen and ten police vans blocking our path ahead. From a distance, they looked like a black wall. Light from the street lamps flashed off the windscreens and a few of the policemen's helmets. Chen Di climbed onto a rubbish bin, looked through his binoculars and announced, 'They're not holding electric batons. Their hands are empty.'<sup>160</sup>

Ma Jian reports a plausible reconstruction of the students' path from Beijing University to the square, allowing the reader to elaborate a nitid image of those instants. Yet, spatial details do not cloud the protagonist's personal participation. However accurate, the description is anchored to Dai Wei's point of view, and the interpersonal dimension of the scene is underlined by the author's repeated employ of personal pronouns. Furthermore, the dynamism of the scene is enhanced by the presence of dialogue, on which a great part of the memories of 1989 narrated in the novel is built. In *The Crazyed*, in order to reach the square, Jian Wan must first arrive in Beijing. He decides to take the train with a group of other students from Shanning University and leave for the capital the day before the crackdown. The account of his journey is rich in details and communicates efficiently the protesters' state of mind:

On the morning of June 3 we boarded the 5:30 train bound for Beijing.

[...] A baby burst out crying at the front end of the car; however hard its mother tried to calm it down, it wouldn't stop. The baby's hollering, mixed with the soft Taiwanese music and the pungent tobacco smell, made my head swim a little. The floor was littered with pumpkinseed shells, candy wrappers, popsicle cartons, chicken bones. Under our feet the wheels were grinding rhythmically but with such a clatter that when talking, we had to strain our voices. Since conversation was hard, we remained silent most of the time except that once in a while we'd curse the government together. Many of the undergraduates had somber faces as though they had grown older all at once. [...]

Approaching the capital in the evening, we began to make plans for our next step. We decided to raise our flag, which had SHANNING UNIVERSITY printed on it, and march to a bus stop. From there, we would get on a bus going to Tiananmen Square. We were not sure what bus route we should take; some said Number 20, some said Number 14, and some said Number 1. But this shouldn't be a problem; we could always ask.<sup>161</sup>

In the first part of the excerpt, Ha Jin depicts the scene inside the train scrupulously, reproducing not only visual elements, but also the feeling deriving from hearing, smell, and touch. The focus on the individual's perceptions,

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<sup>160</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 165–6.

<sup>161</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 196–9.

together with the emphasis on the silence between the students, conveys a sense of solitude that is in sharp contrast with the togetherness seeping through Ma Jian's account. Another difference between the two can be detected in the second part of the passage, which describes the students' confused plan. While Dai Wei's comrades have a clear head about how to reach the square, Shanning University student are disoriented and naïve. Jian Wan sloppiness is probably a consequence of his lack of conviction; a confusion that originates in the protagonist's passive attitude and is reflected also in his spatial unawareness. Despite the difficult conditions, the following step must be taken, and the students detrain in Beijing. Soon they find themselves blocked at the station, since the military alert has paralysed the city. Being Jian Wan the oldest student together with his friend Mou Sen, the undergraduates turn to him hoping for guidance:

Bewildered, fatigued, and frightened, the undergraduates gathered around Mantao and me, expecting us to come up with a solution. Neither he nor I had ever been to Beijing before, so we were at a loss too. [...]

What should we do? Sitting in a ring on the ground before the train station, we discussed our situation briefly and decided to set out on foot for Tiananmen Square. We would go in two groups, because we were not sure if all of us could get there and afraid that the police might stop us. Although we were unfamiliar with the city, it wouldn't be difficult to find our way to the square. We could ask for directions, and a lot of other people seemed to be going there too.<sup>162</sup>

This passage lacks spatial details from a properly geographical point of view, yet it describes meticulously the characters' state of mind. The scarce familiarity with the place makes it impossible for Jian Wan – and likely also for Ha Jin himself – to provide certain reference points. Nevertheless, this lacuna is balanced with the focus on the individuals, whose thoughts are the key of the scene. What is remembered in this case is not the outer appearance of the place but the inner feeling of not-belonging to that place, which translates into fear and dismay. Although less emotion-oriented, Ma Jian's description of the students' arrival in

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<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*, 299–300.

Tiananmen square after their march through the city is devoted to feelings as well, due to the atmosphere of mourning for Hu Yaobang's death:

.....太陽還未出現我們就到達廣場，果然有很多花圈和人。  
紀念碑上方掛了幅胡耀邦的黑白畫像。我們踩著滿地紙花，擁向紀念碑北側，那兒放著七個大小不等的花圈，其中最大的是政法大學法律系。我們就在人民英雄紀念碑前獻了花圈，楊濤帶了悼詞，就由他宣讀了。<sup>163</sup>

We reached the Square before sunrise. As we'd expected, it was filled with mourners and wreaths.

A huge black-and-white portrait of Hu Yaobang had been hung on the Monument to the People's Heroes at the centre of the Square. We trod through the paper flowers that littered the ground to the north side of the Monument, where seven wreaths had been laid. The largest was from the students of the Politics and Law University. We brought out our wreath and ceremoniously placed it next to the others, while Yang Tao read out the eulogy we had prepared.<sup>164</sup>

The narration of the scene provides details concerning the position of the listed elements in the architectural context of the square. Nevertheless, the students' first actions on arriving on the square are aimed to pay their respects to Hu Yaobang. Therefore, spatial coordinates mainly serve the function to endow the reader with the tools to rebuild the imaginary scene. Ma Jian's detached style does not allow much emotional expression, yet the emphasis on the funeral reveals his empathy with the event. Despite the different content depicted in the scenes, both Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's excerpts mark the beginning of their character participation to the protests with a focus on the individual's reaction. Particularly significant here is the relationship between the protagonists and the narrated place, understood in terms of interaction between bodies and places. The quoted passages describe Jian Wan's and Dai Wei's physical presence with a centripetal orientation and, therefore – borrowing Casey's terminology – reflect a predominance of the "*here of [the] body proper*"<sup>165</sup> over the spatial context to which it belongs. Tracing a parallel with the authors' experience, this might be regarded as a hint to a mental involvement with the facts taking place in their native

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<sup>163</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 161.

<sup>164</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 168–9.

<sup>165</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 52. Italics in the original text.

country, which always manages to transcend the distances and unify the supporters of a common cause.

The last pages of both novels are dedicated to the massacre carried out by the government's troops against the crowd of demonstrators in Tiananmen Square. The fact that the carnage took place in a precise and universally known location enhances all the more the connection between space and memory that makes June Fourth an unforgettable date, indissolubly linked with the famous square of the capital. Certainly, Tiananmen Square possesses a commemorative value with reference to collective memory, which makes it an example of Pierre Nora's well-known concept of '*lieu de mémoire*' (site of memory).<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, Umbelino argues that "memory is never placeless,"<sup>167</sup> pointing out that also personal memories have spatial anchors. In *Rou zhi tu* and *The Crazyed*, the square is presented as part of the protagonists' personal stories, merging private and public spaces, as well as concrete and symbolic meanings.

Neither Ha Jin nor Ma Jian witnessed the crackdown in person, yet this does not prevent their recollection from being fixed in space. What happened in Tiananmen Square unsettled their lives, and they do not refrain from expressing in their novels the destructive power of that event on the protagonists' universes. Dai Wei lives the square from the beginning, whereas Jian Wan never reaches it, but he still manages to set foot in Beijing and to see with his own eyes the turmoil that struck the city during the night between June Third and June Fourth. After getting off the train, Jian Wan and a few of his comrades board a van which is supposed to take them to the square, but the ride is interrupted because of the chaos reigning in the streets. The most striking images of that night are the actions of the army, which Jian Wan describes as it sees it approaching towards him, sitting in solitude in the corner of the street:

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<sup>166</sup> Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire* (Realms of Memory), 3 Vols., ed. Pierre Nora, (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–1992).

<sup>167</sup> Luís António Umbelino, "Memory of the Body, Temptation of Space," *The European Legacy* 20, no. 8 (2015): 844.

Units of tanks passed frequently, roaring fitfully. I searched through the hundred people trapped in the alley, but didn't find anyone of my group. I was worried about their safety and whereabouts.

[...] In the distant sky an orange glow pulsed while the sound of gunshots was rising from somewhere as though a battle was under way. Two or three armored personnel carriers stood at a nearby street corner; beyond them dozens of soldiers in fatigues and helmets crouched against trees or sat on the curbs, all with AK-47s or SKS carbines in their arms. One of them fired three shots up at a window of an apartment building from which some residents had called them names a moment ago.<sup>168</sup>

From Jian Wan's arrival in Beijing, Ha Jin's description becomes much richer in details, allowing his text to provide a clear image of the atmosphere of the city, condensed in the last chapters of the story. This can be regarded as an attempt to endow his narrative with an aura of realism that balances his impossibility to report personally verified facts. The chaos in which the protagonist finds himself is depicted not only through vision but also through hearing, represented by the sounds of bullets that cross the scene in both foreground and background. The description of space, in this case, is carried out by means of Jian Wan's memory of perceptions,<sup>169</sup> which enhances the focus on the individual through the fictional sensory details the author provides. Ma Jian as well, on describing the army that proceeds towards the square, focalises on the darts and bullets enlightening the sky over the protesters:

遠處可以看見一輛開路的裝甲車正衝向市民護欄堆堵的路障，一些人把石頭和燃燒瓶往那兒扔，火光時而濺在正衝撞旋轉的車皮上，那兒是牟森剛才搭台辦開學典禮的地方，幾個帳篷民主女神像偶然會被火光閃出些形狀。 [...]

此刻，信號彈突然在天空閃亮了，慘白的光像是給死人照著去地獄的路。

很快從東面路口傳來槍聲，迴音在歷史博物館牆上亂鑽。面前的車人也聽見了，但他們並沒有動靜，幾千人坐在層層臺階上如大片綠蝙蝠。<sup>170</sup>

Suddenly, in the north-western corner of the Square, I caught sight of an armoured vehicle. It was ramming into a wall of bollards that residents had placed across Changan Avenue, a few metres from where Mou Sen had staged the Democracy University's opening ceremony. A small crowd of students ran over and tossed stones and petrol bombs at it, and soon flames darted across its roof as it continued to bash into the barricade. Reflected firelight danced across the Goddess of Democracy and the rows of nylon tents nearby. [...]

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<sup>168</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 306–7.

<sup>169</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 162.

<sup>170</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 575–6.

Just at that moment, a signal flare shot through the sky. Its pale glow looked like the ghostly light that illuminates the dead souls' path to hell.

A sound of gunfire rang out from the north-east corner of the Square. The bangs echoed against the northern walls of the Museum of Chinese History. The thousands of soldiers outside the Museum could hear it too, but they remained completely still, standing packed on the steps like a swarm of green bats.<sup>171</sup>

Although describing both the appearance and the sounds accompanying the army's advance towards the square, Ma Jian seems to give more importance to the geographical coordinates defining the scene than to his character's feelings when he faces it. Borrowing Casey's terminology, it can be said that Ha Jin enhances the "withness"<sup>172</sup> of the body, by exploiting the protagonist's eyes and ears to depict the scene. Instead, Ma Jian emphasises the "aroundness"<sup>173</sup> of space by referring specifically to the position of the elements in the architectural context of the square. The intimate link between space and narrative in *Rou zhi tu*, despite its fictional nature, strengthens the "declarative character of memory."<sup>174</sup> In *The Crazy*, instead, the accent on Jian Wan's sensibility originates from the author's personal feelings, which provide an account of history based on the value of the 'partiality' of individual memory.<sup>175</sup>

On the night of the crackdown, the protagonists experience essentially two environments: Beijing streets and hospitals. This duality mirrors the general structure of the novels, which develop similarly, between hospital rooms and Tiananmen Square. Both Jian Wan and Dai Wei run into injured people and rush them to an emergency room. The depictions of the terrifying scenes opening before their eyes are surprisingly alike, and Ha Jin's distant approach draws closer to Ma Jian's straightforward style. Jian Wan's puts aside fear and anxiety and reports the dynamics of the hospital like a camera:

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<sup>171</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 626–7.

<sup>172</sup> Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study (Second Edition)*, 259.

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Paul Ricœur, "Architecture et narrativité" (Architecture and Narrativity), *Études ricoeuriennes* 7, no. 2 (2016): 20.

<sup>175</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, "La mémoire devant l'histoire" (Memory Before History), ed. Gérard Ermisser, *Terrain*, no. 25 (1995): 105.

We reached the hospital at about four o'clock. The building was swarming with wounded people, many of whom were dying. Some had already died before they arrived. The boy we had carried over was still breathing, but his heart stopped a few minutes after the nurses pushed him into the operating room. A head nurse told us woefully, "We didn't anticipate this carnage. We thought they'd use tear gas, so we stocked some eyedrops and cotton balls. Many people died because we didn't have the medicine and blood they needed."<sup>176</sup>

Chaos pervades the atmosphere, and dead and injured people populate the building together with the alarmed clinical staff. A similar account is provided by Dai Wei, who concentrates on the same aspects of the scene:

.....眼前醫院走廊如屠場，到處是變黑的血塊和新灑上去的紅血，混著泥土和尿的腥臊，人們邊罵邊哭，醫生和護士在人群中踏著流淌的血漿奔走喊叫，兩邊躺了十幾個不再動的，也看不出死或沒死。<sup>177</sup>

The hospital corridor stretching before me looked like an abattoir. Everywhere there was dark, clotted blood, freshly splattered red blood, the stench of blood, mud and urine. People were weeping and cursing. Doctors and nurses shouted commands as they darted back and forth. There were ten or so motionless bodies lying on the blood-soaked floor. I couldn't tell whether they were alive or dead.<sup>178</sup>

The fictional nature of both passages favours the integrations of standardised images that serve the function to strike the reader rather than reflecting the authors' recollections. Moreover, the imposing presence of hospitals in the context of the plots is symptomatic of the authors' will to underline the tragicalness of the incident. Nevertheless, due to the impossibility to reach the square, Jian Wan fails to witness the crucial moment in which the army crushed the student protest, whereas Dai Wei provides an account that follows the military action step by step:

抬頭看去，軍人和坦克車已封了廣場和長安街的交叉口。近處通道口的水泥牆下正趴著一排人，有的還招手，分不清是市民還是學生，我估計他們已處在射擊範圍內，退不出來了。<sup>179</sup>

I looked up to see what was going on. The troops and tanks had sealed Changan Avenue at the north-east corner of the Square. A small crowd of people were crouching behind the low cement wall of the underpass's entrance. I couldn't tell whether they were

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<sup>176</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 309.

<sup>177</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 604.

<sup>178</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 659.

<sup>179</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 578.



civilians or students. I guessed they were within range of the machine guns' bullets, and were too afraid to move.<sup>180</sup>

頭戴鋼盔的軍人密密麻麻的隨坦克車湧近，雙眼被震得無法看仔細。<sup>181</sup>

The tanks and armoured personnel carriers lined up on the north side of the Square began rumbling towards us, followed by a huge mass of helmeted soldiers. My head was juddering so much I couldn't see clearly.<sup>182</sup>

從人民大會堂裏又湧出了很多頭戴鋼盔手持自動步槍的士兵。如湧浪般靠近[...]。

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At that moment, thousands of helmeted soldiers came running out from the Great Hall of the People in the west and moved towards us.<sup>184</sup>

.....混亂中裝甲車緩緩駛來，震得耳朵亂跳.....

大概東面的同學開始撤離了[...]。

[...] 同學們開始沿著前門大街往西走。<sup>185</sup>

In the mounting chaos, the tanks and armoured personnel carriers moved closer, shaking the ground so much that my head bobbed up and down.

They continued to push forward, forcing the students to the east of the Monument to begin evacuating the Square. [...]

We walked west past Qianmen Gate, skirting the southern edge of the Square.

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The precise information Ma Jian provides on the movements of the students and of the army underlines the character's participation to the scene by representing him as a 'body in place.' The profuse use of specific directions draws the attention on the individual's body seen as "agent and vehicle,"<sup>187</sup> and reflecting the integration between subject and space. Thanks to his fondness of geographical details, Ma Jian creates a reportage-like narration that mentions even the exact spot in which the massacre took place, namely the Liubukou intersection:<sup>188</sup>

我們走到了六部口拐角，算是又轉到了長安街。

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<sup>180</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 629.

<sup>181</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu 肉之土* (Beijing Coma), 593.

<sup>182</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 646.

<sup>183</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu 肉之土* (Beijing Coma), 594.

<sup>184</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 647.

<sup>185</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu 肉之土* (Beijing Coma), 597–9.

<sup>186</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 651–3.

<sup>187</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 48.

<sup>188</sup> Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*, 224.

還沒有過馬路就看見中南海紅牆，那裏面正坐著指揮屠殺人民的領袖們。大牆邊站滿了持槍軍人，顯出勝利的威嚴。一排裝甲車和坦克車停在路中央，擋住了看廣場的視線，後面，綠色太陽正從地下拔起。<sup>189</sup>

Heading north, we reached the Liubukou intersection. We were back on Changan Avenue again, having looped round from the west. We stood still and stared at the red walls of Zhongnanhai, knowing that behind them, the leaders who'd ordered this massacre were relaxing in their luxurious villas. Thousands of soldiers stood triumphantly outside the walls, rifles at the ready. A long line of tanks and armoured carriers had formed a solid blockade, screening off the view to the Square. Behind them, a green sun hovered at the horizon.<sup>190</sup>

According to *The Tiananmen Papers*, the people evacuating the square under assault were brutally killed by the government troops on this exact point.<sup>191</sup> The decision to pinpoint its proximity to Zhongnanhai exemplifies the political criticism that pervades the whole novel, representing in space the sharp contrast between the Chinese leadership and the population victim of their ideal of democracy. After a rush to the hospital, Dai Wei goes back to the intersection, and it is on that spot that, soon after, his recollection ends, with the protagonists being hit by a bullet and falling into a coma. Dai Wei eyed-witnesses the military crackdown of June Fourth, but he cannot provide an account about what the troops leave behind after the carnage. Contrariwise, Jian Wan does not succeed in reaching the square, neither the fatal intersection, yet this allows him to avoid being struck. While taking an injured boy to the emergency room, he traverses the streets of the city and describes the warlike scenery after the passage of the army:

The street was strewn with caps, bags, shoes, bicycle bells, jackets, plastic ponchos. After three or four turns, we reached a broader street and saw buses and trucks in flames. In fact, by now it looked as though the whole city was burning, fires and smoke everywhere. At one place there was a pile of bicycles crushed by a tank or a personnel carrier – metal and bloody clothing all tangled in a mess. Not far away a group of double-length buses were smoldering, each having a wide gap in the middle, punched by a tank. Here and there were scattered concrete posts, steel bars, bicycle-lane dividers, lampposts, oil drums, even some propane cylinders.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 601.

<sup>190</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 655.

<sup>191</sup> Andrew J. Nathan and Perry E. Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers*, (London: Abacus, 2001), 504.

<sup>192</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 308–9.

Jian Wan's description of the landscape is static and geographically imprecise, as he uses vague expressions such as "[a]t one place," "[n]ot far away," and "[h]ere and there." Rather than a report of the massacre, Ha Jin seems willing to communicate the sense of desolation that the accident provoked both materially, in the city, and emotionally, in the citizens' hearts. Here the distance translated into introspection, and the landscape reflects the author's emotional reaction to the tragedy. The novel's last scene in Beijing depicts Jian Wan's walk toward the train station. The sun rises over the disaster area, but the protagonist's eyes are able to catch a glimpse of hope for the future, thanks to the courage people showed when facing death to defend their right to freedom:

By now it was already daylight, and the troops seemed too tired to move around. The farther south I walked, the more people appeared on the streets, some of which resembled a battlefield, littered with scraps of metal, bloody puddles, and burned trucks and personnel carriers. I was amazed that the civilians, without any real weapons in their hands, had somehow managed to disable so many army vehicles. Although few guns were fired now, smoke kept rising in the west.

Coming close to the train station, I saw a column of tanks standing along a street. Their cannons pointed north, their engines were idling, and their rears were emitting greasy fumes. The air was rife with diesel fuel. Some civilians were talking to the soldiers; many of them wept and scrunched up their faces. I stopped to watch. An officer in breeches was listening to the civilians attentively and went on sighing and shaking his head in disbelief. Among the crowd an old man held up a long placard that said PUNISH THE MURDERERS! A white banner displayed the slogan THE DEBT OF BLOOD HAS TO BE PAID IN BLOOD!<sup>193</sup>

The character's experience in the capital on June Fourth closes with the same focus on people showed at the beginning, as if space was defined by the people populating it. The author's fictional memory of the Tiananmen massacre develops through different stages, in which the Jian Wan is gradually brought closer to the square, reproducing the narrowing of the mental gap between the exiled author and his homeland implied in the process of recollection.

The third step of the analysis moves from the level of place to that of space. If a place is defined by means of specific coordinates (either physical or

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<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*, 311.

imaginary), space is an unbounded entity that is much harder to define. Casey provides a detailed discussion on the philosophical evolution of the concept of space, and on its modern sovereignty over that of place.<sup>194</sup> Based on the assumption that places are included in space and, in particular, they occupy a part of it, the analysis of places can be broadened by investigating their presence in the abstract realm of space. Besides the descriptions of concrete and specific places, in the two novels it is also possible to detect significant representations of the spatial dimension located at an abstract level. In *The Crazy* and *Rou zhi tu*, imaginary spaces constitute a noteworthy means of expression of the characters' individuality. In Ma Jian's novel, the comatose patient frequently indulges in fantasies that are interwoven with the plot and, together with the copious citations from *The Book of Mountains and Seas*, endow the narrative with a surreal atmosphere that clashes abruptly with the realism of the narrated facts. In Ha Jin's work, instead, dreams are mainly confined to Mr. Yang's private deliria, and only partially shared with Jian Wan and the readers. Different forms of imaginary spaces can be analysed as expressions of the recollecting subject's individuality, including spatial metaphors as well as symbolic and imaginary journeys.

The most famous metaphor the two novels have in common is indeed that of a cannibal China that eats her own people.<sup>195</sup> However, space is also widely used to compose metaphorical images that recall the suffocating sensation of being prisoner of one's situation. On hearing Mr. Yang's ravings, Jian Wan is able to catch scattered words that describe in third person his own mental jail. The first and most articulated one provides a well-crafted metaphor of China that, like that of cannibalism, echoes Lu Xun's words:<sup>196</sup>

"But he lives in a room without a door or a window and without any furniture inside. Confined in such a cell, he faces the insurmountable difficulty of how to end his life. On the rubber floor spreads a thick pallet, beside which sits an incomplete dinner set. The walls are covered with green rubber too. He cannot smash his head on any spot in this

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<sup>194</sup> Casey, *The Fate of Place*.

<sup>195</sup> Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*, 103.

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*, 97.

room. He wears a leather belt, which he sometimes takes off, thinking how to garrote himself with it. Some people he knew committed suicide in that way twenty years ago, because they couldn't endure the torture inflicted by the revolutionary masses anymore. They looped a belt around their necks, secured its loose end to a hook or a nail on a window ledge, then forcefully they sat down on the floor. But in this room there's not a single fixed object, so his belt cannot serve that purpose. Sometimes he lets it lie across his lap and observes it absentmindedly. The belt looks like a dead snake in the greenish light. What's worse, he cannot figure out where the room is, whether it's in a city or in the countryside, and whether it's in a house or underground. In such a condition he is preserved to live." [...]

"He's thus doomed to live on, caged in an indestructible cocoon like a worm."<sup>197</sup>

Belinda Kong provides a thorough analysis of the socio-political changes characterising China in the late 1980s implicit in this image.<sup>198</sup> The use of space in this metaphor deserves here to be further analysed. Being enshrouded in a limited yet fluid space, the protagonist of Mr. Yang's story feels caged into his own life. His illusory motion is not enough to satisfy his desire for suicide, and an environment that was intended to be protective ends up in deteriorating the individual's soul. Therefore, this "cocoon" can also be projected on the character's inner self, who feels caged – rather than freed – by his own thoughts. In fact, this metaphor is not only employed to describe Mr. Yang's condition, but it is also applied to Jian Wan's situation after his mentor's death:

Sitting in the deepening twilight, I felt like a small insect snared in a spiderweb. The harder I struggled, the tighter the strong, entwining filaments would enfold me, choking the life out of me little by little. Then came to mind the image of the dark, rubber-surfaced room described by Mr. Yang. I too felt trapped in such an indestructible cocoon, although I hadn't despaired of escape yet.<sup>199</sup>

Like an infectious illness, the feeling of oppression takes over him, although mitigated by his general apathy. Consequently, he decides to set off for Beijing. If put in relation with the author's recollection of Tiananmen incident, this protective cocoon preventing the individual to take action can be assimilated to the exiled's position, who is prevented from being physically struck by the

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<sup>197</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 16–8.

<sup>198</sup> Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*, 97.

<sup>199</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 294.

government he escaped, but is not immune to the emotional damage caused by such a dramatic change.

A similar sense of constraint is also felt by Dai Wei who, caged in his motionless body, feels choked. To convey the idea of an infinite yet suffocating space, Ma Jian repeatedly employs the image of water with the power to isolate from the outer world:

.....耳朵也每時每刻地睜著，使我能根據聲音展現周圍.....有一段時間什麼也聽不到了，像是潛艇沉入海底，只有心臟搏動，令我清醒地知道，肉軀還在死著.....<sup>200</sup>

I listen intently for any noise that might help me form a clearer picture of my surroundings. When I first became aware of this hospital, I couldn't hear a thing. I felt as though I'd sunk to the bottom of the sea. Only the beat of my heart told me that my body hadn't finished dying yet.<sup>201</sup>

In this imaginary ocean, the author pictures his character as a disoriented fish:

漸漸地我猶如水裏的魚，習慣了在汗裏生活。正如任何生物想活，便要與環境協調一樣，為了排汗，我的汗毛孔漸漸變大，從不出汗的腳幾乎每天都濕臭了。<sup>202</sup>

I felt like a fish swimming in water. I gradually grew accustomed to living in the sea of perspiration. Like any other animal, I had to adapt to my new environment. My pores enlarged so as to release more moisture. My feet, which had previously always been clean and dry, were now constantly drenched in fetid sweat.<sup>203</sup>

Dai Wei feels swallowed by his coma to the point where he sees in his physiological changes the effects of the imaginary liquid surrounding him. The metaphor of water as a disconcerting space is employed to represent not only the protagonist's clinical condition, but also other distresses he experienced before entering this stage, such as heartache:

我毛骨悚然，失戀的就是我了，他是水，我被悶在水裡。從前如魚得水的親密關係因為失戀而變為溺水？不，失戀像是河魚游進了海裡。不，還是魚在海裡，海水升溫了，也不對。

愛情怎會這麼危險。<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 49.

<sup>201</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 43.

<sup>202</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 51.

<sup>203</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 46.

<sup>204</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 84.

With a cold shiver I had to acknowledge that I was the heartbroken one, not her. She was a lake, and I was drowning in her. I was a freshwater fish swept into the salt sea. No – I was a sea fish simmering in an ocean that was becoming hotter and hotter ... Until she left me, I hadn't realised that love could be so perilous.<sup>205</sup>

In these excerpts, water can be regarded as a representation of the individual's helplessness when faced with an imposed and sudden change. Rather than the distance between the author and his homeland, here is the – lack of – space of movement to be symbolised. However, in both cases, external critical conditions are associated to specific bodily reactions like choking, sweating or drowning. This causal relationship can be assimilated to the connection between body and trauma emphasised by Kleinman.<sup>206</sup> Physiological reactions triggered by the process of remembering are reproduced in the text by means of spatial constraints, implying the weakness of the subject against bigger empirical and mental barriers.

Undoubtedly, also the key-place of these Tiananmen recollections – the square – has a symbolic meaning at the level of the individual. Ma Jian's novel conveys a sharper political critic than Ha Jin's, and their different focus is reflected also in the characters' relationship with the architectural symbol of the democracy movement. For Jian Wan, the square represents his personal revenge against the torpor imprisoning him, and the significance of his political action lies in its effects on his conscience:

[...] I had no grand purpose or dream of democracy and freedom; nor did I have the sense of responding to our national exigencies. My motive was mainly personal – I was driven by desperation, anger, madness, and stupidity. First, I meant to show Meimei that I was not a coward and could go to the capital at any time and in any way I chose. Second, I wanted to puncture a hole in this indestructible cocoon that caged me; somehow I felt that the right place to plunge a knife in was Beijing – the sick heart of this country.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 84.

<sup>206</sup> Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "How Bodies Remember: Social Memory and Bodily Experience of Criticism, Resistance, and Delegitimation Following China's Cultural Revolution," *New Literary History* 25, no. 3 (1994): 715.

<sup>207</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 295.

Beijing is defined as “the sick heart of this country,” establishing a parallel with the protagonist’s tormented soul. By reaching the square, Jian Wan hopes to achieve freedom, translating the process of mental healing into a spatial movement. The role of the protest for democracy is therefore inverted, since he wants first and foremost to gain freedom from himself, more than from an oppressive regime. Thus, liberation seems to be the cause of his involvement, instead of the desired effect. Ma Jian too employs the image of a heart to describe Tiananmen Square, but in his depiction the pulsating force is the people’s battle for human rights:

廣場和肉牢都是陷阱 也是無路可走的廣場

……是的，廣場是國家中心，它巨大空曠，可以把弱小的細胞吸聚在一起給他們發揮特徵的機會，其實是讓活物們與奮地忘記了自己，更忘記這中心還是包圍在更堅厚的國牢之內。<sup>208</sup>

*Your body is a trap, a square with no escape routes.*

Tiananmen Square was the heart of our nation, a vast open space where millions of tiny cells could gather together and forget themselves and, more important, forget the thick, oppressive walls that enclosed them ...<sup>209</sup>

The parallel with Dai Wei’s body reflects Ma Jian’s biopolitical interpretation, representing in physical terms the wish for intellectual freedom. In this case, the focus is instead on the power of the movement to give the individual a reason to fight for:

你站在了廣場  
臉感到流動的熱風

廣場就是你平躺的屋子  
你被困在冰冷的市中心

只有心臟在靜謐的響動  
廣場如內熱外冷的肉土<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 278.

<sup>209</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 303.

<sup>210</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 282.



*You remember standing in the centre of the Square, the hot wind blowing across your face. The Square was like the room you are lying in now: a warm space with a beating heart trapped in the middle of a cold city.*<sup>211</sup>

The square is a *routu* 肉土, a soil of flesh, made of humans. It is brought to life by the demonstrators and, at the same time, provides them with a virtual space in which they can feel alive. Nonetheless, the tragic night of between June Third and June Fourth transforms the square into the graveyard of the movement soaking it with the blood of the protesters, yet its original spirit survives. Its memory is what keeps Dai Wei alive throughout the coma and, eventually, brings him to wake up.

Closely related to spaces and places are the characters' journeys to reach and explore them. Spatial movement in the form of travel is a distinctive feature of diasporic identities, and it is a well-represented theme in both *The Crazyed* and *Rou zhi tu*, although in different forms. Ma Jian's narrative draws heavily from the oneiric dimension, and his character constantly fluctuates between reality and dream, as well as between the present and the past. Consequently, the plot develops around an underlying idea of imaginary journey that efficiently expresses the subjectivity of the author's fictional memory. Ha Jin's approach, instead, tends to realism, whereas the unreal is only depicted through the professor's fragmentary narrations, induced by his mental condition. The journey that constitutes the kernel of the novel is Jian Wan's actual travel from Shanning to Beijing, which puts into practice the protagonist's inner awakening. A glimpse of this change can be caught also in the description of the landscape outside the train while it moves toward the capital:

The train chugged along a muddy lake in the north, whose surface was mottled with green and dark patches of reeds. A flock of domestic geese, like white dots, were floating almost motionlessly in the distant water, brightened by the rising sun. After we passed the lake, the landscape suddenly seemed narrowed. The fog was thinning away, though the windowpanes of the train still sweated, blurring the endless peanut and wheat fields divided by rows of stunted mulberry trees.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 307.

<sup>212</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 297.

The changing in the scenery makes Jian Wan aware of the travelled distance, although his blurred vision prevents him to see clearly. The parallel with the migrant's experience is evident. The uncertainty of the future is part and parcel of the journey, which he undertakes under the shadow of a sense of mission aimed to demonstrate the individual's freedom. Nevertheless, after witnessing the atrocities in the city he receives a tip-off from his colleagues, who advise him to flee before being captured by the authorities. As a result, Jian Wan decides to leave and never return to his homeland, just like Ha Jin himself did after 1989. The next journey he envisages is an actual migration, that will make him a self-exile:

In the one-room train station I bought a ticket for Nanjing, where I would switch to an express bound for Guangzhou. I planned to sneak across the border into Hong Kong, though I didn't know how to do it exactly, unfamiliar with the terrain there. The photo of the woman attacked by a shark, which I had seen in the newspaper in Mr. Yang's sickroom a month ago, came to mind, but I was not daunted. If need be, I would attempt to swim across the shark-infested water. I was a good swimmer and with luck should be able to make it. From Hong Kong I would go to another country – Canada, or the United States, or Australia, or some place in Southeast Asia where Chinese is widely used.<sup>213</sup>

The route Jian Wan imagines reflects the mental process of the migrant, and the reasons behind their choices. Ha Jin's novels constitute the writer's way to "return to China,"<sup>214</sup> yet, here he chooses to represent the protagonist's path to escape his motherland, since the recollections of the Tiananmen massacre are indissolubly linked to the author's decision to become an exiled writer. Ha Jin moved to the United States and became a writer who can speak to his people thanks to a freedom of expression China does not allow. Similarly, Jian Wan's final journey is his hope to be a free man: a privilege he can only acquire by crossing distances and borders, regardless of difficulties and dangers.

In *Rou zhi tu*, Ma Jian's approach to the theme of travel is completely different. The whole story could be assimilated to an imaginary journey down the protagonist's memories of 1989, which are skilfully interwoven with excerpts

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<sup>213</sup> *ibid.*, 322.

<sup>214</sup> Li, "Home and Identity en Route in Chinese Diaspora - Reading Ha Jin's *A Free Life*," 206.

from *The Book of Mountains and Seas*. The result is a surreal atmosphere enshrouding fantastic creatures and landscapes with hyperrealistic depictions of the biological processes taking place in the wanderer's body:

.....肉在沒變成土之前是我的載體——好像嬰兒啼哭的聲音.....能食人，要食人吃了它，就不遇妖氣了。山的背面多產玉石，有一種獸似羊卻沒有嘴，牠不吃東西卻生活自如.....血液在大腦東區不斷地衝撞，眼前便又閃著《山海經》裏描述的地理空間，還有裹著菸味的宿舍.....<sup>215</sup>

My body carries me like a boat lost at sea ... There is jade on the north side of the mountain, and animals that look like sheep but have no mouths. They live well without eating ... As fresh blood flows through my motor cortex, scenes from the *The Book of Mountains and Seas* are replaced by images of Beijing University's smoke-filled dorms.<sup>216</sup>

The images from the classic book contribute to recreating a fascinating yet disorienting scenery, in which Dai Wei moves randomly, following sporadic stimuli. The illusory nature of the fantastic locations contrasts with the scientific description of the journeys made by cells, fluids and impulses throughout the body that picture the images in Dai Wei's brain. The spatial movement made physically impossible by his vegetative state is represented through three different forms of journey: anatomic, mnemonic, and imaginary. Thanks to these three dimensions, in the end Dai Wei gains new awareness of the meaning of travel, and of its implications for the human mind:

那麼，腦中的《山海經》，大大小小的五千三百七十座山，都被我走遍了嗎？那些深埋在地下的金銀銅鐵，長到天上的樹，還有那九個頭的鳥.....在我十年的身體旅行之中，我發現那些奇蹟都在肉裏了，那些山峰和沼澤.....也就知道了通往心靈的是一條退路，只有昏死的人才會找到，活人只能在陌生的路上奔跑到底.....<sup>217</sup>

Have I now explored all 5,370 mountains of *The Book of Mountains and Seas*? On my travels through my body, I've discovered that all the wonders described in the book exist within me: the peaks and marshes, the buried ores, the trees that grow in the clouds and the birds with nine heads. I know now that to reach the soul, you must travel backwards. But only people who are asleep have time to tread that backward path. Those who are awake must hurtle blindly onwards until the day they die ...<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 109.

<sup>216</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 114.

<sup>217</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 591.

<sup>218</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 644.

The body, originally pictured as a carrier, becomes a destination. Dai Wei is a migrant that does not look for salvation in foreign lands, but in his own soul. From this point of view, space is not defined by physical parameters, but represented through the evolution of the mind. This maturity allows the subject to gain the intellectual independence for tracing his own path, a rare privilege for a comatose patient, as well as for an oppressed citizen. Traces of a similar attitude can be found in the author's biography. Indeed, although already living abroad, Ma Jian at first kept travelling inside and outside the Mainland for several years, until the publication of *Rou zhi tu* prevented him from entering China again. The status of self-exiled endowed him with the detachment necessary to look backwards, at his motherland, while continuing to pull away in name of his own right to freedom as a Chinese individual.

Also the representation of the oneiric dimension, like that of the journey, follows two main paths: the realistic and the surrealistic. As a manifestation of the subconscious' hidden wishes, dreams are a valuable source to consult in order to outline the traits of a character. In *The Crazy* and *Rou zhi tu*, they are employed to fulfil different functions, emphasising Jian Wan's and Dai Wei's diverse personalities.

In Ha Jin's novel, the oneiric dimension does not have a primary role in the context of the plot, which focuses rather on the fantasy-less reality of the Chinese academic environment at the end of the 1980s. Jian Wan's dreams are understood as his projects for the future that, even when unrealistic, are never unreal. Besides his current plan to marry Meimei and become Mr. Yang's disciple, the character makes one reference to the dream of becoming a soldier he had when he was a child:

When I was a little boy, I had dreamed of becoming an officer in the People's Liberation Army someday, though my father's problematic political status would have disqualified me for army service.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 196.

The remark on the unattainability of his ambitious project reveals the character's disenchanted attitude, which brought him to trim down his expectations due to the influence of politics on social life. Moreover, his tone reveals the remissive manner with which he accepted the fact and found for himself a new and more appropriate plan. In the whole novel, there is only one narration of an actual dream, the only occasion in which Jian Wan's representative depictions merge with illusion:

I had a bizarre dream, in which Meimei and I stayed in an inn at a sandy beach. I was sick with a stomachache, lying in bed and shivering all over. Wearing a white cap and a knee-length skirt, Meimei was cooking crucian carp soup for me on a small alcohol stove we had brought along. [...] Five of its six wicks were afire, hissing softly as the flames licked the bottom of a stainless steel pot. Turning over the fat fish gingerly with a spatula, Meimei crooned a folk song in a soothing voice. The soup was done. It looked milky and smelled like steamed mussel, but I was too sick to eat it by myself. [...]

No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't open my mouth wider, as if my lips had been partly sewn together. My tongue went numb and felt like a wooden stick. I was angry at myself, my heart kicking. I told her to put away the bowl and get into bed.<sup>220</sup>

The exquisite attention to visual details is in sharp contrast with the surrealism of the scene, in which the impossibility for Jian Wan to voice his opinion is represented through a physical paralysis. This image is the only reference to the protagonist's inner reactions, and yet, his will to open his mouth is not strong enough to make him fight his condition: a further proof of his passivity. Although the author does not put much emphasis on dreams, they represent a restrained rebellion that remains confined to imaginary space until the end of the novel, when the character experiences his life-changing epiphany.

In Ma Jian's novel, the oneiric dimension is a fundamental component of the plot, and dreamlike images are inserted between realistic scenes as a secondary setting of the story. Besides Dai Wei's imaginary journeys through the landscapes of *The Book of Mountains and Seas*, he often dreams of himself suddenly realising his capability to fly:

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<sup>220</sup> *ibid.*, 75–6.

我夢到自己幾乎快被水淹死了，但突然會飛了，還在空中飛著叫著。<sup>221</sup>

I dreamed that, just as I was about to drown in a river, I discovered I could fly. I flapped my arms and soared into the sky, yelling at the top of my voice.<sup>222</sup>

.....想像成鳥的角度看自己平躺在床，看自己無望的鼻樑突起在臉中央，同時，也看見媽坐在床邊，顯露著兩隻硬手和涼腳.....

突然就飛出窗外，在樓群之上看著路燈斜照著幾輛鎖在鐵柵欄上的殘破自行車架.....<sup>223</sup>

I imagine gazing at myself through the eyes of a bird. I see myself lying flat on the bed, my nose protruding pathetically from the centre of my face, and my mother sitting on the edge of the bed, with stiff hands and cold feet.

Then I fly out of the window, and from the rooftops I see the lamplight shining obliquely on a battered bicycle frame chained to the railings.<sup>224</sup>

The reference to this power is a clear expression of a desire of liberation from the cage of his body and from the coercive political environment that enveloped China after Tiananmen massacre. Dai Wei's dreams of freedom are encrypted in a metaphorical flight across both realistic and imaginary spaces that he is naturally incapable of performing. Nevertheless, the sparrow that, in the final part of the novel, suddenly appears and settles into his room seems to be the living concretisation of his dreams of flying. By bonding with the bird, the protagonist finds a new dimension to explore, and his spirit a new reason to live on:

我明白了，麻雀的來臨無疑給了自己一個著落點。也許是媚媚的靈魂來了.....牠讓我想起《山海經》裏下著方形的蛋，飛起來有火光的神鳥。那點亮，從牠落在頭上起，就感受到了。

這幾天牠每時每刻都在跳，甚至飛翔。他媽的，飛翔的夢，牠爪子使勁一蹬，撲打幾下就實現了。這叫聲是麻雀，牠應該有灰褐色羽毛和黃色爪子。她就等我醒來一起飛走；媚媚曾說過她下一世要當鳥。<sup>225</sup>

The sparrow's arrival has given me a clearer sense of where I am. Perhaps the bird is A-Mei's soul come to visit me. It reminds me of the sacred bird in *The Book of Mountains and Seas* which lays square eggs and resembles a flame of fire when it flies through the sky. Ever since it first landed on my head, I have felt the warmth of its glow.

For days, it has hopped up and down my body. Sometimes it flies around the room. I've dreamed about flying all my life, but with just a flap of its wings and a jump, this

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<sup>221</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 57.

<sup>222</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 52.

<sup>223</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 93.

<sup>224</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 93–4.

<sup>225</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 524–5.

creature can make the dream a reality. I can tell from its chirp that it's a sparrow. I imagine that it has tawny grey feathers and yellow claws. It's waiting for me to wake up, so that we can fly away together. A-Mei once said that she wanted to come back as a bird in the next life.<sup>226</sup>

Dai Wei feels in the sparrow the presence of his ex-girlfriend A-Mei, but the main reason of his attachment is the idea of being able to fly and overcome every obstacle that stands in his way towards freedom. Jian Wan's disenchanted attitude and Dai Wei's dreamy spirit are reflected in their imagination, which provides them with a blank space to fill with their ambitions.

### 2.3. *History in Words*

If the body is the first space occupied by the subject, language is its primary spatial manifestation in the context of a literary work. The historical background against which the narrations take place influences Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's linguistic choices. Analogously, their transnational identities are reflected in the contamination with foreign languages, which realises through linguistic hybridisation and adaptation to the foreign readership, enhancing therefore the cross-cultural perspective in which their novels are situated.

The description of the Tiananmen Square protests cannot be separated from the features of language employed to reproduce the particular atmosphere of that period. The most distinctive form of language generally associated with the democracy movement are slogans, which were either shouted or written on banners. Through the echo of the slogans that filled the square in the spring of 1989, the student demonstrations reached a worldwide audience, therefore they became the symbol of their fight for freedom and human rights. Both novels quote examples of the slogans used at that time, showing their impact on the square, as well as in other places. While listening to 'The Voice of America'

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<sup>226</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 568.

announcing the students' march toward Tiananmen Square, Jian Wan from the United States hears his compatriots shouting in the background:

The woman reporter announced in slow, simple English that a throng of students from the People's University were on their way to Tiananmen Square, to join those already there. Through the sputtering static I could hear hundreds of voices shouting in unison, "We shall not return without a full victory!" "Down with corruption!" "It's everyone's duty to save the country!" "Give us freedom and democracy!"<sup>227</sup>

Similar slogans are reported also by Ma Jian, marking every step of the protests until the final crackdown. As the students' primary means of demonstration, the content of the slogans changes along with the evolution of the protest, with an increasingly violent content that starts to jeopardise the peaceful tone of the beginning:

「.....最新標語：李朋李朋，昏庸無能，喪心病狂，好景不長。」陳迪在人群中喊了一聲，大家馬上鼓掌叫好。「先抓李朋，再抓小評，抓完小評，天下太平.....」全場乾脆一齊喊口號了。

「陳迪。不要喊口號。」他靠著我不遠，劉崗挺惱火地比劃著叫我勸他。

「我不贊成過激口號，我們不是來推翻政府.....」韓丹有些激動。<sup>228</sup>

Chen Di stepped onto a chair and shouted, 'Our latest slogan is: "Li Peng is a corrupt, incompetent ass. It won't be long before he gets the axe!"'

The crowd roared with approval then chanted in unison, 'Arrest Li Peng first, then Deng Xiaoping. Once those two guys are gone, the world will be at peace ...'

'Tell Chen Di to shut up!' Liu Gang hissed.

'Those slogans are far too militant,' Han Dan said. 'We're not here to overthrow the government ...'<sup>229</sup>

This change is detectable also in Jian Wan's recount that, although covers a narrower temporal frame, has the privilege to include the instants that followed the massacre:

I stopped to watch. An officer in breeches was listening to the civilians attentively and went on sighing and shaking his head in disbelief. Among the crowd an old man held up a long placard that said PUNISH THE MURDERERS! A white banner displayed the slogan THE DEBT OF BLOOD HAS TO BE PAID IN BLOOD!<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 57.

<sup>228</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 374.

<sup>229</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 406.

<sup>230</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 311.



Despite the contradiction implicit in the fact of using formulas typically employed by the Communist Party to manifest their opposition,<sup>231</sup> the slogans served the function to embody the reasons of the demonstrations and export the spirit of the square, not only outside the capital but also to other countries. Due to their international popularity, these banners act as a link between collective and personal memories, marking the authors' memories regardless of their distance from the square.

Slogans, banners and placard had been created by the student associations that organised the protest. Hundreds of demonstrators reunited under their names, which became iconic in the language of the protests. References to these associations are found in both novels since their role is fundamental for the reproduction of the historical context. Ma Jian's accurate account reports many of these associations, such as the *Jueshi tuan zhihuibu* 絕食團指揮部 ("Hunger Strike Headquarters"),<sup>232</sup> the *Shimin gansidui* 市民敢死隊 ("Dare-to-Die Squad"),<sup>233</sup> the *Xi bei lang jiucha dui* 西北狼糾察隊 ("Wolves of the North-West"),<sup>234</sup> the *Baowei Tiananmen guangchang zhuihuibu* 保衛天安門廣場指揮部 ("Defend Tiananmen Square Headquarters"),<sup>235</sup> etc. The result is a chaotic overlapping of authorities that make the individuals' power prevail over the organisations,<sup>236</sup> but reproduces efficiently the disorder and the tension lying over the square. As an 'outsider,' Jian Wan is not able to provide such a detailed outline of the student groups. On arriving in Beijing, he and his comrade Mantao try to understand the dynamics of these association but without success:

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<sup>231</sup> Perry E. Link, *An Anatomy of Chinese: Rythm, Metaphor, Politics*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 19.

<sup>232</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 257.

<sup>233</sup> *ibid.*, 385.

<sup>234</sup> *ibid.*, 387.

<sup>235</sup> *ibid.*, 388.

<sup>236</sup> Codeluppi, "Mapping Ideology in Language Han Dong's Zha gen (Banished!) and Ma Jian's Rou zhi tu (Beijing Coma)," 266.

He went away to make some phone calls, but fifteen minutes later he returned, rather downcast, saying he couldn't get hold of anyone at the headquarters of the Beijing Autonomous Student Union. His cheeks puffed up and the corners of his mouth fell.<sup>237</sup>

The only cited student association is the "Beijing Autonomous Student Union," which is probably meant to designate the "Beijing University Autonomous Student Union."<sup>238</sup> Perhaps a natural consequence of Ha Jin's absence on the spot, imprecisions enhance the feeling of strangeness that strikes the students from Shanning university. Despite their different perspectives, both authors dedicate a special mention to the group of the *Feihu dui* 飛虎隊 (Flying Tigers), underlining their valuable contribution to the students' cause:

The driver told me that he was a veteran and had quit his regular job at a steel mill a year ago, and that if he hadn't owned this minivan, he'd have joined the team of workers called Flying Tigers, which was most active in supporting the student movement.<sup>239</sup>

「聽，飛虎隊來了！」那是由上百輛摩托車組成的隊伍，正圍著廣場兜圈，喊著「學生萬歲」！聲勢浩大，後面還跟著騎自行車和三輪車的大隊人馬。他們每天早晨都會送來牛奶和麵包油條，還有稀飯和鹹菜。<sup>240</sup>

At that moment, a hundred motorcyclists known as the Flying Tigers roared into the Square, followed by a cavalcade of residents on bicycles and tricycles. They came every morning to deliver donations of milk, bread, fried dough sticks, hot porridge and pickles to the students who weren't fasting.<sup>241</sup>

Symbol of the popular resistance, this group of civilian helped the demonstrators bringing them supplies and information.<sup>242</sup> The references to the constellation of organisations that were being founded and dismantled on a daily basis increase the historical value of the fictional *témoignage*, contributing to recreate a realistic picture.

The example of slogans shows how, despite the subversive aim of the protests, the 'language of the square' was not immune from communist ideology.

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<sup>237</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 299.

<sup>238</sup> Dingxin Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 154.

<sup>239</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 301.

<sup>240</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 291.

<sup>241</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 317.

<sup>242</sup> Zhao, *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement*, 186.

Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution were able to carve out their space in the texts, just like the Chairman's portrait continued to cast its shadow over Tiananmen during the protests.

Despite his open opposition to the communist regime, Ma Jian's Chinese is naturally more subject to the influence of ideology<sup>243</sup> than Ha Jin's English, due to the long-standing control of Chinese political power over language that shaped grammar and lexicon throughout history.<sup>244</sup> However, Ha Jin's self-translated English, although frees him from the linguistic influence of politics, puts him in a marginal position in terms of both language and culture.<sup>245</sup> His mission to communicate with Chinese people regardless of the language barrier generates the need to recreate a cultural bound with the motherland, which also materialises in the reproduction of communist tenets, although not without criticism.

In *The Crazy*, the cult of Mao is always associated with a form of madness, which reveals itself through the characters' outlandish rigmaroles. The first and unaware supporter of Mao Zedong is the delirious Mr Yang, who betrays his conscience by declaring his support to principles to which, before the stroke, he had always refused to submit.<sup>246</sup> On hearing one of his ravings, Jian Wan makes a remark on Mr Yang's peculiar use of communist-style language:

"Comrades, you all know Chairman Mao is very fond of this poem," Mr. Yang declared. "It's a real gem. If Chairman Mao likes it, we all must love it. We must study it, praise it, memorize it, and use it as our moral compass, because Chairman Mao's words are the touchstone of truth. Any one of his sentences is worth ten thousand sentences we speak."

I was sick of him! Why did he suddenly talk like a political parrot? He had lost his sense of poetic judgment and again revealed his sycophantic nature.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> For a detailed analysis of the influence of ideology in *Rou zhi tu* see Codeluppi, "Mapping Ideology in Language Han Dong's Zha gen (Banished!) and Ma Jian's Rou zhi tu (Beijing Coma)."

<sup>244</sup> Hodge and Louie, *The Politics of Chinese Language and Culture: The Art of Reading Dragons*, 91.

<sup>245</sup> Yan Zhang 艷章, "Wenhua fanyi zhong de 'tiaohé jiānróng' — — Ha Jin fei muyu wenxue chuanguozuo dui zhongyi wai de qishi" 文化翻譯中的'調和兼容'——哈金非母語文學創作對中譯外的啟示 (Retaining Otherness in Cultural Translation: What C-E Translators Can Learn from Ha Jin's English Fiction Writing)," 71.

<sup>246</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 23.

<sup>247</sup> *ibid.*, 125–6.

The protagonist's condemnation of this ideology is not limited to his comments on a sick person. The highest level of devotion to the Party is embodied in the character of Little Owl, a former lecturer at Shanning University who Jian Wan presents as a "madman" who "talk[s] nonsense."<sup>248</sup>

He declared vociferously, "Chairman Mao has instructed us: 'We come from all corners of the country and have joined together for a common revolutionary cause. So our cadres must show concern for every soldier, and all people in the revolutionary ranks must care for each other, must love and help each other.' Now, you must give me some grub, I'm your soldier. You cannot discard me like a cracked pot just because you're a big shot now."

"Give me a break!" I snapped. Meanwhile, more than twenty people were gathering around to watch.

He wouldn't leave me alone and went on quoting instructions from Chairman Mao, as if the Great Leader were still alive. Too embarrassed to remain the target of his harangue, I put my uncracked egg in his palm. He grabbed it, whisked around, and scampered away to the hot-water room, holding the egg above his head and shouting, "Long live Chairman Mao! Long live the Communist Party!" That was an old way of expressing one's joy, but now the shibboleth sounded farcical.<sup>249</sup>

Mao's quotation is the translation of a popular passage from the third volume of the *Mao Zedong xuanji* 毛澤東選集 (Selected Works of Mao Zedong).<sup>250</sup> The use of a direct quotation makes the language of the Cultural Revolution an actual Part of the text and, at the same time, allows the author to shift the responsibility for the content. Jian Wan's straightforward comments express a radical opposition, while the description of the attention Little Owl receives reflects the approval those principles are still able to arouse in contemporary society.

In Ma Jian's novel, the criticism of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution is sharper. Negative references to that decade are scattered throughout the whole novel, and the resulting picture is that of a *zainan* 災難 (catastrophe),<sup>251</sup> characterised by a myriad of horrors. Although Ma Jian declares

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<sup>248</sup> *ibid.*, 89–90.

<sup>249</sup> *ibid.*, 91–2.

<sup>250</sup> "我們都是來自五湖四海，為了一個共同的革命目標，走到一起來了。[...] 我們的幹部要關心每一個戰士，一切革命隊伍的人都要互相關心，互相愛護，互相幫助。" Mao Zedong 毛澤東, *Mao Zedong xuanji (disan juan)* (Selected Works of Mao Zedong, Vol. 3), (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), 1005.

<sup>251</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 51.

the intention of the communist Party to erase the people's memory of that traumatic period,<sup>252</sup> the reminiscences are still vivid, to the point of threatening the success of the democracy movement:

「我們搞運動的模式主要來自文革經驗，這就很容易把民主運動變成共產黨式的反抗運動。」<sup>253</sup>

'Our only reference point is the Cultural Revolution, so there's always a danger this democracy movement will degenerate into a communist-style rebellion.'<sup>254</sup>

The name of the Communist Party (*gong chan dang* 共產黨) is employed to convey the counter-productive approach the student may inherit, even unwittingly, from the history of their country. The attempt to use the example of the Communist Party to define democracy by stating what it is not reveals Ma Jian's sharp criticism of its means to operate, as well as its power to contaminate the spirit of the movement.<sup>255</sup> As far as Mao Zedong is concerned, the passage of the novel in which the influence of the Chairman is best represented is the one that narrates an episode of vandalism by a group of students that throw ink-filled eggs at his portrait hanging over Tiananmen square. The analysis of the language shows how the author, despite his open opposition to the government, decides to give space to both views of Mao Zedong:

「[...]那車上的解放軍全是熱愛毛主席的[...]」。<sup>256</sup>

'[...] The soldiers waiting to march into the city worship Chairman Mao. [...]'<sup>257</sup>

「[...]是有些激進，但潑到了點子上，毛是一個國家制度問題的全部象徵」。<sup>258</sup>

'They did go a bit far, but they were right to attack Mao. He symbolises all that's wrong with our country.'<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> *ibid.*, 313.

<sup>253</sup> *ibid.*, 380.

<sup>254</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 413.

<sup>255</sup> Codeluppi, "Mapping Ideology in Language Han Dong's *Zha gen* (Banished!) and Ma Jian's *Rou zhi tu* (Beijing Coma)," 263.

<sup>256</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 383.

<sup>257</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 416.

<sup>258</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 384.

<sup>259</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 417.

By identifying the cult of Mao with the military repression of a peaceful movement, Ma Jian condemns the regime and its army. However, the mention of people who *re'ai* 熱愛 (worship) the Chairman shows how this historical figure, even years after his death, still exerts a strong influence.<sup>260</sup> Finally, the high number of references to the symbols of the communist power inscribe the text in an ideological context – the same that marked the generation of the author's memory. As a result, despite his denunciation, Ma Jian's linguistic formulations are marked by political discourse, revealing his socio-cultural bond with the motherland.

References to foreign languages – in particular to English – play an important role in the fictional representation of the authors' memories. The reasons are mainly two: firstly, they reflect the international dimension reached by the student protests of 1989; secondly, they can be regarded as a mark of Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's transnational identities.

In *The Crazy* and in *Rou zhi tu*, the 'presence' of foreign languages is expressed in different ways, first and foremost due to the fact that the texts are written in English and Chinese respectively. The first issue to strike the reader is the protagonists' relationship with English language, which marks their life and their social interactions. Jian Wan is depicted as having a fair knowledge of English that, even if not enough to compete in the foreign academic environment, constitutes a powerful tool to access information in foreign-languages:

I began to read the current issue of Beijing Review, an English-language weekly, to which I had subscribed ever since I was a graduate student. It carried a lengthy article about Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to China; I could follow its general drift without consulting a dictionary.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Codeluppi, "Mapping Ideology in Language Han Dong's Zha gen (Banished!) and Ma Jian's Rou zhi tu (Beijing Coma)," 262.

<sup>261</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 166–7.

The reference to the content of the foreign-language press shows how Beijing was under the spotlight during the student protests. This international attention on the Chinese capital probably facilitated Ha Jin in gathering information on the democracy movement and, therefore, inevitably marked his memories of the event.

Contrariwise, Dai Wei is not confident with English, and this is made particularly evident when his brother arrives in Beijing with his English girlfriend, making Dai Wei feel uncomfortable because of the linguistic barrier:

昨晚小弟和他的英國太太第一次回北京。他倆說著英語，我只能聽懂些單詞：我們，房間，這味道，受不了，晚上，可以見，明天，吃，都是，媽媽，想，好，對，太累了，不，不知道或者銀行、取錢、旅行等。<sup>262</sup>

My brother arrived in Beijing last night. It's the first time he's brought his British girlfriend to China. They spoke to each other in English. I could only pick out a few words, such as: we, room, this smell, horrible, tonight, tomorrow, eat, mother, want, good, yes, too tired, no, bank, cash, travel.<sup>263</sup>

His condition reflects that of the author, whose proficiency in English is still limited, and therefore he continues to rely on Chinese for his literary creation. Nevertheless, Ma Jian too describes the echo the Tiananmen protests find in the foreign press, although his employ of English is not direct. Indeed, the portions of text intended to be understood in English are still in Chinese, but preceded by a gloss specifying the language swap:

街上的人們鼓掌了，在路口等候的司機也鳴笛支持。王飛和余進舉著曲發的牡丹花床單，引來很多圍觀者的猜測，因為寫的是英文：給我自由或者死亡。<sup>264</sup>

Local residents standing on the pavements applauded as we passed, and drivers who'd stopped at the intersections hooted their horns in support. Wang Fei and Yu Jin held up a bed sheet. Bystanders gazed at it in bewilderment, unable to understand the slogan GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEATH! written in English across it.<sup>265</sup>

The effort to attract international attention was one of the key points of the protests, and surely hit the author's self-exilic consciousness. Ma Jian tries to

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<sup>262</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 504.

<sup>263</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 544–5.

<sup>264</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 182.

<sup>265</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 192.

reproduce the worldwide exchange despite the protagonist's lack of confidence with foreign languages, as a proof that the desire of crossing borders can be satisfied even without excellent linguistic skills.

Besides depicting the impact of the movement on western media, foreign languages are employed to broaden the cultural references present in the novels, even if not strictly connected with the protests. For example, in Ha Jin's novel, multilingualism is well represented in the variety of words originating from Italian and French that are scattered throughout the text, such as "inamorato"<sup>266</sup> or "insouciance."<sup>267</sup> Moreover, many are the references to Mr Yang's knowledge of German language, also employed in the form of literary quotation:

"I heard him speak foreign words last night."

"Really, in what language?"

"I've no clue, but it was definitely not English or Japanese. It sounded strange."

"Was it like this, 'Wer, wenn ich schreie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel Ordnungen?'"

She shook her head in amazement, then giggled. "What language is that? You sounded like an officer rapping out orders."

"It's German."<sup>268</sup>

These features enhance the linguistic hybridisation typical of Ha Jin's style, reflecting the international context in which the novel has been created. Contrariwise, Ma Jian does not employ foreign languages directly, and even quoted texts like songs are always translated into Chinese. These two different approaches to portray international influences in the fictional representation of the protests are among the peculiarities of Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's exiled voices. Their conflictual relationship with the motherland finds expression in linguistic features that enrich the original text – either in Chinese or in self-translated English – as well as translations. This last point will be addressed in the following part, which will deal with the issue of the circulation of global Chinese literature through English, French and Chinese translations.

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<sup>266</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 257.

<sup>267</sup> *ibid.*, 94; 295.

<sup>268</sup> *ibid.*, 46.





PART FOUR:  
TRANSLINGUAL NOMADISM



## 1. The Impact of Translation

The 'liquidity' of the concept of global Chinese literature permits to build countless connections between its articulations, and to analyse and compare them as they are created beyond territorial borders. Works belonging to literary categories - now almost obsolete - such as the 'Anglophone,' the 'Francophone,' the 'Sinophone,' et cetera, can be combined, and their synergy exploited to trace the multiple configurations of literary Chineseness in the new millennium. Nevertheless, if on the one hand this concept goes beyond linguistic boundaries, on the other hand it enhances the position of Chinese literature on the international scene. Global Chinese literature encompasses potentially any work containing any form of Chinese identity; however, compared studies between its articulations are most fruitful when they include multiple linguistic environments. In fact, being global does not mean to be globalised, but the concept is born out of globalisation and the migration flows triggered by it. As a result, translation must be taken into account as a means of interaction between global Chinese literature and world literature. Spivak stated that "translation is [...] not only necessary but unavoidable."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, cross-national confrontation

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<sup>1</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translation as Culture," *Parallax* 6, no. 1 (2000): 21.

cannot but rely on translation, in at least one of its forms. This means to involve not only the works translated from the author's mother tongue to a foreign language, but also more peculiar cases. For example, it can include works that are self-translated to avoid censorship or to speak directly to a foreign readership, works relying on translation for being adapted so that the author's message can be exported to the international scene, and works born as self-translations re-translated into Chinese, by their authors or by other translators. Translation constitutes, therefore, the practical medium for literary works to circulate globally, exploiting both centrifugal and centripetal forces. "And yet, as the text guards its secrets, it is impossible"<sup>2</sup> continues Spivak. The perfect transfer is, of course, an unrealistic goal. Nevertheless, it is by means of this imperfect correspondence that literary works become translingual. In this context, this adjective shall be intended not to define authors that juggle with multiple languages, but rather the capability of Chinese literary works to convey modified messages according to the language-culture they address. Like for every articulation of global Chinese, for each one of its translingual alter-ego the subject is always the text.

This chapter analyses the cross-cultural circulation of the fictional memories compared beforehand, pointing out how their different declinations complete the picture of global Chinese literature. Its rhizomatic configuration encourages a cross-language comparison that encompasses all the languages part of this study. Therefore, all the published translations in Chinese, English and French of *Zha gen*, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, *The Crazy*, and *Rou zhi tu* will be taken into account to explore their representation of the aspects that guided our previous analyses – time, space, and language. The following sections are not meant to comment on the substance of the linguistic performances of the analysed translations. Such approach would fall out of the scope of this study and would require the collaboration of native speakers able to grasp every

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

nuance of the translated texts. This spin-off investigation is intended to show how the representation of these fictional memories changes through translations, which are part and parcel of their global identity. By investigating their “*manner of becoming*,”<sup>3</sup> this chapter looks beyond the level of linguistic equivalence to show how memories, although fictional, are altered in the process that transfers them from one culture to another.

Before proceeding to the analysis, a few clarifications on the existing translations should be made. The ‘less translated’ novel is *Zha gen*, only available in Chinese and in English, translated by Nicky Harman (2009).<sup>4</sup> Contrariwise, the versions of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* are four: the novel was translated into English by Ina Rilke (2002),<sup>5</sup> and there are two Chinese versions. The first one was translated by Yuchi Xiu and published in Taiwan in 2002,<sup>6</sup> whereas the second one is by Yu Zhongxian and has been available in Mainland China since 2003.<sup>7</sup> *The Crazy* was translated into French by Mimi and Isabelle Perrin (2004)<sup>8</sup> and into Chinese by Huang Canran (2004).<sup>9</sup> Like *Rou zhi tu*, the novel has been banned by the Chinese censorship and the Taiwanese edition is the only one available. Finally, *Rou zhi tu* is the most peculiar case. Due to its problems with censorship, the novel was first published in the United Kingdom in 2008, translated by Flora Drew,<sup>10</sup> and the English version became the source text for all the subsequent translations, among which the French one, by Constance de Saint-

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<sup>3</sup> Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity - China, 1900-1937*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 16.

<sup>4</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*.

<sup>5</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*.

<sup>6</sup> Dai Sijie 戴思杰, *Ba'erzhake yu xiaocaifeng* 巴爾扎克與小裁縫 (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), trans. Yuchi Xiu 尉遲秀, (Taipei: Huangguan wenhua chuban youxian gongsi, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Dai Sijie 戴思杰, *Ba'erzhake yu zhongguo xiaocaifeng* 巴爾扎克與中國小裁縫 (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), trans. Yu Zhongxian 余中先, (Beijing: Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Ha Jin, *La démence du sage* (The Crazy), trans. Mimi Perrin and Isabelle Perrin, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Ha Jin 哈金, *Fengkuang* 瘋狂 (The Crazy), trans. Huang Canran 黃燦然, (Taipei: Shibao chuban gongsi, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*.

Mont,<sup>11</sup> came out in the same year. The original Chinese version was published only in 2009 in the United States<sup>12</sup> and in 2010 in Taiwan.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to point out that the two languages in which all the books are available are Chinese and English. Indeed, all these novels are to some extent rooted in the Chinese language, which emphasises their connections with global Chinese literature. The English language, instead, constitutes the channel to reach a wider audience, facilitating its intertwining with world literature.

### 1.1. *Language Intersections*

The translingual character of these novels is reflected first and foremost in the permeability of their language. Silvester points out that, for Dai Sijie, the “work of remembering and the act of creation are [...] carried out in French,”<sup>14</sup> and a similar remark can also be made as far as Ha Jin is concerned, since his recollection is indeed ‘carried out’ in English. Han Dong and Ma Jian, instead, rely on their mother tongue to represent their fictional memories, although still entrusting English with the mission to introduce their works to an international audience. The authors’ different relationships with the issue of translation and self-translation influence their texts, in which language is part and parcel of the recollected events, a mirror reflecting the sociocultural environment of the remembered times.

In *Zha gen*, the differences between Sanyu dialect, spoken by the villagers, and Nanjing dialect, the Taos’ mother tongue, are well emphasised throughout the whole novel, as the local language was indissolubly linked to the memory of banishment. The author specifies how young Tao’s proficiency in the local dialect

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<sup>11</sup> The first edition of the novel was published in 2008 by Flammarion. This study was conducted on the 2009 edition distributed by J’ai lu. Ma Jian 馬建, *Beijing Coma* (Beijing Coma), trans. Constance de Saint-Mont, (Paris: J’ai lu, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Beijing zhiwuren* 北京植物人 (Beijing Coma), (New York: Mingjing chubanshe, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma).

<sup>14</sup> Silvester, “Genre and Image in Francophone Chinese Works,” 368.

goes hand in hand with the fading of his memories of Nanjing,<sup>15</sup> underlining the close relationship between personal memories and language. The gap between the two languages is presented as both an obstacle to overcome in order to ‘strike root’ in Sanyu and as an indicator of the Taos’ and the villagers’ different cultural backgrounds. The fact that Han Dong points out explicitly whenever the use of a specific word or phrase is altered because of dialectal nuances makes the puns reproducible also in translation most of the times.

#### Representation of language in *Zha gen*:

九月子說，一次蘇群對他說：“天氣真熱啊！”九月子說：“熱哪，白天不熱，晚上熱。”蘇群說：“晚上熱，白天也熱。”

在三余話裡，熱與日同音。聽九月子說話的人嘿嘿地笑起來，他們對小陶說：“晚上日，白天也日。”<sup>16</sup>

#### English translation:

September was telling them a story about Su Qun. One day she had said to him, “It’s so hot today!” To which he had said, “Not during the day, but it gets hot at night” And Su Qun had responded, “It’s hot at night and hot by day too!”

In the Sanyu dialect, “hot” and “fuck” sounded the same, and the boys all burst out laughing. Looking at young Tao, they said, “Fuck at night, and fuck by day too!”<sup>17</sup>

The presence of the explanation in the Chinese text allows the translator to insert an analogous gloss in the English text without compromising the final effect. What is left out, the “untranslatable residue,”<sup>18</sup> is the phonetic resemblance. Occasionally, the process of translation weighs on the play on words, for example when describing the naivety of Sanyu people through the quoting of the misheard news of Lin Biao’s death.

#### Representation of language in *Zha gen*:

他們奔走相告，說是林禿子帶了一群老婆坐飛機逃跑，周總理從小櫃子裡拿了一個“搗蛋”往天上一擲，飛機就爆炸了。林禿子摔下來，跌斷了三叉骨。三余人說得有鼻子有眼，雖說有些玄乎，但距事實真相也差不了多少。

林禿子自然是指林彪。他現在已經不是林副主席，而是林禿子。因為頭上無毛，是個禿頂，所以是林禿子。一群老婆是老婆叶群的誤傳。他們乘坐的飛機機型是三叉戟，

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<sup>15</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 98.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 60.

<sup>17</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 62.

<sup>18</sup> Bruno Osimo, *Manuale del traduttore* (The Translator’s Handbook), (Milano: Hoepli, 2011), 80.



三余人聽成了三叉骨。“搗蛋”即是導彈。老陶不無興奮地說“老百姓的語言就是生動！”為這些有趣的說法，老陶家人關起門來偷偷地樂了很久。<sup>19</sup>

#### English translation:

They gossiped excitedly about how Baldie Lin and his bevy of wives had fled in a plane and Premier Zhou had gotten out his “troublemaker” and shot the plane down and it had burst into flames. Then Baldie Lin had tumbled out and broken his trident bone. They added their own touches, and the story became rather fantastic, but they were not too far from the truth of the matter.

Baldie Lin, of course, was Lin Biao, who was no longer deputy chairman of the Chinese Communist Party but Baldie Lin, a man with not a hair on his pate. He and his (only) wife, Bev, had left in a Trident plane, which the peasants had heard as “trident bone.” And the “troublemaker” was a guided missile. Tao was quite excited when he heard them talking. “Ordinary people’s language is so vivid!” he exclaimed, and the family secretly enjoyed these unusual expressions for a long time after.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the loss of the homophones, the original aim of the passage is preserved. The strangeness of the ‘translation’ made in Sanyu is reproduced in the target language, thanks to the author’s explanation that compensate the cultural gap that led to the villagers’ misunderstanding. As a result, the excerpt still conveys the similar feeling of a memory whose colours are given by the use of a language that sounds ‘foreign’ to both the Chinese and the English readers.

Also in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, the author exemplifies the cultural differences between the protagonists coming from the city and the local villagers through the contraposition between standard Chinese and local dialects. Nevertheless, a step further is made when western languages, which are more ‘foreign’ on paper, are represented as more familiar to Ma and Luo. For instance, when the two protagonists meet the little seamstress’s father, he recognises their urban origins and tries to speak to them in English.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the contrast between western culture and the China of the Cultural Revolution goes beyond the ‘civilising’ role of French literature,<sup>22</sup> as the cross-cultural text represents the

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<sup>19</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 157–8.

<sup>20</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 158–9.

<sup>21</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 35.

<sup>22</sup> Watts, “Mao’s China in the Mirror: Reversing the Exotic in Dai Sijie’s *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse Chinoise*,” 166.

concretisation of the intertwining of French and Chinese discourses.<sup>23</sup> Thornber points out how the author's transnational identity favours the encounter of the two since, in this novel, "Chinese-language translations and adaptations of French classics are themselves reconfigured, via the language of the novel, back into French."<sup>24</sup> This fundamental aspect is partially lost in translation, no matter in what language, since is the result of the migrant's mutated individuality. In one passage, the collision between the author's Chinese memory and his French – and Frenchified – representation is particularly evident, namely when the author decides to cite the name of Balzac by adapting the transcription in the Latin alphabet of its Chinese translation.

Representation of language in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* :

« Ba-er-za-ke ». Traduit en chinois, le nom de l'auteur français formait un mot de quatre idéogrammes. Quelle magie que la traduction ! Soudain, la lourdeur des deux premières syllabes, la résonance guerrière et agressive dotée de ringardise de ce nom disparaissaient. Ces quatre caractères, très élégants, dont chacun se composait de peu de traits, s'assemblaient pour former une beauté inhabituelle, de laquelle émanait une saveur exotique, sensuelle, généreuse comme le parfum envoûtant d'un alcool conservé depuis des siècles dans une cave.<sup>25</sup>

English translation:

"Ba-er-zar-ke." Translated into Chinese, the name of the French author comprised four ideograms. The magic of translation! The ponderousness of the two syllables as well as the belligerent, somewhat old-fashioned ring of the name were quite gone, now that the four characters – very elegant, each composed of just a few strokes – banded together to create an unusual beauty, redolent with an exotic fragrance as sensual as the perfume wreathing a wine stored for centuries in a cellar.<sup>26</sup>

The orientalist description of the characters emphasises the foreignness of the name of Balzac, betraying the intent to attract the French readers' attention by conveying an image of the author's mother tongue who does not belong to his

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<sup>23</sup> Thornber, "French Discourse in Chinese, in Chinese Discourse in French-Paradoxes of Chinese Francophone Émigré Writing," 230.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 227.

<sup>25</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 71.

<sup>26</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 52.

cultural background. If this strategy also works for the English translation, the same cannot be said of the Chinese one.

#### Chinese translation published in Taiwan:

「巴—爾—扎—克」。這位法國作家的名字翻譯成中文，變成四個表意文字。翻譯這個檔事多麼神奇啊！轉瞬間，這法文名字前兩個音節的滯重、土裡土氣如子彈一般的戰爭氣息都消失了無蹤了。這四個極其優雅的中文字，每個字的筆畫都不多，似乎營造了某種綺異的美感，從中散發出一股野性的異國情調，毫不吝惜地揮灑著，宛如酒窖裡百年珍釀的清香。<sup>27</sup>

#### Chinese translation published in Mainland China:

「巴—爾—扎—克」。翻譯成中文後，這個法國作家的名字變成了四個中國字。翻譯是何等的魅力無窮！突然，這一名字中前兩個沉重的音節，它那撥火棍般咄咄逼人的音響效果消失了。那四個文字，那麼優雅，每一個的筆畫都那麼簡略，聚集在一起構成了一種非同尋常的美，從中散發出一種異國情調的、慷慨大方的氣息，就像是在地窖中存放了幾百年的陳酒那醉人的醇香。<sup>28</sup>

If on the one hand, Dai Sijie's memory of the Cultural Revolution cannot but be generated in Chinese, on the other hand, the employ of French brings him to 'foreignise' his recollection to meet the imaginary of the western readership. Translated into Chinese, the description loses his attractive power, inverting a mechanism that does not seem to work properly in the author's mother tongue. This strategy is also displayed in the use of quotation marks whenever the author refers to cultural elements typical of that phase of Chinese history. Once again, the original intent is preserved through the English translation; however, the use of quotation marks in the Chinese texts affects the depiction of the memory, which is represented as 'linguistically foreign' to the culture that created it.

Like Dai Sijie, Ha Jin too writes in a foreign language. Linguistic hybridisation is a prerogative of his works, which can be regarded as an enriching feature in terms of literary creativity.<sup>29</sup> However, the idea behind his

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<sup>27</sup> Dai Sijie 戴思杰, *Ba'erzhake yu xiaocaifeng* 巴爾扎克與小裁縫 (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 65.

<sup>28</sup> Dai Sijie 戴思杰, *Ba'erzhake yu zhongguo xiaocaifeng* 巴爾扎克與中國小裁縫 (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 58.

<sup>29</sup> Yan Zhang 艷章, "Wenhua fanyi zhong de 'tiaohe jianrong' — Ha Jin fei muyu wenxue chuanguozuo dui zhongyi wai de qishi" 文化翻譯中的'調和兼容'——哈金非母語文學創作對中譯外的啟示 (Retaining Otherness in Cultural Translation: What C-E Translators Can Learn from Ha Jin's English Fiction Writing), 72.

literary practice seems to be radically different. While Dai Sijie ‘translates’ Chinese culture to meet the taste of French readers, Ha Jin bridges between the two languages, expressing the peculiarities of Chinese language in English. His fictional memory of the Tiananmen protests shows specific linguistic features that represent the author’s transnational identity and contribute to locating the novel in a translingual context. One of the most tangible concretisations of such hybridization is represented by Ha Jin’s use of toponyms, which are not always translated using the same strategy. Indeed, the author alternates the employ of names built on *pinyin* transliteration for places widely known in the West, like Tiananmen Square, with literal translations, like in the case of ‘Sandy Rock’ village: a village the protagonist visits before deciding to leave for Beijing. This approach is widely used by the author throughout his production<sup>30</sup> and can be regarded as a way to both keep the cultural connotation of the names of places while adding a touch of irony in the eyes of the foreign reader.<sup>31</sup>

#### Representation of language in *The Crazy*:

She assured me that if the letter had ever arrived at Hanlong, it must already have been forwarded to the village, so I’d better go to Sandy Rock personally. It was four miles away to the north. Not far; I could walk.<sup>32</sup>

#### French translation:

Elle m’assura que si jamais la lettre était bien arrivée à Hanlong, elle avait dû être réexpédiée au village, d’où la suggestion que j’y aille en personne. Rochex sableux était situé à six kilomètres au nord, distance que je pouvais couvrir à pied.<sup>33</sup>

Not only does the translation into English of the name of the village offer an insight into its meaning, but it also allows that idea to be re-translated into other western languages, such as French. In this way, the author conveys a nitid image of the remembered places, which are more likely to impress the reader’s memory

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<sup>30</sup> Xiang Jiahao 向佳豪, “Cong Ha Jin xiaoshuo de yuyan lai kan fanyi shi xiezuo” 從哈金小說的語言來看翻譯式寫作 (Analyzing Translational Writing Starting from the Language in Ha Jin’s Fiction): 6.

<sup>31</sup> Zhang, “Bilingual Creativity in Chinese English: Ha Jin’s in the Pond,” 309.

<sup>32</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 237.

<sup>33</sup> Ha Jin, *La démence du sage* (The Crazy), 236.

as well. The second striking feature of Ha Jin's text is the amount of multilingual references characterising Jian Wan's recollection. Scattered throughout the novel are quotations from different literary traditions, from the *Duino Elegies*,<sup>34</sup> to the *Divine Comedy*,<sup>35</sup> to Du Fu's poems,<sup>36</sup> et cetera. Nevertheless, coherently with his philosophy, the author balances his penchant for western literatures by disseminating in the text clear reminders of the Chinese language behind the English form. For instance, he refers to one of the female characters by stating that "she would become notorious as 'a little broken shoe.'"<sup>37</sup> The expression is the literal translation of the Chinese insult *xiao poxie* 小破鞋, which denotes a woman who behaves immorally in sexual matters. This particular expression is rich in cultural connotation and it was largely employed during the Cultural Revolution to designate a precise category of women, who were even forced to walk with broken shoes around their necks as a punishment for their behaviour. In this case, Ha Jin marked the insult by using quotation marks, emphasising the exoticism of what would have been an apparently nonsensical collocation in the eyes of an Anglophone reader. Once the sentence translated 'back' into Chinese, the passage regains his original linguistic flavour.<sup>38</sup> Instead, the French text perpetuates the 'foreignising' semantic translation, "*Weiya, officiellement désignée comme « petite chaussure brisée »,*"<sup>39</sup> bridging between Chinese and French. This continuous *va-et-vient* incarnates the belligerent forces exerting their influence on the cross-cultural text, and Ha Jin's endeavour to convey in the foreign language the Chineseness of his memory is an attempt to put them in dialogue.

Ma Jian's *Rou zhi tu* is not as multilingual as *The Crazyed*. The reportage-like form of the novel results in language-specific descriptions whose most distinctive feature are the quotations of the students' slogans. The translation strategy

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<sup>34</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazyed*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 69.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 130.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 218.

<sup>38</sup> Ha Jin 哈金, *Fengkuang* 瘋狂 (*The Crazyed*), 200.

<sup>39</sup> Ha Jin, *La démence du sage* (*The Crazyed*), 217.

adopted by Flor Drew seems to be twofold. If, on the one hand, she adapts the target text to western readers through extensions or omissions, on the other hand, she translates slogans word for word, emphasising them with capital letters.

The representation of language in *Rou zhi tu*:

沒想到，報名絕食同學已經三百多人了。有人自製了標語牌，寫著：我愛真理勝過糧食，我愛麵包更愛民主。還有的乾脆寫的背心上：無自由不可忍。一位同學把寫著「絕食不吃油炸民主！」的布條斜披在肩上。<sup>40</sup>

English translation:

By now three hundred Beijing University students had signed up for the strike. The restaurant was full. One girl was holding a placard that said I LOVE TRUTH MORE THAN RICE! I LOVE DEMOCRACY MORE THAN BREAD! Another student had written across his cotton vest I CAN ENDURE HUNGER, BUT NOT A LIFE WITHOUT LIBERTY! A tall student had a banner draped around his neck that said HUNGER STRIKERS WON'T EAT DEEP-FRIED DEMOCRACY!<sup>41</sup>

In this way, slogans have a chance to have on the foreign readers the same effect they had on the author, leaving a similar imprint on their memory as well. Moreover, the emphasis and the semantic translation are also transposed into the French translation, allowing the message to circulate among western languages with the same power.

French translation:

À présent trois cents étudiants de l'université de Beijing avaient signé. Le restaurant était plein. Une fille tenait une pancarte disant J'AIME PLUS LA VÉRITÉ QUE LE RIZ ! J'AIME PLUS LA DÉMOCRATIE QUE LE PAIN ! Un autre étudiant avait écrit sur sa veste en coton JE PEUX SUPPORTER LA FAIM MAIS PAS UNE VIE SANS LIBERTÉ ! Un grand étudiant avait une bannière enroulée autour du cou sur laquelle il était écrit : LES GRÉVISTES DE LA FAIM REFUSENT DE MANGER DE LA DÉMOCRATIE FRITE !<sup>42</sup>

Another example of the application of this strategy is the reproduction of the play on words based on the loanword '*faxisi* 法西斯' (fascist). Also in this case, the translator kept the focus on the source language and tried to reproduce the sound of the Chinese word by altering the *pinyin* transcription, in order to allow an

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<sup>40</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 247.

<sup>41</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 267.

<sup>42</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma* (Beijing Coma), 361–2.

anglophone reader to pronounce the loanword correctly and to see the phonetic similarity with its English equivalent.

The representation of language in *Rou zhi tu*:

.....什麼叫法西斯？  
悶蛋，法西斯就是罰你死唄.....<sup>43</sup>

English translation:

‘What does “fascist” mean?’  
‘Are you stupid? Fa-shi-si: it means “punish-you-with-death”.’<sup>44</sup>

Although the play on words, based on the homophony of the characters *fa* 法 and *fa* 罰 and *si* 斯 and *si* 死, cannot be reproduced in English, its meaning is fully conveyed in the target text, minimising the translation residue. This ruse makes it possible to transfer the pun also into French, without further affecting its original form.

French translation:

– Qu’est-ce que ça veut dire “fasciste” ?  
– Tu es bête ou quoi ? *Fa-shi-si* : ça veut dire “te-punir-de-mort”.<sup>45</sup>

This twofold translation strategy, although sometimes authorises significant interventions on the original text, succeeds in internationalising the novel while preserving its close relationship with the language in which it was created. The linguistic features of the Tiananmen protests are, therefore, able to reach the Anglophone readership via the translator’s intervention, and to exploit such mediation to be subsequently transferred to other languages.

## 1.2. *Temporal Disparities*

The temporal framework in which the novels take place constitutes another main feature in the representation of the authors’ fictional memories. *Zha gen* and

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<sup>43</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 603.

<sup>44</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 658–9.

<sup>45</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma* (Beijing Coma), 884.

*Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* narrate the Cultural Revolution through a wide time frame, whereas *The Crazy* and *Rou zhi tu* concentrate on a rather short historical phase. Therefore, the selected excerpts focus on different interpretations of the narrated time, coherently with the nature of the respective novels. The passages by Han Dong and Dai Sijie provide general remarks on the period of the Cultural Revolution, whereas those by Ha Jin and Ma Jian focus on a specific moment that marked the history of the protests. The heterogeneity of global Chinese literature permits to compare the different versions of the fictional memories to show how polyglossia affects their representation of the temporal dimension. In this context, 'time' has two different meanings, indicating both the temporal indicators guiding the narration and the temporal setting of the novel – or of a specific scene. The description of the activities carried out by the Red Guards by Han Dong, and of the origins of the re-education by Dai Sijie is compared with the description of a few scene during the night of the crackdown in Tiananmen Square by Ha Jin and Ma Jian.

#### Representation of time in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*:

Deux mots sur la rééducation : dans la Chine rouge, à la fin de l'année 68, le Grand Timonier de la Révolution, le président Mao, lança un jour une campagne qui allait changer profondément le pays : les universités furent fermées, et « les jeunes intellectuels », c'est-à-dire les lycéens qui avaient fini leurs études secondaires, furent envoyés à la campagne pour être « rééduqués par les paysans pauvres ». [...]

La vraie raison qui poussa Mao Zedong à prendre cette décision restait obscure : voulait-il en finir avec les Gardes rouges qui commençaient à échapper à son contrôle ? Ou était-ce la fantaisie d'un grand rêveur révolutionnaire, désireux de créer une nouvelle génération ? Personne ne sut jamais répondre à cette question. À l'époque, Luo et moi discutâmes souvent en cachette, tels deux conspirateurs. Notre conclusion fut la suivante : Mao haïssait les intellectuels.<sup>46</sup>

#### Chinese translation published in Taiwan:

簡單交代一下什麼是「再教育」：一九六八年時，紅色中國的舵手毛主席又發動了一場新的撼動全國的革命戰役。大學不再招生，而「知青」們——也就是那些完成了中學課程的高中生——全部都待下放到農村，去「接受貧下中農的再教育」。 [...]

毛澤東之所以這麼做，背後真正的原因始終撲朔難解：他想藉此肅清越來越不聽話的紅衛兵嗎？還是這位偉大的革命夢想家在那兒遐思妄想，意圖創造一個全新的世代？

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<sup>46</sup> Dai Sijie 戴思杰, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 13–4.



這問題永遠無人能解。當時羅明和我常像陰謀份子似的，躲起來偷偷討論這事。我們的結論如下：毛澤東憎恨知識分子。<sup>47</sup>

Generally speaking, alterations in temporal informations are rare. In the selected excerpts, specific indicators referring to the time of the story are transposed with perfect equivalence without raising any particular issue, except in one case – the reference to the year 1968 in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*. The original text introduces Mao's campaign by specifying its launch “à la fin de l'année 68” (at the end of the year '68). The reference to the universal calendar serves as a bridge between history and the personal experience of time,<sup>48</sup> providing the fictional account with an historical value. The directive from the Chairman was indeed published on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1968;<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Dai Sijie's formulation is accurate. However, the translated versions are not all equally precise. In particular, the Taiwanese translation does not specify the moment of the year in which the campaign was announced, reporting only “yi jiu liu ba nian shi 一九六八年時” (in 1968). This change, although minor, blurs the borders of the memory and, even if it does not compromise the information on the historical setting, conveys the image of a less effective intellectual effort to recall.<sup>50</sup>

#### Representation of time in *Zha gen*:

常常有頭戴高帽、掛著牌子遊街的人，站在高高的車斗上。也有的自己走在馬路上，旁邊是穿著綠衣服戴紅袖標的紅衛兵小將，他們手中的紅寶書也是鮮紅鮮紅的。每一次遊街都有喧鬧的鑼鼓伴隨，像過節一樣熱鬧。那些被揪斗的人，有時自己手上也提著一面銅鑼，一面走一面當當地敲打。

如果說紅和綠是時代的流行色，那麼鑼鼓傢伙就是時代的最強音了。只要一見紅綠二色，聽見鑼鼓喧天，小陶就無比激動，忍不住要跑出家門，看看發生了什麼事。<sup>51</sup>

#### English translation:

Parades of people passed through the streets wearing tall hats, labels hung around their necks, standing high up in the backs of trucks or walking, marshaled by the young generals of the Red Guards in green uniforms with red armbands, holding bright

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<sup>47</sup> Dai Sijie 戴思杰, *Ba'erzhake yu xiaocai feng* 巴爾扎克與小裁縫 (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 12–3.

<sup>48</sup> Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome III* (Time and Narrative. Volume III), 154.

<sup>49</sup> Dikötter, *The Cultural Revolution: A People's History, 1962-1976*, xxvi.

<sup>50</sup> Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), 36.

<sup>51</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 47.

red copies of the *Little Red Book* in their hands. Every parade was accompanied by drumming, making it as noisy as Chinese New Year festivities. The struggled-against sometimes carried their own small drums, which they beat as they went along.

If red and green were the most popular colors of those years, then drumming was their most powerful sound. As soon as young Tao saw red and green and heard the din of drums, he was seized with excitement and rushed outside to see what was going on.<sup>52</sup>

The representation of time intended as the ensemble of the features typical of the historical periods in which the novels are set inspires further observations. When describing the Red Guards' parades, Han Dong states that they were "*xiang guojie yi yang renao* 像過節一樣熱鬧" (as noisy as festivals). Nevertheless, the English translation channels the mental connection by specifying they were "as noisy as Chinese New Year festivities." In this case, it is not the result of the activity of recollection to be modified, but the protagonist's spontaneous association ascribable to what Bergson calls *rappel instantané* (instantaneous recall).<sup>53</sup> The use of the hyponym is probably meant to provide the foreign reader with a more precise element of comparison. However, it affects the author's representation of memory by narrowing down the borders of the character's mental association. Moreover, the translation is marked by the translator's interpretation. Due to the slightly negative nuance the adjective "noisy" has, unlike the more neutral, even positive, *renao* 熱鬧, it generates almost a contradiction with the enjoyable event remembered by the protagonist.

In *The Crazy*, Jian Wan's memory of the night of the crackdown is composed mainly of the visual fragments he collects during the few hours he spends in the capital. On running into the military troops headed towards Tiananmen Square, the protagonist is struck by the scene of an officer getting off his jeep and killing a student in cold blood.

#### Representation of time in *The Crazy*:

The tall colonel jumped off the jeep and went up to the student who was still talking to the soldiers. I was impressed by the officer's handsome looks: broad eyes, thick brows, a straight nose, white, strong teeth, and a full chin. He looked like material for a general,

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<sup>52</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 47.

<sup>53</sup> Ricœur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Memory, History, Forgetting), 34.

at least in appearance. [...] Without a word he pulled out his pistol and shot the student in the head, who dropped to the ground kicking his legs, then stopped moving and breathing. Bits of his brain were splattered like crushed tofu on the asphalt. Steam was rising from his smashed skull.<sup>54</sup>

#### French translation:

Le grand colonel sauta hors de sa Jeep et se dirigea vers l'étudiant qui parlait encore aux soldats. Je fus frappé par la beauté de l'officier : des grand yeux, d'épais sourcils, un nez aquilin, de belles dents blanches et un menton volontaire. Si l'on se fiait aux apparences, il avait l'étoffe d'un général. [...] Sans un mot, il sortit son pistolet et tira dans la tête de l'étudiant, qui s'effondra au sol en agitant les jambes, puis cessa de bouger et de respirer. Des bouts de cervelle avaient éclaboussé l'asphalte comme du tofu écrasé. De la vapeur s'élevait de son crâne enfoncé.<sup>55</sup>

#### Chinese translation published in Taiwan:

高個子少校下了吉普車，走向那個仍在跟士兵們說話的學生。這軍官十分英俊，令我印象深刻：大眼、濃眉、直鼻，牙齒潔白又結實，下巴豐滿，是做將軍的料，至少儀表如此。[...] 只見他一言不發就拔出手槍，朝那學生頭上開了一槍，那學生應聲倒地，踢動著兩腿，接著直僵僵，停止了呼吸，腦漿溢到柏油路面上，像搗碎的豆腐；擊碎的頭顱冒出一縷水汽。<sup>56</sup>

The scene constitutes what Bergson defines a “memory image” (*image-souvenir*)<sup>57</sup> that focuses in particular on visual perceptions, conveying a cinematographic description of Jian Wan's experience. The French translation modifies slightly the portrait of the officer, whose nose is described as “*aquilin*” (aquiline) whereas it is “straight” in the original version and “*zhi*直” (straight) in the Chinese one. The substitution alters the mnemonic frame for an apparent reason of collocation,<sup>58</sup> and it is hardly imputable to a need of adaptation of the cultural standard. Nonetheless, Ha Jin's choice to emply the adjective “straight” was already peculiar. Indeed, the image it produces in the Anglophone reader is different from the man with a *gao bizi* 高鼻子 (a high nose) probably imagined by the author. Therefore, further modulations according to the translators'

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<sup>54</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 302–3.

<sup>55</sup> Ha Jin, *La démence du sage* (The Crazy), 299–300.

<sup>56</sup> Ha Jin 哈金, *Fengkuang* 瘋狂 (The Crazy), 279–80.

<sup>57</sup> Bergson, *Matière et mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Matter and Memory: Essay on the Relationship of Body and Spirit), 84.

<sup>58</sup> Jean Delisle, Hannelore Lee-Jahnke, and Monique C. Cormier, eds., *Terminologie de la traduction/Translation Terminology/Terminología de la traducción/Terminologie Der Bersetzung*, (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 125.

interpretations do not affect the original meaning in terms of beauty standards. A cultural benchmark is instead represented by the employ of tofu to compose the similitude at the end of the passage, which can be regarded as an example of “grafting” – a feature that Yao emphasises as typical of the texts influenced by linguistic hybridisation.<sup>59</sup> Tofu is a marker of an ethnic diversity whose function is to highlight the Chinese culture behind the English words, yet without adding any significant meaning to the “cross-cultural text.”<sup>60</sup> It can be regarded as an embellishment that, however, was preserved in translation. As a result, the memory of the murder appears craved in Chinese cultural specificity, regardless of the language in which it was originally narrated and subsequently translated.

In *Rou zhi tu*, the frenetic narration of the events occurring in the square sometimes pauses to leave space for descriptions that provide an insight into the atmosphere reigning in the square. For example, when Dai Wei recollects the image of the hunger strikers lying before his eyes, the description he provides focuses once again on visual details. Nevertheless, a significant portion of his depiction was left out in the English translation and, consequently, also in the French one.

#### Representation of time in *Rou zhi tu*:

營地大概四千多睡下的絕食同學，很多人沒有支帳篷或塑膠布，只是把頭蒙在被子中，有的裹在軍大衣或旗幟裡，還有的就枕在雜誌或紙箱上。

「絕食誓言」的木牌子直立在一些雨傘和旗桿旁。那幅「絕食為了生存」的標語已經被雨水浸得模模糊糊。

遠看一片片被人和棉布以及紅旗標語鋪開的廣場，如被海嘯沖刷之後屍橫遍野的殘破城鎮。昨夜大雨沖刷過的廢報紙和紙箱子、髒被子都濕漉漉地趴在水泥地上等著變爛。

恐怕眼前是世上最大的絕食人群了，這上萬具肚子空空如蟲蜷縮成一片又一片的軀體，覆蓋著地面。又像是為了拍電影而擺的，因為真實的令人懷疑。<sup>61</sup>

#### English translation:

There were four thousand hunger strikers camping in the Square now, together with tens of thousands of other students. Sleeping bodies, blankets, red banners and flags stretched far into the distance. Newspapers and cardboard boxes drenched in the night's

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<sup>59</sup> Steven G. Yao, “Taxonomizing Hybridity,” *Textual Practice* 17, no. 2 (2003): 367.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 296.

rain lay sodden on the concrete paving stones. This must have been the largest mass hunger strike in history. The scene before me didn't look real. The students resembled extras lying on a film set, waiting for the cameras to start rolling.<sup>62</sup>

French translation:

Il y avait à présent quatre mille grévistes qui campaient sur la Place, avec des dizaines de milliers d'étudiants. Des corps endormis, des couvertures, des banderoles et des drapeaux rouges s'étendaient à perte de vue. Des journaux et des caisses en carton trempés par la pluie de la nuit jonchaient les pavés en béton. Ce devait être la plus grande grève de la faim collective de l'histoire. La scène devant moi semblait irréaliste. Les étudiants avaient l'air de figurants attendant que les caméras tournent.<sup>63</sup>

Analogously to Jian Wan's memory, Dai Wei description of the days of the hunger strike relies on visual details that in translation are resumed in a list of elements appearing in the protagonist's visual field. The translated depiction is therefore resumptive not only as far as the peculiarities of the objects are concerned, but also in terms of mental associations. Indeed, the image of the bodies writhing like worms is sacrificed to leave space to the similitude that compares the students to extemporaneous actors. The memory image conveyed is therefore tailored to reduce digressions and to enhance the key information: it was probably the "largest mass hunger strike in history." Apparently, Ma Jian's novel underwent a series of adaptations aimed to increase the forcefulness of the text vis-à-vis the foreign readership.<sup>64</sup> Parts of these alterations influence the representation of the time of the protests intended as the climate the novel is meant to depict by directing the reader's attention towards certain aspects to the detriment of others. The accent on the historical facts results in the perception of an increase in documentary value, especially in the passages where Ma Jian's objective narration emulates the features of reportage literature (*baogao wenxue* 報告文學).<sup>65</sup> This strategy enhances the character of fictional *témoignage* of the novel, which originally results from a balanced interaction between hyperrealism

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<sup>62</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 322.

<sup>63</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma* (Beijing Coma), 435.

<sup>64</sup> For a more detailed analysis see Pesaro, "Authorship, Ideology, and Translation: The Case of Ma Jian."

<sup>65</sup> Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square*, 222.

and disbelief. Its translations, instead, tend to stress the realistic elements that make the novel lifelike. This last point is particularly evident in the last phrase, *yinwei zhenshi de ling ren huaiyi* 因為真實的令人懷疑 (because truth provokes doubt), which was changed in the English translation and, consequently, in all the others.

### 1.3. *Spatial Alterations*

The spatial character of memory analysed in the third part paves the way for the investigation of the modalities with which the mnemonic representations of places are transposed from one language to another, or from a mother tongue to a foreign language adopted for creative purposes.

Among the most personal aspects of spatial memory is the representation of dwelling places. In *Zha gen*, the Tao family has a particularly close relationship with the place in which they live, which symbolises at once their willing to 'strike root' in Sanyu and the difference between them and the villagers. Houses, especially when rural, have specific features according to the cultural environment in which they are built, and the 'enclosures' described in the novel generate in the reader a feeling of estrangement. In particular, what makes the Taos' house different from the others is its windows, whose names seem to some extent foreign, in the original Chinese text as well as in its translated version.

Representation of space in *Zha gen*:

老陶家的新屋最特別的當屬窗戶。

窗戶是普普通通的窗戶，四四方方，木頭做的窗框，窗頁上鑲嵌著幾塊玻璃。但在三余，這是絕無僅有的。三余人的房子，牆上沒有任何窗戶。他們所謂的窗戶最多能算是一個牆洞，也就兩塊土坯的大小。夏秋兩季，牆洞敞開著，入冬以後便被土坯堵上了。因此三余人的房子裡即使是白天也漆黑一團。用玻璃嵌在牆洞上的人家少之又少，更別說有窗框窗頁可以隨意開合的窗戶了。三余人把這樣的窗戶稱作活窗，而僅僅鑲嵌了玻璃的（只有稍稍富裕的人家才有）稱作死窗。<sup>66</sup>

English translation:

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<sup>66</sup> Han Dong 韓東, *Zha gen* 扎根 (Striking Root), 25.

The most remarkable thing about the Taos' house was its windows. They were just ordinary square windows with wooden frames, into which were set panes of glass. But there was nothing like them in Sanyu; the village houses had no windows in the walls. The nearest they got to windows were holes about the size of two mud bricks. These were left open in summer and autumn and were bricked up when winter came so that even in daylight the houses were pitch dark inside. It was extremely rare for someone to have glass set into the holes (only the slightly better-off could afford that) and even rarer to have proper windows with wooden frames that could be opened and shut. These were called windows, "live windows" while the holes set with glass panes were known as "dead windows."<sup>67</sup>

The Taos' house – and its windows in particular – constitute the link "between the lived corporal space and its surrounding public space."<sup>68</sup> As a result, its representation is part and parcel of the author's fictional memory. The emphasis on the names of the windows underlines the gap between the villagers and the Taos, and this is further enhanced in the translation thanks to the employ of quotation marks. What is omitted in the English version are the multiple references to *Sanyu ren* 三余人 (the inhabitants of Sanyu). In the Chinese text, the identification of the people with the place in which they live stresses spatial distance as a symptom of a civilisation imbalance. Contrariwise, in the English version this equivalence is only implied, thanks to the use of the passive form that blurs the agency. On facing a worldwide readership, Han Dong's excerpt becomes less 'place-specific' as long as the textual features are concerned. However, the strangeness seeping from the text that derives from the characters' displacement is preserved, and the gap between the narrative voice and the villagers is translated into the more general distance between contemporary western readers and the rural China of the Cultural Revolution. In *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, the sensation of strangeness towards the protagonist's dwelling place is not expressed through the emphasis of the differences between him and the locals, but through a weird identification with foreign characters and the lands where they live. This feature triggers a sophisticated mechanism based on a fundamental exoticism. The reference to Balzac's works is a pretext under

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<sup>67</sup> Han Dong, *Banished! A Novel*, 26.

<sup>68</sup> Umbelino, "Memory of the Body, Temptation of Space," 848.

which Dai Sijie creates a cultural reference for the French readership<sup>69</sup> and, at the same time, a symptom of the author's hybrid identity behind his fictional memory. The use of the French language to depict the remoteness of France expressing, however, Ma's emotional closeness to the foreign universe creates a combination that in translation cannot but be overthrown.

Representation of space in *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*:

Malgré mon ignorance totale de ce pays nommé la France (j'avais quelquefois entendu le nom de Napoléon dans la bouche de mon père, et c'était tout), l'histoire d'Ursule me parut aussi vraie que celle de mes voisins. [...]

Je décidai de copier mot à mot mes passages préférés d'*Ursule Mirouët*.

[...] J'aurais voulu être comme elle : pouvoir, endormi sur mon lit, voir ce que ma mère faisait dans notre appartement, à cinq cents kilomètres de distance, assister au dîner de mes parents, observer leurs attitudes, les détails de leur repas, la couleur de leurs assiettes, sentir l'odeur de leurs plats, les entendre converser...<sup>70</sup>

English translation:

In spite of my complete ignorance of that distant land called France (I had heard Napoleon mentioned by my father a few times, that was all), Ursule's story rang as true as if it had been about my neighbours. [...]

Then I was seized with an idea: I would copy out my favourite passages from *Ursule Mirouët*, word for word.

[...] I longed to be like her: to be able, while I lay asleep on my bed, to see what my mother was doing in our apartment five hundred kilometres away, to watch my parents having supper, to observe their gestures, the dishes on the table, the colour of the crockery, to sniff the aroma of their food, to hear their conversation ...<sup>71</sup>

The English translation conveys a different feeling. The reference to *Ursule Mirouët* is not equally familiar to an Anglophone reader, who is 'foreign' to both the presented cultures. Indeed, the addition of the adjective "distant" on mentioning "the land called France" reproduces the perception of a geographic and cultural gap separating the reader from the literary universe evoked by the protagonist. Nevertheless, the most interesting effect is obtained with the Chinese translations, where the attempted domestication through the evocation

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<sup>69</sup> Jia Jie 贾诩, "Zhongfa duzhe yan zhong de 'Ba'erzhake yu xiao caifeng'" 中法讀者眼中的《巴爾扎克與小裁縫》 (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress in the Eyes of Chinese and French Readers), 80.

<sup>70</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 72–4.

<sup>71</sup> Dai Sijie, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, 53–4.



of French literature results rather in a further foreignisation.<sup>72</sup>

#### Chinese translation published in Taiwan:

儘管我對這個名為法蘭西的國度一無所知（我曾經從我父親口中聽到幾次拿破崙的名字，但也僅止於此），可是對我來說，于絮尔的故事卻像隔壁鄰居的故事那麼真實。 [...]

我要把《于絮尔·彌羅埃》裡頭我最喜歡的段落逐字抄下來。

[...] 我也想要跟她一樣：在這張床上入睡，卻看得見母親在五百公里外的家中做些什麼，看得見父母吃晚飯的事情，看著他們晚餐時的神情樣貌、舉手投足，看著他們盤裡的菜色，聞著每一道菜的氣味，聽他們說的字字句句.....<sup>73</sup>

#### Chinese translation published in Mainland China:

儘管我對這個叫做法蘭西的國家一無所知（我曾經從我父親的嘴裡聽說過拿破崙的名字，僅此而已），于絮尔的故事在我眼中卻顯得跟我鄰居的故事一樣真實。 [...]

我決定把《于絮尔·彌羅埃》中我最喜歡的段落一字一句抄下來。

[...] 我真想跟她一樣：熟睡在我床上，就能夠看到五百公里之外的母親在我們家裡做什麼事情，能夠出席我父母的晚餐，觀察他們的行為舉止，看他們吃的到底是什麼樣的飯菜，碗筷是什麼樣的顏色，聞到菜餚的香味，聽到他們的交談.....<sup>74</sup>

As a result, the description of spatial distance assumes different meanings according to the readership's cultural background. Dai Sijie's memory of the Cultural Revolution, although originating from his personal experience, is a condensation of his cultural hybridity. Through the process of translation, the text travels over the distance, dropping its primary aim to represent the author's interior clash but gaining a cross-cultural significance. By eradicating the fictional memory from its intrinsic Sino-French dualism, the text is thrown in a different context of cross-cultural influences that modify the perception of distance represented in terms of a cultural gap.

For Dai Sijie, spatial movement goes hand in hand with temporal distance, since a memory generated in China during the 1970s is narrated decades afterwards in another continent. For Ha Jin, instead, the issue of displacement

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<sup>72</sup> "Foreignizing translation signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language." Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 20.

<sup>73</sup> Dai Sijie 戴思杰, *Ba'erzhake yu xiaocaifeng* 巴爾扎克與小裁縫 (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 66–8.

<sup>74</sup> Dai Sijie 戴思杰, *Ba'erzhake yu zhongguo xiaocaifeng* 巴爾扎克與中國小裁縫 (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), 59–61.

affects not only the moment of the recollection, but also that of the creation of the *souvenir*. The spatial and temporal gap is well recreated through the exchange of letters between Jian Wan and his girlfriend, which is also affected by the process of translation.

#### Representation of space in *The Crazy*:

April 19, 1989

Dear Jian,

How is everything? Have you quit smoking? Each year four million people die of smoking-related diseases in our country. Please follow my advice and quit. You know I cannot stand the smell of tobacco.

It's getting hot in Beijing, and sometimes windy and dusty. My school is kind of chaotic at this moment, because every day thousands of students take to the streets to demonstrate against official corruption. They're especially angry at the top leaders' children who have made fortunes by taking advantage of their offices and connections. Many students are talking about marching to Tiananmen Square. I have heard that this is a joint effort of the students from several colleges in Beijing. They demand rapid political reform and that the government take drastic measures to stop corruption and inflation. I don't believe their demonstrations can change anything, so up to now I have avoided participating.<sup>75</sup>

#### French translation:

19 avril 1989

Cher Jian,

Comment va ? As-tu arrêté de fumer ? Tous les ans, quatre millions de Chinois meurent de maladies liées au tabagisme. Je t'en prie, suis mon conseil et arrête. Tu sais bien que je ne supporte pas l'odeur du tabac.

Il commence à faire chaud ici à Pékin, avec parfois des coups de vent et des tourbillons de poussière. À la fac, c'est plutôt l'anarchie, en ce moment. Des milliers d'étudiants descendent dans la rue tous les jours pour manifester contre la corruption officielle. Ils en veulent particulièrement aux enfants des dirigeants qui ont fait fortune en tirant profit de leur charge et de leurs relations. De nombreux étudiants parlent d'aller manifester place Tiananmen, paraît-il à l'appel d'une coordination interuniversitaire de Pékin. Ils réclament d'urgence une réforme politique et exigent des mesures gouvernementales sévères pour stopper la corruption et l'inflation. Comme je ne crois pas que ces manifestations puissent changer quoi que ce soit, j'évite d'y prendre part.<sup>76</sup>

#### Chinese translation published in Taiwan:

親愛的堅，

一切還好嗎？你戒菸了沒有？我國每年有四百萬人死於吸菸有關的疾病。聽我的話，把菸戒了。你知道我受不了菸味。

北京開始熱了，有時候多風多塵。我們學校眼下有點亂，因為每天都有成千上萬

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<sup>75</sup> Ha Jin, *The Crazy*, 58–9.

<sup>76</sup> Ha Jin, *La démence du sage* (*The Crazy*), 57–8.

的學生上街示威，反對貪官。他們尤其對高層領導人的子女利用父母的職權和關係發財感到憤怒。很多學生都在談著要遊行去天安門。聽說北京幾所高校的學生聯合起來，他們要求迅速實行政治改革，要求政府採取果斷措施打擊貪污並控制通脹。我不相信他們的示威能改變什麼，所以到目前為止我都避免參加。[...]

一九八九年四月十五日

From a linguistic point of view, the representation of spatial distance does not raise significant issues. However, it is important to point out that the quoted correspondence is an effective strategy to reproduce remoteness that also works in translation. This is true not only for a third foreign language, like French, but also for Chinese, that is when the text is brought closer to the cultural environment it describes. The distance between China and United States is a key feature of Ha Jin's memory, and emphasising that between Shanning and Beijing allows the Chinese readers to empathise with Jian Wan, sensing the consequences of filtered and deferred information. Phrases such as "in Beijing" underline the spatial gap and are accurately transposed in translation, in particular in the French one, thanks to the addition of the deictic "*ici*" (here). Moreover, the specific reference to the days in which the letters are written – although misreported in the quoted Chinese excerpt – give a clear idea of how the kilometres between Jian Wan and Meimei translate into a temporal delay.

Contrariwise, Ma Jian's novel does not preserve the same form to communicate to different readerships an analogous interpretation of space. The adaptation of spatial descriptions is one of the most striking features of the translated versions of *Rou zhi tu*, in which the participation of the protagonist in the protests results in the merging of individual and spatial dimensions. When Dai Wei describes the square before his eyes, spatial directions serve the purpose to guide the reader through the visualisation of the scene. When translating the passage into English, Flora Drew adds several expansions to convey more precise information to someone who is completely foreign to the depicted places.

Representation of space in *Rou zhi tu*:

——中午到達歷史博物館，天安門廣場已經戒嚴了……警察和便衣在幾輛等待抓人的大小麵包車周圍走來走去，凍得亂跺腳。而後面就是廣場中心的紀念碑了，小時候的兒童

節我曾經隨學校去那兒為革命烈士獻過花圈。人民大會堂如沉重的貨櫃堆在遠處，右邊的紅色天安門城牆襯著下面幾輛如爬蟲般微小的警車，令我想到紀念碑後面的毛澤東停屍房，他會隨時會[sic]站在城樓上檢閱他的軍隊，這廣場是他的墓地，我不敢相信，我們來到這聖地抗議他創建的黨。<sup>77</sup>

### English translation:

At noon, I joined the crowd of students huddled below the steps of the Museum of Chinese History, and looked over at the vast Tiananmen Square spread before us. This enormous public space, the size of ninety football fields, was completely empty. The authorities had ordered it to be cordoned off to prevent our demonstration from going ahead. A few police vans were parked on the road separating us from the Square, ready to take troublemakers away. Police officers and undercover agents paced back and forth nearby, stamping their cold feet on the ground.

Behind them, in the centre of the Square, rose the granite obelisk of the Monument to the People's Heroes. When I was a kid, my class used to be taken to the Monument every year on Children's Day to lay wreaths to the revolutionary martyrs. Beyond the Monument was the Great Hall of the People, the home of the National People's Congress. The tawny concrete building sat on the eastern side of the Square like a huge shipping container. I looked north to the red walls of Tiananmen Gate, the entrance to the Forbidden City where China's emperors used to live. From a distance, the police vans parked beneath it looked like tiny beetles. In 1949, Mao stood on Tiananmen Gate and declared the founding of the People's Republic. His giant portrait now gazed down from it, and his embalmed corpse lay in a memorial hall to the south. The Square was Mao's mausoleum. I couldn't believe that we'd dared venture onto this sacred site to express criticism of the Party he created.<sup>78</sup>

The volume of additions is self-evident. Pesaro, in her article of 2013, states that the explanations added by Flora Drew have been subsequently reintegrated in another Chinese edition published in Hong Kong and in the United States.<sup>79</sup> As a result, Flora Drew's translation strategies end up challenging "the very concept of authorship."<sup>80</sup> These alterations originate from the substantial difference in the two kinds of 'Model Reader' of the source and the target text. Borrowing Eco's terminology, the 'Model Reader' is the hypothetical reader that is called to interpret the literary text according to his or her knowledge and to his inferential capacities.<sup>81</sup> In order to compensate the alleged unfamiliarity of the readers vis-à-vis the geography of the square, the translation helps them in extrapolating the

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<sup>77</sup> Ma Jian 馬建, *Rou zhi tu* 肉之土 (Beijing Coma), 103–4.

<sup>78</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma*, 106–7.

<sup>79</sup> Pesaro, "Authorship, Ideology, and Translation: The Case of Ma Jian," 168.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, 172.

<sup>81</sup> Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula* (The Model Reader), (Milano: Bompiani, 2010), 53–4.

correct image from the text, also employing terms of comparison belonging to the target culture such as the “football fields.” Directions, analysed from a phenomenological perspective, are the result of the bodily presence of the subject in a certain place.<sup>82</sup> By providing further details on the spatial setting, the translator’s additions provide a clearer picture, conveying a version of the author’s fictional memory whose spatial definition is even stronger than in the original. Moreover, the English translation thus modified became a sort of ‘second original’ by serving as the source text for other translations, among which the French one.

French translation:

À midi, je rejoignis la foule d’étudiants agglutinés au pied des marches du musée d’Histoire de la Chine, et regardai la grande place Tiananmen qui s’étendait devant nous. Les autorités avaient ordonné que l’accès en soit interdit par un cordon afin d’empêcher notre manifestation d’avancer. Il y avait quelques fourgons de police dans la rue qui nous séparait de la Place, prêts à emporter les fauteurs de trouble. Dans les environs, des policiers en uniforme et en civil allaient et venaient, battant la semelle pour se réchauffer.

Derrière eux, au centre de la Place, s’élevait l’obélisque en granité du monument aux Héros du peuple. Quand j’étais gosse, chaque année, le jour des Enfants, on emmenait ma classe déposer une gerbe aux martyrs de la révolution. Au-delà du Monument se trouvait le Palais du peuple, siège de l’Assemblée nationale populaire. Le bâtiment en béton fauve était posé à l’est de la Place tel un colossal container. Je dirigeai mon regard vers le nord, où se dressaient les murailles rouges de la porte Tiananmen, l’entrée de la Cité interdite, résidence des empereurs chinois. De loin, les fourgons de police garés en dessous ressemblaient à de minuscules scarabées. En 1949 c’est sur la porte Tiananmen que Mao s’était tenu pour déclarer la fondation de la République populaire. Maintenant, son portrait géant l’avait remplacé, et son cadavre embaumé reposait dans un bâtiment situé au sud. La Place était le mausolée de Mao. Je n’arrivais pas à croire que nous ayons osé nous aventurer sur ce site sacré pour critiquer le Parti qu’il avait créé.<sup>83</sup>

Once again, the issue of authorship comes to the fore. The elimination of the sentence “[t]his enormous public space, the size of ninety football fields, was completely empty,” first introduced in the English version, is probably due to a different idea of ‘Model Reader,’ for whom football fields do not constitute a likely unit of measurement. As a result, through the representation of the mnemonic image depicted in the text, the remembering subject becomes partially

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<sup>82</sup> Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 48.

<sup>83</sup> Ma Jian, *Beijing Coma* (Beijing Coma), 147–8.

codified in the target culture. The balance of cultural references defining every author – and especially those writing from outside China – as a *zhengti*,<sup>84</sup> in Ma Jian's case, is altered in the process of translation in order to meet the needs of western readers, also affecting the representation of the spatiality of memory.

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<sup>84</sup> Rao Pengzi 饒芑子 and Fei Yong 費勇, "Lun haiwai huawen wenxue de mingming yiyi" 論海外華文文學的命名意義 (On the Meaning of the Name of Overseas Chinese-Language Literature): 33.

## 2. Distorted Articulations

Han Dong, Dai Sijie, Ha Jin and Ma Jian are connected to each other by their ethnic origins and by the content of their works. The compared studies of their novels showed how the peculiarities of each articulation influence the perception of space and time and their subsequent fictional representation. After having theorised the deterritorialised nature of Chinese literature, acknowledged the feasibility of cross-language comparisons, and described how its works can be interconnected through translation, it is now time to situate these articulations concretely in terms of transnational identity. The understanding of the peculiarities of every writers' ethnicity reflected in the texts completes the compared study by enhancing the connections between the elements of the corpus, and between the corpus and its authors.

### 2.1. *At the Margins of Globality*

In order to envisage *Zha gen* and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* in the framework of global Chinese literature, an understanding of the two authors' positions is needed. Their personal histories shaped their cultural background, producing an original ethnic identity that is comparable in many respects. They were both born and raised in Mainland China and, despite the fact that Dai Sijie

left his native country when he was twenty-nine years old, his Chinese ethnicity was indeed already rooted in the author's self before his expatriation. Therefore, each author's original identity is spatially located in Mainland China in both cases. Their present position, instead, is contextualised in different countries. Certainly, space is not the only variable to be taken into account, as time must be considered as well. Indeed, in order to best define the reflections of Chineseness on the authors' literary works, the two 'identitarian situations' – the original and the current – shall be defined as chronotopes. Chineseness, just like Stuart Hall's conception of cultural identity, is envisaged as an entity *in fieri*; a process of "becoming," and not only a matter of "being."<sup>85</sup>

The importance of the time factor is particularly evident in the representation of Han Dong's situation. Indeed, the coordinates representing the origin of his literary creation would correspond to Nanjing in 1961, namely the author's city of origin and the year of his birth. As far as those indicating his current position, they would still be located in Nanjing, but in 2003, which is the year in which *Zha gen* was published. Although the two spatial positions coincide, because of the time gap, the two positions denote two separate chronotopes, contributing in different ways to the constitution of the author's actual Chineseness. *Zha gen* should be understood as the product of the forces generated between these two points that define the author's evolving configuration of Chineseness, which is strictly related to his own identity. In this respect, although the concept of identity is generally understood in terms of connections with a group than assertion of one's individuality,<sup>86</sup> Han Dong can be considered as a peculiar case of identification with a group of standalone individuals. Indeed, the 'late generation of authors' appeared on the literary scene in the 1990s, during a phase of transition in which literature was lacking common goals and shared

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<sup>85</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 225.

<sup>86</sup> Chun, "Fuck Chineseness: On the Ambiguities of Ethnicity as Culture as Identity," 126.



feelings. Therefore, their artistic production is limited to the individual sphere.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, Han Dong's fiction is strongly individualistic and based on his own life experience.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, a sense of unity can be found in the general marginalisation that characterises this generation of writers. They take comfort in their isolated position that, freeing them from any sense of literary mission, allows them to concentrate on the link between literature and real life. Consequently, they are able to achieve a true interpenetration between existence and fiction, and the act of writing becomes a means through which to fulfil one's inner self.<sup>89</sup>

As a result, Han Dong's Chinese identity should be understood as shaped by his personal story – from his birth until a precisely selected time – and expressed from an individual point of view. Indeed, as far as *Zha gen* is concerned, the author's experience of banishment was of primary importance in the process of creation of the novel. The autobiographic component is crucial for the plot, which clearly re-evokes the period he spent in the countryside when he was a child. Despite the fact that the two foci are both located in Mainland China, Han Dong's novel represents an articulation of global Chinese literature that nonetheless conveys an idea of estrangement. Although he did not migrate abroad, the effect of spatial shift from Nanjing to the Subei on the eight-year-old Han Dong was equally disorienting. Moreover, the author's marginalised position on the literary scene generates an alienation that, although less extreme, is comparable with the one experienced by migrant authors that cut ties with their own native country.

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<sup>87</sup> Chen Xiaoming 陳曉明 *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue zhuchao* 中國當代文學主潮 (the Main Trends in Contemporary Chinese Literature), (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2013), 392.

<sup>88</sup> Wu Yiqin 吳義勤, "Yu shi tong xing — Han Dong xiaoshuo lun" 與詩同行——韓東小說論 (Walking Along with Poetry: Discussing Han Dong's Fiction), 75.

<sup>89</sup> Wu Yiqin 吳義勤, "Zai bianyuanchu xushi" 在邊緣處敘事 (Narrating at the Margins), in *Zhongguo dangdai wenxue liushi nian: 1949-2009* 中國當代文學60年：1949-2009 (Sixty Years of Contemporary Chinese Literature: 1949-2009), ed. Chen Sihe 陳思和 and Wang Guangdong 王光東, (Shanghai: Shanghai daxue chubanshe, 2010), 250.

Dai Sijie's Chineseness presents different features as far as both temporal and spatial position are concerned. The coordinates of his original situation coincide with the author's date and place of birth, namely Chengdu in 1954. His current situation when *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* was published, instead, is represented by the year of publication, 2000, and the place in which the author was living at the time, Paris. In this case, the separation of the two positions is more accentuated since they do not mark only a time gap, but also a spatial movement. Dai Sijie's Chineseness implicit in his novel should therefore be envisaged as the combination of his ethnic origins and the influences he received after he migrated to France. China was the country in which he was born, and Chinese culture was the context in which he became an adult. Subsequently, France and the French culture stimulated his artistic self throughout the years he spent abroad, pluralising his cultural identity. The author situated himself and his works in a crossroad of two cultures and, therefore, he became an incarnation of a cultural trans-identity.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, the author's multicultural background is widely reflected not only in the plot, but in the title of the novel as well. Nevertheless, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* does not reveal a desire for a cultural identification with a diasporic community. Although enriched with French details, the story is entirely set in Mainland China and, like Han Dong's novel, it is based on personal experience. The detachment from the native country experienced by a migrant individual causes an accentuation of one's subjectivity and intensifies the specificity of one's cultural identity.<sup>91</sup> As a consequence, the focus on the private sphere that characterises the novel should be understood as a reflection of the author's self who, fluctuating between different cultures, chooses to voice his personal story by identifying with the individual. The composite identity that derives from it should be interpreted as

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<sup>90</sup> Croiset, "Passeurs de langues, de cultures et de frontières : la transidentité de Dai Sijie et Shan Sa, auteurs chinois d'expression française" (Crossers of Languages, Cultures, and Borders: The Transidentity in Dai Sijie and Shan Sa, Chinese Authors Writing in French), 3.

<sup>91</sup> Ang, "Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm," 233–4.

the result of a dialogue and not of a clash, since its main feature is the continuity of its flux, which it is not interrupted by any cultural fracture.<sup>92</sup>

*Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is therefore an articulation of global Chinese literature that combines China and France by means of a recollection of the author's past through the lenses of a migrant individual. Like *Zha gen*, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* is a largely autobiographic novel, and Dai Sijie's experience as an educated youth in the mountains of Sichuan serves as a guide for the development of the plot. Yet, such personal experience is recalled from afar, and the foreign insinuates in the story as it did with the author's Chinese identity. Consequently, the forces acting on the novel are a combination of Dai Sijie's native country and culture and the trans-identity derived from his migration. The marginalisation of the diasporic subject is reflected in the focus on the individual, which is reconsidered after decades in light of the author's evolved identity.

## 2.2. *Scattered Chinesenesses*

Ha Jin and Ma Jian are two of the most representative authors belonging to the so-called Chinese diaspora. Since both authors chose to settle down in English speaking countries, although in different continents, their position can be defined as 'Anglophone-situated.' English provided the linguistic environment against which both novels have been written, yet its influence on the texts – and on the authors' identity – is entirely different. Also in this case, the novels can be envisaged as the products of Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's original and current positions, corresponding to chronotopic coordinates that shaped their literary creation. Contextualising their position in a global understanding of Chineseness permits to cross the boundaries of the diasporic category towards a broader conception of transnational influences on culture and identity.

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<sup>92</sup> Silvester, "Genre and Image in Francophone Chinese Works," 369.

Like Han Dong and Dai Sijie, Ha Jin and Ma Jian were both born in Mainland China, which also provided the socio-cultural background that marked their paths towards adulthood. Therefore, the Chineseness implicit in their literary works is considerable, as China does not merely constitute the setting of their plots, but it also represents the environment in which the authors' individualities have been formed. In this respect, the situation corresponding to the origin of the two novels would then have the P.R.C. as its spatial location. Nevertheless, also in this case, the chronotopic conception of the authors' evolving identities encompasses the temporal dimension as well, in function of which Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's Chineseness evolved throughout the years into a composite and multicultural entity. In Ha Jin's case, the coordinates of the original situation at the basis of *The Crazy* correspond to Jinzhou in 1956, namely the author's place and year of birth. Instead, the current position emphasises both a spatial and temporal shift, as it is situated in Boston in 2002, indicating the year and the place in which the novel was published. *The Crazy* is therefore the result of the spatiotemporal interactions that shaped the author's Chinese identity throughout his life, until the moment in which his transcultural personality was concretised on the pages of the novel. What makes Ha Jin's position unique is his peculiar relationship with his own cross-national position, which he lives as both a mission and a burden. The decision of writing in English was a crucial step in the definition of the author's conception of his diasporic identity. Ha Jin claimed such choice to be made out of necessity, in order to survive and build himself a future in the United States.<sup>93</sup> Yet, the apparent rejection of his own national identity does not find a perfect correspondence in the contents of his works, which are focused on Mainland China and on Chinese people's vicissitudes. Ha Jin himself stated in his essay "Exiled to English" that "the literary citizenship is not always determined by language alone. It is also decided by the quality of the author's works, the experiences they present, and the writer's origin." Indeed,

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<sup>93</sup> Ha Jin, "Exiled to English," 119.

Ha Jin found an effective compromise in narrating China using the English language, which means the possibility to avoid the pressure of Chinese censorship while actively contribute to the cross-cultural dialogue between the American and the Chinese readerships. Nonetheless, his choice might as well be regarded as a betrayal, as it “alienates [the writer] from his mother tongue and directs his creative energy towards another language.”<sup>94</sup> Moreover, because of the foreign environment in which the exiles authors’ works are created, their depiction of the motherland is to some extent deformed. As a consequence, Ha Jin’s writing was accused by Chinese critics of encouraging orientalism for the sake of his international reputation.<sup>95</sup> As far as a’s physical displacement is concerned,

Ma Jian’s position is similar to Ha Jin’s. The Chineseness implicit in *Rou zhi tu* is the result of the interaction between two situations that are located in different countries as well. The first one corresponds to the author’s year and place of birth, Qingdao in 1953, while the coordinates of the second one coincide with London in 2008, namely the chronotope representing the publication of the book. Like Ha Jin’s, Ma Jian’s identity is the result of the interactions ongoing between the two positions, one of which is situated in Mainland China, and the other in an Anglophone environment. Nevertheless, Ma Jian’s relationship with his condition of exile reflects a different attitude towards his motherland. Indeed, he has always been overtly fighting Chinese government, voicing his criticism on a number of different issues. His straightforward opinions earned him the label of dissident, and he perpetuates his opposition to Chinese authorities not only by means of literature but also by exploiting other channels in order to reach a broader public. Yet, despite his condemnation of Chinese dictatorship and all its implications, Ma Jian continues to write in Chinese, and he cannot but rely on

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<sup>94</sup> Ha Jin, *The Writer as Migrant*, 31.

<sup>95</sup> Liu Jun 劉俊, “Diyidai meiguo huaren wenxue de duozhong mianxiang — yi Bai Xianrong, Nie Hualing, Yan Geling, Ha Jin weili” 第一代美國華人文學的多重面向——以白先勇、聶華苓、嚴歌苓、哈金為例 (The Multifacetedness of the First-Generation Chinese-American Literature: the Case of Bai Xianrong, Nie Hualing, Yan Geling, and Ha Jin): 20.

Flora Drew's translations to reach an international readership. As a result, if on the one hand he sees exile as "the only possible site to produce Chinese literature with a true consciousness,"<sup>96</sup> on the other hand his literary mission is inevitably dependent on his motherland and on his mother tongue. His composite individuality, shaped by the intertwining of his Chinese self with the Anglophone environment, is a *sine qua non* condition for Ma Jian's creativity. Indeed, not only does it allow him to amplify his voice, but it also provides him with the distance necessary to adopt a critical perspective on the sensitive issues he addresses in his works. *Rou zhi tu* is the reflection of such twofold identity, conjugating a fierce denunciation with highly aestheticised images,<sup>97</sup> and juxtaposing a detailed and almost documentary narration with an exquisite sensibility for linguistic nuances.

Both Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's positions display a "'routed identity', that implies the interplay push/pull forces."<sup>98</sup> It is from the friction generated by such forces that their Chinese identity gains a new power, placing them in a peculiar position within the global understanding of contemporary Chinese literature. The authors' common status of exile encourages the comparative analysis of their writing, while the different ways in which such condition is reflected in their novels permits to identify the dissimilarities between them. Although being the result of their writers' alienation, and despite their common theme, *The Crazy* and *Rou zhi tu* are two articulations of Global Chinese literature that communicate by means of contrast. The authors' re-evocation, conducted following distinct spatial paths, symbolises the different perception of the physical dislocation deriving from their status, and their dissimilar yet perpetual connection with their native soil.

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<sup>96</sup> Kong, "Ma Jian and Gao Xingjian: Intellectual Nomadism and Exilic Consciousness in Sinophone Literature," 138.

<sup>97</sup> Loh, "The Epic Spirit in Ma Jian's Beijing Coma and the 'New' China as Twenty-First-Century Empire," 392.

<sup>98</sup> Li, "Home and Identity en Route in Chinese Diaspora - Reading Ha Jin's *A Free Life*," 215.



## CONCLUSION





The compared analysis of the novels by Han Dong, Dai Sijie, Ha Jin, and Ma Jian showed the interconnections between different articulations of global Chinese literature and the way in which their fictional memories are shaped by their unique combination of space and time. The multilingual corpus proves how the polyglossia is not an obstacle but a resource that diversify the Chinese literary scenario, allowing fictional recollections from the Mainland to reach a transnational dimension. Nevertheless, if on the one hand Chinese literature can and must expand its border and 'going global,' on the other hand this implies becoming part of world literature. Indeed, on trying to envisage Chinese literature as a transnational and translinguistic entity, the significant contribution that the theories developed within the frame of world literature can bring should not be neglected. With China gaining visibility on the international scene, the relationship between Chinese literature and world literature is more and more debated. Writers in exile have sometimes been regarded as China's sort of 'windows' on world literature. As a matter of fact, thanks to their independent position, they are able to enjoy freedom from China's domestic politics, entering the system of world literature by means of a more facilitated circulation.<sup>1</sup> Despite

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<sup>1</sup> Flair Donglai Shi, "Post-Mao Chinese Literature as World Literature: Struggling with the Systematic and the Allegorical," *Comparative Literature World Literature* 1, no. 1 (2016): 26.

the fact that the aim of this study was not to postulate about the position of Chinese literature in the context of world literature, reaching a global understanding of contemporary Chinese literature entails a profound reflection on the global conception of literature in general. Indeed, world literature and global Chinese literature share several features, namely the capability to overcome linguistic and national boundaries and to picture a literary work as a synthesis of both its local and global dimensions. Therefore, theories concerning world literature can be most effective in guiding contemporary Chinese literature towards a global perspective.

Goethe's elaboration of the concept of *Weltliteratur* dates back to 1827. It took place against the background of a European continent devastated by Napoleonic Wars and was inspired by his desire for a new harmony among the European nations:<sup>2</sup>

National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach. But, while we thus value what is foreign, we must not bind ourselves to some particular thing, and regard it as a model. We must not give this value to the Chinese, or the Serbian, or Calderon, or the *Nibelungen*; but, if we really want a pattern, we must always return to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented. All the rest we must look at only historically; appropriating to ourselves what is good, so far as it goes.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, the scenery of today's globalisation calls for new reflections on literature from an internationalised angle. Indeed, Goethe's paradigm can be seen as a prelude of a transnational perspective on literature,<sup>4</sup> which can be applied not only as far as world literature is concerned, but also with reference to what can be defined as "global national literatures." As a matter of fact, world

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<sup>2</sup> John Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Conversations with Eckermann on *Weltliteratur* (1827)," in *World Literature in Theory*, ed. David Damrosch, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 19–20.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed account on the interpretations of Goethe's paradigm, and on its relevance to the field of 'transnational literary studies' see John Pizer, "Goethe's "World Literature" Paradigm and Contemporary Cultural Globalization," *Comparative Literature* 52, no. 3 (2000): 213–27.

literature is not the only alternative to a concept of national literature that has lost its meaning. Bringing “globality” into the frame can also translate into a new approach to national literatures able to seize the transnational interrelations that differentiate yet enrich their panorama.

Despite the far-sightedness of his intuition, Goethe’s cultural background clearly influenced his perception of “foreign literatures,” so much so that he identifies the only imaginable model with the ancient Greeks. Nevertheless, Pizer points out that, although by “World-literature” Goethe actually meant European literature, this should not be read as a wish for an Eurocentric perspective, but as a natural consequence of the restricted dialogue existing at the time between Europe and the rest of the world.<sup>5</sup> Nowadays, the exchange has improved and world literature is increasingly taking into account literatures in less popular languages, although still strongly relying on English translation as a fundamental tool for their exploration. In order to overcome the intrinsic contradiction between a transnational theory and a monolingual practice, one possible solution can be to readjust the target from world literature to global national literatures. Limiting the range of analysis would allow to explore the linguistic variety they conceal. In fact, according to Pizer, “literature is becoming *immanently* global, that is, individual works are increasingly informed and constituted by social, political, and even linguistic trends that are not limited to a single nation or region.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the transnational character that literature has developed is undeniable not only in terms of circulation, but also as far as creation is concerned.

Gaining a global understanding of Chinese literature would, therefore, mean to transpose Goethe’s reflections from the European environment that generated them to the Chinese one. The “model” of Mainland Chinese literature would have to be abandoned, allowing an equal exploration of every expression

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<sup>5</sup> Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Pizer, “Goethe’s “World Literature” Paradigm and Contemporary Cultural Globalization,” 213.

of global Chinese literature definable as such, harmonising differences in language as well as in geographical position.

This ambitious project is founded on a mutual exchange between the particular and the universal, in the same way world literature is. In fact, Pizer points out that, despite the *Weltliteratur* paradigm implies necessarily a dialectic between particularity and universality, thanks to Goethe's broad concept, local and global do not constitute a dichotomy anymore.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, fluctuating between a universal Chineseness and its particular articulations, global Chinese literature projects Goethe's intuition on the Chinese context, revealing the "increasingly inevitable character of the national-international dialogue."<sup>8</sup> The pursuit of a balance between the local and the global does not aim for a utopian unification of all literatures, which would inevitably uproot, to some extent, every literature from its original soil. Instead, the intent of global Chinese literature is to allow these two realities to coexist, preventing distance in space and differences in language to obscure the underlying common features shared by every articulation of this new idea of Chinese literature.

David Damrosch, in his work *What Is World Literature?*,<sup>9</sup> gives a rather comprehensive idea of world literature: "I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language."<sup>10</sup> Such a description clearly defines a great amount of works and, in fact, Damrosch intends his concept not to work as a qualitative definition, but as a method:

My claim is that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works, but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as

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<sup>7</sup> Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice*, 116–7.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 91.

<sup>9</sup> David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 4.

to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike.<sup>11</sup>

At the basis of this interpretation there is the presupposition that a work “manifests differently abroad than it does at home,”<sup>12</sup> which marks variability as a crucial feature of Damrosch’s idea of world literature.

The concept of global Chinese literature presents itself as one of the broadest understandings of contemporary Chinese literature, ranging from Mainland China to foreign countries, and from Chinese to foreign languages. Its intrinsic translinguistic and transnational character translates inevitably into a heterogeneous totality, showing an undeniable affinity with the concept of world literature. Nevertheless, while world literature is mainly concerned with the issue of translatability as a prerequisite for a cross-national circulation of literary works, global Chinese literature proposes a critical strategy aiming to locate its multiple articulations in a comprehensive perspective, regardless of the international diffusion of literary works. This is precisely the reason why global Chinese literature is more effective as a method than as a category, suggesting a hermeneutic approach able to interlace the particular manifestations of a globalised literary dimension. Global Chinese literature in its broadest interpretation, like Damrosch’s world literature, would comprehend an unreasonable number of works, defeating any analytical purpose. Indeed, it is only by considering it as a method that such a wide perspective can reveal its theoretical potential.

Conceived to describe world literature, Damrosch’s interpretation functions substantially at the level of reception and circulation. Reapplying it on Chinese literature would result in a definition comprehending all Chinese literary works that are read outside the borders of Mainland China, in original or in translation. Nevertheless, if only works originally written in Chinese were to

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 6.

be included, this description would not be problematic, being very akin to the concept of *shijie huawen wenxue*. Instead, the problem resides in what should be defined as a “Chinese literary work,” beyond the criterion of language. In order to overcome this problem, Damrosch’s concept should be moved back to the level of literary creation, focusing on literary works that are generated within the imaginary borders of Chineseness.

What can be gained from Damrosch’s perspective is the acknowledgement that world literature is something that is created as local and, later, becomes global. Likewise, Chinese literature can be considered as constituted by a number of manifestations, which take different shapes according to the local context in which they are brought to life, which can then be reunited under the common label of global Chinese literature. This construct takes the language in which the works are written as only one of the many possible variables, therefore not determining the inclusion or the exclusion from the ensemble.

Damrosch continues his argumentation proposing a hermeneutical scheme based on an elliptical model built around two foci. One of the two foci represents ourselves in our present time, while the other one denotes literature of other eras: the reading experience results from the combination of the forces generated by the two foci, the first of which keeps changing along with the current times.<sup>13</sup> Allowing a few modifications, this model can conveniently be transposed into the creation process of Chinese literature. Given its global character, it is possible to hypothesise that the creation of literature is the result of two main forces: one produced by the current state of the author, and the other one deriving from his original ethnic identity. The literary work is generated by the combination of these two forces, the origins of which can be separated, delineating an ellipse, or can coincide, defining a circle. The former could be the case of authors that reside in multiple literary contexts, as for example migrant authors, while the latter might describe the situation of Chinese authors who live

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 133.

and write in Mainland China. By substituting the variable of time with a combination of time and space, this scheme permits to represent the process of creation as it derives from two main forces, resulting from two different positions in time and space, occupied by the same author in different moments. This model does not concern the reception of global Chinese literature, nor it serves the purpose of categorising it *à posteriori*. It is a descriptive scheme functioning at the level of literary creation, allowing a time-space combination, which is potentially definable on a global scale, to become a variable in the creation process, therefore introducing “globality” in the very first phase of the literature-making process.

Obviously, the elliptical (or circular) configuration described above does not reflect the language that an author uses to express himself, bypassing the issue of translation and self-translation. In this respect, Stephen Owen’s words provide an interesting reflection. When reviewing Mc Dougall’s translation of Bei Dao 北島’s poetry, he emphasises the importance of the poet’s work in the context of world literature. In doing so, he wonders if it should be considered as Chinese literature or literature that “began in the Chinese language,”<sup>14</sup> becoming global at a later stage, by means of translation. Indeed, the works belonging to Chinese literature written by first-generation Chinese migrant authors in a foreign language undergo a similar process, as they can be regarded as works that virtually ‘begin’ in Chinese, the authors’ mother tongue, and ‘end’ in another language. Nevertheless, Owen’s observation, although might recall Damrosch’s idea that literature ‘begins’ in a local culture and language and later becomes global, is not fully applicable: as it concerns world literature in general, it is founded on translatability as a necessary condition for a literary work to become global. Contrariwise, in the case of Chinese literature, the global perspective is employed not to ascertain the international circulation of works, but to disclose the connections within the internationalised literature. Therefore, analysing literature in the original languages is a key feature, without which the whole

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Owen, “What Is World Poetry?,” *The New Republic*, November 19, 1990, 31.



theoretical construct would lose its effectiveness. By limiting the range of 'global perspective' to the Chinese context, it is possible to acknowledge the existence of its multiple voices, removing the conceptual barrier that separates original works and translated works. Translation occupies different places in this system according to its function. Besides providing the tangible medium through which Chinese literature can reach an international audience, it can be performed directly by the authors or it can modify the original text deliberately, interfering with the process of literary creation.<sup>15</sup> Global Chinese works begin as local and are later contextualised in a global scenery and, in some cases, they begin in a language and end in another one.

An elliptical model allows us to understand Chinese literary creation at a global level, by relying, at the same time, on the two foci of the authors' original cultural and ethnic identities and their altered position at the time of their writing. Although modifying one's vision is indeed a process, made of multiple stages, all the changes occurred in the past are still reflected on one's present self, therefore imagining it as a point permits to summarise all the past experiences through their present significance. Contrariwise, identifying the 'point of origin' is more problematic. When does one start to move from his or her 'original state' towards his or her 'modified configuration'? It could be said that this happens the moment one begins to interact with the world, speaking, listening and exchanging information with others. As a result, the foci are always two, even in a paradoxical situation where an author never leaves their natal village. Space is what distances the two points, determining the length of the major axis of the ellipse according to one's spatial movement across time. Applying this idea to global Chinese literature means to evaluate every literary output according to the concrete amount of Chineseness contained inside the ellipses, imposing no restrictions on the geographical position of neither one of the two foci.

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<sup>15</sup> Examples of the latter particular case are many novels by Ma Jian, translated by Flora Drew.

Like Damrosch's, Moretti's considerations on world literature are oriented towards a methodological purpose. When stating that "world literature is not an object, it's a *problem*,"<sup>16</sup> he emphasises the need for a new critical method, able to overcome the issue of the unmanageability of a too large corpus of works. Moretti supports the implementation of "distant reading,"<sup>17</sup> as opposed to 'close reading:' a method that would allow transcending primary texts, permitting to perform the ambitious task of approaching literature as a global system. Moretti reaches the peak of his conceptualisation in his work *Graphs, Maps, Trees*<sup>18</sup> by promoting the complete abstraction from the literary language, and a type of analysis based on quantitative data and schematic models. Although this technique could overcome the longstanding obstacle of linguistic differences, such a view might be debatable, as it is difficult to imagine the study of literature as completely separated from a proper analysis of literary works. If excluding the literary texts from the first phase of the study of literature is a feasible plan for a number of scholars dealing with world literature, it is certainly not an option when the aim is to reveal the polyglossia characterising global Chinese literature. Nevertheless, Moretti's intuition contributes to support the idea that the language in which a text is written is not necessarily a fundamental feature, determining the inclusion or the exclusion from a certain literary category.

The 'world literature' approach has been strongly criticised by scholars of comparative literature because of its carelessness *vis-à-vis* the linguistic features and nuances of the literary text.<sup>19</sup> The monoglossic dimension of an English-voiced (or translated) world literature, although it appears to be a rather handy and probably necessary compromise, is inevitably limited in its consideration of language features. Similarly, Shih's Sinophone model is by definition restricted

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<sup>16</sup> Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature," in *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast, (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 149.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, 151.

<sup>18</sup> Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary Theory*, (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Pizer, *The Idea of World Literature: History and Pedagogical Practice*, 94.

to Chinese language, claiming to be transnational, yet without including the linguistic variety of which Chinese literature is nowadays actually composed. As a consequence, none of these strategies can provide a truly global perspective. By allowing polyglossia to enter the framework of a transnational conception of literature, it is possible to enhance the common linguistic and cultural background, while including in the analysis the different features deriving from all the linguistic codes employed for its expression.

However, the delimitation of the corpus is not the only challenge that global Chinese literature has to face. For example, Zhang Longxi's work, *From Comparison to World Literature*,<sup>20</sup> raises important questions about new developments of world literature with reference to the non-Western areas, especially China. In particular, he points out the inevitability of comparison in defining knowledge at any level, insisting on the methodological connection between comparative literature and world literature. Similarly, the challenge of global Chinese literature is also a methodological one, namely the possibility to conceive Chinese literature as a global entity while performing its analysis using a comparative approach. This strategy entails not only the acknowledgement of the different articulations composing the global picture, but also their alignment in a transnational perspective. The adoption of a transnational – or even post-national – point of view is not enough to guarantee the absolute impartiality of the critical eye. In fact, such a target would be rather utopian, as well as critically meaningless. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind the hermeneutical horizon that inevitably conditions the analyst's critical view. To address this issue, Zhang Longxi uses Su Shi's metaphor of Mount Lu:

Viewed horizontally a range; a cliff from the side,  
It differs as we move high or low, or far or nearby.  
We do not know the true face of Mount Lu,  
Because we are all ourselves inside.

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<sup>20</sup> Longxi Zhang, *From Comparison to World Literature*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).

The adoption of a China-centred or a West-centred perspective is a choice that unavoidably affects the critical analysis, for world literature as well as for global Chinese literature. In this regard, Zhang argues that "neither insiders nor outsiders have privileged access to true knowledge."<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, if the project of conceiving a global model for Chinese literature must overcome the limitations of a monoglossic corpus of analysis, the analogous contradiction should be taken into account also as far as the theoretical tools are concerned. Although a theoretical position must be taken, the integration between Chinese and Western scholarship should be encouraged through the adoption of a multi-centred critical apparatus.

In her work *La République mondiale des Lettres*, Pascale Casanova presents the concept of an internationalised literary space, moving from the idea that, in order to truly understand the originality of a text, it is necessary to consider it as part of a totality, namely the world literary space, without stopping at the "prejudice of its constitutive insularity."<sup>23</sup> The history of this world literary space – far from being the reflection of a peaceful process of globalisation – is defined by means of rivalries.<sup>24</sup> The competition between national literatures, fighting to gain access to internationality, enhances their peculiarities. Therefore, in Casanova's view, an internationalised approach cannot rely on a universal model to employ transversally.<sup>25</sup> Similar postulates can be made with reference to what can be named 'Chinese literary space,' that is to say, a virtual space to which Chinese authors and literary works belong. If such space is imagined as international, its area is evidently pervaded by countless contrasting forces. For example, national literature in Chinese, national literature in minor languages,

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<sup>21</sup> Cit. in *ibid.*, 71.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 83–4.

<sup>23</sup> Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (The World Republic of Letters), (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), 19.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, 69.

first-generation migrants' literature in Chinese, first-generation migrants' literature in foreign languages, foreign-born Chinese writers' literature, et cetera. Casanova identifies a national pole and an international pole in every national literature, corresponding to centripetal and centrifugal forces respectively, with exile being the maximum expression of the latter.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, such dichotomy cannot be reproduced in the case of an internationalised Chinese literary space. In fact, the prerequisite for a global perspective on Chinese literature is the abolition of the contraposition between national and non-national Chinese literature, and the acknowledgement of the existence of multiple poles, each of them representing a tile of the variegated mosaic. It is for this reason that the model for a Chinese literary space should be built on her idea of world literary space, and not that of national literary space.

Casanova stresses the connections between literature, language, and politics, elaborating a polycentric linguistic scheme, in which every language controls its literary production and fights with the others to gain the monopolisation.<sup>27</sup> In this myriad of fights, writers choose which side to take.<sup>28</sup> Such a conception is rooted in political ground, and does not prove to be the most effective for the idea of global Chinese literature presented in this study, which does not intend to draw a line between Mainland Chinese writers and exiled dissidents. On the contrary, the reason why authors with so different features are compared is precisely the need to prove their interrelations in the context of a broader definition of Chinese literature. Nonetheless, Casanova's theorisation of national literature, although strictly related to language, does leave space for a cross-border application. National literary space does not correspond to national territory; it is a complex entity that includes a number of autonomous positions, e.g. exiled writers, which can be situated also very far in space.<sup>29</sup> The idea of a

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 163–6.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, 175–6.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, 183.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 296.

national literary space that is irreducible to geographical borders is the first step to take in order to move towards a global conception of a national literature. Nevertheless, Casanova's postulation seems to imply a necessary correspondence between a national language and a national literary space, a prejudice which needs to be overcome in order to reveal the 'globality' of Chinese literature. Fluctuating between languages does not necessarily mean a *va-et-vient*<sup>30</sup> between national literary spaces. Writers from different linguistic backgrounds can be juxtaposed as articulations of the same literary space, in this case the Chinese one, as a consequence of the central role that China plays in their lives as well as in their works.

Following Casanova's intuition, each of the articulations composing global Chinese literature would take place in a belligerent context, where multiple contrasting forces, belonging to one or more literary spaces, exert their influence. Therefore, a work by a writer from Mainland China would be situated among forces that are predominantly from China, while foreign influences could be limited to their translated, therefore 'filtered,' version. Contrariwise, a work by an exiled Chinese writer in the United States would take place against a background animated by a larger amount of foreign forces, including those belonging to the American literary space, while the 'domestic influences' would reside mainly in the author's memory and experience. Every single case is, therefore, a function containing multiple variables, the value assigned to which depends on the particular context. As a result, no universal law can be conceived, and the area of global Chinese literature is to be defined according to the result of each of these functions.

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At the earliest stages of this study, I was particularly concerned with the theoretical challenge, and I happened to interrogate myself repeatedly with questions such as "does this work belong to global Chinese literature? Is this

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 376.

author representative of such globality?” Once the problem tackled, I found out that, despite the undeniable importance of theorisation, there was no point in trying to reconduct a literary work born in the 1990s in downtown Nanjing to an abstract, distorted, and idealised concept of ‘globalisation.’ Similarly, I could not elect some writers to a ‘global’ status to the detriment of others only because of a discrepancy between their native language and the public they address with their novels. I was asking myself the wrong questions. ‘Globality’ does not come on prescription, it is the result of a process that runs over everything and keeps evolving. And this is what is happening to Chinese literature. Today, China invests in policies for cultural expansion, which are a fundamental component of its soft power, and the literary field calls for a redefinition.<sup>31</sup> What needs a rethinking is the general architecture of its national literature that has to find a synergy between its multiple manifestations, in China and abroad, in Chinese or in other languages. Global Chinese literature already exists. Consequently, it should not be defined, but embraced, employed, exploited. This is what I did on substituting my obsolete interrogations with new questions: how can this powerful connection be used? What does it tell us about its particular articulations? What is the place of the individual in such a broad net? After acknowledging the transnational and translingual character of global Chinese literature, I tried to push literary criticism beyond the traditional borders, proposing a methodology to investigate how the fictional representation of individual memory mutates across languages and identities. Naturally, this study is only one of the countless methodological choices compatible with the concept of global Chinese literature. Although such a broad pool of possibilities may look naïve and disorientating, flexibility is a fundamental feature to realise its theoretic potential.

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<sup>31</sup> Yinde Zhang, “Introduction” (Introduction), in *Littérature Chinoise et globalisation : enjeux linguistiques, traductologiques et génériques* (Chinese Literature and Globalisation: Implications in Language, Translation and Genre), ed. Nicoletta Pesaro and Yinde Zhang, (Venezia: Edizioni Ca’ Foscari, 2017), 11.

The theoretical debate illustrated in the first part showed how Mainland Chinese critic and western critic support different positions that, however, are bound to move closer to each other. While the former refuse to accommodate diaspora literature under the wing of Chinese literature, the latter tends to exploit its 'comfortable' position by denying any hierarchical relationship with the Mainland. The focus on the individual character of every articulation permitted to overcome ideological disputes and to focus on the selected corpus. The comparative method suggested by Mainland Chinese criticism has been implemented successfully, while the detachment from its Sinocentric perspective allowed me to visualise the real connection between 'Mainland' Chinese literature and 'overseas' Chinese literature. Western criticism, instead, provided an analysis of the concept of Chineseness that constituted the background for the building of a 'global' Chinese identity. Finally, the philosophical component has been fundamental as it strengthened the structure of this connection with a solid theoretical framework.

The methodology assembled following the principles mentioned above guided the practical analysis. The close reading of Han Dong's and Dai Sijie's novels showed that the feeling of strangeness is not a direct consequence of expatriation. Indeed, the recollection by an author who chose to live in China and to distance himself only internally can appear more *étrange* than that by another who evokes his past to introduce his motherland to a foreign readership. The authors' role during the Cultural Revolution and the cultural elements they intercepted through the years influenced their fictional memories in multiple ways. Han Dong's recollection appears more authentic and vivid, as the mediation of the text is skilfully hidden behind an apparent 'zero degree' narrative.<sup>32</sup> Dai Sijie's reminiscence is instead the result of an exaggerated cultural clash, which seems to be willing to lead the foreign reader into a

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<sup>32</sup> Li Yifei 李奕霏, "“Lingdu qinggan” xiezuo — — lun han dong de zhiqing ticaixiaoshuo” ‘零度情感’寫作——論韓東的知青題材小說 (Writing Zero-Degree Emotions: On Han Dong's Narrations of Educated Youths), 82.



fictionalised nostalgia. Nevertheless, the two depictions of the Cultural Revolution have in common a striking linguistic awareness. The precise and careful use of language filters the authors' reminiscences through the subject who absorbed the linguistic differences during the Cultural Revolution and reproduced them later on. As a result, in this case, the polyglossia of global Chinese literature became a medium to portrait Chinese linguistic diversity, emphasising at the same time the power of language to shape identities and, consequently, recollections. The analysis of Ha Jin's and Ma Jian's novels, instead, showed how displacement influenced their narrations directly. The spatial distance at the time of their experiences of Tiananmen has been reproduced through the narratological structure of the novels as well as through the characters' intellectual and physical involvement. From the perspective of language, the fact that the authors adopted two different codes for their literary expression influenced their recollections heavily. Ma Jian's Chinese conveys an exact and detailed description of the evolution of the protests, whereas Ha Jin's English stresses the distance, both felt in 1989 and recollected later, between him and his motherland. Moreover, the contact with foreign cultures and languages, which both authors experienced during their life in exile, is represented in two opposite ways. Ma Jian 'translated' foreign elements into Chinese, while Ha Jin integrated them into his text. This contrast reflects the different composition of their heterogeneous identities, underlining the importance of analysing polyglossia in order to outline the diversity of literary Chineseness.

Subsequently, the selected articulations have been analysed as spatiotemporal combinations that rationalise the authors' marginalised positions behind their literary works. Nonetheless, the mutual exchange between literary spaces takes place on a rather practical level – translation. My final analysis showed how the polyglossia of global Chinese literature increases exponentially through the process of translation. Different readerships call for different adaptations, which altered the representation of the authors' memories

according to the need of the international readership. Both translation and self-translation have the power to modulate the subject's representation of their own memory. However, their combination must be handled with care. Indeed, if on the one hand translation (and self-translation) can gain a writer international popularity, on the other hand they can produce 'misplaced' cultural references that are not always welcomed by the target readers. Nevertheless, translingualism is one of the mainstays of global Chinese literature, regardless of the effectiveness of its results, and it must be acknowledged and investigated as such.

This thesis contributed to consolidate the method of global Chinese literature by proving the effectiveness of its transnational and translinguistic compared analysis. The analysis of the fictional memories revealed that language is a factor that can and should be transcended when building connections between literary works. Only by doing so it is possible to reveal its actual effects on the representation of the authors' motherland, shaped by a recollection influenced in turn by the marginal position they occupy. Naturally, this study has its limits. Firstly, the methodology I employed is valid only when dealing with narrative texts. Although I do not exclude the hypothesis of applying this interpretation of the concept of global Chinese literature to poetry, I believe it would be necessary to attribute different value to the language itself. Indeed, the main unit of analysis would be the word, with the consequent need to take into account all its phonological and rhythmical implications. Secondly, the focus on the individual in a phenomenological perspective does not allow for a systematisation of the ideological instance. Although one of the purposes was indeed to free literary criticism from the political yoke, in the case of exiled writers it could be pointed out that dissidence is a major factor in the shaping of their image of Mainland China. Nevertheless, if the hierarchy shaping the relationship between Mainland Chinese literature and diaspora literature had to be debunked, and the subject chosen as the quintessence of identitarian

complexity, a writer's political view could not but occupy a background position. Finally, the vastness of the concept of global Chinese literature translates into the impossibility to take into account every articulation that could enrich the compared analysis. The focus on the individual I envisaged in this study needed a preliminary choice made on the basis of the particular situation of every author. I combined diverse yet comparable positions, trying to provide a selection that covered different geographical coordinates and different uses of language. The exclusiveness of the chosen articulations necessarily makes my interpretation partial, although leaving the door open for potential integrations.

Moreover, this thesis paved the way for future analyses that can be conducted from different perspectives. The implications of the Chinese vow to 'zou xiang shijie' 走向世界 (go global) put literature in communication with heterogeneous areas such as economics and politics.<sup>33</sup> The concept of global Chinese literature could provide an effective method to investigate the interactions between literature and the Chinese soft power. The possibility to cross national and linguistic borders would permit to analyse the literary representations of an ideological trend as they are modulated according to the sociocultural context they address. Another possibility is that of employing this method to further analyse the role of translation in shaping different articulations of contemporary Chinese literature. Starting from Emily Apter's idea that "[l]anguages are inherently transnational and time sensitive,"<sup>34</sup> the mutable character of literary representation could be exploited to explore the transformation of a specific issue through translation, self-translation and back translation. The thematisation of translation criticism would permit to

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<sup>33</sup> Nicoletta Pesaro, "La place de la littérature chinoise et le rôle de la traduction à l'époque de la globalisation. Un regard aux théories chinoises courantes" (The Place of Chinese Literature and the Role of Translation and the Time of Globalisation. A View on Current Chinese Theories), in *Littérature chinoise et globalisation : enjeux linguistiques, traductologiques et génériques* (Chinese Literature and Globalisation: Implications in Language, Translation and Genre), ed. Nicoletta Pesaro and Yinde Zhang, (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2017), 34.

<sup>34</sup> Emily Apter, *Against World Literature*, (London: Verso, 2013), 42.

investigate the reflections of a transnational object of analysis on each one of the “small worlds”<sup>35</sup> created by languages that, however, are all ascribable to the over concept of global Chinese literature.

On facing the challenge of conceptualising the unpredictable future of literary criticism, researchers have the power to create methodological synergies able to show the evolution of literature as it becomes more and more intertwined with its collateral manifestations. China is consolidating its transnational character, which will gradually push both its literary representations and their criticism beyond the theoretical limitations deriving from ideological naivety and towards a new understanding of the role they can play in the global community.

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, 42.



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## ESTRATTO PER RIASSUNTO DELLA TESI DI DOTTORATO

Studente: Martina Codeluppi, matricola 840376

Dottorato: Studi sull'Asia e sull'Africa, 30° ciclo

Titolo:

**Writing Memory: Global Chinese Literature in Polyglossia**

(Scrivere di memorie: letteratura cinese globale in poliglossia)

Abstract:

La tesi esamina la rappresentazione narrativa della memoria nel quadro globale della letteratura cinese contemporanea, mostrando l'influenza di dislocamento e translinguismo sulle opere di autori cinesi che scrivono tanto dalla RPC quanto dall'estero, in cinese o in altre lingue. I quattro romanzi *Zha gen* (Mettere radici) di Han Dong, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac e la piccola sarta cinese) di Dai Sijie, *The Crazy* (Pazzia) di Ha Jin e *Rou zhi tu* (Beijing Coma) di Ma Jian saranno comparati come immagini di memorie individuali della Rivoluzione Culturale e delle proteste studentesche di Piazza Tian'anmen. La prima parte si incentrerà sulla discussione di nuovi approcci teorici che inquadrano la letteratura cinese come un'entità poliglossica deterritorializzata. La seconda sarà dedicata all'analisi comparata di *Zha gen* e *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* e metterà in evidenza la rappresentazione del tempo in termini di evoluzione identitaria dell'individuo. Nella terza parte, il paragone tra *The Crazy* e *Rou zhi tu* sottolineerà il carattere spaziale della memoria come testimonianza narrativa. La quarta parte, infine, esplorerà le interazioni tra la letteratura cinese e la letteratura mondiale da una prospettiva translinguistica. La comparazione tra le versioni in cinese, inglese e francese dei romanzi mostrerà come tali memorie deterritorializzate sono modulate dalla traduzione e dall'autotraduzione.

Title:

**Writing Memory: Global Chinese Literature in Polyglossia**

Abstract:

This thesis aims to investigate the representation of fictional memories in the context of global Chinese literature, showing how displacement and translingualism affect the works by authors from the Mainland and from overseas, who express their creativity in different languages. The four novels *Zha gen* (Striking Root) by Han Dong, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress) by Dai Sijie, *The Crazy* by Ha Jin, and *Rou zhi tu* (Beijing Coma) by Ma Jian are compared as reflections of individual memories of the Cultural Revolution and of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. The first part of the thesis addresses the new theoretical approaches configuring contemporary Chinese literature as a polyglossic and deterritorialised entity. The second part focuses on the analysis of two examples of *autofictions*, *Zha gen* and *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, comparing their representation of time as reflected in the evolution of the individual. The third part explores the two novels *The Crazy* and *Rou zhi tu*, focusing on the spatial character of memory transposed in the form of a fictional *témoignage*. Finally, the fourth part investigates the interactions between Chinese literature and world literature, placing the cases analysed in a translingual perspective. The comparison between the Chinese, the English and the French versions of the novels shows how deterritorialised memories are modulated through translation and self-translation.

Keywords:

Memory, Global Chinese Literature, Han Dong, Dai Sijie, Ha Jin, Ma Jian

Titre :

**Écrire la mémoire : littérature chinoise globale en polyglossie**

Résumé :

Cette thèse vise à examiner la représentation des mémoires fictionnelles dans le cadre global de la littérature chinoise contemporaine, en montrant l'influence du déplacement et du translinguisme sur les œuvres des auteurs qui écrivent soit de la Chine continentale soit d'outre-mer, et qui s'expriment à travers des langues différentes. Les quatre romans *Zha gen* (Prendre racine) par Han Dong, *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise* par Dai Sijie, *The Crazy* (La démence du sage) par Ha Jin et *Rou zhi tu* (Beijing Coma) par Ma Jian seront comparés en tant qu'images des mémoires individuelles de la Révolution Culturelle et du mouvement pour la démocratie qui a eu lieu à Tian'anmen en 1989. Dans la première partie, nous discuterons les nouvelles approches théoriques qui configurent la littérature chinoise contemporaine comme une entité polyglossique et déterritorialisée. Dans la deuxième partie, nous nous concentrerons sur deux exemples d'autofiction, à savoir *Zha gen* et *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, en comparant leur représentation du temps figuré comme une évolution identitaire de l'individu. Dans la troisième partie, nous analyserons les deux romans *The Crazy* et *Rou zhi tu*, en mettant en évidence le caractère spatial de la mémoire, transposé en forme de témoignage fictionnel. Finalement, dans la quatrième partie, nous explorerons les interactions entre la littérature chinoise et la littérature mondiale, en plaçant les cas analysés dans une perspective translinguistique. À travers la comparaison entre les versions en chinois, en anglais et en français des romans, nous montrerons comment les mémoires déterritorialisées sont modulées par la traduction et l'autotraduction.

Mots clefs :

Mémoire, littérature chinoise globale, Han Dong, Dai Sijie, Ha Jin, Ma Jian

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