

Discussion paper: Cross-border reading, contemporary fiction, and the imagined child

Kate Foster
UCL

This paper takes a border-crossing event in the life of one contemporary children's novel from China as a vantage point from which to view ways that reading across the book and its shifting contexts can inform our understanding of the narrative. As a working paper in literary studies it is an exploratory venture towards questions for discussion.

Context

In 2016, the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing¹ (HCAAW) was presented to Chinese children's author Cao Wenxuan 曹文轩 (b.1954). The award was preceded by the publication in 2015, in the UK and the US respectively, of the first of Cao's novels to be translated into English, *Bronze and Sunflower* (青铜葵花, 2005) and *Dawang Tome: The Amber Tiles* (大王书:黄琉璃, 2008).² While the domestic publishing industry, and market for children's books, are substantial, and imported titles in Chinese translation have had great success, the export of contemporary children's literature for the commercial English-language market is a relatively recent development.³ For a writer already at the forefront of the international circulation of contemporary children's literature from China to win the HCAAW was an event reported as a significant development in the recognition of Chinese books and authors in the world.⁴ Coupled with two newly-published English translations, it also marked a moment of border-crossing towards new readers.⁵

The author's books for children arrived in a context where the scarcity of English-language information peripheral to writer, texts, and the contemporary Chinese children's literature scene in general, stood in noticeable contrast to the scale of material in the domestic market. For Cao the domestic literary landscape for works is formed not just through longevity of career, but also through the range of outputs and of responses. Beyond works for children, as a literary critic and academic, he has written extensively on literature, on children's literature, and on how it represents the child.⁶ An impressive fan base on the one hand is matched, on the other, by a back catalogue and status sufficient to generate surveys, analysis, and state-of-the-field reviews dedicated to the author's fiction and literary criticism.⁷ New stories from Cao enter a world populated by discourses and commentary on children's literature, what it should look like, who should read it, and why.

As this suggests, a particular feature of this context of production as it relates to works of children's fiction is the attention that is given, in materials in and around the books, towards guiding the imagined reader not only to, but through, the text. This is achieved through a focus on presenting messages about the nature and purpose of children's literature, and about the themes, significance and meaning of the stories, some examples of which I discuss below. The term paratext, used in this sense, is a deliberate reflection of what this context comes to mean. It indicates the way that ideas about literature and about individual works that appear in materials within and around the children's stories call to mind Gérard Genette's⁸ dissection of the types and functions of paratextual elements as they transform the text into the book;⁹ and, importantly, the use of paratext as "the conveyor of a commentary"¹⁰ intended to direct or influence the text's reception.

This approach is reflected in a literary tradition in which aspects of paratext have been employed as a guide both to literature and to the individual text.¹¹ Frances Weightman has written extensively on the uses of prefaces and the evolution of author profiles in Chinese literary tradition, arguing for the significance of author image in the international circulation of texts, and in connecting "the constructed author, the imagined reader, and the fictional work".¹² In a recent study of Cao as celebrity she demonstrates, through analysis of the packaging of a sample of Cao's works, a contemporary case of "authorial self-fashioning" in which the author is "consciously constructed"¹³ through "highly visual and author-centric" materials including multiple photographs.¹⁴ The result, Weightman argues, is an imagined author - an "archetypal paternalistic guide"¹⁵ - whose further characteristics suggest pressures and purposes beyond authorial agency and self-representation.¹⁶

The emphasis in Genette's theorisation is on authorial intent, to the degree that: "the author's viewpoint is part of the paratextual performance, sustains it, inspires it, anchors it."¹⁷ This has its limitations,¹⁸ and is not a restriction applied here, but the influence of Cao's ideas is evident in material around the books, and in scholarship and broader comment, to the extent that, reading about his works, certain words and phrases become commonplace and articles reflecting on his ideas join other materials in new iterations of the text. This is the case, for example, in the language around the role of adversity in children's fiction discussed below. What is particularly noticeable in this contemporary example is the extent to which the resulting commentary reaches beyond why children should (be encouraged by adults to) read certain works to how to direct their approach.

Paratext, including marketing materials, key messages about the books, and about the author's profile, can be viewed as more, or less, relevant to different audiences or across borders.¹⁹

Weightman concludes that the packaging of “the Cao Wenxuan brand” reflects three domestic target markets: children, parents, and peers.²⁰ Decisions about which readership to address, how to present an author, and for international markets which books to translate and how, reinforce a view of children’s literature as a purposeful collaboration between the adults outside the text. Emer O’Sullivan asserts that “the communication in children’s literature is fundamentally asymmetrical” and “at every stage of literary communication we find adults acting for children.”²¹ Children’s literature bears a particular burden of intent, and it also serves to foreground the different ways that adults are involved in imagining the child beyond the book.²² This includes the adult reader who may be “reading the children’s book to fit the book to the child, to mediate, to protect.”²³ Messages may or may not be read, or received, as intended,²⁴ but ideas about children and childhood emerge through the story and through the materials that are attached to the text.

When we think about what literature can tell us about the child in cultural imagination, as the book travels into new territories there is, then, a convergence of issues that relate to authorship, reception, paratexts, cultural contexts, translation and other forms of adaptation, education, bookselling, comparative and children’s literature, and childhood studies. Established and emerging research into the circulation of children’s classics towards an understanding of adaptation, and what this implies about the border-crossing process and about the child as construct, provides one valuable element of the ever-expanding scholarly resource.²⁵ As a researcher of the child image in literary imagination, I am curious about the many different ways that a border-crossing event makes the effects of this convergence visible today, and more so through a work moving from such an intricate and purposeful context and against what has, historically, been the dominant flow of books. This is a view that, in part, follows O’Sullivan’s analysis that what is, at different times, considered appropriate in children’s literature is discoverable through comparative approaches to the text, and speaks to ideas of childhood and of the child as implied reader.²⁶ It is also a way to observe, through an informative example, how the consequent shifts in paratext imagine and direct the reader to and through the text.

Two books

Taking books and materials available at the profile-raising moment of an international literary award, this discussion paper reflects on an encounter with one novel - *Bronze and Sunflower* - at one point in its international travels. Through the direct framing of Chinese and English editions it begins with attention “not only to how paratextual elements are translated but how they are not”²⁷ as a familiar starting point for cross-border reading. It is not, however, an analysis of the translation or

a comparative reading of the English and the Chinese texts,²⁸ and I am not concerned with the decision-making process (what comes along, what is left behind, and *why*). This is, rather, a reading across and between editions of the book to some small details of paratext and of the text to reflect on how these changing elements intend to direct the approach to the narrative in different ways: How do they frame the story? From the messages about the novel that are presented in material that appears alongside the Chinese text I follow two prominent ideas, summarised as: that literature and reading are conduits through which young people learn life lessons; and, that this book has important things to say about the role of resilience in the life of the child. This is a focused view of the expansive material around the book, and of the text itself, that begins and ends with the child image. It takes the original-language and translated books as discrete phenomena and as reflections on, and of, the narrative.

Two lives

Bronze and Sunflower is a story about two marginalised children growing up in rural China in the 1960s and 1970s. Since 2005, it has been reprinted in multiple Chinese editions, repackaged, and brought to market with a range of accompanying materials.²⁹ The tenth anniversary of the novel saw new editions and supplementary volumes,³⁰ and study guides, or readers, that emphasise the educational value of the novel and position it among other Chinese and foreign works.³¹ The English edition, translated by Helen Wang, was first published in the novel's anniversary year, 2015, by children's literature imprint Walker Books.³² It is a stand-alone book that includes two postscripts - a short *Historical Note*, and an author contribution *On Writing 'Bronze and Sunflower'*. It also details other titles in Walker's *World Voices* series placing it among an international array of children's fiction. This position is underscored by information on English PEN, which supported the translation and gave the novel the English PEN Award. Focused on and around the publication of the translation and HCAAW, 2015-2016, further reference is taken from materials generated by that event.

The narrative is almost entirely occupied with the actions and emotions of Bronze, a village boy, and Sunflower, a girl from the city who follows her father, a sculptor who is sent to a rural labour camp. The children experience terrible events through cycles of disaster and recovery. This narrative structure supports, and is reinforced by, popular analysis of the thematic core of the novel as the lesson that hardship is a catalyst for the children's development of a creative and resilient approach to life. This is the approach taken by Li Donghua who positions the novel as the author's views on children's literature in practice.³³ An example is useful to map the lesson in the novel.

Here is one cycle, delivered over ten pages in the English translation, and seven in the original,³⁴ after Bronze's family take in the newly-orphaned Sunflower:

And the family had such fun! At night, after the lights were turned out, they talked and talked, and the sound of laughter flew out of the window of their little thatched house and into the night. Anyone passing by would wonder what on earth could be so funny.³⁵

Soon after, without warning, comes a storm and devastating flood:

The family went home. But it was no longer a house, just some broken-down walls. Bronze went in first, determined to find Sunflower's schoolbag. He poked about with his foot underwater, and every time he felt something, he'd hook it up with his toes: a bowl, a wok, an iron shovel.³⁶

Generations experience the destruction differently, the children entertained by the bizarre appearance of a fish in the flooded house, the adults aware of the seriousness of their situation:

Mama looked at the two children, who hadn't a care in the world, and at the house that had no walls. She turned away and wept. Baba's hard, rough hands rubbed his hard, rough face over and over.³⁷

In the end, the dip towards despair becomes a pragmatic and a practical response, the plain expression an antidote to melodrama: "When the flood receded, the family built a shelter on the foundations of their old house. From now on, they would have to live even more frugally."³⁸ A similar cycle is repeated for different disasters. A locust swarm that destroys the crops is preceded by the villager's languid anticipation of a "truly golden harvest".³⁹ While others leave, Bronze's family decide they have no option but to stay.⁴⁰ The cycle of disaster and recovery does not reduce the downward pull of an inescapably difficult life: the story resolutely refuses the remedy of a happy ending; new disasters occur, including deaths; (unjustified) complacency reaps its own reward; and the resilient individual rebuilds.

Guided reading

Different Chinese editions of the novel hint at the contrasts that form the logic of the narrative. The 2014 commemorative edition opens with an epigraph, "This is the story of a boy and a girl..."⁴¹ Another, slightly earlier, edition has its own dedication to "those who have suffered hardship and their descendants".⁴² Placed side by side, as prominent, concise statements directed at the implied reader, they have the power to suggest tensions in the story - the calm before each storm. The first case is a gentle beginning. In the second, the dedication suggests a shared knowledge of adversity. Materials accompanying various editions and iterations foreground adversity as at the thematic (and educational) heart of the text;⁴³ and promote the importance of guiding children's reading towards

positive results.⁴⁴ A focus on the function of children's literature is not unusual in this context,⁴⁵ and reflects a heritage that, from the heated discourses of the early modern era forward, includes a century of debates about how books might (or should) influence children.⁴⁶ It forms part of the context for the marriage of clarity of intent; the presentation and exposition of the lesson; and how an audience of adults and of children is imagined.

Materials such as study guides, with sections on why we should read this writer,⁴⁷ and the souvenir volume to the commemorative edition, imply a focus on showcasing and on explaining the author and his works. Weightman asserts the significance in the souvenir volume of contributions from literary figures as underscoring the text's "reliability and educational value" for the benefit of adults.⁴⁸ As a way of imagining the adult as guide to the child, they also come together in the repetition of messages about meaning. Ideas connect Li's article, referenced above, on the value of adversity and the need to resist pressure to soften the narrative in children's fiction,⁴⁹ with shorter pieces that comment on the nature and purpose of suffering in the novel.⁵⁰ The commentary, here and elsewhere, places the book in relation to trends in children's literature in China,⁵¹ a positioning that also highlights the existence of opposing views among critics and authors about the purpose of children's literature, and the nature of the child.

The thematic focus on the value of adversity in children's texts references the writer's postscript, *Meili de tongku* [Beautiful Suffering] (2005),⁵² suggesting the role that this short essay has played in establishing a view of the novel that centres on the importance of writing (and reading) about hard experiences in stories.⁵³ In the postscript, Cao proposes an era in which society is focused on pleasure and the idea of happiness; and one that tries to shield children from the knowledge that life is in fact difficult, and that adversity is part of life, and of growth.⁵⁴ The repeated use of "we" (*women*) implies a shared (adult) responsibility to understand that children cannot be protected from the inevitable, and should instead be helped to build resilience so they are ready to meet hardship. The implication is that stories that reflect suffering are necessary for the child, and for society.⁵⁵ In place of shallow happiness, Cao argues for optimism built through experience, presenting a bleak alternative for children ill prepared to face hardship. The child imagined throughout this argument is brought into focus in the closing section that appeals to "today's children" who are encouraged to view their difficulties as part of a universal experience in which they are neither the first nor the last.⁵⁶

The exploration of lessons in resilience through a return to the children of an earlier era is more than a turn to biographical detail as literary inspiration,⁵⁷ it is a return with a stated aim to engage an imagined present-day child in learning to overcome a contemporary problem. In this, it imagines a young audience able to benefit from an engagement with literature and with the experiences of fictional children. If we consider how the text is framed, through themes of adversity, coupled with the idea of learning, this points to the cycles of suffering in the story. It also draws attention to the imparting and gaining of knowledge as a repeated motif. The narrative pauses to reinforce its message when, for example, Grandmother muses that children do not know enough to fear the devastating impact of a locust swarm because they lack the real-life experience of their elders.⁵⁸ Bronze and Sunflower are hardy, imperfect, teachable figures who are positioned as having a role to play in the growth of the implied child reader, allies both to the beleaguered adults in the text and to “today’s children”.

New readers

How, then, does a repositioning of paratext reflect on the text? Beyond the book, the lack of English-language material on the work mid-decade has already been noted. The only published English translation of an essay by Cao that I have found that was available before the award foregrounds the role of the adult, and of reading, in guiding the child.⁵⁹ For a broader readership, the second theme, the significance of suffering, is readily transposed through the English-language commentary generated around the HCAAW. The Jury President's laudation reflects language around the Chinese text:

Cao Wenxuan’s books don’t lie about the human condition, they acknowledge that life can often be tragic and that children can suffer. At the same time, they can love and be redeemed by their human qualities and the kindness they sometimes find when they are most in need.⁶⁰

Focus and tone are replicated in media coverage that itself relies heavily on publicity materials. This, from an interview in *The New York Times*: “Sunshine and playtime are not the hallmarks of Cao Wenxuan’s stories for children.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, a direct comparison between Chinese editions and the English edition highlights differences. The original postscript - a standard part of the novel and commentary - is not included, removing this vivid articulation of the intended message.⁶² This reduces the prominence of the terminology of suffering and, in its place, is an author commentary that focuses on the verisimilitude of the story and the creative role of the writer as he recalls the inspiration for the novel in a conversation with a friend.⁶³ Rather than an instruction on meaning, the implied reader encounters a creative process, arrived at through real-life experience, that mirrors

the narrative structure of the novel: the (writer) narrator (creating) observing an established child trope - the child out of place.

A further interaction can be discovered in the *Historical Note* - just over a page of text that introduces the Cultural Revolution era, cadre schools, and the harshness of rural life in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶⁴ One way an idea of the audience is constructed is through assumptions about what they can be expected to know: how much context is required for the reader to make sense of the story? In children's literature, it is an approach with added relevance when, while children find ways to read beyond cultural difference,⁶⁵ part of the purpose of reading may be understood to be to learn about other places and lives.⁶⁶ Here, the note provides reference points on what may be unfamiliar while maintaining a gentle, accessible tone. One consequence is to emphasise that the audience is expected to need some help to access the narrative. Viewed as a reflection on the text, the note has more to say. It begins:

Bronze and Sunflower is set in rural China in the late 1960s and early 1970s at the time of the Cultural Revolution, when the political situation in the cities was very tense. The Chinese authorities sent huge numbers of professional people (known as 'cadres') from the cities to labour camps (known as 'cadre schools') in remote rural areas.⁶⁷

The note goes on to advise that the integration of villagers and cadres was not easy: "They didn't always understand each other but they had to get on as well as they could."⁶⁸ Read through the dreadful losses narrated in the novel itself, this approach is more than a translation of the past into the supposed-simple language of childhood for the reader unfamiliar with China's history. Consider the low-key introduction of significant terms - cadre schools, Cultural Revolution - the use of "very tense", the idea of dislocated lives, and the measured lesson of cooperation across barriers. Returning to the story, this is an account that highlights the matter-of-factness of the novel - drama without melodrama - and one that flows into, rather than standing apart from, the text.

One final observation on the imagined child glimpsed through the book. The English edition has a front-cover endorsement from author David Almond: "A beautiful book - a treat for all young readers."⁶⁹ This may, as Valerie Pellatt suggests, be praise for the translation and the translator,⁷⁰ although as the translator's name and the fact of translation are relegated to the back cover in the 2015 English edition it is not clear that this association would be made by the reader. Looking back to the story, taking the book as both a "treat" and a representation of hardship, prompts reflection on how the tale is told. The imagined child reader is to be drawn into the "treat" of the book where they will find children who are themselves repeatedly drawn into an enchanting but perilous landscape.⁷¹

This is not just, however, a matter of discovering harsh reality, it highlights the way that, in a further play with contrasts, the novel overlays the mundane world with enchantment: the children are other-worldly; intriguing creatures populate the wetlands; and we read the dying thoughts of Bronze's buffalo. Such observations are, of course, available through the text, and are suggested not to imply that they are invisible without reference to materials beyond the story itself, but simply to follow the prompts of paratext to explore ways of seeing, and therefore what is seen.

Questions

The cross-border journey of *Bronze and Sunflower* is an example that prompts questions that pull at multiple threads of inquiry. The great imbalance in paratextual material at the border-crossing moment - evident notwithstanding the small sample discussed - provides an opportunity to follow contemporary processes of adaptation and circulation: How is the English-language landscape around the novel evolving, and will it come to reflect the scale of the original?⁷² Close connections are made in the Chinese context between the book and wider commentary on childhood and on literature: Will new fiction in translation direct much-needed attention to the translation and international circulation of contemporary literary and cultural criticism, and how might that influence the book? The novel is a contemporary example of fiction reaching new markets and imagining new audiences: How, brought together, might the multiple translations and shifting and expanding contexts of a contemporary work such as this inform or map current ideas of children, childhood, and children's literature in the world? Finally, while books and their contexts allow space for reflection on the text, this is a critical reading that is itself a further *imagining* of the child. As is often noted, text and paratext cannot reveal the real reader or how they read.⁷³ This seems most relevant to the case of children's literature, and perhaps especially so where a strong connection between intent and meaning is asserted.⁷⁴ How do the messages that sit behind the text travel and how do children encounter the child who is imagined through the book?

Notes

¹ The HCAAW is a biennial award and one of two given by the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY). The other is for illustration.

² Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower*, trans. Helen Wang (London: Walker Books, 2015), hereafter *Bronze and Sunflower* [Walker]; Cao Wenxuan, *The Amber Tiles*, trans. Nicholas Richards (Beijing: Daylight Publishing House, 2015). The English translation of *Bronze and Sunflower* was published in the United States in 2017 by Candlewick Press.

³ *Publishers Weekly* noted over 600 children's book publishers, serving an expanding market: Teri Tan, "Children's Books in China 2019: The Chinese Children's Book Market is Still on a Roll," *Publishers Weekly* (15 March 2019). On addressing the ongoing exchange imbalance between U.S. and Chinese markets, see also: Karen Springen, "The Growth of Chinese Children's Books," *Publishers Weekly* 265.5 (26 January 2018).

⁴ See, for example: Jiao Feng, "Cao Wenxuan: Bringer of Aestheticism to Children," *China Today* (31 May 2016) http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/english/culture/2016-05/31/content_721761.html

⁵ Chen Xianghong, and Xu Liujuan, "Cao Wenxuan zuopin zai Yingyu shijie de chuanbo yu jieshou: yi *Qingtong kuihua* wei li" 曹文轩作品在英语世界的传播与接受: 以‘青铜葵花’为例 (The circulation and reception of Cao Wenxuan's works in the Anglophone world: *Bronze and Sunflower*) *Foreign Language and Translation, Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics* 2.101 (2019): 2.

⁶ For a sample list of works see: Cao Wenxuan and An Wulin, *Qingtong kuihua: xiaoshuo yuedu yu jianshang* 青铜葵花: 小说阅读与鉴赏 (*Bronze and Sunflower: reader and appreciation*) (Beijing: Beijing shaonian ertong chubanshe, 2014): 237-239. Hereafter *Bronze and Sunflower: reader and appreciation*. See also Kate Foster, *Chinese Literature and the Child: Children and Childhood in Late-Twentieth-Century Chinese Fiction*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15.

⁷ For a survey of scholarship on Cao Wenxuan see, for example: Yang Juanjuan, "Cao Wenxuan bijiao yanjiu zongshu" 曹文轩比较研究综述 (A survey of comparative studies of Cao Wenxuan) *Journal of Yancheng Institute of Technology (Social Science Edition)* 29.2 (2016): 44-52.

⁸ Gérard Genette [1987], *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ See: Frances Weightman, "Authoring the strange: the evolving notions of authorship in prefaces to classical Chinese supernatural fiction," *East Asian Publishing and Society* 8.1 (2018): 4-5, 9-10; and, on children's literature, Belinda Yun-Ying Louie and Douglas H. Louie, "Children's Literature in the People's Republic of China: its Purposes and Genres," *Chinese Children's Reading Acquisition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Issues*, Wenling Li, Janet S. Gaffney, and Jerome L. Packard, eds. (Boston, Dordrecht, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 177.

¹² See Frances Weightman, "Authoring the strange"; and, Frances Weightman, "Authorial self-fashioning in a global era: authorial prefaces to translated editions of contemporary Chinese fiction," *Prism* 17.1 (2020): 57.

¹³ Frances Weightman, "Marketing Chinese children's authors in an age of celebrity," *JOMEC Journal 15 Advertising China*, Sally Chan and Rachel Phillips, eds. (2020): 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16. Weightman decodes the majority of the 36 portraits of Cao that appear across the souvenir volume to the 2014 commemorative edition of *Bronze and Sunflower* [Phoenix] and provides a compelling view of how the author's image is constructed.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-5.

¹⁷ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts*, 408.

¹⁸ For a concise development of Genette's discussion of paratextual elements and authorial intent see Kathryn Batchelor, *Translation and Paratexts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 12-14.

¹⁹ Emer O'Sullivan discusses the argument that children "do not relate to macrocontextual data" in her examination of children's reading strategies for translated texts. Emer O'Sullivan, *Comparative Children's Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 95-96.

²⁰ Frances Weightman, "Marketing," 16.

²¹ Emer O'Sullivan, "Comparative Children's Literature," *PMLA* 126.1 (January 2011): 191.

²² This observation extends to wide-reaching views of the influence of children's books. See for example: *Ibid.*, 190.

²³ Peter Hunt, "The Fundamentals of Children's Literature Criticism: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*," *The Oxford Handbook of Children's Literature*. Lynne Vallone, and Julia Mickenberg, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 40.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-37. Kathryn Batchelor, *Translation and Paratexts*, 172-174.

²⁵ Two notable examples are Emer O'Sullivan's extensive study of adaptations of Pinocchio, and new research by Anna Kérchy on Hungarian translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* - itself a popular focus of circulation studies internationally - as manifestations of ideas of childhood through the domestication of the story and of the implied reader. See: Emer O'Sullivan, *Comparative Children's Literature*, 138-145; and, Anna Kérchy, "The Creative Reinventions of Nonsense and Domesticating the Implied Child Reader in Hungarian Translations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*," *Children's Literature in Translation: Texts and Contexts*. Jan Van Coillie, and Jack McMartin, eds. (Minderbroedersstraat, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020), 159-178.

²⁶ Emer O'Sullivan, *Comparative Children's Literature* (2005), 3, 91, 104-105.

²⁷ Kathryn Batchelor, *Translation and Paratexts*, 161.

²⁸ A fascinating account of one translation process is provided by the translator of the Italian edition of the book. Paolo Magagnin, "Chinese children's literature and the challenges of internationalization. Cao Wenxuan's *Qingtong kuihua* in Italian translation," <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/223179717.pdf>

²⁹ Zhang, in 2016, noted 170 Chinese editions of *Bronze and Sunflower*. In 2019, *Publishers Weekly* estimated total domestic sales of the novel at 4.5 million copies. It has been translated into multiple languages including Korean, French, German, Russian, and Italian. Zhang Mingzhou, "Cao Wenxuan, Hans Christian Andersen Award Winner 2016," *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, 54.4 (2016): 8. See also: Teri Tan, "Children's Books in China."

³⁰ The two volumes of the novel consulted here are: 1. *Qingtong kuihua diancang jinian ban* 青铜葵花典藏纪念版 (Bronze and Sunflower commemorative edition) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Phoenix Juvenile and Children's Publishing, [2014] (2017)) hereafter *Bronze and Sunflower* [Phoenix]; and, 2. *Qingtong kuihua* 青铜葵花 (Bronze and Sunflower), (Beijing: Tiantian Publishing, 2011) hereafter *Bronze and Sunflower* [Tiantian]. Additional materials include the souvenir volume that accompanies the Phoenix edition of the novel: *Qingtong kuihua jinian teji* (Bronze and Sunflower souvenir volume) (Nanjing: Jiangsu Phoenix Juvenile and Children's Publishing, [2014] (2017)) hereafter *Bronze and Sunflower souvenir volume*.

³¹ The two study guides consulted here are closely-related collections of readings from Cao's stories, and commentary from An Wulin: Cao Wenxuan, and An Wulin, *Qingtong kuihua: ertong wenxue mingjia jingdian shuxi* 青铜葵花: 儿童文学名家经典书系 (*Bronze and Sunflower* reader: children's classics series) (Beijing: Beijing Education Publishing House, 2015) hereafter *Bronze and Sunflower reader*; and *Bronze and Sunflower: reader and appreciation*.

³² Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Walker].

³³ The 2005 article by Li Donghua has been reproduced in different iterations and formats of the novel, including the two readers consulted here, and itself references the author's postscript, *Meili de tongku*, discussed below, so that it both comments on and becomes part of the paratextual material that intensifies the focus on the novel as demonstrating growth through hardship: Li Donghua, "Zhimian ertong shijie de kuanan" 直面儿童世界的苦难 (Facing up to suffering in the world of children) in Cao Wenxuan and An Wulin, *Bronze and Sunflower reader*, 116-17.

³⁴ Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Walker], 144-153. Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Phoenix], 92-97.

³⁵ Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Walker], 144-145. Extracts are taken from Helen Wang's translation.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁴¹ Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Phoenix].

⁴² Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Tiantian]. In this edition, the description of the novel as a story about a boy and a girl also appears, in a longer introduction to the novel on the inside front cover.

⁴³ Examples range from Li Donghua's article, referenced above, to a maxim in the reader that difficulties are "life's whetstone". Li Donghua, "Zhimian ertong shijie de kuanan," 113-21; Cao Wenxuan and An Wulin, *Bronze and sunflower: reader and appreciation*, 41.

⁴⁴ Cao Wenxuan and An Wulin, *Bronze and Sunflower reader*, i-iv, 5-6.

⁴⁵ Louie and Louie use forewords from the 1990s as a source of information on the "goals" attributed to children's literature in China, suggesting the routine use of paratext to connect the text to reading towards specific and stated objectives. Belinda Yun-Ying Louie and Douglas H. Louie, "Children's Literature in the People's Republic of China," 177.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 177-182. Mary Farquhar provides a genealogy not only of Chinese children's literature but also of the various purposes assigned to children's books across the twentieth century. Mary Ann Farquhar, *Children's Literature in China: From Lu Xun to Mao Zedong* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1999). Contemporary writers are still habitually compared to the modern pioneers, most notably Lu Xun, whose views of childhood are, for example, referenced in the foreword to the *Bronze and Sunflower reader*. Cao Wenxuan and An Wulin, *Bronze and Sunflower reader*, 1.

⁴⁷ See for example: Cao Wenxuan and An Wulin, *Bronze and Sunflower: reader and appreciation*, 1-3.

⁴⁸ Frances Weightman, "Marketing," 8-9.

⁴⁹ Li Donghua, "Zhimian ertong shijie de kuanan."

⁵⁰ Gao Hongbo, "Tongku yu meili, shuangsheng de jiemei" 痛苦与美丽, 双生的姐妹 (Suffering and beauty, twin sisters) *Bronze and Sunflower souvenir volume*, 17; and, Wang Quangen, "Kuanan shenchi de shengming zhexue" 苦难深处的生命哲学 (A philosophy of life in the depths of suffering) *Bronze and Sunflower souvenir volume*, 19-20.

⁵¹ See for example Li Donghua, "Zhimian ertong shijie de kuanan," 113.

⁵² Cao Wenxuan, "Meili de tongku" 美丽的痛苦 (Beautiful suffering [2005]), Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Tiantian], 259-62. The essay also appears elsewhere, including in the Phoenix edition, and in the Cao Wenxuan reader from Beijing Children's Publishing House.

⁵³ The postscript is repeatedly cited and, approaching the novel through the author's wider commentary, themes of suffering and adversity are often foregrounded so that, through repetition, the vocabulary becomes a familiar element of

context and of scholarship. For an earlier engagement with the role of tragedy in literature see: Lin Jinlan and Cao Wenxuan, "Xuyan" 序言 (Introduction) *Luori hong men: xiaoshuo juan* (Beijing: Dazhong wenyi chubanshe, 2000), 1-13.

⁵⁴ Cao Wenxuan, "Meili de tongku," 260.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 260-261.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 261-262. A similar comment appears on the cardboard sleeve and back cover of the commemorative edition of the novel, with an additional connection made between adversity in childhood and strong adults. Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Phoenix].

⁵⁷ Commentary by and about the author often connects Cao's writing with the riverside landscapes, and experiences, of his childhood, mirroring the importance of personal memory in his approach to, and writing on, literature. See for example: Cao Wenxuan and An Wulin, *Bronze and Sunflower reader*, 1-4, 209; and, on fiction and memory, Kate Foster, *Chinese Literature and the Child*, 30. This idea was also foregrounded in narratives around the HCAAW with the then Vice President of the IBBY writing about undertaking a personal visit to Cao's childhood home. Zhang Mingzhou, "Cao Wenxuan, Hans Christian Andersen Award Winner 2016," 4-9.

⁵⁸ Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Walker], 238.

⁵⁹ Cao Wenxuan, "Children's Disposition and Children's Views," trans. Liang Hong, *Representing Children in Chinese and U.S. Children's Literature: Ashgate Studies in Childhood 1700 to the Present*, Claudia Nelson and Rebecca Morris, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014) [Reprinted by Routledge, 2016], 135.

⁶⁰ Patsy Aldana, "Laudatio given by Patsy Aldana, Jury President, Hans Christian Andersen Award 2016," (New Zealand, 2016). ibby.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Patsy_HCA_laudatio.pdf

⁶¹ Amy Qin, "Little Sugarcoating in Cao Wenxuan's Children's Books," *The New York Times* (1 May 2016) <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/02>

⁶² It is interesting that this was also excluded from the Italian version, although translated for use. Paolo Magagnin, "Chinese children's literature and the challenges of internationalization," 7.

⁶³ Cao Wenxuan, "On Writing 'Bronze and Sunflower'" [2005] in Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Walker], 389-90.

⁶⁴ Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Walker], 387-88.

⁶⁵ Emer O'Sullivan, *Comparative Children's Literature* (2005), 95.

⁶⁶ See for example the range of opinions collected by Karen Springen on the value and purpose of Chinese children's stories for different American reader groups: Karen Springen, "The Growth of Chinese Children's Books."

⁶⁷ Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Walker], 387.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Valerie Pellatt, "Translation of Chinese Paratext and Paratext of Chinese Translation," *The Routledge Handbook of Chinese Translation*, Chris Shei and Zhao-Ming Gao, eds. (London: Routledge, 2017): 175.

⁷¹ In the first such instance, Sunflower feels the pull of the river - she can "hear the river calling her" - and later, following the sound of voices, wants to cross and is almost carried off downstream. Cao Wenxuan, *Bronze and Sunflower* [Walker], 6.

⁷² For a survey of the circulation of English-language editions of the novel up to 2019 through library holdings and reviews see: Chen Xianghong, and Xu Liujuan, "Cao Wenxuan zuopin," 1-6.

⁷³ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts*, 408-10. Kathryn Batchelor, *Translation and Paratexts*, 172-174.

⁷⁴ This point is made for the child reader by Cheung et al. who note in their study that there is a gap between analysing the values written into the children's book and reaching conclusions about their effect. Cecilia S. Cheung, Jorge A. Monroy, Danielle E. Delaney, "Learning-Related Values in Young Children's Storybooks: an investigation in the United States, China, and Mexico," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 48.4 (2017): 538. See also Claudia Nelson and Rebecca Morris, eds., *Representing Children*, 532. For a view of the diversity of recent research into young reader experiences and practices around the world, with a focus on adolescents and young adults, see: Evelyn Arizpe and Gabrielle Cliff Hodges, eds., *Young People Reading: Empirical Research Across International Contexts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

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