

## WSPÓŁCZESNE CHINY

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### **CHINESE INTERNET LITERATURE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NEW-STYLE LITERARY MECHANISMS: A CASE STUDY OF *SISTERHOOD* BY ANNI BAOSHI**

Chinese internet literature is a phenomenon that started blossoming eagerly not very long after the country launched its connection with the net. The size and scope of literature-related initiatives that came to life through the agency of the internet in China are of no comparison to that of any other virtual space in the world. Even in its initial phase, that is at the advent of the 21st century, there were countless literary forums and websites that served as the space that absorbed and circulated volumes of texts produced by non-professional writers.

Even though internet literature has already been acknowledged as an actual phenomenon in popular culture, it is still perceived as inferior in terms of literary worth or simply considered a kind of entertainment intended for the masses. Indeed, it may be argued that quantity tops quality when it comes to *wuxia*<sup>2</sup> or *xianxia* online publishing industry; this complex subject deserves separate research and shall not be covered here.

Regardless of the criticism and tendency to marginalize the topic, naming just a few authors that have been propelled to stardom and literary mainstream thanks to online distribution could be the first argument not only to prove how prolific online literary communities might be, but also to present the potential literary merits that can be found on the Internet. Han Han, Murong Xuecun, Chen Cun and many

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<sup>2</sup> Chinese characters of terms and names deemed to be secondary to the topic are given in Appendix 1.

others have shown that writers if they wish to remain relevant, should not downplay modern media, nor should they overlook new means of artistic expression. One of such artists is Anni Baobei / Qing Shan,<sup>3</sup> whose short story *Qiyue yu Ansheng* (*Sisterhood*)<sup>4</sup> I aim to analyze in this article. Despite the author's long-selling and bestselling status in China, she remains barely known to the Western audience.

It is almost a cliché statement that the unceasingly expanding volume of worthwhile research in humanities is a great incentive to formulate ideas based on an interdisciplinary approach. Shao Yanjun, a professor at Peking University whose main area of interest is online culture, has put forward a concept of New-Style Literary Mechanisms, which touches upon both social and literary criticism.<sup>5</sup> Contrary to the previous cultural production mechanisms known in history, the ones that have crystallized very recently are mostly fan/readers-generated and grassroots. The distinctions presented in her article has served as the core notions to analyze a representative of a fascinating, one-of-a-kind phenomenon, that is Chinese online literature. As Fang Wei notes, online literature has already become a part of the „Chinese story”, and along with the rapid development of this phenomenon, Internet literary criticism followed, even if the pace of its response may not be fully satisfactory.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the criticism mentioned by Fang does not relate to any concerns expressed by the field of translation studies, which I am also going to touch upon.

## Literature Review

Michael Hockx widely discusses the topic in his monographs dedicated to Chinese online literature of its early period. He describes both the way literary platforms used to function and presents the prominent figures of the online literary

<sup>3</sup> Li Jie (励婕) is more commonly known by her pen names: she debuted as Anni Baobei (安妮宝贝), yet in 2014 she announced to have changed her pen name to Qing Shan (庆山). Since I focus mostly on her early writing, I shall further refer to her using the former pen name.

<sup>4</sup> 七月与安生 [Qiyue he Ansheng]. The work has not been translated to any language up to date. Thus, I propose *Sisterhood* as the title and from now I shall refer to the story in this manner.

<sup>5</sup> Shao Yanjun, *Chuantong Wenxue Shengchan de Weiji he Xinxing Jizhi de Shengcheng* [The Crisis in the Traditional Literary Production Mechanism and the Emergence of a New-Style Mechanism], “Zhongguo Zuojiā Wang” [The Chinese Writers’ Website] 29.04.2011, <http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/2011/2011-04-29/96945.html> [accessed 13.01.2022].

<sup>6</sup> Fang Wei, *Zhongguo wenxue piping ruhe yingdui wangluo wenxue fazhan* [How does Chinese literary criticism respond to the development of online literature?], 8th International Scientific Conference “Issues of Far Eastern Literatures”, Sankt Petersburg 2018, pp. 281–287, <https://www.ifel.spbu.ru/arhiv/2018/1/II/index.html> [accessed 13.01.2022].

scene.<sup>7</sup> While other works provide worthwhile insight to the online literature and online communities (especially those China-based and Chinese-oriented), their abundance seems to prove a certain pattern: the more worthwhile literature on the matters of secondary (or merely contextual) relevance to the main topic of the research, the less literature can be found on translating works of internet literature *per se*. Naturally, the potential of online literature to represent Chinese cultural capital and its soft power has been noticed; in this respect, some researchers discussed the area of translation internet literature, but they rather focused on the cross-cultural dimensions of translation. These interesting, yet not directly related to my research, topics are touched upon by Guo Jing<sup>8</sup> and Zheng Jianwei.<sup>9</sup> Since the topic reflects the dynamics of processes taking place in the virtual space, it is understandable that some resources may exist inclusively online. Commentaries on translating online fiction (*wuxia*, *xianxia*, and *xuanhuan*) are provided by the translator who works under a penname Deathblade; he shares his insights on Youtube – an online video-sharing platform. No matter the worth of the resources rooted in the translation practice, his work is remote in terms of poetics from Anni Baobei's work.

As mentioned before, even though the Chinese virtual media has produced at least a few outstanding and prolific writers, the field of translation studies and, to some extent, literature studies have not witnessed a rise of research dedicated to Internet literature. On the other hand, it would be unfair to claim that the early works of Anni Baobei have not received any feedback from academia. Articles of many Chinese scholars and young researchers explore the main themes of her writing, such as isolation, loneliness, urban life, the „stories of disturbed characters, reflecting the ‘messed up’ lifeworlds of China's one-child generations,<sup>10</sup> etc. Those certainly prove useful in understanding the thread of meanings within the texts yet are not of key importance when discussing the mediatic aspects of her early works.

To sum up, it is justified to say that any translation-oriented approach toward Annie Baobei and the internet literature in China represents uncharted territory.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Hockx, *Internet Literature in China*, Columbia University Press, New York 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Guo Jing, *Ye tan Zhongguo wenxue fanyi chuban “zouchuqu” yi Zhongguo wangluo wenxue OuMeire weilie* [The Translation and Publication of Chinese Literature Goes Global: The Example of Chinese Online Literature Fever in the USA and Europe], “Chuban Jiaodu” [View on Publishing] 2017, no. 3, pp. 85–87.

<sup>9</sup> Zheng Jianwei, *Zhongguo wangluo wenxue de haiwai jieshou yu wangluo fanyi moshi* [Overseas Reception of Chinese Online Literature and the Model of Online Translation], “Huawen Wenxue” [Literature in Chinese language] 2018, no. 5, pp. 119–125.

<sup>10</sup> Clarissa Sebag-Montefiore, *Interview: Annie Baobei*, [http://www.timeoutshanghai.com/features/Books\\_\\_Film-Book\\_features/6982/Interview-Annie-Baobei.html](http://www.timeoutshanghai.com/features/Books__Film-Book_features/6982/Interview-Annie-Baobei.html) [accessed 13.01.2022].

### Background information: the text and the author

Born in 1974 in Ningbo, Anni Baobei is now one of China's bestselling novelists. Before fame and fortune, she worked in a bank. In 1998, three years after she began working full-time, to escape the tedium of her daytime work, Anni Baobei began publishing some of her short stories on "Rongshuxia" (*Under the Banyan Tree*), one of China's earliest literary websites.<sup>11</sup> Annie Baobei (she was given the name by her readers) belongs to the writers who managed to reach a high-literary status in China through online publishing. Fame, however, was not followed by much in-depth scholarly interest. As Hockx points out when speaking of online authors such as Anni Baobei, who went on to considerable critical acclaim, "scholars have generally paid more attention to [...] commercial success than to [...] literary characteristics".<sup>12</sup> Anni Baobei's early fiction may be labelled as highly subjective and concise in stylistic terms. Some researchers point out expressionist qualities, as well as visible influences of Margarite Duras' prose (for a while, quite a prominent literary figure in China).

In sharp contrast to other female authors of that period, such as Zhou Weihui (to English readers known as Wei Hui) or Mian Mian, the author presented here still enjoys the status of both best-selling and long-selling author. Throughout the first decade of the XXI century, she managed to gather a relatively big and loyal group of readers, who referred to themselves as „Annie's fans" *An mi*. All that happened without Anni Baobei's attempts to become a celebrity, which is another profound difference between her and other so-called *chick lit*. Those readers were not only die-hard fans of the author's works, but they also attributed moral merits to her, such as honesty, without actually knowing the person.<sup>13</sup> But for the support of the online fandom, this stable and long-lasting human capital earned by Annie Baobei would not be possible.

### Theoretical framework

#### The early period of Internet literature in China

For the sake of this article and despite multifarious literary practices that come into reality via the Internet, I use probably the simplest definition of Internet

<sup>11</sup> Cai Shenshen, *Female Celebrities in Contemporary Chinese Society*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Hockx, *Internet Literature...*

<sup>13</sup> Shao Yanjun, *Chuantong Wenxue...*

literature put forward by Michael Tse and Maleen Z. Gong: „Internet literature is an original non-scholarly literary work that is first published on the Internet”.<sup>14</sup>

I should emphasize at this point that it is the very dawn of the phenomenon that is the main concern of my work; that is to say, I shall focus on the events and phenomena taking place before 2004 – the year when Shanghai Shengda Network Development Co. Ltd. purchased Qidian literature website (one of the most important grassroot online community at the time) and turned what used to be a creative ferment into a commercialized industry.

As Yang notes, in the year 2000, Internet users in China (merely 9 million) were a small minority, mostly young, urban, and with an education level well above the average. Back then, being online used to be one of the distinctive features of the new „petty-bourgeois” and, after some time, it shifted to be associated with the forming middle class.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned above, Anni Baobei began to publish some of her short stories on “Rongshuxia” one of China’s earliest literary websites. It is one of the sites of great popularity back then are now non-existent, which poses a problem for a researcher, even a paradox. Since the reference source - the text published online - ceased to exist, one needs to rely on the paper versions of the texts primarily published online. As a result, recreating parts of the literary entourage that could serve as a context in the course of translation is difficult and requires resorting to indirect references.

Anni Baobei belongs to the kind of authors who share characteristics described by Chen:

*All of their personal histories have several common characteristics: they first obtained Internet access when they were undergraduate students; most of them did not have much interest in writing before they started to write literary works online; all of them admitted that the encouragement of readers was the most important factor in their continuing to write at that time; and some of them did not even think that their writings belonged to Internet literature.*<sup>16</sup>

Celebrity online status enabled the author to seize an opportunity to become a print writer very quickly. Just a few years after she released her debut in print, that is collection of her short stories *Gaobie Wei'an* (*Goodbye, Vivian*), “Rongshuxia”

<sup>14</sup> Michael Tse, Maleen Z. Gong, *Online Communities and Commercialization of Chinese Internet Literature*, “Journal of Internet Commerce” 2012, vol. 11, pp. 100–116.

<sup>15</sup> Yang Xin, *Internet Writing and Urban Fashion: the Case of Anni Baobei*, “Southern Review of Asian Studies” 2006, vol. 28, pp. 121–129.

<sup>16</sup> Chen Jing, *Refashioning Print Literature in China: Internet Literature in China*, “Comparative Literature Studies” 2016, vol. 49, no. 4, pp. 537–546.

forum dramatically lost its popularity. Nowadays, one hardly considers Anni Baobei an Internet writer, since her presence in the contemporary Chinese literary landscape is not limited merely to virtual space.

### **Specific features of online literary practices important for the translation-oriented approach**

Shao Yanjun was one of the first scholars to recognize the fact that there has been a growing gap between the expectations of Chinese readership and traditional modes of literary texts distribution such as literary magazines and journals. Shao draws upon a dichotomy between the traditional literary production mechanism and the new-style mechanism, and she hints that the vitality of Chinese literature lies in the latter. Not only the modes of production have changed; through the new-style mechanism combined with and driven by market forces, the acts of reading, commenting, circulating, and the way of moving to the cultural mainstream have changed too.

Although the sociocultural background presented in his article is relevant only to the Chinese literary landscape, the terms are useful in attempts to describe the gap between Internet literature and the somewhat slow response from academic circles. According to Shao, academia (in this case, also including the translation field) represents the traditional literary production mechanisms therefore they may be reluctant to draw its attention to the phenomena existing outside the establishment. In the article, I wish to point out some characteristics of Anni Baobei's style related to the new medium and to analyze some of the challenges of translating Anni Baobei's work given that her writing is a model example of the new-style literary production mechanism in practice. It should be mentioned at this point that the new style-literary production mechanisms resonate with the main topics of the author's writing: the crisis of traditional forms is linked with the crisis of traditionally advocated values, and such a predicament is with no doubt reflected in Anni Baobei's works.

I use the term „the New-Style Literary Mechanism” to refer to the totality of the online literary practices, which may require a new approach to analyze them and, consequently, to translate literary works that represent this relatively new trend. There is a paradox in scholars and writers emphasizing the importance of technology while at the same time reducing it to a simple tool or platform, failing to recognize that the importance of new media and technology goes far beyond that – to say briefly, it shapes the message just like any other media used to and still do.

The generation that first expressed itself through literature in cyberspace embodies trends very new to China at the time: globalization and a strong desire to

have a distinct cultural identity. Those qualities are hard to discover on the pure basis of linguistic or textual considerations, yet they shape the process of reading (and translation) of online literature texts.

Landa argues that the changes in the virtual space we are witnessing have to transform the substance of literature itself, at least in three dimensions. One of those is the mediatic dimension:

*[...] the very material of literature, text, is significantly altered by digitization and the web. Text is something that has to be produced, and the economics of production is changing significantly. The new regime of production will have an economic influence on literature.*<sup>17</sup>

The economics of text production is one of the key points in my analysis. Today, „online” is inseparable from „real,” but such was also the case for the communities engaged in shaping online literature in China at the turn of century. Even in its initial phase, the Internet was a force reshaping communication patterns and redefining and expanding the notion of what is „literary” in language.

What is more, literature involves the strict correlation between form and contents (*ibidem*); given that, such a significant change of the medium – a transition from traditional production forms of literature to the new-style literary mechanisms must inevitably lead to redefining the meaning of literature, especially the texts and the authors that take the advantage of technological innovations.

Even though Anni Baobei refuses to admit any influence on her writing to cyberspace, her claim sounds somewhat self-contradictory:

*The Internet was an experimental playground for me and never influenced my stories.*<sup>18</sup>

Even if such was the case (which, as I point out, is doubtful), Anni Baobei is one of the pioneering and most influential figures in this literary period and, as such, her early works should be analyzed as the online phenomena in the first place.

I believe that the characteristics of new-literary production mechanisms intertwined with Chinese online literature managed to produce a kind of text that requires considering at least a few problems worth discussing in terms describing the genre. That also relates to choosing or fashioning the specific translation strategy. First, this literary current naturally represents the mindset, sensibility, and search

<sup>17</sup> José Angel Garcia Landa, *Literature in Internet*, in: *The Texture of Internet: Netlinguistics in Progress*, Santiago Posteguillo, Maria Jose Esteve, Maria Luisa Gea-Valor (eds.), Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne 2007, pp. 143–161.

<sup>18</sup> Daria Berg, ‘People Must Search within China’s Contradictions to Discover What Really Matters’: *An Interview with Bestselling Author Anni Baobei*, in: *Transforming Book Culture in China, 1600–2016*, Daria Berg, Giorgio Strafella (eds.), Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2016, pp. 203–210.



for uniqueness felt and expressed by the generation of youths at the time. It is understandable enough not to elaborate further that such external factors help to create a theoretical frame and form a suitable tone of a literary translation. As for the online literature itself, I argue that changes in the economics of text production and changes involving the poetic dimension of literature are the aspects that should be recognized and conveyed in the act of reading and translation.

### **New-Style Literary Mechanisms in Practice**

When considering specific features of online literature that both reflect the *Zeitgeist* and pose a challenge to render in translation I have started from a premise that a different mode of discourse or, simply saying, the fact of publishing the story online prior to its print publication may influence the main body of the text. Such is the case in Annie Baobei's *Sisterhood*. The story depicts a long-lasting friendship between two girls. Qiyue comes from a common social background and grows up to become a hard-working successful student and bank worker, while Ansheng is a maverick who never had a chance to meet her father, and through the course of her short life keeps changing her plans, ambitions, and aspirations.

I propose conducting the analysis of stylistic and linguistic characteristics of the presented excerpts in the light of the following three issues:

1. The specific text economy;
2. Unorthodox punctuation;
3. The mediatic realm of the source text, in translation conveyed *inter alia* through the approach to CSI (Culture-Specific Items).

#### ***The specific text economy***

One of the unusually mind-racking aspects of the translation is the strive to convey the flow of the prose. The early Annie Baobei's literary style is succinct, even to the extent of posing a threat to readability, and *Sisterhood* is no exception to that rule. Short sentences or even utterances seem to remind of text messages or online posts, yet what appears to be an easy task to translate turns out to be a challenge: how to make such simple prose sound as powerful as it does in the source language without being overly simplistic, infantile, or disloyal to the author?

Below I present the examples highlighting this inconspicuous difficulty of stylistic simplicity. All the translations presented in that section and the following ones are done by me.



1)

<p>七月低下头有些难过。她说，那我呢。安生说，你和我一起走。 (<i>Qiyue dixia tou youxie nanguo. Ta shuo, na wo ne. Ansheng shuo, ni he wo yiqi zou.</i>)</p>	<p>The latter lowered her head, saddened a bit. What about me, she asked. You and I will go together, said Ansheng.</p>
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2)

<p>好。回去。安生扔掉烟头。家明。她回头低唤家明。 (<i>Hao. Huiqu. Ansheng reng diao yantou. Jiaming. Ta huitou di huan Jiaming.</i>)</p>	<p>Ok, let's go back. Ansheng threw the cigarette butt. She turned her head to call Jiaming.</p>
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3)

<p>七月反抱住她。好了。安生乖。一切都会好的。我们会长大的。长大了就没事了。 (<i>Qiyue fan bao zhu ta. Haole. Ansheng guai. Yiqie dou hui hao de. Women hui zhang da de. Zhang da de jiu meishi le.</i>)</p>	<p>She hugged Ansheng back. It's ok. It's all right. We'll grow up. Once we grow up, we will be all good.</p>
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4)

<p>不。我还要喝。我还要喝。安生扑倒在吧台上。只有酒才能让我温暖。 (<i>Bu. Wo hai yao he. Wo hai yao he. Ansheng pu dao zai batai shang. Zhiyou jiu cai neng rang wo wennuan.</i>)</p>	<p>Nah, I still wanna drink, I still wanna drink some. She leaned against the bar. Only alcohol can keep me warm.</p>
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As we read the story, we may observe that the more dramatic the scene, the shorter the sentences. They seem to separate every image in order to highlight emotional situations or the states the characters find themselves in.

Even though the actual translations of the sentences presented above cannot be in no way standardized with the same measure, they all adhere to the same translation strategy. Literary online forums, such as “Rongshuxia,” enabled the authors to measure the readership quantitatively and reach of their works more accurately; moreover, readers were given a possibility to interact with either stories or authors. As a consequence of this shift, storytelling online and narrative texts in cyberspace lean toward its communicative aspects. Naturally, the idea that literary

writing is a communication act is by no means newly put forward.<sup>19</sup> However, as new-style literary mechanisms shorten the presumed distance between authors and their readership,<sup>20</sup> it may encourage the writers to focus on the communicative dimension of their artistic statements.

The focus on communicative aspects of translation can be related to the functional approaches advocated by Nida or House.<sup>21</sup> In the course of translating the story, sentences are no longer the translation units – the basic unit is an utterance, and so the attention shifts toward its value in communication. Given such an approach, economizing the translated text seems justified. Functional translation theories may also prove useful in interpreting the use of what is here called “unorthodox punctuation.”

To sum up, the new, more double-sided realm of literary text may promote a more succinct, direct style, displaying the main communicative goals of all the utterances. In the process of translation, it could be rendered by following the strategy of „economizing on the information.”

### ***Unorthodox punctuation***

As we read the story, we soon realize that the use of punctuation used by the author is highly untypical; apart from commas and periods, no other punctuation marks can be seen. Punctuation is an aspect that forms the flow and the rhythm of prose; it is also determined by the specific features of the source language and target language. Given the fact that in Chinese interrogative<sup>22</sup> pro-forms sometimes happen to be the last word of a sentence, the absence of question marks does not have to hamper understanding the text (from the source language reader’s perspective). What is more, it can be unreservedly considered a literary device that constitutes the author’s voice.

It is worth mentioning at this point that all forms of online self-expression have brought along some loosening in terms of grammar rules that should be observed in communication. I could not be further away from suggesting that the original

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<sup>19</sup> See: Roger D. Sell, *Literature as Communication: the Foundation of Mediating Criticism*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Another value that is being shortened in the process is the attention span; it was not necessarily the case twenty years ago but should not be omitted when discussing any Internet-related topics.

<sup>21</sup> See: Eugene Nida, *Toward the Science of Translating. With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating*, E. J. Brill, Leiden 1964, and Juliane House, *Translation Quality Assessment: Past and Present*, Routledge, New York 2015.

<sup>22</sup> Chinese does not distinguish interrogative and indefinite pro-forms, so it is a simplification, which I make, since the matter is not crucial to the analysis.

text ignores language correctness. It is more proper to say that the author exercises the freedom given by the new medium. What is the freedom in the source language becomes a conundrum in the target text, however, the narrow range of punctuation marks found in the story poses yet another challenge of achieving the target text readability.

5)

<p>七月，家明是有什么事情了吗。母亲担心地看着在收拾衣服的七月。 (<i>Qiyue, Jiaming shi you shenme shiqing le ma. Muqin danxin de kanzhe zai shoushi yifu de Qiyue.</i>)</p>	<p>Qiyue, what's going on with Jiaming? Her mother was staring very worriedly at Qiyue, who was packing her clothes.</p>
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6)

<p>他说，七月，圣诞节会放美国新的大片，到时我可以请你去看吗。 (<i>Ta shuo, Qiyue, Shengdanjie hui fang Meiguo xin de dapian, dao shihou wo keyi qing ni qu kan ma.</i>)</p>	<p>Qiyue, within days an American blockbuster is coming out, maybe I could invite you to go with me, he said.</p>
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7)

<p>七月开完会忍不住对安生说，你喜欢什么样的男人。 (<i>Qiyue kai wan hui renbuzhu dui Ansheng shuo, ni xihuan shenmeyang de nanren.</i>)</p>	<p>After the meeting, she could not help asking Ansheng, what kind of men do you like?</p>
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8)

<p>然后他问安生，觉得逃课一个月去写生快乐吗。 (<i>Ranhou ta wen Ansheng, jue de taoke yi ge yue qu xiasheng kuaile ma.</i>)</p>	<p>Then he asked Ansheng, how did it feel to skip the classes for a month to draw nature. Was it nice?</p>
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In some sentences, the necessity to use alternative punctuation (such as question marks) appears inevitable. The target language flexibility in terms of punctuation is limited, compared to that of the Chinese text. The difference shows every time an interrogative statement appears in the source text. Even in online discourse, writing a question without a proper punctuation could confuse an English-speaking reader.

What I call „unorthodox punctuation” is naturally in line both with the author's style and the already mentioned economy of text production. Such use of the literary device may, surprisingly, also evoke a deeper emotional response from the readers. While in the traditional written language punctuation marks helps to structure the

text and make it more apprehensible, yet on the Internet, these ‘high-level’ functions lose their relevance and are skipped. However, according to him, punctuation marks play a distinct role in online communication (and, consequently, in literary practice<sup>23</sup>): they indicate emotions. Annie Baobei’s use of punctuation is the mood indicator, (most probably) well understood by her readers. The story is rather gloomy, and the constant mood makes it even more depressing – punctuation secures this consistency, and I believe it is a loss that this feature cannot be fully conveyed in translation.

### ***The mediatic realm of the source text***

Is it possible to recreate at least the main characteristics of the original medium – an online forum? This aspect seems to be more translation-related yet remains an immanent part of the author’s early writing style. When considering that dilemma, we should imagine the target text without any chance to resort to some paratextual elements such as footnotes, choosing interpolation instead, if necessary, since footnotes or any extratextual remarks would not adhere to the features of the online, on-screen reading experience. As already mentioned, dealing with so-called Culture-Specific Items forms the most exposed characteristics of such a translation strategy.

Whenever referring to CSI, I use the definition proposed by Aixela:

*Those textually actualized items whose function and connotations in a source text involve a translation problem in their transference to a target text, whenever this problem is a product of the nonexistence of the referred item or its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the target text.*<sup>24</sup>

According to the distinction put forward by the same scholar, we could imagine conserving CSI by implementing intratextual glosses to preserve supra textual parameters of the source language text.

<sup>23</sup> This conclusion can be easily drawn, based on communicative roles of literature.

<sup>24</sup> Javier Franco Aixelá, *Culture-specific Items in Translation*, in: *Translation, Power, Subversion*, Román Álvarez, María, Carmel África (eds.), Multilingual Matters, Clevedon 1996, pp. 52–78.

9)

<p>初中毕业，16岁。七月考入市里最好的重点中学。安生上了职业高中，学习广告设计。 (<i>Chuzhong biye, 16 sui. Qiyue kao ru shi li zui hao de zhongdian zhongxue. Ansheng shang le zhiye gaozhong, xue-xi guanggao sheji.</i>)</p>	<p>They were sixteen when they graduated from junior-high-school. Qiyue was admitted to <b>the best high school in the city</b>, while Ansheng went to a vocational school to study advertising design.</p>
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10)

<p>休息的时候大家聊起余纯顺，又聊到徒步或骑车环游世界等行为。 (<i>Xiuxi de shihou dajia liao qi Yu Chunshun, you liao dao tubu huo qi che huan you shijie deng xingwei.</i>)</p>	<p>While having a break, everybody talked about a <b>Chinese explorer Yu Chunshun</b>, and also about cycling or walking around the globe and other actions of such kind.</p>
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11)

<p>安生说，我在城隍庙小摊上淘的。 (<i>Ansheng shuo, wo zai Chenghuang miao xiao tan shang tao de.</i>)</p>	<p>I fished it out of a small vendor stall by <b>a temple for the City God</b>, said Ansheng.</p>
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12)

<p>当然还是要一路北上。然后去兴安岭，漠河看看。 (<i>Dangran haishi yao yi lu beishang. Ranhou qu Xing'an ling, Mohe kan kan.</i>)</p>	<p>Of course, I still wanna go up north, and later go sightseeing to the <b>Xing'an mountain range in Inner Mongolia</b> and to Mohe.</p>
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The passages presented above could seemingly serve as examples of employing Venuti's domestication strategy, which means that culture loaded items are conveyed with the use of interpolations. However, such a strategy is aimed to depict the limitations of "online reading space," so it is not influenced by any considerations related to "translating the culture." However, the strategy inevitably entails something 'lost in translation,' that is the original's conciseness, and therefore may be challenged.

## Conclusions

The internet literature in its initial phase has been characterized by publishing works either in episodes or by creating forum posts. Such arrangements cannot be found in the printed copies of Anni Baobei's works; a stream of text without any divisions such as chapters is a part of the author's style at the time, and it somehow brings up an association with online posts. Since my theoretical basis is rooted in literary criticism rather than translation theories, some issues of "theorizing" my work required putting forward ideas supported by translation scholars.

Based on the analysis presented above, the mediatic and poetic shifts in online literary production constitute textual features that translators should closely analyze in the course of their work.

The internet and everything that comes along with it presents a sweeping change to the whole world, including China. Literature and other cultural activities have no way to remain isolated – quite the contrary, those engaged in the culture-creating process should think of how to embrace the new possibilities and how to redefine their role in the modern world. However, in the age of acceleration, many worthwhile phenomena are fleeting and short-lived. Academic interest helps to revive those processes and retell their signification. Such is the case of the "pre-Qidian" (that is, before 2004) era of Chinese online literature.

Even though some works of Chinese online authors have been translated into other languages, it has not been followed by the interest of translation studies scholars. These authors represented the new generation and, along with that, new literary qualities. Therefore, I believe they deserve to be discussed by, as Shao Yanjun could refer to it, traditional modes of literary production, or in this specific case – academia.

Both the ways the Internet shapes the world and the fact that it is a new medium itself is bound to influence literature nowadays. If possible, this shift should also be reflected in the acts of translation. I believe to have proved that the mediatic characteristics shape textual realms in a way that requires careful attention of the translator, but also readers and literary scholars. Since the internet literature is still relatively uncharted territory, I am aware of the fact that my research may bear some limitations in terms of theoretical framework. Yet, the ideas put forward in my paper could hopefully serve as the starting point for further research.

The very simplistic writing of Annie Baobei could serve as a model example of the relation between literature and the internet. In the course of presenting the features of *Sisterhood*, I aimed to subtly expose the features related to the online sphere. As for the hypothetical translational challenges, the combination of authorial voice and metatextual factor (the fact that the work was published online in

the first place) results in drawing attention to the specific manner of economizing the text, punctuation – a topic strictly related, and approach toward CSI. Naturally, as the literary works differ, and so do the everchanging online media, another theoretical framework may be proposed for the sake of analysis and research.

I hope that my analysis proves the validity of researching and discussing the influence that new media exert on literary texts.



**Appendix I**

## Glossary

安迷 ( <i>An mi</i> )	Annie Baobei's fans
安妮宝贝 ( <i>Anni Baobei</i> )	Anni Baobei
陈村 ( <i>Chen Cun</i> )	Chen Cun
告别薇安 ( <i>Gaobie Wei'an</i> )	Goodbye, Vivian
韩寒 ( <i>Han Han</i> )	Han Han
美女文学 ( <i>Meinv wenxue</i> )	chick lit
棉棉 ( <i>Mian Mian</i> )	Mian Mian
慕容雪村 ( <i>Murong Xuecun</i> )	Murong Xuecun
榕树下 ( <i>Rongshuxia</i> )	Rongshuxia Literary Website
起点中文网 ( <i>Qidian Zhongwen Wang</i> )	Qidian literature website
庆山 ( <i>Qing Shan</i> )	Qing Shan (recent pen name of Li Jie, previously published as Anni Baobei)
仙侠 ( <i>Xianxia</i> )	Xianxia literature
玄幻 ( <i>Xuanhuan</i> )	Xuanhuan literature
网络文学 ( <i>wangluo wenxue</i> )	Internet literature
武侠 ( <i>wuxia</i> )	<i>Wuxia</i> literature
周卫慧 ( <i>Zhou Weihui</i> )	Zhou Weihui (Wei Hui)

**Abstract**

China is one of the very few countries in the world that managed to transform its online sphere both into a vibrant literary scene and into a tool of successful soft power. Some writers who represent the advent of online literature (*wangluo wenxue*) still enjoy best-selling and long-selling status. Despite that, the wide readership of such authors as Anni Baobei, Han Han or Murong Xuecun has not been followed by significant academic interest.

This paper draws from the contribution made by Shao Yanjun to analyze whether the New-Style Literary Mechanisms (such as online literary forums) put forward by him shape textual features, and if so, whether these should be reflected in translation. The research combines literary criticism and translation theory perspectives to present some key features of Chinese Internet Literature by presenting an example of a popular short story authored by Anni Baobei *Sisterhood* (*Qiyue yu Ansheng*). The analysis of stylistic and linguistic characteristics of the translated excerpts is conducted from three perspectives: the specific text economy, unorthodox punctuation, and the attempt to recreate the mediatic realm of the source text conveyed *inter alia* through the approach to CSI (Culture-Specific Items). It is found that texts created under the new-style literary mechanism regime may influence the translation strategy and constitute the novelty of *wangluo wenxue*.

**Keywords:** Annie Baobei, internet literature, literary translation, “Goodbye, Vivian”; New-Style Literary Mechanisms, Chinese literature