

## ARTICLE

# Chinese Modern Writer Lao She in Poland: Translation and Its Historical Significance

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## ABSTRACT

Lao She occupies a unique place in the history of Chinese-Polish literary exchange. He was the first modern Chinese writer to be translated into Polish, and the only one whose works were translated from the 1940s to the 1990s. This article explores the context in which Lao She was translated in Poland, identifying three significant translation periods that reflect political, ideological and cultural changes in both countries. The first phase (1940s–1950s) reflects the introduction of Chinese culture through socialist cultural diplomacy. The second phase (1960s–1970s) marks an ideological detachment, with translators pursuing aesthetic and literary values beyond political frameworks. The third phase (1980s–1990s) reveals a shift towards market-driven motivations, following Poland's transition to a post-socialist society. By analyzing the backgrounds of translators, the contexts in which their work was published, and the paratextual framing, the study reconstructs the historical logic behind the selection and interpretation of Lao She's works in Polish. It argues that translation served as both a medium for disseminating literature and a mirror for the changing relations and cultural policies between China and Poland. The findings emphasize the dynamic interaction between ideology, literature and readership, showing how cross-cultural translation can shape and reflect national narratives and intellectual trends.

**Keywords:** Lao She; Chinese Modern Literature; Poland; Translation; Reception

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# 1. Introduction

Lao She (1899–1966) is one of the most renowned and representative modern Chinese writers (1917–1949). His works have been translated into more than 20 languages and are widely disseminated around the world, making him one of the most translated authors in the history of modern and contemporary Chinese literature<sup>[1]</sup>. Current studies on Lao She have predominantly focused on translations in English, Japanese, and Russian, limiting the discourse to these languages<sup>[2]</sup>. This focus has obscured studies on the broader range of translations of his works.

Poland and China share similar historical trajectories, with both countries experiencing national revolutionary movements that significantly influenced their literary activities<sup>[3]</sup>. Although geographically distant, the two nations are connected through their literary sympathies and continuous cultural exchanges. These ties have been further strengthened by China's Belt and Road Initiative<sup>[4]</sup>. The translation of Lao She's works in Poland, therefore, deserves greater academic attention.

# 2. Literature Review

Research on modern Chinese literature in Poland has largely focused on the cultural background of literary works, translation strategies, and reception<sup>[4,5]</sup>. Within this landscape, Polish scholars tend to show a stronger interest in writers such as Zhang Ailing, Yu Hua, and Mo Yan, while studies devoted specifically to individual authors remain limited<sup>[1]</sup>.

Existing research provides a general overview of the dissemination of modern and contemporary Chinese literature in Poland, however, specialized investigations on Lao She are still scarce<sup>[6]</sup>. Current studies on the translation of Lao She focus mainly on textual comparisons of translations and discussions of translation techniques. They rarely explore his broader cultural influence or the historical significance of his reception in Poland. For example, Chen Lifeng<sup>[3]</sup> examined the translation and dissemination of modern Chinese literature in Poland from the perspectives of political ideology, international relations, and economic development, and outlined different stages of translation activity. However, Chen's work does not offer an in-depth analysis of how Lao She's writings were selected or how they shaped

cultural understanding, leaving a research gap concerning Lao She as a distinct case.

Research on the overseas dissemination of Lao She's works remains at an early stage. Shu Ji's<sup>[7]</sup> *Overview of the Translation Studies on Lao She's Literary Works Abroad* is one of the earliest and most frequently cited studies in China on this topic. Although it documents translations of Lao She's works across several countries, it gives little attention to the Polish context and only covers translation activities up to 1953. As a result, it does not reflect the translation efforts that took place in subsequent decades.

In Poland, scholarship on modern Chinese literature tends to examine broad patterns of literary transmission rather than focus on individual writers<sup>[3]</sup>. Research on Lao She in Poland is reflected mainly in translation practice rather than in sustained academic inquiry. One notable exception is the monograph by the renowned Polish sinologist Zbigniew Stupski<sup>[8]</sup>, *The Evolution of a Modern Chinese Writer. An Analysis of Lao She's Fiction with Biographical and Bibliographical Appendices*, which remains the most systematic study of Lao She's works in Poland to date.

Meanwhile, translation studies have developed rich theoretical frameworks for analyzing literary translation, especially within postcolonial and cross-cultural contexts<sup>[9,10]</sup>. These frameworks are highly relevant to examining the Polish translations of Lao She's works, for example, in assessing whether translators adopted domestication or foreignization strategies<sup>[9]</sup>. In addition, Even-Zohar's<sup>[11]</sup> polysystem theory provides a useful perspective for understanding how translated literature enters and reshapes the target literary system, often responding to changing cultural or political conditions. Jauss's<sup>[12]</sup> concept of the horizon of expectations offers an important lens through which to interpret the changing reception of Lao She in Poland. According to Jauss, readers' expectations, shaped by their cultural experience, literary tradition, and socio-political context, determine how foreign works are understood and valued at different historical stages.

Existing research shows that, although many studies touch on themes relevant to Lao She's translations, they rarely address how his works were shaped by Poland's shifting literary norms and socio-political environments. Recent theoretical perspectives suggest that these contextual factors are crucial for comprehending the reception of foreign lit-

erature. The combination of limited empirical research and rich theoretical potential, therefore, makes it necessary to reassess the Polish translations of Lao She's works within their specific historical and cultural contexts.

### 3. Overview of Translation of Lao She's Works in Poland

According to the author's research, Lao She was the first modern Chinese writer to be translated into Polish and remains among the most widely received modern Chinese

authors (1917–1949) in Poland. The strong interest of Polish sinologists in Lao She is most clearly reflected in the extensive translation of his works. As early as 1948, his writings were translated directly from Chinese into Polish and published in Warsaw, which is four years earlier than the first Polish translation of Lu Xun, often regarded as the father of modern Chinese literature. Translation activities continued from the 1940s through the 1990s<sup>[13–16]</sup>.

To date, fifteen of Lao She's works have been translated into Polish, including fourteen novels and one play. A detailed list of the translations is provided in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Translation of Lao She's work in Poland (adapted from Wang<sup>[17]</sup>).

Time	Chinese Title	Polish Title	Translator	Press House
1948	《赵子曰》 <i>Zhao Ziyue</i>	<i>Nieźrównany Pan CzaŃ Tsyjűe</i>	Witold Jabłoński	Książki i Wiedza
1950	《赵子曰》 <i>Zhao Ziyue</i> (reprint)	<i>Nieźrównany Pan CzaŃ Tsyjűe</i>	Witold Jabłoński	Książki i Wiedza
1953	《骆驼祥子》 <i>Luotuo Xiangzi</i> 《火车》 <i>Huoche</i> 《上任》 <i>Shangren</i> 《黑白李》 <i>Hei Bai Li</i> 《月牙儿》 <i>Yueyar</i>	<i>Ryksza</i> <i>Pociąg</i> <i>Na Służbie</i> <i>Bracia Li</i> <i>Sierp Książczyca</i>	Olgiert Wojtasiewicz Bolesław Miga	Czytelnik
1964	《离婚》 <i>Lihun</i>	<i>Rozwód</i>	Tadeusz Żbikowski	Książki i Wiedza
1965	《大悲寺外》 <i>Dabeisi Wai</i> 《柳家大院》 <i>Liujia Dayuan</i> 《开市大吉》 <i>Kaishi Daji</i> 《歪毛儿》 <i>Waimaor</i> 《眼镜》 <i>Yanjing</i> 《断魂枪》 <i>Duanhunqiang</i>	<i>W Cieniu Świątyni Wielkiego Miłosierdzia</i> <i>Nasze Podwórko</i> <i>Dobry Interes</i> <i>Przyjaciel z Dzieciństwa</i> <i>Okulary</i> <i>Śmiercionośna Włócznia</i>	Teresa Lechowska	Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy
1983	《猫城记》 <i>Maocheng Ji</i>	<i>Notatki z Kociego Grodu</i>	Tadeusz Żbikowski; Hu Peifang	Literature na Świecie
1985	《茶馆》 <i>Chaguan</i>	<i>Herbaciarnia</i>	Jerzy Abkowicz	Information missing

As shown in **Table 1**, the translation of Lao She's works in Poland predominantly took place during the period of the People's Republic of Poland (1944–1989). When examined in relation to the sociopolitical environment, intended readership, and the objectives behind translation activities, these translations can be broadly divided into three phases: 1) introduction of Chinese literature and culture, 2) ideological detachment phase, and 3) market-driven phase. This division provides a useful framework for understanding how Lao She's works were repeatedly reinterpreted and repositioned within different stages of Poland's cultural and political development.

### 4. The Introducing Chinese Modern

#### Literature and Culture: *Zhao Ziyue* and *Luotuo Xiangzi*

In the mid-1940s, following the end of World War II, Poland established a new social and political order<sup>[18]</sup>. Between 1946 and 1949, the government implemented the “Three-Year Plan” to rebuild the country after wartime destruction. This period also marked a “Three-Year Transformation” in the literary sphere, during which debates in major literary journals centered on the role of realism and the emergence of what Yi Lijun terms “intellectual liquidation literature”<sup>[18]</sup>. Although discussions surrounding socialist realism were still unfolding at the time, Polish literary circles generally agreed that literature should not be reduced to a political instrument. Calls for depoliticization and resistance

to rigid formalism gained broad support among critics and writers. Works that “reflected the essential characteristics of national and social life”<sup>[18]</sup> were especially welcomed.

It was within this context that early Polish translations of Lao She, *Zhao Ziyue*<sup>[13]</sup>, and later *Luotuo Xiangzi*<sup>[14]</sup>, were introduced. Their narrative realism, social critique, and portrayal of everyday life resonated with Polish readers and aligned with contemporary discussions on literature’s social relevance, thereby facilitating Lao She’s entry into the Polish literary system.

#### 4.1. Witold Jabłoński and *Zhao Ziyue*

In the late 1940s, when Poland was undergoing extensive post-war reconstruction, local scholars, who had only limited access to Chinese literature, became increasingly curious about China<sup>[18]</sup>. The spread of the “Lao She Fever” across Europe and the United States drew particular attention<sup>[2,7]</sup>, especially as China and Poland had shared experiences of national upheaval. In this context, translators sought works that could introduce Chinese culture without heavy political overtones. Lao She’s *Zhao Ziyue*, a novel depicting the everyday lives of young urban intellectuals during a period of social transition, met this need well.

The first translator to engage systematically with Lao She’s writing was the Polish sinologist Witold Jabłoński. Polish translation of *Zhao Ziyue*, published in 1948 by *Książki i Wiedza*<sup>[13]</sup>, marks the first direct Polish translation of a modern Chinese literary work. Jabłoński’s academic background helps explain why he became the pioneer who introduced modern Chinese literature to Poland.

After graduating from the University of Warsaw in 1919, Jabłoński specialized in ancient Chinese language and literature at the School of Oriental Studies in Paris (1924–1930)<sup>[19]</sup>. He first visited China in 1930 and later taught French language, literature, and history at Tsinghua University (1931–1932). Returning again in 1936, he taught comparative linguistics at Yenching University (1937–1938). In 1947, he became head of the newly established Sinology Department at the University of Warsaw, and by 1952, he was director of the Institute of Oriental Studies, where he trained numerous later sinologists. He continued to visit China in 1953, 1955, and 1957, passing away in Beijing on 23 July 1957<sup>[19]</sup>.

Ge Haowen (Howard Goldblatt) once remarked that

the reception of Chinese writers abroad depends on careful choices regarding “who to introduce, what to translate, and when”<sup>[20]</sup>. Jabłoński’s academic experience and his long-lasting ties with China shaped his decision to translate Lao She. Indeed, *Zhao Ziyue* was the only work of modern Chinese literature he translated, and several factors explain this choice.

Firstly, Jabłoński’s expertise in Chinese linguistics, dialectology, and folk culture made him particularly sensitive to the linguistic richness of Lao She’s writing. *Zhao Ziyue* is well known for its humor and strong Beijing dialect features, qualities that had already gained scholarly attention in China. During his visits to China, Jabłoński collected a corpus of folk songs from various regions and later wrote his doctoral dissertation on this material. His interest in folk culture made Lao She, whose works are deeply rooted in everyday cultural practices, an especially compelling author to introduce to Polish readers.

Secondly, cultural and political conditions in late-1940s Poland shaped the selection of translation material. After the war, public enthusiasm for revolutionary or war-related literature had declined, and political control over literary activity was tightening. Compared with writers such as Lu Xun, Mao Dun, or Guo Moruo, Lao She showed a distinct tendency toward liberal humanism<sup>[21]</sup>. *Zhao Ziyue* focuses on the spiritual and moral development of urban youth, charting their journey from frivolity to self-awareness, without explicit political messaging. This made it particularly suitable within Poland’s literary climate, which was calling for “depoliticization” and valuing works reflecting “the essential characteristics of national and social life”<sup>[18]</sup>.

While the selection of text played a key role in shaping Polish readers’ first impressions of Chinese literature, Jabłoński’s translation strategy was equally decisive. His approach combined fidelity to the source text with careful adjustments to enhance readability and cultural accessibility. In the preface to the 1950 reprint, Jabłoński stated clearly that the translation aimed to “remain as close as possible to the original,” with untranslatable terms provided in pinyin<sup>[13]</sup>. As the first Polish translation of a modern Chinese literary work, the text had to strike a balance between domestication and foreignization<sup>[9]</sup>.

To enhance accessibility, the title was rendered as *Nieźrównany Pan Czao Tsyjue*, a version “more in line with

the nomenclature of Polish novels”<sup>[13]</sup>, enhancing the satirical tone of the work. He also added subheadings to each chapter, giving Polish readers an entry point into the narrative. In translating personal names and temporal references, Jabłoński frequently adopted naturalization. For instance, the character Li Shun (concierge of the Zhao household), was translated as “Śliwka” (“plum”), a colloquial term used in Polish to address others informally. In doing so, the translator preserved the vernacular flavor of Lao She’s writing while making the text more culturally legible.

Similarly, when translating the Chinese lunar calendar, Jabłoński replaced “the third lunar month” with “April,”<sup>[13,22]</sup> and he rendered “the Xinhai Revolution” as “the 1911 Revolution,”<sup>[13,22]</sup> thereby aligning the text with Polish readers’ temporal framework. He also omitted several passages that would have required extensive annotation, including explanations of the I Ching hexagrams Qian and Kun<sup>[22]</sup> to improve readability for Polish audiences<sup>[13]</sup>. Besides, Jabłoński also included over 50 detailed commentaries explaining Chinese place names, personal names, food, literature, religion, folklore, history, rituals, and more. The cover of the translation also features the title and author’s name written in Chinese calligraphy, inviting Polish readers to embark on a journey to the East<sup>[13]</sup>.

*Zhao Ziyue* was published by *Książka i Wiedza*, one of the largest publishing houses in Poland. The initial print run of 5,000 copies in 1948 was followed by a reprint of 5500 copies in 1950<sup>[13]</sup>. As the first major channel through which Polish readers encountered modern Chinese literature, the translation played an important role in introducing Lao She and offering insights into the emerging landscape of modern Chinese writing.

## 4.2. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz and *Luotuo Xiangzi*

If *Zhao Ziyue* marked the successful first step in introducing contemporary Chinese literature to Poland, the translation of *Luotuo Xiangzi* published in the collection *Ryksza i Inne Opowiadania*<sup>[14]</sup>, offered Polish readers a deeper and more concrete understanding of China and Lao She’s literary world.

*Ryksza i Inne Opowiadania* contains five of Lao She’s works: *Ryksza* (*Luotuo Xiangzi*), *Pociąg* (*Huoche*), *Na Shuźbie* (*Shangren*), *Bracia Li* (*Heibai Li*), and *Sierp Księżyca* (*Yueya’er*). Among them, *Luotuo Xiangzi* was translated

from Evan King’s English version (*Rickshaw Boy*) by Bolesław Miga, while Tadeusz Żbikowski compared the translation closely with the Chinese original and corrected textual deviations. The remaining four pieces were translated by Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, *Pociąg* (*Train*) from English and the other three directly from the Chinese texts. Collectively, these stories portray the struggles of the urban poor who attempt, yet fail, to escape their tragic destinies. They expose the dark realities of society and express sympathy for the oppressed lower classes<sup>[23]</sup>.

Because the Polish version of *Luotuo Xiangzi* was based on Evan King’s<sup>[24]</sup> English adaptation, it inevitably reflects traces of the English mediation. For example, in terms of naming conventions, the Polish translation adopts a mixed strategy of domestication and foreignization similar to the English version: “Xiangzi” becomes “Siang-tsy,” “Liu Si Ye” appears as “Mr. Liu Si” (Pan Czwarty Liu), and “Hu Niu” is rendered as “Tygrysicy” (“Tigress”), emphasizing her fierce personality. More significantly, under the influence of literary and ideological considerations present in both China and Poland during the early 1950s, certain characters were altered or omitted in the Polish translation. These include Ruan Ming, Lao Ma, and Xiao Ma’er.

The political sensitivity of the novel in the early 1950s is also reflected in its reception in China. In December 1952, Fang Bai proposed publishing *Luotuo Xiangzi*, but the novel was rejected due to its “problematic” critique of the old society, its insufficiently positive stance toward the socialist revolutionary cause, and its satirical portrayal of early socialist ideology<sup>[25]</sup>. Wang Renshu further argued that the novel embodied “decadent” ideas, offering no hopeful future for laborers. Characters such as Lao Ma and Xiao Ma’er represent workers who endure hardship and poverty for their entire lives yet remain trapped at the bottom of society, which is an implicit projection of Xiangzi’s own fate. Likewise, the character Ruan Ming, who betrays his teacher under the guise of revolution, is depicted as a speculative “pseudo-revolutionary,” serving as Lao She’s pointed satire of ideological opportunism in the early socialist movement.

After debates among Fang Bai, Niu Ting, Feng Xuefeng, Wang Shuren, and others<sup>[26]</sup>, a revised edition of *Luotuo Xiangzi* was eventually published by the People’s Literature Publishing House in January 1955, with all references to Ruan Ming removed and several additional modifications

introduced. The Polish translation, however, was published in 1953, two years earlier than the revised Chinese edition. Although it is possible that the Polish translators were aware of the ongoing ideological controversy surrounding the novel in China and adjusted their translation accordingly, no reliable documentary evidence has been found to confirm this hypothesis.

At the same time, the fact that the Polish translation underwent changes before the publication of the Chinese revised edition must also be understood within the broader historical context of Poland in the early 1950s. Socialist realism, ultimately a fusion of ideology and artistic practice, required literature to be “drawn from life but elevated above it”<sup>[18]</sup>. While this principle had initially contributed to shaping typical characters and environments, by the early 1950s, it had rigidified into a doctrinal system. Literature was increasingly judged primarily on political grounds<sup>[18]</sup>, and ideological conformity became a decisive criterion. The prevailing view insisted that “the writer’s worldview and the social impact of their work should align perfectly, with the writer held accountable at every turn”<sup>[18]</sup>. Under such conditions, translators inevitably faced pressure to modify their translations to match ideological expectations.

As Shi Chengjun<sup>[26]</sup> notes, the revised Chinese edition of *Luotuo Xiangzi* “eliminates some naturalistic details that detract from the work’s intellectual brilliance,” and its “political attitude is much more moderate, at least without the ridicule of socialist ideas”. In this sense, the adjustments found in the Polish translation, guided by translators’ understanding of their readership and reception context, aligned more closely with Poland’s ideological climate. These modifications did not fundamentally contradict the spirit of Lao She’s original text; on the contrary, they heightened Polish readers’ sympathy for the tragic fate of Xiangzi and other members of the urban underclass.

The translation strategies adopted in the Polish edition were shaped significantly by the theoretical perspectives of Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, often regarded as the “father of Polish translation studies”<sup>[27]</sup>. As a scholar of both translation theory and Sinology, Wojtasiewicz played a major role in shaping the development of Polish–Chinese translation. According to his 1957 definition, “translation means expressing in the target language what is equivalent to the source language”<sup>[28]</sup>. This principle of equivalence reflects the same

emphasis on fidelity found in Witold Jabłoński’s translation of *Zhao Ziyue*, establishing a continuity in the Polish reception of modern Chinese literature.

Wojtasiewicz also stressed the translator’s responsibility to manage cultural differences. While acknowledging that cultural gaps often pose challenges, he insisted that translations should remain rooted in the cultural traditions of the source text. For him, dialects were particularly resistant to translation: “Dialect can almost never be fully translated”<sup>[28]</sup>. Attempts to replace source-language dialects with equivalent dialects in the target language were, in his view, destined to fail. Consequently, the translation of *Luotuo Xiangzi* adopted a similar approach to that of *Zhao Ziyue*: names and place names were rendered phonetically in Polish, and dialectal or colloquial expressions were handled through paraphrasing or phonetic transcription.

The combination of Olgierd Wojtasiewicz’s translation theory and Tadeusz Żbikowski’s expertise in Chinese-language proofreading resulted in the publication of the Polish edition of *Luotuo Xiangzi*. The book was issued by *Czytelnik* in Warsaw in May 1953, with a print run of 5160 copies<sup>[14]</sup>. Żbikowski also authored a preface introducing Lao She’s life and creative principles, portraying him as a realist writer consistently aligned with the people. By this point, Polish readers, having access to both *Zhao Ziyue* and *Luotuo Xiangzi*, were able to form a clearer understanding of Lao She’s oeuvre and gain preliminary insight into the broader landscape of modern and contemporary Chinese literature.

## 5. The Phrase of Ideological Detachment: *Li Hun* and *Da Bei Si Wai*

In 1954, a wave of “thawing literature” emerged in the Polish literary sphere, followed by the outbreak of the “Poznań Incident” in 1956<sup>[18]</sup>. Although this political turmoil disrupted the nation, it simultaneously opened space for greater literary diversity. By this time, the initial phase of cultural exchange between Poland and China, characterized by high political enthusiasm, had come to an end. National-level cultural contacts were nearly suspended.

However, the interruption of official cultural relations did not prevent Polish academics from continuing to translate Chinese literature. On the contrary, Chinese writers

with liberal tendencies, whose works were less politically charged, began to attract heightened interest among Polish translators. Although the overall number of Polish translations of modern Chinese literature declined during this period, translations of Lao She's works increased. Between 1964 and 1965, two volumes comprising seven of his works were published in Poland: *Li Hun (Rozwód)*, *Da Bei Si Wai (W Cieniu Świątyni Wielkiego Miłosierdzia)* Liu Jia Dayuan (*Nasze Podworko*), *Kaimen Daji (Dobry Interes)*, *Wai mao'er (Przyjaciel z Dzieciństwa)*, *Yan jing (Okulary)*, and *Duan Hun Qiang (Śmiercionośna Włocznia)* (see **Table 1**).

### 5.1. *Li Hun*: Reconciling Ideology and Aesthetic Values

By the mid-20th century, the concept of the “depoliticization” of literature gained significant traction among Polish writers and critics<sup>[18]</sup>. This shift was influenced both by changing diplomatic relations between Poland and China and by long-standing debates within Poland concerning the relationship between literature and politics. As tensions between the authorities and the literary community intensified, many neutral scholars, while upholding literature's aesthetic and humanistic value, began distancing themselves from politics in their creative, critical, and translational work to avoid conflict with state institutions<sup>[29]</sup>.

During this stage, Polish translators of Lao She devoted greater attention to the literary and aesthetic dimensions of his works, yet they continued to navigate political constraints. Texts with minimal ideological content and high artistic value became preferred translation choices. At the same time, Polish translators were increasingly interested in the intersection of Chinese and European cultural traditions embedded in Lao She's fiction, hoping that translations of his works would highlight the cultural exchange and integration present in early modern Chinese literature. As a result, translation strategies during this period showed a clear detachment from ideological content.

One of the leading Polish translators of Chinese literature, Tadeusz Żbikowski, based his translation of *Lihun* primarily on the 1953 Chinese edition published by *Shanghai Chenguang* Publishing House and consulted Guo Jingqiu's English translation, *The Quest for Love of Lao Lee*. The Polish edition appeared in Warsaw in November 1964, published by *Książki i Wiedza*, with a print run of 9260 copies<sup>[16]</sup>.

The Chinese version of *Li Hun*, published in August 1933, is considered one of Lao She's finest realist works and evidence of the maturation of his literary style. It was one of the most critically acclaimed works of Lao She before the liberation<sup>[24]</sup>. While many readers consider *Luotuo Xiangzi* to be Lao She's greatest work, Lao She himself said, “No, I like *Li Hun* better”<sup>[30]</sup>. As cited in Wu's work, literary critic Li Changzhi similarly argued that “this novel surpasses all his previous works”<sup>[31]</sup>. The novel's high aesthetic value explains why it was selected for translation during this ideologically restrictive phase.

With regard to translation strategy, due to the political environment in Poland and the diplomatic relations between China and Poland, the translators of *Li Hun* were cautious in dealing with political themes. Unlike in the earlier period, when translations remained highly faithful to the original, the translators deliberately removed all sections involving explicit political ideology<sup>[18]</sup>. Politically sensitive terms were softened or omitted, reducing the original text's critique of the reactionary Kuomintang government. Instead, the translation highlighted the critique of civic character and mediocrity.

For example, the original passage describing how “political changes... meant that the section members' rice bowls would be broken again”<sup>[22]</sup> was omitted from the Polish translation. Similarly, the critique of Kuomintang-era political oppression, such as the line “He was a Communist, but if he wasn't, he had no rules at all and didn't approve of the script”<sup>[22]</sup>, was softened. The word “Communist” was translated as “revolutionary”<sup>[16]</sup>, which introduced ambiguity.

Aside from the removal of ideological content, the Polish translation remained largely faithful to the original. The edition also contained a number of illustrations inspired by traditional Chinese paper-cutting, highlighting Chinese folk aesthetics and further reinforcing the novel's cultural dimension.

### 5.2. *Da Bei Si Wai*: A Fusion of Eastern and Western Traditions

The collection *Da Bei Si Wai* was translated by Teresa Lechowska and published in July 1965 by *Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy* in Warsaw, with a print run of 8270 copies<sup>[15]</sup>. The volume contains six of Lao She's works: *Da Bei Si Wai (W Cieniu Świątyni Wielkiego Miłosierdzia)*, *Liu Jia Da Yuan*

(*Nasze Podwórko*), *Kai Shi Da Ji* (*Dobry Interes*), *Wai Maor* (*Przyjaciel z Dzieciństwa*), *Yan Jing* (*Okulary*), *Duan Hun Qiang* (*Śmiercionośna Włócznia*) (see **Table 1**).

As the translator noted in the preface to the Polish edition of *Da Bei Si Wai*: “The 20th century in the Far East was a time when the two great cultural circles of China and Europe met. Lao She was one of those writers whose work harmoniously blended the veins of both traditions”<sup>[15]</sup>. Both the selection of works in the collection and the translation strategies adopted reflect Lao She’s capacity to merge Eastern and Western traditions, blending old and new cultural elements to create a literary world in which tradition and modernity, as well as Eastern and Western influences, intersect<sup>[24,29]</sup>. This framing allowed Polish readers to better grasp the aesthetic foundations of Lao She’s creative practice.

Lao She himself once said, “I am not familiar with the high officials in the political arena, and I cannot portray their promotion and retreat in a positive way. I do not know much about politics either. I only know some small people”<sup>[30]</sup>. True to this statement, *Da Bei Si Wai* portrays a wide range of social groups, including intellectuals, ordinary laborers, and women, presenting the tragedies of modern China through the everyday experiences of ordinary people. Although Lao She’s narrative world is grounded in Chinese society, his works also bear the imprint of Western modern cultural forces<sup>[29]</sup>. In stories such as *Duan Hun Qiang* and *Da Bei Si Wai*, the interplay of Chinese and Western narrative styles and techniques highlights the tension between traditional Chinese national spirit and modern Western cultural consciousness<sup>[15]</sup>.

This blending of cultural influences, without a direct focus on politics and ideology, made these works particularly appealing to Polish translators during the 1960s. Although political ideology influenced the translation of Lao She’s works in Poland, the aesthetic value of literature and Chinese cultural characteristics remained important factors for translators. The works selected for translation during this period thus reveal a clear shift toward depoliticization, aligning more closely with the aesthetic sensibilities central to Lao She’s literary vision.

## 6. Market-Driven Stage: *Mao Cheng Ji* and *Cha Guan*

In the early 1980s, Sino-Polish diplomatic relations began to thaw, and cultural exchanges gradually resumed.

At this point, thanks to the translations produced in previous decades, Polish readers had largely satisfied their initial curiosity and imagination about China. The transmission of cultural knowledge was no longer the primary objective of translators. Instead, changes within Poland’s socio-economic environment, particularly the rapid development of the market economy and the increasing commercialization of the publishing industry, shifted translation priorities toward market-oriented considerations. Reader expectations, commercial potential, and the marketability of selected works became key factors in determining which texts would be translated, while earlier emphases such as folk culture or cultural specificity became less central<sup>[12]</sup>.

In addition to the earlier generation of trained sinologists, a new cohort of translators began to emerge in the translation field. Compared with the older generation, these younger translators operated under fewer constraints regarding what to translate and how to translate it. Translation strategies became more flexible and adaptive. The selection of modern and contemporary Chinese works for translation was driven less by ideological concerns and more by the anticipated reception among Polish readers.

During this stage, translation activity showed greater diversity, and the overriding priorities became meeting readers’ tastes and responding to market demand. The publication of works such as *Mao Cheng Ji* and *Cha Guan* reflects this shift toward commercially driven translation practices and signals a new stage in the Polish reception of Lao She’s literature.

### 6.1. *Mao Cheng Ji*: Western Bias and Catering to Market Expectations

In 1978, as China entered a new period of reform and opening up, the political and cultural environment normalized, and Lao She was officially rehabilitated, restoring his reputation<sup>[30]</sup>. Chinese scholars who had long remained silent for political reasons began openly commemorating him and publishing extensive research on his life and works<sup>[32]</sup>. Lao She’s rehabilitation, along with several international symposia on Lao She studies, reignited global interest in his writings. In particular, by the mid-1980s, Chinese academics re-evaluated *Mao Cheng Ji*, bringing renewed international attention to China, a nation ideologically distinct from the West<sup>[33]</sup>. Western countries, anticipating literary critiques of Chinese politics, found that *Mao Cheng Ji* aligned closely



with their preconceived narratives.

During the early 1980s, Sino-Polish diplomatic relations improved, and cultural exchanges gradually resumed. Meanwhile, Poland experienced political turmoil in the late 1970s and profound social and political transformation in the early 1980s<sup>[29]</sup>. As Yi Lijun<sup>[18]</sup> observed, “By the end of the 1980s, there was almost only one voice in Polish literature, and that was the reckoning of the 40 years after the war”. In China, the emergence of “scar literature” (伤痕文学) and “reflective literature” (反思文学) after the reform era attracted the attention of Polish academics<sup>[29]</sup>, who saw parallels between Chinese and Polish literary developments.

As a result, the older generation of May Fourth modern writers faded from Polish translation, but Lao She’s unique experiences and narrative voice continued to appeal to Polish translators. Stimulated by the market economy, commercial value became an important criterion for Polish translators’ choices. Driven by domestic socio-political changes and international expectations, *Mao Cheng Ji* had a large potential readership in Poland, and its anticipated demand and commercial appeal directly stimulated its Polish translation.

The Polish translation of *Mao Cheng Ji* was carried out by the Chinese-Polish translator Hu Peifang (1931–2014), later supplemented by Tadeusz Żbikowski (the translator of *Li Hun*). The translation was published in *Literatura na Świecie* (*Literature in the World*) in 1983, based on the original Chinese edition, though it was not released as an independent book<sup>[1]</sup>. Today, the original text of this translation is difficult to locate, making it impossible to analyze its translation strategies in detail. Nevertheless, the backgrounds and interests of the translators provide valuable insights into the characteristics of Lao She’s translations during this market-driven stage.

Hu Peifang, the translator of *Mao Cheng Ji*, was born in China and later married a Polish national, residing in Poland for nearly six decades<sup>[17]</sup>. As a member of both the Chinese Writers’ Association and the Polish Writers’ Association, she possessed an exceptional understanding of both Chinese and Polish literary traditions. Her earlier translations already showed a tendency to make strategic title choices aimed at Polish readers. In 1961, she translated Xu Huaizhong’s *We Sowed Love*, retitling it *Tibetan Tales* (*Opowieść Tybetańska*), and in 1967, together with her husband, the famous Polish sinologist Roman Sławiński, they translated the book. In 1967

together with her husband, the renowned Polish sinologist Roman Sławiński, she translated Ai Wu’s *South Journey*, retitling it *Hotel for the Blind* (*Zajazd Niewidomych*). In 1994, she translated *Jin Ping Mei* (*Kwiaty Śliwy w Złotym Wazonie*) into Polish and in 2006, she co-wrote the screenplay *Love in the Year of the Tiger* (*Kochankowie Roku*), which was screened in both China and Poland.

Hu Peifang’s translation choices and frequent renaming of works reflect an orientation toward reader expectations, showing how market dynamics shaped translation decisions during this period. Her involvement in *Mao Cheng Ji* exemplifies the larger trend of Polish translators responding to market demand, commercial appeal, and international ideological interest when selecting modern Chinese works for translation.

## 6.2. *Cha Guan*: Catering to Readers and Commercial Value

The play *Cha Guan* was translated into Polish by Jerzy Abkowicz in 1985<sup>[34]</sup>. Abkowicz also translated a number of contemporary Chinese works, including the French-Chinese writer Gao Xingjian’s play *Che Zhan* (*Train Station*) and Zhang Xianliang’s novel *Lv Hua Shu* (*Afforestation Tree*) in 1987.

Jerzy Abkowicz’s choice of works reflects his interest in themes of political exile, ideological suppression, and individual suffering. Gao Xingjian moved to France in 1987 after his play *Che Zhan* staged at the Beijing People’s Art Theatre in 1983, was later banned during the “Campaign for the Removal of Spiritual Pollution” (In Chinese: 消除精神污染运动) in China. Similarly, Zhang Xianliang was labeled a “rightist” in 1957 following the publication of his long poem *Da Feng Ge* in the literary magazine *Yanhe*<sup>[33]</sup>. His novel *Lv Hua Shu* recounts the experiences of rightist intellectual Zhang Yonglin, focusing on imprisonment in labor camps and subsequent wandering abroad. Zhang’s rehabilitation in 1979 renewed interest in his works both in China and abroad.

The experiences of these writers deeply resonated with many Polish authors who had themselves faced exile or political repression<sup>[29]</sup>. Their works aligned with Western narratives framing China as a “totalitarian society” governed by a “centralized state,” thereby appealing to an ideological lens already prevalent in Europe. Abkowicz’s translation choices, *Che Zhan*, *Lv Hua Shu*, and *Cha Guan*, thus reflect both

aesthetic preference and alignment with Western ideological expectations.

As one of Lao She's most celebrated works, *Cha Guan* has become a classic of modern Chinese drama. Written in 1956, it has been repeatedly adapted for films, theater, and television. The 1982 film adaptation and the 1985 stage revival by Jiao Juyin and Xia Chun, performed on tour in several European countries, greatly elevated its international visibility<sup>[30,35]</sup>. In this context, the Polish translation of *Cha Guan* responded not only to academic interest within Polish sinology but also to the tastes of general readers, giving the work considerable commercial value.

During the 1980s, China gradually resumed cultural exchanges with the outside world. After a decade of relative isolation, Western audiences developed both curiosity and a degree of prejudice about China. This curiosity intersected with a long-standing Western fascination with the "exotic Orient," generating substantial market interest in works such as *Jin Ping Mei*, *Mao Cheng Ji*, and *Cha Guan*. The Polish publishing industry capitalized on this commercial opportunity, bringing these works to market to satisfy both reader expectations and the broader demand for Chinese literature with political or cultural resonance.

## 7. Conclusion

The translation history of Lao She's works in Poland shows that, beyond translators' interests, Sino-Polish diplomatic relations, and ideological shifts, the three global "Lao She translation waves" played a decisive role. These waves occurred mainly during the Polish People's Republic (1944–1989), making Lao She one of the most translated modern Chinese writers in Poland, while many other modern authors remained marginal. Since the 1990s, however, the rise of a market-driven publishing industry has reshaped translation priorities. Reader preferences and commercial value increasingly determined translation choices. As a result, earlier modern Chinese literature lost visibility, while internationally popular contemporary writers, such as Mo Yan, Yu Hua, Su Tong, and Zhang Ailing, came to dominate the Polish market.

Translations inevitably reflect the translators' expectations, interpretative frameworks, and the cultural realities of the receiving society. The Polish translations of Lao She

across different periods mirror the social, political, and literary conditions of their time, and the varying translation strategies reveal how external constraints and local contexts shaped the reception of his works. Studying the Polish reception of Lao She, an area often overlooked within broader Sino-Western literary discourse, therefore, helps illuminate the mechanisms of cross-cultural transmission. It also reveals the potential for Lao She's works to continue functioning as a cultural bridge between China and Poland, fostering mutual understanding while highlighting shared historical experiences.

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Not applicable.

## Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable. This study did not involve human participants.

## Data Availability Statement

All data used in this study are derived from publicly available historical and bibliographical sources, including archives and published Polish translations of Lao She's works. No new datasets were generated or analyzed. Additional information is available from the author upon reasonable request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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