



Where Have All the Paragraphs Gone?

Detecting and Exposing Censorship in Chinese Translation

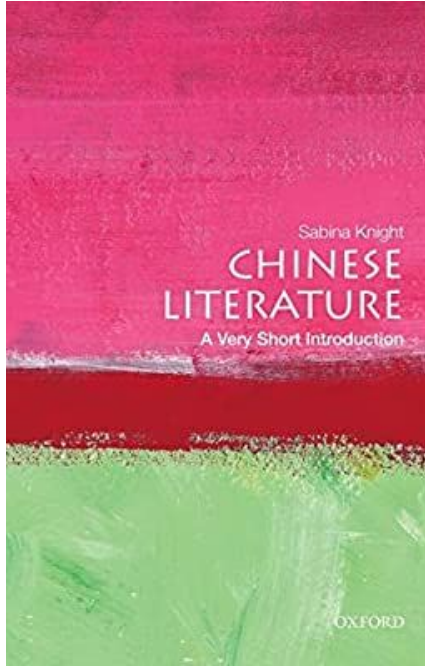
Mizhang Streisand (GFW Report)

Eric Wustrow (University of Colorado Boulder)

Amir Houmansadr (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

<https://gfw.report/projects/translation-censorship>

Ambiguous rules encourage self-censorship



Publisher



Translate

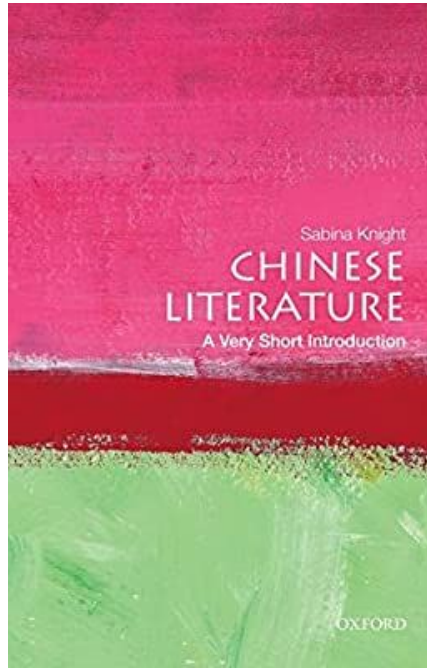


Censor



Reject

Ambiguous rules encourage self-censorship



Publisher

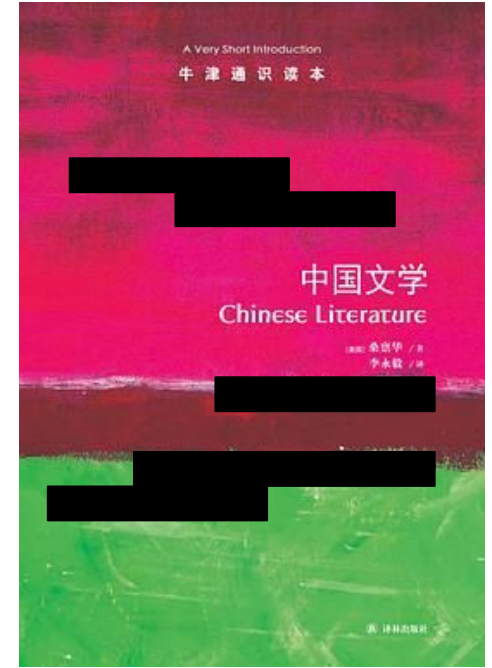


Translate + "edit"



Censor

Approve



Dilemma: Publish partially or nothing?

Author's own review of translated work



Sabina Knight



Heavily censored. Read the edition from Hong Kong instead.

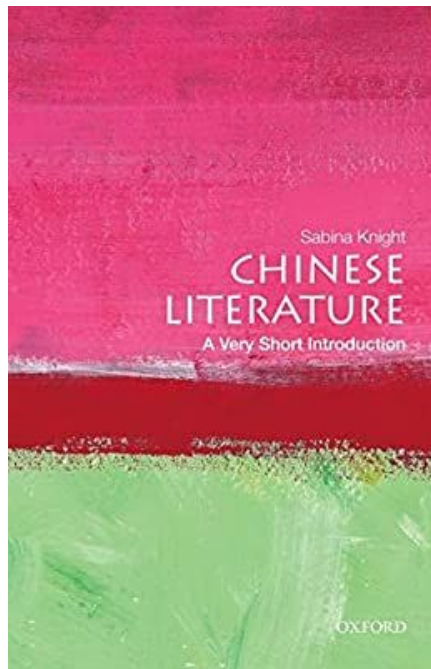
Reviewed in the United States  on August 6, 2020

This translation from the PRC is ****heavily censored****. Unapproved revisions appear throughout the book, and the last chapter has been **radically cut and mangled**. The book includes what the publisher pretends is the English original. But it is no longer the same book that I wrote for Oxford University Press.

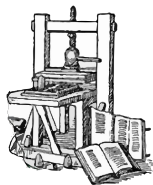
Most egregious, the translator or editors significantly cut and rewrote the last chapter on modern literature, not only in the Chinese translation, but also in the English. In places the translator or an editor has inserted new text in an attempt to patch transitions after significant cuts.

Among other changes, they cut lines that mention the alliance between the CCP and the Nationalists, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. They cut passages treating Ma Jian's *_Beijing Coma_*, Yan Lianke's *_Dream of Ding Village_* and Hong Ying's *_Summer of Betrayal_*. They cut the openings to three sections that treated Gao Xingjian's *_Bus Stop_*. (I had used discussion of the play to unify the chapter's sections.) They also cut my paragraph on the political controversy over Gao's Nobel prize, including the line "These debates had already led some to champion the notion of a greater 'cultural China' not limited by the political borders of the PRC" (p. 119).

How to Combat this censorship?



Publisher



Translate + "edit"



Censor

Approve



Combating censorship with the Streisand effect

- Provoke **curiosity** in what is censored

Combatting censorship with the Streisand effect

- Provoke **curiosity** in what is censored
- **Highlight** censored text and make it easy to access

Combating censorship with the Streisand effect

- Provoke **curiosity** in what is censored
- **Highlight** censored text and make it easy to access
- Why don't authors or publishers do this?
 - Fear of punishment or further censorship
 - We avoid this by being an independent third-party

How to find the missing parts?

After the government slashed subsidies for publishers in the mid-1980s, many presses turned to popular literature, including gangster fiction by the self-proclaimed “hooligan” Wang Shuo (1958–) and “body writing” by “glamour girl writers” such as Mian Mian (1970–) and Wei Hui (1973–). In the decade between Wang Shuo’s *Playing for Thrills* (1989) and Wei Hui’s *Shanghai Baby* (1999), novels banned in China (but published in Taiwan and circulated underground) also explored political and sexual deviance. Hong Ying’s (1962–) *Summer of Betrayal* (originally titled *The Generation of Naked Dancers*, 1992), set in the shadow of the 1989 June Fourth incident, confronts the moral implications of membership in the “Degraded Survivors’ Club” as the protagonist uses her sexuality (e.g., taking multiple partners at a final party) to further her quest for selfhood.

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How to find the missing parts?

Tokenize the matched paragraph into several English and Chinese sentences

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Translate the Chinese text into English using Google Translate API

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In the decade between Wang Shuo’s “*Playing with Heartbeat*” (1989) and Wei Hui’s “*Shanghai Baby*” (1999), several novels also explored sexual perversion.

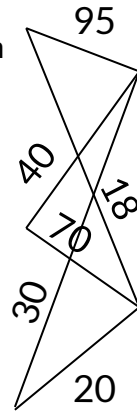
How to find the missing parts?

Calculate the similarity scores for all edges in the bipartite

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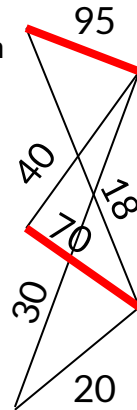
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How to find the missing parts?

Translate the missing parts back to Chinese and highlight them.

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在王朔的《玩儿的就是心跳》（1989）和卫慧的《上海宝贝》（1999）之间的十年，一些**在中国被禁（但在台湾出版并在地下传播）**的小说也探讨了**政治和性方面的反常行为**。

洪英（1962-）的**背叛之夏（原名《赤裸舞者的一代》，1992）**以1989年六四事件为背景，直面主人公加入“堕落幸存者俱乐部”的道德含义，她的性取向（例如，在最后一个派对上带多个伴侣）以进一步追求她的自我。

Demonstration website

Where have all the paragraphs gone?

Translated literature often [gets cut or changed](#) before being published in China. What's even worse, readers are not informed of such removal or changes most of the time. "The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became the truth". While the censors carefully follow Orwell's instruction manual, we refuse to forget their painstaking efforts.

[In this work](#), we automatically detect and manually analyze the censorship on translated literature. In addition, we attempt to combat this form of censorship by actively triggering the Streisand effect. That is, by highlighting the censored text and making it easy to access, we hope the censored text reach a broader audience, even including the curious who would not have read the censored version of the books.

This page uses the Chapter 5 of *Chinese Literature: A Very Short Introduction* by [Sabina Knight \(桑棗華\)](#) as a demonstration, comparing its [English version](#) and its [Chinese version](#) translated by Li Yongyi (李永毅) side-by-side. In particular,

- Text deleted in the Chinese version is highlighted in yellow.
- Text meaning changed in the Chinese version is highlighted in purple.
- Click on the  button on the right to show a translation of the deleted text.



Chapter 5 Modern literature:
trauma, movements, and bus stops

第五章 现代文学：创伤、运动和车站

<https://gfw.report/projects/translation-censorship/>

[0003]

A political allegory of China's passage from the countryside to the city, Gao's play suggests five themes central to the modernization and globalization of Chinese literature. Though many critics interpret the play as signaling the government's failure to deliver the means of progress, others hear in it ongoing commitments to national pride, humanism, progress, memory, and pleasure. Although such positive aspirations have often been downplayed by critics of Gao's 2000 Nobel Prize in Literature, their resonance for the Nobel Committee and for his other admirers suggests these themes' centrality in contemporary world literature.

[0004]

Pursuing the nation

[0005]

After Gao's characters have waited a year, they try to block the road as a bus approaches. It blares its horn, and the characters scatter as the bus, full of foreigners, speeds past. It was a tourist bus for foreigners, Mom explains, which would have required foreign currency certificates. This affront further discourages them, and a little later Glasses despairs that no bus will come: "Let's walk, as that guy did. In the time we've spent foolishly waiting at this bus stop, someone could have not only arrived in the city, but accomplished something there. What are we waiting for?"

[0006]

Because the characters decide to set off on foot only at the end of the play, their passivity has also been interpreted as an allegory for China's belated modernization. Though many features of modern societies were

高行健的剧作是一则寓言，解读了中国从乡村进入城市的变化，隐含着对中国文学的现代化和全球化至为关键的五个主题：对民族自豪感、人文主义、进步、记忆和快乐的追寻。



追寻民族

虽然早在16世纪中国就出现了现代社会的许多特征，但在19世纪欧洲列强武力入侵时，中国在军事上却毫无准备。当英国偷运鸦片引发的纠纷演变为一场战争时，一系列不平等条约强迫中国接受了西方的重商主义（现在

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Click to show missing parts.

追寻民族

高的角色等了一年，当一辆公共汽车接近时，他们试图封锁道路。它吹响了喇叭，随着满载外国人的公共汽车疾驰而过，人物四散开来。妈妈解释说，这是一辆面向外国人的旅游巴士，需要外币证明。这种侮辱使他们更加气馁，过了一会儿，格拉斯对没有公共汽车来了感到绝望：“我们走吧，就像那个家伙那样。在我们傻傻地在这个公交车站等车的时间里，可能有人不仅到达了这座城市，而且还在那里完成了一些事情。我们还在等什么？”

由于剧中人物决定徒步出发，他们的被动也被解读为中国迟来的现代化的寓言。虽然早在16世纪中国就出现了现代社会的许多特征，但在19世纪欧洲列强武力入侵时，中国在军事上却毫无准备。当英国偷运鸦片引发的纠

Censored topics and the count of censorship actions

Topics	# Paragraphs cut (altered)	# Sentences cut (altered)	# Words cut (altered)
Gao Xingjian	2	14	0
Plasma Economy	0	3	0
Mao Zedong	1	2	0(1)
Great Leap Forward	0	1	0
Cultural Revolution	1	6	1
Tiananmen Massacre	1	4	0
Book Censorship	0	1	0
Total Count	5	31	1(1)



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Alternative approaches: ChatGPT



Compare the following text and its Chinese translation. Does the translation provide the same information? If not, provide the difference along with a 200 word explanation of this censorship.

Original text: "Though many critics interpret the play as signaling the government's failure to deliver the means of progress, others hear in it ongoing commitments to national pride, humanism, progress, memory, and pleasure. Although such positive aspirations have often been downplayed by critics of Gao's 2000 Nobel Prize in Literature, their resonance for the Nobel Committee and for his other admirers suggests these themes' centrality in contemporary world literature."

Translation: "高行健的剧作是一则寓言，解读了中国从乡村进入城市的变化，隐含着对中国文学的现代化和全球化至为关键的五个主题：对民族自豪感、人文主义、进步、记忆和快乐的追寻。"



The translation does not provide the same information as the original text. The original text mentions that the play has been interpreted by many critics as a signal of the government's failure to deliver progress, while the translation does not mention this perspective at all. Instead, it only focuses on the positive themes of the play and its centrality in contemporary world literature.



This censorship is likely due to the sensitivity of the topic of the government's failure to deliver progress. In China, any criticism of the government or its policies is heavily censored and restricted by the state. By not mentioning the negative interpretation of the play, the translation avoids any potential controversy and protects itself from any potential backlash from the government.

The censorship of negative views and criticism is a common practice in China, as the government aims to maintain control over the flow of information and preserve its image as a strong and successful nation. This censorship also affects literature, as authors and works that challenge the status quo or criticize the government are often suppressed and banned.

The censorship of the original text highlights the limitations and challenges faced by authors and literary works in China, where freedom of expression is often restricted. This censorship not only affects the work itself but also limits the perspectives and ideas that are available to the public, creating a one-sided view of the world.

Future Work

- Analyze more books and present the missing parts.



<https://gfw.report/projects/translation-censorship/>
