CHAPTER 15

TRANSLATING WU MING-YI INTO ENGLISH AND FRENCH

Gwennaël Gaffric and Darryl Sterk

Gwennaël Gaffric and I initially set out to structure our discussion as a game of twenty questions, based on our respective experiences introducing Wu Ming-Yi's Sinophone oeuvre to Francophone and Anglophone audiences. We quickly realized we neither had that many questions nor the space for that many answers—especially since our responses to a dozen of them were already exceeding the word limit. What follows, then, is a conversation structured around twelve questions. The sequence of questions is arbitrary, but the order of our responses is not: in each case, one of us initiated the exchange, and the other carried it forward—or redirected it elsewhere.

Why did it end up being you? How did you come to translate Wu Ming-Yi?

Darryl Sterk: I was a late bloomer who ended up being in the right place at the right time. In 2004, the year I turned 31, I had completed my PhD coursework and wanted to be in Taiwan—both to be with my then-girlfriend (now wife) and to take my Chinese to the next level. So I enrolled in an MA program in Interpreting at National Taiwan Normal University, where I met Michelle Wu, a conference interpreter and instructor.

It soon became clear that I was not destined to be a conference interpreter, so I transferred to the translation track. I stayed in touch with Michelle, who kindly recommended me to the editorial team at *The Taipei Chinese Pen*. The editor at the time, Professor Yan-Wing Leung 梁欣榮, gave me my first taste of literary translation: an essay by Lung Ying-Tai 龍應台.

A few years later, by which time I had translated a half dozen essays and short stories for *The Pen*, Professor Leung invited me to serve as a discussant at a symposium on the translation of Taiwan literature. The guest speaker was Gray Tan 譚光磊, a literary agent who spoke about strategies for promoting Taiwanese authors at international book fairs. In my response to his presentation, I asked whether he ever did *pro bono* work. (He hadn't.) Professor Leung then asked whether I did any pro bono work. (I hadn't.)

Even though I'd revealed my naïveté—and perhaps a touch of hypocrisy—I'd also demonstrated my ability to speak and read Chinese. Gray, who happened to be looking for someone to translate a sample of *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, asked Michelle Wu for a recommendation. She kindly referred him to me, in part because I was then researching Indigenous representation in film and fiction. Gray invited me to translate the prologue and first two chapters, of *The Man*. Dear Reader, I said *Yes!*

Gwennaël Gaffric: My story with Wu Ming-Yi began in 2010, and I believe luck played a role. I was a PhD student researching ecological issues in modern and contemporary Taiwan literature. Wu had not yet published *The Magician on the Skywalk*, nor his academic studies on nature writing in Taiwan. I had read some of his short stories of his in a master's-level course taught by Professor Antonio Chen 陳建忠 at Tsinghua University, but it was with his novel *Routes in the Dream* that left me "head over heels." To this day, I cannot explain why that novel struck such a deep chord or why I felt an overwhelming desire to translate it—especially given that I had no professional translation experience at the time.

Nevertheless, I managed to contact the author directly and asked if he would allow me to translate his novel into French. He didn't have an agent at the time and agreed—on the basis of a simple phone call! It was the first time any of his works had been translated. I was fortunate to receive a translation grant from the National Museum of Taiwan Literature, and the novel was published in France in early 2012. Since then, I have had the opportunity to translate additional works by Wu Ming-Yi and to focus

my dissertation largely on his writings. There is something poignant about this trajectory: we have evolved together—he as a writer, and I as a translator and scholar.

We both have experience translating several contemporary Taiwanese authors. What, in your view, makes Wu Ming-Yi's writing distinctive? Can you identify this quality across his different works?

Gwennaël Gaffric: As I try to answer this question, I realize that it touches on something quite subjective—perhaps even intimate. I've been fortunate to translate Taiwanese authors of different generations, genders, literary genres, and political sensibilities. What makes Wu stand out? With Wu Ming-Yi, there is something at once poetic and subtle but also sincere and, I would say, "serious" (認真) in his writing, as soon as he tackles scientific or ethnological subjects. Many Han authors today, for example, write about Formosan Indigenous peoples and cultural backgrounds, but I find Wu Ming-Yi somehow both more cautious and more accomplished. One of the strengths of his writing is that he always tries to find the right tone for the characters he invents (whether male, female, Han, Indigenous… or even human or nonhuman), which is essential to a "choral" novel.

Darryl Sterk: I totally agree, Wu Ming-Yi's literary writings about Indigenous peoples are the best in Taiwan since Wu He's, though the two Wus are completely different writers. Although there have been some difficult bits, I don't think Wu Ming-Yi is that challenging stylistically. He's not a Wu He, or a James Joyce. But in his own way, he's ambitious—as a writer of "beasts" of novels with large casts of characters whose lives intersect across vast distances of space and time. He's a gripping storyteller, who gets the reader to care. He certainly got me to care. I cry at the tear-jerker moments every time I edit, like when an elephant tamer writes to his dead colleague's daughter in *The Stolen Bicycle* to say he wishes he had been the one to make the ultimate sacrifice. He also knows how to come up with an intriguing metaphor, like the eponymous man's compound eyes or the bicycle in the tree at the end of *The Stolen*

Bicycle. What most impresses me about him is that he knows his stuff as a naturalist. It's because I translated *The Man With the Compound Eyes* that I hope to become one myself.

What's something you think came off particularly well? Or badly?

Darryl Sterk: I'm going to try to dwell on the positive with a translation I was particularly happy with, and that is the first sentence of *The Man*: "The trickling of water through the fissures in the subterranean rock was suddenly drowned out when the mountain made an immense but also somehow distant sound." Even though this was the umpteenth revision, there's still room for improvement at the beginning. But when I get to "subterranean rock," I feel like I'm in the groove. There's a welcome and appropriate ambiguity in the phrasal verb "drown out," I preserve the agency of the mountain from Wu's original, and then a duple rhythm, ending on a stress. I could cite a lot of other passages that I'm proud of, or happy with, but a general point is that a lot of thought goes into particularly conspicuous sentences, such as one at the beginning of a novel. Another example is Atile'i's poem: "The sun, it shines with its own light, the moon, it borrows to be bright." Could this be a metaphor for translation?

Gwennaël Gaffric: It's hard to say, because we are often our own worst judges, and I try to set aside my translations once they've been published. I could say that I am pleased with my handling of the multilingual dimension of Wu Ming-Yi's novels, and I have observed that he himself has become increasingly talkative on the subject in his own texts (for example, in *The Stolen Bicycle*). I also have the impression that when I translate Wu Ming-Yi, it is always the same French voice, the same style of writing that glides onto the page, which must mean that I have "grasped" something. To mention a more impactful translation choice, I'm proud of the fact that I chose to translate *The Man* in the present tense, which makes the narrative more vivid. As for what went "badly," I'm always thinking of a stupid typo in *The Man*. At the end of the novel, there's an incidental character, a cetacean specialist. And instead of

giving him Swedish nationality, I gave him Swiss nationality because of the first common Chinese character between the two countries: Sweden is *Ruidian* 瑞典 and Switzerland is *Ruishi* 瑞士. I don't doubt that there are excellent Swiss cetologists, but all the same, it was careless of me. And the editor didn't notice anything either.

Was there something particularly challenging?

Gwennaël Gaffric: In my experience, there are often three types of challenges that arise when translating a Chinese work into French: first, the specificities of the Chinese language (such as the absence of masculine/feminine distinctions, or the absence of a clear narrative tense), second, the sociocultural context, and third, the author's style. As for the first challenge, I remember a turtle character in *Routes in the Dream* whose name was Shitou 石頭. Now in French, 石頭 can be translated as "la pierre" (the stone) or "le caillou" (the pebble), two similar words, but one is feminine and the other masculine. I asked Wu Ming-Yi if he had the sex of the turtle in mind when writing, but he said he didn't. So I opted for the feminine because, strange as it may seem, "tortue" is a feminine word in French (whether male or female) and the turtle seems female in the collective imagination. Regarding the author's style, I can mention the difficulty of finding the right tone in a book like *The Magician on the Skywalk*, so that the child characters don't sound too adult. Finally, there is the question of scientific and entomological terminology: in the translation of the short story "The Man with the Compound Eyes," mention is made of a large number of plants and animals endemic to Taiwan, and which have no vernacular equivalent in French. I made the choice to translate "literally" the Chinese vernacular names of the species mentioned, rather than use scientific names in Latin, which are longer and, above all, usually less pictorial and poetic than the Chinese ones. At the end of the translation, however, I tabulated the names so readers could identify the various species.

Darryl Sterk: Everything's challenging! I love Gwennaël's analysis and examples. I have discussed examples elsewhere (see my answer to question 6 below). I will mention a painful experience I had that illustrates one of the main challenges of literary translation. A fellow translator wrote an article for *Books from Taiwan* about "clunkers" in English translations from the Chinese, titled "Whence the Clunker? or, Towards Improving the Style of English Translations of Sinophone Fiction (I)." One of the article's readers on *Literocracy* said he was glad the author hadn't chosen something by him. Yeah, I can relate, I thought. Then I went and looked it up and discovered it was by me. The author chose the example seemingly at random from *The Man*, "They felt so happy to have the chance to go into the mountains to do some work together they started taking turns singing songs they made up themselves." The putative clunker definitely had room for improvement—in retrospect I would have used the verb "to improvise," and in retrospect I'm amused and grateful to Josh Dyer for pointing it out. The truth can wound, but you know what they say, whatever doesn't kill you…. I hope the experience has made me a better translator and writer. How? At a time when Google Translate, DeepL, and ChatGPT can translate literally, I'm trying to relax and translate more flexibly. Sometimes this gets me in trouble.

Is the translation a literary (over)interpretation of the work?

Gwennaël Gaffric: I like to say that a translation is always more arbitrary than an original text. This is because the original text is supposed to have a wide range of possible interpretations, whereas the translation is the result of a singular journey based on one interpretation: that of the translator. Of course, as translators, we do our best to keep the text as "open" as possible, but to understand a text properly, it would require several translations. Even if I believe that some translations are better than others, I like Antoine Berman's line on retranslation: "retranslating is necessary because translations age, and because none is *the* translation: this shows that translation is an activity subject to time, an activity that has its own temporality: impermanence and incompletion." However, over-interpretation must be avoided: our ethics

as translators dictate above all that we welcome the author and their work and take care of it, not modify it to suit the idea we have of it or the purpose we would like it to serve. For example, I'm very critical of retranslations that aim to remove polemical content from a text or an author. A work has to be read with its flaws, and the biases of its time, and there's no sense in erasing them in translation.

Darryl Sterk: In the interests of avoiding self-repetition, I'll just say that I agree in principle. I suppose a work of literature can take a stand on an issue, but if it is simply opening a conversation on the issue, then the translator had better not take a stand. That said, my approach may lean more toward a postmodern perspective than Gwennaël's. Exhibit A is a juicy example of overinterpretation in the first paragraph of the first chapter of the first edition of my translation of *The Stolen Bicycle*: "The word for fate in Mandarin is *ming-yun*, literally 'life-luck' or 'command-turn'. But 'fate' in my mother's native tongue of Taiwanese is the other way round: *ūn-miā*. It belies fatalism, putting luck in front of life, suggesting you can turn the wheel of fate yourself instead of awaiting the commands of Heaven." I toned it down in the second edition, but am still partial to the way I did it in the first.

How have you engaged with Wu's oeuvre as a scholar?

Gwennaël Gaffric: I sure have, during my thesis, and beyond. I'm often beset by two feelings: firstly, the frustration of having to finally propose an exegesis, a reading, a decoding of texts that I would have preferred to leave "raw" and "open." There are a number of paths and cross-cutting tracks in Wu Ming-Yi's works, in which readers can get lost or find their way back. I sometimes have the impression that by trying to map out these paths, or worse, to propose a literary or political interpretation of them, we are turning them back into "beaten paths," and losing something of the original mystery, of the pleasure of reading for the senses, and not just for the intellect. But I also believe (it took me a while to realize this) that offering a study of an author, especially in the Taiwanese case, helps to broaden their readership and

imagine possible links with other authors, other places than Taiwan. In a sense, making them an important author for understanding the state of our world. Finally, I believe that an academic study can sometimes do what translation can't (because translation is always a matter of choice and strategy, which you have to stick to, and which means that you have to abandon other choices and strategies): restore uncertainty and multiple meanings to paragraphs and plots.

Darryl Sterk: Yes. I've written about:

1. My experience translating *The Man* "on location" during the summer of 2012. The on-location translation included a cycling side trip up to a Bunun village with Gwennaël.
2. The meaning of the videomosaic gaze of the man with the compound eyes, in a 2016 article which benefited from Gwennaël's scholarship, his article "Du Lieu au Tout-Monde" about the global perspective in Wu Ming-Yi's fiction and his PhD. "Taiwan, Écriture et Écologie" in which he explores Jakob Johann von Uexküll's concept of an Umwelt, an animal's subjective world (put to good use in Ed Yong's nonfiction masterpiece *An Immense World*).
3. Ming-Yi's "uncompromising localism," a way of phrasing the argument that he writes for a local audience, leaving the translator with the job of ensuring accessibility for readers who don't know Taiwan that well. This is the article that includes a discussion of the juicy example of overinterpretation (on pp. 151–152 of the 2019 article) that I mentioned in my answer to the previous question.
4. The translation of bionyms in Wu's nature writing. In a 2019 chapter, I advocate translating Chinese bionyms "literally," because such folk terms are often evocative and potentially meaningful in a literary context. Just like Gwennaël did, see question 4! Wu's an especially appropriate author to discuss in such terms, because he often uses more than one bionym for the same species to reflect different cultural perspectives on it.
5. The "responsible primitivism" in *The Man* in a chapter in a 2022 collection. As a scholar of Indigenous representation in film and fiction, I thought I would point out that some of Ming-Yi's Indigenous characters are romanticized, particularly Anu in *The Man*, but that Ming-Yi's treatments are a lot less

stereotyped and melodramatic than most such representations. And he puts his romanticism, or primitivism, to good purpose, educating people about Indigenous lifestyles and enticing them to live arguably more sustainable and natural ways of life.

What's it like to work with Ming-Yi?

Gwennaël Gaffric: I didn't have the opportunity to physically meet Wu Ming-Yi when I started working on the translation of *Routes in the Dream*. In fact, I believe our first "face-to-face" meeting with Ming-Yi took place at the same time for Darryl and me (at the Taipei Book Fair, in 2012 or 2013?). Quite a strange place to meet him! It was quite an intense moment, even though it was short. After that, of course, I met with Ming-Yi many times, and I think we now have a friendly relationship. I think Darryl would agree: Ming-Yi places a fair amount of trust in his translators, and now does us the honor of letting us read his new manuscripts before publication. This trust doesn't necessarily need to be expressed in words: there is a kind of tacit complicity (*moqi* 默契, we would say in Chinese) between an author and his translators: as privileged readers trying to reproduce the same act of writing, the author "knows" that "we know." For my part, although I'm a very talkative person in life, I rarely ask questions of authors during the translation process (unless there are very specific points of detail). I prefer to discuss other subjects with them: their travels, their life experiences, the books they've read, and so on. I feel it helps me more. It's important for me to try to visit (whenever possible) the places the works are about, and to read the books the authors are inspired by.

Darryl Sterk: I think that first meeting must have been in 2012, because the English translation of *The Man* came out in 2013. Gwennaël has developed a better approach to working with Ming-Yi than I had at the time. Instead of asking after literary inspirations and life experiences, I was too worried about misunderstanding something, so I kept asking questions about the text itself. When Atile'i's *tui* 腿

(leg/legs) was pinned under a rock, I asked whether one or both were pinned. Ming-Yi said he had never thought about it, which I thought was really interesting. As Roman Jakobson pointed out, different languages allow you to say anything but force you to say different things, like whether it's one or two legs pinned under a rock, when what's important is that the poor guy can't move. I guess that applies to an author writing a novel in Chinese, he didn't have to decide—in his imagination—how exactly his character was pinned. Ming-Yi's answer to my question was liberating and empowering. He set me free to imagine it myself, to use my judgment, like any other reader. And so I basically stopped pestering Ming-Yi with my questions. (To be honest, I still asked questions, but not as many.)

What's it like to work with different editors and publishers?

Darryl Sterk: I would have thought there was an SOP [standard operating procedure] for publishing works of fiction, but if there is, then publishers don't follow it. The editor who acquired *The Man* for Harvill Secker was enthusiastic, but then suddenly left before I submitted. Her replacement viewed the publication of *The Man* as a chore. She told me my translation was superb, and I assumed that we would now proceed to copyediting, but months passed before I got the proofread manuscript back. It was helpful—it made me realize that "madding" is a word, as in the title of Hardy's novel—but it wasn't the more supportive copyediting I was expecting. So I submitted fifteen pages of corrections and was informed that this amount of correction was completely impossible to accommodate. I had a nervous breakdown, but there was little I could do besides whittle down the corrections to a few pages. Hence, the clunkers. I'm sure there's more than one.

The editor assigned to *the Stolen Bicycle* was excellent. She made intelligent suggestions that killed a lot of my darlings—including a pun on "bear all things," which can mean support or give birth to—but improved readability. She also introduced a few Australianisms like "gobsmacked," which was fun, even if, with the lingering Americanisms and Canadianisms, it probably made the text sound like it could

have been from anywhere. Her only problem was procrastination. In the end, she made it about halfway through before her boss "read her the riot act" and forced her to submit. In other words, the first edition is half edited, half by me alone. When the book was longlisted for the Booker International, she generously returned to the project and gave me the opportunity to address half-dozen outstanding issues that I hadn't gotten right the first time, though she didn't go on to edit the rest of it. Not that I'm complaining; she's part of why the book was recognized in the first place.

Gwennaël Gaffric: It's true that the work with editors is essential in the process of translating a book. As for the three works that I have translated—I'm not counting Wu's short texts that have appeared in magazines or anthologies—I had three very different experiences. In the case of the translation of *Routes in the Dream*, the publisher was so small it was a single person, who had very little involvement in the proofreading and editing work, which was done by my mother, who even designed the cover. The publisher even printed the penultimate version. There are still a few typos as a result, and I often suggest that readers who bought the paper book let me send them the final PDF. Despite that, I'm very happy with this translation, particularly in the way it conveyed the multilingualism of the text. For *The Man*, I worked with a major publishing house, but like Darryl, there was a change in editorial management, and the person who bought the translation rights left just before publication. The new editor didn't do much promotional work, and the book probably didn't get the response it deserved in France. The novel did, however, win a literary prize in France (the first, to my knowledge, for a Taiwanese work translated into French). For *The Magician on the Skywalk*, things went much more smoothly, as it was published in my "Taiwan Fiction" collection at Asiathèque, and the collaboration with the editor and the proofreader was very professional. The publisher invited Wu Ming-Yi to take part in festivals in France, and the book was nominated for two awards.

What's it like to read book reviews and Goodreads ratings?

Darryl Sterk: I haven't read a negative review by a professional reviewer of any of my Wu Ming-Yi translations. That may be partly because Wu remains relatively little known outside Taiwan, and reviewers tend to be more cautious when evaluating work that hasn't yet reached a broad readership—aware that a harsh review might significantly limit its exposure. I mean, critics can pan the latest Stephen King novel and it will still sell millions of copies. I mostly ignore reviews on Goodreads, except for one that said I'd made all the characters sound the same. This is not the case. I do take note of the rating out of five and have been a bit disappointed that neither novel I translated broke the four-star barrier (though many excellent works fall in the 3–4 star range, and I guess I can always blame "the typical nonprofessional reader.")

Gwennaël Gaffric: From time to time, I consult book reviews (Goodreads is not widely used in France, but we have other platforms such as Babelio). Unfortunately, there aren't many reviews of Wu Ming-Yi's novels, but those I've seen seem very positive (though I may not have read all of them). I'm a little more attentive to other kind of reviews, especially in literary blogs (of which there are quite a few in France). They're often fascinating, as their authors take the time to talk about the book, and sometimes about the translation or the translators—often with generous words. Regarding Wu Ming-Yi's translations, I know that my choice to render the dialogues in Taiwanese in *Routes in the Dream* has in a "creolized" French has prompted some discussion and debate. But I expected it, and I think it's good thing that this issue can be discussed because it raises the question of how to translate multilingualism. I think Darryl would agree: although we can certainly make mistakes, our translation choices are generally deliberate, and we could justify our strategies (whether our own or the result of discussions with the author or editor), even if readers don't always realize that!

Darryl Sterk: I'd just add that, as Nietzsche, I think, once suggested, thoughts and words often come unbidden; the real task is deciding which ones to keep. I sometimes don't make a final decision until after the dust has settled—and even then, I'm occasionally, and fortunately, surprised. For instance, I didn't realize that "drown out" was ambiguous until after I'd written it.

How has translating Wu's works affected you personally?

Darryl Sterk: It has had an immense impact on me personally and professionally, though perhaps not in the way I would have anticipated. I joined some kind of environmental club in high school, but it was issue-based. Members of the club were committed to recycling and concerned about global warming. But at least I knew very little about nature, except what I'd picked up in high school biology courses, which felt abstract and superficial. I returned to that kind of knowledge when I had my first "mid-life crisis" in my twenties, when I took cell biology and general biology and a bit of organic chemistry at the university level imagining that I would become a naturopathic doctor. But if at the time you'd asked me what kind of bird this is and what kind of beast that is I would have had no idea. It wasn't until I was translating *The Man* that I realized how little I knew. I had a lot of names floating around in my head, but couldn't for the life of me attach them to specific organisms. Somehow Atile'i (Atihei in Gwennaël's translation)'s speedy acquisition of practical knowledge of nature in *The Man* motivated me to try to at least recognize the natural creatures whose names I was translating. A decade on I'm proud to say I can recognize something not just as a kind of tree but as a particular species of fig, and something else not as a butterfly but as certain nymphalid. And I gratefully acknowledge that I wouldn't be the person or professor I am today had I not had the opportunity to translate Ming-Yi.

Gwennaël Gaffric: Studying and translating Wu Ming-Yi has obviously had an impact on my career as a translator and as a scholar, but its influence is not limited to my professional evolution. I think any

translation has an impact on our lives in one way or another—it enriches the way we see the world but also changes the way we write and use our own language. There's probably a bit of Wu Ming-Yi in me now when I write. Maybe that is why I feel a little "at home" in each new work of his. Like a writer, a translator tries to become the "other," and even if this is only an ephemeral state, it's likely that some remnant remains somewhere inside us. As with Darryl, I believe that translating Ming-Yi also led me to reflect on literature's relationship with what surrounds us, the nonhuman environment but also the natural sciences and Indigenous knowledge. Translating Wu Ming-Yi rekindled my interest in science and the exploration of living things. But unlike Darryl, translating Wu Ming-Yi—and contemporary Taiwanese authors in general—gave me renewed confidence in the power of fiction and the imagination, which tends to be lost in Euro-American literature, and particularly in French literature.

How have you settled into the role of promoter of Wu's works?

Gwennaël Gaffric: I think I have a double advantage in terms of visibility, being both a translator from Chinese and a scholar. Journalists, festivals and booksellers are more likely to contact Chinese-language translators than English-language translators to talk about a novel, for example, which gives us more opportunities to promote the authors we translate. In recent years, I've been lucky to translate the Chinese science fiction writer Liu Cixin 劉慈欣, whose translated works have been quite successful in France, and I'm often called upon to talk about his novels. Whenever I can, I also try to talk about and promote lesser-known Taiwanese authors such as Wu Ming-Yi. Beyond public or media events, I guess that the fact that I work academically on Wu Ming-Yi, and that I teach Taiwan literature at the university, are also kinds of promotion.

Darryl Sterk: I felt a bit lost at the first promotional events I did for my translations of Wu Ming-Yi. I had just finished my PhD, so I was used to critiquing. Now my job was to "push" the book, to sell the

book. I didn't know what to say, and everything I could think of fell flat. I didn't feel up to the task. I felt better able to help out as Ming-Yi's interpreter at such events. It's all been consecutive interpreting, meaning Ming-Yi speaks and then I translate. He's gotten really good at dividing his delivery into sound bites, and I know pretty much what he's going to say, so it's not especially challenging, and sometimes it's even a lot of fun. But of course I remember the times I didn't do as well as I'd hoped. One time I didn't know how to say "beriberi," and I had no idea why Ming-Yi had mentioned Scarlett Johansson, because I'd never heard of *Lucy*, a movie she starred in that was partly set in Taipei. Both times an audience member filled in the gap, reminding me that I'm *not* a professional interpreter, and that I do better, and feel better about myself, working behind the scenes.

What unpublished translated work by Ming-Yi would you like to translate?

Darryl Sterk: I was going to say the short stories in *The Land of Little Rain* because they're about aspiring naturalists, and I'm an aspiring naturalist. But I've discovered a very clever and creative translation of the fourth story, "The Cloud is 2000m up," by Catherine Xin-Xin Yu 余欣欣, who calls the character Guan 關 (meaning "to close") "Shutter," partly because Guan is a photographer. I think it's brilliant—and that I should step aside and give other translators a chance to shine. But there is one work for which I think I might be the right translator: Wu Ming-Yi's new novel *The Sea Breeze Club*, because it's about a Taiwanese woman who grows up in a Truku community. There's a lot of Truku in the novel. I might be the right translator because I've spent about a decade studying Tgdaya, which, like Truku, is a dialect of the Seediq language, as well as Seediq culture in general. Wu's characters remind me of a lot of the Seediq friends I've made and the stories they have told me.

Gwennaël Gaffric: I haven't yet had the chance to translate *The Stolen Bicycle* into French. So far, I've translated *The Man with the Compound Eyes*, *The Magician on the Skywalk*, *Routes in the Dream*, as well

as several short stories (including “The Man with the Compound Eyes,” “A Toilet Story”) and *sanwen* (including one Darryl has translated, about a butterfly named after Koxinga). My instinctive choice would also be to translate *The Land of Little Rain*, which is eminently Wu Ming-Yi–esque: it has a strong relationship to the nonhuman, to the strange but also to childhood and death, always with the same subtle and inspiring poetry. But I’d also like to translate his *sanwen*, particularly about butterflies. I’ve been translating more and more science fiction stories for several years now, and Wu Ming-Yi strikes me as one of those authors reconnecting science with poetry. For Wu Ming-Yi, science is not a cold, rational relationship with the world, but an embodied attempt to understand our place in it, our relationships of coexistence, and there is never any contradiction between “Western science” and the supposedly “non-scientific” cosmologies in his works. To my knowledge, he is one of the rare authors who combine natural history, life sciences, and Indigenous cultural representations, without one canceling out or scorning the other. As for making room for other translators, I understand Darryl’s point about the need to let other translators’ voices be heard. As the director of a series at Asiathèque, I’m always trying to find the right translator for the right book, even when it’s the same author. (Though I admit I’d be a little sad not to translate Wu Ming-Yi’s work into French myself).

PART IV

THE MAGICIAN'S LENS