# Alai's Reception in the English-speaking World

Chen Xin

(Beijing Normal University)

**Abstract:**

After one of Alai's most influential novels, *Red Poppies*, was translated for the English-speaking world, some scholars and critics have yielded relatively comprehensive academic insights about Alai's complicated identity and his unique creativity in literary writing. But for the limited accessible sources to Alai's other works and through more or less oriented and even distracted lenses to look into Alai as a Chinese-Tibetan writer, Alai's reception in the English-speaking world may not be adequately inclusive. The question of how we can receive Alai from a culturally diverse perspective without narrowing Alai down to some specific issues still requires further contemplation.

**Keywords:** Alai, reception, identity, Chinese-Tibetan writers, historical narratives

---

Alai, one of the most significant and representative figures in Chinese Tibetan literature, earned his literary reputation initially in the second half of the 1980s after his shift from poetry composition into fiction writing. His first full-length novel *Chen'ai luoding* (translated as *Red Poppies* afterwards into English) made him the youngest winner ever and the first awarded Tibetan author of the Mao Dun Literary Prize. Though gradually upraised to his height of fame in local and national belles-letters circles as well as among the public, there incessantly emerged discussions, debates and even disputes over how to subsume Alai under certain categories and how to appraise Alai and Tibetan writers in a more comprehensive and consolidated manner.

Alai's equivocal positioning in contemporary Tibetan and Chinese literature not only leads to his problematized reception inside the People's Republic of China, following his works being adapted to other languages, his multifaceted

ambiguities, including his geographical sense of belonging, cultural orientation, linguistic identity and historical recognition, etc., yet also makes him more or less an inapplicable case to some conventional or even stereotypical research paradigms employed by Western scholars. Actually, when western critics[1] at the commencing stage rendered Alai's image to their readers, it seemed that Alai's interpretability did not necessarily hinge on his "inherited" traits with respect to his ethnic identity or cultural background. As Wu suggests that Alai should not be narrowed and reduced down to a sort of "anti-" literature, the very aesthetic kernel of *Red Poppies* is "simply a reflection of life with its inexplicable ending." (Wu 92) Though cautiously extracting some provokingly sensitive issues from the light cast upon Alai, Wu does not succeed in maintaining the author's role solely as one with high literary achievement. Alai's image in later critics' articles or essays is more similar to an exotic model or embodiment of a typical identical hybridity which Tibetan writers are presupposed to possess. When talking of "presupposed," I mean that in western academic groups, there exists a sort of conceptual "division" between "Chinese literature" and "Tibetan literature." Though this division is shown apparently as a traditionally shared consensus among scholars in Tibetan studies, actually it is not a relatively long period since this chasm emerged to the surface.[2] Rediscovery of "modern Tibetan literature" is a concurrent phenomenon accompanied by translation of some modern Tibetan literary texts[3], while it is undeniable that expected horizons of western scholars may be an indirect derivative outcome of traditional western Shangri-la imagination. Regardless of disparate critical sources, textual or contextual, in the process, given limitedly accessible texts and scarce exemplary cases for further studies in this field, Alai's translation makes a non-negligible contribution to establishing western understandings of modern Tibetan literature as a work of "literary integrity."

Moreover, it is this very "integrity" that in one way develops and at the same time "dwarfs" Alai's reception in English-speaking circles (and the larger western-language circles). Alai is not introduced as a literary figure "outside" the very

1 Here I use the term "western critics" mainly to refer to critics in English-speaking circles, for Alai's first translated novel *Red Poppies* has laid the textual and research groundwork for most Alai-concerned studies that I have access to now. According to Ji Jin, it was after the publication of Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin's translation of *Red Poppies* ensuing versions in French, German, Italian and Spanish and so on (in total more than 10 languages).

2 It is partially because of a delayed reception of modern Tibetan literature since the end of the 20th century.

3 Apart from Alai's works, for another important publication please see: *Tales of Tibet: Sky Burials, Prayer Wheels, and Wind Horses*..

language in which he is translated. On the contrary, he is a new face inseparably bound with an old land—Tibet. His novel is applied as an exotic monocular telescope for more accurate focal adjustment when observing an imagined land lacking a physically substantial supplement. In this regard, Alai is somehow forced to bear a role of not only an "introduction" of a new world but more importantly an "incarnation" of the world itself. Alai's translation keeps a synchronous pace with the emergency of designating Tibetan literature as a specialized and self-contained literary whole.

As a correlative consequence, *World Literature Today* put forward several reviews about Tibetan literature in 2003 (Wu 92; Lussier 101) in a section called "literature in review," which aroused a discussion on where Tibetan literature should be placed in the sphere of world literature. This article mainly focuses on finding a perspective of re-interrogating the relationship between Chinese literature and Tibetan literature under a global context, in which what should be strengthened is not a uniform reception of literature but a consciousness that "it is the worldliness of world literature that poses the most vital challenges." (Venturino 52) And Venturino stresses further that he believes readers of world literature can better approach Tibetan literature via seeing it as "Tibetan national literature," (Venturino 52) wherefore he compares Tibet to some sovereign nation-states to indicate their analogous similarities (for example, sense of identity or accepted language), while he is fully conscious of the fact that Tibet is not an independent country. Indeed, major themes that later studies tend to take advantage of have already been proposed in this article and the like, especially one such as the "colonizer-colonized" axis between China and Tibet, which is nailed down as a widely accepted pre-understanding amid western scholars when mentioning Chinese-Tibetan literature interactions.

According to Kamila Hladíková, Tsering Shakya is crucial in determining the nature of Tibetan literature as a colonized kind. (Hladíková 11) When we resort to Shakya's argument to find the grounding thesis, his reasoning, however, appears problematically inadequate in deciding Tibetan literature's colonized core. Shakya draws his conclusion in light of the so-called "similarities" between western colonial rule and Chinese governance over Tibet: "In both cases, colonialism caused a dislocation of identity and traditional epistemology in the indigenous social system and culture." (Shakya, "Waterfall" 29) In this regard, Chinese "colonization" over Tibet is embodied in the regime's propagation of its Marxist and materialist ideologies, which "set out to control the minds of the natives." (Shakya, "Waterfall"

29) [4] His assertion that China-Tibet relations should be viewed as a counterpart of western colonization has overlooked a determinate factor for denominating so particular a relation as a colonial one, that is, economic oppression and exploitation imposed upon the colonized. Though the discursive barycenter of post-colonial criticism may not strengthen an economically colonized relationship, while their fierce castigation of Eurocentrism and Occidentalism is still an exuviated form of the previous colonial relationship, for example, between some western countries and some third-world countries in Asia or Africa. As a new critic method in a new global trend, post-colonial theories may be well applied to analyses of regional relationships with a historical legacy of former economic colonialism. However, when it comes to a fundamentally different place, this set of prepositions should await a more prudent and delicate re-examination and explanation. Unfortunately, Shakya, together with some other critics,[5] did not provide sufficient evidence to validate a Chinese "takeover" of Tibet as a process of colonization in this sense. And a similarity-based assertion will in turn muddle future clarification over Alai's coordination in Chinese-Tibetan modern literature.

Admittedly, it is profoundly intricate why Tibetan literature will be mostly perceived in such a skeleton, a "ruptured" framework, in which heterogeneity, peripheral-ity and otherness are the prominent attributors when describing authors and works in this region. But even if we suspend the contention between different narratives about Tibet, when it comes to Alai himself, if similar research methods are adopted without modification, without being based on more insights into authors' local experiences along with their literary selves, other considerable problems may arise. The recent ten years have witnessed a gradual deepening in Alai's scholarly exploration, which, on the other hand, still to some degree falls short of making Alai manifested through more dimensions in the English-speaking world, instead of being dominantly absorbed in the cultural or political labelling game pivoting around Alai's geographical, historical, cultural, linguistic, ethnical and social origins.

Alai's miscellaneous experiences continuously put challenges to those who are

4 See also Shakya, Tsering's article "The Development of Modern Tibetan Literature in the People's Republic of China in the 1980s." Some scholars also borrow Shakya's conclusion, for example, see Hladíková's article "The Soul of Tibet: Representations of Landscape in Chinese-medium Literature about Tibet from the 1980s."

5 For instance, Wang Yiyan thinks that even if Alai writes in Chinese, his cultural identity should not be directly adjuvant to his writing language. Tibetan writers writing in Chinese have "striking" similarities with, say, Indian writers writing in English. In this way, those writers who are unable to utter out by means of their own language are deemed as a consequence of colonization.

apt to fixedly grid him in a mechanical category. Carlos Rojas' analysis on Alai may serve as a good illustrative case. At the beginning of his essay, he chooses Alai's short story "Huai hua 槐花" (Sophora Flower) as the target text. After the protagonist Xielaban's dialogue with a young man, he recalls later in surprise that the young man speaks in Xielaban's "home speech," which has long been thrown into oblivion in his daily life. His astounded reminiscence of his previous dialect is therefore considered a good starting point to manifest the narrator's cleavage in his linguistic identity. On account of this linguistic separation, Rojas further deduces that when Alai intends to address the drastic confrontation between his native tongue and standard written Chinese, he would choose a specific strategy to involve himself into this confrontation. For Alai, different languages designate their respective identities (nations), and "Alai uses the language of one 'nation' to represent another […] a homeland positioned at the interstices of the two nations and their respective societies and cultures." (Rojas 116) Thus, Alai's story is not a mere replicate of Chinese mainstream narratives about the history of those ethnic minorities, and "his works not only are the product of a 'translation' of local subject matter into written Chinese." (Rojas 118) Therefore, Alai's primary concern in writing his autobiographical stories is the action of "translation" itself, whose function is the "linguistic politics" mentioned in the title.

Nevertheless, Rojas may ignore the fact that in Alai's story, the "home speech" of Xialaban is neither standard Tibetan nor Chinese Putonghua, but a local dialect, which is not a suitable example to entrench the perceived conflicts between Tibetan minority groups and Chinese-speaking circles. Noticeably, he translates an excerpt from the original novel as follows:

> a local dialect ( jiaxiang fangyan 家鄉方言) that very few people understand, while in this city Chinese (Hanyu 漢語) and standard Tibetan (biaozhun Zangyu 標准藏語) are the norm (Rojas 116)[6]

From this quote, we can find it is not a careless pitfall in the author's reading on "Huai hua," but rather, the local dialect is in a broader sense merged into a larger Tibetan language pigeonhole, which attenuates diversity and even incommunicability (since very few people understand) between marginal dialects

6 Original text is noted by the author: Alai 阿來, "Huai hua 槐花" (Huai blossoms), in Alai, *Chen'ai feiyang* 塵埃飛揚 [Dust Blowing in the Wind] (Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 2005), 81–88, 83. As the author cites it in traditional Chinese characters, I did not transform them into simplified Chinese in the article.

and the central normalized language (standard Tibetan). Reclassifying the dialect into the broader Tibetan language family, perhaps, is aimed to further perform adaption of the duality between Tibetan identity and Chinese identity. Whereas, this adaption seems relatively reluctant and to some degree untenable. A critical reason is that the author may find it difficult to appropriately advance forward the typical post-colonial research paradigm in this case, as other-ness, in-between-ness or translatability that are frequently emphasized by post-colonial researchers are not just twofold when it comes to Alai. Tibet, including the greater Tibet areas, is far from a consistent cultural and historical whole when scrutinized in various scales. For our readiness to discuss Alai's self-identity, it should be high priority that we firstly be aware of how to position Alai in a feasible framework. If we individualized Alai's Tibetan identity to be non-subordinate of his Chinese identity, how about his blood ties with Hui ethnicity as Alai's father belongs to Hui ethnic groups? How about his relationship with other Tibetan communities, especially those who live in Lhasa or write in standard Tibet rather than Chinese? Should his identity be further divided into several other sub-groups, like a Tibetan Chinese writer, or a Chinese Tibetan writer or even a Chinese-Tibetan writer in a "particular" sub-community? And if so, where should we set the boundary of our classification for fear that we may fall into a trap of infinite subdivision? Even if we put all these problems aside, the China-versus-Tibet framework is far less stable than it seems. Rojas' article is collected in *Global Chinese Literature*,in whose introduction Alai and Chinese ethnic writers are not abundantly mentioned, especially on how they can be located in the ambiguous "global Chinese literature," which may infer that when juxtaposing Chinese ethnic writers along with diasporic or overseas Chinese writers, theories may not always be articulated and similar consequences drawn.

Many scholars and critics actually have noticed Alai's unsettled identity is beyond the inconclusive capability of a static and simple dualism between China and Tibet. As a hybrid of Hui and Tibet ethnicity, Alai was born in the northeastern part of Sichuan, a marginal part of the greater Tibet area as well as a junction point between Tibetan culture and Han culture. Sichuan-born writers like Alai and Tashi Dawa share common identity issues as to whether or not they should be regarded as Tibetan writers. Wang Yijian reveals that in Alai's work, Alai is at the same time questioning either Chinese mainstream narratives of Tibet or Lhasa-centered monolithic Tibetan identity. (Wang 98) These identity issues are elaborated in Maconi's studies in more detail. He thinks that Tibetan writers actually belong to two different intellectual circles "sharing literary affinities and experiences," (Maconi 177) namely one circle mainly consisting of authors or critics writing in

Tibetan and the other in Chinese. Besides linguistic distinction, Tibetan authors' writing also differs geographically. In Lhasa, inhabited Tibetan writers can be divided into two less proximate groups, the ones who are not capable of speaking Tibetan (like Tashi Dawa) and the others who insist on writing in standard Tibetan language. Outside Lhasa we can see two other groups. In Amdo, Chinese and Tibetan writers tend to collaborate more than those in Lhasa, while Kham contemporary literature is "better represented by the so-called 'Khampa Sinophone" literature," (Maconi 180) wherein we can see a name list of Alai, Jiangbian Jiacuo and so forth. It would be generally doubtful to think of all Tibetan writers to be in a homogenously amalgamated Tibetan literary community. Tibetophone writers may reject Tibetan Sinophone literature being viewed as "Tibetan literature," and though Tibetan Sinophone writers may accept, some of them may feel sensitive about their Tibetan-ness and sense a sort of "incongruity" in their national identity. (Maconi 192)

According to previous studies, we can find discrepant identifications in Tibetan literary groups, as aforementioned, may in some sense disintegrate the Tibetan identity as a whole, if we resort to individualizing this identity as a concrete one and independent from Chinese nationality. As a result, it may seldom suffice to provide a divergent perspective in reading Alai and Tibetan literature other than within the set discourses of colonial criticism.

Another point that attracts predominant scholarly attention is the contention between Chinese mainstream narratives about Tibet and Alai's alternative narrations of that period of history. Many critics are well aware that Alai's works are not aiming at catering for a long-standing western imagination about Tibet. Yue Gang has noted that the represented history of the Jiarong area in Alai's texts "defies any simplistic reading of the Shangri-La myth into the novel." (Yue 550) In *Red Poppies*, Alai's literary ambition lies in his endeavor to reproduce a local history of Jiarong. Yue thinks that *Red Poppies* is "a historical novel of an apocalyptic order," (Yue 547) which is an "epic" and "poetic" nostalgia of Alai's historical memories. Those hereditary memories descend from hundreds of years ago, long before Tibet's communication with the modern world, such as the Nationalist Party or CCP. Though several important events are unexclusively referred to, Yue's sketch of Tibetan history, especially modern Tibetan history, is not politically bound to a certain specific period of time, such as the PRC's governance of this area, which bears relatively negative remarks from western intellectuals.

Yue's expounding of Alai's historical concern is actually not on the surface and is a more text-restricted interpretation than other critics' context-oriented criticism.

Yue successfully exposes the difficulty to "locate" Alai's history at a tangible point due to his complicated experiences and views of where he grew up. However, in another aspect, this article is also not at the "bottom" when discussing the historical relationship between Tibet and China. Actually, Yue and some other western scholars would more or less tend to view the China-Tibet relationship as "chaotic," in which chaos is sustained by a supposition that the change of Tibet is the source of the chaos in this regional relationship. What does it mean? It suggests a comparably weird setting that China is a historical continuum while Tibet is to some degree self-disassembled in front of historical upheavals. This is also a theoretical foundation for Chinese-Tibetan colonialism, namely China's inherited "imperial" rule over Tibet from Qing Dynasty all the way up to the PRC today. The unchanged Chineseness (as the ruler of Tibet) is the essential "wedge" to stabilize this Chinese-Tibetan colonial narrative, which perhaps is also a big hurdle against a more fluid and non-biased interpretation of Alai. Without noticing that China itself is also a beholder and bearer of a hundred years of radical and revolutionary transformations, it may be inevitable to generate some one-sided reflections on Chinese-Tibetan history and its impacts on later generations. Though, from Alai's reception in other languages, we can still hear some thought-evoking voices in their close reading of Alai's works.

Howard Choy delivers an earlier discernment into the historical pictures deeply buried under Alai's lines. Choy takes three authors as parameter-like examples, whose works delineate diverse versions of Tibet compared to the mainstream narrative: Alai, Tashi Dawa and Ge Fei. What he values in his studies is far less a rigid confirmation of an author's identity (for Ge Fei himself is undoubtedly a Chinese writer) than a rejection to CCP's then propaganda about Tibet. It is made by a new generation of writers consisting of both Tibetan and Chinese persons of letters. This group of writers attempt to suspend the traditional "teleological historiography" in the depiction of their recreated Tibet. Hence, he chooses five complementary texts of a characterized Tibet covering nearly all of the 20th century, and concludes that these three writers all supply "alternative modes of historical writing." (Choy, "Historiographic" 84) What Alai conveys is "the identity vacuum created by history," (Choy, "Historiographic" 84) in contrast to Tashi Dawa's cyclical historical views as a substitute for a progressive view and Ge Fei's skepticism of traditional banality of Tibetan history. The crucial years of 1951 and 1952[7] blanked out in Tashi Dawa's works are re-filled and "bridged" by Alai, who "opens up a dialogue between a declined noble family and its ex-servant."

7 It is the moment China succeeded in taking sovereignty of Tibet.

Alai's attitude towards emancipation of Tibet is complicated in his elegy of that old time. And Choy further discusses Alai's sense of historical identity in another article. According to his point, Alai experienced an identical confusion between "Chineseness" and "Tibetanness," resulting in his taking a roundabout measure to shape an idiotic protagonist in *Red Poppies*: "Idiocy is a way of denying that one is identical or identifiable with any single group."(Choy, "Quest" 223) Inasmuch as Alai felt discomfited by the two questions "where am I" and "who am I,"(Choy, "Quest" 226) his writing is aimed to present, commemorate, record and rediscover a certain origin where Alai's literary meaningfulness could gush out.

Notwithstanding his delicate reading into Alai's identity issue and Alai's own strategy in coping with the mutant historical alteration, Choy's interpretation is still to some extent incomplete. He mirrors Alai in a relatively passive way that Alai is trying to "escape" from a certain kind of historical discordance so that he decides to display himself in the guise of an idiot. Alai does not end up in just putting on a seal for a full stop of pre-modern Tibet but successfully re-creates an open space for further elucidation. It means that though *Red Poppies* is in the common sense a complete "novel" with its well-designed beginning and ending, it is not in a literary sense a complete "practice," an experiment Alai undertakes to put something together. Wokar Rigumi points out that Choy "misreads" Alai since "the idiot does not display anxiety over the issue of his ethnicity anywhere in the novel." (Rigumi 1) In his view, Alai's idiot-stance narration is a legitimation of his bi-racial identity and the "identity politics of reclaiming the ambiguous and polyethnic historical past." (Rigumi 2) Distinguished from other researchers, Rigumi considers that Alai obscures the mainstream historical writings about Tibet to be camouflaged in his inversion from traditional nationalist discourse to an economic one. In his argument, it is the opium trade that "draws the chieftains into dependency with larger circuits of commerce of Chinese markets" (Rigumi 7-8 ) and eventually metamorphoses Tibet into another social form. Correspondingly, changes of Tibet are not merely contemplated by Alai as a "result of a simplistic struggle of one nation against another." (Rigumi 8)

Rigumi's emphasis on the role of economic factors in Tibet's revolutionary transformations is rarely found in other criticism about Alai. With nationality-centered issues being desalinated, Rigumi's interpretation generalizes Alai's Tibet on a more globalized scale. What he suggests in the title "a localist counter-narrative to nationalist histories" is thus fulfilled from the other way around, namely from a global perspective, which takes in the confrontation between different "nations" to separate them into smaller "local communities." However, it is somewhat

inexplicable whether or not the PRC is in this sense a "colonizer" anymore. Tibet's economic ties with Han groups (poppy trade) were actually interrupted by the PRC after its "emancipation" of Tibet. If we attempt to universalize the Chinese-Tibetan relationship both in the pre-PRC and PRC era, we must firstly encounter some urgently important questions Rigumi does not give a full solution to: how to create a periodization of the Chinese-Tibetan relationship and in each phase how to make a qualitative definition of their interactions? When we talk of a "colonizer" or a "colonized," we start from a global vision. Thus how can we justify a return back to a localist perspective with maintaining the allegation that the colonial relationship is still theoretically legitimate? Rigumi notices a spatial relation between China and Tibet, while he does not fully grasp the Chinese-Tibet relationship in a historical and chronological aspect, therefore he stops before answering how his "local Tibet vs global China (or other agents involved in Tibetan modernization)" can be altered into "local Tibet vs local China" and "global Tibet vs global China."

This is another difficult point for us to understand Alai's cognition and evaluation of Chinese-Tibetan history in different phases. Some scholars have exerted effort in delving into the changing nature of this trans-regional history. Nimrod Baranovich provides a more dynamically interactive relationship between the PRC and Tibet since the 1950s. What he holds interest in is the PRC's developing attitude toward Tibetan history and people from the establishment of the country to the eve of a new century. Alai in his novels, as Baranovich reflects, not only reveals a kind of incongruity when positioned between his own senses of Chinese-Tibetan history and mainstream Chinese narratives of that period of time, but he also attempts to make a complementary conglutination between two different discourses. On the one hand, Alai rather "repeats" some set discourses of old sayings and stereotypes about Tibet than just breaks with the PRC's former historical narrations, and on the other hand "presenting a subtext with alternative narratives." (Baranovich, "Literary" 174) Baranovich sees the relationship between Alai's own novel and the PRC's propaganda about Tibet in the 1980s on a condition that the post-Mao political climate may have changed to make history writing limitedly more liberate. In Baranovich's opinion, the PRC's history writing on Tibet differs in different historical stages. Right after the establishment of the Republic, Chinese history textbooks did not immediately and thoroughly annihilate an exclusive Han-centered history narrative inherited from the pre-1949 era. In the 1950s, the Chinese history books tend to consider ethnic non-Han groups as "Chinese others," and from an

inter-exchangeable use of the term "Han people" and "Chinese people,"[8] we can infer that they are subconsciously identical in that period's perception of the relation among Han and ethnic minorities. After 1956, with systematically reconstructed Marxist history views fully applied to history writing, class categories veil and diminish dominance of a nationalist description. In his analysis, the notion that "China is a multi-ethnic state"(Baranovich, "Others" 92)first came to its first place in Chinese history textbooks. Although most extremely negative representations of non-Han people had been deleted, the 1956 version of the history book still remained a strong Han-centered tendency. And this unevenness between Han and non-Han groups of people in their elaboration in history textbooks, in the author's eyes, had not been finally eliminated till the turning point of the new century.

From this account, we may have a clearer idea where Baranovich will locate Alai's novel in traditional Chinese-Tibetan narratives. Alai's alternative narratives are not purposed to serve as a "subversion" of his received history education about Tibet. Actually, upon the publication of *Red Poppies*, Maoist indoctrinations had already faded from its dominant influence upon history writing. For Baranovich, Alai stands at a transitional point between Maoist views of history and views in the 21st century, in both periods of which China as a multi-ethnic state is set as a prior political consensus. What Alai challenges in traditional discourses thus becomes less a simplistic interrogation or even refusal of their validity than a more detailed supplementary transformation of traditional stereotypes about Tibet from mainstream ideologies. Alai challenges the textbook's expounding of old Tibet as a cruel and dark place and at the same time challenges the depiction of the region "as a place full of humanness." (Baranovich, "Literary" 176) The irreconcilable conflicts between tribe rulers and un-liberated serfs recorded in textbooks are also softened and mitigated in the relationship between two fictitiously designed characters: the narrator "I" and his maid servant "Dolma." And "serfs in 'Old Tibet'" did not necessarily feel oppressed, did not necessarily hate their masters." (Baranovich, "Literary" 183) In Baranovich's essay, the reason why Alai will set two kinds of narratives in "Red Poppies" is due to a strategy in coping with possible political censorship and also a consideration upon the commoditization of his works. Apart from other critics' inclination to regard Tibetan literature as intrinsically centrifugal from its Chinese center, the author points that Alai "does not even hint at the possibility of Tibetan independence or struggle in the future" (Baranovich, "Literary" 198) as a proof for Alai's assertion of his Chinese-ness.

8 More details can be found in Baranovich's second article published in 2010.

But there are still problems in Baranovich's understanding of Alai's literary practice. First and foremost, his analysis of the evolution of the Chinese official presentation of Tibetan history in the history textbooks, helpful and reflective as it may be, the periodization seems too broad. He doesn't propose a good exemplary case when he mentions the ideological changes occurring in the post-Mao era, especially from the end of the 1970s to the beginning of 2000s, when Alai embarked on his literary career and a broader cultural milieu of that period. Second, for Alai, he still lacks more comprehensively biographic studies on himself, which is an extensively existing phenomenon in the English-speaking world.

In conclusion, Alai's reception in the English-speaking world has visibly become deeper. But his reception is in several senses awaiting further improvement and more profound excavation. If we visualize the structure of Alai's reception, it may be an unbalanced top-heavy one. An overweighing majority of critics and scholars just pay focus on the "origin" of Alai's works, in other words, his ethnicity-nationality befuddlement, historical cognition and recognition, politics and strategy in identity confirmation and so forth. Alai himself has become a "background" of the background where he grows up and undergoes his maturation in his literary deeds. There are three volumes of Alai's work being translated into the English-speaking world,[9] but only *Red Poppies* stirred up enough academic concentration. But when handling issues in the Chinese-Tibetan relationship across cultural, historical and political spheres, many scholars may find Alai is not an easily manageable author that can flawlessly embrace their conventional analytic and critic tools. How Alai himself can give out his voice after penetrating cultural filtration and distortion to a new language circle? This problem will still haunt us in Alai's future introduction to the English-speaking world and its solution may lie in more in-depth communications amid scholars from different regions.

## Works Cited

Alai. *Red Poppies*. Tr. Goldblatt, Howard and Sylvia Li-chun Lin.Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002.

_____. *The Song of King Gesar*. Tr. Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin. London:

9 Apart from *Red Poppies*, for other two volumes please see: Alai. *The Song of King Gesar*. Trans. Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin. London: Canongate, 2013. And also: Alai. *Tibetan Soul: Stories*. Trans. Karen Gernant and Chen Zeping. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012.

Canongate, 2013.

_____. *Tibetan Soul: Stories*. Tr. Karen Gernant and Chen Zeping. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012.

Baranovich, Nimrod, 2010a. "Literary Liberation of the Tibetan Past: The Alternative Voice in Alai's *Red Poppies*." *Modern China* 36, no. 2: 170–209. Print.

_____, 2010b. "Others No More: The Changing Representation of Non-Han Peoples in Chinese History Textbooks, 1951–2003." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69.1: 85-122. Print.

Choy, Howard Y. F. *Remapping the Past: Fictions of History in Deng's China, 1979-1997*. Leiden: Brill, 2008. Print.

_____. "In Quest (ion) of an 'I': Identity and Idiocy in Alai's *Red Poppies*." *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change* (2008): 225-35. Print.

_____. "Historiographic Alternatives for China: Tibet in Contemporary Fiction by Tashi Dawa, Alai, and Ge Fei." *American Journal of Chinese Studies* (2005): 65-84. Print.

Draggeim, Alexandra. "A Complex Identity: Red Color-coding in Alai's *Red Poppies*." *Asian Highlands Perspectives,* 2015, 35(1): 75-101. Print.

Hladíková, Kamila. "The exotic other and negotiation of Tibetian self: a study of modern Tibetian fiction of the 1980s." (2011). Print.

_____. "The Soul of Tibet: Representations of Landscape in Chinese-medium Literature about Tibet from the End of the 20th Century." *Archiv orientální* 78.1 (2010): 75-95. Print.

Ji Jin 季进. "Translation and Spread of Alai's works in English-speaking World" 英语世界阿来作品的译介与传播 (Yingyu shijie Alai zuopin de yijie yu chuanbo). *Borderland Books, Naturailis Historia and Epics— A Collection of International Symposium on Alai's Works* 边地书、博物志与史诗——阿来作品国际研讨会文集 (Biandishu, bowuzhi yu shishi—Alai zuopin guoji yantaohui wenji). Ed. Alai Workshop 阿来工作室(Alai gongzuoshi). Beijing: n.p,, 2018. 99-113. Print.

Lussier, Mark. Rev. of *Tales of Tibet: Sky Burials, Prayer Wheels, and Wind Horses*, ed. & trans. Herbert J. Batt. *World Literature Today* 77:1 (April–June 2003): 101. Print.

Maconi, Lara. "One Nation, Two Discourses: Tibetan New Era Literature and the Language Debate." *Modern Tibetan literature and social change* (2008): 173-201. Print.

Rigumi, Wokar T. "A Localist Counter-narrative to Nationalist Histories: Alai's *Red Poppies* as Historiographic Metafiction." *Studies on Asia* 2 (2011): 1-14. Print.

Rojas, Carlos. 2010. "Alai and the Linguistic Politics of Internal Diaspora." In Jing Tsu and David Der-wei Wang, eds., *Global Chinese Literature: Critical Essays*. Leidon: Brill, 115–132. Print.

Shakya, Tsering, et al. *Tales of Tibet: Sky Burials, Prayer Wheels, and Wind Horses*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.

_____. "The Development of Modern Tibetan Literature in the People's Republic of China in the 1980s." *Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change* (2008): 61-85. Print.

_____. "The waterfall and fragrant flowers: The development of Tibetan literature since 1950." *Manoa* 12.2 (2000): 28-40. Print.

Tsu, Jing, and David Der-wei Wang, eds. *Global Chinese Literature: Critical Essays*. Brill, 2010. Print.

Venturino, Steven J. "Where is Tibet in World Literature?" *World Literature Today* 78.1 (2004): 51-56. Print.

Wang, Yiyan. "The Politics of Representing Tibet: Alai's Tibetan Native-Place Stories." *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 25.1 (2013): 96-130. Print.

Wu, Fatima. Rev. of *Red Poppies*, by Alai, tr. Howard Goldblatt, Sylvia Li- chun Lin. *World Literature Today*, 77 (2003): 92. Print.

Yue, Gang. "As the Dust Settles in Shangri-La: Alai's Tibet in the era of Sino-globalization." *Journal of Contemporary China* 17. 56 (2008): 543-563. Print.

**Author Profile:**

Chen Xin <201831080045@mail.bun.edu.cn> is a PhD candidate at Beijing Normal University. His research interest is Comparative Literature and World Literature.