

## Allusions and the Translation of Classical Chinese Poetry

### Poetry

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### ABSTRACT

When a translator sees “芳草萋萋” in a traditional Chinese poem, he tends to render it readily into “fragrant grass is rich and thick.” It is natural and simple enough, and the reader of the English text feels nothing special about it. However, the situational connotation concealed in the poem is lost in the process. The translation of allusions thus presents problems difficult to surmount, especially between such languages as English and Chinese of which the culture and writing system are so different. The requirement that a translation should be faithful cannot remove the fundamental gulf between the two languages. Every translation must lack some of the overtones of the original. However faithful we try to be, we have to make difficult decisions.

The purpose of this study is to examine the translation strategies that have been used, and to investigate what factors might be involved in the decision-making. The subjective factors are the translator's personal philosophy or aesthetics of translation and the purpose of the translation. The objective factor is the form and nature of the allusion and its function in the whole work which confine the translators' choices of strategies.

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Traditional Chinese poetry is replete with allusions. It is sometimes condemned as pedantic and artificial, but most of the allusions in traditional Chinese poetry can be reasonably justified by their contributions to the density and complexity of poems and thus to the total poetic effect. A successful allusion helps to make us feel the writer's grasp of the situation he is dealing with, gives his grasp of it with precision, force, and economy.

James R. Hightower believes that "there is often an element of play involved in the use of allusion: the writer at once showing off and giving his reader a chance to match wits with him."<sup>1</sup> Play, in connection with the experience of art, is a major element in aesthetics. Hans-Georg Gadamer, for example, regards play as the clue to ontological explanation of work of art, and argues that "play itself contains its own, even sacred, seriousness"<sup>2</sup> and that the concept of play has played a major role in aesthetics. Even the allusion used as ornament admittedly adds to the pleasure and amusement of reading, depending on the reader's learning and the time and patience he or she is willing to spend on the poem.

James J. Y. Liu briefly illustrates the use of allusions in Classical Chinese poetry with a few well-chosen examples. First, allusions can be used as an economical means of presenting a situation.<sup>3</sup> For example, Tu Fu wrote in a poem:

疾信生平最蕭瑟 暮年詩賦動江關 (杜甫：詠懷古蹟)

Yu Hsin's whole life was nothing but bleakness

But in his last years his poetry move the river pass

Yu Hsin was a poet whom Tu Fu admired. He lived in the Southern and Northern

1. James R. Hightower, "Allusion in the Poetry of T'ao Ch'ien" in Studies in Chinese Poetry and Poetics, ed. Ronald C. Miso (San Francisco: Chinese Material Center, 1978), p.131.

2. Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, ed. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd., 1975), pp91.

3. James J. Y. Liu, The Art of Chinese Poetry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p.132

Dynasties. A native of the south, he was forced to stay in the north and served in the northern court against his will. Therefore his poetry often shows sadness and nostalgia. By alluding to Yu Hsin, Tu Fu suggested that he shared Yu Hsin's misfortune, but that his poetic achievement might compensate for what he had lost in life in other respect. Furthermore, "there may be practical reasons for using allusions, such as when a clandestine love affair is involved, or when political or personal satire is intended. Under such circumstances, allusions afford an obvious way of avoiding scandal or prosecution."<sup>4</sup> In a poem, Li Shang-yin made reference to the legend of Ch'ang Oh, who stole her husband Kin Yi's elixir of life and fled to the moon:

嫦娥應悔偷靈藥 碧海青天夜夜心

Ch'ang Oh should regret having stolen the elixir,

Nightly she faces the green sea and blue sky alone! (tr. James J. Y. Liu)

This poem, Liu believes, was probably written for a Taoist nun (though this argument has been much, but inconclusively) debated, and intended to suggest that the nun in her solitude may regret having taken the vow of chastity. Liu takes this poem as an expression of Li Shang-yin's love for a lady whom he could see often but for some reason could not openly communicate.

Longman Group Ltd., 1976), pp.150-51.

The structure of comparison of an allusion is similar to that of a metaphor. It is composed of three elements: tenor, vehicle and the signified meaning.<sup>5</sup> For example, Tu Fu wrote,

乾坤日夜浮 (杜甫：登岳陽樓)

Day and night the sun and moon on the waves float and start (tr. Innes Herdan)

This line alludes to 水經注: "Tong-tin lake covers 500 li and the sun and moon seem to rise from and set in it." 乾坤 (Heaven and earth) is the tenor, day and night afloat is the

4. James J. Y. Liu (1966), p.136

5. See Geoffrey N. Leech's analysis of metaphor in his A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry (London:

vehicle. The lake covers the earth; the heaven covers the lake. Heaven and earth seems to be afloat on the lake day and night. The magnitude of Dong-tin Lake is what the poet tried to convey to the reader.

Yu-kung Kao and Tsu-lin Mei, borrowing Roman Jakobson's model, suggests that allusion, like metaphor, can be analyzed as an instance of the principle of equivalence. They regard allusion "as a shorthand for historical allusion, which requires the comparison of a contemporary topic to a past event."<sup>6</sup> For example, Yuan Zhen wrote in a poem in memory of his deceased wife when he prospered later in life:

自嫁黔婁百事乖 (元稹·遣悲懷)

When you wed this poor Ch'ien Lou (tr. Innes Herdan)

A hundred things vexed you

Ch'ien Lou, a noted scholar of Chi State in the "Spring and Autumn" era who preferred a life of poverty to seeking wealth and high office. Duke King of Lu offered to bestow him three thousand "zhong" of grain yearly, but he declined. Consequently, he was accorded courteous reception by the King of Chi, who offered to invite him to serve in the court with annual pay of a hundred taels of gold, which he declined again. He led a life of poverty and hardship all his life. The poet, by comparing himself to Ch'ien Lou, regretted that he had been too poor to give his deceased wife a barely satisfactory life when she had still been alive. Another example shows that, apart from similarity, contrast can be no less effective in constituting the principle of equivalence. Tu Fu wrote in his "Autumn Meditations,"

匡衡抗疏功名簿 劉向傳經心事違

A disdained K'uang Heng, as a critic of policy;

As promoter of learning, a Liu Hsiang who failed. (tr. A. C. Graham)

These two lines suggest that Tu Fu wished to emulate K'uang and Liu of the Han

6. Yu-kung Kao and Tsu-lin Mei, "Meaning, Metaphor, and Allusion in T'ang Poetry," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, 1978, pp.291-92.

Dynasty but he succeeded neither as a minister in court nor as a scholar seeking to promote Confucian learning.

The most frequently used allusions are the story of Chang Oh (嫦娥), the story of the Cowherd and the Spinning maid (牛郎織女), the story of clouds and rain in Wu Mountain (巫山雲雨), and the story of "overturning the country and the city" (傾國傾城). These allusions, by repetitive use, have lost their allusive power and developed into clichés or become common Chinese idioms so that they are, for Chinese readers, no longer necessarily linked with their original sources. However, they are still remote from English readers' experiences. This is a cultural barrier a translator have to try to cross.

Concerning the difficulty of crossing this barrier, Lefevere puts it very well, "allusions point to ... the real untranslatable, which does not reside in syntactic transfers or semantic constructions, but rather in the peculiar way in which cultures all develop their won 'shorthand,' which is what allusions really are. A word or phrase can evoke a situation that is symbolic for an emotion or a state of affairs. The translator can render the word or phrase and the corresponding state of affairs without much trouble. The link between the two, which is so intricately bound up with the foreign culture itself, is much harder to translate."<sup>7</sup>

Failure to recognize an allusion leads to errors in translation. Not only novice translators but established masters commit such mistakes as well. This happens more often to key-phrase allusions than to proper-noun allusions because key phrases are mostly common phrases which often fit well into the context and easily escape our notice. For example, Tao Ch'ien wrote in his "Blaming Sons,"

阿宣志學 (陶淵明：責子詩)

A- hsuan does his best (tr. Arthur Waley)

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7. Lefevere, A. Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame (London: Routledge, 1992),

Ah-suen has tried in vain (tr. Charles Budd)

Here “志學” is a reference to Book II “Wei Ching” of Confucian Analects:

子曰：吾十有五而志於學

The Master said, “At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning”

What Tao Ch'ien suggests here is that his son, A-hsuan, is approaching fifteen now. Another example is from Herbert Giles' translation of Po Chu-yi's “The Everlasting Wrong”:

漁陽鼙鼓動地來 (白居易·長恨歌)

But suddenly comes the roll of the fish-skin war-drum (tr. Herbert Giles)

“漁陽” here implies the rebellion of An Lu-shan instead of fish skin. The number of mistranslations shows that allusion should be recognized as a problem in Chinese-to-English translation of classical Chinese poetry.

Ritva Leppihalme's distinction of allusions into two kinds helps a lot in our investigation.<sup>8</sup>

(a) key-phrases allusions

大鵬一日同風起，搏搖直上九萬里 (李白：上李邕)

The biggest eagle can fly along with the wing,

And using his strength will cover ninety thousand li (tr. Rewi Alley)

(b) proper-noun allusions

誰解乘舟尋范蠡？五湖煙水獨忘機。(溫庭筠：利州南渡)

Who would follow wise Fan Li and immerse

His success on the five lakes where mists rise? (tr. Hu Zhuanglin)

In example (a), the two lines are obviously borrowed from Chuang Tzu, in order to praise Li Yung's personality and learning. Fan Li in example (b) is a historical figure,

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8. Ritva Leppihalme, Culture Bumps: An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd., 1997), p.3

who, having helped King Yuei defeat King Wu and recover his country, retired to hermitage with Xi Shi, the famous great beauty.

Strategies for the translation of key-phrase allusion cannot be identical with that of the proper noun allusions. A careful survey shows that a wide range of strategies for both kinds of allusions is used by translators. These employed strategies are outlined below.<sup>9</sup>

#### A) Proper-noun Allusions

##### 1. use the name as such, spelling the sound

###### a) use the name as such

仙人王子喬 Wang Tzu-chiao (tr. H. A. Giles)

###### b) use the name, adding some guidance

黔婁 this poor Ch'ien Lou (tr. Innes Herdan)

##### 2. use the name, adding a detailed explanation for example a footnote

誰解乘舟尋范蠡?

Who has the wisdom to embark

And search for Fan Li\* (Innes Herdan)

##### 3. transfer into English word by word in literal meaning.

###### a) add a footnote

可憐飛燕倚新粧。

"Flying Swallow"\* newly dressed in her finery. (tr. Innes Herdan)

###### b) without adding any explanation

玉環飛燕皆塵土

Jade Bracelet and Flying Swallow all turned to dust? (tr. Irving Y. Lo)

##### 4. replacement of name by a target language name

神女生涯原是夢

9. I borrow Leppihalme's classification with slight modification. See Leppihalme (1997), pp.78-84.

Her life like Fairy Queen was a dream after all (tr. Xu Yuang-zhong)

織女機絲虛夜月

Vega threads her loom in vain by night under the moon (tr. A.C. Graham)

6. omission

a) omit the name but transfer the sense by other means, for example by a

common noun

千金縱買相如賦 (辛棄疾：摸魚兒)

True, a thousand taels of gold could buy a reconciliation (tr. Irving Y. Lo)

Even if favour could be bought back again (tr. Xu Yuang Zhong)

玉環飛燕皆塵土

Both plump and slender beauties returned to dust? (tr. Xu Yuang Zhong)

b) omit the name and the allusion altogether

愚者愛惜費 但爲後世嗤 仙人王子喬 難可與等期 (古詩十九首)

But sages may arise / to call him fool (tr. Charles Budd)

B) Key-phrase Allusions

1. literal translation

漢皇重色思傾國

His Imperial Majesty, a slave to beauty,

Long for a “subverter of empires” (tr. H.A.Giles)

2. extra-allusive guidance added in the text

漢皇重色思傾國

China's Emperor, craving beauty that might shake an empire (tr. Witter Bynner)

3. the use of footnotes given as additional information

一春夢雨常飄瓦 (李商隱：重過聖女祠)

Throughout the spring, a dream-rain\* often flooded the tiles; (tr. James Liu)

\*Dream-rain alludes to the well-known story about King Huai of Ch'u, who had an amorous encounter with the Goddess of Mount Wu in a dream. Since she assumed the forms of cloud and rain,



the expression “cloud and rain” became a common euphemism for sexual intercourse.

4. addition of intra-allusive allusion-signaling features, such as a quotation mark

思傾國 Long for a “subverter of empires” (tr. H. A. Giles)

5. reduction of the allusion to sense by rephrasal

金屋妝成嬌侍夜

When dressed, in secret chamber

Her beauty served the night. (tr. W. J. B. Fletcher)

6. recreation or rewriting

常存抱柱信，豈上望夫臺

My eyes still gaze adoring on my lord (tr. W. J. B. Fletcher)

7. omission of the allusion

常存抱柱信，豈上望夫臺

omitted (tr. W. A. P. Martin)

Why should I climb the look-out (tr. Ezra Pound)

It is impractical to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of all strategies one by one here. Every translator must believe he has tried to seek the best solution after weighing up and considering all possibilities in the complex process. A brief discussion of the two opposite extremes in the range is an expedient.

The favorite strategy of translators was found to be literal translation: an alluded name was retained or a key phrase was translated with minimum change. Such translations can not help causing problem for target language readers. But it is more faithful to the original text, and, if an explanation is added, is more helpful to patient target-language readers to understand what the original text is really about. Otherwise, what the image of the “biggest eagle” can inspire in the Western reader is far from what the fabulous “大鵬” of Chuang Tzu can inspire in the Chinese reader. Besides, without the aid of any explanation, the target-text reader will find H. A. Giles’ “Long for a ‘subverter of empire’” ridiculous and bewildering.

Replacing the name by a target language name is a rarely adopted method. It raises

concerns with the background knowledge of the reader. In the examples above, the target text reader must have been sufficiently informed on astronomy and Spenser to understand the translated text. Besides, behind “織女” there is a story implying sorrowful separation of lovers or spouses, whereas “Vega” is merely the name of a star in the outer space. The translator took a snap course but the result is far from the ideal of equivalence. Yet it is most readily accepted by the English text reader. This is the so-called target-text-oriented approach.

For a certain allusion, a wide variety of strategies may be adopted by different translators. This shows that the type or nature of allusions is, in many cases, not a dominant factor in the choice of solutions. This phenomenon is interesting, and, I think, is worth our examination on what may be related to the choice of translation strategies. Let's look at the following examples:

A) 常存抱柱信，豈上望夫臺？

1) Omitted altogether (W.A.P. Martin)

2) My eyes still gaze adoring on my lord (tr. W.J.B. Fletcher)

3) ... Why should I climb the look-out? (tr. Ezra Pound)

4) We swore to be true with a “beam-clasping” faith

And the thought of his absence was pain (tr. C. Gaunt)

5) I often thought that you were the faithful man

Who clung to the bridgepost,

That I should never be obliged to ascend to the

Looking-for-Husband Ledge. (tr. Amy Lowell)

6) You always kept the faith of Wei-sheng,

Who waited under the bridge, unafraid of death,

I never knew I was to climb the Hill of Wang-fu

And watch for you these many days. (tr. S. Obata)

7) That even unto death I would await you by my post

And would never lose heart in the tower of silent watching. (tr. Witter Bynner)

8) Sooner die than break faith, you declared. What would life be without you?

It was impossible to contemplate. (tr. Weng Xian-liang)

9) Rather than break faith, you declared you'd die.

Who knew I'd live alone in tower high? (tr. Xu Yuan-zhong)

The first line alludes to a story in Chuang Tzu: when the girl Wei Sheng had sworn to meet under the bridge didn't show up, and the water rose to meet him instead, he kept his appointment and died there, embracing a pillar of the bridge.

莊生曉夢迷蝴蝶 (李商隱)

1) Master Chuang was confused by his morning dream of the butterfly;

(tr. James J.Y. Liu)

2) The sage of his loved butterflies day-dreaming; (tr. John Turner)

3) Chuang-tzu\* dreaming at dawn

He was a butterfly, (tr. Innes Herdan)

4) Dawn-dreaming Chuang-tzu, the hovering butterfly;

Inspiring the Emperor' heart haunting the cuckoos, (tr. Robert Payne)

5) Chuang-tzu dawned, dreamed

Of turning butterfly, (tr. Shui Chien-tung & Keith Bosley)

For the name 莊生, versions no.1, 3, and 5 translate it by the sound, and version no.3 adds a footnote explaining the story of the Taoist philosopher's dream. Version no.2 omits the name but replaces it with a common name, probably for fear that the readers may be unfamiliar with it. Chuang-tzu is a famous Taoist philosopher. He once dreamt he turned into a butterfly and on waking could not be sure whether he was a man who was dreaming of becoming a butterfly or a butterfly who was dreaming of becoming a man. The story alluded is familiar to almost all educated Chinese readers, but to readers of the translation who do not know the story, something is missing in the reading. The variety of strategies used in the published translations may make us curious about what was happening in the mind of the translators when they were tackling them.

Ritva Leppihalme argues that the familiarity of an allusion for readers in the target

culture is a factor of vital importance in decision-making.<sup>10</sup> This is true in the case of translation between two Western language cultures with certain degree of bilateral contacts. In this case, dealing with cross-cultural allusions such as proper names or key phrases from the bible, Greek myths, and Shakespeare shall take familiarity into consideration. Sometimes they are easier to translate because standard translations come in handy. In the case of translating classical Chinese poetry into English, nonexistence of such transcultural allusions raises the difficulty of the task.

Some allusions, especially common-noun key-phrase allusions, fit well into the context, reconcile with other elements into compelling units, and successfully help present the feeling and the situation. The lines make perfect sense without recognizing the allusions. This kind of allusions can be dealt with by no other than literal translation. For example:

水調歌頭 (蘇軾)

我欲乘風歸去 又恐瓊樓玉宇  
高處不勝寒 起舞弄清影  
何似在人間

1. Yes, I would wish to mount the winds and wander there  
at home, but dread those towers and halls of jade  
Set so immeasurably cold and high  
To tread a measure, to sport with fleshless shade,  
how alien to our frail mortality! (tr. John Turner)

2. But I'm afraid the crystalline palace would be  
Too high and too cold for me,  
I rise and dance, with my shadow I play,  
On high as on earth, would it be as gay? (tr. Xu Yuang-zhong.)

“The crystalline palace”(瓊樓玉宇) alludes to Dah-Ye-Shi-Yi-Jih(大業拾遺記): Chu

10. Leppihalme (1997), p.80.

Chien-yo was admiring the moon on the river bank, when someone asked him what there was to be admired. Chu replied laughingly: "Follow me and take a look." Presently, they saw the moon cover half of the sky, with a shiny crystalline palace in it. "Too high and too cold for me" (不勝寒) covertly alludes to the story in Ming-Huang-Tzar-Luh(明皇雜錄): On a mid-autumn night, Yei Ching-nern invited Ming Huang (the emperor) to visit the moon palace. Yei told his majesty to wear a fur coat when they were about to set out. On reaching the moon palace, they found it unbearably cold indeed. These two lines describe the cold and height of the moon, suggesting the cleanly brightness of the moon, and meanwhile indirectly express the poet's inner conflicts of alternation between yearning for the heaven and staying on the earth. In the next line "I rise and dance, with my shadow I play", some of the words also occur in Li Po's "Drinking Alone By Moonlight," which is undoubtedly familiar to Su Shih. However, ignorance of it does not hinder our appreciation of the beauty of the poem, and we can't be sure whether Su Shih's adaptation of it was conscious or not. The images themselves are all vivid and forceful enough to convey the feelings and attitudes. Thus, the literal translation either with or without footnotes is the appropriate policy. In this case, the structure and the nature of the allusion is the predominant factor in determining the translation strategy.

Another example shows that some common-noun allusions fit into the context unobtrusively and make perfect senses without need of knowledge of the sources. These allusions, when recognized, adds overtones that reinforce the strength and complexity of the whole work:

萋萋滿別情 (白居易: 草) Po Chu-yi: Grass

1. I find the endless grasses

Heavy with regret. (tr. Innes Herdan)

2. Deep green are these parting thoughts of you. (tr. Zhang Ting-chen & Bruce M. Wilson)

3. My sorrow grows like grass o'ergrown. (tr. Xu Yuan Zhong)

芳草萋萋鸚洲 (崔顥：黃鶴樓) Ts'ui Hao : Yellow Crane Pavilion

Fragrant grasses spring and spread

On Parrot Island, (tr. Innes Herdan)

On Parrot Islet sweet green grass grows fast and thick. (tr. Xu Yuan Zhong.)

On Parrot Isle the fragrant grass in wild

Luxuriance grows. (tr. W.J.B. Fletcher)

“The fragrant grass” is easy to translate because it can readily be put into English, but an experienced reader of Chinese poetry will find its origin in Ch'u Ts'e (楚辭): “When you left it was spring, the grass grew, how rich and thick!” Hereafter the term is used from time to time to connote the sadness and loneliness of parting. It is customary in traditional Chinese literature to associate description of natural scenery with interpersonal relationship. Another example, which is from Nineteen Old Poems (古詩十九首), shows the frequent use of it:

涉江採芙蓉，蘭澤多芳草 (Nineteen Old Poems)

The red hibiscus and the reed,

The fragrant flowers of marsh and mead, (H.A. Giles)

Crossing the river I pluck the lotus flowers;

In the orchid-swamps are many fragrant herbs. (Arthur Waley)

I cross the river to pluck hibiscus,

In the orchid marsh, many scented plants. (Dell R. Hales)

In the above examples, only Zhang Ting-chen and Bruce M. Wilson's translation retains the connoted meaning of the parting thoughts by means of adding extra-allusive guidance in the text. Xu Yuan Zhong adds the word “sorrow” in the text. In other translations, the images create the situation effectively but the connotation is lost.

Another example is from Li Shang-yin's “The Jeweled Zither”:

滄海月明珠有淚 藍田日暖玉生煙

1. In the vast sea, under a bright moon, pearls have tears;

On Indigo Mountain, in the warm sun, jade engenders smoke. (tr. James J.Y. Liu)

2. Tears that are pearls, in ocean moonlight streaming;

Jade mists the sun distils from Sapphire Sward: (tr. John Turner)

Each of the two lines conceals an allusion, which is known only to knowledgeable students of Chinese literature. Since Li Shang-yin's poems, especially "the Jeweled Zither" to which these two lines belong are highly ambiguous and obscure, familiarity with the sources makes little contribution to the reader's appreciation of the lines. Besides, the inter-connection of the rich and copiously suggestive images has successfully added to the strength and complexity of the whole poem. A literal translation is the best choice to produce the total effect that the original poem intends to achieve.

Yu-kung Kao and Tsu-lin Mei draw a distinction between two types of allusion, according to their effects of the whole poems:<sup>11</sup>

- a) local allusion--the double meaning accrues only to the line containing it
- b) global allusion--the added meaning affects not only its vehicle but the whole poem as well

For the local allusion, Kao and Mei pick two lines from Tu Fu's "Autumn Meditation" (秋興) for example: "A disdained K'uang Heng, as a critic of policy / As a promoter of learning, a Liu Hsiang who failed." Tu Fu's "The Temple of Yu" (禹廟) provides an appropriate example of the global allusion. James R. Hightower thinks in the global effect the allusion is the subject of the poem, and unless it is identified you do not know what the poem is about. A special category, "詠史詩" (poems celebrating historical persons) are the most obvious kind. Hightower discusses Tao Ch'ien's "In Praise of the Two Tutors Surnamed Shu" (詠二疏) detailedly in his brilliant essay on Tao Chi'en. Lu Lun's "Frontier Songs" (盧綸塞下曲), Wang Wei's "The Old

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11. Yu-kung Kao and Tsu-lin Mei, "Meaning, Metaphor, and Allusion in T'ang Poetry," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 1978, p.330



General”(王維：老將行) and “The Legend of the Peach Blossom Valley”(桃源行) belong to this category. J. Lambert and H. van Gorp’s distinction between macro-level and micro-level is the same as Kao and Mei’s dichotomy: “the allusions operating on the macro-level involves the internal structure of the entire text and its interpretation. The micro-level, on the other hand, is the lexico-semantic and stylistic level.”<sup>12</sup> This difference of allusions plays an important role in the choice of translation strategies. When the allusion is the subject matter of a poem, it can not be omitted in the process of translating. The most likely strategy is a literal translation, sometimes with footnotes or guidance added in the text. Xu Yuang-zhong’s translation of Lu Lun’s “Frontier Songs” is an example. Meng Haoran’s “Dining in Taoist Priest Mei’s Mountain Hut(孟浩然：宴梅道士山房) is full of Taoist allusions which are hardly understandable to English readers without the aid of explanation. Producing a Taoist atmosphere is the subject matter of the poem, so these allusions can not either be omitted or rephrased. Sometimes macro-level allusions and micro-level allusions coexist in a poem, or the latter are embedded in the former. For this “compound” structure of allusions, the strategies for macro-level and micro-level allusions are considered. In Li Po’s “You Should Not Cross the River” (李白：公無渡河), the subject matter alludes to an ancient poem in which a woman was bewailing her husband’s being drowned in the river. Some historical figures such as Emperor Yao and Yu and the phrases borrowed from Shi Ching (Book of Poetry) are embedded in it, operating on the micro level. Another example is, again, Li Po’s “To Li Yung” (李白：上李邕). Li Yung was a famous poet and calligrapher, and an outspoken official. Li Po praises Li Yung’s talent and promising future by comparing him to the giant eagle in the fable of Chuang Tzu. This is the subject of the whole poem, to which attached an allusion to Confucian Analects in which Confucius said we should stand in awe of the rising generation. This poem contains an allusion operating on the macro-level and one on the micro-level.

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12. J. Lambert and H. van Gorp, “On Describing Translations” in T. Hermans (ed.) The Manipulation of Literature. Studies in Literary Translation (London: Croon Helm, 1985), pp.42-53.



Translation is a complex mental process, which can be interfered by various factors. Elaborate system of classification seems impractical and misleading. Still, we can try to visualize what happens during the process; what problems a translator encounters and what factors he has to consider.

In this investigation, it would be legitimate to note that the omission of an allusion or replacement by a more familiar target language name is seldom used, as they can not escape resulting in loss of the message conveyed by the allusion. Admittedly, in translation the gap between the spirit of the original text and that of its reproduction must be accepted. The question is how big the gap can be accepted. A conscientious translator has to make effort to bridge the gulf, so he has to make decision among a wide range of strategies taking into account subjective and objective factors. The translator may not always be conscious of using strategies, nor may he have developed a systemized method of dealing with allusions. However, certain factors do exist in the translation process. Objective factors such as the structure and nature of allusions may confine the alternatives of strategies on the part of the translator, as we have shown above. Subjectively, the translator's philosophy or aesthetics of translation plays an important role in the choice of strategies.

Xu Yuan-Zhong, the distinguished Chinese scholar and translator, thinks a verse translation should be "faithful to the original less in form than in sense. Or in other words, a poetic translation should be as beautiful as the original in sense, in sound and if possible, in form."<sup>13</sup> His attitude toward translation exhibits manifestly in his translation of Classical Chinese poetry. He places emphasis upon poetic qualities such as the diction, the rhyme, and the rhythm, and frequently replaces allusions by common nouns, seldom adding footnotes. For example:

千金縱買相如賦

Even if favour could be bought back again

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13. Xu Yuan-zhong, Loh Bei-yei, and Wu Juntao, ed., *300 Tang Poems: A New Translation* (Taipei: Bookman Books, Ltd., 2000), p.6.

玉環飛燕皆塵土

Both plump and slender beauties returned to dust

He even tries the method of replacement by a target language allusion:

神女生涯原是夢

Her life like Fairy Queen was a dream

In her translation of 300 Tang Poems, Innes Herdan tries to keep as close to the originals as possible. She adds footnotes to almost all allusions, for she thinks "Chinese poets, passionate lovers of their own country, and each attached in particular to those regions which were familiar to him, would have a whole range of associations for these names which is missing with us."<sup>14</sup> Although she admits Ezra Pound, whose exorbitantly free translation of Chinese poetry rouses much controversy, "opened up a new vista... brought the feeling of T'ang China so close to our sense that we felt all that life with a new immediacy,"<sup>15</sup> she chooses to follow the school of literal translation. Her book is printed in a bilingual English-Chinese format, for the purpose that English students of Chinese, and Chinese students of English can read the two side by side and form their own judgment.

On the other hand, A. C. Graham objects to the use of footnotes. He postulates that to explain an allusion is not necessarily sufficient to make it function in a poem. He believes it might be "better tactics to hurry the reader past it rather than delay him with a note."<sup>16</sup> This attitude could be debatable in that a poem, especially a good poem is not intended for the reader to "hurry past." Poetry can be regarded as a kind of language that says more and says it more intensely than ordinary language does. Accordingly, no one can doubt that appreciating poetry requires attention and patience. Jonathan Culler puts

14. Innes Herdan, "Translator's Preface" in her translation of *300 Tang Poems* (Taipei: The Far East Book Co., Ltd, 1973)

15. Innes Herdan, "Translator's Preface" in her translation of *300 Tang Poems* (Taipei: The Far East Book Co., Ltd, 1973)

16. A. C. Graham, *Poems of the Late T'ang* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), p.29.

it very well, "We must read more slowly, savouring the delicate intricacy of the texture, playing with these riddles and shorthands. We cannot devour or gobble up but must graze, carefully nibbling each piece of grass"<sup>17</sup> Besides, Graham himself could not avoid using footnotes here and there. In one of the footnotes he went so far as to suspect "靈犀" to be an aphrodisiac.

John Turner admits his intention is "to make the translation of a poem read like a poem itself."<sup>18</sup> His work shows his predilection to replace a proper noun with a common noun. For example, he changes "Chuang Tzu" into "the sage" for the sake of smoothing the flow of reading.

Robert Payne aims at literal translation, "without paraphrases."<sup>19</sup> His treatment of allusions is always retaining them with minimum change.

James J. Y. Liu is the one who specifically recognizes allusions as a problem area. In discussing Li Shang-yin's poetry, he said, "the use of allusions is a common poetic devices in Chinese and forms an essential part of Li Shang-yin's art as a poet. All allusions in poetry, if properly used, are not merely substitutes for common nouns or abstract epithets but add something to the total meaning and effect of the poem."<sup>20</sup> The importance he places upon allusions in Classical Chinese poetry makes him follow the school of literal translation and retain all allusions with comparatively quite a few footnotes and lengthy commentaries added in his translation of Li Shang-yin's poetry. To clarify the scene, Liu draws a distinction between "the poet-translator" and "the critic

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17. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1978), p.236.

18. Lu Shu-xiang and Xu Yuan-zhong, ed., *Gems of Classical Chinese Poetry in Various English Translations* (Taipei: Bookman Books, Ltd., 1995), p.9.

19. Lu Shu-xiang and Xu Yuan-zhong, ed.(1995), p.9

20. James J. Y. Liu, *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p.38.

translator,"<sup>21</sup> (I would rather replace the latter with "the scholar-translator") and that these two kinds of translators have different aims and different readership. He proceeds to argue "such critic-translators as Innes Herdan and Hans Frankel naturally wish to produce readable English versions of Chinese Poetry, but their primary concern is to demonstrate certain features and qualities of the original, rather than writing good poems in English."<sup>22</sup> In the hands of poet-translators like W. A. P. Martin and Ezra Pound, allusions are often either omitted or rephrased. For example, in Li Po's 長干行, such allusions as 青梅竹馬 and 抱柱信 are omitted entirely by both of them. The allusion of 望夫台 is omitted by Martin and replaced with a common noun "lookout" by Pound. Ezra Pound's translation, because of his fame and influence in the literary field, has aroused vehement controversy over whether his work is translation or recreated text instead. A critic-translator like Herdan and Liu himself would retain all the allusions and add notes to explain their significance and poetic effect. The translation following this approach tends to be criticized for being prosaic or too academic. We can say the poet-translator follow the approach which is more receiver- and target-text oriented, whereas the critic-translator follow the source-text oriented approach. This corresponds to Nida and Taber's theory that "translation – because of the fundamental disparity it reveals between source text and target text – will depend in very large measure upon the purpose to be accomplished by the translation in question."<sup>23</sup>

To sum up, the dominant factors in the decision-making process are as follows:

1. the structure and nature of the allusion and its function in the whole work
2. the purpose of the translation
3. the translator's philosophy or poetics of translation

Sometimes the translator may make decision on a case-by-case basis. Of course, the

21. James J. Y. Liu, The Interlingual Critic: Interpreting Chinese Poetry (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p.37.

22. James J. Y. Liu, (1982), pp. 38-9.

23. E. A. Nida and C. Taber, Theory and Practice of Translating (Leiden: Brill, 1969), p.33.

decision-making process is not so simple in that different types of allusions may combine in a poem, and some translation situation is characterized by a certain combination of factors. Clearly, the source-language reading competence is not sufficient to qualify a translator to cope with this task. The requirement of biculturalization is expected of a qualified translator.

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## 典故與中國古典詩的翻譯

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### 摘 要

中國古典詩中大量使用典故，對翻譯者構成極大的挑戰。可能造成誤譯，可能譯出後原有的效果盡失，或大打折扣；面對各種可能的翻譯策略，譯者不免躊躇，顧此失彼恐難避免，得失之間卻費思量。例如「芳草萋萋」一辭，按照字面譯成“fragrant grass is rich and thick”是再自然不過了，忠於原文，對譯者也簡便。可是西方讀者讀來只不過是很普通的草的意象而已，其源自中國傳統的暗示意義在翻譯的過程即喪失了。本文即在檢視中國古典詩的英譯者處理典故時所採用的策略，以及影響策略決定的有關因素。芬蘭學者 Dr. Ritva Leppihalme 認為典故的熟悉度是選擇翻譯策略的決定性因素，作者認為此說法只適用於有共同文化背景的歐洲語言之間的互譯，歐系語言有諸如聖經、莎士比亞、希臘神話、希臘悲劇等跨文化的典故。中國古典詩的英譯，典故的熟悉度幾乎不存在，對翻譯策略沒有影響。主要的影響因素是典故的性質與形式典故在全詩中的作用，以及譯者本人的翻譯美學觀點。

關鍵字：翻譯、典故、中國古典詩