

TRANSLATING CLASSICAL CHINESE POETRY INTO ENGLISH: CHALLENGES
AND A POSSIBLE SOLUTION—A CASE STUDY OF TRANSLATING LI PO'S
“GRIEVANCE ON JADED STEPS”

by

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(Under the Direction of Dezsó Benedek)

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, my argument is twofold: first, the inadequacy of translating Chinese poems into English is inherent and unavoidable; second, the inadequacy of poetical translation can only be compensated by means beyond translation. I use the translation of Li Po's poem—玉阶怨 (Grievance on Jaded Steps)—as a case study to demonstrate the complexity of translation. Three translations of this poem are presented for comparison and analysis. The analysis is followed by a discussion of the causes of the inherent insufficiencies in translating classical Chinese poetry into English. I maintain that differences at both the linguistic and aesthetic levels pose challenges for poetical translation. I conclude the thesis by suggesting a possible way to compensate for the inherent inadequacy of translating classical Chinese poems into English.

INDEX WORDS: poetical translation, inadequacy, mode of reading

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BA, Sichuan University, 2006

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2012

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May 2012

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein said, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” (Wittgenstein 1953) Throughout my study of the literature of other cultures, I have found that my understanding and appreciation of these literary works are both constructed upon and limited by conventions of my primary language, as well as about the concepts and ways of thinking within that linguistic system. This awareness is, perhaps, shared by all who undertake the endeavor of studying the literature of other cultures. We speak a language, yet there are many languages; each language represents a culture and a world of meanings, signifying the signified defined by the culture and the world of meanings it represents. While we all admit the limits of language and that the ideas and concepts in one language may not sufficiently be translated into another, we also recognize the mediating capacity shared by all languages to connect the speaker to what s/he means. It is this same capacity of language that makes translation a possible task as well as an indispensable means for cross-cultural and comparative literature inquiries.

Just recently, Chinese literature has once again begun to draw a great deal of interest from American academia as a response to global proclivities toward learning the Chinese language. The most immediate previous wave of interest in Chinese culture came during the 1980s, when China was opened up to the world. Chinese classics, including philosophy, history and literature, were translated into English and were introduced to the

U.S. With China emerging as a major economic power in the new century, more and more people in the U.S are starting to study Chinese language and culture. This makes it all the more necessary to examine or re-examine “the Chinese literature in English translation”. I use quotation marks because the translated texts of Chinese literature could misrepresent the original Chinese text in one way or another. When Chinese people talk about Chinese literature, it is almost impossible for them to evade classical Chinese poetry. As the foundational text of Chinese literature, classical Chinese poetry is the beginning of Chinese literature, and for the longest time in history, it had been the dominant literary genre. Stephen Owen noted the significant status of classical Chinese poetry in Chinese civilization by saying, “a nineteenth century merchant, a Buddhist monk, and a Confucian official may have held profoundly different values; the nature and depth of their educations may have differed greatly; but all three would probably have known, loved, and memorized a few of the same poems by Li Po. They would have memorized the poems as children and recited them throughout their lives when the occasion seemed appropriate.” (Owen, *Anthology* xxxix) Indeed, classical Chinese poetry is not only the foundation of Chinese literature, it also exerts tremendous influence on Chinese culture. It is so influential that in many cases, people even identify classical Chinese poetry as Chinese literature and the essence of Chinese culture. It is in classical Chinese poetry that Chinese literary and cultural traditions are shaped and preserved. *The Book of Songs*, believed to be compiled by Confucius himself, is the first collection of Chinese poetry in Chinese literary history. In this collection, poems are divided into three sections; “Airs of the States” contains poems of love and courtship as well as poems about public concerns, such as political satire, etc. They assume the voice of ordinary

people, and the language is usually marked by simplicity and straightforwardness; “Hymns” and “Eulogies” are selected ritual and sacrificial songs of the Western Zhou (Kern 20). As the most significant book in Chinese poetry and literature, *The Book of Songs* laid the foundation for Chinese poetic traditions and prescribed poetry’s function as “a social act” (Owen, *Anthology* 371) reflecting poet’s sincere feelings about the society and government of his time. Poets of later dynasties in Chinese history are always inclined to allude to poems in *The Book of Songs*, or rework some of the poetical themes into their poetry.

The dominance of poetry in Chinese literature means that translating Chinese literary works into English involves mostly translating Chinese poetry into English. The earliest translation of Chinese poetry in Western tradition was done by French symbolist poet Theophile Gautier, who was inspired by the different poetic quality found in Chinese poetry and composed poetry accordingly (Xie 4). During the late nineteenth century, sinologists James Legge and Herbert Giles translated a large numbers of Chinese poems into English. Their translation, while targeted at a larger ordinary readership, is invariably marked by the Victorian poetic style, displaying similar features of meter, rhyme, and diction as poems from the Victorian Era, and completely domesticizing the strange Chineseness into normative Victorian poeticism(Xie 5). Arthur Waley’s translation of Chinese poems ignored the rhyme of the original Chinese poem and represented each Chinese character by a stress in English. He believed that the content of the original Chinese poem is more important than its form (Cohen 35). It was not until the early twentieth century that large volumes of classical Chinese poetry were translated into English. Among them, there is Helen Waddell’s *Lyrics from the Chinese*. Waddell’s

translation of Chinese poetry inherited Legge's and Giles's Victorian style treatment. When Pound published *Cathay* in 1915, classical Chinese poetry began to exert influence on modern American poetics. Modern scholars of Chinese literature, such as Stephen Owen, Zong-qi Cai, and Wai-lim Yip translated large volumes of Chinese poetry into English.

Translation has never been viewed as an easy task. Literary translation always attracts more criticism than appreciation. Rabassa termed literary translation as “being a kind of bastard art, an intermediate form, and as such always vulnerable to attack” (Rabassa 21). Poetical translation, as the highest form of literary translation, is universally acknowledged as the most challenging, so much so that some translation critics even claim that it is impossible to translate poems of one language into another. To quote Robert Frost, “poetry is what gets lost in translation”. Christopher Caldwell also said that poetry is not translatable because the aesthetic qualities of poetry do not survive translation (Caldwell, 143). Such assertions of poems' untranslatability have been rejected by many scholars. Bassnett attacked Robert Frost's comment as “immensely silly”, arguing that poetry is not something intangible, ineffable; it is constructed by language and therefore can be translated across languages (Bassnett, *Constructing* 57). Yet, Robert Frost's and Caldwell's remarks do speak to the intimidating challenges inherent in poetical translation. Shelly summarized the difficulty of poetical translation in this way: “it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its color and odor, as to seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet” (Bassnett, *Constructing* 58). By making an analogy between translating poems across languages and studying the physical qualities of a

violet, Shelley pointed out the difficulties involved in the two major tasks of poetical translation: understanding “the creation of a poet” and transfer such understanding into another language. Neither of these tasks can be made easy. Over the years, many studies have been conducted to discover better ways to translate poems. Many of them, however, only deepen our understanding of the complicated nature of poetical translation without offering a viable means to make up the deficiencies of translation. The author of this thesis argues that the inadequacy of translating Chinese poems into English is inherent and unavoidable. The author further argues that since the deficiency in translation is inherent, it is futile to seek means within translation to make up the deficiencies. Acknowledging the inherent insufficiencies of translating Chinese poems into English, the author goes on to discuss the causes of the inadequacy through examinations at both the linguistic and aesthetic levels. Lastly, the author wishes to seek means beyond translation to compensate for the inherent inadequacy of translating Chinese poems into English. The present study begins with a literature review of translation theories as a theoretical foundation for the author’s argument. By examining translation theories, including those specifically on literary translation and poetical translation, the author finds that each translation theory, although having its own merits, is partial—at best they may offer a solution to problems in some aspects of translation with sacrifices being made in other aspects. The translation of Li Po’s poem—“Grievance on Jaded Steps”—is used as a case study to strengthen the author’s argument in concrete examples. Three different translations of this poem are presented and analyzed. By reading and comparing these translations against the original poem the author wishes to demonstrate the complexity of translating classical Chinese poems into English; evaluating these

translations by various translation theories, the author wishes to illustrate the intricacy in evaluating the quality of translation. The analysis is followed by a discussion of the causes of the inherent insufficiencies in translating classical Chinese poetry into English. The author concludes this thesis by suggesting a possible way to compensate for the inherent inadequacy of translating Chinese poems into English.

CHAPTER 2

THE CURSE OF THE BABEL

In this section, I offer a review of translation theories from both the Western world and China. A large number of translation theories approach the issue of translation from a purely linguistic perspective, and attempt to address general questions in translations. I refer to this type of translation theories as general translation theory. Literary translation theories specifically deal with problems in translating literary works. My review begins with general translation theories. Instead of giving a detailed list of all general translation theories, I choose to highlight some of the most influential ones. I then move to reviewing literary translation theories. The reason for such arrangement is to show that at the linguistic level, translation has its limitations. In literary translation, the linguistic level limitations are compounded by the discrepancy between different literary and cultural traditions. It is a theoretical support for my argument that there are inherent deficiencies in translation and the inherent inadequacy of translation renders translation as a futile means to make up the deficiencies in translations.

In the Western world, cultural communication between different countries is a long established tradition. The practice of translation dates back to very early times in history. As Lefevere points out, “from republican Rome onward, translation has been used in language teaching in the European educational system” (Lefevere, *Translating* 6). The philosophy of translation was essentially developed at the same time, as most translators are philosophers and men of letters themselves. Over the centuries, many translation

theories have developed as the need for translations grew. As an ancient craft of language art, translation is defined by its uses and existence (Rabassa 21). “Faithful translation,” as Lefevere argued has always been a central notion of translation in the Western tradition (Lefevere, *Constructing*15).

The early translation theories in the Western world are marked by translators’ debates on literal translation vs. free translation as attempts to define if faithfulness to the source text occurs at lexical level or semantic level. As early as 46 BCE, Cicero discussed his translating strategies and approaches in *De optimo genere oratorum*:

And I did not translate them as an interpreter, but an orator, keeping the same ideas and forms, or as one might say, the ‘figures’ of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage. And in so doing, I did not hold it necessary to rend word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language

(Munday 19)

In this passage, Cicero touched on two important aspects in translation: the source text and the usage of the target language. By claiming it is not “necessary to render word for word,” Cicero noted that the task of translation is not a transfer of words across languages but a transfer of “ideas,” “forms,” “general style,” and the “force of the language.” Such transfers also require conformation to the usage of the target language. Cicero’s translation philosophy is backed by St. Jerome, who is also against a word-for-word translation.

In an almost similar disparagement against literal translation, St. Jerome summarized his approach to translation as:

Now I not only admit but freely announce that in translating from the Greek-except

of course in the case of the Holy Scripture, where even the syntax contains a mystery-I render not word-for-word, but sense-for-sense

(Munday 20)

St. Jerome used the word “sense” to capture, in Cicero’s terms, the “idea”, “form,” “style” and “the force of the language”. By a sense-for-sense translation, not only the meaning of the source text is translated, but that which is carried beyond the source language is also translated into the target language.

In China, the practice of translation dates back to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25AD-220AD) when the flourishing of Buddhism in China urged Buddhist monks to translate the Buddhist Sutra from Sanskrit into Chinese. Taking these religious texts as holy, the Buddhist monks believed that the translation of Buddhist Sutra must be loyal to the original text word-for-word as sacred words from Buddha can never be altered. They went to the extreme of adopting a rigid word-for-word translation strategy without realizing that language is culturally and contextually bound. Not surprisingly, the translated Sutra in Chinese was almost incomprehensible. Translators in subsequent eras went to another extreme by recreating the original text into idiomatic Chinese without considering the style of the original text. Perhaps it is this extreme that leads Lefevre concludes the Chinese tradition of translation stays closer to the interpreting situation, and comparatively emphasize less on fidelity to the original text (Lefevre, *Constructing* 15). This is an erroneous observation in that the root reason for this so-called interpretation situation is not because ancient Chinese translators pay less attention to faithfulness, rather, it is a response to the former overly rigid, incomprehensible translation. Their concern of conforming to idiomatic target language usage seems

override their emphasis on fidelity to the original text, but it is their belief that a faithful translation should display a high degree of idiomaticity. Their mistakes were later corrected by a well-learned Buddhist monk, Xuan Zang, during the Tang Dynasty, who advocated preserving the style of the source text. From then on, translation practice in China is marked by a free translation with considerations given on the style of the source text.

The early translation theories in both the Western world and China highlight stylistic considerations in translation, asserting that free translation, instead of literal translation, allows a better preservation of the content, form and style of the source text. This was a significant realization that laid the foundation for useful literary translation theories, because different languages are different systems of coding. A word-for-word translation could work perfectly when translating a single word signifying a common object, such as apple, into other languages, but when it comes to translating a sentence into another language, a word-for-word translation is futile. Free translation allows translators to express the meaning of the source text by using the language in ways that conform to the target language usage while preserving the meaning of the source text.

The general agreement on free translation, while solving the most essential puzzle about translation theory, actually opens up more questions for both translation practice and translation philosophy. Almost all translation theories on translation practice in later times can all be boiled down to addressing three basic questions: what is a faithful translation, what is the border line for translator's freedom, and how the translator should exercise the freedom to ensure fidelity to the source text. For example, Schleiermacher believes a faithful translation should display foreignness, as translation invariably

involves bringing new elements into the target language (Munday 27). Translators have to use a special language, which conforms to the usage of the target language, but also embraces the foreignness of the source text to address untranslatable words, concepts etc. It is translators' responsibility to deliver the same impression to readers of the target language as the source text would give to native speakers of the original language. The significance of Schleimacher's work is that, for the first time in translation theory, foreignness is being regarded as a necessary quality of the translated work. Previously, many theories are downplaying foreignness by over emphasizing the importance of idiomatic target language use.

In line with Schleimacher's endorsement of foreignness is Eugene Nida's "formal equivalence theory", which asserts that translation is the medium for the target language speakers to gain an understanding of the source text in its original cultural context. The rationale of this theory is based on Nida's attempt to explore the word meaning in the text through a scientific model. According to Nida, the word meaning is acquired in cultural context. It can be differentiated at three levels: linguistic level, referential level and emotive level. Focusing on the form and content of the original text itself, Nida further argued that the translation of the original text should match, as closely as possible, the different elements in the original language so as to create a the original cultural context (Nida 159). Comparing with Schleimacher's thoery, Nida's formal equivalence theory poses more constraints on translator's freedom to recreate the original text into the target language, as it calls for translators to pay keen attention to the structure of the original text, and match the structure of the translated text with the original text.

On the other hand, Nida's dynamic equivalence theory seems to release the translators from the yoke of matching the structure between the translation and the original text. The dynamic equivalence theory advocates that translation should display "naturalness" by conforming to the target language convention. In this theory, Nida focuses on the relationship between the reader and the text. He pointed out that "the relationship between receptor and (the translated) message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the (original) message" (Nida 159). Therefore according to dynamic equivalence theory, translators should exercise the freedom to ensure the relationship between the target language speaker and the translated text is essentially the same as the original language speaker and the original text. As suggested by Nida, this "principle of equivalent effect" can be achieved by orienting toward the readers' linguistic and cultural needs and the target language that displays "complete naturalness of expression" (Nida, 159).

In addition to translation theories of translation practice which serve as practical guidelines and often used for evaluating translation, there are translation theories specifically focusing on informing our understanding of translation with applicable general models to evaluate the quality of translation, examining the degree of faithfulness of the translated text to the original text. Perhaps the most comprehensive of such translation theories is House's model of translation quality assessment, which draws its theoretic strength from Halliday's model of discourse analysis. In her model, House takes an analytical approach to treat the text in terms of its register, field, tenor, mode and language. To reduce the complexity of the terminologies in her model, House simplified her assessment means into lexical, syntactic and textual means (Munday 97). The

operation of House's model calls for a comparative analysis of the source text and the translated text through the three means, respectively, to establish a profile for each text, and the comparison of these two profiles will yield results for the quality assessment. While House's model is comprehensive, it may not be appealing as such analysis is time-consuming.

Baker is one of the few theoreticians who recognized that faithfulness to the original text is multileveled. She differentiated the levels as: at word, above-word, grammar, thematic structure, cohesion and pragmatic (Baker 5). Baker's theory became a foundation for later theoreticians to study and develop translation theories from a linguistic perspective. Later translation theories are built upon the previous ones but display greater theoretical advancement with regard to linguistic content. While such linguistic translation theories are becoming more and more scientific and idealistic, they are also more unrealistic and inapplicable. The truth is translation practitioners are not necessarily linguists, and as translation is more and more widely used for cross-cultural communication purposes, translation theories incorporating cultural studies are emerging and taking precedence. Lefevere's theory of translating as rewriting points to the interesting phenomenon that factors such as "power, ideology, institution and manipulation" play a decisive role in the acceptance or rejection of a certain text (Lefevere, *Translation* 2). In terms of translation process, Lefevere wrote: "On every level of the translation process, it can be shown that, if linguistic considerations enter into conflict with considerations of an ideological and/or poetological nature, the latter tend to win out" (Lefevere, *Translation* 9).

In terms of literary translation, linguistic level considerations in general translation theories are far from enough. The artistic and aesthetic dimension of literature make literary translation not simply a matter of transmitting ideas to another language, but an endeavor that calls for significant artistic and aesthetic considerations, which in many cases even outweigh the importance of linguistic level faithfulness. For example, the Romans once saw the goal of literary translation is to surpass the original text, which is to be appropriated by the translators as a source of inspiration enriching the target language and culture (Friedrich 12). Robert Bly identified that the process of translating a poem from one language into another includes an initial literal translation of the original poem, followed by a comparative examination between the original poem and the literal translation; then the translator revises the literal translation to reflect the meaning, sound effect and sense of the original poem. Idealistically, the translator finds a native speaker of the target language to read the revised translation and make final adjustments to refine the translation. Bly's method for poetic translation illustrates that linguistic level translation will not yield a decent translation of a poem. Translators have to transfer the meaning, sound effect and sense created by the original poem into their translation (Bly 67).

Paul Selver pointed out that the actual contents, the rhythmic structure and the verbal effect are the main ingredients of a poem. The reproduction of these ingredients in poetical translation indicates the quality of the translation (Selver 21).

Many translators of poetry have noted that translating a poem amounts to composing another poem in the target language. The translated poem should share with the original poem in its form, but it has its own distinct life and has the voice of the

translator. In “When is a Translation Not a Translation,” Susan argued that translation is the original text for the target language readers (Susan, *Constructing* 25). This argument credits translation as a useful and effective means to reincarnate the source text. It recognized the power of translation and the important role of translators. In *The Life of Goethe*, when discussing poetical translation, G. H. Lewes says:

a translation may be good as a translation, but it cannot be an adequate reproduction of the original. It may be a good poem; it may be a good imitation of another poem; it may be better than the original; but it cannot be an adequate reproduction; it cannot be the same thing in another language, producing the same effect on the mind. And the cause lies deep in the nature of poetry...” (Selver 11)

In line with Susan’s argument, Lewes considers the quality of translation by taking the translated text in its own right. According to Lewes, translation and the reproduction of the original text are different concepts. The translated poem can be a good poem in itself, or it displays good resemblance to the original poem, or it may even be better than the original poem, yet if we take the translation as the reproduction of the original text, it is always inadequate. This inadequacy is caused by the nature of poetry. Caldwell goes even further to suggest that “where translations are good poetry, they are virtually recreations, the poetic emotion they re-create rarely has much resemblance to that aroused by the original” (Caldwell 142). All these assertions have one thing in common—it is unrealistic to expect the translated poem to exactly match the original poem. Recreation on the part of the translators in translating poems is always necessary.

As for literary translation theories from the Chinese tradition, their significant development occurred at the turn of the 20th century when contact between China and the Western world became more and more frequent. Many works in Western philosophy and literature were translated into Chinese. With the boom in translation, many Chinese translators have formed their own literary translation ideals drawn upon Chinese literary traditions as well as their translation practices. Among them, the most influential translation theory has been put forward by Yan Fu, the translator of *Evolution and Ethics*. He summarized his translation ideal in three words: “faithfulness”, “expressiveness” and “elegance” (Yan viii). These three words are not only used by many later translators as guidelines for translation but are also used by readers as standards to evaluate the quality of translated work. Yan Fu’s theory could be too simple in that he did not explain specifically what faithfulness is. The second requirement that the translation has to be “expressive” curbs the tendency of “faithfulness” to result in an extreme, rigid word-for-word translation. However, as a translation theory, lacking a systematic and detailed explanation of these issues makes it insufficient and vulnerable.

Fu Lei’s idea of translation as transmitting the spirit of the original text seems to advance Yan Fu’s “faithfulness” and offers an answer to this concept. The “spiritual resemblance” (Fu 475) advocated by Fu Lei is a realization that languages are culturally bound, and so are the texts. In translating, it is necessary for translators to look behind the form of the language to gain the spirit, which is most essential.

Qian Zhongshu’s claim that “the highest standard of translation is transformation” also seems to recognize the fact that it is impossible to retain the form of the original text in translated text. Therefore, translators have to “transform” the original text. It is

reasonable to argue further, based on both Fu Lei's and Qian's claims, that the translated text should stand independently as a literary work, but it has to retain the spirit of the original text (Qian 77).

A translation theory, whether it is a translation theory in general or a literary translation theory, attempts to address the issue of inadequacy. Each translation theory seeks to expand the possibility of translation so that a translated text can be a better, if not a full, reproduction of the original text. However, of the translation theories discussed, some consider only certain aspects and make sacrifices in other aspects. Some tend to offer general guidelines for translation practice and evaluation but lack a systematic and solid theoretical framework; others may be too detailed to have a practical appeal. As a field of study, translation theories have the tendency to achieve theoretical perfection without realizing the fact that a translated text is always an inadequate reproduction of the original text. The distance between languages and cultures poses constraints on translators, and always affects the full reproduction of the original text. In addition, a translator's command of both languages, translator's interpretation of the original text, reader's aesthetic values, personal preference are variables that make translation open to criticism .

CHAPTER 3

TRANSLATING LI PO'S POEM—A CASE STUDY

In this section, I will use the translation of Li Po's 玉阶怨 (Grievance on Jaded Steps) as a case study to demonstrate the complexity of translating classical Chinese poetry into English. By examining three translations of the same poem, the author argues that the inadequacy of poetical translation is inherent and unavoidable. The analysis of the three translations is followed by a discussion, making comparisons among these translations, as well as using the translation theories previously reviewed to evaluate these translations. Evaluating the translations against various theories reveals an interesting phenomenon: The evaluated quality of the translation may vary according to the theoretical basis of that evaluation—a translated text could be rated high according to one theory but could be rated as poor according to another. My analysis and discussion lead me to explore the causes of inadequacy in translating Chinese poems into English. First, I will analyze Ezra Pound's translation of Li Po's 玉阶怨, followed by an analysis of professor Sun Dayu's translation and a translation cited in Zong-qi Cai's *How to Read Chinese Poetry* respectively.

Perhaps no figure in American literature has a more intimate relationship with Chinese poetry than Ezra Pound. A poet himself who never learned Chinese, Pound translated Chinese poems into English with the aid of Fallonsa's notes. T. S. Eliot's well-quoted remark that "Pound is the inventor of Chinese poetry of our time" accurately captures the profound influence of Pound's translations of Chinese poems on American

literature. Just as T. S. Eliot said, Pound is an inventor. The Chinese poetry translated by Pound is more an invention than a piece of translation in many ways. First, Pound, perhaps as well as the scholars who study Pound, did not realize the conceptual difference in poetry between the Chinese tradition and the Western tradition; second, Pound did not really understand the Chinese language. His translation of Chinese poems is mostly based on interpreting Fallonosa's notes. Therefore, it is not surprising that Pound's translation sometimes strays from the original Chinese poem. For one thing, Fallonosa sometimes misread the Chinese language and left a false note; for another, it is possible that Pound could have misread Fallonosa's note. In translating the Chinese poems, it is fair to say that Pound interpreted Chinese poetry from the perspective of English poetics and recreated Chinese poems to fit his own perception of Chinese poetry.

Pound's translation of Chinese poems influenced the intellectual discourse on modernism and orientalism. *The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* by Zhaoming Qian, published in 1995, made a clear assertion that the influence of Chinese poetry on American modernism has been significant. Pound's profound influence on American literature is also found in his initiation of the Imagist poetry—a new poetic model featuring profuse use of images and economic use of words. It is perhaps the invention of the Imagist poetry that leads scholars to claim that Pound is inventing a new kind of English poem.

Pound's translation is presented as a model exemplifying the sort of poetical translation ideal that permits poets' recasting of the original Chinese poem. In my analysis of Pound's translation, I focus on what is lost in the translation. I certainly do not intend to attack Pound's translation, nor do I wish to take sides on whether Pound's

translation is a “literary miracle”, or “literary fraud”. Such judgments really do not pertain to the discussion here. The point I am trying to make is that without an understanding of Chinese poetic traditions, Pound’s translation, at best, only reflects the surface value of the original Chinese poem. Such reflection is also just a coincidence since the linguistic feature of the loose syntactic coordination between words in Chinese poem allows Pound to work through translating the poem without really understanding the Chinese language. However, a great poet himself, Pound is able to use poetic language to “recreate” the Chinese poem in his translation. The Chinese elements in the translation, while not fully embodying the rich cultural implications as does the original Chinese poem, certainly created an erotic cultural sense which is often perceived as Chinese, or Oriental.

Pound’s Translation

In my analysis below, I offer a word-for-word translation of the original Chinese poem followed by Pound’s translation. Both versions have the original Chinese poem to the left. I would analyze Pound’s translation line by line.

玉阶怨	Jaded staircase grievance
玉阶生白露，	Jaded staircase generate, bear white dew
夜久侵罗袜。	Night long time soak gauze stocking
却下水晶帘，	Let down crystal curtain
玲珑望秋月。	Tinkling, clear look up autumn moon

玉阶怨

The Jewel Stairs' Grievance

玉阶生白露，

The jeweled steps are already quite white with dew,

夜久侵罗袜。

It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stocking,

却下水晶帘，

And I let down the crystal curtain

玲珑望秋月。

And watch the moon through the clear autumn.

As the founder of Imagist poetry, Pound advocates the economic use of words, clear presentation of images, and a free verse style. His translation of the Chinese poem almost accurately reflects his Imagist poetic ideals. If this was a piece written by Pound, rather than translated by Pound, we would have to view this poem from a purely Western perspective on poetry. However, since it is a translation of a Chinese poem, we will have to view the poem from the perspective of translation. One major concern that English speakers should have is whether Pound's translation is accurate and faithful to the original Chinese. As I have shown in the review of translation theories in the previous section, different translation philosophies have their own definition on the faithfulness to the original text. This being said, perhaps it is most viable for us to evaluate Pound's translation against different definitions, and draw our conclusion accordingly.

The original Chinese poem is pentasyllabic quatrains, a type of four line poem with 5 characters per line. Usually, this type of poem requires rhyming on the last character of the first line, the second line and the fourth line. However, in this poem, Li Po abandons this rhyming rule to add a lyric accent to the poem, making it sound like a spontaneous, heart-felt emotion, expressed through a series of images: "jaded staircase," "white dew," "gauze stocking," "crystal curtain," and "autumn moon." Li Po did not explicitly mention

the subject of this poem; however, Chinese readers would recognize the subject as a court lady because of the images of the “jaded staircase” and “gauze stocking”. A “jaded staircase” is often used in Chinese literary works to refer to palaces, and the implied image “jade” by “jaded staircase” is always associated with women in Chinese literature. A “gauze stocking” alludes to Cao Zhi’s Goddess (洛神赋), in which he described a beautiful goddess whose gauze stocking was stained by dust. By using these two images, Li Po effectively delineates the subject as a beautiful court lady. The images are connected by the verbs in the poem, with each line having one verb.

In the first line of the original Chinese poem, a single verb, “生” (pronounced as sheng: to generate, bear), vividly shows the relationship between the images of the “jaded staircase” and “the white dew” and gives readers an impression that the clear white dew covers up the entire staircase. By using “生”, Li Po breathed life into the first line and engaged readers in a way as if they are right before the jaded staircase, seeing white dew accumulates on the steps. Pound’s translation of “The jeweled steps are already quite white with dew” does reflect this relationship between the two images. Yet, it fails to convey the same dynamics of the original sentence. The Daoist naturalistic vision implied in the verb “生”, which reflects self-generation, is lost in Pound’s translation. To put “玉阶” (Jaded steps) as “jeweled steps” may not be quite accurate either as “玉” means jade and the image of jade is associated with females and femininity. Of course, the English word “jade” has a negative connotation to refer to ill-tempered woman, vicious horse. It is likely that Pound purposefully used “jeweled steps” to avoid misunderstanding on the part of English readers. “White dew” is actually a traditional image in Chinese poetry that showed the coming of the cold season because of the color word modifier “白”

(pronounced as bai: white). It first appeared in *The Book of Songs*. “白”, which literally means white, is usually associated with clarity and purity. When “白” is used with dew, it implies that it is the cold season. In Chinese poetic tradition, there is another image of dew—“morning dew” - which arouses an image of a spring like, warm season full of hope and sunshine. In Pound’s translation, there is no image of “white dew”, but only “dew.” According to Pound’s translation, the dew gives the steps a white coloring. While this first line of the original Chinese poem introduces the subject, the position of the subject, the season, and the time of day through a series of images, as well as a verb imbued with philosophical connotation, the English translation does not convey as much information.

In the second line, the character “久” (pronounced as jiu), which means a “long time”, tells the reader that the court lady has stood on the jaded staircase for a long time. Combined with the first character “夜” (pronounced as ye), meaning evening or night, preceding “久” as well as the context established by the first line, readers of the original text understand that the court lady has stood on the jaded staircase for a long time at night. “侵罗袜”— (the dew on the jaded staircase) soaking the court lady’s gauze stocking— is a natural result of the court lady standing on the jaded staircase for a long time at night. Therefore, by using this natural result, Li Po not only implies that the court lady was standing on the jaded staircase but also effectively enhances the “coldness”, “loneliness” and “longing” felt in the court lady’s inner mind. Indeed, the coldness is not only about the external environment but also reflects the court lady’s inner feelings. It is a sensation felt by the court lady both physically and emotionally. The external environment is a reflection of the court lady’s inner world. In Pound’s translation, the

idea of a “long time” is practically lost, as he renders “夜久” as “It is so late.” While this shows the time is late at night, it says nothing about the court lady’s long wait for her king on this cold night, let alone her inner grief. It is notable that Pound assumes the personae of the subject by using “my gauze stocking.” But, since the English translation of those images does not carry the same cultural implication as the original Chinese does, the context established in the original Chinese is not established in the English translation. While the original Chinese of “my gauze stocking” in association with other images tells Chinese readers the identity of the subject of the poem and implies her position as standing on the jade staircase, readers of the English translation cannot infer the same information from “my gauze stocking” and other images. By saying that the dew soaked the gauze stocking, Li Po showed that the court lady was standing on the staircase, anxiously looking far ahead, expecting to see the emperor coming in his majestic chariot. The English translation could leave readers to wonder if, in fact, the sudden mentioning of “my gauze stocking” in this line is a bit awkward, since the readers of the English translation may not be able to tell the position of the subject as standing on the staircase, possibly rendering it meaningless. On the other hand, the situation is made confusing and complicated as Pound translated the title as “jeweled steps’ grievance.” Given this title, the subject of the poem is the jeweled steps. The discrepancy between the subject in the title and the subject implied in the translation reveals the fact that Pound does not fully comprehend the original Chinese poem.

The translation of the last two lines is mostly accurate in terms of their surface meaning, but again, they do not fully capture the implications conveyed by the original Chinese. The first character, “却” in the third line, when used as a content word, means

“retreat, draw back, lose, decline”; when used as a function word, it indicates a transition, somewhat similar to “yet” in English. By using “却” here, Li Po indicated that the court lady’s was so disappointed and helpless that she could only let down the crystal curtain and go back into her chamber because after the long wait, she knew that the Emperor would not come. The “crystal curtain” can be viewed as the outward reflection of her heart. By letting down the curtain, the court lady was almost forcing herself to get rid of her vain hope. In the last line, the action of watching the moon showed the court lady’s lingering longing and sentimental attachment to the Emperor. The image of the moon is laden with rich cultural significance. Especially in Chinese poetry, it is almost the synonymous with the reminiscence of a loved one, or one’s family. By describing the court lady’s watching of the moon after letting down the crystal curtain, Li Po also showed how much the court lady was hoping that the Emperor could enter her chamber just like the moonlight.

The word “怨” (pronunciation: yuan)—grievance—does not appear anywhere in the poem except in the title. But through the series of images employed, Li Po vividly showed the grievance of the court lady. Indeed, using images to show the inner feeling of the court lady is the core artistic feature of this poem. The grievance in the court lady’s heart was shown and enhanced by all these images, and as these images are woven into a series of pictures by the poet, their cultural implications are mutually enriched and enhanced.

As we can see from the word-for-word translation of each individual word in the original Chinese poem, Pound’s translation is mostly accurate in terms of the surface meaning, except a few errors. However, for readers of Pound’s translation, one source of

confusion could come from the difference in the subject of the title and the subject of the poem. From the title, readers might assume that the poem's subject is the jeweled steps. However, as "I" appears along with the "jeweled steps" in the first line, how the jeweled steps and "I" are related? Do the "jeweled steps" symbolize something? How can the "jeweled steps" have grievance? By putting the title 玉阶 (jaded/jeweled steps) 怨 (grievance) into "jeweled steps' grievance", Pound's inability to comprehend Chinese is revealed. Perhaps Pound himself was asking the same questions when he translated the poem from Chinese to English. The succinct and highly contextual nature of Chinese language makes it perfectly fine to omit words, such as preposition "on" in this case. Without solid foundation in Chinese, Pound is probably unable to figure out the omission of the preposition.

Sun Dayu's Translation

The following translation of the same Chinese poem is by Sun Dayu, a writer, poet, translator and professor. Sun once studied British Literature in Dartmouth College and Yale University. In his early career, Sun was dedicated to translating Shakespeare's plays and sonnets into Chinese, in addition to writing modern Chinese poems. Later, he started to translate classical Chinese poetry and other classic Chinese literary works into English. All these are included in his *Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poetry and Prose*. The following translation below is from this collection.

玉阶怨 Complaint on Gem Steps

玉阶生白露， Dew drops on the gem steps fall' n cool

夜久侵罗袜。 Through her flimsy silken socks seep;

却下水晶帘， Stepping down through the screen of crystal beads

玲珑望秋月。 She at the sparkling autumnal moon doth peep.

In Sun's translation, we notice that his rendition of the original Chinese poem is very different from Pound's. Sun focused on showing the action of the court lady on this particular night. His translation sometimes ignores the sentence structure of the original Chinese poems and adds new information that is not necessarily implied in the original Chinese poem. As we can see in the first line, Sun's subject is the "dew" instead of the "jaded staircase." The verb in Sun's translation is "drop," and he added "fall'n cool" which is not mentioned verbally in the original Chinese poem. His rendition evokes a picture of the "jaded staircase" and "white dew" in motion. This effect is achieved in the original Chinese poem by the verb "生," but Sun's attempt to recreate this sense of "motion" may not be judicious, as he has to shift the subject, borrow a new verb, and add new information. The verb "drop" is not a good choice at all, not only because the original text does not have any words that may even slightly insinuate "drop," but also because "drop" is almost the opposite of "生," if we consider these two verbs in terms of the direction involved in the actions they represent. The movement of a "drop" is assumed to be descending, while "生" is ascending. "Fall'n cool" is Sun's addition. It is certainly understandable why Sun added this information. As I have mentioned when analyzing Pound's translation, the image of "white dew" shows the coming of the cold season. Sun certainly understands the implication of this image, but Li Po's point of using the image of "white dew" is to have readers comprehend this information from the images, instead of mundanely stating it. Perhaps in Sun's view, he is afraid that simply

translating the image into English would cause the loss of its implication. As we proceed to the second line, we notice that Sun completely takes out “夜久 (Night|long time)” and actually only translated “侵罗袜.” In this way, he makes the first line and the second line cohesive. Indeed, such an arrangement allows Sun to make his translation display the metrical and rhythmic beauty that one usually finds in English poetry. One explanation for his abandoning “夜久” in his translation is that he may argue night and the long length of time can both be inferred from the context created in his translation. In the original Chinese poem, this information is also implied in the context, but Li Po’s intention of making this information explicit in the original Chinese poem is to emphasize the court lady’s anxiety and longing. In the original Chinese poem, after reading the first two lines, readers are immediately invited to envision a beautiful court lady waiting on a jade staircase at night, anxiously waiting for her love; she has been standing on the jade staircase for a long time, because her gauze stockings are soaked by the dew. In Sun’s translation, readers can only envision a picture of the court lady standing on the jade staircase. They aren’t privy to the court lady’s inner feelings.

In the third line, Sun translates the verb “下” as stepping down. When “下” is used as a verb, the core implication is a downward movement. The specific meaning of “下” as a verb in a sentence, whether it means “go down”, “fall”, “descend”, “drop”, “cast”, “to go,” etc., is defined in accordance with the words before or after it. In this line, the character before “下” is the function word “却”, which does not affect the semantic meaning of the verb “下.” “Crystal curtain” or, in Sun’s translation, “the screen of crystal beads,” is the object of “下.” Therefore, either “letting down” or “stepping down” would

make sense, depending on how we interpret the context created by the poem. By saying the court lady stepped down on the screen of crystal beads, Sun implied that the court lady actually descends the jade staircase and watches the moon in the court yard. Here, we may need some architectural foreknowledge about the design of court chambers in ancient China. Semantically, Sun's interpretation makes perfect sense, but contextually and culturally speaking, it is more logically sound for the court lady to retreat back to her chamber, because the court lady has been waiting for a long time at night, and she should have known that the Emperor would not come. Her look back at the moon (from her chamber) in the last line shows her lingering desire to see the Emperor and, at the same time, her sorrow and grievance. The action of looking back at the moon is prompted by a complexity of all sorts of emotions. Therefore, Sun's understanding of the verb “下” as stepping down completely waives the inner struggles suffered by the court lady and only shows her desire to spend the night with the Emperor.

Sun's translation of the title as “Plaint on Gem Steps” goes against Li Po's artistic ideal for this poem and undermines the artistic value of the poem. The definition of “plaint” in English is “utterance of grief or sorrow; a lamentation.” This title could give readers an impression that the poem is about utterances of grief, but as we have seen, the original Chinese poem invites readers to enter the court lady's inner world and sympathize with her feelings. Throughout the poem, Li Po uses images and a limited number of verbs to describe the court lady's actions, from which readers can infer her emotions. The poem is not about what the court lady says, but what she thinks and feels, what is on her mind on that particular night. It could be argued that Sun chooses to use “plaint” as he invites readers to hear the court lady's inner lamentations. However, the

grievance conveyed in Li Po's poem is more about inner feelings than an actual complaint.

A Translation from *How to Read Chinese Poetry*

The translation of the same poem below is from Zong-qi Cai's *How to Read Chinese Poetry*.

玉阶怨 Lament of the Jade Stairs

玉阶生白露， On jade stairs, the rising white dew
夜久侵罗袜。 Through the long night pierces silken hose;
却下水晶帘， Retreating inside, she lowers crystal shades
玲珑望秋月。 And stares at the glimmering autumn moon.

In this translation, we can perceive the original Chinese poem as somewhat different from the previous two translations. The diction and structure are closer to the original Chinese poem. In the first line, the verb “生” is put as “rising.” Although in this way, the first line is without a verb; at least, “rising” indicates a movement, and better yet, “rising” involves an upward movement, which is also implied by the verb “生” in Chinese.

Another advantage of this translation is that the relationship between the jade step and the white dew is the same as indicated in the original Chinese poem. In the second line, the verb “侵” is translated as “pierced.” This choice is better than “soak” or “seep,” since the original meaning of “侵” is “to attack”. Putting “侵” as “pierced” shows the white dew soaking the stocking. The unfriendly invasion implied by “pierced” echoes the original

meaning of “侵” and shows Li Po’s consideration of diction when he composed the original Chinese poem. In Chinese language, there are a few other verbs which mean soak or seep, such as “浸”, “润,” etc., but using “侵” is more vivid and almost gives the white dew a personality. The last two lines make the court lady’s action of “retreating inside” explicit. This is a reasonable addition, because it is not an imaginative creation on the part of the translator but an action that truly has happened in the original Chinese poem’s context . While this translation clearly maintained the verbs and offered a translation that is closest to the original Chinese poem in terms of word choice, structure and form and relays Li Po’s poem more accurately, it is perhaps the least poetic among the three versions.

The three translations cited here demonstrate the complexity of translating classical Chinese poetry into English. Since the subject of the original Chinese poem is implicit, translators constantly engage themselves in word games, in which they attempt to figure out the subject of the original poem, if the poet of the original Chinese poem is using the first person or the third person, whether they have to make the subject explicit in their translation, and whether making the subject explicit undermines fidelity to the original text. They may also notice that the subject of the poem is not necessarily the subject of each line. To translators who are native English speakers, the omission of propositions and the interpretation of function words can always be problematic. In fact, even for Chinese scholars of classical Chinese poetry, these issues are often open to many possibilities, bringing debates and contending views. Since words in Chinese have multiple meanings, various contexts, which open the poems to several possible interpretations, misinterpretations are not uncommon. As we have seen in Sun’s

translation, his understanding of the verb is different. The highly contextual feature of the Chinese language requires translators to reconstruct the context of the original poem. However, the historical differences render it difficult for translators to know exactly the context established by the poet of the original poem.

Even though Pound's and Sun's translations may suffer from some inaccuracies, each of the three translations has its own merits. In fact, if we use different translation theories to compare these three translations, our comparison will yield different results. For example, both Pound's and Sun's translations reflect poetical translation ideals which encourage translators' attempts in their translations to give them a life of their own while assuming the voice of the translator. Pound's translation even outdoes Sun's in that he seems to break out of the shackles of the original Chinese poem and incorporate the images to fit his own poetic ideal. Sun's intent to recreate the poetic sense and style of the original Chinese poem seems to be unnatural and overdone. On the other hand, the translation from Cai's book, the poem's own qualities, and the voice of the translator may not be as distinct as in the other two versions. Likewise, if we evaluate the quality of these translations by Caldwell's standard that a good translation of a poem is always a recreation that bears little emotional resemblance to the original poem, perhaps Pound's translation is better than the other two. However, if we use Yan Fu's "three word" translation standard, Pound's and Sun's translations fail at "faithfulness", and the translation from Cai's book is perhaps the best. If we use Fu Lei's translation idea, all three translations achieve "spiritual resemblance" in showing the court lady's grievance, but none of them seem to show that Li Po is using the court lady as an analogy to himself and expressing his own lamentations over losing the Emperor's favor. Applying Qian

Zhongshu's ideal of "transformation", we, too, are left with inconclusiveness—all three translations transform the original Chinese poem, but to what degree are these successful transformations?

Indeed it is impossible to have a definite answer as to the quality of a translation. It is always the case that a translated piece could be a good and accurate one by certain translation theories, yet at the same time, fail to meet the standards of other translation theories. As I have noted earlier, all translation theories have their own idealistic views on the quality of translation and suffer from the deficiency to allow a universal appeal or to offer comprehensive guidelines for an accurate translation that mimics the virtuosity and appreciation of the original. In many cases, translation theories are purpose-related, making perfect sense under the premises assumed by the theoreticians' functions, implicitly or explicitly, that readers would share with them. They are applicable to translating certain texts but may not share the same applicability in translating other texts. There is no universal standard to judge the quality of the translation, just as it is impossible for everyone to agree unanimously on which translation theory is the best.

In essence, the problem lies in translation itself. As Friedrich pointed out, "the art of translation will always have to cope with the reality of untranslatability from one language to another" (Friedrich 11). Since untranslatability between languages is an inherent reality, deficiency of translation also is inherent. The boundaries between languages and cultures pose constraints on translators, making translation inadequate in that there are always some aspects of the text cannot be transferred into another language. However, the inherent deficiency of translation does not render translation between different cultures impossible. The challenges posed by the issue of untranslatability

should encourage translators to explore the possibilities of languages. In fact, it is by studying the limitations of translation that our understanding of languages and cultures is advanced. It is for this very reason that I venture to investigate the factors contributing to the inherent deficiency of translating Chinese poems into English.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT CAUSES THE PROBLEM

As we have seen, no matter which translation is more accurate among the three translations given here, it is certain that all these translations fail to fully represent the original text. In this section, I wish to find out what causes the inherent deficiency in translating Chinese poems into English. I argue that at the lowest level, the linguistic distance between Chinese and English presents challenges for translators; within this level, the distinct features of Chinese poetic language complicate the matter of translation, not only because of its syntactic characteristics but also because it is laden with Chinese cosmological reflections. Further, at the aesthetic level, the divergence between Chinese literary traditions and Western literary traditions gives rise to more challenges. The linguistic level difficulties, combined with the aesthetic level discrepancy, make the translation of Chinese poem into English inherently deficient.

The Linguistic Distance between Chinese and English

It may seem banal to examine the linguistic level differences between Chinese and English, as they are almost too obvious to merit special attention. However, starting with the apparent linguistic level differences allows us to dig deeper and extricate the hidden causes. Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family, while English is from the Indo-European linguistic family. The linguistic distance between Chinese and English means translating Chinese poems into English entails necessary changes in meter and rhyme. Chinese characters are logographic. A single Chinese character usually contains

multiple meanings; for example, the character “文” (wen) means “patterns, civilized, culture, civilization, literature, script, writing, to write, etc”. It has to be bound with another character to form a word and make its meaning definite in that singular instance. Unique to Chinese language is its monosyllabic and highly contextual features, which allow Chinese poets to use fewer words to express meaning. This symbolic language requires many more words to extol the same meaning in other languages. Perhaps what is more frustrating for translators is the archaic usage of the Chinese language in classical Chinese poetry. The language of classical Chinese poetry is free from rigid syntactical boundaries and is therefore highly flexible. The loose syntactical cooperation in classical Chinese poetry makes it possible for prepositions, personal pronouns, etc., to be omitted when occasions arise. It obscures the grammatical roles of certain Chinese characters; for example, a noun can be used as an adjective, and an adjective can be used as a verb. Much of the art of classical Chinese poetry also lies in the fact that the verbs in the Chinese language free actions from temporal constructs. This tenseless feature of verbs allows poets to capture actions and events as they emerge and develop on their own, without being restricted by the concept of finite time. As the poem in our case study has illustrated, the poet presented a series of images with the verb in each line, and readers are invited to watch the events act themselves out. It is notable that Chinese poets also seem to purposefully avoid binding actions with specific agency and leave that to readers’ interpretation. By interpreting the agency of the actions, readers are able to exercise their imagination and engage themselves more intimately with both the poet and the poem.

In contrast, the English language has a comparatively more restrictive syntactical cooperation, requiring agreement between the subject and the verb. Also, verbs have to be committed to finite time. The time and space restrictions posed at the linguistic level in English give rise to many questions in translation. How does one determine the syntactical relationship between words? Should the implicit subject be made explicit? How does one interpret the implied agency of an action? Should the English translation be tenseless or be put in the temporal constructs following the conventions of the English language? These are just some of the questions that translators face. Many translators believe that translating classical Chinese poetry into English involves a so-called double translation. Translators first translate classical Chinese poetry into modern Chinese and, then, render it into English. The truth is that the language of classical Chinese poetry is highly flexible and has a loose syntactical cooperation: the sentence subject is implicit and does not appear in the poem, propositions are often omitted and nouns or adjectives can become verbs. What makes the matter of translation even more complicated is that the Chinese language does not indicate the tense or part of speech through conjugation. Sometimes, a noun is used as a verb or an adjective; sometimes, an adjective is used as a verb. All this information is based on knowledge of classic Chinese and can be inferred from the context. Quite different from Chinese, an English word is multisyllabic. The English language has a strict, almost rigid grammar, not only in terms of syntactical cooperation but also in terms of verb conjugation in accordance with person and tense.

Francois Cheng argued that Chinese poetry should be studied as “a language in its own right” because Chinese poetic language is the very reflection of Chinese cosmological thought and has its own implicit structure (Cheng 32). In his essay “Some

Reflections on Chinese Poetic Language and Its Relation to Chinese Cosmology”, Cheng observed that at the lexical level, Chinese poetic language displays the pairing between function words and content words, reflecting the emptiness-fullness dualism in Chinese cosmology (Cheng 36); at the syntactic level, Chinese poems reflect Yin-Yang pairing through parallelism, in particular in the Chinese poetic form of the regulated verse composed of four couplets, which is viewed as “a dialectic between parallel and non-parallel couplets” (Cheng 42). Cheng further pointed out that parallelism is “constructed in a two-part mode” in that it is “at once opposed and complementary” (Cheng 42). Because of this special construction, “parallelism cannot be rendered by a translation that contents itself with paraphrasing the two lines” because “the place of every word is defined both within the line and between the lines, thus acquiring its own particular kind of signification” (Cheng 42). At the symbolic level, Chinese poems displays “the triad Heaven-Earth-Man” through the concrete images used by poets (Cheng 44). Those images are imbued with symbolic significance in the sense that they are drawn from nature yet at the same time are fully reflective of human psychology and emotions. As we have seen in the case study of Li Po’s poem, “the triad of Heaven-Earth-Man” is expressed by images drawn from nature (white dew, moon), the earthly world (jaded step) and human beings (gauze stockings).

The Aesthetic Divergence between Traditions

In addition to the challenges at the linguistic level which impart inherent deficiency to translation, the fundamental differences between Chinese literary traditions and Western literary traditions add more complications to translation. As I have mentioned in the opening chapter of this thesis, classical Chinese poetry and Chinese literature are

intertwined and mutually define each other. It is the Chinese notion of literature that prescribes what poetry is in Chinese traditions, and it is in classical Chinese poetry that Chinese literary and cultural traditions are shaped and preserved. To examine the aesthetic divergence between the Chinese traditions and the Western traditions, I start with a comparison of the notion of literature and poetry in both traditions and then inquire about how the conceptual divergence speaks to the mode of reading, and what mode of reading should readers assume in reading translated Chinese poetry. First and foremost, what does literature mean in Chinese tradition? The following passage has been quoted by many Sinologists to illustrate the concept of literature in Chinese tradition:

Wen as a virtue/power is great. It is born with heaven and earth. Why (is it so)? With the darkness (of heaven) and the yellow (of earth), myriad colors are compounded; with the squareness of earth and the roundness of heaven, all shapes are derived. The sun and the moon successively appear (in the sky) like jade disks, showing the lovely configuration of heaven from above. Rivers and mountains are brilliantly adorned to display the orderly configuration of earth. These are the patterns of Tao. Look up to see the brilliance, and look down to observe the latent sectioning, the positions of high and low are determined, and therefore the two primary forms (of heaven and earth) came into being. Only humans, endowed with intelligence, can integrate with them. Together they are called the Triad. Humans are the efflorescence of the Five Elements and are, in fact, the mind of heaven and earth. When mind came into being, language was formed. When language was formed, the pattern became manifest. This is Tao, the natural course of things.

(Adapted from Stephen Owen's translation: Owen *Readings* 183)

This excerpt is from the opening chapter of Liu Hsieh's 文心雕龙 (pronunciation wēnxīndiāolóng)—*Literary Mind Carves Dragon*. A major work of Chinese literary thought, 文心雕龙 presents systematic discussions on literary genres and literary criticism. In this first chapter of his book, Liu Hsieh offered a comprehensive account of the notion of literature in Chinese tradition. His definition of literature captured the origin of Chinese literature and shed light onto the functions of literature in Chinese culture. The Chinese character for literature is “文” (pronunciation: wén), which also means “pattern”, “writing”, “cultivated” and “civilized”. “Pattern” is the core meaning of “文”. “文” as literature is the outward manifestation of the “aesthetic pattern” of the universe, the natural world. This “aesthetic pattern” is born with the universe. Everything, every color, and every shape in nature are elements forming this “aesthetic pattern”. Human beings, endowed with intelligence, are part of the universe in that human beings possess the mind of heaven and earth. Language arises from this mind and is used to express the inherent aesthetic patterns in the universe. The relationship among language, mind, and universe is such that only the mind can understand the aesthetic pattern of the universe because this mind is the mind of heaven and earth, and the mind uses language to express the aesthetic pattern of the universe. In Chinese culture, the universe—heaven, earth, and everything within the natural world—was not created by God but was naturally generated. Everything within the universe operates as a result of Tao (道), the natural process. The aesthetic pattern is inherent in this natural process and can be expressed by examining the natural process. Therefore, in Chinese tradition, literature is the outward

manifestation of the natural world through language. The function of literature is, in essence, to show and carry on the natural process—文以载道. The concept of literature in Chinese tradition echoes what Cheng has argued about Chinese poetic language as the reflection of “emptiness-fullness”, “yin-yang pairing” and “the triad of Heaven-Earth-Men” in Chinese cosmology. The Chinese notion of literature as an outward manifestation of the universe also announces the non-fictional nature of Chinese literature. Chinese literature is not a made by writers but a manifestation of the inner.

As for poetry, it is a Chinese belief that a poem reflects what is on the poet’s mind. This idea was initiated by a canonical statement on the origins of a poem—“The poem articulates what is on the mind intently; song makes language last long” (诗言志, 歌咏言)—from the Confucian *Book of Documents* (Owen, *Readings* 26). This passage is considered a canon of the Chinese definition of a poem in the sense that Chinese poets, throughout history, compose poems via this rule. It is taken for granted as being the truth, and no one ever questions this statement by asking if a poem could be something other than what is on the poet’s mind, nor would anyone venture to suggest that a poem is something different. Its undisputed status is also undergirded by the form of the Chinese character representing the term poem. The Chinese character for a poem, 诗/詩, shi, is ideographically formed. The left part of this character is 讠, 言, which means “language” when used as a noun and “to speak, to say or to articulate” when used as a verb. The right part of this character 寺, is a variant of 志, which means “mind, intent, ambition or aspiration.” The meaning of the character 诗 is a combination of the two parts—poetry is the language of mind, or poetry articulates what is on mind. As we see, whether we take

the left part of this character as a noun or a verb, this does not affect the etymological interpretation of 诗. The claim about what poetry is from the “Great Preface” to *The Book of Songs* perhaps more clearly articulates the definition of poetry and its relationship to language—“诗者，志之所之也。在心为志，发言为诗。The poem is that to which what is intently on the mind goes. In the mind it is intent; coming out in language, it is a poem” (Owen, *Readings* 40). In agreement with the definition of poetry from the *Book of Documents*, this claim also echoes the notion of literature in Chinese literary tradition as an outward manifestation of the inner. As this claim argues, the poem in the inner mind is the intent; language allows the inner mind to manifest itself and be a poem. Therefore, poetry is the outward manifestation of the inner mind—the same mind of heaven and earth discussed in Liu Hsieh’s passage. This is also why Chinese poetic language reflects Chinese cosmological perceptions. Given this definition, the relationship between poet and poem is not that of a creator and creation. Instead, poets use poetry to express their feelings and emotions, their socio-political concerns, etc. They do not compose poetry simply for the sake of composing poetry. Their intent is always to deliver a message through their poems. In Chinese tradition, poetry is not only “art work” but also “a social act” (Owen, *Anthology* 371). As “art work”, Chinese poetry requires poets to use language artistically; as “a social act”, Chinese poetry carries a social function to communicate poet’s mind to readers and influence readers. Such poetical culture assigns poets a significant role to speak for their age. The notion of literature/poetry as an outward manifestation of the inner has another significant implication: the outer reflection of the inner leads to the production of the text; on the other hand, reading the outer, readers respond to the text, and their response influences their inner. This explains

why reading poetry in the Chinese tradition is viewed as a process of moral education and civilization.

In the Western tradition, literature is viewed as a way of demonstrating the beauty of language. The function of literature is more for aesthetic purposes than for efferent pedagogical purposes. The English word “poem” has its origin in the Greek word “poiesis”, which means a making or a forming. In Susan Stewart’s *Poetry and the Fate of Senses*, she wrote:

The Greek word poiesis, derived from poiein, “to make,” conveys two kinds of creation: the inspired creation that resembles a godlike power and the difficult material struggle, the techne, of making forms out of the resources available.

Poetry’s work of creating the figure of the human proceeds by means of imagination and a material engagement with the resources of language; it takes place under a threat of overdetermination ...and a threat of under-determination... (Stewart 12)

As such, a poem in the Western tradition belongs to art, and the poet assumes the role of creator. The creation of poems by a poet is twofold: first, a poet’s godlike power enables him to exercise his imagination; second, the poet creates forms out of available material sources. These two conditions are interdependent. Lacking either one of them will not lead to the production of a poem. This idea of composing poetry as creation is completely absent in the Chinese poetic tradition. As is discussed earlier, a poem is poet’s inner mind manifested in language. Because a Western poet materializes his “inspired creation” into language, of utmost concern to the Western poetic tradition is the poet’s skill in crafting the language. In line with the concept of literature in Western tradition, a

poem is a form of literary art which displays the properties of beauty in language—the beauty in the aesthetic and evocative properties of language. It is not essential for poems to deliver any message. The main function of poetry, again in line with that of literature, is more for aesthetic purposes than for pedagogical or efferent purposes. Croce's view on poetry is representative of the Western perception of poetry, as he said that "true poetry must have no utilitarian, moral, or philosophical agenda; a piece of art, it concerned exclusively with the beautiful" (Kenny 958).

The conceptual differences between the two literary traditions are acutely observed and discussed by Stephens Owen in his "Omen of the World—meaning in the Chinese lyric". Through a comparative analysis of Tu Fu's poem with William Wordsworth's Westminster Bridge, Owen pointed out that in Western poetry, "the fusion of significance and word-scene occurs on the level of art," (Owen, *Omen* 74) but in Chinese poetry, "meaning is subtly infused in the particular forms of the world perceived...it tells you about both the world and the inner concerns of the poet" (Owen, *Omen* 74). As it is exactly observed by Stephen Owen here, Western poetry is poets' artistic creation of the world-scene, while in Chinese poetics, poets perceive the world with intent in mind, which affects and shapes what he sees, and therefore what he observes reflects his inner mind. The poem links poet's mind with the world perceived by the poet. By describing the world perceived, the poet tries communicate what is in his mind. Their ultimate concern is to have readers know their mind, and less important is how they craft the language.

The notion of poetry as intent coming out in language is of great significance to our understanding of Chinese poetic traditions in at least three ways. First, it speaks to how

Chinese poems are composed. The relationship between a poet and his poem, which is implied in this definition, is such that the poem is not something made by the poet but an outward manifestation of his mind in language. A Chinese poet is not a godlike creator of the poem; rather, he uses the poem to manifest his intent. Of course, this is not to say that poetry in the Chinese tradition does not display artistic uses of language. In fact, the earliest Chinese poetry was produced in the Western Zhou dynasty by its court officials for political and ancestral sacrificial rituals, featuring rhetoric devices such as rhyme and alliteration. These artistryes of language, passed down to poets of later generations, are preserved in poetry composition as a means of conveying the internal externally. Second, since the poem is the poet's mind, the primary concern for readers engaged in reading Chinese poems should be understanding the poet's state of mind—the most essential element of Chinese poems—instead of focusing on the craft of the language. Such a mode of reading helps readers to gain a cultural understanding of Chinese poetry. Third, because poetry in Chinese traditions assumes an expressive and communicative mode of delivering messages, it predicates the pedagogical function of poetry and the role of a poet as the voice of their age to speak out people's concerns.

The diverse notions of poetry in Chinese and Western traditions are somewhat mutually exclusive in that what is considered a poem in one tradition is nullified by the definition of poetry in the other. Contingent upon this difference is an important yet often overlooked issue—the mode of reading. The expressive mode of Chinese poetry to manifest what is on poet's mind allows poetry to be used as a means for communication and education. In some way, Chinese poetry, in particular those that are composed for a specific occasion, or a specific person, are “utterances used in communicative situations”

as Baker would call them (Baker 217). In reading Western poetry, we pay attention to the beauty of the language, but in reading Chinese poetry, taking Chinese poetry as literary work of art as well as “a social act” (Owen, *Anthology* 371), we have to explore what is on the poet’s mind when he composed the poem, to seek the significance implied in the poem, and ask the poet’s intention for writing the poem. The dual function of poems in the Chinese traditions means reading Chinese poems is not solely a task for aesthetic purposes, but also a task to seek out the practical messages implied in the poem. Then the question is what does the appropriate mode for reading Chinese poems entail?

The Issue of the Mode of Reading

In *Analects*, Confucius said, “Look to how it is. Consider from what it comes. Examine in what a person would be at rest. How can a person remain hidden?—how can someone remain hidden?” (Owen, *Readings* 19)

This passage almost seems irrelevant to the discussion of reading Chinese poetry because it discusses how to examine a person, yet Confucius’ method of examining a person actually speaks to the mode of reading we should use to read Chinese poetry. According to Confucius, the examination of a person follows three steps. First, “look to how it is” refers to looking at the apparent features of the person. In reading Chinese poetry, the first thing we notice is the linguistic features of the poem and its language. The linguistic features tell us whether this poem is a regulated verse, a quatrain, or Yuefu lyrics; the language of the poem introduces us to the content of the poem. After gaining the initial impression of the person/the poem, Confucius asks us to look behind the outer by “considering from what it comes”. Why does the poet write this poem? What is his motive? What does he wish to convey? The third step—“examine in what a person would

be at rest”—shows that a person’s true quality/the meaning of a poem maybe concealed, or distorted, under specific situations. The situational influence exerted on a person/a poem can blind us to the true quality of the person/the meaning of a poem. For example, readers from different backgrounds may interpret the same poem differently. This is Confucius’s recognition of the possible dynamics involved in knowing the inner through viewing the outer. To solve this problem, Confucius believed that finding out the conditions under which a person would be still would yield a true understanding of the person’s quality/a poem. Given that poetry is what is on the poet’s mind in Chinese tradition, the poet’s state of mind is the thing immanent in the poem. The repetition of the rhetorical question—“how can someone remain hidden”—underscores the conviction that by following the three steps, nothing about the person/poem will remain hidden.

Applying these steps to read Li Po’s Jaded Step Grievance, we know that the court lady’s lament is an outward manifestation of something on Li Po’s mind when he was writing this poem. Knowledge of Li Po’s political career may shed light on Li Po’s state of mind, and help us approach the immanence in the poem. While in most of his poems Li Po showed contempt and disregard about participating in political affairs and holding a position in court, he did look for opportunities to work for government and hoped the administration would adopt and implement his political ideals. For a time, he held a position in court, advising chancellors and the Emperor on state affairs. Unfortunately, he soon lost favor because of his aggressive and disdainful personality. It is under these circumstances that Li Po wrote a number of poems that are characterized by an abandoned lady’s lament or grievance. Just as is present in this poem, Li Po was constructing a metaphor between himself and the court lady. By depicting the court lady

standing on the jeweled steps longing for the Emperor, Li Po effectively conveyed his inner lament of being abandoned by the Emperor and his enduring wish to regain the Emperor's favor. By approaching this poem knowing Li Po's intention for writing it, Chinese readers may go even further to examine Li Po's political ideology and the socio-economic status quo of that particular time in history, and develop their own judgment on issues, such as if Li Po's political ideal is pragmatic, why should the Emperor abandon Li Po, etc. Their judgment on such issues would necessarily shape their opinions of the poem, of Li Po's personality and his dealings with the court politics. However, if we read this poem from a purely aesthetic mode of reading, we will not be able to approach the inner mind of the poet, nor our take on this poem will shape our inner mind.

The mode of reading that is applicable to poetry from one tradition cannot be effectively applied to reading the poems from another tradition. This adds to the complications apparent in translating Chinese poems into English, as well as reading the English translation of Chinese poems. To begin, let me discuss its implication on translation. As Barnstone pointed out, "the act of translating a poem involves the two distinct activities of reading and writing" (Barnstone, 49). Reading is the first step in translating a poem. By reading the original poem, the translator is provided with the content of translation. However, without applying an appropriate mode to reading Chinese poems, translators would only have a shallow understanding of the original Chinese poem. Pound's translation of Chinese poems could serve as an example. Lacking a substantial understanding of Chinese poetic traditions, Pound is unlikely to have insights on what the original poem means to say, or grasp the spirit of the original poem, let alone transfer the spirit of the original poem into their translation. At best, such

translators only draw inspirations from the original poem, detaching the surface meaning and recreating another poem. While reading and writing are identified as two distinct activities by Barnstone, how translators read actually directly affect how they write, i.e., how they translate. If translators do not understand the original Chinese poem fully, their translation of the poem will be insufficient even beyond the inherent inadequacies of translation.

On the other hand, the issue of the mode of reading poses questions for reading the English translation of the Chinese poem. Should we examine the English translation via the mode appropriate to reading original English poetry, or should we assume the mode of reading appropriate for Chinese poetry? For aesthetic purposes, readers can view the quality of the translation by focusing on the translator's use of language, as they would when reading an original English poem. If the purpose is to gain a cultural understanding of Chinese poetic traditions, then it is important that readers be reminded to apply a more efferent mode of reading, different from what they would use when reading English poems. As Chinese poets write poems to intently convey what is on their minds, one concern that readers must always have in reading a translation of a Chinese poem is what was in the poet's mind when s/he was writing the poem. To understand a Chinese poet's state of mind requires English speaking readers to bring this different mode of reading to the poetry, because the mode of reading decides how much readers can gain from the English translation of the Chinese poem. Schleiermacher advocated in his translation ideal that a translation should bring together the writer of the source text and the reader of the target text. But what Schleiermacher failed to recognize is that to bring together the writer of the source text and the reader of the target text, translation can only share part

of the responsibility. The other part lies in readers' mode of reading. The bridge linking together the writer of the source text and the reader of the target text is concertedly built by translation as well as by readers' applying the same mode of reading to the translated text as the source language readers would use to the original text. This being said, we come to the possible obstacle which readers may face—most of them may not have the background knowledge of Chinese history and Chinese poets; so, even if they apply the correct mode of reading, it is still difficult for them to interpret the poet's state of mind when writing the poem. This is another deficiency that cannot be solved by translation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

As I have discussed, the vast divergence between Chinese and English as well as the two different literary traditions render the translation of Chinese poem into English inherently deficient. The linguistic distance between Chinese and English is increased by the cosmologically enriched Chinese poetic language; beyond the linguistic level differences, the conceptual incongruence of poetry also poses insurmountable challenges for translators, insurmountable in a sense that by molding the original Chinese poem into the English poetic conventions, translators always have to sacrifice certain aspects of the original poem. The loss in translation is certain and unavoidable.

Translation theories recognized the deficiency without realizing that the inherent deficiency cannot be made up by translation. Language and literary traditions are idiosyncrasies developed within each culture and do not always necessarily find their counterparts in another culture. While translation establishes a channel for cross-cultural communication, its inherent deficiency invariably inhibits the full transmission of ideas. As deficiencies are an integral part of translation, it makes no sense to seek means within translation to make up the loss.

Lying behind these palpable differences is the concealed issue of mode of reading. The different modes of reading complicate the matters of reading and evaluating the English translation of the original Chinese poem. Bassnet proposed that translating a poem into another language calls for an “intelligent reading” of the original poem.

According to Bassnet, such “intelligent reading” is a “detailed process of decoding that takes into account both textual features and extratextual factors” (Bassnett 60). The “textual features” are the linguistic characteristics of the poem, and the “extratextual factors” are the knowledge of the source culture necessary to read the poem. What Bassnet fails to mention in her recommended “intelligent reading” is that translators should read the original Chinese poem via the mode appropriate for reading Chinese poems, i.e., one that permits a reading that inquires about the poet’s state of mind. Such a mode of reading expands and substantiates translator’s knowledge of “extratextual factors” and will enhance the credibility of his/her translation. For readers of the translated text, a similar type of “intelligent reading” is also needed.

With regard to evaluating the translated poetry, it is no surprise that there are no universally agreed upon standards. Lacking unanimously approved principles, the value of a translated poem can be seriously undermined if readers’ perceptions of the translation are in conflict with the translator’s ideal. For example, if readers of the translation from Cai’s book believe that translation of poetry should be a re-creation that should not be restricted by the original poem, they may find his translation to be of poor quality. On other hand, the translation from Cai’s book will be favored by those who advocate linguistic level faithfulness. It would be helpful if readers are informed of the translator’s perception of poetical translation and evaluate the translation in the same vein accordingly.

Collectively, these problems lead me to suggest that we should go beyond translation and seek other means to compensate for the insufficiencies inherent in poetic translation. One viable way is for translators to add explanatory notes following their

translation of each Chinese poem. The explanatory notes serve as a channel for translators to communicate their own reading of the original poem to their readers, as well as an aid to improve readers' cultural understanding of the original Chinese poem by bringing the "extratextual factors" to the readers. Explanatory notes also enhance the effect of authenticity of the translation, because they clarify explicitly translators' takes on the original Chinese poems. This helps readers and critics to evaluate the quality of translation by applying standards in accordance with translator's translation philosophy.

One necessary component to such explanatory notes is a glossary detailing the cultural implications of the words from the original Chinese poem. As we have seen in the case study, a word in a Chinese poem may acquire such rich meanings from the grand context of Chinese poetic traditions that, without ample knowledge about Chinese literature, it is impossible for readers to figure out the rich implications. Take the case study as an example, readers' appreciation of Li Po's poem would be greatly enhanced with explanatory notes expounding on the cultural implications of all the images which appear in the poem. In a sense, the untranslatability of Chinese poems is not necessarily caused by the apparent meanings of words, but it lies in factors that are culturally and rhetorically related, such as the rhetorical devices—allusions, metonymy, and synecdoche—frequently used in Chinese poetry. Such difficulty is not necessarily shown at the syntactical level. In other words, translators can easily find the counterpart of the Chinese word in terms of its surface meaning, but no word in English can match the original Chinese word in terms of its semantic function and cultural implication. In Li Po's poem, we have seen an abundance of these words and phrases, like "jaded steps", "gauze stockings", etc. Without an explanatory note to aid in the reading of the translated

text, it is hard for readers to gain a cultural understanding of the poem. Words with cultural associations always pose constraints on translators, but explanatory notes release translators from the yoke of untranslatability. By providing explanatory notes with the implied meanings of the words, the inadequacy of the flat translated text can be compensated. Readers' appreciation would be improved. The value and credibility of the translated text are also ensured and enhanced.

Also, the explanatory notes should elucidate the appropriate mode for reading Chinese poems. Of course, readers have the freedom to apply the reading mode in accordance with their purpose for reading the translation. However, an explanation of appropriate mode of reading, in itself, helps readers understand the differences in Chinese poetic traditions.

In addition, necessary to the explanatory notes is translator's message briefing readers on their translation philosophy and perhaps a self-critique of his or her translation. By illustrating their translation philosophy in translating the Chinese poem, translators could share with readers how they read the original Chinese poem, what their interpretation of the poem is, and most important, why they translate the poem in their particular way. A more responsible and open-minded translator may even offer a self-critique of his/her own translation, discussing the constraints and imperfections of the translated text with the readers. Such critique should not be viewed as a confession of the translators' inadequacies. Rather, it offers questions for discussion, a notion of their partialities, and food for thought.

Including explanatory notes to the English translation of each Chinese poem may seem unconventional and redundant. The truth is, many original Chinese poems are

followed by notes providing necessary information to aid native Chinese speakers in understanding their own poetic traditions. It is reasonable to offer explanatory notes for the English translation for readers of the translated text. One advantage of including such notes is that reader's insights will be significantly increased while reading the translated poems. The explanatory notes introduce the "extratextual factors" to readers and allow them to have an "intelligent reading" of the translated poem. Not only will readers develop a more comprehensive cultural understanding of the poem, they are also guided to discern the differences between different cultural traditions. This is exactly what cross-cultural studies aspire to achieve. Knowing to apply a different mode of reading to the translated text, readers are offered the chance to experience the cultural differences. By assuming the reading mode that probes the poet's inner mind, the distance between readers and the poet is diminished.

In addition to the benefits for the readers of the translated text, explanatory notes also benefit translators. By illuminating their translation philosophy in explanatory notes, translators free themselves and their work from being unduly judged. Explanatory notes open up a channel for translators to speak to readers, and allow readers and critics to evaluate the quality of translation by using theories in accordance with the translator's translation philosophy. Explanatory notes will greatly enhance the credibility and authenticity of the translated text. Of course, this benefit requires translators to take the obligation more seriously and meticulously in their translation. To provide explanatory notes on an individual word's cultural implications, translators have to make sure that they understand each word correctly. It is likely that, in this process translators will

discover their misinterpretation, and this is exactly why providing explanatory notes ensures the credibility of the translation.

Explanatory notes help to compensate for the inherent inadequacy of poetical translation in that they allow readers to have an “intelligent reading” of the poem. They bring the poet and the readers of the translated poem closer together. Explanatory notes also enable readers and critics evaluate the quality of translation according to the translators’ perception of translation.

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