

Forms of Open Form: A Comparison of English Translations of Li Ch'ing Chao

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Remarking upon American poetry in this century, Kenneth Rexroth defined the major groups as those who were metaphysical poets and those who were anti-literary and based their poetics in presentational immediacy.¹ The American metaphysical poets have displayed little interest in Chinese poetry and poetics. On the other hand, the poets of presentational immediacy, the Imagists, Objectivists and Post-modernists, have been influenced by Chinese poetry and poetics. The major translators of the Sung woman poet, Li Ch'ing Chao, are Kenneth Rexroth (and his later collaborator, Ling Chung) and the team of C. H. Kwock and Vincent McHugh. As translators, Rexroth/Chung and Kwock/McHugh practice quite different versions of presentational immediacy or, as it might also be called, open form. The minor translators of Li Ch'ing Chao have included those who have translated in the expedient context of essays about the poet, such as Kai-yu Hsu and Hu Pin-ching, and those who have accomplished limited translations for anthology purposes, such as Eugene Eoyang and the collaborators, Willis Barnstone and Sun Chu-chin. The minor translators practice various sorts of presentational immediacy/open form, and these approaches range from the Barnstone/Sun attempt to simulate Chinese line arrangement to the more standard English lineation, which bears close resemblance to Rexroth. The most distinctive of the various translators, Kwock and McHugh, differ from Rexroth through their practice of variable margins and radical syntactical breaks. They recall Modernist experimentation and developments among American Post-modernist poets of the 1950's and 1960's. Kwock and McHugh are the furthest translators from the forms of American metaphysical poetry (outside, of course, of the novelty translations of Barnstone/Sun). However, as we will show, in a comparison of the same poem of Li Ch'ing Chao, the major translators are, by moments, both more and less

successful than one another. In other words, there is no clear superiority in terms of the translations of Li Ch'ing Chao.

While the factors of the Chinese language, Chinese poetry and the distant era of the Sung dynasty provide immediate problems for translators of Li Ch'ing Chao into English, the translators have enjoyed an abundance of possibilities for rendering the translations into English. Kenneth Rexroth amounts to a remarkable instance of a poet-translator whose career recalls many developments of poetry in English in this century. After a brief period of youthful experimentation in the late 1920's with the prevalent current of literary cubism (an example of one of the successive movements and schools throughout Modernism), his work settled into its distinctive mode. Ordered by lines of agreed syllable length, his form of free verse often tended toward either a short lyrical poem or a long and discursive narrative poem. The best of his short lyrics have a specifically elegiac quality that extends to both tone and content. There is the obvious possibility of influence from Chinese poetry and from Imagist poetry in the Oriental mode in these short, lyrical elegies. In turn, in his translations, Rexroth's elegiac tone dominates other possibilities. But, after all, his choice of poetry to translate often ran in accord with the title of one of his translation projects: *Thirty Spanish Poems of Love and Exile*.² In one way, Rexroth's shorter lyrics have a plainness of diction that approximates translated poetry, but, at the same time, these shorter lyrics, and particularly the elegies, are complicated by a content that shares something with the metaphysical tradition, even as the poem is based on presentational immediacy. If this aspect of Rexroth's poetry suggests a regard for past tradition within English, the longer narrative poems look forward, in a specifically American context, to the 1950's: Rexroth's lament upon the death of Dylan Thomas, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," can be seen as an immediate progenitor of Allen Ginsberg's "Howl."³ To assign Rexroth to a particular school of American poetry is almost misleading. He is generally aligned with the Objectivists, yet he properly belongs to all three major aspects of presentational immediacy. He was, for instance, a very considerable influence on certain Post-modernists, even if his poetry and, consequently, his translation style, had been resolved by that period.

Speaking generally about the translation process in his essay, "Poet as Translator" (1959), Rexroth argues that the issue is essentially one of sympathy; the translator is an advocate, a special pleader for the original. "All great translations survive into our time because they were so completely of their own time," he continues, insisting upon the translator as one who

is conscious of communicating directly with his audience.⁴ He also argues for some attention to the act of translating, itself, the poignancy of the feeling of possession which can occur as the words of the original language come alive in one's own language. While this process cannot be analyzed, we feel Rexroth is justified in his emphasis. In a brief survey in his essay, Rexroth gives his choices for the outstanding translators from Chinese poetry into Western languages: Judith Gautier, Klabund, Pound, Stuart Merrill, Bynner, Waley, and Karlgren. Rexroth speaks of individually recognized translations such as Pound's "The River Merchant's wife: a Letter," and Witter Bynner's version of Yuan Chen's "Elegy for His Dead Wife" as also being important poems in English in this century (whether Rexroth originated this idea or not, it has certainly been repeated in regards to Pound's version of Li Po's poem). Finally, in Rexroth's summation, he states that the necessities of life are the foremost guide for the translator, an emphasis that coincides with his own tradition in presentational immediacy and with the spirit of the 1950's.⁵

In his introduction to *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* (1959), Rexroth speaks of his Sung translations and how he often allowed for freer versions than the literal rendering of the poem at hand.⁶ In the instance of Li Ch'ing Chao, he was to return to these early efforts and, with the collaboration of Ling Chung, refine them. There is one example of a Li Ch'ing Chao poem which has the early version, the same version with significant changes on a phonograph recording, and a later revision in the final volume. The poem, titled "The Day of Cold Food" in *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese*, also appears on *Poetry and Jazz from the Blackhawk (with Kenneth Rexroth)*, a recording, undated, but probably from the late 1950's.⁷ On the recording, the translation is paired with a translation of another Chinese woman poet, Chu-shu Chen, under the overall title, "The Deserted Courtesan." While the circumstances of the recording are notable in terms of the accompaniment, a cello, the comparison between Rexroth's printed translation and the actual lineation, as described by his voice on the recording, reveals a significant variance. In the original printed version, the translation goes:

浣溪紗

淡蕩春光寒食天，
玉爐沈水裊殘煙，
夢回山枕隱花鈿。

海燕未來人鬥草，
 江梅已過柳生綿，
 黃昏疎雨濕秋千。

The Day of Cold Food

Clear and bright is the splendour
 Of Spring on the Day of Cold Food.
 The dying smoke rises from
 The jade animal like a
 Silk thread floating in water.
 I dream on a pile of cushions,
 Amongst scattered and broken hair ornaments.
 The swallows have not yet come back
 From the Southern Sea, but already
 Men begin again, fighting for straws.
 Petals fly from the peach trees
 Along the river. Willow catkins
 Fill the air with floss. And then —
 In the orange twilight — fall
 Widely spaced drops of rain.⁸

In the recorded version of the translation, admittedly more pronounced and dramatized by the circumstances of a live and accompanied performance, the translation appears to follow this pattern:

Clear is the bright
 Of the first day of spring.
 The dying smoke rises
 From the jade animal
 Like a silk thread
 Floating in water.

I dream on a pile of cushions
 Amongst broken, scattered hair ornaments.

The swallows
 Have not yet come back
 From the Southern Sea

But already
Men begin again
Fighting for straws.

Petals
Fly from the peach trees
Along the river.

Willow catkins
Fill the air with floss.

And then –
In the orange twilight –
Fall
Widely
Spaced
Drops
Of Rain.⁹

In the two versions, the changes Rexroth has made, beyond the important issue of the line differentiation, are instructive. Obviously, in a live performance (and particularly in a nightclub), a Chinese festival with a translated name of "The Day of Cold Food" would not only sound awkward but also comical. Rexroth drops this phrase, refines the logic of the line about the broken hair ornaments and presents his translation in a quite emotional outpouring of grief to emphasize his sense of the original for an audience largely unfamiliar with such things. The cello, itself, takes a long solo and attempts, with some subtlety, a distinctively Chinese melodic line. There is a definite bridge established, one that suggests some approximation with the *tz'u* (although the performers might not have been especially aware of the potential). The issue of the different rendering of lines remains central to the question of Li Ch'ing Chao translations. If Rexroth's more pronounced shorter line in the oral version accords with a more accurate fashion than the way we have scored it, it would probably be much like the possibilities of line accomplished by Kwock and McHugh. The oral line clearly proposes another opening of form than the sort of form Rexroth depends upon in his printed translations.

When Rexroth collaborated with Ling Chung two decades later, he did not change the lineation of the poem, but he certainly refined and corrected

his previous versions. The title has been returned to scholarly Chinese, with the *tz'u* tune-pattern. A wide variation or mistake appears in relation to the line in the original: "Men begin again fighting for straws." The incense has been named (as it wasn't in the original). The name of the sea has been changed. However, the problem of the ending remains. This may well be in relation to Rexroth's concession on a very good line in English: "Willow catkins/Fill the air with floss." The final and collaborative translation reads:

The Day of Cold Food
To the tune "The Silk Washing Brook"

Clear and radiant is the splendor
Of Spring on the Day of Cold Food.
The dying smoke of aloes wood incense
Floats above the jade burner.
My dream is broken, and hidden
Like my flower hair ornaments
Buried in a pile of cushions.
The swallows have not yet come back
From the Eastern Sea, but already
People are gathering wild flowers and herbs
In the meadow. The plum blossoms by
The river are gone. Catkins
Appear on the willow branches.
And then — in the orange twilight —
Fall widely spaced drops of rain.¹⁰

The tone of the final Rexroth/Chung translation differs somewhat from Rexroth's earlier versions. The almost massive grief of the earlier translation has been refined into a more subtle yearning. Clearly, Rexroth mistranslated the line in his original version, the line about men fighting for straws. This refers to a festive occasion, the so-called "game of weeds." Kai-yu Hsu, who translates this poem more literally in his introductory essay, "The Poems of Li Ch'ing Chao" (1962), clarifies this line and the problem of the final line:

Rippling spring light in late April —
A whiff of dying incense smoke hovers over
the burner.
Waking from a dream I find my hairpin under
the pillow.

Swallows are yet to return, though people
 are playing the game of weeds now.
 Plum blossoms are over, and catkins have
 appeared on the willow trees.
 An evening drizzle wets the deserted swing.¹¹

The "game of weeds," as Hsu describes it in a note to his translation, is a game in which the players (couples?) select strong lengths of grass stems, tie knots, intertwine the stems and tug to see whose stem breaks first. Hsu also refers, in the same note, to another folk game during the Dragon Boat Festival of the fifth month (the Day of Cold Food belongs to the third month). On that day, participants gather specimens of grass, weeds, shrubs, in a contest which awards the most extensive collection (a rather wonderful evocation of a very distant and perhaps tribal past). This would seem to be the occasion Rexroth and Chung refer to in their translation, perhaps as an alternative to the difficult cross-cultural understanding of the "game of weeds." Rexroth's original translation, where men begin again fighting for straws, can be seen as a substitution of sensibility. As Hu Pin-ch'ing points out in her study of Li Ch'ing Chao, she was not a poet who would have spoken about such matters as war or, to allow Rexroth leeway, the eternal strife among men.¹² In his original translation, Rexroth was substituting the sensibility of a poet such as Tu Fu or himself. The variation also describes the pronounced difference between men and women in traditional Chinese society. Li Ch'ing Chao is a poet of the chamber and the courtyard. While she will allow herself to range into nature beyond those precincts, she will not allow herself the commentary about war and strife, a commentary that would have belonged to the world of men.

The problem of the final line of the poem remains. Hsu prefers the literal, as does Hu Pin-ch'ing ("At dusk, a drizzling rain soaks my swing."). Rexroth's final line is quite different, but for logical reasons. This line evidently carries an erotic connotation in Chinese culture. However, it sounds almost silly in English. Certainly, the erotic connotation would accord with the burgeoning of spring stated throughout the poem and possibly add poignancy to the loneliness of the speaker (if this indeed is the instance here rather than a celebration of spring itself). Rexroth does create a poignancy with his version in English, even if it is unfaithful to the original. Poetically speaking, he was correct in his erring. After all, Li Ch'ing Chao's poem has the quality of a pageant, and Rexroth sustains that potential in

English through the conclusion.

To understand the differences between Rexroth (and Rexroth/Chung) and Kwock and McHugh, one might turn to Wai-lim Yip's introduction to *Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres* (1976). Yip points out the evolution from Modernist predecessors to Post-modernists in terms of such open forms as page presentation: "the break-up of lines into small units graphically arranged."¹³ He also demonstrates how the visual nature of images are promoted through their isolation as independent visual units. Perhaps most importantly, in order to separate these strategies from mere typography, he provides examples from Pound, Williams, Creeley and Snyder to show how the voice itself, tone and diction and phrasing, are placed with greater precision. An obvious manifestation of post-modernism's emphasis upon the actual voice and colloquial diction exists in Snyder's poetry and in his translation of the Han Shan (Cold Mountain) Poems. In Snyder's poetry, as Yip shows, English approaches Chinese. Snyder also makes the most recognizable bridge between Rexroth and Kwock and McHugh. As a young poet, Snyder wrote almost perfect imitations of Rexroth (cf. "Above Pate Valley"). As he developed at the beginning of the 1960's, Snyder shifted towards the open forms exhibited by Kwock and McHugh, who were translating Li Ch'ing Chao during this same period. While there was probably little influence, since the New American poets and associated poets shared many of these tendencies during and after this period, the likeness of Kwock and McHugh to the Snyder poem which Yip uses as example is readily apparent.¹⁴

The complex across/down pattern of lines and movement in the Post-modernist poem has a relationship with the Chinese language. Since Chinese is traditionally written vertically on the page in character columns, there is a natural obstacle in the horizontal English poetic line. It is not necessarily true that the poetic line must read horizontally, as the Modernists well knew. It might be argued that rhetorical patterns in English present their gist more clearly in a horizontal line, but, in the sometimes overly-pruned syntax of a poet such as Snyder, the rhetorical pattern is not the leading indicator. Among the Li Ch'ing Chao translators, the most extreme response to this problem comes from Willis Barnstone and Sun Chu-chin who utilize the down column and ask the English reader to read right to left in the Chinese manner:

the influence of foreign music, foreign tunes, brought in uneven lines. One syllable to a line, three, five, nine, eleven — anything to fit the tune. That was the *tz'u* . . . So the way we break it up on the page is really in accord with that. That *convention*. I always have the feeling any verse that runs vertically has a timeless value whereas horizontal lines are limited in time. By time?¹⁷

To compare line breaking translators, here is the Kwock/McHugh version of the same poem translated by Barnstone/Sun:

Recollections of a Dream

(written to the air of *Yu Chia Ngao*)

*The lyf so short, the craft
so long to lerne . . .*

Sky

joining cloud in dawn murk
sea

Star river

about to change i
into a thousand
sails
dancing

So

as if my other I
went back
to Heaven's Emperor's House

I hear

Heaven speak
solicitous
asking
where I'm going

I answer:

'A long way
'lamenting
' — how late in the day!
'Mastered

'the poetic art
 'and got
 'not one line
 'to startle the world'

I now
 like the Great Bird P'eng
 Wind-rider
 first
 lifting wing
 on his journey
 — 90,000 miles!
 O wind!
 hold true
 Blow my sail
 far out
 to the Immortals'
 Three
 Islands¹⁸

Comparing the Barnstone/Sun with the Kwock/McHugh translation, an obvious difference would be diction. Despite the superficially extreme nature of Barnstone and Sun's version, they maintain a standard American English diction throughout. They certainly do not approach the Chinese-like English of Kwock and McHugh's final stanza, and Barnstone/Sun do not suggest the multiplicity of Chinese in the way Kwock/McHugh suggest it in the second line of their first stanza:

Sky
 joining cloud
 sea in dawn murk

As Vincent McHugh says:

. . . the word order in Mandarin, lacking nearly all such pointers as articles, prepositions, inflections, or differentiation between the form of singular or plural, noun or verb or adjective, is nevertheless *precisely what we should regard as logical in English*.

As against the word order in Latin, for example. *It makes sense* as English and as poem.

.....

AXIOM: TO STICK AS CLOSE AS MAY BE TO THE INTENSE
MATHEMATICAL CONCISION OF THE CHINESE
AND CREATE STRUCTURES TO PROJECT THIS IN
ENGLISH¹⁹

Another significant difference between the translations of Li Ch'ing Chao's "Recollection of a Dream," would be the verb usage. Barnstone and Sun use verbs in a normal fashion. Their "is to" line in their last stanza is less than normal and a poor choice. Kwock and McHugh, as one of their axioms declares, wish to avoid standard verb usage:

AXIOM: MORE THAN DRONE OR DRIP OR IAMB THE
SIMPLE DECLARATIVE VERB IS THE CURSE OF
ENGLISH POETRY AND TRANSLATION

Or almost any verb you can avoid, for that matter. What you were told in rhetoric classes is all wrong. Most verbs don't add zing to a sentence. They *describe* action. They don't *make* it. Functionally, they're discourse, not poetry. (With the usual exceptions.) Many an oral sentence — and why not in poetry? — works better with nothing but a participle. Or no verb at all.

Or haven't you noticed?²⁰

This advocacy of participles and 'incomplete' sentences certainly sounds wonderful, even if Kwock and McHugh practice it less often than their declaration suggests. This debatable but provocative notion goes along with the paring of other parts of English sentences (subjects and articles, especially) in poetic practice in this century. There must be concision in English to approach Chinese, but there is also a limit: under-translation. The British translator, for instance, who prefers rhetorical structures and a regular line is, after all, attempting to meet the demands of his possible readers as well as the demands of Chinese or American poetics.

In the passage about the writing of poetry in "Recollection of a Dream," there is a wide variance between the translators. Barnstone/Sun may well be closer to the Chinese sense of syntactical structure, but they may also have confused the sense of Li Ch'ing Chao's original poem. The Barnstone/

Sun version reads: "I/say:/The road/is long,/the day/near dusk//in writing/poems,/people-/starting/words/come/invisibly." The Kwock/McHugh version of this passage is emphasized, in the overall poem, by the addition of an epigraph, the first line of Chaucer's "The Parlement of Foules": "The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne" — a paraphrase of *Ars longa, vita brevis*. While their version of this passage makes better sense than Barnstone/Stone, Kwock/McHugh stumble on the colloquial 'got/not' juxtaposition, marring their otherwise consistent diction. Their passage reads: "I answer:/A long way/'lamenting/' — how late in the day!/'Mastered the poetic art/' and got/'not one line/' to startle the world." For an English reader of these translations, it is difficult to say whether one set of translators is superior to the others in terms of the original poem's movement, said to be "as rapid as a galloping horse."²¹ Where Barnstone/Sun have movement through their one and two-word lines, Kwock and McHugh have movement (and sometimes grace) through their use of participles and line breaks.

"Recollection of a Dream" remains a unique poem in the extant work of Li Ch'ing Chao. Rexroth claims there is no other poem like it written by a woman in Chinese literature.²² It is mystical and visionary and related to Chinese shamanic tradition, as expressed by the legendary bird's flight. In his note on the poem, Rexroth wonders if many of Li Ch'ing Chao's "love poems" are actually mystical. It is, of course, a question not easily answered, a question to remind us of our distance from this woman's sensibility, especially the finer points, as well as our distance in time from her era. Because the poetic form of the *tz'u* remains at least a more reliable path for our knowledge of her work, if not her person altogether, we wish now to turn to some considerations of the form in order to create the basis for our final comparison between the major translators.

When the critics Wang Kuo-wei and James J.Y. Liu refer to the *ching-chieh* 境界 "world" of a poem, they are referring to the essence of the poem.²³ Both Wang and Liu utilize this term as a technical category of critical analysis. For instance, Liu distinguishes "world" from both "content" and "theme" as employed in Euro-American criticism.²⁴ Perhaps this is why Wang says that "poetry dies when titles are given."²⁵ A title may hint at content or state the theme of a poem, but a title cannot summarize the "world" a poem creates. The phrase *ching-chieh* is listed in *Matthews' Chinese-English Dictionary* where its meaning is given simply as "state; condition; boundary."²⁶ There is little guidance here for either poet or translator. However, Wieger's etymology of the character *ching* 境 gives us an

essential clue to how the poem as a whole functions as "territory" 土, the radical meaning in itself "earth." Here it keys the locative function of the character. 竟 is the phonetic element. Wieger identifies two components to the structure of the element: 音 meaning sound or utterance and 儿 from 人 man. Thus, "limits or boundaries; where the 音 languages or dialects of 儿 men change."²⁷ In turn, the character 境 *ching* suggests a territory or "world" which is limited and defined by the quality of language we encounter. This casts light on Liu's concept of "exploration" as a principle of poetic development. He views "world" and "language" as two aspects of the single event of the poem:

In other words, poetry embodies a process of probing into reality and experience, and, at the same time, a process of searching for the right words. Thus the word 'exploration' is meant to emphasize that poetry is neither a physical object nor a kind of code which communicates a 'message', but a verbal symbol which embodies a mental process of creation on the part of a poet and evokes a similar process of re-creation on the part of the reader.²⁸

Although the basic character of the *tz'u* is determined by its melody, the counterpoint of metric-tonal and syntactical structures lends specific character to the territory of this poetic "world." Exploration of objective and subjective potentials in the act of composition results in the consummation of the vision of the poem. The vitality and depth of a given image depends upon its relation to the other elements within the composition as a whole. The Chinese language and *tz'u* as a lyrical form in particular are sinuous and flexible instruments for the creation of "worlds" out of such relationships.

The translator's task, intermediate between that of the poet and reader, would appear to be maddening. For instance, how is the translator to capture the dynamic of meter tone and syntax that generates the specific texture and emotional value of the "world" in the Chinese original? The exploratory development of imagery in the Chinese original often depends upon the presentation of characters or phrases in a precise sequence that becomes scrambled or vague when forced into conformity with English phrasing and syntax. Even the traditional presentation of poems in vertical

lines presents a unique problem for the translator who may or may not find clear guidelines for where a line ends or where enjambment occurs between lines. Liu cites lack of punctuation, the use of the term *chü* 句, to denote both syntactic and metrical units and the lack of a Chinese term for "enjambment" as problems of a critical nature in evaluating the number and length of lines in *tz'u*. In addition, he cites variations in syntactical units within extended metrical sequences and the loss of the *tz'u* melodies themselves as factors which may lead to confusion.²⁹ The problems thus raised have solutions appropriate to our individual cases; but it becomes clear that translation, where the "world" of the *tz'u* is concerned, is more a task of transmutation into a "world" disclosed in the poetic potential of English than a mechanical transposition from Chinese of the original poet's exploratory process.

In considering translations of Li Ch'ing Chao's *tz'u*, there are two lines from Wang Kuo-wei's *Poetic Remarks in the Human World* (人間詞話) which may provide a basis for evaluating not only the translation's fidelity to the "world" of the original but also its value as a "world" standing independent as a poem in English. The first of these terms, world with self (有我之境), and the second, world without a self (無我之境), refer to the stance of the poetic persona within the poem:

In the *world* with a self, it is "I" who look at the external objects, and, therefore, everything is tinged with my color; in the *world* without a self, it is one object that looks at other objects, and therefore, one no longer knows which is "I" and which is "object."³⁰

The translator of the *tz'u* form must take special care in the representation of the person's relationship to the objects and images. The "world" emerges in the balanced relationship between the two. Identity may be reinforced or challenged by engaging a particular object or natural principle. Conversely, the environment may be illumed as the poet's perception is informed by a particular emotion or memory. There is a process of projection involved on the part of the poet, as well as an exploration. With Li Ch'ing Chao, one often has the feeling that in her bereavement and exile it is the tension of facing the crisis of identity in solitude which motivates the gesture of poetry in the first place. It is the unique strength of her character engaging the crisis through the medium of her poetry which makes her poems great.

Therefore, the translator must handle the representation of personal identity with care.

The appropriate handling of this problem will fulfill the condition that Wang means to assert by distinguishing between "veiled" and "not veiled" 隔與不隔之別. The character 隔 (*ke*) denotes separation, division or filtering as by wall or membrane. One of Wang's examples of a verse with a "veiled" quality (we might say "insulated") is by Chiang Kuei 姜夔 or 白石: "The wine washes away my light sorrows and the flowers melt my heroic passions" 酒祓清愁; 花消英氣. Here, sentiment and circumstance are presented in general terms and in terms of a causal relationship (wine acting on sorrows, flowers on passion) which, as a causal relationship, can be perceived only from a stance at one remove from the situation as such. In contrast, Wang quotes from the same poem: "Standing on the steps of jade; gazing afar, I sigh for the luxuriant grass extending onward a thousand miles" 玉梯凝望久, 歎芳草萋萋千里.³¹ This verse represents a world with a self, but it does so with presentational immediacy. The poet's stance, his surroundings and his response require no mediating exploration. There is no division among them and the verse as a whole is "not veiled"; therefore, a "world" emerges; natural principle and humane response are integrated in one poetic gesture. Turning now to the *tz'u* of Li Ch'ing Chao, we can read the form in terms of the challenge it presents for the translators and then examine how the translators fare.

The *tz'u* to the tune *I Ch'in Wo* 憶秦娥,³² entitled "Wu-t'ung Tree" or "Wu-t'ung Leaves," is a short *tz'u* which repeats part of certain lines to intensify the emotional impact of the imagery. Although the poet is clearly present in the context of the scene, she mentions herself as subject of feeling only once, in the later part of the poem. The opening line *lin kao ko* 臨高閣 locates her in the act of looking from a high tower. 臨 may mean either "approach" or "look down." The scene before her is uninviting:

亂 山 平 野 煙 光 薄
luan shan p'ing yeh yen kuang po
disordered mt. even plain mist light thin

The last phrase, concerning the mist, is repeated. The hour and the atmosphere lack comfort. The next two lines may function as a subtle parallelism, i.e., as the crows return to their roost, the poet's attention turns inward from open space:

棲 鴉 歸 後，暮 天 角
 hsi ya kuei hou mu t'ien chueh (chio)
 perch crow return back evening sky horn

斷 香 殘 酒 情 懷 惡，
 tuan hsiang ts'an chiu ch'ing huai O, wu
 stop remanant dregs
 cut off scent spilt wine feelings longing evil, hateful
 dregs

The crow or raven is by tradition considered a friend of gloom. But here, the simplicity of the bird's natural gesture is contrasted with the poet's disordered and explicitly afflicted condition. It is not the landscape which prompts her emotional response. Nor does she introject her personal feeling into the scene. Rather, her "world" both without and within is fatefully impoverished of warmth and emotional nourishment. The crow's return accords with its nature and the time of day; her return does not, nor can it. At once plaintively and with muted defiance, she contemplates her condition in identity with the seasonal rhythm:

西 風 催 襯 梧 桐 落
 hsi feng ts'ui ch'en wu-t'ung loh
 west wind hasten assist wu-t'ung fall, drop

梧 桐 落
 wu t'ung loh
 wu-t'ung drop

又 還 秋 色 又 還 寂 寞
 yu huan chiu se yu huan chi mo
 again return autumn color against return stillness
 lonely, silence of
 solitude

The personal distress that concludes line 5 has been transformed into an expression of endurance. The situation is neither hopeful nor intolerable. Waning light and bitter wind both without and within yield a severe beauty to the "world" of the poet through the strength of the poet's character.

Having generated a basic reading of the Chinese text, we can turn now to two very different translations of the same poem by our major translators, Rexroth/Chung and Kwock/McHugh:

THE WU-T'UNG TREE

To the tune "Remembering the Girl of Ch'in"

I stand on a high tower
 And look over jumbled mountains
 And wilderness plains
 And thin gleaming mist —
 Thin gleaming mist.
 As the ravens fly home to roost,
 Bugles ring out against the sunset sky.
 The incense has faded,
 But some wine remains.
 My arms embrace nothing but remorse.
 The wu-t'ung leaves fall —
 The wu-t'ung leaves fall.
 Autumn colors return.
 My desolation returns.³³

— Rexroth/Chung

THE WU-T'UNG LEAVES

(To the air of *Yi Ch'in Wo*)

Going up
 to the high balcony
 Disordered mountains
 level plain
 in
 thin
 mist
 In thin mist
 the crows
 homing
 I hear
 cowhorns in the dusk
 Burnt-out incense
 leftover wine
 Weary at heart
 West wind hurrying
 wu-t'ung leaves
 to their fall

The *wu-t'ung* leaves'

fall

Moment of loneliness!

Autumn sign!

— Kwock/McHugh³⁴

Rexroth and Chung present a poem which is clearly focussed on the "I" as subject. Kwock and McHugh introduce "I" only once. In that respect, Kwock and McHugh seem closer to the "world" of the original. Rexroth and Chung have apparently translated 臨, the first character in the poem, twice. "Stand" in the first line and "look out over" in the second line both focus attention on the action of the persona. Kwock and McHugh utilize a participle to avoid introducing an explicit subject. They also employ line breaks to create pauses between the elements of the image as a whole. Rexroth and Chung repeat "and" three times in a row. There is no equivalent structure in the Chinese. Since the first conjunction links actions of the subject and the the second conjunction links two separate objects, the conjunctions result in some minor syntactic confusion. They do have the advantage of emphasizing the force of the repeated phrase: "thin gleaming mist." This image in Rexroth and Chung's translation, through the use of the unusual participle "gleaming" to translate 光, conveys a curious personal force to the image. The effect is oddly disturbing.

On the other hand, Kwock and McHugh avoid the issue of how to translate 光 by simply deleting it. They generally choose simpler terms than Rexroth and Chung to stand for the Chinese. Kwock and McHugh rely on the word order of the Chinese and emphasize it by carefully distributed line breaks to carry the emotional force of the original. Kwock and McHugh provide the reader with a fair chance of "exploration" of the poem's "world" as it emerges image by image. They draw the reader into the poem rather than explicitly producing the dramatic context. In their translation, the repetition of "in thin mist" introduces the image of crows returning and horns sounding in the evening sky. Rather than the emphasis on "gleaming" we encountered in Rexroth and Chung's version, we encounter the all-pervading quality of the mist. The mood achieved by the association of mist, crows homing and cowhorns in the dusk is not veiled in the sense that the parts cohere without division among them and with an emotional integrity that requires no comment or explanation. By contrast, the emotional value of the

lines in Rexroth and Chung is not as clearly related to the poem as a whole. How are we supposed to feel as "bugles ring out against the sunset sky"? The image violates the brief simplicity of the original, and there seems little reason to associate bugles and ravens. The relationship of the image to what precedes and what follows is "veiled" to say the least.

The two translations differ over the "wine." Rexroth and Chung feel there is wine still left, while Kwock and McHugh feel there is only leftover wine. The character 殘 may mean spilt. It may also refer to residue or remnants. By utilizing "but" as a conjunction and implying a distinction between incense and wine, Rexroth and Chung seem to have over-translated the line. The concluding phrase to this line, 情懷惡, comes in for characteristic treatment by both sets of translators. Rexroth and Chung capture the specific character of empty longing in dramatic terms by elaborating the image. Kwock and McHugh come closer to transposing the precise metric value, a restrained expression of misery, but their line lacks the ache of desire.

In the last lines of the poem, Rexroth and Chung delete the reference to "west wind" on textual grounds. Aside from this deletion, which may be more correct than Kwock and McHugh's version, Rexroth and Chung present a version of the last lines that is poignant and accurate to the text. Their straight repetition of the phrase, "The wu-t'ung leaves fall," carries all the force of the original. Kwock and McHugh vary the syntax in which the wu-t'ung leaves are presented. At the first reference to the wu-t'ung leaves, they form the third of three line fragments beginning with 'w.' The lines are at once light and hard to read through (a brittle quality, like autumn leaves themselves). The leaves fall as a consequence of the onrushing west wind. The character of the event epitomizes the poem as a whole: "Moment of loneliness!/Autumn sign!" Curiously, Kwock and McHugh have deleted any reference to "return" 還 in the last line. It is also curious that they use exclamation marks for emphasis. They characterize the fall of the leaf in itself as the "moment of loneliness" — thus an autumn sign, the gap between tree and ground as the leaf falls. This would indeed be a fitting focus for the conclusion of the poem. But something of the depth of feeling has been lost here, while it is forcefully conveyed in Rexroth and Chung's version. The addition of exclamation marks is a weak effort at compensation.

When Rexroth and Chung err, it is on the side of over-translation; when Kwock and McHugh err, it is on the side of under-translation. On the whole,

Kwock and McHugh seem to have represented Li Ch'ing Chao's "world" with greater accuracy both to the Chinese text and to the delicately poised quality of her identity within the "world" the poem discloses. They organize their lines in separated and staggered phrases and therefore reflect something of the vertical nature of the Chinese lines. The rhythmic qualities of Kwock and McHugh's version are characterized by flexibility: the reader may feel encouraged to slow down or speed up and experiment with a variety of different rhythmic phrasings. The reader is thus encouraged to explore the poem and not merely in application of critical theory; the emotional depth opens and quickened perception is the reader's own possibility. Rexroth and Chung's translation is a compelling and beautiful poem in its own right. By transforming a world without self into a world with self, they greatly enhance the emotional impact that emerges on first reading. The overly elaborate working of certain images may well be redeemed by the lean strength of the last four lines of the poem. Obviously, each translation has its strengths and weaknesses. If we have learned anything from this exercise, it is respect for the value of the *tz'u* as a lyric form of great emotional depth and equally great flexibility in sensual perception.

Notes

1. Kenneth Rexroth, "On Translating Roman Verse," *With Eye and Ear* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 146. In a related passage in this essay, Rexroth justifies the proximity of presentational immediate poetics to Chinese by suggesting that the American language is moving away from its Indo-European origins "and is so far from the inflected subtleties of Latin that it is closer much to the syntactical logic of Chinese."
2. Kenneth Rexroth, *Thirty Spanish Poems of Love and Exile* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1957).
3. Kenneth Rexroth, *Thou Shalt Not Kill* (New York: New Directions, 1954).
4. Kenneth Rexroth, "The Poet as Translator," *Assays* (New York: New Directions, 1961), pp. 19-40. This essay, first delivered at a Symposium on Translation at the University of Texas in November, 1959, is also included in Arrowsmith and Shattuck's *The Craft and Context of Translation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), pp. 29-49.
5. Rexroth, "The Poet as Translator."
6. Kenneth Rexroth, *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. xi.
7. Kenneth Rexroth, *Poetry and Jazz at the Blackhawk* (with Kenneth Rexroth) (Fantasy #7008, n.d., app. 1959). The musicians are unnamed on this recording. It is possible that the accompanying cellist on the track with the Chinese translations was Fred Katz.
8. Li Ch'ing Chao, "The Day of Cold Food," trans. Kenneth Rexroth, *One Hundred*

Poems from the Chinese (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 98.

9. Rexroth, *Poetry and Jazz at the Blackhawk*.
10. Li Ch'ing Chao, *Complete Poems*, trans. Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung (New York: New Directions, 1979), p. 23.
11. Li Ch'ing Chao, "The Day of Cold Food," trans. Kai-yu Hsu, "The Poems of Li Ch'ing Chao (1084-1141)," *PMLA*, 77 (1962), 521-28.
12. Hu Pin-ch'ing, *Li Ch'ing Chao* (New York: Twayne publishers, 1966), p. 66.
13. Yai-lim Yip, *Chinese Poetry: Major Modes and Genres* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 32.
14. The Snyder poem Yip uses as example is "Burning the Small Dead" from *The Back Country* (New York: New Directions, 1967). In *The Back Country*, Snyder is far more experimental than he is in earlier or later work. Although many commentators prefer his early book, *Myths and Texts*, it must be said that the music of his poetry is far superior in a later volume such as *Regarding Wave* (1970), the result of the experimentation in *The Back Country*.
15. Li Ch'ing Chao, untitled version of "Recollection of a Dream," trans. Willis Barnstone and Sun Chu-chin, *A Book of Women Poets from Antiquity to Now*, ed. Alike Barnstone and Willis Barnstone (New York: Shocken Books, 1980), p. 136. The editors also include versions by Rexroth and Eugene Eoyang of other Li Ch'ing Chao poems.
16. See the Eoyang and Rexroth versions for the sake of contrast in the above volume of women poets.
17. C. H. Kwock and Vincent McHugh, "Thoughts of Chairman Wen Ch'ang: A Translators' Dialogue," *Old Friend from Far Away* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1980), pp. 195-96.
18. Kwock and McHugh, *Old Friend from Far Away*, pp. 46-47. The same version exists in the Tao Press edition, San Francisco, 1962.
19. Kwock and McHugh, *Old Friend from Far Away*, pp. 188-89.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 192-93.
21. Hu Pin-ch'ing, *Li Ch'ing Chao*, p. 59.
22. Rexroth and Chung, *Li Ch'ing Chao: Complete Poems*, see the note on p. 116.
23. Wang Kuo-wei, *Poetic Remarks in the Human World*, trans. and annotated by Ching-i Tu (Taipei: Chung Hua, 1969), p. 1.
24. James J. Y. Liu, *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 199.
25. Wang, p. 39.
26. R.H. Matthews, editor, *Matthews' Chinese-English Dictionary* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 159.
27. L. Wieger, *Chinese Characters*, trans. L. Durant (New York: Dover, 1965), p. 187.
28. Liu, pp. 201-02.
29. James J. Y. Liu, *Major Lyricists of the Northern Sung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 10.
30. Wang, p. 2.
31. Wang, pp. 26-28.
32. "Yi Ch'in ê" 憶秦娥 in *Li Ch'ing-chao chi-chiao-chu* 李清照集校註 (Peking, 1979), p. 48.
33. Li Ch'ing Chao, *Complete Poems*, trans. Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung (New York, New Directions, 1979), p. 38.
34. Kwock and McHugh, p. 50.