

# English Translations of Classical Chinese Poetry Since the 1950s: Problems and Achievements

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During the last thirty years, many English translations of classical Chinese poetry have been published. The purpose of this paper is not to list them, nor to evaluate them. Instead, I will focus on a few of the problems faced by all translators of Chinese poetry, and show how different translators have dealt with them. As illustrations I choose translations which seem to me to be especially imaginative, or at least boldly innovative, in solving the problems under discussion. But I do not mean to imply that other translations, not mentioned in this paper, are less successful in tackling the same problems, or inferior as translations. I have grouped the problems to be discussed in four sets: (1) meter and prosody; (2) syntax, word order, connectives, parataxis and hypotaxis; (3) parallelism and antithesis; (4) repetitions of words and phrases.

## I. Meter and Prosody

### 1. Rhyme

Ideally, the meter chosen by the translator should resemble the meter of the Chinese original as closely as possible, but it must also be acceptable in English. Since rhyme is a constant feature of classical Chinese poetry and a familiar phenomenon in English verse, most English translations down to the early twentieth century were rhymed. But in the second half of this century, free verse and "sprung rhythm" have been favored over rhymed verse by the majority of translators. But there have been notable exceptions of translators using rhyme constantly or occasionally. We will consider five of them: Ezra Pound, James J. Y. Liu, Wayne Schlepp, John Turner, and David Hawkes.

Ezra Pound, in his complete translation of the *Shih ching* 詩經, *The Confucian Odes* (1954), uses rhyme in all but seventeen of the 305 poems. In the original *Shih ching*, all poems rhyme, except nine (nos. 266, 267, 271, 273, 277, 285, 293, 294, and 296). Only two of these nine poems (nos. 293 and 294) are unrhymed in Pound. That is to say, his decision whether to rhyme or not is in most cases not determined by the presence or absence of rhyme in the original Chinese poem. His fifteen other unrhymed poems are nos. 149 (aside from the near-rhyme whirling/surging), 177, 184, 208, 109, 244, 258, 259, 263, 264 (of its fifty-one lines, only the last two rhyme: be/thee), 268, 278, 295, 297, and 305. Furthermore, though he uses rhyme in most poems in *The Confucian Odes*, he often uses it sparingly, and he does not attempt to reproduce the original rhyme patterns, or even to make each translated line correspond to one Chinese line: he freely expands and contracts the length of individual lines and whole poems. Samples of Pound's translations will be given below under "Rhythm."

James Jo-yü Liu 劉若愚 used rhyme (occasionally replaced by assonance) in many of his translations in his pioneering book, *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (1962), and he faithfully kept the original rhyme patterns. But he abandoned rhyme in his later publications, having come to "realize the virtual impossibility of keeping the rhymes without damage to the meaning."<sup>1</sup>

Wayne Schlepp in his monograph on *san-ch'ü* 散曲 develops a theory and practice of using rhyme and other prosodic features in his English translations in such a way as to create effects comparable to the estimated effects of the original Chinese *san-ch'ü*, without attempting to use the same number of rhymes and the same rhyme schemes.<sup>2</sup> He honestly assesses the uneven results of his efforts to reproduce the effects of Chinese rhymes, and concludes that "serious Chinese verse is nearly always more successful in English without rhyme."<sup>3</sup>

Father Turner insists on using rhyme in nearly all his translations, and vigorously defends the need for both rhyme and rhythm.<sup>4</sup> To achieve rhyme and rhythm, he is willing to depart from the original rhyming and rhythmic patterns, to shift phrases, and at times to pad his lines, because his avowed aim is to create translations that sound like real English poems. Here is an example:

## 春曉 孟浩然

春眠不覺曉  
處處聞啼鳥  
夜來風雨聲  
花落知多少

Meng Hao-jan (689-740), "Dawn in Spring"

How suddenly the morning comes in Spring!  
On every side you hear the sweet birds sing,  
Last night amidst the storm – Ah, who can tell,  
With wind and rain, how many blossoms fall?<sup>5</sup>

Note the difference in the rhyme scheme, the addition of "sweet" in the second line, the omission of *sheng* "sound" in the third line, and the shift of "wind and rain" to the fourth line.

As for David Hawkes, he does not normally employ rhyme in his masterful translations of Chinese poetry. In his *Ch'u-tz'u: The Songs of the South* (1959) he renders the entire *Ch'u-tz'u*: 楚辭 into free verse. In *A Little Primer of Tu Fu* (1967), his "Exegesis" of each of the thirty-five poems contains a word-for-word rendition, and the "Translation" of each poem is a prose paraphrase. He says of Tu Fu's Regulated Verse (*lü-shih* 律詩): "Its perfection of form lends it a classical grace which unfortunately cannot be communicated in translation. That is the reason why Tu Fu, one of the great masters of this form, makes so comparatively poor a showing in foreign languages."<sup>6</sup> But in his most ambitious undertaking, his integral translation of *The Story of the Stone* (1973 –), Hawkes renders all the poems into rhymed verse, with an elegant Victorian ring that goes well with the graceful flow of his prose.

## 2. Free Verse and "Sprung Rhythm"

As already mentioned, since the 1950s rhymed translations have been less numerous than translations in free verse, and many translators have followed in the footsteps of the great pioneer, Arthur Waley (1889-1966). Between 1916 and 1923, Waley developed a meter based on the "sprung rhythm" of Gerald Manley Hopkins (1884-89), with as many stresses in each line as there are syllables in the Chinese line. In "sprung rhythm," stresses may follow each other without an intervening unstressed syllable, or they may be separated by any number of unstressed syllables. Waley's

“sprung rhythm” was most successful as a flexible, dynamic equivalent of the Chinese five-syllable line; it worked less well for the seven-syllable line. The latter, Waley stated in 1946, “is much more difficult to handle and I have not attempted any long poems in this meter.”<sup>7</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, Waley published two books with large portions of translated Chinese poems: *Yuan Mei* (1956) and *Ballads and Stories from Tun-huang* (1960). In *Yuan Mei* he selected for translation poems in five-syllable rather than seven-syllable meter as far as possible, and when he found it necessary to use poems in the longer meter, he tended to give excerpts only. Indeed, his renditions of five-syllable verse come out very well, e.g.,

人老惜分陰  
一日如一歲

When one is old, one treasures every minute;  
A single day is precious as a whole year. . . .<sup>8</sup>

His “sprung rhythm” versions of seven-syllable verse are less satisfying rhythmically, e.g.,

我震其名愈加意  
細嚙欲尋味外味

I had heard so much about this tea, that with great circumspection  
I sipped at it, so as not to miss the ‘flavour that is beyond  
flavour.’<sup>9</sup>

Most of the ballads translated in *Ballads and Stories from Tun-huang* are in seven-syllable meter.

### 3. Line Length

The problems posed by line length have been solved in various ways by different translators. Since the Chinese poetic tradition generally favors shorter lines than the English poetic tradition, and since classical Chinese words (however they may be defined) have a shorter average length than English words, Waley and many of his followers have wisely chosen to make one *stressed* English syllable correspond to each Chinese syllable. Other translators have disregarded line length altogether. A few have attempted

to match the number of syllables per line with exactly the same number of English syllables. Notable among these attempts is the book *Fifty Songs from the Yüan* by Richard F. S. Yang and Charles R. Metzger (1967). In what they call “the final English poetic translation,” Yang and Metzger create for each of the fifty *san-ch’ü* 散曲 an English version whose syllable count matches the Chinese line for line. Here is their first poem, “Sad Parting” by Kuan Han-ch’ing 關漢卿 (ca. 1220-ca. 1300), to the tune “Four Pieces of Jade”:

四塊玉 別情

自送別  
心難捨  
一點相思幾時絕  
凭欄袖拂楊花雪  
溪又斜  
山又遮  
人去也

I cannot  
Bear a love  
Cut off. My sleeve removes the  
Willow's snow. Winding fades the  
Stream beyond  
My hill-stopped  
Lover's view.<sup>10</sup>

While preserving line length and syllable count, this version makes substantial changes in the choice, order, and structure of words, phrases, and concepts. In an appendix, Yang and Metzger give for each poem a “word by word” translation and a “first draft.” The latter turns out to be a more faithful version in many cases than the “final English poetic translation.”

*Tz'u* 詞 is a poetic genre which, like *san-ch'ü*, originated as song words written in fixed patterns, to go with new or old musical tunes. Most *tz'u* and *san-ch'ü*, unlike most *shih* 詩, consist of lines of uneven length. These intricate formal patterns are difficult to convey in translation. Lois Fusek in her book *Among the Flowers* (1982), which is a complete translation of the anthology *Hua-chien chi* 花間集, has gone farther than anybody else in making the *tz'u* patterns visible in translation by exactly matching the relative length of every line in each poem. Besides, she indicates the

number of Chinese syllables to the right of the English line. For example:

夢江南 溫庭筠

千萬恨  
恨極在天涯  
山月不知心裏事  
水風空落眼前花  
搖曳碧雲斜

Wen T'ing-yün (812-817), "Dreaming of the South"  
(first of two)

Ever rising resentment,	(3)
It reaches out to him at world's end.	(5)
The moon over the mountain cannot know what she feels.	(7)
In water and wind, flowers fall lifelessly before her.	(7)
Dark clouds tremble and drift aslant.	(5) <sup>11</sup>

#### 4. Rhythm

Poetic rhythm is an essential but rather elusive goal of all those who want their translations to sound like poetry. No translator has reached this goal with more brilliance than Ezra Pound. Here are some samples, taken from his *Shih ching* translations. These samples will also illustrate Pound's rhymes (end rhymes and internal rhymes). Just as his rhyme schemes are unrelated to the original Chinese rhyme schemes, so his rhythmic patterns are unrelated to the rhythmic patterns of the original poems.

采采卷耳  
不盈頃筐  
嗟我懷人  
寘彼周行

Curl-grass, curl-grass,  
to pick it, to pluck it  
to put in a bucket  
never a basket load

Here on Chou road, but a man in my mind!

Put it down here by the road. . . (No. 3)

野有蔓草  
 零露漙兮  
 有美一人  
 清揚婉兮

Mid the bind-grass on the plain  
 that the dew makes wet as rain  
 I met by chance my clear-eyed man,  
 then my  
 Joy began. . . (No. 94)

(野有蔓草)  
 猗與那與  
 置我鞀鼓  
 奏鼓簡簡  
 衎我烈祖  
 湯孫奏假  
 綏我思成  
 (那)

Thick, all in mass  
 bring drums, bring drums  
 bring leather drums and play  
 to T'ang, to T'ang  
 source of us all, in fane  
 again, again, pray, pray:  
 T'ang's heir, a prayer  
 that puts a point to thought. . . (No. 301)

## 5. Caesura

An important structural element of Chinese verse is the caesura. A pioneer in indicating the caesura in translation is Hugh M. Stimson. In his "Lu In" (1974), he marks the caesura by starting a new, indented line at the caesura. In his later publications, he indicates the chief caesura by extra space between words, e.g.,

杜子將北征  
 蒼茫問家室

I, Master Tu about to Journey north

vast, vague    wonder about my home . . . .<sup>12</sup>

Stinson's example is followed by David Lattimore, e.g.,

三月三日天氣新  
長安水邊多麗人

Third month third day    the air tastes new  
in Ch'angan by the water    many a pretty girl . . .<sup>13</sup>

Here the minor caesura is marked by a little extra space, and the major caesura by more extra space.

Some other translators likewise mark the caesura by indention. Irving Yucheng Lo does this in his translation of Wang Wei's 王維 (701?-761?) "Red Peonies" ("Hung mu-tan" 紅牡丹):

綠艷閑且靜  
紅衣淺復深  
花心愁欲斷  
春色豈知心

Such radiance of green,  
so casual and composed;  
The tint of her dress  
blends crimson with pink.  
The heart of a flower  
is nearly torn with grief;  
Will spring's brilliance  
ever know her heart?<sup>14</sup>

But in his translation of three other poems by Wang Wei in the same five-syllable meter, Lo leaves the caesura unmarked.<sup>15</sup> Charles Hartman uses the same device of indention to indicate the caesura in his translation of Han Yü's 韓愈 (768-824) "The Girl from Flower Mountain" ("Hua-shan nü" 華山女):

街東街西講佛經

On street corners east and west  
they teach the Buddhist sutras . . .

But he is not quite consistent in his use of this device; sometimes the indentation does not coincide with the caesura, as in the following line (taken from the same poem):

黃衣道士亦講說

A yellow-robed Taoist also  
preaches his texts,<sup>16</sup>

William H. Nienhauser employs the same device as Lo and Hartman, with the same inconsistencies, in his translation of nine "Palace Poems" ("Kung tz'u" 宮詞) by Wang Chien 王建 (768-833). He leaves the caesura unmarked in the first and the eighth of the nine selections, and marks it by indenting in the other six. But he, too, does not always indent at the caesura, e.g.,

乞與金錢爭借問

With strings of cash they struggle  
to inquire of him,  
(Poem 4)<sup>17</sup>

## II. Syntax, Word Order, Connectives, Parataxis and Hypotaxis

Some of the best translators take great pains to keep the original word order as far as possible, while others consider word order less important. The former group takes advantage of the similarities between Chinese and English syntax. Angus C. Graham states that "when it is possible to approximate to the Chinese word-order it is in my experience very common to find after experimenting with different phrasings that it is after all the one nearest to the Chinese that makes the strongest English."<sup>18</sup> (Graham practices what he preaches in *Poems of the Late T'ang* and his other translations.) David Lattimore professes the same goal and reports a similar experience: "Chinese syntax is so close to English . . . that the attempt to get as close as possible to the original (without falling into pidgin) seemed worth making. Again and again, in trying to amend a locution or correct the tone, I have sought and found guidance in returning to the Chinese. Almost without exception my translations are not only line-for-line, but colon-for-colon

within the line.”<sup>19</sup> And most recently, David R. Knechtges, in the first volume of his monumental *Wen-hsüan* 文選 translation, has defined his purpose and procedure in this respect as follows: “Although I have striven for consistency and have tried to follow the original word order, in a number of places I have had to produce, either for considerations of clarity or euphony in English, a rendering that only approximates the Chinese. I have also not hesitated to supply the understood subject where omitting it would make the line incomprehensible. Other slight deviations from the original include the addition of conjunctions and transition words in order to make a smoother connection between lines and clauses.”<sup>20</sup> But many translators make less of an effort to adhere to the original word order, especially those who attach primary importance to formal prosodic features, such as rhyme (see Turner’s example above) or line length (see the sample from Yang and Metzger above).

Despite the basic similarities between Chinese and English word order, the syntax of classical Chinese poetry involves problems on which scholars and translators agree neither in theory nor in practice. David Knechtges, in the statement just quoted, articulates the conventional view that understood subjects, conjunctions, and connectives should be supplied in translation. While Knechtges refers here to the translation of *fú* 賦 only, many conventional translators would feel free to make the same additions in other poetic genres as well. Wai-lim Yip 葉維廉, on the other hand, asserts that conventional translators “must have been led by the sparseness of syntax in the original to believe that the Chinese characters must be telegraphic — in the sense that they are shorthand signs for a longhand message — and so they took it as their task to translate the shorthand into longhand, poetry into prose, adding commentary all along to aid understanding, not knowing that these are ‘pointers’ toward a finer shade of suggestive beauty which the discursive, analytical, longhand unfolding process destroys completely. The fact is: these images, often coexisting in spatial relationships, form an atmosphere or environment, an ambience, in which the reader may move and be directly present. . . .”<sup>21</sup> In his own translations, Yip therefore dispenses with most (but not all) syntactic connectives, e.g., in the second half of Liu Tsung-yüan’s 柳宗元 (773-819) “River Snow” (“Chiang hsüeh” 江雪):

孤舟簑笠翁  
獨釣寒江雪

Single boat. Bamboo-leaved cape. An old man  
Fishing by himself; ice-river. Snow.<sup>22</sup>

David Lattimore, in *The Harmony of the World*, also makes it a point to supply connectives very sparingly; but he arrives at a different reading of the "River Snow" couplet, taking *chiang* 江 as a modifier of *hsüeh* 雪, and *chiang hsüeh* as the object of *tiao* 釣:

Lone boat old man coolie hat straw coat  
angles by himself the cold Yangtze snow

A translator who is radical and rather consistent in sticking to the original word order, with a minimum of added subject pronouns and connectives, is Eric Sackheim, in ... *the silent Zero, in search of Sound* ... (1968). Here are some samples:

戰城南  
死郭北  
野死不葬鳥可食

Fighting city south  
Dying wall north  
Field dead unburied, the crows can eat ...<sup>23</sup>

旦辭爺娘去  
暮宿黃河邊

... Morning: leave father/mother and go  
Evening: lodged at the Yellow River side ...<sup>24</sup>

衰榮無定在  
彼此更共之

Decline/flourish: without fixity  
That/this: in turn, both of them ...<sup>25</sup>

An illuminating discussion of problems of prosody, syntax, and diction in translating Chinese poetry into English is Angus C. Graham's review of John D. Frodsham's book on Li Ho 李賀.<sup>26</sup> Grabam points out that "elaboration of grammatical relationships between clauses puts an obscuring

film of thought between the seer and what he sees" (p. 565). Graham also warns translators against replacing Chinese parataxis with English hypotaxis (*ibid.*). Preference for parataxis is indeed a striking feature of Chinese verse. However, when two phrases follow each other in a Chinese poem, it is sometimes hard to tell whether the first is meant to be subordinate to the second or coordinate with it. But the translator has to make a choice, and parataxis is usually more effective than hypotaxis in modern English poetic translation. Compare two versions of Wang Wei's "Chin-hsieh ch'üan" 金屑泉, the first by Chang Yin-nan and Lewis C. Walmsley, the second by Pauline Yu:

日飲金屑泉  
少當千餘歲  
翠鳳翔文螭  
羽節朝玉帝

He who drinks daily from the Stream of Powdered Gold  
Shall live at least a thousand years!  
Then he will be presented to the Jade Emperor,  
Riding beneath a plumed canopy in a carriage drawn by  
soaring blue phoenixes and spirited young dragons.<sup>27</sup>

Drink each day at Gold Powder Spring  
And you should have a thousand years or more:  
To soar on an azure phoenix with striped dragons,  
And with plumes and tassels attend the Jade  
Emperor's court.<sup>28</sup>

### III. Parallelism and Antithesis

Parallelism and antithesis are significant features in classical Chinese poetry, and they are occasionally employed in English poetry. But a long series of end-stopped lines and too much precise parallelism tend to sound bad in English. Therefore some of the best translators deliberately break up the parallelism of Chinese couplets, e.g., Kenneth O. Hanson in two "Short Poems on Various Subjects" ("Tsa-shih" 雜詩) by Han Yü:

朝蠅不須驅  
暮蚊不可拍

Don't shoo the morning flies away

Nor swat mosquitoes in the evening. . . .

雀鳴朝營食

鳩鳴暮覓羣

Mornings the sparrow twitters seeking food  
The dove at evening coos to woo her mate. . . .<sup>29</sup>

Other translators skillfully preserve syntactic and semantic parallelism, and thus manage to convey to the English reader an essential element of Chinese poetry, without violating standard English syntax and diction. Anne Birrell is one of the many able recent translators who take great pains in this respect. Here is a sample from her book, *New Songs from a Jade Terrace* (1982), which is a translation and explication of the entire *Yü-t'ai hsin yung* 玉臺新詠:

高臺動春色

清池照日華

綠葵向光轉

翠柳逐風斜

The tall terrace stirs with spring's flush,  
Clear pools reflect sunlit splendour,  
Green mallow twists toward sunlight,  
Kingfisher willow slants with the wind. . . .<sup>30</sup>

Since antithetical middle couplets are a constant feature of Regulated Verse (*lü shih* 律詩), this poetic form poses a special problem for translators. (One may recall the remark by David Hawkes, quoted above, about the difficulty of translating Tu Fu's Regulated Verse.) Some recent translators have striven hard to do justice to this crucial feature, e.g., Jan W. Walls:

號山無定鹿

落樹有驚蟬

暫憶江東鱸

兼懷雪下船

Mountain winds howl; deer unsettled;  
Tree leaves drop: cicada alarmed.  
For a while I remember delicacies east of the river,  
And recall a boat under falling snow.<sup>31</sup>

Other translators deliberately forego the attempt to reproduce antithetical couplets and concentrate instead on the precise prose sense of the poems. A distinguished exemplar is William Hung (Hung Yeh 洪業). Here is his version of the antithetical couplets in the third of Tu Fu's five poems titled "Autumn Fields" ("Ch'iu yeh" 秋野):

掉頭紗帽側  
曝背竹書光  
風落收松子  
天寒割蜜房

Shaking my head at the thought of official life, I feel my loose  
hat become tilted;  
Reading the writings on the bamboo, I enjoy the warm sunshine  
on my back.  
The wind has felled many pine cones which I shall gather;  
The weather is growing cold, and I shall collect the honey from  
the beehives.<sup>32</sup>

#### IV. Repetitions of Words and Phrases

When a word or phrase occurs more than once in a given poem, the translator should determine whether the repetition is significant. If it is, he should make an effort to achieve a similar effect in his translation. But he may feel that repetition of the same word or phrase is not the best way to achieve this effect in English. Thus Kenneth O. Hanson, in his translation of a Han Yü poem from which I quoted earlier, renders the fivefold repetition of *ming* 鳴 by four different verbs (chosen to fit English usage for different animals, and perhaps also to blend with the sounds of neighboring words: twitters seeking, coos to woo, frogs croak), and he uses alliteration rather than reduplication to render *ko-ko* 閣閣 in the last line:

雀鳴朝營食  
鳩鳴暮覓羣  
獨有知時鶴  
雖鳴不緣身  
暗蟬終不鳴  
有抱不列陳

蛙鳴無謂  
 閣閣祇亂人

Mornings the sparrow *twitters* seeking food  
 The dove at evening *coos* to woo her mate.  
 Only the crane knows its hours  
*Cries* but not for itself.  
 And the dumb female cicada never *cries*  
 What she feels she does not display.  
 Only the frogs *croak* with no good reason  
 Making up a tumult of *noise and nuisance*.<sup>33</sup>

There are significant repetitions of words in Li Po's 李白 (701?-763?) poem "Meng yu T'ien-mu-shan pieh Tung-Lu chu kung" 夢遊天姥山別東魯諸公. In their translations of this poem, two scholars, Elling O. Eide<sup>34</sup> and Liu Wu-chi,<sup>35</sup> reproduce some but not all of the repetitions. Eide points out (p. 376) that Li Po uses *t'ien* "heaven" three times in line 5: 天姥連天向天橫, and reflects this repetition in his translation: "The Lady of Heaven. Joining the heavens, faces the Heavenly Span." In Liu's translation the repetition disappears: "T'ien-mu Mountain links to the horizon and extends heavenward -." *T'ien* "heaven" recurs in two other places in the poem: in the phrase *t'ien-chi* 天雞 (line 18), which Eide translates as "the Rooster of Heaven" and Liu as "the Cock of Heaven," and in the Taoist term *tung-t'ien* 洞天 (line 27), rendered by Eide as "the Grotto Heavens" and by Liu as "the fairy cave." The word *yen* 煙, occurring three times, is translated by Liu as "mists" each time, while Eide renders it as "mist" (line 2), "spray" (line 24), and "mists" (line 38). Neither scholar translates the word *ching* 驚 the same way in lines 22 and 36: Eide has "frightened" and "startled," Liu makes it "tremble" and "fright."

Conversely, translators often use the same word where the Chinese has parallelism rather than repetition. Thus Yip repeats "no" in the first couplet of Liu Tsung-yüan's "River Snow" (whose second couplet was quoted above):

千山鳥飛絕  
 萬徑人蹤滅

A thousand mountains — no bird's flight.  
 A million paths — no man's trace.

Lattimore is more careful in keeping the parallelism:

thousand hills bird flights cease  
myriad paths men's tracks erased

Having discussed repetitions of single words, we will now consider repetitions of phrases. Phrases may be repeated with or without variation, in adjacent or separate positions. Phrases repeated in adjacent positions are very conspicuous. When a translator fails to reproduce such a repetition he cannot possibly have overlooked it but must have had a good reason for his alteration. Let us look at two versions of a couplet from a *tz'u* 詞 titled "Ju meng ling" 如夢令 by Li Ch'ing-chao 李清照 (born 1084, died after 1151). In this *tz'u* pattern, the third and the second line from the end are identical. In this poem they read 知否? 知否? In John Scott's translation, they are combined into one line: "Surely you know."<sup>36</sup> I do not know the reason why Scott, who is sensitive to stylistic nuances in Chinese and English, chose to abandon the repetition, which is part of the *tz'u* pattern and admirably fits the context of lively dialogue. The repetition is preserved in Yip's translation: "Know it? Know it?"<sup>37</sup> But this version sounds less natural in English.

A type of repetition common in *yüeh-fu* 樂府 and poetry influenced by *yüeh-fu* from Han times on consists of a phrase (usually a two-character phrase) at the end of a line which is repeated at the beginning of the next line, e.g., in the second of two poems by Ts'ao P'i 曹丕 (born winter 187/188, died 226) called "Untitled Verse" ("Tsa shih" 雜詩), translated by Ronald C. Miao:

行行至吳會  
吳會非我鄉

On and on to Wu and Kuei; —  
Wu and Kuei; are not my home,<sup>38</sup>

The same type of repetition occurs in the first of Ts'ao P'i's two poems, and here Miao chooses not to reproduce the repetition in his translation:

披衣起彷徨  
彷徨忽已久

Putting on a robe, I rise and pace  
Back and forth; suddenly it is late;<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, Eugene Eoyang, a sophisticated stylist, must have had good reasons for suppressing the repetitions in two couplets of Po Chü-i's 白居易 (772-846) "The Old Man of Hsin-feng with the Broken Arm" ("Hsin-feng che pi weng" 新豐折臂翁):

直到天明痛不眠  
痛不眠終不悔

Right up to daybreak, I hurt so much I cannot sleep,  
But I have never had any regrets.

欲求恩幸立邊功  
邊功未立生人怨

Wishing to seek favor, achieved military deeds at the frontier,  
But before he could pacify the frontier, the people became  
disgruntled;<sup>40</sup>

Wang Ching-hsien 王靖獻, too, being a skillful and experienced poet in both languages, must have had good reasons for suppressing the repetition near the opening of Ts'en Shen's 岑參 (715-770) "Fisherman" ("Yü fu" 漁父):

扁舟滄浪叟  
心與滄浪清

The boatman of Ts'ang-lang is quite old,  
But his heart is as clean as flowing water.<sup>41</sup>

Repetitions with variation are also treated differently by different translators. Richard B. Mather faithfully preserves the repetitions in Shen Yüeh's 沈約 (441-512) "Four Recollections" ("Liu i shih ssu shou" 六憶詩四首); with a delicate sense of what is tolerable and desirable in English, he inserts "and" to introduce the last member of the chain:

I recall the times she came, . . .	憶來時
I recall the times she sat, . . .	憶坐時
I recall the times she ate, . . .	憶食時
Starting to sit and then too shy to sit,	欲坐復羞坐

Starting to eat and then too shy to eat, . . . 欲食復羞食  
 And I recall the times she slept, . . .<sup>42</sup> 憶眠時

Robin D. S. Yates, for reasons unclear to me, introduces an additional element of variation into a structurally significant series of varied repetitions in Wei Chuang's 韋莊 (836?-910) "Lament of the Lady of Ch'in" ("Ch'in fu yin" 秦婦吟). Where Wei has a uniform series (*tung lin, hsi lin, nan lin, pei lin*), Yates uses a prepositional phrase in the first two instances, and an adjective in the last two instances:

My neighbor in the east had a daughter, . . .	東鄰有女
My neighbor in the west had a daughter, . . .	西鄰有女
My southern neighbor had a daughter . . .	南鄰有女
My northern neighbor's young wife . . . <sup>43</sup>	北鄰少婦

## V. Conclusions

During the last thirty years, English translations of classical Chinese poetry have reached higher levels than ever before. But no translation can render all aspects and nuances of a given poem. Recent translators, as we have seen, have shown great ingenuity and skill in tackling the problems facing all translators, but in finding equivalents for certain features of the original poem they have had to sacrifice other features. Those who insist on rhyme and/or perfect poetic rhythm have to compromise on fidelity of diction and order; those who reproduce the syllable count or the relative line length on the printed page have to shift, cut, and expand here and there; those who wish to mark the caesura find that they cannot always break the English line at the same places as the Chinese line; those who are eager to preserve the original word order come up against stubborn differences in Chinese and English syntax; those who ignore or reshape English syntax run the risk of becoming unclear, incomprehensible, or awkward; those who stick too closely to Chinese patterns of parallelism and repetition are in danger of sounding monotonous and dull; but those who neglect those patterns mutilate the original poem. The best translators are at home in both poetic traditions, aware of the linguistic and cultural differences between them, and able to devise means to bridge the differences to the extent that they can be bridged.

## Notes

1. Liu, *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, p. 42. For bibliographical details on this and other citations, see the Bibliography at the end of this paper.
2. Schlepp, pp. 64-66.
3. Schlepp, p. 66.
4. Turner, pp. 11-12.
5. Turner, p. 93.
6. Hawkes, *Little Primer*, p. 47.
7. Waley, *Chinese Poems*, "Preface," p. 5.
8. Waley, *Yuan Mei*, p. 165.
9. Waley, *Yuan Mei*, p. 164.
10. Yang and Metzger, p. 19.
11. Fusek, p. 53.
12. Tu Fu 杜甫 (712-770), "Journey North," in Liu and Lo, *Sunflower Splendor*, p. 121. Caesuras are marked by the same device in Stimson's *Fifty-five T'ang Poems*.
13. Tu Fu, "Ballad of Lovely Women," in Lattimore, *The Harmony of the World*.
14. Liu and Lo, p. 97.
15. Liu and Lo, p. 96.
16. Liu and Lo, p. 173.
17. Liu and Lo, pp. 193-95.
18. A. C. Graham, "A New Translation," p. 566.
19. Lattimore, *The Harmony of the World*, "Translator's Note."
20. Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, p. xiv.
21. Yip, *Chinese Poetry*, pp. 8-9.
22. Yip, p. 317.
23. Sackheim, p. 41, anonymous Han *yüeh-fu*.
24. Sackheim, p. 50, "Mu Lan's Song" ("Mu-lan tz'u" 木蘭詞).
25. Sackheim, p. 117, T'ao Ch'ien 陶潛 (365?-427), "Drinking Wine" ("Yin chiu" 飲酒, first of twenty).
26. A. C. Graham, "A New Translation."
27. Chang and Walmsley, p. 41.
28. Pauline Yu, p. 203.
29. Liu and Lo, p. 187.
30. Birrell, p. 225, Wen-Jen Ch'ien 聞人情 (mid-sixth century A.D.), "Spring Sun" ("Ch'un jih" 春日).
31. *Sunflower Splendor*, pp. 138-39, Tu Fu, "Two Poems on Night" ("Yeh" 夜, first of two).
32. Hung, p. 246.
33. Liu and Lo, p. 187, Han Yü, "Tsa shih" (second of two). Emphasis added to mark the translations of *ming* and *he-ko*.
34. In his essay "On Li Po," in Wright and Twitchett, eds., *Perspectives on the T'ang*, pp. 369-79.
35. In Liu and Lo, pp. 106-08.
36. Scott, p. 107.
37. Yip, p. 437.
38. Liu and Lo, p. 45.
39. Liu and Lo, p. 44.

40. Liu and Lo, pp. 204-05.
41. Liu and Lo, p. 144.
42. Liu and Lo, p. 70.
43. Liu and Lo, pp. 270-72.

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