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All the submitted articles are subject to a blind review process. The opinions of two scholars in the relevant subject are solicited before a publication decision is made. Such peer review ensures that only articles of the highest quality will be published.

The journal also features book reviews and review articles. Literary translations from Chinese to English as well as translations of seminal works in the field will be accepted only where they are seen to be relevant to critical inquiry.

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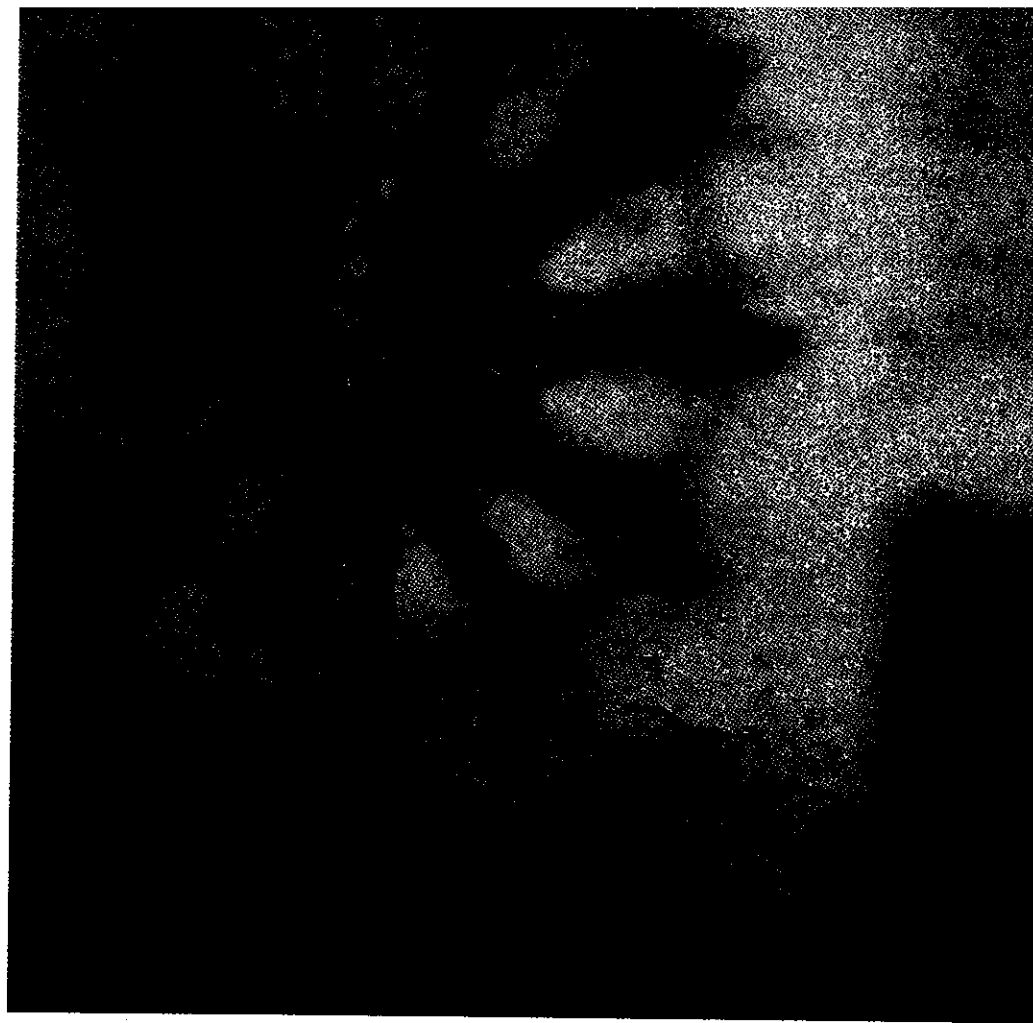
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**Bizarre Circuses, Barbaric Costumes:
Hong Kong and the Aspirations of Translation**
詭奇馬戲及蠻裝：香港與翻譯之所向

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閔福德

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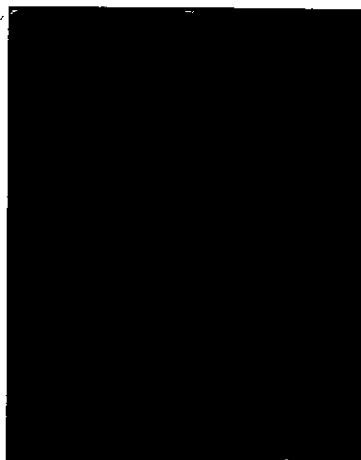


Note: This is a heavily abbreviated version of an informal presentation given at the one-day symposium "Translating Hong Kong," held at the Hong Kong Central Library, on Sunday 19 June 2011. My intention was to illustrate, through pictures and anecdotes, what I see as the link connecting translation with place and time, and underlying it all, my conviction that translation is at its best an expression of friendship that transcends both time and place. This elderly gentleman (in fact Lao Naixuan 勞乃宣, Richard Wilhelm's collaborator) serves as a recurring reminder of this theme.

1. Translation, its Places and Times, its Affinities and Predestinations

1.1 Robert Morrison 馬禮遜 in Macao 澳門 & Guangzhou 廣州

We begin in Macao, and the extraordinarily prolific and obsessive missionary, lexicographer and translator, Robert Morrison. Not many know that Morrison was in fact the first westerner to translate a chapter (the fourth) from the novel *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢 (*The Story of the Stone*). One of Morrison's friends was the equally unusual and talented painter George Chinnery 錢納利.

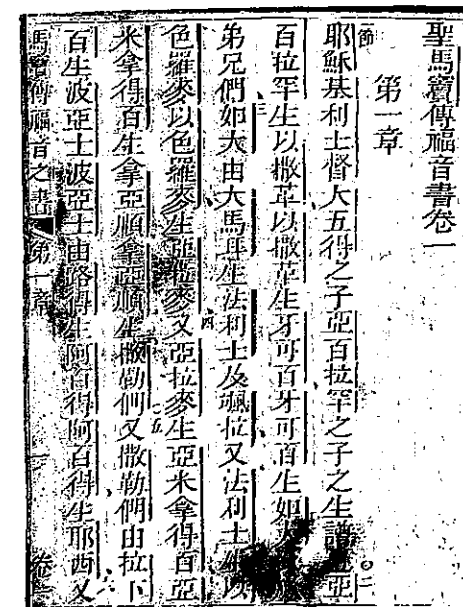


George Chinnery, *Self-portrait* (Braga Collection, National Library of Australia).

Morrison worked, as did so many early translators, Chinese and Western, with a number of collaborators.



His Chinese New Testament, recently republished in a beautifully produced leather-bound facsimile, was written in a strange kind of Chinese. But it was nonetheless a breakthrough.



His grave, in Macao's Protestant Cemetery 澳門基督教墳場, is a moving reminder of this great man's sojourn, and of his indefatigable attitude to his work as a mediator between China and the West.



1.2 James Legge 理雅各 and Wang Tao 王韜 in Hong Kong & Scotland

Equally indefatigable, Legge was also deeply reliant on his Chinese collaborators, especially his friend, Wang Tao.



Legge family in Scotland
with Wang Tao.



Legge with Chinese students.

1.3 Gützlaff 郭實臘, Buccaneer Missionary and Translator

Unlike Legge, Charles Gützlaff was a rogue, the first of many to grace the China coast. Gützlaff famously (and perhaps understandably) thought that Jia Baoyu 賈寶玉 was a girl. That coast community (of which Hong Kong was so important a part) bred a whole generation of translators.



1.4 Harold Acton and Chen Shixiang 陳世驥 in Beijing 北京

Acton was a wealthy English Eccentric whose real home was Italy, but who made Beijing his home for a while, and established friendships and connections while he was there with a number of talented young writers. One of the results was the fine anthology he produced with the young Chen Shixiang. The book was a poignant expression of time and place, and still stands out from other anthologies. Robert Payne's slightly later book was the result of Payne's stay in Kunming 昆明 on the exile campus of Xinan lianda 西南聯大.



Acton with his young friends:
Desmond Parsons (extreme left,
top row); Laurence Sickman
(extreme right, top row); In the
front row: Li Yixie, Chen Shixiang,
Bian Zhilin 卞之琳, Alan Priest,
Cecil Taylor, Lin Geng 林庚, Li
Guangtian 李廣田 and other
Beida 北大 students.

1.5 Lao Naixuan, Richard Wilhelm and the *I Ching* 易經 in Qingdao 青島

The crowning work of the great German Lutheran pastor and sinologue/translator, Richard Wilhelm, was his *I Ging: Das Buch der Wandlungen*. He was only able to undertake this monumental re-interpretation of the *Book of Changes* because fate and political circumstances had driven the elderly scholar Lao Naixuan from Beijing to take refuge in the German territory of Qingdao. Once again, destiny threw these men into an alchemical cauldron of time and space.



1.6 London, Oxford & Beijing: Arthur Waley, David Hawkes & Yang Xianyi 楊憲益/
Gladys Yang 戴乃迭

A direct lineage connected Arthur Waley with his friend and disciple, David Hawkes. Both studied Latin and Greek (Waley at Cambridge, Hawkes at Oxford). Waley embarked in the 1920/30s on his massive translation of *Genji* 源氏物語, and declined his publisher's request to tackle the *Honglouloumeng*. Yang Xianyi also studied Classics at Oxford, before returning to China and a life of translation, through the turbulent decades after "Liberation."



Waley at a wartime concert, with members of the Royal Family, Osbert Sitwell and Walter de la Mare.



Yang Xianyi visiting David Hawkes in Wales, c. 1985.

Much later Hawkes and Yang became firm friends, united in their love of literature, and of good whisky.



The Old Master is a returning motif: he comes to remind us of the hand of destiny, and the role of friendship.

2. A Communion of Spirits: Jao Tsung-yi 饒宗頤 on the Painters of the Late Ming

For the men of letters of the Ming, a work of literature was an outpouring of feeling 以文章為心腑, a painting was a gift between friends 以畫幅為酬酢. Artistic activity was a means of expressing friendship. A poet who wrote an inscription repaid a painting with a poem, and an artist repaid a poem with a painting. Painting and poetry assuaged longing 可慰相思之飢渴... The best painting was often painted for the best friend, and if that best friend was himself a painter then the painting would be better still, its meaning more profound, because it was painted for someone with real understanding ... In the words of *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* 文心雕龍, 'the message in music is hard to understand, and it is hard to meet someone who does so understand. Perhaps in a thousand years one may find one such person.' 音實難知, 知更難逢, 逢其知音, 千載其一。The Ming scholar-artists did not paint for gain; they painted for those who understood 求知音之賞. This is what Zhang Yi 張怡 meant, writing in his Preface to Zhou Lianggong's 周亮工 *On Viewing Paintings* 讀畫錄, when he talked of "finding the meaning in it" 於中得解, and when he spoke of the "communion of spirits" 於此道大有神會.¹

This essay by Professor Jao was written for a symposium on the loyalist painters of the Ming, held thirty-six years ago (in August 1975) to accompany the exhibition at the Chinese University of Hong Kong of paintings from the Chih Lo Lou 至樂樓 Collection. It was translated and published in the fifth issue, a Special Art Issue, of the Hong Kong translation journal *Renditions*.

¹ Adapted from the translation by James Watt, "Painting and the Literati in the Late Ming," *Renditions* 5 (1976), 138-143.

Renditions

A Chinese-English Translation Magazine • Number Six
Special Art Issue



Spring 1976

This year (2011) a similar exhibition from the same collection was held at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, entitled “Nobility and Virtue” 明月清風. Professor Jao Tsung-yi’s elegant calligraphy graces the cover of the catalogue. In the 2011 catalogue notes the Hong Kong curator writes of the collector’s concern for the “character” of the artists whose work he purchased. They were men who had witnessed the peril and turmoil suffered by their country, and they were “too noble and virtuous to bow to the new regime.” Consequently they “sought refuge in religion, solace in painting, realization in martyrdom, self-expression in art and literature, and seclusion in Nature.” These men had tasted in full the bitterness of a life turned upside down, and perhaps due to these tumultuous experiences they were able to break through the confines of tradition and find liberation in their individualistic art.



It was all too easy to read the *yimin* 遺民, the loyalists of a defeated dynasty, the story of their personal and artistic integrity, their quest for “nobility and virtue,” as an allegory for the plight of Hong Kong’s intelligentsia, exiled here, sojourners in this colonial port, protected by the anomaly of British rule from the vicious and destructive forces that have ravaged China for nearly two centuries. The state of exile itself has prompted deep inner, often introspective, questioning. It has also thrown the Hong Kong artist – and dare I say, the translator – back on the only reliable source of comfort in such times: true friendship and stoical enlightenment.

This is surely a recurring and principal theme of the Hong Kong artistic and literary scene: the perpetuating of the finest and noblest Chinese – indeed human – traditions in a time of chaos and upheaval; the upholding of the values of friendship and sympathetic understanding, when just across the border all semblance of trust was being destroyed and the basic values of human decency were being betrayed at every turn. Translation has played, and still plays, an important part in that perpetuation.

I had the great honour, in the early 1980s, to accompany some of these great figures at their gatherings. Probably my only qualification for so doing was that I could drive a car.



3. Old Gentlemen



On this occasion (c. 1984) I was chauffeur for not only Professor Jao, but also the Cambridge-trained archaeologist Cheng Teh-k'un 鄭德坤, and my own PhD supervisor, Liu Ts'un-yan 柳存仁, himself a Hong Kong teacher and literary/film figure from the 1950s, before he travelled to Australia.

Old Chinese Gentlemen were rapidly becoming more and more present in my own life, and in my own ties to Hong Kong.



It is in this context, the Hong Kong sojourner's context, that I wish to meditate on the aspirations of the translator. But before I do so, please allow me to offer one or two disclaimers. I am woefully ignorant about more recent developments in the rich world that is Hong Kong literature, and thoroughly incompetent when it comes to matters of literary, cultural or translation theory. My thoughts, such as they are, are therefore personal and historical, based on my own six sojourns in Hong Kong since 1966, when I very first came here, as a student – significantly I came at that time because the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution prevented me from going to China “proper.” As will become clear, my involvement began not with a young man’s healthy involvement in the contemporary scene, but with an almost Proustian acquaintance with a number of already somewhat elderly individuals, many of who have now passed away. Friends have commented over the years: “Why do you spend so much time with old Chinese gentlemen?” I have never known how to answer that question. It is probably a matter of time and place, of destiny, of karma, of predestined affinity. And so, I believe, is the mechanism that brings about translation.



Liu Ts'un-yan, in his Canberra office/study, c. 1978.

I was first introduced to the Hong Kong literary world by Liu Ts'un-yan, who one day in 1979 said to me “Why don’t you try your hand at translating something on the Chinese *ci*-lyric 詞, for my friend Stephen Soong 宋淇 in Hong Kong? He edits a magazine called *Renditions*.”



With Stephen Soong, at the Chinese University Staff Club, c. 1985.

In 1979 I had never heard of Stephen Soong, and knew very little about the *ci*-lyric. However, this was to be the beginning of a consuming fascination with the *ci*, and of a long friendship.

Renditions

A Chinese-English Translation Magazine
 The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Shatin - New Territories - Hong Kong Cable Address - Sinoversity

July 10, 1978

Mr. John Minford
 Department of Chinese
 The Australian National University
 Box 4, P.O.,
 Canberra, A.C.T. 2600

Dear Mr. Minford,

Thank you for your letter of June 22 which contained the good news that you would complete the translation of 翁其誠's essay on Tz'u by the end of July. Although his essay is derived from the traditional Tz'u criticism, it is the best one of its kind in summarizing the salient differences between Tz'u and poetry. Furthermore, it has the advantage of being comparatively little known since it was written and published in the interior during the Sino-Japanese war.

We agree with you that a bald translation would be very much limited in its appeal. But please be careful with the annotations lest the tail may wag the dog. There is no restriction on the use of Chinese characters. Here again please be sparing and phrases of common usage should be avoided. There is no problem of printing the poems in parallel text. However, we don't see much point in printing romanization and tonal marks together with the original. Tz'u was meant to be sung and the pronunciations of a sizable number of the words are different from our usual way of pronouncing them in present day. We have listened to some of the recorded tapes and found the way some words are pronounced is simply baffling even to the Chinese ears. All the other essays and translations are not accompanied with romanization and if your is singled out in doing so would spoil the uniformity. Please look at it from the editorial point of view.

We would feel much obliged if you feel happy to annotate some of the esoteric terms of the critics, provided the annotations would occupy no more space than the text itself, otherwise it would create layout problems when we make up the pages.

One of the strangest things that has come across to me is the use of Pin-yin for proper names in David Hawkes' "The Story of the Stone" and the use of the Wade-Giles system in PRC's "A Dream of Red Mansions" published by the Foreign Language Press not too long ago.

Please feel free to write to me if there is anything else you would like to find out.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen C. Soong
 Stephen C. Soong
 Executive Editor

SCS:tsf

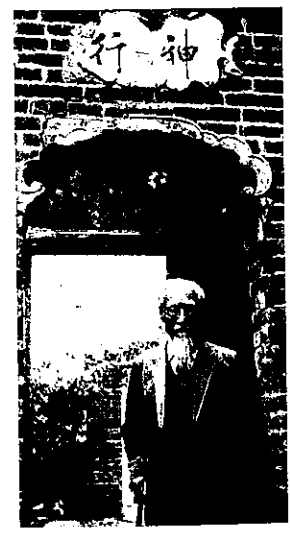
June 20, 1978
 Mr. John Minford
 Chinese Dept., A.N.U.
 Box 4, P.O.
 Canberra, A.C.T. 2600
 Australia
 Dear Mr. Minford,
 Thank you very much indeed for your letter of May 11 which is enlightening, lucid and reasonable in the presentation of your views.
 I would like to make it clear that our readers tend to think in terms of the Chinese original while you think in terms of the English version which is the final product and the difference in approach is in your favour. While most of the points raised in our reading notes are clarified by you have been resolved, some need further comment.
 I cannot agree with you when you state that most of my general comment are later written. For all those points, the title "Tz'u" is there in the original. There is no attempt to use "Tz'u" as a "filling cabinet" in our end but to show your point home. "Tz'u" is acceptable after you mention "Tz'u" and "Tz'u" is used. It would be possible to give an explanatory note for classification. That would make your case as much the stronger.
 As to the issue of the specific style, may I suggest a common form which is acceptable to all translations, the character number a tone in different sets, annotations as different that you can hardly tell they are not the same. For example, one without romanization (the full name) is acceptable for the time being but standardize the following tones like English "Pinyin" in the first, "Tone of the Tz'u" and "Tz'u" which are different from your definition. It will be unnecessary for me to make one version or compare to the other. If it is common classification in such a whole thing would be a total shame and confuse the reader to no end. Let me suggest a compromise.
 To the tone of 翁其誠's 詩話, Yang Tsung-han
 If you can devise a way to improve it, so much the better.
 The 翁其誠 in both versions of 詩話 and 詩話 is mentioned in general. It follows that 翁其誠, 詩話 and 詩話 are used in accordance to. There is no need for me to give explanation in substantial this.

Two of many letters written to me by Stephen Soong, in the course of his editing the Special Tz'u Issue of Renditions (1978-79).

I arrived in Hong Kong when we were on our way from Australia to northern China in August 1980, armed with Liu's introductions to Stephen Soong and to another old friend of his, the elderly exiled Mongol Prince, Yang Tsung-han 楊宗翰. In his old age he too became a translator in Hong Kong. My collection of old Chinese men was already growing by leaps and bounds.



With Liu and Yang Tsung-han, Hong Kong, c. 1986.



Yang Tsung-han in Hong Kong, 1983. The card, inscribed for the son of the scholar Yang Chung-hsi 楊鐘羲, was given to me in 1980. The signature is from a letter dated 1981.

*楊宗翰
 敬啟者
 此卡係
 翁其誠
 先生
 所贈
 予
 我
 謹
 此
 佈
 宣
 統
 三年
 冬
 月
 廿
 八
 日*

*Sincerely yours,
 Yang Tsung-han*

4. *The Fragrant Hermitage* 馨庵詞稿

The linked themes of exile and integrity, with not a small admixture of nostalgia, have haunted me ever since. They are to be found, for example, in a seven-character classical poem written in Hong Kong in the early 1950s by the exiled Soong Hsun-leng 宋訓倫.



宋訓倫十三歲小影

Soong Hsun-leng as a young man.

He prefaced his poem with these words.

When Mainland China fell to the Communists, I took refuge in Hong Kong.
There, in the prevailing atmosphere of futility and gloom, my chief pastime
was to meet with friends, to drink wine and write poetry. In this way we tried
to give vent to our feelings of oppression and sorrow.

Over the vast ocean

Where do my thoughts wander?

I think of history repeated: another

Craven betrayal to the northern barbarians.

Absent from home,

I grieve the onset of age.

Plucking flowers,

I lament the passage of youth.

Climbing the tower, a sojourner,

I pen verses in vain;

Facing the mirror, a lone luan-bird,

I indulge my feelings alone.

I cherish this intangible emotion –

Do not mock me, friend!

I struggle with drunkenness

To write a new poem.²

2 Soong Hsun-leng 宋訓倫, *The Fragrant Hermitage* 馨庵詞稿, trans., John Minford (Taiwan 臺灣: SKS 宋緒

Another poem of Soong's, written in 1957, celebrates an occasion when he joined a gathering of like-minded friends.



A similar gathering of Soong's friends, in 1985.

During the first lunar month of 1957, Yao Hsin-nung 姚辛農 and Wang Chi-ch'ien 王己千 invited me to join them at the Leng Hsiang Hsien Kuan (as Yao's home was called), where Sheng Hsien-san played the *sheng* 笙, Lü Chen-yuan and Feng Teh-ming played the *p'i-pa* 琵琶, and Miss Ts'ai Teh-yun and Wu Ch'un-pai, the poet Hsü Wen-ching, and Wu Yin-nung played the seven-stringed *ch'in* 七弦琴. Chou Shih-hsin and Hsin-nung's wife were in charge of the arrangements. Hsü Wen-ching was blind, but when the drinking was over, on the spur of the moment he dashed off an ink-painting of an orchid – done swiftly and with a telling simplicity. He signed it “Dame Hsü” Hsin-nung and Miss Ts'ai Teh-yun together with Cheng Yuan-su then performed the *k'un-ch'ü* 崑曲 scene known as “Playing the Ch'in” 搖琴, telling the tale of Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 and Zhuo Wenjun 卓文君. It was a splendid party. (Mr. Soong himself asked me to use the old Romanization.)

To the tune Ch'in yuan ch'un 沁園春

Meeting this evening,

Exiles at the world's edge,

All of us drunk,

Quaffing from sparrow-goblets;

Hearing the silken strings,

Plucked by silver-cased fingers,

The tinkling of ice,

The dripping of jade....

康設計有限公司, 2005).

In yet another lyric, written in the 1970s, Soong wrote:

*The old dream of Shanghai –
How can I bear to speak of it?
The setting sun,
The crumbling walls,
The ruined well.
The falling away of things.
This exile's feeling:
Just staying alive
Crossing the Jade Pass
Is no easy matter!*

It was no accident that led me to translate these lyrics in 2004. It was the hand of destiny again, across time and space, and the playing out of an earlier fascination with the *ci* genre, with elderly gentlemen, and with Hong Kong. And it led to another enduring friendship, with the old man's son, the Taiwan architect, collector and designer, Soong Shu-kong 宋緒康, who commissioned the translation, and who guided me carefully through the subtext of his father's poems.

5. Startled by an Old Dream

I recently discovered that another Hong Kong writer who used traditional forms as a poet was the father of the late Professor D.C. Lau 劉殿爵, Lau King-tong 劉景堂. Lau was widely considered the best Hong Kong writer of *ci*-poetry of his generation.

鷓鴣天

前度來時月正中，今宵無奈雨和風。不知沙岸當年跡，能否依稀認爪鴻。
驚舊夢，太匆匆。人生歡會幾回同，眼前好景君須惜，比似煙花一霎紅。

To the tune Zhe gu tian

*When last I came here the moon was in the middle of the sky.
Tonight, alas, there is rain and wind.
Might I on some sandy bank
Find traces of the wild swan?
Startled by an old dream,
Vanished so soon.*

*How few are the happy meetings in life!
The fine scene before your eyes
Should be cherished, my friend.
It is like a firework – a single flash of red.*

The translator of this poignant little poem, Katherine Whitaker, had in the 1930s been a student at Hong Kong University, in the same class as the poet's son, D.C. Lau, who became her friend. She wrote of the father's poems:

Scholars who had to flee from their homeland during the late Qing's troubled times or the chaotic conditions of civil war in the Republic since 1911, and who had settled in the more peaceful life of the British Colony of Hong Kong, could not but feel nostalgic about the lifestyle and atmosphere of the old literary world... Poetry became an outlet and best friend. It could communicate the most intimate thoughts and feelings, record the warmth and affection of friends who understand each other (知音), and relieve one's frustration from all manner of ills.

Again, the same themes: exile and nostalgia, literature as a gift, as the exile's balm, translation as the friend's offering, literary friendship as mutual understanding.



With D.C. Lau, Stephen Soong and Yang Qinghua (father of the poet Yang Lian),
Hong Kong c. 1986

6. A Circus

But if sensitive world-weary souls responded in this way, there were not a few who found the “reality” of Hong Kong a little hard to stomach. One such was Kang Youwei 康有為, whose zealous thoughts were too pre-occupied with reform to allow him to enjoy the spectacle of a circus visiting town.

康有為：詩一首
Hong Kong and Macao
By Kang Youwei
Translated by T. C. Lai



Kang Youwei

香港從來未曾因歐戰而淪
陷而淪陷者其數百載之始
五江海峽亦在
深淵出則夕陽
五間先生其可見
是奇野獸及奇裝

*Hong Kong – what a picture of desolation!
Macao – how like a landscape at dusk!
You ask: ‘What did you see, sir, in those places?
‘Bizarre circuses and barbaric costumes!’*

When my friend P.K. Leung 也斯 and I visited London in 1997 and gave a joint 2-man-show at the South Bank on Hong Kong culture, we chose this last line of Kang Youwei’s as the title for our show. It is a catchy line, but it also captures the typical failure of many observers (both European and Chinese) to see beyond the “circus,” and empathize with the unique and subtle flavour that is Hong Kong.



BIZARRE CIRCUSES
& BARBARIC COSTUMES
詭奇馬戲及蠻裝

Programme note for South Bank show, 1997. Picture by Luis Chan.

I have chosen it again today, for the same reasons. Many take the surface glitter of Hong Kong for its essence, and fail to tune into its soul. The translator must somehow strive to see beyond the circus and the costume. This is the translator’s aspiration.

7. Bon Viseur

The translation of the little “circus” poem is by someone very different from (but just as interesting as) Kang: T.C. Lai 賴恬昌. It comes in his book *Hong Kong: Images on Shifting Waters* (1977), and was later included in the *Renditions 29/30*, Special Hong Kong Issue. T.C. is the son of one of Hong Kong’s finest scholars. He went on to become a founding father of the Hong Kong Translation Society, and a prolific translator – quite apart from being a wonderful painter and a great gourmet!



My wife and I dining with T.C. Lai, c. 2005.

Here is one of his later paintings, done when he had decided to branch out and create his own "late" style, a unique fusion of East and West.



One of T.C. Lai's paintings of Hong Kong.

T.C. has been, along with Stephen Soong and D.C. Lau, an important figure in the Hong Kong translation world. He is the personification of the passionate amateur, bringing an inimitably carefree style of his own to whatever he turns his hand to. One of T.C.'s early contributions to *Renditions* (Spring 1978) was a series of translations on food, from those great Chinese *bons viveurs* Yuan Mei 袁枚 and Li Yu 李漁 with whom T.C. was clearly in sympathy. Here is a characteristic piece, by Li Yu, on the subject of bamboo shoots:

The bamboo shoot derives its particular fragrance and delicacy from the mountain air. It is the queen of all vegetables. Even the best lamb and pork pale before it. Cook bamboo shoot with any meat and you will find on serving that people prefer the bamboo shoot to the meat...

The poet Su Dongpo 蘇東坡 wrote:

*I would rather eat a meal with no meat
Than live in a place with no bamboos.
With no meat one may become thin;
With no bamboos one becomes vulgar.*

寧可食無肉，不可居無竹。無肉令人瘦，無竹令人俗。

Anyone who fails to share in and sympathize with Hong Kong's deep enjoyment of the culture of food, will find it hard to translate the literature of Hong Kong.

8. Mu Dan 穆旦, the Absent Friend

Another friend, Pang Bingjun 龐秉鈞, from Nankai University 南開大學, came to Hong Kong and translated for *Renditions* the posthumous poems of his mentor and friend, Mu Dan, one of the 20th-century China's finest poets and translators. For these two northerners, both from Tianjin 天津, Hong Kong in the 1980s provided a space in which their earlier friendship could find fruit in translation.



P.K. Leung with Pang Bingjun, 1990s.

9. Xi Xi 西西: "The Mother Fish" 母魚

Translating the work of Xi Xi has been for me another recurring theme since the early 1980s. In the late 1990s, a gifted student at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University translated (as her final year project) the story, 'The Mother Fish.'

A 17-year-old girl believes that she is pregnant, and that she will have to procure an abortion. She anticipates the dark horrors of the experience:

She would expose her young beautiful body to the stranger. Once she had accepted the worst, like shaking hands with death, she was full of courage to face whatever might occur. A gloomy room, dismal green, with a dark sombre ceiling, floating high above her. The shade of the hanging lamp covered with dusty cobwebs. A stink of decay spreading throughout the house. From inside the shallow mottled enamel tray, the clattering sound of metal. Then the touch: not a soft, sweet, warm touch, but the touch of a horrible snake, with thick rough skin, slimy as a toad. It would crawl over her body relentlessly, boring and biting; its sharp teeth cutting into her flesh and veins.

As it turns out, she is not in fact pregnant at all. But nonetheless, the story ends on a note of almost unbearable pathos, as the "child," which is at the same time the child/creation of the writer's imagination, speaks to its mother:

I am your head-birth. I was born from your mind, from your imagination. Other head-births are just characters made up by story-tellers. They come into existence as part of their stories. I am independent of any story. You created me not because you have to write stories. You created me out of love. You created me so naturally, you gave me life, you brought me into this world. When story-tellers give birth to their characters, they devote themselves wholeheartedly to nurturing them, to making them come alive. They proudly present their vivid creations to the world. But you, you tried by all possible means to hide me, you tried so hard to conceal my existence. You even thought of destroying me, because I represented darkness and shame. This is your misery. This is the misery of a woman. Why continue to endure this humiliation? Life comes into existence out of nothing. It should be a process of discovery, of creation, of growth and blossoming. Birth is the greatest happiness. Why should it become a tragedy?

I've only been in this world for three months. But I've been with you. Through the sunny and the rainy days. From the moment you gave birth to me, I became part of your memory. For ever. In your mind. I hope you are happy and healthy.

I hope you grow stronger every day. Mother, love is not something you need to be ashamed of. I love you. I love my father. He is a previous father fish.³

For having written something as dark as this, Xi Xi would undoubtedly have suffered hugely in the People's Republic. This is a spiritually polluting story. It is also a powerful document, a moving work of art, a characteristic product of this intense woman's vision of the human condition. And the translation is a fine, empathetic piece of work, informed with a true Hong Kong sensibility.

10. Friendship and the Aspirations of Translation



Revolution is certainly no dinner party, nor is it a picnic. The picnic as such may not be a revolutionary mode of being, but it nonetheless lies at the heart of the Chinese experience. Lin Yutang 林語堂 would certainly have agreed. The picnic essay is a poignant celebration of life's moments of pleasure. In the same way, an account of a punting trip down the Cherwell River on a summer's day, with good picnic hamper aboard, might conjure up Lewis Carroll's Oxford. Perhaps the most famous picnic in Chinese history was that of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 at the Orchid Pavilion 蘭亭.

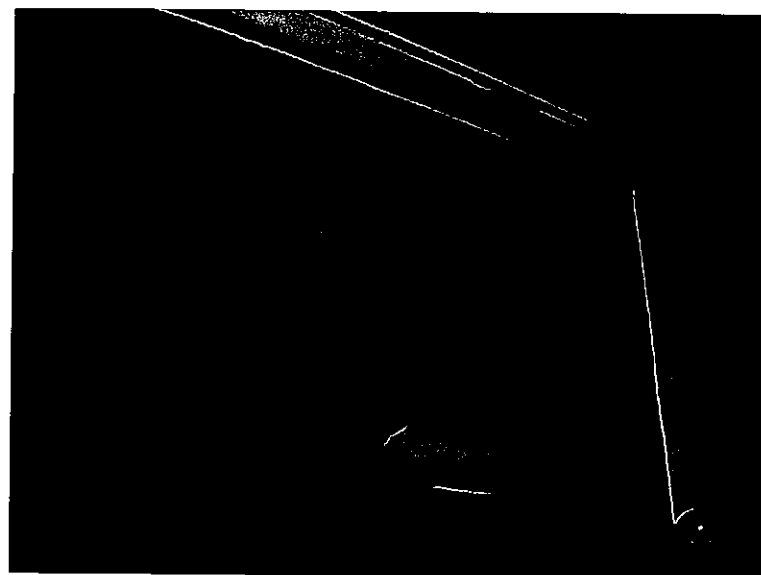
11. From the "Orchid Pavilion Preface" 蘭亭序 by Wang Xizhi

In men's relationships with one another, in their journey through life, some become friends because they share certain aspirations and can talk together within the confines of a room; some are friends because they find natural objects with which to identify their feelings and choose to abandon themselves beyond the limitations of their physical forms. Friends may have an infinite

³ Translated by Hidy Ng.

variety of tastes, with some enjoying tranquillity and others going for the hustle and bustle, but when they happily discover each other, in which discovery they also find themselves, they are overjoyed and forget that old age will inevitably descend on them.⁴

The translator of this essay, Wong Siu-kit, a good friend throughout the 1980s and 1990s, is another important figure in Hong Kong's translation history, someone who taught decades of students at Hong Kong University, and who communicated to them his own delight in life, in literature and in the handling of words.



Siu-kit, at one of our parties, c. 1996.

12. "Postcolonial Affairs of Food and the Heart" 後殖民食物與愛情 by Leung Ping-kwan

For P.K., the post-modern picnic is an endless pub-crawl in search of human warmth. It forms the central theme of one of his most moving stories, set during a period of severe handover denial. Here are the memorable closing sentences of that story, again translated by a gifted young student from the Polytechnic University.

I went back to my seat and looked around me. I was so content to see this jumble of friends sitting around one big table, chatting animatedly with each other, happily drinking up the wine. Some have left us and gone to live elsewhere. New ones have joined us. This is a new and difficult time for us all.

4 Translated by Wong Siu-kit 黃兆傑.

We have different views on every subject under the sun. We argue endlessly. Sometimes we hurt each other a bit. But somehow we manage to stay together. Maybe in the end we learn to be kind to one another. The present situation is no good for any of us. It's late at night now. Outside the streets are empty and desolate. But we can still sit here, we can still linger awhile amid the lights and voices, drunk on the illusion of this warm and joyous moment.⁵

13. Somewhere in the Interstices

To have been able over the years, as translator and teacher, to share in this quest for the "warm and joyous moment" has been for me a wonderful way of discovering translation's highest and truest aspiration: friendship. In this way we have all, again and again, writers, translators, students, publishers, "happily discovered each other, in which discovery we have also found ourselves." Perhaps we do not always quite succeed in "forgetting that old age will one day inevitably descend on us," but nonetheless this fragile world is one we can still build together, while all around us "the streets are empty and desolate." It is in this spirit that we should teach and foster translation in Hong Kong. Not in the mean-spirited manner so prevalent in our number-crunching institutions. That is my firm belief. We should be bold and proud. The translation of literature is after all the very lifeblood of any civilization. We should continue to encourage young translators to be a proud part of a larger creative community, of a larger and more liberal culture, to enrich the society of which they are such a vital part. If the universities fail, in their predictable short-sightedness, to provide generous support for this, then we must make sure that it happens somewhere else, somewhere in the interstices – on convivial occasions such as this.✕



5 Translated by Jessie Chan.

