Multiple Dimensions of Translation

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Abstract: This essay explores several aspects or dimensions of literary translation. First, translation offers pleasure in the reading experience, and for translators, literary translation is a creative or re-creative activity. Sometimes, a translation may become a better work than the original. Second, the ideas of incommensurability and untranslatability are misleading and harmful, and the so-called critique of the "hegemony" of English is not only disingenuous and hypocritical but also prevents non-Western literary works from being translated and known in the world as part of world literature. Finally, with several concrete examples, this essay argues for the importance of cultural understanding in successful translations.

Keywords: literary translation, John Florio, Lin Shu, Qian Zhongshu, Thomas Kuhn, incommensurability, untranslatability, world literature, cultural understanding

CLC: H059 **Document Code:** A **Article ID:** 2096-4374(2025)01-0012-14

DOI: 10.53397/hunnu.jflc.202501003

Translation as (Re)Creation

Poor Bottom! As a victim caught in the erotic skirmish between Oberon and his Fairy Queen, this honest Athenian weaver can keep his human dignity only at the bottom, while his head is transformed into the monstrous mug of an ass. This nasty metamorphosis nearly scares his fellow mechanics out of their wits, but one of them cries out: "Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated!" (Shakespeare, *Midsummer* 232). This well-known line of Shakespeare's comic humor may serve as a warning against mistranslation that can result in a serious disfiguration or distortion, but we must not forget here the spirit of frolicking and having fun in this wonderful Shakespearean line. The audience's reaction to the ridiculous transformation of Bottom should be a hearty laugh, as appropriate for a comedy, not horror or fear, and the translation of Bottom is to be enjoyed as recreation and theatrical entertainment. In fact, in the 16th and the 17th centuries, the word "translate" was often used to mean "change" or "transform" rather than the finding

of equivalent expressions in different languages. Here is a beautiful example by John Milton describing "Sweet Echo" as a lovely spirit ascending to Heaven in *Comus* 242–243:

> *Sweet Queen of Parley, Daughter of the Sphere,*
> *So mayst thou be translated to the skies,*
> *And give resounding grace to all Heav'n's Harmonies.* (95)

Yes, translation can be fun and an elegant kind of recreation, and here I am speaking of literary translations from a reader's perspective and a translator's vantage point. Reading a good translation of a great work of literature is definitely a pleasure, and translating great literary works may also, when done well and successfully, give one a special kind of gratification. Who has not enjoyed reading the world's great literary works in translation? This is particularly true when we are young and do not have a good command of any foreign language to read in the original, but even when we grow up and can read in a foreign language, it is always enjoyable to read an excellent translation. Indeed, sometimes a superb translation may even be preferable to the original.

A good example is John Florio's English translation of Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*. Not that Montaigne's French was not good, but for English readers at the time, Florio (1552–1625) made a translation particularly suited to their taste and aesthetic sensibility and therefore won a lot of admirers. John Florio, "an Englishman in Italian," was a talented linguist "steeped in Italian and French and at the same time in love with the resources of the English language," as Stephen Greenblatt describes him in the introduction to a 2014 reprint of some of Montaigne's *Essays* in Florio's translation, which was first published in 1603. As is well known, Shakespeare borrowed Florio's Montaigne in writing his plays and many great writers at the time admired Florio's translation. "The brilliance of his achievement was so generally acknowledged," Greenblatt continues, "that even those English readers with very good command of French—John Donne, Walter Ralegh, Francis Bacon, and Robert Burton, to name a few—chose to encounter Montaigne through Florio's English" (x). Florio was a lover of words and the compiler of the first English-Italian dictionary, and a stylist of Elizabethan prose. John Lee argues that "Florio's translation is less than accurate, but fundamentally sympathetic to Montaigne and more effectively Englished" (606). In Florio's eyes, Montaigne's style was relatively plain, so he "constantly expands Montaigne's sentences, doubling words, often yoking an unusual term (sometimes a neologism) with a more common English word for explanation, and adding clauses in parallel, particularly if it gives him a chance to indulge his encyclopaedic knowledge of English proverbs" (606).

The result was a Montaigne rendered into a more decorative but extremely effective style of English prose that warranted reprinting even more than 400 years later.

Interestingly, there is a comparable example in China. Lin Shu (1852–1924), a scholar of the late Qing and the early Republican period, translated more than 170 novels, mostly from French and English, and had a remarkable influence on many readers of his time. Lin Shu did not know any foreign language but, working with those who knew the original and translated for him orally, he was able to write down the content quickly in a flexible and highly readable literary Chinese that suited the palate of educated readers at the time. Like Florio, Lin Shu was a writer in his own right and had his own ideas of style. Sometimes he could not resist the temptation to add words or alter expressions in his translation when he felt the author's original expression was not effective enough, which he took to be an opportunity to help the author and improve the original. He would

often bring the foreign text to the time-honored standards of classical Chinese prose writing and compared the techniques of a foreign novelist with those of great Chinese writers in the past. The result was a remarkably successful translation of many foreign novels that opened the eyes of his readers at a time when most Chinese, including the late Qing court and the officials, had very little knowledge of any literature and culture beyond China.

As the erudite scholar Qian Zhongshu recalls, when he reread a novel in Lin Shu's translation in 1963, he found it "surprisingly still retaining some of its attractiveness," and, having read more, he concluded that many of Lin Shu's translations "deserved to be reread, even though infested with numerous errors of omission and commission" (81–82). Not only did he prefer Lin Shu to some later and no doubt "more faithful" translations, but he also found Lin Shu's translation more enjoyable to read than some of the original works. For example, he "preferred Lin Shu's translation to Rider Haggard's original," because in this case, "the translator in using the 'target language' surpasses the author's ability to use the 'source language,' and the translation turns out to be superior in style to the original" (100–101). He mentioned some similar cases in different literatures: Walter Pater, for instance, preferred reading Edgar Allen Poe in Baudelaire's French translation, and some authors even admitted the merits of translations surpassing their own works. "Walter Whitman did not deny the possibility that Ferdinand Freiligrath's German translation of *Leaves of Grass* was better than his English original; and Jorge Luis Borges even admired Néstor Ibarra's French rendering of his poetry as superior to his own original in Spanish." Qian Zhongshu, himself a polyglot, goes on to add: "Of course, Whitman was not necessarily capable of knowing the relative merits of German, but Borges was certainly qualified to make a judgement on the French" (101). Obviously, Whitman and Borges regarded their translators as equals, that is, creative poets and writers who had made a better version of their own poems. Thus, literary translation is not only a recreation, but also a re-creation, a creative work based on another work, the original.

In translating a literary work from one language into another, the translator is putting the original in an equivalent but new way of expression in a different language. Because no two languages are completely equivalent, the translator must find an expression in the target language that not only conveys the meaning of the original, but also builds up an atmosphere close to, or at least not far from, that of the original text. In so doing, the translator must first deeply understand the original text in its literary, cultural, and historical context, and then try to re-create an equivalent of the original, and also a context and style that resemble that of the original. In this sense, the translation is a new work created or re-created by the translator, and in some cases, when the translator is a good poet or writer, the translation may read just as well as, or even better than, the original. The translated text in the target language may produce associations and implications that are new and different in a new context, and how to balance between faithfulness to the original and a new text, and a new but appropriate atmosphere in the translation, becomes a constant challenge, but that also makes translation a creative art, something the translator does in new, innovative, and creative ways each time a literary text is translated.

Qian Zhongshu talks about the joy in reading Lin Shu's translations and even says that it was those translations that had motivated him as a young boy to learn foreign languages. One of the functions of translation, says Qian, is "enticement" or "seduction," because a good translation will "arouse curiosity in some readers and kindle their infinite expectations for the original as if they have their appetite worked up by a little taste but have not been indulged and fully satisfied"

(79). In this sense, then, Qian Zhongshu goes on, "the function of a good translation is self-elimination; it leads us to the original, and when we read the original, we immediately throw away the translation" (79). Good translations thus nobly sacrifice themselves in the interest of the original texts, but not everyone is capable of learning foreign languages to such a high level as to throw away translations so easily. For most readers, and in fact for all readers, translation is the version in which they get to know many wonderful works of foreign literature. No one can read all the important literary works in the original, not even the polyglot comparatists, and we all need to read literary works, at least a great number of them, in translation. We should recognize and admit that it is the great contributions translators make that give us access to the treasure trove of the world's literatures. "Without translation, we are left adrift on our various linguistic ice floes, only faintly hearing rumors of masterpieces elsewhere at sea," as David Remnick puts it (98). "So most English-speaking readers glimpse Homer through the filter of Fitzgerald or Fagles, Dante through Sinclair or Singleton or the Hollanders, Proust through Moncrieff or Davis, García Márquez through Gregory Rabassa—and nearly every Russian through Constance Garnett" (98). For many Chinese readers, at least for my generation, we glimpse Shakespeare through the filter of Zhu Shenghao (朱生豪) and Liang Shiqiu (梁实秋), Balzac through Fu Lei (傅雷), Heinrich Heine through Qian Chunqi (钱春绮), Byron and Pushkin through Zha Liangzheng (查良铮), and many Russian writers through Ge Baoquan (戈宝权) and Cao Jinghua (曹靖华), among others. It is impossible to name all the important translators of foreign literature who have made the world richer, more colorful, and more enjoyable, but we must give credit to translations and acknowledge the great contributions translators make by granting us knowledge about the world and its wonderful cultures and literatures.

The Fallacies of Untranslatability and the "Hegemony" of English

Bottom's monstrous metamorphosis often serves as a reminder of the danger of mistranslation, which can be misleading, distorting, and untrustworthy. That is how comparative literature traditionally looked at translation and why it excluded it from its disciplinary field, requiring a high proficiency in foreign languages to work with texts in the original rather than translations. The hackneyed Italian adage *traduttore*, *traditore* (translator is traitor) expresses the comparatist's mistrust of translation, but for the 19th century and much of the 20th, comparative literature mainly engaged in intra-European comparisons only and the working languages were the major European ones, usually the trio of French, English, and German plus ancient Greek or Latin, while non-European languages were considered invalid or illegitimate for comparative literature. At the same time, there has been a heavy emphasis on differences of all sorts in most 20th-century literary theories, and cultural differences between the West and the Rest are often considered fundamental and absolute. European and non-European languages are thought to be incompatible with one another, even incommensurable and untranslatable. China is often made a symbol of incommensurability and untranslatability, a dichotomy between the East and the West. Witness Jacques Derrida's argument that China and its non-phonetic language represent the fundamental *différance* par excellence between the West as logocentric and China as a "civilization developing outside of all logocentrism" (90). Or consider Michel Foucault's China as "heterotopia," based

on his deliberate misreading of an incomprehensible "Chinese encyclopaedia," or a strange and ridiculous "Chinese" way of classification that exhibits an "exotic charm of another system of thought," while showing "the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*" (xv). Under the influence of such powerful figures as Foucault and Derrida, linguistic and cultural differences between China and the West (often represented by ancient Greece) set out the basic framework for dichotomous comparisons involving the Chinese language, literature, and culture.

Another important figure who has proposed more specifically the ideas of incommensurability and untranslatability is Thomas Kuhn, whose argument about scientific revolutions exerted a huge influence on the humanities and social sciences in the 1970s through the 1990s. Kuhn argues that a scientific revolution happens when there is a paradigmatic change in the understanding of the nature of the world and the many branches of scientific knowledge, a sudden rupture or complete breakthrough that supersedes the old working principles or paradigm. According to Kuhn, different paradigms are based on incommensurate modes of thinking and the change of paradigms makes everything different. "The normal-scientific tradition that emerges from a scientific revolution is not only incompatible but often actually incommensurable with that which has gone before" (*Structure* 103). Scientists working under different paradigms not only have different standards and definitions, ask different questions, give different interpretations, but they "practice their trades in different worlds," which Kuhn considers to be the "most fundamental aspect of the incommensurability of competing paradigms" (150). Kuhn's idea of incommensurability of paradigms became very influential, but also controversial, and it has been criticized for the radical dichotomy Kuhn created among different paradigms or modes of thinking. Critics argue that debates between scientists who believed in the Ptolemaic geocentric view and those holding the Copernican heliocentric view could happen precisely because they understood one another clearly and knew where they differed about the movement of the heavenly bodies and the nature of the galaxy. Debate is also communication, and it is certainly a much-exaggerated overstatement to claim that these two schools of astronomers did not speak the same language and could not communicate with one another. Without adequate understanding of their opponents' views, they could not have had a meaningful debate.

In his later works, Kuhn retreated from his earlier and more radical position of incommensurable paradigms, but he insisted that even though they may share a common language, scientists working under different paradigms have completely different understandings of certain terms they use, which then become untranslatable. "Only for a small subgroup of (usually interdefined) terms and for sentences containing them do problems of translatability arise," and incommensurability is thus localized as a linguistic problem, "a claim about language, about meaning change" (*Road* 36). The two concepts are still linked with one another, with the same emphasis on fundamental differences. "Incommensurability thus becomes a sort of untranslatability," Kuhn concludes, "localized to one or another area in which two lexical taxonomies differ" (93). Although the concept of untranslatability seems to cover a smaller area than does the earlier concept of incommensurability, it still has the same implication of the impossibility of communication, the idea that translation or equivalence of value or meaning is impossible across unbridgeable linguistic gaps. In effect, untranslatability functions to legitimize the separation of languages, cultures, and communities just as Kuhn's earlier concept of incommensurability did, and by the same token, the idea of untranslatability is also subject to the same criticism several philosophers have brought to bear on the concept of incommensurability.

"Instead of living in different worlds, Kuhn's scientists may, like those who need Webster's dictionary, be only words apart," says Donald Davidson in a sarcastic vein (189). Scientists, like most other people, may understand differently or even misunderstand, but it is not a case of untranslatability in the sense of incomprehension or total failure of understanding.

Kuhn's ideas of incommensurability and untranslatability may not have had much influence on the study of the history of science, but they have been adopted by some social scientists and literary scholars in the general trend of overemphasizing differences. Emily Apter's provocatively titled book, *Against World Literature*, is a recent example, in which she faults world literature for overlooking "incommensurability of what has been called the Untranslatable" (3). But fixation on what has been called the Untranslatable flies in the face of the long human history of translation and communication across linguistic and cultural barriers since time immemorial. In the 21st century, comparative literature has opened up to more literary traditions and the scope of comparison is no longer limited to a few major European or Western literatures. World literature has become the new wave that has invigorated literary studies everywhere, suitable for our time of globalization with the awareness of the close connectedness of different peoples, nations, their cultures and literary traditions. In translation studies, changes have also taken place. "Stop asserting that any text is untranslatable," as Lawrence Venuti puts it forcefully. "Start realizing that every text is translatable because every text can be interpreted" (x). Translation is interpretation, a hermeneutic activity that always aims to find ways of understanding across and beyond linguistic and cultural differences. As a concept, world literature has not alienated itself from translation. When we trace back the idea of *Weltliteratur* to the originary moment when Johann Wolfgang von Goethe made the famous remark that "poetry is the universal possession of mankind […] National literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach," he was discussing his reading of a Chinese novel in translation with his young secretary Johann Peter Eckermann (19–20). World literature in our time cannot be conceptualized without translation because its scope is much larger than just Europe and the languages involved far exceed the usual trio of English, French, and German. World literature requires more knowledge of more, not less, languages, and translation becomes absolutely necessary for having access to the world's various literatures.

Works of literature all start in a particular linguistic and national tradition, and they become part of world literature, as David Damrosch's influential redefinition of *Weltliteratur* has it, by circulating "beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language (Virgil was long read in Latin in Europe)" (4). Here translation is fully acknowledged to be crucial for the circulation of literary works beyond their original language, but the last bit in this redefinition is equally important, namely circulation of a literary work in a widely used language, a lingua franca. Latin used to be the common language in Europe for centuries, and thus Virgil's work could long circulate in the original among European readers. The same can be said of classical or literary Chinese, which was used not just by the Chinese, but also by the Koreans, the Japanese, and the Vietnamese for centuries before the 19th century. In our world today, however, neither Latin nor classical Chinese is the common language used by people in different countries, while English has become the de facto lingua franca in international communication. Given the wide usage of English internationally, translation into English becomes an effective way for works of literature, especially non-European literature, to become known beyond their culture of origin and enter the sphere of world literature.

And yet, some scholars have argued against English as a "hegemonic" language and dismissed translation into English as appropriation and domestication of the foreign by the hegemonic power. Aamir Mufti has pushed the line of argument that world literature has missed "something of considerable importance," that is, "the question of Orientalism" (314). From a postcolonial point of view, Mufti maintains that English is the colonizers' unifying language. "Having consigned the languages of the global South, including formerly extensive and dispersed cultures of writing, to narrowly conceived ethnonational spheres," says Mufti (336), "English now assumes the mantle of exclusive medium of cosmopolitan exchange." In the interest of "diversity," which is "a colonial and Orientalist problematic," he argues for "linguistic heterogeneity" against "standardization and homogenization" (339). The irony in Mufti's argument, however, is his continuous use of English, prominent especially when he published a book to advise others to *Forget English*. While blaming world literature as sustaining the continuous dominance of English as a global language and demanding abandoning global English, Mufti continues to write in English as the dominant language for influence and prestige. The real problematic consequence of this self-contradictory argument, like the argument based on the idea of untranslatability, is to make translation of non-Western works into English all but impossible, and thus to prevent these works being widely known and circulating in the world. The result in practice would be, therefore, to have the yet unknown works of non-Western literature consigned to the dark corner of unknown and unread books, thereby guaranteeing the real hegemony of the major works of Western literature as the only works of world literature circulating everywhere in the world. In fact, there is nothing inherently "hegemonic" to a language, including English, and Mufti's writing in English provides a glaring example how English can be used to express ideas and make arguments, including the argument criticizing the "hegemony" of English and asking others to forget it. Mufti's argument fails to convince because he does what he argues against and argues for what he does not do himself.

Translation and Cultural Understanding

Translation of complicated texts, such as literature or philosophy, requires much more than linguistic competence alone. It is not only a matter of words, but also a matter of ideas. We often notice cultural differences between the East and the West at the expense of cultural differences within the East or the West, and that is wrong. The German poet and writer Heinrich Heine has an excellent book on German religion and philosophy, beautifully written in a poetic language and with a great sense of humor. At the beginning of the book, Heine makes some interesting remarks on the differences between the French and the Germans:

> In recent years the French believed they could attain an understanding of Germany if they made themselves acquainted with the best products of our literature. By so doing they have merely raised themselves from a state of total ignorance to the level of superficiality. The best products of our literature will remain for them only mute blossoms, the whole German mind a dreary puzzle, so long as they do not know the significance of religion and philosophy in Germany. (274)

Anyone engaged in translation and translation studies should pay attention to these remarks, because they make it clear that, first, while the West is often thought of as one entity different from the East as another, there are cultural differences even within the West itself, between France and Germany, two major countries in Western Europe. Without adequate understanding of German religion and philosophy, Heine argues, even the French could not truly appreciate the best products of German literature. If that is the case, then how much more difficult would it be to understand German or French culture and literature across the huge gaps between the East and the West? Second, Heine's remarks also make us realize that literature is deeply imbedded in its cultural background in terms of religion, philosophy, and history, and without knowledge of such cultural background, works of literature will remain "mute blossoms," unable to reveal to us what is contained in the beauty of their verbal expressions. That is to say, to be able to adequately understand literary works and translate them well, the translator must first achieve adequate cultural understanding before dealing with the technical difficulties in translating the original text. Without such adequate understanding, translation may be inadequate and even completely wrong.

Let me give a concrete example to illustrate my point. In Shakespeare's *King Lear*, having been mistreated by his two elder daughters, the old king went mad and ran to the heath in a horrible storm. The loyal Earl of Kent comes in search of the king and has the following conversation with one of Lear's attendant courtiers:

> KENT I know you. Where's the king?
> GENTLEMAN Contending with the fretful elements;
> Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,
> Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,
> That things might change or cease, tears his white hair,
> Which the impetuous blasts with eyeless rage
> Catch in their fury, and make nothing of,
> Strives in his little world of man to outscorn
> The to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain. (III.i.3, 1273)

This passage is beautifully translated by Zhu Shenghao (1912–1944) in powerful and highly effective language:

> 肯特 我认识你。王上呢？
> 侍臣 正在跟暴怒的大自然竞争；他叫狂风把大地吹下海里，
> 叫泛滥的波涛吞没了陆地，使万物都变了样子或归于毁
> 灭；拉下他的一根根白发，让挟着盲目的愤怒的暴风把
> 它们卷得不知去向；在他渺小的一身之内，正在进行着
> 一场比暴风雨的冲突更剧烈的斗争。 (484)

Of the many Chinese translations of Shakespeare, Zhu Shenghao's version is probably the most read and the best-known. He worked under very difficult conditions during the war against the Japanese invasion and died in 1944 at the rather young age of 32, but endowed with extraordinary talents and excellent command of both English and Chinese, he was able to complete single-

handedly the translation of most of Shakespeare's plays, which made a remarkable contribution not only to literary translation in China, but to Chinese literature in general. By discussing a problem in Zhu Shenghao's translation, I do not want in any way to devalue his excellent work but simply to emphasize the importance of cultural understanding for adequate translation.

The problem here concerns the "little world of man" in Shakespeare's original, which Zhu Shenghao translated as "他渺小的一身." Now "渺小" in Chinese means not "little," but "tiny," "minuscule," with the implication of being "insignificant" or "inconsequential," so Zhu Shenghao's translation would mean "his insignificant self." Shakespeare's "little world of man," however, itself a literal translation of the Latin *microcosm*, and "little world" thus has a very different connotation. This has to do with the idea of the correspondence between man as microcosm and nature or the universe as macrocosm, an idea deeply imbedded in the minds of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The idea of man as holding the central position in creation can be traced back to the Greek philosopher Pythagoras, which forms the important cultural background for Shakespeare's words. "Man is called a little world not because he is composed of the four elements (for so are all the beasts, even the meanest) but because he possesses all the faculties of the universe," says E. M. W. Tillyard by quoting Photius, the Byzantine lexicographer, in expounding the Pythagorean doctrine: "for he possesses the godlike faculty of reason; and the nature of the elements, which consists in nourishment growth and reproduction" (84). The idea of correspondence of man and nature was a common belief in Shakespeare's time: "the idea of man summing up the universe in himself had a strong hold on the imagination of the Elizabethans," says Tillyard (111). "Commonest of all correspondences in poetry is that between the storms and earthquakes of the great world and the strong passions of man," Tillyard goes on to say. "Lear in the storm provides the greatest of all examples" (113). The horrible storm on the heath is thus "as much a part of his thought as is the actual violence of the weather" (82). In this sense, then, "the to-and-fro-conflicting wind and rain" are but externalization of Lear's rage and thoughts, and as the tragic hero he occupies the center of the stormy scene, even though beaten by the wind and rain.

This may help us understand a seemingly strange idea Charles Lamb proposed in his essay on Shakespearean tragedies: "that the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any other dramatist whatever" (23). The evidence he cited for his opinion is precisely the scene of Lear walking alone on the heath. "So to see Lear acted, to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting," says Lamb, but he continues: "The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom [of] that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches" (32). Once we understand the idea of correspondence and how it constitutes the cultural background of Shakespeare's description of Lear on the heath, we may see that "his little world of man" in Shakespeare's original is not at all "他渺小的一身," for the "world" (*cosmos*) of man may be "little" (*micro*), but definitely not "minuscule" or "insignificant." On the contrary, precisely because man is the most intelligent and noblest among all creatures, "the little world of man" is higher and more important than the outside world of things in nature, and Lear could "outscorn" the raging storm in nature because that raging storm is but an external reflection of his internal passion and emotions. Therefore, to translate "his little world of man" into "他渺小的一身" may have diminished the significance of Lear as the tragic hero and obscured his central and leading position in the stormy scene.

Now let me turn to another example, this time a passage from the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi translated from Chinese into English by Burton Watson, an important translator of ancient Chinese classics. As with Zhu Shenghao's translation of Shakespeare, my discussion of a mistake in Burton's translation does not in any way diminish the important contributions he has made in introducing Chinese classics to a global readership. As a Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi always challenges our received notions and the commonsensical way of looking at the world, and his language is often subtle and difficult, seemingly making counterintuitive propositions. It often takes some careful thinking and reflection before we can understand the point he is making. The following is a famous passage from the chapter on "External Things" (xxvi.13) in which the philosopher talks about words and meaning in a series of analogies:

> 荃者所以在鱼，得鱼而忘荃。蹄者所以在兔，得兔而忘蹄。言者所以在意，得意而忘言。吾安得夫忘言之人而与之言哉？ (Guo 407)

The following is Burton Watson's translation:

> The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you've gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit, once you've gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him? (302)

Watson's translation reads well, and the analogies are adequately translated, but the problem arises when we come to the last sentence. Zhuangzi made the analogies to express the idea that words or language is just like the tool to catch fish or rabbit, once you've gotten the fish or the rabbit, you can throw away the tool. In a way, this is similar to Ludwig Wittgenstein's advice at the end (6.54) of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that the reader who has comprehended his propositions should throw them away as he should, so to speak, "throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it" (189). Here we see the philosopher's debasement of language, especially writing, which is common in philosophical traditions both East and West. According to Zhuangzi, most people are unenlightened to throw away the nonessential, so they may remember the words but fail to get the meaning. That is the point he makes in the last sentence, posed as a rhetorical question. Now in Zhuangzi's Chinese original, "忘 言 之 人," literally "words-forgetting man," does not have an indication of the tense to specify time, but Watson chose to translate the sentence in the perfect tense, "a man who *has forgotten* words." By so doing, however, he lost the whole point Zhuangzi is making! The man who "has forgotten" words must have forgotten someone else's words, not Zhuangzi's, while Zhuangzi is still trying to find a man who *will* forget *his* words, that is, a man who will perfectly understand his meaning. Such a man will forget his words, just like throwing away the ladder after he has climbed up on it. Therefore, the correct translation of the last sentence should be: "Where can I find a man who *will* forget words so that I can have a word with him?" The change from Watson's version in grammatical tense is hardly noticeable, but that makes all the difference. Why do you want to talk to anyone who will forget what you have to say? A good question, but that is typical of Zhuangzi's seemingly counterintuitive statement. In fact, "forgetting words" (忘言) has become a poetic trope of deep understanding beyond language in the Chinese tradition. For example, when the poet Tao Yuanming says in one of his best-known

poems:

此还有真意，
欲辩已忘言。
There is a true meaning in all of these,
But when I try to explain, I forget my words. (Yuan 247)

He was alluding to Zhuangzi's remarks quoted earlier, and therefore, as I explained elsewhere, "forgetting words is not an indication of the poet's failure to speak, but rather a sign of a deeper understanding as well as a different approach to truth, of which its articulation was in suggestive, pregnant silence rather than words" (Zhang 70).

A translation should try to create an equivalent text with similar connotations and associations, while avoiding associations very different from the original. For example, there is an old Chinese song from the Han dynasty dating back to more than two thousand years ago, a young woman's avowal of love with daring imagination and impressive imagery:

上邪。
我欲与君相知。
长命无绝衰。
山无陵。
江水为竭。
冬雷震震。
夏雨雪。
天地合。
乃敢与君绝。 (Shen 63)

The poem has no title, but the first two characters are used as title, "上 邪," which is an evocation of Heaven. Here is my translation (Zhang 43):

O Heaven!
I would be with you,
And my love will never die.
Only when mountains are gone,
And all rivers are dry,
When thunders roll in winter,
In summer snowflakes fly,
When heaven and earth join as one,
Only then my love may die!

The speaker in the poem starts by an apostrophe calling on Heaven and then takes an oath to assert her undying love. Her oath is taken in the form of negatives, for she lists a series of absolute impossibilities as the condition for love to end, and such negative impossibilities or litotes become a most emphatic way to assert her undying love. The impressive images, "mountains are gone," "all rivers are dry," etc., extraordinary as they are, are by no means unique, for we find similar and

almost identical expressions in very different literatures. For example, here is a famous poem by Robert Burns:

My Luve is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
My Luve is like the melody
That's sweetly played in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luve am I;
And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun!
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare-thee-weel, my only luve,
And fare-thee-weel awhile!
And I will come again, my luve,
Tho' 't were ten-thousand mile. (164)

As we can see, both poems use negative expressions to emphasize the impossibility of love's end. Indeed, undying love is one of the universal themes in all literary traditions, giving expression to secular love between a man and a woman. However, the same Chinese song quoted above is translated by Anne Birrell with the title "Almighty on High!" published in an anthology of classical Chinese literature in translation:

Almighty on High!
I long to know my lord,
Let our love never fade or die
Till mountains have no peaks,
Or rivers run dry.
Till thunder roars in winter,
Or snow pours down in summer,
Till the skies merge with the ground—
Then may I die with my lord! (Minford and Lau 390–391)

The poem is described quite appropriately in the anthology as "A love song, sung by a girl to her lover, in the form of a mock-serious oath to the supreme deity" (390). Reading the translation, however, we may have the impression that an ancient Chinese song is turned into a poem with strong Christian connotations. The use of "Almighty on High" and "my lord" have too strong a suggestion of Christian pious poetry to be a fitting translation of this ancient Chinese song,

and that is also a problem with cultural understanding or the creation of an appropriate cultural background in translation. There are so many questions about language, literature, and culture in translation that make literary translation unpredictable, creative, and therefore an art worthy of our effort, respect, and appreciation.

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