

MODERN RENDITION  
OF  
SELECTED OLD CHINESE CI-POEMS

英译中国古词精选

龚景浩 选译

商务印书馆

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## 序

爱国华侨龚景浩先生的《英译中国古词精选》行将付梓，我有幸先睹为快，不免要品评几句，作为序言。

龚先生于1956年毕业于北京大学西方语言文学系英语专业，中学是在苏州东吴大学附属中学上的，入北大时已学过十年英语。上大学一年级时，曾用英语上演莎士比亚《威尼斯商人》，饰夏洛克，极为成功。他毕业后留校担任英语专业基础课教学多年，深受学生尊敬和爱戴。1964年暑期，高教部委托北大西语系在秦皇岛举办全国高等院校英语专业高年级英语师资培训班，龚景浩当时尚为一名青年教师，但由于他的英语语言和文学造诣深、教学经验丰富、灵活，曾独立担任一个班的精读课教学（包括领导课堂讨论和批改英文作文），教学效果极佳，受到学员们普遍的赞扬，誉为难得的高年级英语教师，而那些学员中大多数人的年龄和资历都超过他（多为讲师，甚至还有副教授）！

龚景浩旅美多年，曾获得哈佛大学硕士学位，历任“美国之音”书报评论栏目的撰稿人和世界银行高级中、英文翻译。他的中译英能力和水平，在他任职期间，在华盛顿地区公认为

首屈一指。

龚先生热爱祖国,热爱人民,热爱中华优秀传统文化。他曾慷慨解囊救济国内水灾灾民。在美退休后,坚决回国定居。虽然年逾花甲,视力减退,他仍笔耕不已,编写英语新词词典,并翻译我国古典诗词为英文诗体。他的勤奋和高雅的情趣令人敬佩。下面谈谈我阅读龚景浩《英译中国古诗词精选》的一点体会:

就英译外国诗歌来说,一般认为比较好的诗人翻译家是17世纪英国诗人德莱登(Dryden)。他译的古罗马诗人维吉尔(Virgil)的全集(1697年出版)脍炙人口。德莱登的翻译是意译,即通过选择译文语言中与原文相对应的语法结构、句型和惯用语,力求传达原文的意思、神韵和风格。这样的译文读起来很顺,既自然,又通畅。这就是严复所要求的“达”的标准。另一位英国诗人翻译家是阿瑟·韦里(Arthur Waley, 1889—1966)。他译的唐诗和日本古典文学名著《源氏物语》受到普遍的称赞。1985—1986年,我在美国康乃尔大学访问期间曾参加该校英文系诗歌朗诵会。我选了李白的“花间一壶酒”一诗作为朗诵的材料,必须附以英文译文。我曾试图自己来译,但总觉不满意。最后还是采用了韦里的既自然,又通畅的英文译文,收到了很好的朗诵效果。

龚景浩先生英译的中国古诗词,读起来也很自然、通畅,而且十分忠实于原文。这是因为他对英语语言和文学造诣很深,对现代英语习惯用法(包括诗歌语言和日常口语)娴熟掌握。他运用英文自由诗体(free verse)来译中文长短句的词,

甚为得体。他也间或用韵，以起强调的效果。他掌握英语口语很自然，例如，“有人楼上愁”译为“Someone up there is sad”，既是英语口语，又符合英诗抑扬格(iambic)的节奏。他不死译、硬译，而是遵照英语的习惯搭配，例如，“玉砌”译为“marble terraces”、“玉阶”译为“marble steps”，而不用 jade 字眼。(但也不绝对如此，例如，“月色已如玉”译为“The moonlight is already jade white”。这里 jade white 给人以玲珑透明之感。)又例如，“绿水”译为“blue water”，而不是 green water。这里，我要着重谈谈他译的“寒山一带伤心碧”，他把“伤心碧”译为“heartbreak blue”。这种译法颇能传达太白用语之奇特，因太白显然对此句赋予特殊的强调，因此一般译法似难传达“伤心碧”所表现的极为深沉而强烈的感觉。龚译巧妙处在利用英语词汇 blue 一词多义之特点，既表达了颜色“碧”，又兼及“伤心”之义，因为 blue 有“忧伤、悲凄”的含义。龚又用名词 heartbreak 作定语(试比较肖伯纳剧本标题 *Heartbreak House*)来修饰名词 blue，以达到双重强调之目的。龚善于用不同手法达到强调，例如，通过转换词性：“罗衣特地春寒”译为“I was suddenly chilled / By the onslaught of spring”，用名词 onslaught 来译副词短语“特地”，因 onslaught 有“猛烈袭击”的含义。龚又善用短促而有力的诗歌语言与诗行来译原作中同样短促、有力的语言和千锤百炼的诗行——这种诗行里凝聚着人生无限艰辛和痛苦。我指的是：“尘满面，鬓如霜”和“明月夜，短松冈”，译为“Face covered with dust, / Temples

hoary like frost”; “A bright moonlit night, / A mound of stunted pines”。龚译易安居士《声声慢》中“寻寻觅觅”为“I search and seek”既简练，又贴近原文，更合乎英语习惯搭配。龚译“梧桐更兼细雨，到黄昏、点点滴滴”十分传神：“... the parasol trees and a thin rain falling. / By dusk time, / The dripping became incessant”。最后一行诗译“点点滴滴”为“dripping... incessant”，令人折服。龚又善于用韵，例如，李后主“问君能有几多愁？恰似一江春水向东流”译为“How much sorrow, pray, can a person carry? / Like the spring torrent flowing eastward, without tarry!”另外，后主此首末句令读者或听众在脑中似乎看见一条长河缓缓自西朝东流动不尽，颇似 Pope 诗行“That like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along”形容一条受伤的长蛇在地面上蠕动。龚译文颇有异曲同工之妙。此外，龚所做注释亦佳，例如，“长亭更短亭”的注：“‘Every five miles a smaller pavilion, every ten miles a larger one’, as the saying goes; in olden times wayside pavilions were built for wayfarers to rest their feet in.”

龚景浩先生的《英译中国古诗词精选》把我国历代优秀词阙选译为现代英语诗篇，附以简介和注释，将有助于外国读者阅读、欣赏我国古典文学作品，同时对我国从事诗歌翻译的人们也会起到启发和引导的作用，因此值得发表和出版。

李 赋 宁

一九九六年四月于北京大学

# Preface

Mr. Kung ChingHao, who has returned to China after a long sojourn abroad, has translated and put together a book of old Chinese *ci*-poems from different periods. I have the good fortune of reading his manuscript before its publication, and would like to offer a few comments as a preface.

Mr. Kung graduated in 1956 from the English Section of the Western Languages and Literature Department at Peking University (PU). Before college, he had attended the high school affiliated to Suzhou (Soochow) University in Suzhou. At the time he entered the university, he had already had ten years of English. When a freshman, he joined his classmates in presenting one act of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* in English, in which he played Shylock. His play-acting endeavour made quite an impression. After graduation, he was engaged by the university to teach basic intensive English courses. He remained at the job for a number of years. Among his students, he was respected and looked upon with high regard. In 1964 WLLD (PU) was chosen by the Ministry of Higher Edu-



cation to run a summer training course for teachers of advanced college English classes from all over the country, in the port city of Qinhuangdao. Mr. Kung was then a junior member of the English faculty at PU, but owing to his extensive knowledge of language and literature and to his experience in the teaching of English, he was entrusted to take up, all on his own, an advanced intensive class that summer. And that task included the conduct of classroom discussions and consultations on English composition writing. All this he handled to good effect. He was highly rated by the course participants and won praise as an English teacher who could successfully cope with the more advanced English courses. One must bear in mind that the participants were most of them older than Mr. Kung and had had longer teaching careers. (The majority of them were university lecturers, with even a few associate professors!)

Mr. Kung moved to the United States in the mid-seventies. While there, he completed the studies for a master's degree at Harvard University. Subsequently, he worked at the Voice of America, putting together a Magazine and Book Review program broadcast in Chinese; later he worked for the World Bank as a translator, then a senior translator. His capabilities, especially his into-English translation skill and talent, were impressive.

Mr. Kung has warm feelings for the motherland, its people, and for traditional Chinese culture. After retirement from the World Bank, he moved back to China to reside. And although he is now over 60, with poor eyesight, he keeps on working with languages, having published a book titled: *300 Popular Sayings in Present-Day English* (Shanghai Yiwen Press, 1995) and translated the present collection of old Chinese *ci*-poems. His assiduity and fine taste have won our admiration. Now to his translation of Chinese *ci*-poems.

In the field of into-English poetry translation, the 17th-century English poet John Dryden is generally regarded as the most important forerunner as a poet-translator. He translated the collected works of Virgil (published in 1697) and won high critical acclaim for his work. Dryden did not follow the word literally; that is to say, he selected only those salient grammatical structures, patterns of expression, and idioms in English that correspond felicitously with the original, striving in the process to convey the precise meaning, style, and spirit contained in the original. His translations read well: there is a natural flow to the poetry in translation. I believe that is what Yan Fu called “达” (finding the perfect corresponding expression). Another distinguished English poet-translator was Arthur Waley (1889—1966), whose translation of Tang poetry and the

Japanese classic “The Tale of Genji” have won great critical acclaim. In 1985-1986, when I was visiting Cornell University, I often attended poetry recitation gatherings organized by its English Department. One time, I chose a poem by Li Bo beginning with the line: “Among flowers I brought a jug of wine.” It was required that English translations should accompany the poems recited. I tried to do the translation myself but was not satisfied with the result. In the end, I adopted Waley’s version, which sounded fine in recitation, with a natural rhythmic flow. My recitation went down well with the audience.

Mr. Kung’s selected *ci*-poems also read well in English, with a natural flow to them. And yet he sticks quite close to the original! This is because he has a good command of the English language and knows English literature well; also, he is well versed in English usage and idioms (as far as both poetic language and everyday speech are concerned). He has adopted a free-verse approach in translating the irregular lines of Chinese *ci*-poems, with felicitous results. He does not altogether avoid rhyme, which he uses occasionally to achieve a heightened effect. He really has a mastery of colloquial English. For example, Li Bo’s line: “有人楼上愁” he renders very simply as “Someone up there is sad”, which is natural fluent colloquial English and yet at the same time a perfect English iambic line.

Mr. Kung never goes in for “forced” translations; rather, he adheres closely to the natural English word order and collocations. Examples: “玉砌” as “marble terraces” and “玉阶” as “marble steps”, avoiding the word “jade”. (However, the word “jade” is not eschewed in all cases, as for example in the line: “The moonlight is already jade white” for “月色已如玉”, which calls to mind a lovely whiteness shed by the moonbeams.) Still another example is the rendering of the words “绿水”, which becomes “blue water”—“green water” would not be appropriate. Now I would like to discuss his rendering of one line of Li Bo’s: “寒山一带伤心碧”. The last three words in the line: “伤心碧”, which become “heartbreak blue” in translation, give a good example of Li Bo’s striking poetic diction. It is apparent that Li Bo places special emphasis on this line, so the more ordinary ways of rendering it would fail to convey the depth of sadness experienced by the poet, looking at the mountains. Here, Mr. Kung displays his skill by choosing the word “blue”—a word with multiple meanings and connotations. As it is, both the colour and the feeling of sadness stand out, because being blue is being sad and pensive. Mr. Kung uses “heartbreak” as an adjective (Remember Shaw’s play — *Heartbreak House*) to describe this blue feeling, so as to be doubly emphatic. Mr. Kung is good at employing other

means for heightened effect — like changing the parts of speech of words, as for example in the line “罗衣特地春寒” ( I was suddenly chilled/ By the onslaught of spring). The word “onslaught”, a noun, is used here to translate an adverbial phrase: “of a sudden”, to bring out the quickness of impact. Mr. Kung is also skilful in the handling of short and forceful poetic phrases to bring out correspondingly short, forceful, long-suppressed feelings in the heart of the poet — lines of such terse force that they seem to contain a concentration of the ceaseless pain and deep sorrow of life. I refer to two pairs of short phrases in one poem: “尘满面, 鬓如霜” (Face covered with dust, / Temples hoary like frost); “明月夜, 短松冈” (A bright moonlit night, / A mound of stunted pines). Mr. Kung’s handling of Li Chingzhao’s famous line “寻寻觅觅” (I search and seek) is sparing in the use of words, sticks close to the original, and yet conforms to English usage. The translation of “梧桐更兼细雨, 到黄昏、点点滴滴” (... the parasol trees and a thin rain falling. / By dusk time, / The dripping became incessant) in the same poem says exactly what the poet was saying. Using “dripping... incessant” for “点点滴滴” is really a master stroke. Mr. Kung uses rhymes well, too. Example: Li Yu’s famous line “问君能有几多愁? 恰似一江春水向东流” becomes: “How much sorrow, pray, can a person carry? / Like

the spring torrent flowing eastward, without tarry!" This last line gives the vivid feel of a long river flowing endlessly on — to the east. It reminds me of a line of Alexander Pope's: "That like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along", describing a wounded long snake pulling itself along on the ground. Mr. Kung gives an equally vivid image. Lastly, the notes Mr. Kung provides are sometimes delightful. For example, the note for "长亭更短亭" goes like this: "'Every five miles a smaller pavilion, every ten miles a larger one', as the saying goes; in olden times wayside pavilions were built for wayfarers to rest their feet in."

In sum, Mr. Kung's "Modern Rendition of Selected Old Chinese *Ci*-poems" presents to us a collection of *ci*-poem gems rendered into modern English verse. Fortified by an occasional note, here and there, the book could be of use to readers abroad who have taken an interest in classical Chinese literature. At the same time, translators of poetry in China may also glean something useful here. Therefore, bringing out this book is well worthwhile.

Fu-ning Li

April 1996

at Peking University

## Translator's Note

*Ci*<sup>1</sup>-poems in China had their beginnings in the Tang Dynasty as lyrics of songs written for courtesans to sing at banquets or for the embellishment of a social function. Each *ci*-poem had to be fitted into an existing tune pattern bearing such titles as Moon on West River, Butterflies Love Flowers, etc. The rhyming and word tone movement requirements for *ci* were rigid, although the early lyrics consisted mainly of easy, colloquial and everyday phrases.

Unlike traditional poetry, *ci*-poems did not have a clean-cut regularity of verse-line schemes (a certain number of feet to a line); instead, *ci*-poems were made up of irregular verse lines, ranging from two, three words (in rare cases, even only one word) to seven words or more to the line. For this, *ci* acquired another name for itself: poems of long and short lines. Another feature of *ci* is that in the majority of cases it was a two-part (two-stanza) composition: a first part and a second part separated by a few blank spaces. The two parts are connected in the flow of ideas, in tone, and in mood. Many times,

the first part is a description of scenery while the second part points to a philosophy of life.

In time, *ci* writing was taken over by the literati and “professional” poets, who perfected the metrical schemes and brought fresh phrasing to *ci*. Its meters now became more intricate and its diction and phrasing more refined and elegant. *Ci*-poetry, which earlier had been rather disdainfully called “an adjunct of poetry”, later developed into a full-fledged literary genre in its own right. It flourished especially in the Song Dynasty (960-1279 A.D.).

*Ci*-poems were mainly composed to express the poet’s intensely-felt personal feelings like the sorrow of being parted from the loved one, the joy of re-union, love for natural beauty, life’s disappointments, and the charm of rural living. Oftentimes, the poet’s feelings and emotions were projected on-to the scene or scenery at hand, bringing a subtle poignancy or an exquisite beauty to the poem.

Translating poetry is well-nigh impossible. In the matter of meters (meters in Chinese poetry depend on the words’ tone movements), it is indeed not possible to attempt to fit the English translation into any existing *ci*-poem’s set metrical scheme; on the other hand, nor would it be advisable to impose a set English metrical pattern in translation — that would make the



verses sound stiff and artificial, lacking in spontaneity, and would thereby fail to bring out the poetry contained in the original poem. What I believe a translator should do is to adopt a free-verse approach, with emphasis on striving to put across the poetic thoughts, sentiments, feelings and situations, along with the overtones, undertones, and nuances, as best one can. As to meters, an “inner rhythm” approach should be used to approximate the rhythm in the original poem to maintain a sort of poetic flow that one experiences when one reads the original.

This is the approach I have attempted for this collection of gems of old Chinese *ci*-poems. Whether I have been successful or not I leave to the readers to judge.

KUNG CHING HAO

November 1996, Beijing

1. *Ci* — read like *tse*.