

# 中國古詩英譯

—— 整齊美集 ——

林健民



# **ANCIENT CHINESE POEMS AS TRANSLATED**

**( In Parallelism Style )**

**By: C. B. LIM**

# 中國古詩英譯

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# —請注意—

- (一) 此書有創譯句「整文美」規格，故與其他人的翻譯完全不同。
- (二) 全書七十餘首，每首四句英譯皆整文美，一個字不多亦不減，包括標點符號。
- (三) 整文美「譯法」不押韻，但準確性極高，九成半以上。
- (四) 此種首創翻譯規格，乃欲使讀者購得英譯中國古詩時，知所分別選擇。

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## SUGGESTIONS ON TRANSLATION OF ANCIENT CHINESE POEMS

by: Claro Ben Lim

### ( 代 序 )

For the past three years whenever I had opportunity to visit Taipei or Hong Kong, I used to frequent the book stores where they sell translations of ancient Chinese poems. On such visits I managed to have bought about a dozen kinds of translation including Select Chinese Verses by Dr. Herbert A. Giles and Mr. Arthur Waley which were published by the prestigious Commercial Press, Ltd. And as introduced by the Press, both Giles and Waley were proficient scholars of Chinese literature during the early 1920's.

My interest in gathering such kind of books was kindled by the fact that initially I found quite a few of the translations not to be satisfactory; they hardly could get 85% accuracy from the original text. This curiosity pressured me to buy more and more books of the like, for I myself had started my own translations some three years ago, and am eager to appraise others' work.

At the outset, I discovered that the inaccuracy of the translations was mainly due to one factor, i.e., they employed the conventional way of imitating an English rhyme to match the Chinese, and as a result, while the Chinese rhyme meant "white", the imitated English rhyme turned out to be "black" or some other meaning, thereby rendering the translation works appear funny.

In order to show some specific samples of this kind of literary manipulation, I prefer to cite a few sets of Dr. Giles translation work hereinbelow, and at the same time for comparison, I would like to present here also my humble counterpart of interpretation on each of the corresponding Chinese poems.

For instance on the well known Tang Dynasty Chen Tze Ang's poem "On Ascending The Yu Chow Tower", original Chinese text reads as follows:

登幽州台歌

唐·陳子昂

前不見古人  
念天地之悠悠

後不見來者  
獨愴然而淚下

Whereas Dr. Giles translation came out this way:

R E G R E T S

My eyes saw not the men of old;  
And now their age away has rolled  
I weep--to think I shall not see  
The heroes of posterity!

As one can easily see, and compare with the original text of Chen Tze Ang, the Chinese rhyme occurred only in the second and fourth sentences, but Dr. Giles' translation rhymed it first and second, then third and

fourth with a different rhyme. As a result, reading the translation may be pleasant to the ear, but the meaning of the whole poem in English is entirely quite far from Chen's original.

In my humble opinion, what actually Chen Tze Ang wanted to express in the poem is this:

### ON ASCENDING THE YU CHOW TOWER

Ahead of me I see no ancient people,  
Nor do I see of any follower behind;  
To consider an illimitable universe,  
I feel so sad that am weeping alone!

Even the title, Dr. Giles had no reason to change it to "REGRETS" when the ancient Chinese poet specifically pointed out his feeling occurred at a certain scenic place, i.e., The Yu Chow Tower. If one reads this writer's translation, he can readily see that it will corroborate the poet's expression of thoughts right at the Tower.

In another Tang Dynasty poem by Wang Chang Ling, which is so well known that all Chinese intelligentsia can recite it, entitled "A MATRON'S REPENTANCE", but Dr. Giles titled it as "AT THE WARS" which is rather inaccurate. For the same reason there are discrepancies again in the translation of this four-sentence poem.

I herewith reproduce both the Chinese poet's text and that of Dr. Giles' translation:



閨 怨  
唐 · 王昌齡

閨中少婦不知愁 春日凝粧上翠樓  
忽見陌頭楊柳色 悔教夫婿覓封侯

AT THE WARS

See the young wife whose bosom ne'er  
    has ached with cruel pain!--  
In gay array she mounts the tower  
    when spring comes round again.  
Sudden she sees the willow-trees  
    their newest green put on,  
And sighs for her husband far away  
    in search of glory gone.

At a glance, one could easily see that the translated sentences are a little too long simply because Dr. Giles wanted to match an English rhyme with the Chinese one; however, the original Chinese rhyme appeared only in sentences 1, 2, and 4, but Dr. Giles produced a rhyme in sentences 1 and 2, while in sentences 3 and 4 he introduced another rhyme which technically speaking, like the first above cited Chinese poem, he did not even comply with the original form of rhyming work of Wang Chang Ling. Such being the case, why insist in producing rhymes just to suit the pleasure of the translator?

My humble thinking again, a fair interpretation of this poem and its title should be read as follows: