

TU FU

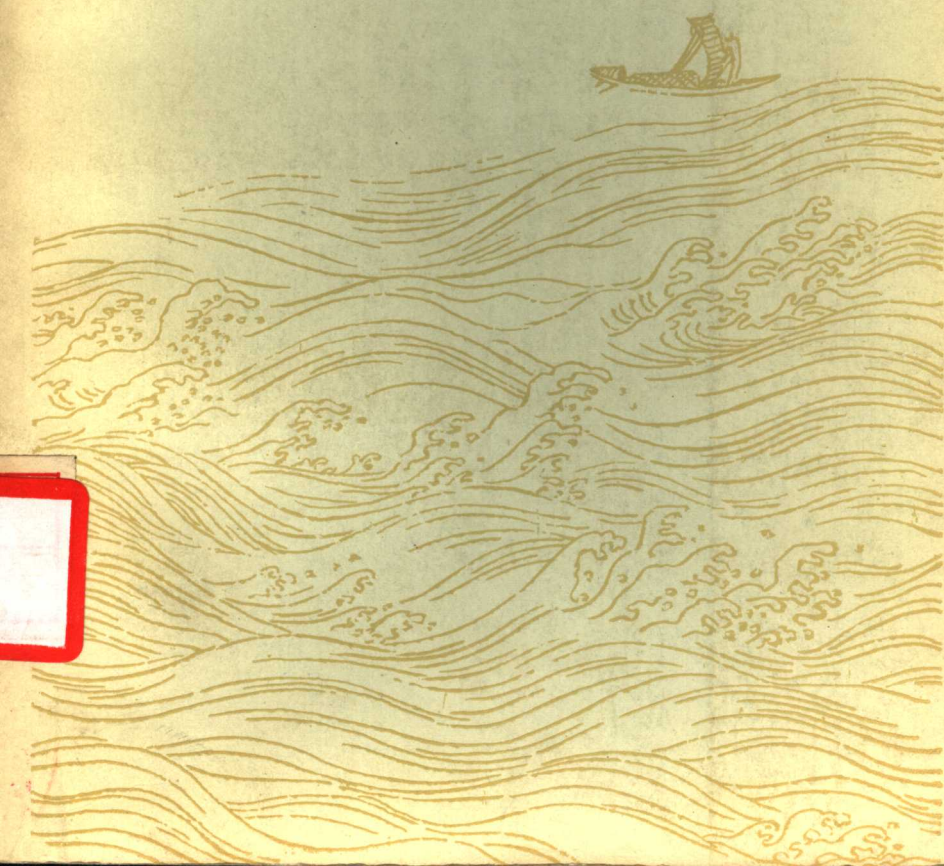
杜甫诗英译

一百五十首

One Hundred and Fifty Poems

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Preface

Genuine art has inexhaustible life, especially the genuine art of poetry. It is because a poet has dedicated his life to his work and unboomed himself of what he felt and thought with the language that touches directly the heart strings of his reader, and on account of the truth, goodness and beauty of the poems, their effect would never diminish, no matter how long in point of time.

This is what occurs to me whenever I open the poetic works of Tu Fu, the great poet of ancient China. In the span of his life of less than sixty years (A. D. 712-770), he had written a quantity of poems, and owing to his excellent artistry, we can conjure up even now vividly a picture of him and his time. Never would the vitality of his art exhaust itself in the future so long as there are books in the world.

It is, of course, not only artistry that makes Tu Fu great; we would rather say that it is the superb artistry and the sublime ideology that make Tu Fu great. Both are inherent in him. He loved his country and his people, regarded the duty of making the world better as his own. The principal thoughts running through his

works are combating the ravages of war, the rulers' extravagant living by means of bloodsucking oppression upon the people, etc. How he wished he could be a high official so that he had the power to bring peace, justice and prosperity to the country, and his fellow countrymen would be saved from untold miseries! The theme had always been of great significance in the very long period of the feudal society in China, and so it had always aroused a general and profound sympathy. Even now we are still moved deeply by the moral power of his ideology.

The brilliant achievements of Tu Fu gained him an outstanding position in the long history of poetry in China. Some historians of Chinese literature traced the source of Chinese poetry back to the Zhou dynasty and even earlier, that is 1066 B. C.. "The Book of Songs", the very first poetical collection, has already appeared ever since the time of Confucius (551 B. C. -479 B. C.). After that, running down through ten and more centuries, there were various forms of poetry styled the Songs of Chu District, Folk Songs of the Han Dynasty, Songs of the Three Kingdoms and Songs of the Six Kingdoms, till the flourishing and colourful period of the poetry of the Tang dynasty. So many poets appeared during these centuries that they were like the bright stars in the sky, but the brightest ones among them accepted universally are Qu Yuan (circa 340 B. C.

-278 B. C.) , Tao Yuanming (also styled Tao Qian, A. D. 365-427) , Li Po (A. D. 701-762) and Tu Fu.

Tu Fu is esteemed to be a poet epitomizing the classical poetry of China. Having carried forward the good traditions of the ancient, he made an excellent development himself and exerted an immeasurable influence on poets of later generations. There were few ancient Chinese poets who had written poetry as abundant in content, various in patterns and large in quantity as Tu Fu had done. One may regard Tu Fu as the most representative poet ever produced in the history of Chinese classical poetry of some three thousand years, and have a general conception of the poets and poetry of ancient China by reading Tu Fu's works.

In this book I present my translation of one hundred and fifty odd poems of Tu Fu, thereby attempting to offer it as a kind of example to the people who love poetry and at the same time are interested in the translation of poetry from Chinese into English, and also to make a brief introduction of our great poet Tu Fu to foreign readers.

These one hundred and fifty odd poems are about one tenth part of all Tu Fu's works, containing approximately most of his chief creations in each period of his life, as well as many others that reflect the various aspects of his life, thoughts and style, which are not

unimportant either.

Tu Fu's life and works may be divided into four periods. The first is before the age of thirty-five when he learned diligently and toured far and wide. Of this period there are not many poems of him left, and the well-known ones are "Looking at Mountain Tai", "The Painting of an Eagle", "Evening Feast at Zuo's Manor", etc. The second period is some ten years before he was forty-four when he lived in Chang-an (now Xi-an), the capital of the Tang dynasty, and his major compositions are "The Eight Bacchanals", "The Chariots Rattle on", "A Song of One Hundred Lines on the Journey from the Capital To Fengxian County", etc. The third is a short period before he was forty-eight years old and during this time the country was suffering from the tremendous turmoil of rebellion led by Generals An Lushan and Shi Siming. Short as it was, Tu Fu indited many poems that have won universal praise ever since, such as "The Moonlit Night", "A Spring View", "To Hermit Wei, the VIIIth Among His Brothers", "Three Officials", "three Partings", "Thinking of My Brothers in a Moonlit Night" and "Dreaming of Li Po — Two Poems". And the fourth period is his last eleven years when he wandered all over Sichuan, Hunan and Hubei Provinces, and his important offerings among more than one thousand poems written in these years are "The

Favourable Rain in a Spring Night", "Ode to My Cottage Unroofed by the Autumn Gales", "News of the Government Troops Recapturing the Southern and Northern Parts of Ji", "On the Tower", "Lodging at a Yamen", "Reflections in the Autumn—Eight Poems", "A Night in-a Chamber", "Mountaing" and "Watching the Sword Dance Performed by the Pupil of the Elder Sister of Gongsun" etc.

I should be pleased if my foreign readers could know something about Tu Fu and his art after reading my translations.

But a translation is very hard to be equivalent, and even harder to be identical to the original. A translation is only a reproduction, although it must be a work of art itself when the original is. One can only know the original exactly by reading the original directly, and translation is only a medium that is requisite when there are in the world various written and spoken languages, or when there are differences between ancient and modern languages. It is unnecessary, if not impossible, to translate a piece of music or a painting, because there is no such thing as language barrier in it. But, as a matter of fact, it is necessary to translate ancient English into modern English or ancient Chinese into modern Chinese, and even more necessary to translate English into Chinese and vice versa, especially when international

contacts are becoming more frequent and when we find out that the world is but a little place, after all. It is also for this reason that I offer this book to my reader.

Art is a wonderful thing which may affect differently different appreciators facing the same original work. In translation, the reproduction of the original, what impressions may have, and how much of the spirit and features of the original may be conveyed to the reader by means of the translation, is a question for a translator to consider when he takes up his work, and a question, too, requiring the judgement of readers and critics.

In order to convey the spirit and features of the original as perfectly as possible, a translator must do his utmost to make his work possess the spirit and features of the original. The reproductions must also be a work of art when the original is such. When the original work is poetry, it would be best not to translate it into prose; and when it is classical poetry in well-knitted form, it would be best not to translate it into modern free verse.

The task of a translator is to introduce to the readers the original work with its contents and forms as faithfully as possible. The style, etc., I think, are in the words and lines and they are the invisible and faithful companions of the Faithfulness. Yet translation is not merely a technical process of linguistic conversion. It would be

meaningless or riddled with mistakes if one treats translation in the same way as to design a computer program. Translation is the art of reproduction and recreation, especially when it is concerned with literature. Yet the translator must be careful in exercising his right of pen, and it would be unfair to the authorship if he unnecessarily murders the details of the original or, on the contrary, polish it ever so much. A translator is not a creator himself, and to be as close as possible to the original work is the crux of the matter. This is my basic concept of translation, and the principles I have tried to follow, even though I am not equal to the task, and have not done so well as I should like to.

No wonder if there are various translations of the same poem and they may all be truthful, since the art of poetry is so ethereal that it allows different people to make out what they feel and diverse hands to describe what they are able to see. However, the variances between the translations are like the paintings from life, they may be from different angles and in all nuances of shades, but they are still truthful to the model.

There are many difficulties in the translation of Chinese classical poetry. It is because, for one thing, the abstruseness of the Chinese archaism and the very terseness of the traditional way of writing poetry make the exact and thorough comprehension of the implications

not easy. For another, the very uniqueness of versifications, developed and finalised on the bases of the peculiarity of Chinese characters themselves, are so integrated with the Chinese characters that it is not possible to translate them into another language. Besides, there are variant readings here and there in variant editions through all the centuries, and different interpretations of equivocal texts much debated among the annotators and the commentators. These and other problems require the translator to make decisions of his own.

To overcome the difficulties in the course of translation, I scrutinized Tu Fu's poems over and over again, weighing every word, every line and the whole poem to make out the implications, consulting every book that came my way, and asking my friends for advice. The problems of how to express my comprehensions justly and appropriately in English verse had racked my brains even harder. I would not give examples one after another here since the solutions of the difficulties and problems I met with have elucidated themselves in the translation. In some places I cannot say I have resolved them very well, while in other places I might have left much to be desired. But what I can say is that this book is a painstaking result which had taken up nearly all my spare time in ten consecutive years.

In solving the problem of prosody in the transla-

tion, I have tried various schemes. The strict rules of antithetical couplet and the interweaving of level and oblique tones in Chinese classical poetry are obsolete, and cannot be adopted too, even in modern Chinese poetry, not to mention the impossibility of finding anything similar in English prosody. The rule of five or seven words (five or seven characters or syllables, that is to say) to each line is prevalent in Chinese classical poetry, but to limit the number of words in each line for English poetry is impossible. I simply abandon any attempt to do so. I asked myself, in my translation, to make every line of a poem have the same number of foot, or approximately equal, with two syllables in each foot and iambic in general. Whether it is of pantameter, hexameter, heptameter or octameter it all depends on the poem. Thus it may more or less keep the characteristics of the pattern of Chinese classical poems. Some of the originals are not in keeping with strict prosody, such as those in the forms of "five-word-old-style" or "seven-word-old-style" and also some in somewhat irregular form, such as "folk songs of the Han Dynasty", still I have arranged them with the same method aforesaid, since I thought the difference between them and the poems in accord with strict prosody is not easy to be shown in the translation of English poetry.

The variances are inevitable, it is so in the composi-

tion of poetry as well as in the translation. In respect of the implications of the original poem, exceptional arrangements are even more necessary. Prosody enables poetry to be expressed rhythmically, and the variations of foot and metre are permitted in case there are poetic rules and forms on the whole.

As to the rhyme, Compared with English words, the Chinese monosyllabic words are much easier to rhyme. There are many Chinese poems, classical and modern alike, having the same rhyme throughout a poem, even there are scores of lines, and I think it is hard to do the same in English poetry. I adopted mostly the method of rhyming two closest lines, while in some other poems rhyming the first and third, the second and fourth. There are few also, rhyming the first and fourth, the second and third, and even fewer rhyming with similar sounds throughout the poem.

Rhyming is a problem that bothered me time after time, and sometimes in searching a proper word I would feel restless for days. Perhaps it would have been wiser to give up the attempt altogether; yet, in spite of my failure to do it well somewhere, I felt it was so hard not to try, I would rather take a chance even though it may spoil the poem a little. Besides, rhyming is one of the important aspects in Chinese classical poetry, and I think it is better to show it to some extent in translation.

if possible.

For a long period past, there have been a number of translations of Chinese classical poetry published in succession. The English versions of Tu Fu's poems published, as I know, in foreign countries are (1) Tu Fu, the Autobiography of a Chinese Poet, by Florence Ayscough (published in 1924, 1934) ; (2) The Book of Seven Songs by Tu Fu, by Edna Worthley Underwood and Chi Huang Chu (1928) ; (3) Tu Fu, Wanderer and Minstrel Under Moons of Cathay, by the same translators above (1929) ; (4) Tu Fu, China's Greatest Poet, by William Hung (1952) ; and (5) A Little Primer of Tu Fu, by David Hawkes (1967) . Those published in our country are (1) Tu Fu, China's Great Poet, the Bard of T'sao T'ang Ssu, by A. J. Brace (Chengdu, 1934) and (2) Tu Fu, Selected Poems, by Rewi Alley (Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1962) .

There are, in addition, a number of English translations of Tu Fu's poems appearing in various collected works of English translations of Chinese classical poetry.

It is really gratifying to know that the translation of Chinese classical poetry, including that of Tu Fu's, has been given due attention. Yet, observing the list above, one may find out that these works were all done by foreign Sinologists, translators, or foreign scholars of Chinese origin, and none of them by a Chinese.

I should like to add that, as I known, there are some books of this category that were translated by Chinese translators, such as the English versions, of "Li Sao", by Lin Wenqing (1929) and Yang Hsienyi and Gladys Yang (1953); the French version of Tao Yuanming's poems by Liang Zongdai, and the German version of it by Yang Yezhi. There are too, some collected translated works by Su Manshu, Wong Man and others who lived or are living in Hong Kong or Taiwan.

Nevertheless, they are very few in comparison with publications of this kind overseas. And, considering the flourishing development after Liberation of translation and publication work, the work of translating Chinese classical poetry into foreign languages seems inadequate. Among mountains of books being published, very few books of this kind can be found. As our country has a large population and territory, and brilliant and great with her long cultural tradition, I think we have both the duty and capability to undertake the task of introducing the rich and varied cultural legacy of our ancestors to the world. I hope the research, translation and publication work in this area would go ahead in our country so as to keep abreast with the outer world and contribute our cultural heritage to the treasure house of world literature.

In recent years, I am glad to say, there is a series of books printed in Hong Kong by The Commercial Press

and the translators are our scholars, such as "Gleanings from Tao Yuanming" by Professor Roland C. Fang, "Li Po — A New Translation" by the famous film director Mr. Sun Yu and "Su Dongpo — A New Translation" by Professor Xu Yuanchong.

I deem it my great honour to have one among the series, and that is "Tu Fu — A New Translation", published in 1981. The above publications are not circulated in the mainland, and with the consent of the Commercial Press, Hong Kong Branch, I turned over my book, with a lot of revisions and supplements, to The People's Publishing House of Shanxi Province. They kindly undertook to publish it. But part of the contents has been used as an appendix to an album of traditional Chinese paintings entitled "Paintings Inspired from Tu Fu's Poems".

The translation of poetry is an onerous task that the one hundred and fifty poems have taken me ten years to complete. It cannot be mentioned in the same breath with Tu Fu who wrote more than one thousand poems within the same number of years. I wonder if I could persist in doing so much work for such a long time without the encouragement from my friends at every juncture. An easier way, the translating of English or American literature into Chinese, for instance, tempted me now and then. Anyhow I have come to a place where I can put a full stop at last at the moment, and

looking back at the long and tortuous course I cannot help feeling relieved and big with joy.

The acknowledgements would be too long if I made a list of every one to whom I am indebted, so I mention here but some of them. Mr. Ye Junjian, a writer, Professor Roland C. Fang and Professor Xu Yuanzhong, they have recommended me to the publishers and the hopeful prospects thus offered by them are like road signs that guide me from one milestone to another.

Part of my manuscripts had been kindly and carefully read and revised by the late Professor Lin Tongji who unfortunately died of a sudden attack of myocardia, infarct on in November 20th, 1980, in his seventy fifth winter, when he was giving lectures at California University, U.S.A. I miss him deeply whenever I remember the last few times when we met or I see his handwritings left on the papers.

I would have left many mistakes and misuses uncorrected in English without the help of Mr. Yang Zhihong, who was my colleague in some publishing houses some twenty years ago, and now is my colleague again in Shanghai Translation Publishing House. He graduated from Oxford University and has gone over all of my translations including this book, in spite of his ill health in these years. Mr. Hu Xiongding and Mr. Zhang Danzi have done me the same favour here and there too.