Translating between Literary Systems: An Interview with Professor Jonathan Stalling

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Abstract:

In this interview, Professor Jonathan Stalling talks about the differences between translating classical and contemporary Chinese poems and discusses how the various responsibilities for the present and past global reception of translated Chinese literature fall on translators, authors, and others. He argues that translators can help the authors that they translate better understand the target language's industry norms and to offer authors options about how to best navigate the target country's literary system. Stalling explains how founding the "Chinese Literature Translation Archive" at Bizzell Memorial Library at the University of Oklahoma, can provide the archival research materials needed to better understand the kinds of negotiations that take place (or fail to take place) between the US and Chinese literary systems. He also introduces his two major interlanguage projects: Pinying and English *jueju*. Both projects are the main topic of a new book focusing on his work: *Yinggelishi: Jonathan Stalling's Interlanguage Art*. He adds that a rationale behind the English *jueju* project is that learning to compose classical Chinese poetic forms in English helps prepare English readers to be better readers of classical Chinese poetry. Lastly, he gives some practical suggestions to Chinese literary translators.

Keywords: literary systems, Chinese Literature Translation Archive, interlanguage art, Pinying, English *juejue*

Li: Professor Stalling, thank you for accepting this interview. Let's start with some basic questions: How did you start your translation career? Why did you choose Chinese poetry?

Stalling: Well, my first Chinese teacher, Li Qingmin, emphasized memorizing

classical Chinese poetry, Tang poetry in particular. So even as an adolescent, I was interested in translating classical Chinese poetry. It was simply part of my education. And I was already a poet as an adolescent as well, so I enjoyed translating these works and trying to write some of my own *jueju* in Chinese. Then as an undergraduate, I invented the English *jueju* form for an assignment given to me by the poet June Jordan. She had asked me to find a way to translate classical Chinese poetry so that she could hear the music of the original. After that, I started to translate classical Chinese poetry into this experimental monosyllabic rhyming form. So, while the English *jueju* started as a genre of English poetry, it was also a way for me to translate canonical poems, to let the English readers hear the formal features of regulated verse better. This was all in the late 1990s.

Li: So you started to formulate such an idea of English *jueju* when you were an undergraduate student?

Stalling: Yes. I started this work in 1996 when at UC Berkeley, and I was given a chance by Professor Jordan to teach the form to my fellow students at UC Berkeley as well as inmates at Dublin Women's Prison, and at the Glide Memorial Church homeless shelter in San Francisco, and in other places. Jordan believed that the form I came up with could teach the fundamental essence of English poetry too, and that this would be valuable to those who were most in need of a voice. I continued to teach the form as a genre of English poetry ever since, but also spent a number of years early on trying to systematically translate a larger body of classical Chinese poems in various genres into my monosyllable-based system. By 2002, however, I abandoned this translation method and started to focus on expanding the composition method to make it as comprehensive as possible.

Li: You mentioned that you first used English *jueju* as a form both to compose English poems and to translate classical Chinese poetry but later chose to focus solely on the former. Do you think there is a conflict between translation and composition?

Stalling: The conflict between translating classical Chinese poetry into English and composing classical Chinese forms in English lies in the freedom of the latter to generate new poetic combinations wholly within the constraints of the rules of regulated verse. In translation, you are not free to choose one's own words because word choice and how they are sequenced must convey the meaning of the poem being translated. This semantic constraint limits one's ability to be faithful to all the rules of regulated verse which demand an end rhyme scheme, adherence to a particular semantic rhythm within lines, parallelism between lines, and patterns of horizontally and vertically balanced and counterbalanced vowels. While it is very

hard to translate into monosyllabic English regulated verse, it is not hard to use this system to generate new works. With over 8000 variations of English monosyllabic words to draw upon, we can compose *jueju*, *lushi*, *ci*, and *qu* endlessly.

Li: Allow me to direct our attention to translation practices again: What do you think is the difference between translating traditional Chinese poems and modern ones?

Stalling: For me, there are two very big differences. The first one is that for modern poems, at least for contemporary poems, oftentimes, the poets are alive. In many ways, the job of modern translators of living poets is to get their work to the widest audience. So for me, translating contemporary Chinese poetry needs to rely on contemporary English poetic norms. There is more domestication, in other words, for contemporary poetry. *Baihua* and modern English are both polysyllabic and hypotactic by nature with light parataxis for poetic effects so modern or contemporary Chinese and English poems are roughly similar in form (when compared to classical Chinese poetry). That similarity allows one to deemphasize the source formalism since the source texts' formal qualities live in the same universe as modern English poetic techniques and qualities. *Wenyan shi* (Classical Chinese poetry) on the other hand is so different from English free verse, and to my mind traditional English verse as well. So when translating classical Chinese poems, I have preferred the path of more extreme foreignization. When translating contemporary poetry on the other hand I typically have opted for domestication because translating contemporary poets is focused more on the poet's style rather than the genre, and should focus on the source poet's choices rather than drawing attention to the translator's choices. Also, when you are translating poets like Li Bai, Du Fu or Li Shangyin, you can rest assured that there are already many other pre-existing translations. So I feel that translators can make more bold choices and experiment with the language more because their translations are always adding to a corpus of earlier translations. But for contemporary poets, maybe it's the only time that a poem will be translated, so the translation practice should be quite normative, I think. Therefore, there is more invisibility of the translator with contemporary poetry because the translation has a different social function.

When it comes to classical Chinese poetry, I believe new translations are always supplemental rather than being a kind of displacement. A translation does not displace previous translations but just supplements them. When you are translating, it is not doing violence to previous translations. It is not trying to erase them but just adds to them. That is why when we are translating famous poems by Tang and Song poets, it is ok to add unusual translations to the tradition. We want to get as many

different concepts through language as possible. But when I am translating poems by a poet like Shizhi or Zheng Xiaoqiong, I had to recognize the possibility that my translation may be the only English translation available of a particular poem and deliver something that the widest audience would appreciate.

Li: I noticed an important point here. Usually, we would use "experimental" to describe contemporary Chinese poetry and "traditional" to describe classical poetry. But talking about translating them into English, you mentioned that you would use experimental methods to translate classical poetry. So this reverses my expectations.

Stalling: I guess it's because contemporary Chinese poets are the ones doing the experimenting. If you are translating Duo Duo, or someone like the Taiwanese poet Xia Yu, for instance, both of whom have quite experimental works, or Che Qianzi, who writes more experimental poems, the English translation will also appear to be experimental. But this experimental quality in the English translation is set in motion by the author rather than the translator. If a contemporary Chinese poet is pushing against her audience's expectations, then the translator will need to do the same thing in English. But the translator is letting the Chinese poet push, whereas the English translator is simply carrying that intentionality forward into English: pushing against poetry norms more generally. When translating a classical Chinese poem, on the other hand, experiments are necessary because the poem comes from a different poetic tradition. The source text is not experimental in the context of its source community's poetic norms, but to convey its formalism in English with any fidelity makes it appear "experimental." So I am talking about the experiments conducted by the translator as the result of challenging target norms to convey something that was not experimental in the source text (such as regulated verse norms).

Li: About the translation of contemporary Chinese literature into English, many people are discussing the unsatisfactory reception of translated Chinese literature in the global market. What's your opinion of this? Do translators have to take any responsibility?

Stalling: I think that the answer is complicated. Both translators and authors have to take some responsibilities, and the harder part of the answer to discuss is what falls back on the author's shoulders I think. Let's talk about both of these though. When we say "literature", we mostly mean "fiction" here. When we say "fiction", we mostly mean "literary fiction" rather than "genre fiction". So it's important to differentiate literary fiction writers like Ge Fei, Mo Yan, Su Tong, Wang Anyi, Jia Pingwa, from our earlier discussion of poetry. All of these are all great Chinese

writers with a wide critical and generally popular reception among Chinese critics and readers. So the expectation is that the same should be true of their English translations. But you see their work represents the literary norms established within the Chinese literary system which is quite distinct from the American Literary system. When we talk about literary fiction in America, we talk about individual authors, as if they are sovereign actors, but in reality, authors work with many other people in the US to bring about a published literary work. American authors typically grow into mature writers within creative writing workshops like the famous MFA model where mentors and peers shape their work from prototypes through an iterative process after which texts are further shaped by literary agents and finally by commercial publishing house editors. All the actors shape the modern English novel as fiction (and much of poetry) in English follows the larger "value-added economics" we find shaping every other commodity in late capitalism. I call the work provided by actors to improve literary works, "positive assessment labor," and the value of literary works that have gone through this process is ensured because "negative assessment labor" filters out all other works that would otherwise compete with the highly networked works for market share. In the end, therefore, we can say that American literary fiction is radically collaborative and dispersed across a wide agential network of actors just as other kinds of designed products. The result of this process taking place repeatedly over many decades is that literature has continually been improved through ideation, inception, prototyping, beta testing (workshopping), iteration (revision), to market testing (agents' and editors' consultation and shaping), etc. By the time a novel hits the bookstores, the author is only responsible for 70-90% of the book's final form. The other percentages come from peers, editors, agents, and other readers whose input helped "improve" the book along the way. Every actor who touches the book adds labor value to the product, making the product more valuable (or so the logic holds). Over the last 30 or 40 years, there has been a huge growth within the US creative writing industry because most of the money in the American literary system comes from providing positive and negative assessment labor, rather than "writing" (your own work). If you want to make a living in the US as a writer, then you learn how to convert your network position and assessment skills into helping others reach the largest audience. The money we make as writers therefore is typically earned by adding value to other people's writing rather than in the sale of our own books. I should be clear here, this is not the way we Americans talk about our literary system, but it is how the system works, and I have come to notice this not because I have taught creative writing for decades (which I have), but primarily because our

system is so different from the Chinese literary system.

In China, a writer's income comes largely from salaries provided directly by the Writers' Association and the central funding mechanism that undergird the distribution of literary fiction into libraries for instance. The "chuban fei" (subventions) that are sponsored by the Writers' Association and universities, or other state-funded agencies contribute greatly to the overall book sale numbers. Thus, even book sales are partly determined by a centralized funding mechanism rather than relying wholly on market forces. But the most conspicuous difference lies in the fact that China has not had a creative writing industry paying writers to teach undergraduates how to write. Nor are there literary agents paid to reshape works of fiction based on their superior knowledge of literary market trends, or editors empowered to intervene in the shaping of novels to offset their publishing risks, etc. In short, it is nothing at all like America. But I should mention that America is quite unique. Even France and Germany do not have literary systems like the one we find in the US. So American literary fiction is "cooked" to a high degree by an extremely high level of editorial quality control, whereas Chinese fiction can be thought of as relatively uncooked. An author like Bi Feiyu or Jia Pingwa will write a book and send it to the publisher. The publisher will check it for typos, and print it, so no one outside the author touches it. So Mo Yan can write a 500-page-long book, in a handwritten manuscript in two months, and send it off to a publisher, and they will publish the whole thing. No one dares to change the words. That's a completely different paradigm.

And herein lies a problem, and this is how I answer your question (thank you for your patience), when an editor doesn't change a word, and when the translator translates the work faithfully, it means the English version will be very different from other novels readers are encountering in English because there is only one person writing it. Chinese novels are rough in this sense, simply by virtue of the fact that they haven't been shaped by this larger value-added economic model. In short, they haven't been edited. The plus is that no one else interferes with the author's vision, so it arrives at the reader's doorstep in its pure form. The Chinese literary system therefore can be thought of as being stridently individualistic, philosophically romantic, and exceedingly idiosyncratic in the best sense, but this also means that works of Chinese fiction lack the normative refinements that can only be achieved at scale within literary systems that provide the kinds of resources we find in the US.

So let me try to narrow this down now to answer your question now. The expectation of English readers is extremely high for English novels. The characters

are expected to be fully developed because any lack of development would have been discovered and improved upon early on. The balance between exposition and dialogue is expected to be just right again because many hands are on deck to ensure that this is the case. The novel will take on topics that readers care about and likely conform to evolving ideological norms. And finally English readers expect a highly refined literary English which only specialized training and experience can help writers (including translators) gain. So what I am saying is that native English speakers cannot write publishable fiction unless they are highly trained and well networked within the literary system. The competition is insanely tight for reader attention. So when American readers encounter a work of Chinese fiction like Jia Pingwa's novel *Ruined Capital* (Fei du)*,* they find a novel well over twice as long as the English norm with many characters that are not developed throughout the length of the novel, a loose plot and gender stereotypes that many will find off-putting if not offensive. I was the series editor that published that book in English, and it was wonderfully translated by Howard Goldblatt with fidelity and class, but he did not alter or update the text, so the book could not be expected to hit a wide target market despite my huge expectations at the time, given its notoriety among Chinese readers and critics. So I personally feel that translating such works into English is an opportunity to let English readers learn about different kinds of writing, cultures, and literary systems more generally. But Chinese novels can be a difficult choice for English readers to make because they are not used to this kind of loose style, personal style.

So this is an unspoken problem for the translators of Chinese literature. The question we have to ask ourselves is: What do I do as a translator? Do I keep faithful to the original or try to tighten it a little bit to make it more appealing to English readers accustomed to English novels? So the answer to your question is: Yes, it does come down to the translator in the sense that they must choose how to talk to their authors about their expectations and desires vis-à-vis the English audience. Translators need to get better at talking to Chinese novelists about the market realities in the West, and how our system has been steeped in capitalism for so many decades that it has evolved in a very specific way quite distinct from its Chinese counterpart. Because the Chinese government still puts money into the Writers' Association, it largely protects the writers from the marketplace. The writers can write what they want without thinking "Oh! I have to sell the book." or "The publishing house will not publish my book unless I…" There is not as much of this kind of worry for Chinese authors as their American counterparts. Of course, there is censorship so this also means that authors are not free to

conform to the market pressures that would likely find sensational or politically challenging work more appealing than those that are not. English novels are free to discuss contemporary cultural issues to directly appeal to their readers, while Chinese novels are not. This can mean that Chinese novels may come off as lacking modernity from an American perspective, but I still think that the main hurdle lies in the formal distinctions between the Chinese and American literary systems.

To my mind, there is only one moment when a Chinese author and an English translator fully went through the American literary publishing system. When Mo Yan first published his two novels, the American translator Howard Goldblatt worked with a very famous literary agent to reshape the novel. The editors even requested that Mo Yan rewrite the ending of his second novel in English *The Garlic Ballads* (Tiantang suantai zhi ge). Mo Yan's willingness to take criticism and improve his work may well have been a causal factor in his lasting appeal and fame among English readers relative to his Chinese contemporaries. If the author can be more flexible, it may be possible for more Chinese writers to work with higher-level agents and editors who will help reshape their novels as shown in Mo Yan's example. That could produce more popularity as 500-page novels can be honed into 300-page English counterparts, etc. If done correctly, such revision can pull out the really deep part of the novel and present an even more potent vision of the novel than the one originally penned by the author. After all, I think that this is the way English novelists feel as they compare their first drafts to their final published versions.

In the end, the translator's responsibility and the author's responsibility are intertwined: I think that translators need to talk to their authors and ask them: "What is your goal for the English version? Do you want it to be read by a small scholarly readership or by average people?" If an author chooses the former, go with fidelity; if the author chooses the latter, then the author will need to accept the American idea of networked collaboration and the translator will need to become integrated into the highly networked system of literary publishing (likely by working with an agent). I don't think that this is a betrayal if the author has asked for his/her work to go through this process. But it would be a betrayal if the author is not consulted first. I think that's the future, to be quite honest. Some level of collaboration would be very helpful to Chinese literature more generally. At the end of the day, we will need to see agents working directly with authors and translators to help them understand the American market and create new versions of books that may be called "adaptations" rather than "translations". The idea is to legitimize both tracks, to see both as legitimate pathways. Let's see what happens.

Li: So it was not the translator that revised the draft, but Mo Yan that rewrote the book himself, right?

Stalling: Yes, that is correct. Mo Yan made the changes based on the editor's and agent's comments and suggestions, and the translator (Howard Goldblatt), translated those changes into English. So you asked me if the translator bears any responsibility, and the answer is yes. I think the translator bears the responsibility of explaining the situation to the author and providing the author with choices. That's their responsibility. Goldbatt did this with Mo Yan by sharing the editor's and agent's ideas with the author. He did not stand in the way of the American literary system by shielding the author from it. But here we can also see how commercial agents and presses also bear responsibility for they could do so much more to bring translators into their formal assessment networks, to provide them with highly networked cultural capital, etc. Both parties then can and should let Chinese authors know that if a book is too long with problems in its plot and certain characters are not developed, it will likely not find a large American audience. After reading the book, the translator can say: "I will translate it. It's a great novel. But I would like to work with agents and editors to shorten it a little bit, and here is why. And I want to do this with you (the author)." Not only should authors always have the right to "yes" or "no" to this, but we can see from Mo Yan's example, that they could embrace the process by potentially reworking elements if they agree (as Mo Yan did) that the novel would be better for the revision. The translator's responsibility is to follow the author's desire, but to make sure the author is offered clear choices. There must be trust and collaboration at the heart of the translation process.

This is my feeling that to promote Chinese literature, we probably need a little bit more honesty about the differences between the English and Chinese literatures, and it will be the author's responsibility to respond to this honesty with goodwill understanding that the English market is a hard nut to crack. But it's their choice.

Li: Yes. In China, the promotion of contemporary Chinese literature has partly become a political agenda. Some government sectors like Guojia Hanban (the Beijing-based National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language) put money into it and hire translators. The writers are also glad to be included in these programs. But the outcome oftentimes is disappointing. Your answer really explains this phenomenon that I have always been curious about. You also got involved in this project organized by Hanban and you collaborated with Professor Liu Hongtao at Beijing Normal University to promote Chinese literature in the English-speaking world, right?

Stalling: Yes, I worked closely with Liu Hongtao. For ten years we worked

together in fact on this project, but I should mention that the Hanban was only involved for the first half of this partnership. This was a big part of my education, a real hands-on learning experience. We had a sizable start-up grant from the Hanban for the first publication of the *Chinese Literature Today (CLT)* journal and book series. Since I was then a young scholar, I was all about fidelity. But I understood that there was a deep desire among Chinese authors to find an English audience for their work. I believed then and still believe today in the meaning of promoting Chinese literature as a global good, as Chinese literature conveys a real-world, textured, genuine, and complex portrait of a large percentage of humanity and it is simply another realm of wonderful literature from a purely literary perspective.

We created *Chinese Literature Today (CLT)* to be a beautiful magazine with rich colors and whose layout is also very sophisticated and well designed, and yet I found it still very difficult to get the readers to pay attention to Chinese literature. That's when I started to wonder: if this isn't working, then how do you do it? So it was the struggle to promote *CLT* that led me to establish the Chinese Literature Translation Archive (CLTA) as a way to better understand the actual history of Chinese literature in translation.

Li: Could you say something more about why you started the CLTA?

Stalling: By starting an archive and studying the history of translation, you can read the letters between Mo Yan and Howard Goldblatt. You can add the other agents I have been discussing into your study of how translation works within the larger ecosystem of various publishing industries, and you can start to put all the pieces together. Now we understand what's happening here: Chinese-English Translation Studies was always missing its material history. It never had an archive. So scholars like you and I have nothing to study. We have our minds to study. We have ideas, concepts, and theories. We have the original books and their translated versions which are not the same. So we have to come up with why they are different. So we write a dissertation about why they are different, right? We write a book or an article. We guess. We use theory. But actually, we could have an archive where you have all the draft materials and letters to and from the author, translator, editors, and agents. You can put together the history and get the answers. And the answer is that: translation is not between languages and cultures only, but also between literary and economic systems at scale. So when I was working with Liu Hongtao, that experience taught me to see the problem. But it didn't actually reveal the solution so the Translation Studies and Comparative Literature/Chinese literature community needed new ways to seek out the origin of the problems. Archive work allows us to come up with new tools for scholars to use, so hopefully

sometime in the future young scholars like you can come to Oklahoma and spend time in the archive and read through the Howard Goldblatt papers, or the Wolfgang Kubin papers. Kubin is a translator of mostly poetry into German, but his archive is full of letters from almost all the *Menglong* poets: Bei Dao, Gu Cheng, Shu Ting, Yang Lian, all of these, from the 1980s forward. You can get a lot of background stories about translation through that correspondences and learn about Chinese poetry in Europe at the end of the twentieth century. A decade on, I now definitely think that the answers we are looking for can be found in archival work and new methods drawn from complex systems' theory. Now we can think about agents, not abstract agents as in Bordieu's theory or actor-network theory, but the actual people whose letters and notes provide us with the evidence we need to describe the interactive network of translation. There is almost no scholarship that describes how the American literary market works and how it does or doesn't influence its Chinese counterpart. We need much more archival work to be able to know how the *guanxi* (relationships) works in both systems for instance. And then, when we have these resources, we can better understand the differences between literary expectations for audiences and how to transmit more between them.

Li: Your argument also sheds some new light on Translation Studies, especially the study of literary translation history. The archives enable us to dive into the details. However, these archives are usually precious and rare. It's not so easy to get access to them. Compared with the contemporary archives, for the study of the earlier periods, like late Qing, the archive work could be even harder. Let's move on to the next question:

Congratulations on the publication of your new book *Yinggelishi, Jonathan Stalling's Interlanguage Art*. From Pinying to English *jueju*, I know that you have been developing such interlanguage projects for more than a decade. How has your perception of this interlanguage art evolved over these years?

Stalling: Well, firstly, this book is edited and designed by Professor Chen Wang (Cal State), and I wish he was here to answer your question as the book reflects his reading of my work and there are two other chapters by Timothy Billings and Liu Nian who interpret the work from their respective disciplines too. But of course, the book is focused on what can be called a long learning process for me as an interlanguage worker.

I'm not sure where to begin, but since you mentioned translation in the Qing Dynasty, I suppose it would make sense to start with my work's indebtedness to that period. There is a portion in this book that talks about Li Ruzhen, a Qing fantasy writer. In many ways, my project Pinying was inspired by Li Ruzhen in the sense

that his fantasy writing imagined a kind of interlanguage phonology. We can think of this fiction as presenting a kind of speculative phonology. He was a very well-known phonologist that studied the evolution of Mandarin and wrote a book about the phonology of modern Mandarin – *Lishi Yinjian* (A Phonology Book by Li). In this work, he tried to create a modern mandarin rhyme table that would update the rhyme table tradition of the past to capture the standard pronunciation of Mandarin in the Qing Dynasty. He was an innovator and a real linguist trying to modernize the Chinese sound system. But he was also a fantasy writer, and he wrote about the split-tongue people in his novel, *Jinghua yuan* (Flowers in the Mirror). This "fanshe" (reversed-tongue) people had the most complicated language in the world, yet they figured out how to use Chinese characters to spell their language and by extension any language. He imagined that Chinese people could pronounce any language like magic through a fantasy application of *fanqie,* reverse spelling (using one character to represent only its initial consonant and another character to represent only its vowel or vowel plus final). The book even includes a fantasy rhyme table in it. The idea that you don't need letters and that you could have a modern Chinese language that doesn't Romanize but Sinicizes other languages through *fanqie* is something that inspired me to think: why can't we create a *fanqie*-based writing system for English? For me, the Qing Dynasty is really interesting because you have those cosmopolitan global figures who were not westernized. Their training was not western but their disposition was cosmopolitan. So you have this really unique moment before Hu Shi went to America and others like Lu Xun went to Japan to get educated. This was really a special moment, especially for translation. Liminal figures like Li Ruzhen had a big and in modern terms, strange imagination. They imagined the whole world and asked how China and the Chinese language could fit into that world. But then within a few decades, that space was gone as people started to ask other questions and it was always about: Do we keep the Chinese characters? Or do we throw them away? Do we take one kind of Romanization over another kind of Romanization? No one ever thought about *fanqie* again. That's why I think this is a pretty unique lineage of thinking, and I want to live in this lineage, this kind of speculative linguistics. So English *jueju* and Pinying both came out of this kind of romantic idea, going back in time and moving toward the future from the way of thinking in Qing Dynasty or before as opposed to starting in the 20th century. The last chapter of the book is written by a linguist, Liu Nian, and she writes about our conversations and reflects at some length on the Li Ruzhen's portion. I also talked about Li Ruzhen at the end of my 2015 Ted Talk. Today, we can actually build interlanguage technologies like the one Li imagined by employing

computational algorithms to re-sequence the English language using "fanqie" characters to literally blend languages at the level of the phonetic DNA. That's what Pinying is, and it's something I have really enjoyed working on over the last decade or so. Now you can download the app in the Apple app store by searching for the exact word "Pinying" (don't forget the 'g' at the end).

Pinying transforms Chinese into English by employing *fanqie*, while my other project of teaching English *jueju* moves in the opposite direction by transforming English into Chinese by limiting it to English and by organizing it according to the rules of regulated verse and the rhyme table tradition (parsing its 8000 words into *ping* and *ze* categories, semantic categories for parallelism and so on). While Pinying can solve some problems by disambiguating the sequence of English phonemes in a word, English *jueju* can be used to transfer so much information about Chinese poetics into English. In a few hours, teachers can use the hands-on experience of composing regulated verse in English to impart knowledge most Ph.D. students in Sinology likely have not had hands-on experience doing. This is why I have focused most of my efforts on teaching middle-school and high-school students and teachers as one does not need more than a middle-school education to become proficient at writing English *jueju*. So over the last few years, I have begun to think more about how classical Chinese poetry and regulated verse in particular represent an information system, and so my approach makes it closer to informatics, and I think about how we can use interlanguage to transmit not individual poems through translation, but the whole classical Chinese poetry and poetics system by making English fully compatible with it structurally. Once the English language has been reorganized into one wholly compatible with classical Chinese poetics, we can teach it to students with little effort, and once students can use the form proficiently, then they have a schema upon which to hang correlated ideas from classical Chinese philosophy, politics, aesthetics, ethics, and quite a bit of history and sociology as well. It's basically impossible to impart this information through standard translations as the formal dimensions of regulated verse are rarely marked in English translation.

Li: When discussing how to transmit classical Chinese poetics into English, you mentioned the limitation of translation. My question is: What do you think about the untranslatability of poetry?

Stalling: Untranslatability is an interesting quality to discuss in the context of poetry. The problem is that translatability does not end with the translation but also includes the interpretive horizons of readers. For instance, my tonalized monosyllabic translations of Li Bai's poetry may follow the same patterns as the

Chinese and can therefore be chanted (*yinsong*), but what that pattern "means" or the kinds of associations a reader may feel when hearing them are not likely to be the same as those experienced by a native speaker of Chinese. So we may be able transmit classical Chinese sound sequences and patterns in English but we need to prepare readers by providing them with a larger interpretive schema within which to unpack those sounds. An English speaker who knows how to compose a regulated *jueju* in English will know what the alternation of vowel lengths means when hearing *yinsong* chanting done properly. They will have a framework within which to notice the counterbalance within and between lines and will feel the skill of both the poet and the chanter while those without this preparation may enjoy the poem but will not have the same acuity or intensity of experience. So translatability must be thought of as something larger than the text, something that takes a larger experiential approach to migrating information across languages and time. But for all intents and purposes, however, I do not think that untranslatability is a very useful idea. We just have to continue to expand how we define translation.

Li: I read the translator's note in your translation of a collection of Shizhi's poems named "Winter Sun: Poems by Shizhi". In the note you mentioned "Sounds could hold meanings" and there are "culturally specific ways of hearing", which made the translation of the aural textures of Shizhi's poems impossible. Now do you still think so or do you have some new solutions?

Stalling: I translated a couple of his poems in the beginning and included the rhyme schemes, but I realized as soon as I did it that they sounded less like Chinese Cultural Revolution poems and much more like traditional English poems. Because American readers don't have the red song background, they are not likely to feel the red song patterns that undergird Shizhi's works. Therefore, I felt like I had put Robert Frost's sound into Shizhi's poems. In some way, Shizhi's poems are too easy to translate because his poems are not terribly complex and the rhymes can be pretty easy to create in English. But the effect was undesirable from my point of view because I felt they were not communicating their spirit as I had expected. This was how I felt at the beginning of the process at any rate. I have changed my attitude a bit since then though. Compulsively maintaining the formal quality of his poetry for all those years was a part of his personality in a way that I didn't understand when I was firstly translating them. I think rhyming created a safe space for him, one where the world was ordered outside during the tumult of the cultural revolution or inside the mental hospital where life was very hard. In hindsight, I could have written an essay about this background of the poet's formalism to let readers learn more about the "red songs" that informed his prosody and more about

his mental health to help readers prepare themselves to hear his poems differently. In any case, I made the choice to do free verse as I felt that this was the best way for his poetry to reach a wider English audience. I'm pretty happy with the results even if I may have done it differently today.

Li: My last question is: What suggestions would you give to novice translators, especially literary translators?

Stalling: My advice to Chinese native speaker translators (of Chinese into English) is to workshop their translations. I would suggest that they try to attend American-style creative writing workshops as they are a brilliant training ground for translation as I have already said earlier. If you can participate in a good workshop, then you will meet future collaborators who can also work on your translations with you and help you improve them. And you will likely have a teacher who can help you learn how to network your work better. Only by participating directly in the feedback loops of workshopping can you become familiar with literary English. Translators must have a literary-grade English, and to my knowledge, this is the best (though not only) way to get it. No textbook can tell you how to write well. It's based on an iterative, collaborative practice. This is not about gaining native-speaking proficiency. Literary English is a specialized skill that cleans, smooths, and tightens writing. That kind of English doesn't come out of someone's mouth, even a native speaker's. It doesn't come out of our pens either. It only emerges from someone with this kind of training after they have normalized iterating on the feedback of multiple people. There is no reason why non-native English Speakers can't become the best translators of Chinese into English as long as they put in the workshopping work to gain literary English level skills. I have other advice, but this is the bit that ties together most closely with what we have talked about.

Li: Thanks for taking the time to answer my questions.

Stalling: Thanks to Xuezhao for asking such interesting questions and for having the patience to listen to my super long answers!

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Xuezhao Li is a PhD student in Chinese Studies at the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, the Ohio State University. She specializes in the study of literary translation in late Qing and early Republican China and has published journal papers including "On the Translation of *Hong Lou Meng* by Jorge Luis Borges", "Translation and National Literary Style Reforms: An Analysis of the Relay Translation of 'The Californian's Tale'" as well as translations including "Butter Pancakes".