

whose stated subject is the evolution of *annual observances* in Han China, *not* the evolution of the Buddhist and Taoist churches. Within the given field, I wonder if Dull really believes that much more of a popular nature could be extracted from the Han sources besides what the book already contains. In point of fact, his rejection of the "Treatise" as a source on popular festivals is far too sweeping. Granted that it approaches its subject from the point of view of the court and the government, the fact nevertheless remains that more than half a dozen of its recorded observances do have popular roots, including several of paramount importance for everyday Chinese both during the Han and later.

As to the reviewer's major criticism that the book lacks a unifying theme: such a theme is admittedly not the one suggested by him as being particularly appropriate—namely, the elaboration of New Text Confucianism. To have concentrated on such would have meant to slight or to ignore entirely those observances that did in fact have popular origins, and which therefore had little or nothing to do with New Text Confucianism. What the book tries to do is to trace the evolution, institutionalization, and attachment to fixed places in the Han festival calendar of a variety of annual ceremonial observances—some of them popular and ancient, others scholastic and recent—but particularly those having to do with the beginning of the year. The book goes on to examine the possible significance and continuity of these observances in later China, when some of them disappeared, others were absorbed into parallel observances, and still others retained their identity and vitality down to modern times. Of all this the review says not a word. Nor does it mention the fact that the topic has never heretofore been systematically explored.

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On Translating Chinese Poetry

I am writing in response to Richard John Lynn's review (*JAS*, XXXVI, May 1977, pp. 551–54) of my two books, *Mei Yao-ch'en and the Development of Early Sung Poetry*, and *Heaven My Blanket, Earth My Pillow*. I find his review to be fair and perceptively written. Indeed, in my view, Professor Lynn's work in Chinese literary criticism is to be counted among the most sophisticated contributions in this area to date. There is one point, however, with which I feel compelled to take issue, primarily because I feel that the underlying question here is of interest to all students of classical Chinese language. This is his use of the word "paraphrase" for certain aspects of my translation practice. I wish to concentrate on two places where he does this.

(1) Lynn objects to my interpretation of a passage in *Ts'ang-lang shih-hua*, and offers an alternative translation of this passage. In reconsidering my reading in the light of his views, I must agree that he is correct to this extent: I failed to note that Mei Yao-ch'en and others of his period are in fact being praised by Yen Yü for carrying on T'ang traditions (albeit not always *High* T'ang traditions; therefore, from Yen's point of view, they are being "damned with faint praise"). I would still maintain, however, that in light of the complexity of the early Sung situation in poetry Yen is failing to do it justice. The primary point, though, is that my misreading did

not result from paraphrase at all. My translation is every bit as syntactically rigorous as Lynn's. The problem is that I misconstrued Yen's terminology, specifically his use of the character *pien*^a as a pejorative term (although my translation of this word, "transformed," could actually be used as a pejorative in English in certain contexts). Even "slavishly imitate" could be a proper rendition of *yen-hsi*^b in the right contexts, although I admit that this is not one of them.

More serious is my disagreement with Lynn's discussion of my interpretation of Mei's long statement on poetics from *Liu-i shih-hua*. I find no substantive difference in our understandings of the prose part of this statement; the crux lies in the couplets Mei quotes. Here I find it necessary to digress a moment into a controversy initiated by Edward H. Schafer in his article "Supposed 'Inversions' in T'ang Poetry" (*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, XCVI, 1 [Jan-Mar 1976], pp. 119-21). To sum up this complex matter, Professor Schafer argues that in a language totally dependent upon word order, the admission of inversion would constitute opening the door to chaos; therefore, in any line of Chinese poetry that might appear to be "inverted," we must explore every possible alternative reading. This Schafer does with some of the couplets proposed as examples of inversion by Kao Yu-kung and Mei Tsu-lin in their article "Syntax, Diction, and Imagery in T'ang Poetry" (*Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, XXXI [1971], pp. 112-14), and he does indeed show that the verbs in these lines can be interpreted in other ways, usually as causatives.

The opposing view, which I would like to argue, is that there does not exist in the principles of Chinese grammar, such as they are, anything explicitly denying inversion. On the contrary, there are passages in traditional criticism which use various terms in such a fashion that they can sometimes be taken as referring to "inversion." An example would be the term *ts'o-tsung*^c as used by the eleventh-century monk Hui-hung^d in a passage quoted in *Shih-jen yü-hsieh*,^e at the beginning of chapter 3. This being the case, I conclude the following: if, in a given line, both an "inverted" reading and a non-inverted one (e.g., a causative reading) are possible, there is no way to demonstrate conclusively which was in fact intended by the poet. Thus the translator, or, for that matter, the critic, has a perfect right to plunk down for one or the other. Let me introduce an example, a couplet by Tu Fu:¹ *chu kao ming fei-ts'ui / sha p'i wu k'un-chi*.^f Assuming inversion to be present here (i.e., *fei-ts'ui* = subject of the verb *ming*; *k'un-chi* = subject of the verb *wu*), we would get:

The bamboo is tall; [in it] are singing the kingfishers.

The sand is remote; [on it] are dancing the jungle-fowl.

To this, Professor Schafer would say, "Wrong! The verbs are both causatives":

The bamboo's height inspires the kingfishers to sing.

The sand's remoteness inspires the jungle-fowl to dance.

Finally, I can imagine yet a third reading, in which *ming* and *wu* are not verbs at all:

The bamboo is tall—singing kingfishers.

The sand is remote—dancing jungle-fowl.

My position is that it is *impossible* to *prove* that any one of these is necessarily the poet's intention. Therefore, as translator, I reserve the right to use any one of them, *without* being accused of paraphrasing. I find that if we follow Schafer, in fact, we end up with a truly unbelievable number of causative verbs in Chinese poetry; and that the resulting readings are often, or even usually, more bizarre in a superficial

¹ As quoted in Lu Chih-hsüan, *Tu Kung-pu shih-hua chi-chin*ⁱ (Taipei, 1967), p. 71.

sense than the readings that would result from the “inverted” interpretation. To take this just one step further, Schafer’s entire discussion implies to me an excessive emphasis on linguistic craft as a criterion in judging poetry. The quality of the image *as such*, the poet’s vision, is not even taken into consideration.

We now come to the two couplets quoted by Mei Yao-ch’en, in the translation of which Lynn claims that I have “ignored the syntax.” Nothing could be further from the truth. I always weigh the syntax as carefully as possible before embarking upon a translation. The problem is that Lynn and I have simply plunked down for different readings of the syntax, both of which, in light of my previous discussion of the inversion controversy, are perfectly possible. In the Yen Wei couplet, Lynn suggests a “desiderative aspect” in the verbs. The couplet reads: *liu t’ang ch’un shui man/ hua wu hsi-yang ch’ih*.⁸ Now, while I recognize the *possibility* of taking this couplet as Lynn does, I must maintain the equal legitimacy of my own reading. Similarly, in the more complex Wen T’ing-yün couplet,⁹ I see two possible readings: in mine, the parts of speech pan out as follows:

X X X X X
adj. → noun adv. → adj. → noun

Professor Lynn wishes to take them:

noun { transitive or
causative adv. → adj. → noun
verb ————— }

Again, there is no authority on earth, Chinese or no, who can decide which reading is “correct.” This I do not find an instance of “chaos,” but, on the contrary, proof of the intriguing ambiguity of Chinese poetic syntax, an ambiguity that is always under control, and used to good effect.

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Glossary

- ㄟ 變
- ㄟ 沿 襲
- ㄟ 錯 綜
- ㄟ 惠 洪
- ㄟ 詩人玉屑
- ㄟ 竹 高 鳴 翡翠；沙 僻 舞 鷗 鷺
- ㄟ 柳 塘 春 水 漫；花 塢 夕 陽 暉
- ㄟ 鷓 聲 茅 店 月；人 跡 板 橋 霜
- ㄟ 魯 質 軒，杜工部詩話集錦