

Taiwanese Opera in English: Translating Liao Chiung-chih's *Chen San Wu Niang*

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Abstract

The paper deals with the author's translation of *Chen San Wu Niang*, a traditional Taiwanese opera script compiled by Liao Chiung-chih. Beginning with a synopsis of the play and an analysis of its language, the author goes on to discuss his translation strategy and its implications for the actual work of translation: the decision to render operatic arias in rhyme and meter; the use of dialogue as a means of characterization; possibilities for translating Taiwanese puns, proverbs and colloquialisms; and improvisation as a means of adding color and interest to the translated text. Lastly, there is a call for translation of other classic scripts in celebration of what is perhaps Taiwan's premier contribution to the arts, the Taiwanese opera.

Keywords: Taiwanese opera, *Chen San Wu Niang*, Liao Chiung-chih, Taiwanese literature, translation

Back in the days when I was an itinerant English teacher putting around Tainan County on an umpteenth-hand Vespa, I'd occasionally happen on an outdoor opera performance, a so-called *yetaixi* (野台戲). If I had time to kill, I'd stop to gawk at the spectacle. I liked the costumes and singing but the language barrier made it impossible for me to follow whatever story was being acted out, so after a minute or two I'd call it a "cultural experience" and be on my way.

Later, after investing considerable time and money in Taiwanese language lessons, I was invited to attend a performance by Ming Hwa Yuan (明華園), Taiwan's top modern opera troupe. This time, with the help of Chinese subtitles and the colloquial Taiwanese (Hoklo) I'd picked up in classes and on the street, I was able to follow most of what was happening onstage. I won't say I became an aficionado of Taiwanese opera, or *gezaixi* (歌仔戲), but over the years I gained a modest appreciation for the form, delighting in the songs, the stories, and the language. So when the time came to settle on an MA thesis project it occurred to me that it might be fun to translate an opera script into English, an endeavor that, insofar as I was able to determine, had yet to be undertaken by any translator, Taiwanese or foreign.

Which is surprising. After all, the opera is arguably Taiwan's premier contribution to the arts, and has been hailed as a symbol of Taiwanese identity (Huang, 2009: 216-217). The opera's history and every aspect of its performance have been meticulously researched and documented. Leading Taiwanese opera companies have performed in theaters and concert halls the world over. And – more to the point – other traditional forms of drama are available in English translation: Gladys Yang's *Palace of Eternal Youth* (長生殿), a classic drama from the Qing period; Ben Wang's *Laughter and Tears*, selected passages from Kun dramas (崑曲); and David Hawkes' *Liu Yi and the Dragon Princess*, an adaptation of a 13th century *zaju* (雜劇) (musical drama of the Yuan period), to name a few noteworthy offerings. And in China a project to translate the entire Peking opera repertoire into English is reportedly underway. But I've searched the World Wide Web over and not found a trace of Taiwanese opera in English translation.¹

In an effort to begin to fill that void I have translated *Chen San Wu Niang* (陳三五娘), a script compiled by opera doyenne Liao Chiung-chih (廖瓊枝). What follows is a discussion of

¹ Ming Hwa Yuan (明華園) has included English subtitles in live performances. Unfortunately, in the video clip that I viewed subtitle quality was not on par with the caliber of production and performance. See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9y38yuIx_k.

my approach to the translation of the text, the challenges I encountered, cultural and linguistic, and the strategies I employed in dealing with them. But first, an introduction to *Chen San Wu Niang*.

Chen San Wu Niang

Chen San Wu Niang ranks as one of the “Big Four” (四大齣) of the Taiwanese opera, a group of classics that includes *Shanbo Yingtai* (山伯英台), *Lu Mengzheng* (呂蒙正) and *Shixiji* (什細記). Based on legends and folk tales, these are not individual works but rather themes on which operas are scripted, and there have been countless versions of each of them – the Liao Chiung-chih compilation is but one of the many retellings of the love story of Third Brother Chen (Chen San) and Fifth Daughter Huang (Wu Niang)². Set in the Minnan (閩南) region of China's Fujian province, ancestral home to the majority of Taiwan's Hoklo-speaking population, *Chen San Wu Niang* is said to have special resonance for audiences in Taiwan (Zheng, 1997: 14).

The Liao version, compiled in 1985 (Zheng, 1997: 368), is a comedy in thirteen scenes. Chen San (陳三; Third Brother), an aristocratic young scholar, and Huang Wu Niang (黃五娘; Fifth Daughter), daughter of a prominent Fujianese family, fall in love at first sight at a Lantern Festival (元宵節) gathering in the Fujian city of Chaozhou (潮州). Before they have a chance to become acquainted, however, a crowd of revelers comes between them and they lose sight of each other.

² A note on names: In the translated songs and dialogue Chen San (陳三) is sometimes referred to as “Third Brother”, that is, “third son of the Chen family”, and Huang Wu Niang (黃五娘), or “fifth daughter of the Huang family”, is translated as “Fifth Daughter” throughout the script. It has been suggested that for economy and consistency it would be better to simply transliterate, i.e. “Chen San”, “Wu Niang”. While that suggestion does have its merits, my choices were based on the need to create rhymes, and that was more easily accomplished by translating the names into English, as the following lines of song will illustrate:

As much as I long to go with you, Third Brother,
I cannot abandon my father and mother. (Scene Eleven)

Chopping wood and toting water,
He's toiled two years for fair Fifth Daughter. (Scene Seven)

Rhyming would be difficult if not impossible with transliterated names. (To avoid possible confusion Chen San is also listed as “Third Brother” in the *Dramatis Personae*.)

In translating the names the maidservants, Spring (益春) and Daisy (春花), I deliberately chose simple English names that would reflect the young women's social status relative to that of the gentry whom they served (The servants' surnames do not appear in the Liao script).

Several months later, Chen San, a native of the neighboring region of Quanzhou (泉州), is again traveling through Chaozhou and happens to pass by the Huang mansion, Fifth Daughter's home. It is the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, a traditional festival, and Fifth Daughter and her maidservant Spring (益春) are outdoors on a balcony eating lychee fruit, a seasonal treat. Fifth Daughter recognizes Chen San and tosses a bunch of lychees to him as he passes below the balcony. Then and there the young scholar vows to win her love. Later, posing as a workman, he gains entrance to the Huang mansion and deliberately breaks a priceless mirror, a Huang family heirloom. With no money to compensate Fifth Daughter's father for the loss of the mirror, Chen San sells himself into indentured servitude, agreeing to labor in the Huang household for a period of three years.

Eventually, Chen San finds his way into Fifth Daughter's bedchamber and declares his love for her. Fifth Daughter loves Chen San but her father has already promised her to the loutish Biggie Lin (林大), son of the prefectural governor – to break the marriage agreement would bring the governor's wrath down on the Huang family. With the help of the maidservant Spring (with whom he has had a tryst), Chen San persuades Fifth Daughter to elope with him. Accompanied by Spring – Fifth Daughter has allowed Chen San keep the maidservant as concubine – the lovers set out for the young scholar's home in Quanzhou.

On the road to Quanzhou a widowed innkeeper turns the trio in for a reward that has been offered for their capture. Man, wife and concubine are brought before an enraged Governor Lin, who orders Chen San be flogged for his crime and Fifth Daughter be returned to her family. Just when all is seemingly lost, Chen Bixian (陳必賢), Chen San's older brother, arrives to save the day. At an official inquiry Chen San and Fifth Daughter are exonerated and will be permitted to remain together. Huang Sixth Daughter (黃六娘), Fifth Daughter's younger sister, saves the family honor by agreeing to marry Biggie Lin, and all presumably live happily ever after.

The Language of the Text³

One glance at the script and the translator immediately learns that, to borrow a phrase Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz*, “we’re not in Beijing anymore.” That is to say, the language is

³ In the examples in this section standard written forms, i.e. those listed in the MOE online dictionary (教育部台灣閩南語常用詞辭典), are given in parentheses if they are different from those used in the script of *Chen San Wu Niang*.

Taiwanese, as opposed to standard spoken Mandarin or standard written Chinese. This presents a significant orthographic challenge: compiler Liao's amanuenses, of whom there were several, apparently, each followed his or her own predilection in choosing Chinese characters to transcribe Taiwanese songs and dialogue, hence orthography is inconsistent throughout the script:

乳母：(白) 喂，你是青仔叢是麼，親像痾狗爭墓坑，按呢亂亂撞、亂亂撞，加哉恁祖媽踣真在，若無煞予你撞撞倒。

Nursemaid: Hey, you big oaf! You're like a crazy dog digging up a grave! You almost knocked me down!

林大：(白) 嘎……是汝來撞我兮，也嘅是我去撞你兮。

Biggie Lin: You ran into me! I didn't run into you! (Scene Three)

Here Biggie Lin has collided with Fifth Daughter's nursemaid, nearly knocking the woman off her feet. The nursemaid berates Biggie for his carelessness in pure, earthy Taiwanese. Terming him “青仔叢” (MOE: 青仔穰 *tshenn-á-tsâng*), a rude or reckless person, she likens him to “a crazy dog digging up a grave” 痾狗爭墓坑 (痾狗春墓墳 *Siáu káu tsing bōng-khòng*), another idiom describing a person who behaves rudely or recklessly. Moreover, by referring to herself as 恁祖媽 (*lin tsóo-má*), or “yo' granny”, she effectively abuses the young man (colorful language of this sort will be discussed in greater detail below). Some of the Chinese characters in the passage are standard forms listed in the MOE online Taiwanese dictionary: 親像 (*tshin-tshiūnn*) (seems like/ is comparable to; Mandarin: 好像/好比); 按呢 (*án-ni/án-ne*) (in this way, in such a way; Mandarin: 這樣/如此); 煞 (*suah*) (unexpectedly; Mandarin: 竟然). Others are nonstandard forms: 加哉 (*ka-tsài*) (MOE: 佳哉/嘉哉 luckily/fortunately; Mandarin: 幸虧/幸好); 踣 (*khiā*) (MOE: 倚 to stand; Mandarin: 站立).

The orthographic disparities in the script fall into three general categories: 1) standard or popular variants, i.e. Chinese characters MOE has designated as accepted variants, and nonstandard characters that have achieved currency in print media, KTV subtitles, TV advertisements, etc.; 2) literal translation; 3) transliteration. Below are examples of each type:

Standard and popular variants: The verb *beh* (Mandarin: 要, 想) is transcribed as both 要 and 卜. Neither character is listed as the MOE standard (欲), though both are included as

accepted variants⁴:

林大：(白) 日頭將近要落山，要(beh)去叨位看。

Biggie Lin: Now that the sun's about to go down, where'll we go for a night on the town? (Scene One)

李工：(白) 陳三，汝顧厝，我合黃家益春姐仔約好仔，我卜(beh)來去五娘慁兜磨。

Old Man Li: Chen San, you stay here and keep an eye on the place. I've got a job to do do at the Huang mansion. (Scene Five)

The negative verb or adverb *m̄* (MOE: 毋; Mandarin: 不) is variously transcribed as 吓, 嘸 or 無:

林大：(白) 狗吓 (*m̄*)驚咧驚貓。

Biggie Lin: Ha! I'll scratch you where it itches! (Scene One)

家童：(白) 阮公子講伊是大丈夫男子漢，按呢敢有嘸(*m̄*)著？

Homeboy: The young master calls himself a gentleman – is there anything wrong with that? (Scene Three)

六娘：(白) 母親，爹爹這麼生氣，若找著大姊嚙(*m̄*)知會打她不。

Sixth Daughter: Mother, I've never seen Daddy so angry! When he finds Sis will he give her a beating? (Scene Eleven)

Only one of the three usages is accepted as an alternate form (MOE: 嘸).

Elsewhere, the adverb *hiah-nih* (Mandarin: 那麼) appears in either of two forms (彼呢/吡呢), neither of which correspond to MOE usage (遐爾/許呢/赫爾/遐呢); *kiánn*, or “child” is transcribed as either 囡 or 子 (MOE: 囡); the third-person plural pronoun *in* (MOE: 佢; Mandarin: 他們) is transcribed as 慁; the preposition *kā* (MOE: 共; Mandarin: 給; 跟; 把) is transcribed as 甲...and the list goes on!

⁴ It should be noted that the Liao script was published in 1985, well before the compilation of the MOE online dictionary – at the time of transcription there were no official “standard” forms for written Taiwanese.

Literal translation (metaphrase): The adjective *suí*, meaning “pretty” or “beautiful”, is transcribed as either 美 or 水. The former is a literal translation, or metaphrase, with a literary reading of *bí*, the latter a transliteration, with a literary reading of *suí*:

林大：(白) 有夠美 (*suí*) 的。

Biggie Lin: Wow, she's a knockout! (Scene Three)

林大：(白) 真兮，阿爸，真水 (*suí*)，我愛汝！

Biggie Lin: It's true, Dad! She's a real beauty! I love her! (Scene Thirteen)

The MOE lists 嬭 (*suí*), possibly a “homemade” (土字) phonogram (形聲字)⁵, as standard usage and 美 as a variant. The transliteration 水 (see below) is a popular form often seen in newspaper headlines or KTV subtitles, for example.

Transliteration: Transcribers chose to use many Chinese characters simply for their phonetic similarity to the Taiwanese words or phrases the characters are meant to represent:

陳三：(七字仔，唱) 益春汝生氣為如何

Chen San: (sung) Oh, why so angry, Spring? Why the face so long?

益春：(七字仔，唱) 汝免鄭青假糊塗

Spring: (sung) Don't play dumb! (Scene Nine)

Here, *tènn-tshenn/tinn-tshinn*, “to feign ignorance” is rendered as 鄭青 (MOE: 佯生; Mandarin: 裝糊塗).

Hōo (MOE: 予, 互), which function as both verb (Mandarin: 給予) and preposition (Mandarin: 被/讓) is transcribed as 乎:

陳三：(三盆水仙，唱) 口舌我是真厲害 拜託益春汝鬥安排

Chen San: (sung) A smooth and easy talker, my verbal skills are best,

Just hand the basin over – my words will do the rest!

益春：(白) 哎唷。我才唔敢咧。若乎(*hōo*)阮阿娘知影盆水是我乎(*hōo*)汝捧去的，阮阿娘一定會罵我。

⁵ 嬭 is not listed in either modern sources (e.g. MOE Chinese online dictionary 中華民國教育部重編國語辭典修訂本) or classical etymologies (e.g. *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字).

Spring: Ai-oh! I wouldn't dare – if m'lady finds out I let you carry the water, I'll get a good scolding. (Scene Seven)

In Scene Seven Chen San persuades Spring to allow him to carry a basin of water into Fifth Daughter's bedroom. MOE lists the character 乎 (*honnh*) as an interrogative particle (ex: 你今仔日欲去迺迺乎 *Lí kin-á-jít beh tshut-khì tshit-thô--honnh?*) and an interjection (ex: 乎，原來是按呢喔！ *Honnh, guân-lâi sī án-ne--ooh!*). Prescribed usage aside, readers of Taiwanese would have little trouble deciphering the meaning of the character as it is used in the script.

In Scene One Biggie Lin tickles his manservant, Homeboy:

林大：(白) 狗吓驚咧驚貓。(Scene One)

Biggie Lin: [A pun: literally, “You're not afraid of dogs, you're afraid of cats” – i.e. “you're ticklish”]

In Taiwanese to “tickle” or “itch” is *ngiau* (MOE: 癢), phonetically similar to the word for “cat” (貓 *niau*), the basis for the pun. The standard written form is somewhat obscure, but an audience of native Taiwanese speakers would surely catch the gist of the wordplay when recited by actors onstage, hence the transcriber simply chose to use a more common character of similar reading. Elsewhere in the script 貓 corresponds with MOE usage but represents a different concept entirely:

林大：(白) 我是笑汝兮面怎會吡呢貓……啦！

Biggie Lin: And *I'm* laughing at *your* spotty mug! Zit-head!

六娘：(白) 啥麼啊！汝講我貓，哎唷春花啊，伊講我貓……啦！

Sixth Daughter: Zit-head? Zit-head? Daisy! Ai-oh! He called me “zit-head!” (Scene Three)

The Taiwanese 貓貓 (*niau-niau*), means “pockmarked” – here Sixth Daughter, Fifth Daughter's younger sister, is reduced to tears by Biggie Lin's ridicule of her acne lesions. Although the usage has also been adopted by MOE, it is clearly a transliteration unrelated to the denotative meaning of the Chinese character.

Meanings for most nonstandard usages were obvious in context, but some required a bit of guesswork:

乳母：(深宮院·唱) 元宵花燈紅街市
觀賞兮儂榮未離

Nursemaid: (sung) Lanterns and fireworks color the night,
Throngs of revelers jammed in tight. (Scene Three)

The MOE online dictionary has no listing for 榮 (Mandarin: *qí*). *A New Century Chinese-English Dictionary* defines it as “a halberd-shaped ceremonial object carried by a guardsman before the emperor on an inspection tour.” Other standard Chinese dictionaries provide much the same information, shedding no light on the meaning of character as it used in the nursemaid’s song.

Translation sometimes calls for a bit of speculative analysis. In Chinese dictionaries the character 榮 is listed under the “wood” radical (木部), a signifier of meaning; 啓 is a phonetic element. In Taiwanese 啓 has a reading of *khé*, phonetically close to *kheh/khueh* (MOE: 𨔵; Mandarin: 擁擠), “to crowd” or “to be crowded.” In this scene Fifth Daughter’s nursemaid is leading her through a densely packed throng of Lantern Festival celebrants and the two get caught up in the crush of the crowd. The nursemaid describes the situation as “榮未離” (𨔵袂離 *kheh-bē-lī*), “so crowded we can’t move”, possibly a variation of the more common phrase 走袂離 (*tsáu-bē-lī*), “to be hemmed in”. Of course this is a conjectural interpretation, but it is in keeping with the context of the scene.

The examples give above are a representative sampling of the nonstandard transcription found throughout the Liao script. And though such usages may not be designated as “standard” by any official body, they commonly appear in Taiwanese-language (台文) publications, newspapers, KTV subtitles and elsewhere – in many instances they would be more familiar to readers of Taiwanese than the MOE forms.

As a translator, my concern is not whether certain Chinese characters have been used in accordance with designated standards for writing Taiwanese – I leave that to those better qualified to make such judgments – but the simple fact is that many, many Taiwanese words and phrases are commonly written in a number of different ways, and that usage varies, not only from writer to writer, but often within a single work. Written Taiwanese in this sense is roughly analogous to written English of the past – prior to orthographic standardization common English words were often subject to various spellings, as exemplified in this passage from the “General Prologue” to Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*:

Whan that Aprill, with his shoures soote [sweet]
 The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote
 And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
 Of which vertu engendered is the flour;
 Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete [sweet] breeth
 Inspired hath in every holt and heeth...

Far from decrying the orthographic inconsistency, as a reader and translator of Taiwanese literature (台文) I've grown accustomed to it, and have even come to delight in the various forms the language takes when put on paper. Moreover, until writers working in written Taiwanese uniformly adopt the standardized forms – and, frankly, I don't see that happening for some time, if ever – translators will simply have to accommodate themselves to textual realities.

Translation Strategy

Before beginning the work of translation I had to first decide how best to approach the text. Two possibilities suggested themselves: I could treat the script as a cultural artifact and do a “thick” translation, or I could translate it as a work of folk literature that originally functioned as a form of public entertainment. To illustrate how these possibilities might differ, below are two translations of a Taiwanese proverb, an admonition against bigamy that appears in the ninth scene of the opera. The first rendering is an example of what Appiah (2004: 389) calls “thick” or “literal translation”: that is, “a translation rich in annotations and glosses aimed at locating the text in its cultural and linguistic context...a form of ethnographic translation” (Palumbo, 2009: 119):

一某無人知，二某是相捨代。
 (MOE: 互相洩底。例：一某無人知，兩某相卸代。)
 [One wife/ no one knows/ two wives/ mutually reveal secrets]

Translated literally, the meaning of the adage is somewhat less than clear and would require glossing:

某(*bóo*) is a colloquial Taiwanese term for wife; historically, in China it was often the practice of men of means to keep more than one wife (i.e. a wife and a concubine); 相

卸代 may be defined as “to mutually divulge the inside story” or “to mutually reveal secrets” (MOE: 互相洩底). Thus, the adage a whole may be paraphrased as “when a man has two wives, the wives will have disputes and disagreements in the course of which all of the family’s shameful secrets will become known to others” (MOE: 家中二妻爭，因互相謾罵而使得家醜外揚).

A “thick” translation would provide detailed explanations of culture-bound language, concepts and allusions but would not attempt to reproduce source-text features such as rhyme, meter or other literary devices. Such a translation would likely be of greater interest to those engaged in ethnocultural or ethnolinguistic research than to the average reader.

A freer rendering:

一某無人知，二某是相捨代。

(Tsit bóo bô lāng tsai, nāg bóo sī sio-sià-tāi.)

Monogamy, propriety; bigamy, an infamy.

Here both rhyme and meaning are accounted for, and the parallel structure echoes that of the source text. This version attempts to reproduce the “illocutionary power” of the original, defined by Lefevere (1992: 19) as the “level of language usage at which language is used primarily for effect”.

Clearly, each approach has its purposes. For me, the decisive factors in arriving at a working strategy were the nature of the source-text material and the effects I hoped to achieve in translation. Before the advent of radio, motion pictures and television, opera was a major source of diversion for the people of Taiwan, delighting gentry and common folk alike. Liao Chiung-chih's *Chen San Wu Niang*, a classic from that period, is a romantic comedy, a love story with laughs. What I hoped to achieve in my translation was to recast the romance and humor of the original in language familiar to a target-culture readers, and to impart a sense of the lyrical beauty of the opera's arias. In pursuing these aims, I followed Andre Lefevere's advice to translators of literature:

In making decisions, translators should remember that their first task is to make the original accessible to the audience for whom they are translating, to mediate between their audience and the text. Ideally they should be able to convey both the semantic

information and its illocutionary power. (Lefevere, 1992: 19)

By way of illustrating Lefevere's principle of translating at the "illocutionary level", here again is passage seen earlier:

乳母：(白) 喂，你是青仔叢是麼，親像痛狗爭墓坑，按呢亂亂撞、亂亂撞，加
哉恁祖媽踣真在，若無煞予你撞撞倒。

Nursemaid: Hey, you big oaf! You're like a crazy dog digging up a grave! You almost
knocked me down!

林大：(白) 嘎……是汝來撞我兮，也唔是我去撞你兮。

Biggie Lin: You ran into me! I didn't run into you! (Scene Three)

The Taiwanese expression *tshenn-á-tsâng* (菁仔攬) translates easily into an equivalent English usage, "big oaf." What follows is more problematic. In context, target-culture readers might get a sense of what is meant by "a crazy dog digging up a grave" – a person behaving in a rude or reckless manner – but the phrase is awkward and unnatural in direct translation, particularly in a line of dialogue. The idiom *lín tsóo-má* (literally "your great-grandmother") carries the force of curse – by referring to herself as Biggie's female ancestor, the nursemaid is effectively abusing the young man. A literal translation would fail to match the illocutionary force of the source-text and possibly confuse target-language readers (Is the nursemaid Biggie's grandmother?). My final translation:

Nursemaid: Hey, you big oaf! You're runnin' 'round here like a chicken with its head
cut off! You nearly knocked me down, ya jackass!

Biggie Lin: Whaddya mean? *You* ran into *me*!

The colloquialism "running around like a chicken with its head cut off" describes a person charging about in a frenzied or reckless manner. The pejorative "jackass" – a stupid or foolish person – carries approximately the same emotive force as the Taiwanese "*lín tsóo-má*". In choosing these phrases I sought to convey the illocutionary power of the source-text in words and expressions familiar to an audience of target-culture readers.

Lefevere (1992: 19) also speaks of the importance of "poetological and ideological" considerations in literary translation:

If [translators] are to mediate effectively between their audience and their texts, they have to attach greater importance to the poetological and ideological expectations of the target audience than to the poetological and ideological considerations that influenced the production of the source text. When in doubt translators are well advised to tilt to the target audience and its expectations, not to the source text.

But oftentimes the “poetological and ideological expectations” of the target-culture may be at odds with those of the source-culture. Although the translation is intended primarily for a target-language audience, initial readers and critics were my Taiwanese classmates. Their comments and criticisms were honest and insightful, and of much help in revising and polishing the final draft. There were points, however, where cultural differences surfaced:

益春：(都馬調，唱) 三哥啊 請汝詳細共伊想看覓
 彼個林大敢有三哥仔汝即般兮人才
 益春講予汝了解 我即擺會來留汝
 是阮阿娘叫我 我始專工來

Spring: (sung) Third Brother, think: You're handsome, strong, and clever –
 Could Biggie Lin compare to you?
 No, I tell you, never!
 Biggie Lin's a loser – rude and crude, uncouth!
 My lady sent me here today
 And that's the honest truth. (Scene Eight)

Here Fifth Daughter's maidservant, Spring, tries to convince Chen San (Third Brother) that it is he Fifth Daughter truly loves, and not her fiancé Biggie Lin. The point of disagreement with my classmates was the choice of the word “strong” in describing Chen San. Chen San was a scholar, they pointed out, a member of the Ming aristocracy – he would have spent his days poring over the Confucian classics in preparation for the imperial examinations, not in athletic pursuits. Physically, they advised, he would have been slender and unimposing, hardly the strapping young hunk that I'd portrayed him to be. And of course they were right. But my translation is aimed at a target-language audience that might question the appeal of a slight, scholarly type to a beautiful young woman, and so I went with my own cultural bias. As Gideon Toury (2000: 208) noted, if “norms systems of the target culture are triggered and set into motion” then “shifts from the source text [are] almost an inevitable price”.

Rhyme and Meter

Form was another consideration in fleshing out a translation strategy. In the opera *Chen San Wu Niang* much of the story is told in song, with rhyming lyrics. Should corresponding parts of the translation also rhyme? There are arguments for and against. Vladimir Nabokov (2004: 115) famously equated rhyming literary translations with punishable offenses: “‘Rhyme’ rhymes with ‘crime’ when Homer or *Hamlet* are rhymed”. Lefevere (1992: 71) also cautions translators:

Translators who translate with rhyme and meter as their first priority often find themselves neglecting other features of the original: syntax tends to suffer most...and the information content is almost inevitably supplemented or altered in none too subtle ways by “padding”: words not in the original added to balance a line on the metrical level or to supply the all-important rhyme word.

Also, in practical terms, the effort required to create a rhyming translation far exceeds that needed to produce an unrhymed rendering.

On the other hand, there are good reasons to rhyme. Reading an opera script is essentially a two-dimensional experience in black and white – absent are the stages sets, costumes, singing and acting, the lifeblood of live performance. Arias are a central element of operatic performance – if the “music” of rhyme and meter is forgone, why not simply “novelize” the script, as has been done with some Chinese opera in English translation?⁶ But perhaps the most compelling arguments for rhyming are successful translations in which well-crafted rhymes play an integral part. Below are passages from the work of two literary translators, David Hawkes and Ben Wang (汪班). In Act One of Hawkes’ *Liu Yi and the Dragon Princess*, an adaptation of Shang Zhongxian’s (尙仲賢) 13th-century *zaju* (雜劇), *Liu Yi Chuan Shu* (柳毅傳書), the exiled Dragon Princess mournfully recalls her former life of luxury:

There were pretty maids to wait on me back there
Dressing with crystal combs my piled up hair;
But now my clothes are ragged and threadbare,
My haggard face is lined with care.

⁶ E.g. *Lady White Snake: A Tale from Chinese Opera* by Aaron Shepard and Song Nanzhong.

No fairy prince sought me in marriage
A flying phoenix for his carriage;
Though I'm a spirit I'm condemned for ever
To be a shepherd-slave beside this river...(Hawkes, 2003: 36)⁷

In an aria from Ben Wang's translation of *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭), Tang Xianzu's (湯顯祖) classic Kun drama (崑曲) from the Ming period, the opera's heroine, Du Liniang (杜麗娘), bemoans the transience of youth:

Why this sudden torrent of emotions brought on by the season:
Are they passions, are they yearnings? – I know not the reason.
Born I was into this eminent family, whose tradition
Is to marry me into a family of equally high position.
But waiting indefinitely for such a union ideal
Is quietly wasting away my golden years.

沒亂裏春情難遣，
驀地裏懷人幽怨。
則為俺生小嬋娟，
揀名門一例、一例裏神仙眷。
甚良緣，把青春拋的遠！ (Wang, 2009: 276-277)

Neither are literal translations, yet each convincingly captures and conveys the drama and poetry – the illocutionary power – of the original works. In a preface to his work Hawkes states, “My translation of them [the song lyrics] is very free, as any rhymed translation of Chinese verse is bound to be...” (Hawkes, 2003: 25). He also notes that his is a “version for an English language production, made for the entertainment of an English-speaking audience” (Hawkes, 2003: 27). Wang (2009: xvii) calls his work “a welcome read for the general public”. Both translations have won praise from leading literary figures. Burton Watson, himself a celebrated translator of Chinese literature, writes of Hawkes' work: “In David Hawkes' skillful adaptation, with its rhymed verse renditions of the arias, the thirteenth century drama...comes wonderfully to life” (*Liu Yi and the Dragon Princess*). And in a preface to *Laughter and Tears*

⁷ The original passage from Shang Zhongxian's *Liu Yi Chuan Shu*: 往常時凌波相助，則我這翠鬟高插水晶梳。到如今衣裳襤褸，容貌焦枯。不學他蕭史台邊乘鳳客，卻做了武陵溪畔牧羊奴.... Recovered July 1, 2013, from <http://www.xysa.com/xysafz/book/quanyuanqu/t-index.htm>.

writer Kenneth Hsien-yung Pai (白先勇) lauds Wang's "mastery" of translating the rhyming verses of Kunqu into English (Wang vi). Although I became acquainted with the Hawkes and Wang translations only after I had finished translating *Chen San Wu Niang*, reading their work and the critical response to it was for me validation of my decision to translate in rhyme.

In this passage from Scene Six, Chen San has deliberately broken a priceless mirror in order to sell himself into indentured servitude and be nearer to his ladylove:

九郎在遊花園，聽見鏡破的聲音，走過來看。*Strolling in the garden Huang Jiulong (Fifth Daughter's father) hears the sound of the mirror shattering and approaches to investigate.*

黃九郎：(白) 惱啊！

Huang Jiulong: Argh!

(漢調，唱) 眼觀鏡破氣騰騰 罵聲益春輕浮性

做事全然無謹慎 寶鏡價值並非輕

(sung) I see the mirror in pieces; enraged, I scold the maid –

How could you be so careless, you silly little jade?

Spring, you feckless creature, you've caused me such a loss!

Have you any notion what that precious mirror cost?

益春：(漢調，唱) 跪落稟告員外知 拍破寶鏡是磨鏡師

Spring: (sung) Before m' lord I kneel, and humbly I reply:

This clumsy workman broke the glass – I swear it wasn't I!

陳三：(漢調，反唱) 合我全然無牽礙

Chen San: (sung) It's she who is to blame, sir, the fault is none of mine –

益春：(漢調，唱) 汝拍破唔認不應該

Spring: (sung) 'Twas you who broke the mirror – shame on you for lying! (Scene Six)

Here and through much of the play the songs fell into iambic patterns, the meter most common to English verse.⁸ However, I occasionally experimented with other metrical possibilities:

益春：(白) 阿娘！

Spring: M'lady!

⁸ Robert Frost is said to have remarked: "There are only two meters in English, strict and loose iambic." Recovered July 4, 2013, from <http://www.frostfriends.org/meter.html>.

益春：(都馬調，唱) 三哥做儂著袂歹 儂伊嘛生做有內有外才
 伊兮詩詞滿腹來 文章深如海
 慫兄塊廣南做運使 慫叔西川塊做督台
 別儂若有伊兮家世 也無三哥兮儂才
 想當初咱若無荔枝拋落伊手內 伊何必著假做磨鏡咱厝來
 事到如今汝愛有主裁 林大若來娶親汝卜怎排解
 汝若嫁伊 一生著叫苦叫悲哀

Spring: (sung) Third Brother's a treasure,
 A man by any measure:
 Tall and handsome, scholarly too,
 He's read lots of books and written a few.
 And, as you may've expected,
 His family's well connected:
 His brother's a magistrate down in Guangnan,
 His uncle a governor out in Xichuan –
 Even if others could rival his line,
 They couldn't outdo him – the man is so fine!
 If you hadn't tossed him those lychees, my lass,
 He'd never have come here to polish your glass.
 Decide, m'lady – don't wait till tomorrow –
 A marriage to Biggie: a lifetime of sorrow! (Scene Eleven)

Here, Spring sings Chen San's praises in an effort to convince Fifth Daughter to run away with the young scholar. To convey a sense of comic urgency I experimented with anapestic meter, two short syllables followed by a long syllable, a foot that tends to move briskly. As Coleridge instructed, "With a leap and a bound the swift Anapests throng."⁹

A word about operatic "tunes" or "melodies" (調 *tiāu*): In Liao Chiung-chih's *Chen San Wu Niang* lyrics are sung to various melodies. Opera aficionados will of course recognize the names (e.g. 七字仔, 都馬調, 補甕調, 卜卦調, etc.) and probably be able to hum most of the tunes. However, in the passages of translated song I did not attempt to account for differences in the various *tiāu* (a quixotic task at best), one of the inevitable losses of translation. The one exception I made was for the chant-like melodies (嗑仔調 *khek-á-tiāu*). In the following

⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Metrical Feet – A Lesson for a Boy".

passage Lin A-xiang (林阿香), the widowed innkeeper who betrays Chen San and Fifth Daughter to the authorities, introduces herself:

林阿香：（嗑仔調，唱）老身的名叫林阿香，十七、八歲就死尪，大家講我煞頭重，我都不信各家別人，嫁著一個做碓坑，實在真淒慘，嫁也未到一冬，天災大地動，碓坑一下崩，我又擱死一個尪，看破親戚不擱放，決心卜守空房，在這開一間小客棧，生意雖然無外棒，一工罔渡過一工啊，過一工。

Lin A-xiang: (chanted) My name is Lin, A-xiang Lin/ When I first tied the knot, I was only seventeen/ My ol' man croaked, just up and died/ "She's a jinx!" the people cried/ I didn't listen, too full of pride/ got hitched again, was another man's bride/ Hubby Two dug coal, worked underground/ the earth gave a rumble and the tunnel crashed down/ Now I'd lost my second master, dead and gone in a mine disaster/ That's when I swore to never wed again, I was plain sick and tired of buryin' my men/ Spent my nights in a widow's bed, had to find a way to keep m'self fed/ And so I opened this B&B/ business ain't great, but it's good enough for me!

Although Lefevere cautions against translating rhyme, he also concedes that it may be effective if handled properly: "The sound effects produced by the succession of rhymes undoubtedly heightens the illocutionary power of the poem, especially in some genres of poetry" (Lefevere, 1992: 71). Do my rhymes add color and interest to the translation, heightening its "illocutionary power"? Are they fun to read? I leave those judgments to readers.

Characterization

One of the major challenges of translating *Chen San Wu Niang* lay in bringing the various roles to life on the page. Onstage, opera performers rely on expression, gesture, tone of voice, and figures (身段)¹⁰ to express character and emotion, adding depth and variety to their portrayals. In my translation I couldn't hope to simulate every aspect of live performance, but I wanted to suggest something of each character's personality, as well as his or her relative

¹⁰ Movements and postures derived from traditional dance forms and martial arts, "figures" are a standard feature of opera performance.

social standing. As such, characterization through “dialogue” – lines spoken and sung – was really the only avenue open to me. For example, in the formal diction and regular cadences of Fifth Daughter's lines, I tried to reflect the archconservative upbringing and concern for reputation that initially prevent her from giving in to her desires:

五娘：(七字仔，唱) 想卜隨哥去泉州城 卻也難放母合爹
我難合哥情難捨 更不能萬世留臭名

Fifth Daughter: (sung) As much as I long to go with you, Third Brother,
I cannot abandon my father and mother –
Worse than the pain of our separation,
Elopement would ruin my good reputation. (Scene Eleven)

In the speech of the “common folk” – Fifth Daughter's nursemaid (乳母), the innkeeper Lin A-xiang (林阿香), and Chen San's mirror-polishing master, Old Man Li (李工) – informal diction and “dialectal” variation in vocabulary and grammar serve as indicators of social class. Here, Old Man Li scolds his apprentice Chen San, a scholar unaccustomed to physical labor, for being slow and lazy:

李工：(白) 汝哪會行彼慢，親像大龜塊趑過岸，按呢怎趁有食？

Old Man Li: Dang it, boy, you're slower'n a turtle crawling 'cross a rice paddy! Git a move on, or we'll starve to death!

Although Biggie Lin, Fifth Daughter's fiancé, is the son of a high government official, he disdains formal learning and has failed the imperial examinations. When he encounters Fifth Daughter at the Lantern Festival gathering his speech is both inappropriately familiar (although he and Fifth Daughter are formally engaged they are still relative strangers to each other) and clichéd (“...light of the silvery moon”):

林大：(卜卦調·唱) 思思念念美紅妝 元宵燈下來相逢
我是恁姑爺林文廣 日後卜合娘配成雙

Biggie Lin: (sung) Oh, baby, baby, you're always in my head!
I'm Biggie Lin, the gov'nor's son –
The guy you're pledged to wed.
And now we meet out on the street,

'Neath the light of the silvery moon
Just gimme a hug and a kiss tonight –
We'll be a couple soon! (Scene Three)

Chen San's diction is mix of the colloquial and a loftier, more formal register. Here he confesses to Fifth Daughter his infidelity with the maidservant Spring, asking for forgiveness by prefacing his remarks with a proverb:

陳三：(都馬調，唱) 人講一某無人知 二某是相捨代
總講是我貪心自己愛 如今才難下台
阿娘阿娘 以往之事汝莫追究
水潑落地難得收 為守咱的祕密請汝相讓

Chen San: (sung) "Monogamy, propriety; bigamy, an infamy."
I was concupiscent; I was fickle –
Lustfulness got me into this pickle!
We can't change the past – it's useless to try,
For the sake of our secret, let sleeping dogs lie. (Scene Nine)

Spring admits to the "affair" but denies culpability or regret, her plainspoken honesty a hallmark of her character:

益春：(都馬調，唱) 我並無對娘不起 汝叫我去認罪分明將我欺
Spring: (sung) My conscience is clean; I'm feeling no shame.
I've done nothing wrong – I won't take the blame! (Scene Nine)

Puns

Puns are often difficult to translate: "[A] pun activates two meanings at the same time. Readers get both the obvious usual meaning of the word and the frequently less obvious, more unusual meaning the author intended" (Lefevere, 1992: 52). Like Mandarin and other Chinese dialects, Taiwanese has a high occurrence of homophones and is thus fertile ground for punning. In Scene One Biggie Lin has accidentally kicked his manservant Homeboy in the stomach. As Biggie helps Homeboy to his feet the young men engage in a bit of good-natured horseplay:

Biggie Lin: I kicked you? Hey, you OK? Get up and lemme have a look.

林大摸家童身軀，家童笑不停。Biggie rubs Boy Friday's stomach and they both laugh uproariously.

林大：(白) 今是怎麼樣。

Biggie Lin: What's with you now?

家童：(白) 嘻……我驚癢啦。

Homeboy: Hee, hee...that tickles!

林大：(白) 狗吓驚咧驚貓。

Biggie Lin: Ha! I'll scratch you where it itches!

家童：(白) 我是講驚癢啦。

Homeboy: Stop! Stop! You're giving me the twitches! (Scene One)

As shown earlier, the Taiwanese terms for “cat” (貓 *niau*) and “tickle”, (撓 *ngiau*) are very nearly homophonic. Here it would be impossible to translate literally and still preserve the sense of the pun because “cat” and “tickle” sound nothing alike in English. As a substitute for the wordplay, I used the English phrase “scratch you where it itches,” which may be taken either of two ways: apart from its literal definition it is used colloquially to mean “giving someone exactly what he or she wants” (or, in this case, what Homeboy may *not* want). Rhyming “itches” with “twitches”, the convulsive spasms one generally experiences upon being tickled, does to a degree restore the sound element of the pun, preserving some of the playfulness of the passage.

Proverbs and Colloquialisms

Proverbs and adages, nuggets of proverbial wisdom, appear throughout the play. In the opera's final scene Sixth Daughter, Fifth Daughter's younger sister, is persuaded to marry Biggie Lin in spite of his unbecoming appearance when Daisy, her maidservant, quotes a time-honored adage:

六娘：(白) 這……爹，伊生成彼呢歹。

Sixth Daughter: I...Daddy! He's so *ugly*!

春花：(白) 儂講醜醜尅吃袂空，嫁水尅是十暗九暗空。

Daisy: Remember the old saw, m'lady: “Marry a homely hubby and you'll never go hungry!”

黃九郎：(白) 是啦，六娘，汝看林家財勢兩全，汝若嫁予伊，一生可享不盡兮富貴。

Huang Jiulong: That's right! Sixth Daughter, the Lin's are a wealthy and powerful family.
Wed their son and you'll enjoy a life of luxury! (Scene Thirteen)

Some Taiwanese proverbs translate readily into English but others require explanation. In Scene Eight Spring informs Chen San that, despite appearances to the contrary, Fifth Daughter is truly in love with him. Chen San, however, is skeptical:

陳三：(白) 若按呢，伊為何出言相欺，又將我趕出房呢？

Chen San: Then why'd she kick me out of her room?

益春：(白) 這……這叫做枵鬼假細膩、愛食假志氣。

Spring: Well...you know what they say: "A starving ghost feigns daintiness."

(Scene Eight)

The aphorism *Iau-kui ké sè-jī, ài tsiah ké sè-jī* (枵鬼假細膩、愛食假志氣) may be translated as "A starving ghost pretends she's not hungry but she really wants to eat." Here Fifth Daughter affects a show of decorum lest she reveal her true feelings for Chen San. For economy and assonance, or internal rhyme, I rendered the line as "a starving ghost feigns daintiness" (the last half of the maxim is usually unstated) and added a footnote to ensure comprehension.

The script also showcases a number of colorful Taiwanese colloquialisms. In the opera's final scene the eloping lovers have been apprehended. Standing trial before Governor Lin, Biggie Lin's father, Chen San protests to his brother that his "crime" was motivated by love, not lust. But Biggie insists that Chen kidnapped his fiancée, prefacing his remarks with a phrase translated directly from the Taiwanese: "your mother's eighteen years old and your grandmother just celebrated her first birthday (度晬 *tōo-tsè*¹¹).” As an expression of scornful disbelief the locution is more or less equivalent to the American English "Bullshit!":

必賢打陳三。Chen Bixian slaps Chen San.

陳必賢：(將水，唱) 咿嘎罵聲啊咿 罵聲孽弟不知恥

枉汝自細勤讀五經合四書 滿腹才富學五車

竟犯此最敗壞陳家兮名譽

(……)

¹¹ A traditional celebration held in honor of a child's first birthday.

Chen Bixian: (sung) Argh! You shameless little jackass, you!

A staunch Confucian from the age of two,
Wealth and learning you had in abundance,
A man of respect, a man of substance;
But now you've thrown it all away –
Traded it in for a roll in the hay!

(...)

陳三：(白) 大哥，請汝原諒我做出一時荒唐之事，但是我合五娘是真心相愛，
是伊心甘情願隨我回鄉。

Chen San: Brother, please forgive me – I did a crazy thing! But Fifth Daughter and I
are in love – true love! She left with me of her own free will.

林大：(白) 汝講恁母仔十八歲、恁阿媽度晷，陳運使，伊明知五娘是我兮某，
閣三更半暝強共伊帶走，汝講，伊該不該認罪？

Biggie Lin: Ah, your ma's eighteen years old and your granny just celebrated her first
birthday! He snatched her away in middle of the night – even though he
knew me and her were engaged – and now he won't own up to it! (Scene
Thirteen)

Here I deemed the vividness of the Taiwanese expression worth preserving in literal translation. If the opera were staged in English, however, the shorter, more direct Americanism would no doubt better convey the illocutionary power of the original.

Most controversial with my first readers were certain liberties I took with the source text. In Scene Nine, Fifth Daughter has agreed to elope with Chen San *and* allow him keep Spring as concubine. Here she queries her husband-to-be as to how he'll allocate his time and attentions:

五娘：(都馬調，唱) 今郎君在眼前汝怎主裁

Fifth Daughter: (sung) Tell us now, O husband virile, with whom will you spend your
nights?

益春：(都馬調，唱) 我是小小的女婢無權利

Spring: (sung) I'm just a poor little servant girl, without any conjugal rights.

五娘：(都馬調，唱) 那按呢我做大某汝做細姨

Fifth Daughter: (sung) As lawful wife I stake my claim to holidays and weekends!

益春：(都馬調，唱) 我若得一點心意都真歡喜

Spring: (sung) As concubine I'll share with her, but please – no other girlfriends!

陳三：(都馬調，唱) 我一定會做得真公平

Chen San: (sung) I'll be impartial, I will be fair –

My love and affection you'll equally share. (Scene Nine)

Departures from the original will be obvious to readers of Taiwanese. Fifth Daughter's anachronistic “weekends” and Spring's condition of “no other girlfriends” are not in the script – I “improvised” for the sake of the rhyme and interest. Thus, I admit to sacrificing absolute fidelity for sound and invention, here and elsewhere in the script. Such departures are not without precedent, however – traditionally, improvisation was a standard feature of operatic performance. Liao Chiung-chih:

雖然同是內台戲班，只有美都是按劇本演戲的；其餘劇團，按歌仔戲的說法，都是「做活戲」，也就是排戲先生只講劇情大綱，派好角色後，演員即興發揮，靠的是演員經驗累積的唱唸功力，也就是俗稱的「腹內」。

Of the opera troupes performing at indoor venues, only Mei Du [a well known troupe of the 1940s-50s] followed scripts; the other troupes would “make living opera,” as it was called in opera circles; that is, the director would outline the plot and assign roles, after which the actors would improvise the performance, relying solely on experience and their singing and acting skills – what they had “in the gut.” (Ji, 1999: 27) [My translation]

In “making living opera” I no way altered plot or characterization. And, of course, readers are always free to disagree with my choices.

Translating Liao Chiung-chih's *Chen San Wu Niang* was an experiment, an attempt to recast the original songs and dialogue in language and imagery familiar to modern Western readers without sacrificing the opera's essential “Taiwanese-ness.” Although the translation is aimed primarily at readers, the script could easily be adapted to the stage or serve as subtitles for a Taiwanese-language production. In the course of translating I learned a great deal about Taiwanese (Hoklo) and English, and gained an even greater appreciation for the Taiwanese opera and Taiwanese culture – I only hope the script is as much fun to read as it was to translate. The manuscript is as yet unpublished but I've already begun work on another classic opera, and I hope other translators will take up the challenge as well. In closing, a last bit of Taiwanese folk wisdom:

做戲空，看戲蠢。

[Those who make plays are vacuous; those who see plays are fatuous.]

I wonder where “those who translate plays” would fit into that equation?

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英譯歌仔戲：翻譯廖瓊枝的《陳三五娘》

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摘 要

這篇論文討論筆者翻譯由廖瓊枝編輯的傳統台語歌仔戲《陳三五娘》劇本。作者以對劇本的簡介和語言的分析來開始，然後討論他的翻譯策略及其對實際翻譯工作的意義：決定在韻律和旋律上予以歌劇的詠嘆調；使用對話作為人物性格刻劃的方式；翻譯台語雙關語、諺語、俚語之可能性；即興創作以增加翻譯內容之色彩和趣味。最後，筆者以拋磚引玉的心態，呼籲譯界同好共襄盛舉，一起將歌仔戲這項傑出的藝術經典譯介給廣大海外讀者。

關鍵字：歌仔戲、《陳三五娘》、廖瓊枝、台語文學、翻譯