

## *North and South: East or West?*

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The project of translating *North and South* into Chinese occurred to me as a quite natural decision after I was introduced to Mrs. Gaskell's writing, simply because this mid-19th century book reveals so much about 21st century China, especially in the textile industry. Not only the arguments presented by workers and masters but also the material conditions of the poor in industrial cities versus the poor in rural areas working on land, the condition of the working class, the social division of the male and female roles, Victorian sexual morality, the marriage code based on family social status, income etc. are probably more familiar to the Chinese readers today than to modern British ones. Even the class prejudices shown on each side, by Mrs Thornton and Aunt Shaw, will find ready echoes in the hearts of China's newly rich entrepreneurs and old intellectuals or officials faced with inter-marrying sons and daughters.

My task, as I first understood it, was simply to put this relatively familiar world into a language familiar to Chinese readers. However, even that task is not so simple. Chinese sentence structure always puts modifiers before the modified, so that relative clauses have to come before their antecedents. Take, for example, a simple sentence from the very first page, like 'Margaret had been on the point of telling her cousin of some of the plans and visions which she entertained as to her future life in the country parsonage'. In Chinese, we have to say, 'Margaret had been on the point of telling her cousin some of HER-ENTERTAINED-AS-TO-HER-FUTURE-LIFE-IN-THE-COUNTRY-PARSONAGE PLANS AND VISIONS'.

It is, of course, possible to produce such long and complicated sentence structures in Chinese, but they are not very readable, nor considered particularly literary. The beauty of our literary language relies largely on simplicity in structure and lexical allusiveness rather than elaborate structure and lexical prolixity. One can, therefore, try to reproduce the book as if Gaskell were writing in elegantly succinct Chinese rather than elegantly complex English. My treatment of this long sentence is to cut it into two short sentences: 'Margaret had been on the point of tell her cousin some of her plans and visions. These were the plans and visions she entertained as to her future life in the country parsonage', and then re-arrange the word order of the modifier and the modified in conformity with Chinese grammar rules.

In some cases, Chinese literary succinctness fits beautifully. In Chapter 3, Henry Lennox (mis)quotes a Samuel Rogers poem, 'The Wish', to refer to rustic simplicity, 'Mine is a cot beside the hill' (p. 24). There is a simple, perfectly balanced couplet from ancient Chinese poetry which exactly expresses this sentiment. The English translation goes roughly as follows:

Gathering chrysanthemums under my east fence  
Taking south mountain with an easy glance.

Can I boldly slip in this quotation to make the readers easily understand the author? Or should I give an awkward literal translation of the quotation? My decision--in favour of the Chinese poem--is still open to debate. I welcome criticism from readers of this Journal and all Gaskellians.

Another problem I found difficult to answer is how to translate the way Captain Lennox and Mr. Lennox are addressed. In English, the title Captain and Mr. tell readers something about the person's social position and character. In Chinese Captain Lennox can also be addressed as Mr. Lennox or possibly Captain Mr. Lennox. Therefore in addition to the fact that the two characters are very confusable to Chinese readers, the Chinese translation does not carry the nuance the English titles have. I am aware of this loss but I cannot think of any other way to translate titles except literally, trusting to Gaskell to keep the two Lennoxes apart. The exception, where I felt I had to step in to prevent a muddle, was the in the first chapter when everybody was expecting the Captain, Mr. Lennox was announced. Here, I added a sentence clearly labelling the announced Lennox as the Captain's younger brother.

Although Chinese readers probably know more 19th Century English literature than English readers know of 19th Century Chinese literature, there are huge gaps that require lengthy footnotes to fill. Mr. Hale's doubts, whose nature is not even clear to John Sutherland (see the introduction to his 1997 book *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?*) are even more perplexing to Chinese readers, who generally can't tell a Protestant from a Catholic. But footnotes should be used sparingly. A translation for Chinese readers has to be reader-friendly; it cannot be completely writer-friendly. But in the end, the translator can trust the universality of human experience and the humanism of Gaskell to get through the unfamiliar language to the familiar human realities underneath.

