

## A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

This "translation" of Sophocles' *Antigone* is probably no more Greek than *Voltaire's Orphelin de la Chine* was Chinese. I do not know Greek and this translation, based on a number of English versions of the play, cannot be taken as a translation in the sense that an English poem which reproduces the "prose sense", the imagery, the rhythm, the physical shape, the total complexity of a Chinese poem is a translation. In fact I was careful to describe it in Chinese as an adaptation translation, a name which would make little sense in English. It is unrealistic to expect *any* translation to give more than some of the total richness of an original work and translations must be judged in terms of the *purpose* of the translator, unless that purpose be to reproduce the original, which would be a foolish ambition. My purpose was to produce an 'actable' version of the Greek tragedy which would suggest as much of the human interest I had always seen in its English versions as possible. I made no attempt at reproducing the peculiar Greek qualities—indeed I couldn't have done so, not knowing what they were. Nor did I try to write Greek poetry in Chinese: again I couldn't have done that. The result is a piece of writing which must be judged as Chinese drama: not a drama about the Chinese, but a work using Chinese drama as a medium. Creon is no more Greek than the *Hsiung-nu* chieftain in the Yuan drama *Han Kung Ch'iu* is Hsiung-nu. Nor is Creon Chinese. And the question of Creon's nationality is in any case irrelevant.

The most Chinese thing about the translation is the language, which is not the Chinese that the eighth century essayist Han Yu advocated, nor the Chinese that the twentieth century Hu Shih would have us write. It is a blend of the languages of the *Shih Ching*, T'ang poetry, Yuan drama and the modern Mandarin-speaker. The mixture is a conscious reaction against the pale, impoverished *pai-hua* modern Chinese, a product of the modern heresy, which is still so much the fashion. In the May 4 Movement when Hu Shih (whose literary polemic is tedious, whose verse is worse) and his comrades preached the simple colloquial style, their interest was social rather than literary in the best sense: the aim was chiefly to fight illiteracy (—partly by producing a literature which the semi-literate could read). I believe it's no use trying to write poetry in a vocabulary of five hundred words. Now that we (or at least some of us) can afford to take the serious business of writing poetry seriously, we should feel cheated not to be allowed to draw freely on the *total* heritage of Chinese literature and the rich resources of the Chinese language. It is the duty of every modern Chinese writer to read the *Shih Ching*, the *Ch'u Tz'u*, *Tu Fu* and the *Shuo Wen* (the dictionary of the Han Dynasty) with utter devotion. One of the aims of my translation was to explore the possibilities of employing a greater range of the Chinese language as it has been used from the Chow Dynasty to the present day.

Some of the verse forms I have used bear a certain resemblance to various traditional verse forms. But no attempt has been made to repeat the latter slavishly. Thus, the first "chorus" is not to be taken as a series of "quatrains" (*chueh chu*): too many lines having level-tone words in the penultimate syllable. I think this is the kind of liberty one should be allowed to take with traditional verse forms.

At a time when no one is certain of the direction modern Chinese writing is taking, need one apologise for an experiment even when one is so acutely conscious of one's limitations?

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