

Chinese

炸脖魁⁰²

有(一)天魚裡，那些活濟濟的偷子
在街邊，儘着那麼跣那麼覓；
好難四，啊，那些鷄鷄鴿子，
還有家的猪子樞得格。

「小心那炸脖魁，我的孩子！
那咬人的牙⁰³，那抓人的爪子！
小心那誅布誅布鳥，還躲開
那符命的般得飯子！」

他手拿着一把佛盤劍：
他早就要找那個蠻松蟒—
他就躲在一棵屯屯樹後面，
就站得那，心裡頭想。

他正待那，想的個烏飛飛，
那炸脖魁，兩個燈籠的眼，
且禿，《个》林子裡夫雷雷
又勃勃，波，的出來攢。

左，右！左，右！透了又透，
那佛盤劍砍得欺哩咋喳！
他割了他喉⁰⁴，他拎了他頭，
就一嘎隆，的「一」了回家。

「你果然斬了那炸脖魁了嗎？
好孩子快來罷，你真勺—丫⁰⁵滅！
啊，乏勺—又的日子啊，喝仗！喝喂！
他快活的才己⁰⁶個得，的「一」世⁰⁷。

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在街邊，儘着那麼跣那麼覓；
好難四，啊，那些鷄鷄鴿子，
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“A long way before it, and a long way behind it”: “Jabberwocky” in Chinese Translation

You Chengcheng

Translating “Jabberwocky” into Chinese poses the same conundrum it poses for translators of all literary texts across different languages: Should a source-oriented or target-oriented translation be made by employing a domesticating or foreignizing translation strategy, or a combination of both? The indeterminacy is made more self-evident in the Chinese translation of this nonsense poem. In Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, more than 60 translated versions of *Through the Looking-Glass* have been published since its debut in the early 1920s, a period that witnessed how the dynamic forces of western classics, after being translated and transmitted, reinvigorated the Chinese literary scene, especially for children.

In translating a nonsense poem like “Jabberwocky,” the overarching difficulty lies not just in teasing out the metalinguistic complexity of this deceptively playful form and its rich culture-specific connotations (a nonsense-for-nonsense translation), but also in conveying the communicative effect of the original poem—that sense of being “pretty but RATHER hard to understand”, as Alice phrased it. Over time, Chinese translators generally adopted the following translation methods to tackle the nonsensical elements of the poem: 1) free translation to render a coherent and lucid narrative about how a brave boy slays the venomous dragon (and for this purpose, the nonsensical elements were minimized, rewritten

or deleted), 2) domestication with the use of Chinese verse forms or newly coined expressions/characters, among others, to make an amusing Chinese poem, 3) foreignization by means of annotations, zero translation, transliteration, or *calque* to maintain the strangeness of the original text.

Chao Yuen Ren, an early translator of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*, is a linguist, philosopher, and composer. His foray into the translation of these two books, particularly the puns and other forms of wordplay therein, is often cited as an exemplary case of literary translation. Planned to be published in 1932, however, Chao's manuscript was burned during wartime. It was not until in 1968 that he recompiled the remnants and published his translation, along with his own cassette recording and Tenniel's original illustrations, in *Readings in Sayable Chinese*, a textbook targeting American learners of the Chinese language. In the preface to his edition, Chao dwelt upon the necessity of translating the Alice stories for a child readership in vernacular modern Chinese (as opposed to the classical style), enabling poetic experiments to deal with the verses, and maintaining the delightful absurdity of nonsense which, in his understanding, corresponds to *bu tong* (不通, failure to make sense) in Chinese.

What distinguishes Chao's version from others is, without doubt, his experimental capability to retain multi-dimensions of fidelity to the original. As the translator puts it proudly, "I was able not only to make point for point in the play on words but also keep practically the same meter and rhyming patterns in all the verses" (1969, 127). His translation of the first stanza stands out as a perfect testimony to his well-defined *skopos*. To achieve the dual function of fidelity, Chao's version is phonetically faithful to the original with new Chinese characters invented to transpose the experience of nonsense in the Chinese language. It should be noted, above all, that the Chinese language has a graphic origin before its phonetic system is developed. Therefore, many characters carry with themselves the visual presentation of signs and symbols, such as field (田), human (人) and wood (木). The characters invented by Chao, in a spirit of Chinese portmanteau, somehow provide illustrative clues, albeit ambiguous and baffling, of what they may allude to. "Brillig," for instance, is translated into 𠄎, a nonce character with its upper part "白" (white, daytime) and the lower part "黑" that brings 黑 (black) into mind, in which case, the new character suggests the liminal time between day and night, as Chao, later in the words of the hypothetical Chinese Humpty Dumpty, explains the neologism in Chapter Six.

The translation of the names of those fantastic creatures in the first stanza also yields an absurd glimpse of the Chinese "tulgey wood", by nature, a continued stripping and confusion of essences, categories, and identities. Comparably, the

target reader can easily conjure up the hybridity of these species, partly bizarre, partly familiar, from the composition of the weird Chinese characters: Jabberwock dragon-like (魁), toves beastly (揄), borogoves avian(鸚鵡鳩) and raths an aberrant kind of pig (猪). Unlike many of his successors who prefer to remove glossolalia and deliver a clear-cut narrative line, Chao skillfully concocts a carnivalesque language play full of malapropism, meaningless words, and stand-alone radicals of Chinese characters, all evincing the translatorial attempt to defamiliarize the established Chinese writing system – a distant echo of the authorial intention to engage child readers in linguistic gamesmanship.

While the newly invented Chinese characters present a vaguely palatable form of nonsense, Chao's consistent deployment of onomatopoeia also enhances the sound effect of the poem. On the lexical level, “uffish”, “whiffling”, “burble”, “snicker-snack”, “galumphing”, for instance, are respectively translated into “鳥飛飛”, “夫雷雷”, “渤波波”, “欺哩咔咔” and “嘎隆”, which altogether produces crescendo ambient effects of an intense fighting scene. On the other hand, however, the metrical scheme that Chao tends to preserve throughout, an approach to maintain the formal equivalence to the source-text, seems to impede the reader's process of enjoying nonsense for nonsense's sake. Moreover, the labyrinthine new characters and clueless radicals, though expressive and ingenious, cannot be read aloud at all. As a matter of fact, the readability and whimsicality of the nonsense poem can be recalled in *da you shi*, the Chinese-style limerick. It normally consists of four lines that sustain a syllabic rhythmic balance, each line of five or seven words. As the local poetical form can readily impart fun with words, rhythm, rhyme and sounds, it is easy to understand why many translators, like Lai Ciyun, Zhang Hua and Chen Lifang, adopt this form to translate the nonsense poem. On the flip side, such a strategy of domestication, very likely, allows the poem to be twisted to fit the localized form or to reduce it to an arbitrarily homogenized interpretation. As a result, the poem's underlying aesthetic contradictions and hermeneutic plurality will be greatly impoverished in translation. If the source reader has to defer logical judgement and grasp the fine points of the fun with more delight than frustration when reading the poem, can the translated version perform the mission other than at the expense of the nonsense?

Nonsense itself, as a British invention that synthesizes the sense/other-than-sense dichotomy in a web of linguistic, philosophical, and socio-historical connections, contributes to the difficulty of its translation, since Chinese literary tradition offers no equivalent genre. Variations of humor, as in jokes, parables, riddles and wordplay, have been pervasive in everyday Chinese speech as much

as in literary works for centuries. Nevertheless, its historical development was shackled by Confucianism, the most influential school of thought in China. It teaches a doctrine of moderation and decorum, and advocates the orthodox literary writings. Against this moral backdrop, nonsensical content in Chinese literature mostly serves adult readers for self-entertaining humor, sarcasm, and intellectual wit. If there is any in children's literature, the content is quite often subject to the onslaught of didacticism and meaning-making overtones. As Shi Zhecun aptly comments, "Even if it is a part of children's literature, a ready-made song of meaningless rhyme will be annotated by the so-called children's literature experts, accompanied by some superficial moral lessons to restrain children's lively imagination" (88).

My very rough sketch above, of course, does not aim to dampen the translator's enthusiasm for the herculean task. Quite the opposite, it does justice to the importance of translating the genre for contemporary Chinese young readers who are experiencing more cross-cultural fusion and accommodation than ever before. Getting lost on the obfuscatory journey of translating "Jabberwocky" and reading its translation goes without saying, but the encounter with various alloys of seriousness, play and bilingual creativity ensures gains in imagining a world other than the one in which we normally live. As in the last stanza that also begins the poem, Chao's translation of "mome" into 冢 provides an opportune frame of reference for this quest, the graphic features of which illustrate the very necessity of finding home again, possibly a new one, after an existential personal journey to nonsense, and its translation.

Chinese translation

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