

3rd Prize (LT)

SHEK Kai Fung Karson

Master of Arts in Language Studies
(Translation and Interpretation stream)

黃鳥歌

A Song of Yellow Birds

翩翩黃鳥

Aloft the yellow birds flutter.

雌雄相依

Females and males count on each other.

念我之獨

My desolation I brood over:

誰其與歸

With whom would I return, I wonder?

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Commentary

The translation process was pleasantly smooth, until I was stuck with the word 「歸」 in the last verse. The meaning that first came to my mind was ‘to head back’, yet I was contemplating if there was any more profound implication behind this word. It may affect the tenses and word choices as such. I had done some research in advance, and it turned out there are two divided opinions regarding who this poem was dedicated to. From the background information provided by the Department, it seemed that King Yuri (琉璃王) was longing for Chihui (雉姬), one of his concubines who left the palace after a quarrel, but he failed to get her back. In this sense, the last verse implying that Chihui refused to return, appears to be a rhetorical question— ‘who will go back with me?’ Meanwhile, some scholars suggest that King Yuri was thinking of his first deceased wife. (夏月亮, 2012) Let’s go back to the background information and focus on the line 「王嘗息樹下」. With 「嘗」 referring to a past attempt, the interpretation is obtained that King Yuri had once rested under a tree and then wrote the poem. This opens the whole new possibility that the poem had been written long before Chihui left. The last line would no longer be a rhetorical question. Instead, the intended meaning of the poet was 「歸宿」 (‘an ending’). He genuinely inquired if he should settle down, and with whom in his last years, devastated by the loss of his beloved wife. I decided to go for the first interpretation, avoiding ambiguities that may hinder the target readers’ understanding. Overall speaking, my translation has been an enjoyable process as there were numerous creative decisions to be made, leading me to ponder the poetic composition of rhythm and rhymes. There is still room for improvement after I chew the work over. Most importantly, I never translated poetry before, but now I have a better appreciation of the artform after this first attempt.

References: 夏月亮. (2012). 《黄鸟歌》背景研究. 考试：教研版, 191-192