

Wixted, John Timothy, Review of Lois Fusek, *Among the Flowers: The 'Hua-chien chi'* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), in *Journal of Asian Studies* 44.1 (Nov. 1984), pp. 163-165. [*Hua-chien chi* = *Hua-jianji* 花間集]

Among the Flowers: The *Hua-chien chi*. Translated by LOIS FUSEK. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. viii, 232 pp. Biographical Notes, Glossary, Bibliography, Index of Tune Titles, General Index. \$25.

Among the Flowers is the first translation of all five hundred poems that appear in the earliest extensive anthology of *tz'u* poetry, the *Hua-chien chi*, the preface to which is dated A.D. 940. (I say the first "extensive" anthology because, contrary to what is stated in the introduction, the compilation is not "the very first anthology of *tz'u*": see Glen W. Baxter, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 16 [1953]:144-45, n. 91.) The *tz'u* are lyrics or song-poems usually comprised of irregular lines, generally written to the pattern of earlier popular song lyrics. Most employ boudoir themes descriptive of palace ladies or courtesans.

The translations by Lois Fusek in this work are unique in the way they convey one feature of the prosodic structure of *tz'u*: length of line. When translating a poem or series of poems to the same tune-title, Fusek makes all 3-character Chinese lines use exactly the same total number of typespaces in English translation, all 5-character lines use exactly the same (correspondingly longer) number of spaces in her rendering, and so on.

The resulting visual effect can be striking. For example, in the following poem not only are all 5-character lines the exact same length in English (with the one shorter 3-character line) but the six other poems in the series are also perfectly aligned with it:

Her hair is bound loosely in a chignon.
Her painted eyebrows are finely arched.
Day and night, her thoughts are of him.
Because of him, she is worn with grief,
When flowers are so lush (p. 48).

This was quite an undertaking for the translator. Given that Fusek submitted herself to this strait jacket, it is astonishing how seldom the results, juggled to end in just the right number of spaces, sound awkward. Some of the translations are quite poetic.

The creation of English lines with precise numbers of typespaces, a fundamental aspect of the translation, is, in my opinion, misguided. *Tz'u* song-poems were composed to one or another "tune"—to a pattern that included not only length of line, but also rhymescheme and tonal sequence within lines. Fusek's translations visually approximate length of line, but they do so in English, a language wherein

the total number of spaces in a poetic line is comparatively meaningless, as opposed to the number of stressed syllables per line. She has tried to "suggest the disciplined structure within which the *tz'u* poets worked" (p. 9); but notwithstanding the forms prescribed by tune patterns, *tz'u* were in fact freer and generally more colloquial in tone than the more formal *shih* poetry. More important, as Fusek states, "It is probable that most lyrics [in the *Hua-chien chi*] were patterned directly to the music itself, or at least were written when the music was still extant" (pp. 3-4); thus it seems strange indeed to attempt "to suggest *visually* the patterning of the different tunes" (p. 5, italics added) when patterning is so narrowly defined by the translator and its one aspect so disproportionately highlighted. Initially, Chinese *heard* these song-poems sung; once published, like all classical Chinese, they were not printed in separate poetic lines visually aligned.

Another reason I feel the task, as defined by Fusek, is misguided is because unwelcome liberties were taken with the original, presumably in order to generate lines in English with a specific number of spaces. Filler words are added to the translation, a particularly unfortunate practice when they are verbs (e.g., "dip" and "shut," p. 39; "cover," p. 38) and thus detract from the static atmosphere of the original images. For the same reason, paraphrase and ellipsis occur frequently. And most unfortunately, when the reader encounters a doubtful rendering, there is often no way of knowing if Fusek misconstrued the line or whether she is using the rendering as an expedient to make the poem fit her visual scheme.

Even if one were to accept her priorities, much the same visual effect could have been gained by using a variety of line indentations or by directing the printer to expand or contract given lines to the same length. There would still be considerable constraint in the length of translated lines, but the loosened bounds would offer much wider latitude for addressing other major problems.

The description of how "the association of the real and the artificial colors all of Wen T'ing-yün's work" (p. 18) is very well put. Fusek's words contrasting Wen T'ing-yün and Wei Chuang are brief but apt (p. 21), as are those summarizing Ou-yang Chiung's preface (pp. 11-12). And her discussion of hairstyles, clothing, and other accoutrements is welcome (pp. 27-28).

There are other problems, however. As indicated by the bibliography, major important sources, notably Japanese scholarship, were not consulted for the translations; for example, Aoyama Hiroshi's concordance to, as well as articles on, the *Hua-chien chi*; the translation and annotation of many poems in the anthologies by Murakami Tetsumi and Nakata Yūjirō, use of which would have spared the translator more than one questionable rendering; and the articles and book by Harada Yoshito on T'ang clothing, hairstyles, and makeup, which help to explicate many of the terms that play a prominent part in the work. The omission of my published monograph, *The Song-Poetry of Wei Chuang (836-910 A.D.)* (Tempe, Ariz., 1979), as well as the study and translation of song-poems to the tune "The Taoist Nun" by Edward H. Schafer ("The Capeline Cantos," *Asiatische Studien* 32 [1978]:5-65), is regrettable.

It is questionable that the *Hua-chien chi* is "a collection of verses of immense merit and appeal" (p. 12). Many of the lyrics are less than memorable, and they often pall upon sustained reading, owing to the limited range of them. (Some implications of this limited range—of images, language, and syntax, as well as theme—are suggestively addressed at the end of the review by J.-P. Diény: *T'oung Pao* 67 [1981]:111-16.) To say that these lyrics are "filled with frustration and hate" (p. 17) is surely wrong; one may speak of "chagrin," "reproach," or "distress," but not of "hate." Selected poems in translation with fuller notation, perhaps with appended discussion, would

have been preferable to the claustrophobic feeling that a stretch of uninterrupted reading of these five hundred poems engenders. Moreover, the translator was ill-served by the typeface selected to print the poems.

The translation of this anthology is an unusual accomplishment. Although I cannot endorse it with enthusiasm, it is remarkable nonetheless.

JOHN TIMOTHY WIXTED
Arizona State University

is
o
d
is
n
s
c
t