Review of *Together, We Made it Through 2020* (bilingual, with self-translation)

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Wang, Ying, et al., *Together, We Made it Through 2020*. 2020. https://www.yinghattiewang.com/single-post/together-we-made-it-through-2020

Together, We Made it Through 2020 is a collection of poems and prosaic essays authored by five people from four Melbourne-based families of Chinese heritage: Wang Ying, Wu Qingru and Wu Qingying, Tang Yaqi, and Du Ni. As the title suggests, the collection is written against the global backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, during which millions of lives were lost and lockdown restrictions had a significant impact on the mental health of billions of people across the world. This collection faithfully recorded the experiences and reflections of Chinese-Australians during these challenging times.

The authors are bilingual in Mandarin and English, and some original works are accompanied by self-translations; the source text (ST) and target text (TT) are presented as parallel texts. This review, however, focuses on the translation of one poem. Author Tang Yaqi pays homage to Walt Whitman, by translating an excerpt from his poem 'Song of Myself'. In what follows, I compare the visual presentation of Tang's rendition with Chinese literary translator Li Yeguang's version published in 1994.

Tang's translation, or transcreation to be exact, is quite different from Li's rendering in regard to the visual form (see appendix). This difference may be attributed to the fact that the translation of a poem depends on the translator's personal style and preferences, and on the context in which it is done. In Tang's case, as the virus spreads, economies grind to a halt due to global and regional lockdowns; therefore, sustaining lives and livelihoods requires a decision framework to calibrate social and movement measures. Similarly, Tang's poetic translation requires a decision framework to transfer the emotions and thoughts of Whitman; and to project those of Tang who found her solace in poetry in this particular social setting. Working from home, reduced workload, mandatory face masks, social distance restrictions, rumours about vaccines, and various conspiracy theories prompted Tang to rethink the meaning of life, reshape her values, and redefine her life path.

The following table is a cursory comparison, in terms of visual presentation, of the translated poem, including the verse count, word count per verse, and punctuation which, to a large degree, form a poem's sound, rhythm and tempo:

Word count (including punctuations)	ST: Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* Section 18	TT1: Li Yeguang's Chinese translation	TT2: Tang Yaqi's Chinese translation
Number of verses	9	10	12
Verse 1	11	16	8
Verse 2	21	10	8
		17	7
			9
Verse 3	7	7	10
			5
Verse 4	11	21	5

Verse 5	6	12	10
Verse 6	9	19	
Verse 7	9	18	8
Verse 8	11	21	7
			6
Verse 9	11	32	9
			11

From the table above, it can be seen that, in her translation, Tang made more changes to the format of the ST by splitting, merging, even rearranging words and verses. For example, in verse 2 of the ST, Li split the translated verse into two verses, while Tang's version has three verses. For verses 3 and 4, Li kept the same line of verses, but Tang rearranged them by breaking verse 4 into two parts of equally five words, and shifting the first five to verse 3. For verses 5 and 6, Li kept the original format whilst Tang merged the two into one new verse. In total, Li's translation has one more verse than the source poem, while Tang's rendition has three more verses.

As far as punctuation goes, Tang also made more alterations. Li's version kept the question mark, the period and exclamation marks, but not the dash and semicolon; Tang, on the other hand, abandoned the original punctuation entirely and replaced them with either a comma or left the line with an open ending, such as without any punctuation marks.

Li's translation is highly faithful to the original and looks like a mirroring text, while Tang's translation manifests itself as a classical Chinese poem which gives the original poem a new life, or a reincarnation. The former more strictly follows the format of the source text, but not just a word for word rendition; the latter can be deemed as a new poem to some extent.

However, the word count itself does not warrant a corresponding format, because the length of one English word ranges from one letter, for example "I", to as many as eleven letters, for example "embouchures". Readers who are not bilingual can only compare translation in its visual format: whether the English poem on the left has the same or similar length and width as the Chinese poem on the right (see table above), and whether the punctuation can be matched accordingly (see appendix). As a rule of thumb, the Chinese target text is usually made up with more words than the English source text but takes up less space. A good way to reduce the word count is to use classical Chinese, instead of modern vernacular Chinese, which is exactly what Tang did in her translation. Monolingual readers who have no access to the English poem can only rely on the translation for the understanding and appreciation of Whitman's literary creation.

The translations are analysed from the perspective of correspondence of format, as one possible way of evaluating translation of poems from English into Chinese. However, the visual effect of translations, as a preliminary step of reading translated poems in Chinese, is to be interpreted independent of their linguistic quality. Both translations may be judged as sound monolingual readings, with clear attempts to preserve the literal meaning, the logical flow, and the literary merits of the ST. Without any intention of evaluating the quality of each TT, I aim to highlight that the differences between the TTs in their visual formats may be informed by a range of factors. One factor is that the contexts in which the translations were produced, (including the purpose of translation and the medium of publication) are different. TT1 is an official publication, while TT2 is produced out of interest during lockdown and published online. Other factors include the contrasting identities of the translators and the historical moment or social background of their translational act.

This collection contains more poems and prosaic texts as well as illustrations composed at the Darwin Covid-19 quarantine centre in February 2020. At the time, Wang Ying's family

took a trip to their hometown – the ground Zero Wuhan for Chinese Lunar New Year and was stranded there due to the coronavirus outbreak. Her family, among many other Australians, is the lucky first group evacuated by the Qantas chartered flight. Just as the author declares in her prologue "reverence for life, live bravely", *Together, We Made it Through 2020* is a collection written in both simplified Chinese and English, and translation of English poems which may resonate with the Melbournians' struggle as they have endured one of the world's longest and toughest lockdown.

Appendix

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Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*
in the 1855 version of *Leaves of Grass*
(Section 18, 9 verses in total)

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1. Have you heard that it was good to gain the day? (11 words)
2. I also say it is good to fall 8—battles are lost in the same spirit in which they are won. (21)
3. I beat and pound for the dead; (7)
4. I blow through my embouchures my loudest and gayest for them. (11)
5. Vivas to those who have fail'd! (6)
6. And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea! (9)
7. And to those themselves who sank in the sea! (9)
8. And to all generals that lost engagements! and all overcome heroes! (11)
9. And the numberless unknown heroes, equal to the greatest heroes known. (11)

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惠特曼：自我之歌
(Li Yeguang's translation)

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你听说过得到胜利是很好的，是么？16
我告诉你失败也很好，10
打败仗者跟打胜仗者具有同样的精神。17
　　我为死者擂鼓，7
我从我的号角为他们吹出最嘹亮而快乐的音乐。21
万岁！一切遭受失败的人！12
　　万岁！你们那些有战船沉没在大海里的人！ 19
　　万岁！你们那些自己沉没在大海里的人！ 18
　　万岁！一切失败的将领，一切被征服了的英雄！ 21
　　万岁！你们那些与知名的最伟大的英雄们同样伟大的无数的无名英雄们！32

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惠特曼：自我之歌（选自《草叶集》）
(Tang Yaqi's translation)

曾闻否，捷报佳音 8
溃以为，败亦善哉 8
战之胜败者不论 7
彼我一志，同出一魂 9
为亡者，我响凯旋鼓，我嘹华章乐 15
随乐长欢呼 5

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为败者，为随舰沉海者 10
为战中堕海长眠者 8
为一众战败之将 7
为诸得胜英雄 6
英雄闻名，天下尽重 9
亦无名者无数，此当一同 11