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Australian Association for Literary Translation

**Chinese Studies Association of Australia (CSAA)/AALITRA  
Chinese-English Translation Competition 2023: Five Chinese Songs**

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The Chinese Studies Association of Australia and The Australian Association for Literary Translation conducted a Chinese-English Translation Competition in 2023, which considered translations of Chinese texts, of any genre or period, into English. The AALITRA Review is pleased to publish this commended piece in this current issue.

Songs reflect and carry people's emotion, affections, values, and culture, and translation of songs facilitates cultural exchanges between peoples. Song-lyrics translation can be for the purpose of understanding or singing, or in Low's (114-15) terms, adaptations and translations respectively. This work is for the latter. Low (79) suggests that singable translation is a "Pentathlon", and the Target Text (TT) needs to be assessed by five criteria: Singability (phonetic suitability of the TT for singing); Sense (whether the meaning in the Source Text (ST) is well transferred); Naturalness (how natural the style of the TT is); Rhythm (how well it fits with the rhythm of the music); and Rhyme (how well the TT rhyming matches with the rhyming of the ST). Since it is often very difficult to meet all five criteria to the same extent, the translator should aim at achieving a high overall score across the pentathlon, rather than over-emphasising any particular criterion at the expense of others. Thus, compromises are often necessary.

Translated here are the lyrics of five Chinese songs, which reflect upon the life of people in various regions of China. "*Half A Moon Is Climbing Up High*" is based on a Uyghur folk song "*Yi-la-la, Sha Yi Ge*" in West China, and was created in 1939 by Ruobin Wang (1913-1996), who is often called the "West-China King of Songs". The song is a serenade in a half-mooned night outside the sweetheart's window, and it has been performed by countless Chinese and foreign musicians. In 1993, the song was honoured as one of the "Twentieth-Century Chinese Music Classics" by the Chinese Ethnic Culture Promotion Association (Yan & Wang). To match the ST rhyming in my translation, I used "dressing desk" instead of "dressing table", and "toss it to glide" instead of "throw it down" (扔下来) as in the ST. Low (80) suggests that "[Rhyming] is the easiest criterion to assess, and usually the least important". That might be the case in English, but in Chinese songs and poems, rhyming is very important and should not be treated lightly. Thus, I have applied the above-mentioned adaption. The repeated phrase "a rose" in the second last line of each verse is inserted to match the musical rhythm, and it also makes the lyrics more expressive.

"*On The Way to See Mum*" is a North China style folk song, about a young woman's experience on her way to *Hui Niang Jia* (returning to parents' home), a long-lasting Chinese tradition where a married woman visits her childhood home. A married woman lives with her husband's family, thus *hui niang jia* is a reunion with her own family and an important and ritualistic occasion, especially for those who are newlywed or with a new baby. The song tells of a gorgeous and excited young woman, who became confused and helpless after an encounter with a sudden mountain shower on her way to *hui niang jia*. The song's original title was "*Little Missus Going Mum's Home*", which was included in a 1982 album by the Taiwanese superstar Teresa Teng (1953-1995), and became popular in mainland China when Mingying Zhu, a well-known pop star, performed it in the 1984 Spring Festival Gala. The lyrics are by Yi Sun (1928-), a famous Taiwanese song writer with over 4000 song-lyrics to his name (Sun). For my

translation, the title is adapted to set the scene for the story. The use of auxiliary words, such as *ma*, *ya*, *der* at the end of the lines, and *Yi-ah-yi-der-wei*, is typical of North Chinese folk songs. They have no real meaning other than to help fill the gaps, smooth over the singing, and make the song colloquial. Therefore, they are not translated, but presented phonetically as *pinyin* in italics in the TT. The same goes for the translation of onomatopoeia in the ST: *shua-la-la* (唰啦啦) is used to represent wind blowing through the willows, and *hua-la-la* (哗啦啦) is for water flowing in the rivers. In the TT repeated *la*'s following “swish” and “swash” are to imitate the sounds in the ST on the one hand, and to keep the rhyme in the TT on the other. As suggested by Low (13), “in general you should translate phrases in terms of *what those words are doing* at that point of the work, whether they are providing information, humour, emotion or whatever” (italics original). Another feature of the translation is the inversion of word orders, putting verbs (e.g. flies, runs) or adjectives (e.g. happy, scared) in the front of the line, which makes the sentences more vivid and stimulating.

“*Mountain Yao Night Song*” is about a harvest celebration in a village of the Yao people, an ethnic minority living in the mountainous Southwestern China. The music was based on an orchestral piece from 1951, and it was turned into a lyrical song in 2009 by Zhaozhen Guo, a well-known song writer (Wikipedia). The picturesque scenery that can be envisaged by the lyrics, and the elegant music made the song an immediate success and has remained popular among Chinese people, both domestically and overseas. Again, in my translation, the chanty words (e.g. *Heiyo hohei*, *heiye yahoo*) and onomatopoeia (e.g. *deedee*, *dongdong*) in the ST are not translated, but presented by *pinyin* in italics. The added repetition of “wafting” in the TT is to imitate the repeated “fragrance waves” (阵阵清香) and to better fit the music rhythm.

“*Great Ocean, My Hometown*” was written by Liping Wang for a 1982 movie about the lives of seamen, “*The Ocean is calling*”. Wang is famous for the great number of popular songs he created, both music and lyrics. The song was intentionally “neither Chinese nor of any other peoples” as requested by the movie director (*Baidu Baike*). It was awarded the Golden Medal for Pop Music by the Chinese Musician Association in 2008 and was included in school music textbooks on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. The lyrics of this song are plain and reserved, but underneath it are the deep affection and love for mother, sea, childhood, and life in general. The translation is straightforward, and the only point of explanation needed is perhaps the inverted word order in “Wave saw me *up grown*”, again to meet the criterion of rhyming.

The lyrics of “*My Motherland and I*” were written in 1983 by Li Zhang (1932-2016). It uses Child/Mother and Wave/Ocean metaphors for the relationships that people have with their motherland, which was deeply seated in the Chinese psyche (and arguably in many other cultures as well). The song gained significant popularity after the superstar Guyi Li sang it in 1984, and in 2019, even English versions became available online (e.g. TAN). It is important to note, however, that they are adaptations rather than translations as in Low’s terms. The translation of the last line in the first verse of the ST, “和我诉说” (*hewo sushuo*, [You’re venting to me]), was challenging. “诉说” in Chinese mainly refers to telling others your grievance, suffering, or painful experience, which does not fit with the otherwise high-spirited and cheerful text and melody of this song. One possible explanation for the writer’s use of it here is that it rhymes well with the preceding lines, which is an example of the importance of rhyming in Chinese songs. As a compromise, I used “Tell me your thoughts” to make it broader and neutral in sense, and to near-rhyme with its preceding line in the TT as well. Another adaption is the translation of “袅袅炊烟” (*niaoniao chuiyan* [wafting kitchen smoke]) in the first verse of the ST. “Wafting” is commonly used in English to describe smokes, but I feel it does not match well with the grace and elegant image depicted by “袅袅” in ST. Therefore “smoke curling up tall” is used instead.

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## 1. 《半个月亮爬上来》

新疆民歌  
王洛宾词曲  
译文、编排：马山

半个月亮爬上来，  
咿啦啦，爬上来。  
照着我的姑娘梳妆台，  
咿啦啦，梳妆台。  
请你把那纱窗快打开，  
咿啦啦，快打开，  
咿啦啦，快打开。  
再把你那玫瑰摘一朵，  
轻轻地扔下来。

半个月亮爬上来，  
咿啦啦，爬上来。  
为什么我的姑娘不出来，  
咿啦啦，不出来。  
请你把那纱窗快打开，  
咿啦啦，快打开，  
咿啦啦，快打开。  
再把你那玫瑰摘一朵，  
轻轻地扔下来。

## 2. 《小媳妇回娘家》

作词：孙仪  
作曲：汤尼  
译文、编排：马山

风吹着杨柳嘛  
唰啦啦啦啦  
小河里水流得儿  
哗啦啦啦啦  
谁家的媳妇  
她走得忙又忙呀  
原来她要回娘家

身穿大红袄  
头戴一枝花  
胭脂和香粉她的脸上擦  
左手一只鸡  
右手一只鸭

## 1. 《Half A Moon Is Climbing Up High》

Xinjiang folk song  
Music & lyrics: Luobin WANG  
Translation & Arrangement: Shan MA

Half a moon is climbing up high,  
*Yee-la-la*, climbing high.  
Shining upon my girl's dressing desk,  
*Yee-la-la*, dressing desk.  
Please open your window wide,  
*Yee-la-la*, open it wide,  
*Yee-la-la*, open it wide.  
And then pick a rose, a rose of yours,  
Gently toss it to glide.

Half a moon is climbing up high,  
*Yee-la-la*, climbing high.  
Why doesn't my girl show in my sight,  
*Yee-la-la*, not in sight.  
Please open your window wide,  
*Yee-la-la*, open it wide,  
*Yee-la-la*, open it wide.  
And then pick a rose, a rose of yours,  
Gently toss it to glide.

## 2. 《On The Way To See Mum》

Lyrics: Yi SUN  
Music: Tony  
Translation & Arrangement: Shan MA

The wind blowing through willow *ma*  
*Swish-la-la-la-la-la*  
The water flowing in river *der*  
*Swash-la-la-la-la-la*  
Someone's missus  
Who's walking brisk and fast  
Turns out she's on her way to see her mum

Wearing a coat of red  
Having a flower on head  
Powder n rouge make her face bright  
Left hand's a hen  
Right hand's a duck  
Happy on back is a little chubby baby *ya*

身上还背着一个胖娃娃呀  
咿呀咿得儿喂

一片乌云来  
一阵风儿刮  
眼看着山中就要把雨下  
躲又没处躲  
藏又没处藏  
豆大的雨点往我身上打呀  
咿呀咿得儿喂

淋湿了大红袄  
吹落了一枝花  
胭脂和花粉变成红泥巴  
飞了一只鸡  
跑了一只鸭  
吓坏了背后的小娃娃呀  
咿呀咿得儿喂  
哎呀我怎么去见我的妈

### 3. 《瑶山夜歌》

原曲：刘铁山，茅沅  
填词：郭兆甄  
编曲：蔡克翔  
译文、编排：马山

灿灿明月，  
淡淡清风，  
瑶家山寨沉浸在溶溶月夜中。  
田野上飘来阵阵稻谷清香，

丰收夜，人不眠，  
到处起歌声。

木叶声声吹，  
铜鼓响咚咚；  
脸对脸儿跳个舞，  
手拉手心相通。  
嗨哟～，嗨嗨～，嗨依～，呀啰。  
嗨哟～，嗨嗨～，嗨依～，呀啰。  
耳环亮闪闪，  
彩裙翩翩舞；  
歌声环绕篝火飞，  
映得满天红。

*Yi-ah-yi-der-wei*

Gathering is a cloud dark  
Blowing is a wind fast  
Approaching is a mountain shower abrupt  
Nowhere for a hide  
Nothing as a cover  
Fat drops of heavy rain hit me hard ya  
*Yi-ah-yi-der-wei*

Red coat is in dripping wet  
Flower's blown off head  
Powder n rouge turn to mud of red  
Flies off the hen  
Runs away the duck  
Scared on back is the little poor baby ya  
*Yi-ah-yi-der-wei*  
Oh my, How can I go to see my mum

### 3. 《Mountain Yao Night Song》

Music: Tieshan LIU, Yuan MAO  
Lyrics: Zhaozhen GUO  
Music Arrangement: Kexiang CAI  
Translation & Arrangement: Shan MA

The moon is shining bright,  
The breeze is soft and light,  
Village Yao is soaked in the melting moonlight.  
Fragrant scent of rice is wafting, wafting over the fields,  
Harvest night, sleepless night,  
Songs arise on every site.

Leaf of woods sounds "deedee",  
Drum of bronze beats "dongdong";  
Face-to-face we're dancing,  
Hand-in-hand hearts engaging.  
*Heiyo, hohei, heiyee, yaloo.*  
*Heiyo, hohei, heiyee, yaloo.*  
Earrings are glittering,  
Colourful skirts are spinning;  
Around bonfire songs're soaring,  
Sky is reddening.

篝火暗了，  
月儿疲倦了，  
白色的浓雾为群山拉起幕帐。  
你听那年轻的朋友，  
把知心的话儿尽情弹唱。

Faded the bonfire,  
Tired the moonlight,  
Thick white fog covers mountains like a curtain.  
Listen to those young girls and lads,  
They're pouring out heart to each other.

耳环亮闪闪，  
彩裙翩翩舞。  
歌声环绕篝火飞，  
映得满天红。  
嗨！

Earrings are glittering,  
Colourful skirts are spinning.  
Around bonfire songs are soaring,  
Sky is reddening.  
Hi!

#### 4. 《大海啊，故乡》

#### 《Great Ocean, My Hometown》

词曲：王立平  
译文、编排：马山

Lyrics & Music: Liping WANG  
Translation & Arrangement: Shan MA

小时候妈妈对我讲  
大海就是我故乡  
海边出生  
海里成长

Mum told me while I was young  
Ocean is my hometown  
By its beach I was born  
Waves saw me up grown

大海啊大海  
是我生长的地方  
海风吹，海浪涌  
随我漂流四方

Ocean, ah ocean  
Where I was raised upon  
Blowing winds, and surging waves  
Accompany me in roaming around

大海啊大海  
就像妈妈一样  
走遍天涯海角  
总在我的身旁

Ocean, ah ocean  
You are Mother in every account  
No matter where I may go  
You are with me all along

大海啊故乡  
大海啊故乡  
我的故乡  
我的故乡

Ocean, my hometown  
Ocean, my hometown  
You are my hometown  
You are my hometown

#### 5. 《我和我的祖国》

#### 《My Motherland And I》

作曲：秦咏诚  
作词：张藜  
译文、编排：马山

Music: Yongcheng QIN  
Lyrics: Li ZHANG  
Translation & Arrangement: Shan MA

我和我的祖国

My motherland and I

一刻也不能分割  
无论我走到哪里  
都流出一首赞歌  
我歌唱每一座高山  
我歌唱每一条河  
袅袅炊烟 小小村落  
路上一道辙  
我最亲爱的祖国  
我永远紧贴着你心窝  
你用你那母亲的脉搏  
和我诉说

我的祖国和我  
像海和浪花一朵  
浪是那海的赤子  
海是那浪的依托  
每当大海在微笑  
我就是笑的旋涡

我分担着海的忧愁  
分享海的欢乐  
我最亲爱的祖国  
你是大海永不干涸  
永远给我 碧浪清波  
心中的歌

Can never be torn apart  
No matter where I travel  
An ode always flows out of heart  
I sing for every mountain  
I sing for every creek  
Village small, smoke curling up tall  
Tracks in the road  
Oh my dearest motherland  
Forever I will be close to your heart  
You use your motherly pulse  
Tell me your thoughts

My motherland and I  
Relate like ocean n waves  
Wave is child to ocean  
Ocean is wave's support  
Whenever ocean is smiling  
I am the swirl of her smile

I share all the ocean's sorrows  
I share all her joys  
Oh my dearest motherland  
You are the ocean which never dries up  
Always assures me blue water waves  
A song from heart



**Appendix**  
**Five Chinese Songs: Music Arrangement**

**1. Half A Moon Is Climbing Up High**

Music & Lyrics: Luobin Wang

Translation & Arrangement: Shan Ma

*Half A Moon Is Climbing Up High.*

Half a moon is climbing up high, Yi-la-la, climbing high.

{Shining up on my girl's dress-ing desk, Yi-la-la, dress-ing desk.}  
 {Why doesn't my girl show up in my sight? Yi-la-la, not in sight.}

Please open your win-dow wide, Yi-la-la, open it wide,

Yi-la-la, open it wide, And then pick a rose, ar-ise of you-rs,

gent-ly toss it to glide. gent-ly toss it to glide.

## 2. On The Way to See Mum

Music: Qingxi Weng (Tony); Lyrics: Yi Sun

Translation & Arrangement: Shan Ma

On The Way To See Mum

The wind blow-ing through wil-low ma swish-la-la-la-la-

la, The water flow-ing in ri-ver der swash la-la-la-la-la. Some-one's

miss-us who's walk-ing brisk and fast. Turns out she's on her way to see her

mum.

1. Wea-ring a coat of red hav-ing a flower on head,  
 2. Gather-ing is a cloud dark blow-ing is a wind fast,  
 3. Red coat is in dripping wet, fla-wer's blown off head,

pow-der n rouge makes her face bright. Left hand's a hen,  
 Approach-ing is a moun-tain show-er a-brupt. No-where for a hide  
 pow-der n rou-ge turn to mud of red. Flies off the hen.

right hand's a duck, happy on back is a lit-tle chubby baby ya,  
 nothing as a cover, fat drops of heavy rain hit me hard ya,  
 runs a-way the duck, scared on back is the little poor baby ya.

1. 2. 3.  
 Yi-ah-yi-der-wei. Oh, My! Oh, My!

How can I go to see my mum!

### 3. Mountain Yao Night Song

Music: Tieshan Liu & Yuan Mao

Lyrics: Zhaozhen Guo

Arrangement: Kexiang Cai

Translation & Arrangement: Shan Ma

Mountain Yao Night Song.

The moon is shining bright, the breeze is soft and light. Village Yao is soaked in the melting moon light. Fre-grant scent of rice is wafting, wafting o-ver the field, Harvest night, sleepless night, Songs arise on every site. Leaves of Woods sounds "deedee", Drum of bronze beats "dongdong". Face to face we're dan-cing, hand-in-hand hearts en-ga-ging. Hei-yo, ha-hei, hei-yi, ya-loo, Hei-yo, ho-hei, hei-yee, ya-loo. Ear-rings are glitter-ing, colourful skirts are spinning. Around bonfire songs soaring, sky is reddening. Faded the bonfire, tired the moonlight; thick white fog co-vers the mountain like a cur-tain. Li-stern to those young girls and lads, they are pou-ring out heart to each o-ther. Ear-ring are glitter-ing, colourful skirts are spinn-ing. Around bonfire songs soaring, sky is reddening. Hi!

#### 4. Great Ocean, My Hometown

Lyrics & Music: Liping Wang

Translation & Arrangement: Shan Ma

Great Ocean, My Hometown

$\text{♩} = 66$

Mum told me while I was young, O-ocean is  
my home-town. By its beach I was born, waves saw me up grown.  
O-ocean ah, O-ocean, where I was raised upon. Blowing wind, and surging waves,  
accompany me in roaming a-round. O-ocean, ah ocean, you are mother in every a-count  
No matter where I may go, you are with me all a-long.  
O-ocean, my home-town O-ocean, my home-town, you are my home-  
town. You are my ho-me-town.

5. My Motherland And I

Music: Yongcheng Qin

Lyrics: Li Zhang

Translation & Arrangement: Shan Ma

My Motherland and I

1. My mother-land and I can ne-ver be torn a- part.  
 2. My mother-land and I re-late like o-cean n wave.

No matter where I tra-vel, An ode always flows from my heart.  
 Wave is child to ocean, O-cean is Wave's sup-port.

I sing for e-very moun-tain, I sing for eve-ry creek.  
 Whenever ocean is Smil-ing, I am the Swir of her Smile.

Village small, Smoke curling up tall tracks in the road.  
 I share all the o-cean's sorrows, I share all her joys.

Oh, my dear-est mother-land, Forev-er I will be close to ur heart.  
 Oh, my dear-est mother-land, you are the o-cean which never dries up.

you use yo-ur mo-ther-ly pulse, Tell me your thoughts.  
 Always assures me blue wa-ter waves, A song from my heart.

Oh, my dearest mother-land, you are the Ocean which never dries up

Always assures me blue water waves, A Song from my heart.