



THE ART OF TRANSLATION

BY JIMMY TU

So often language is only thought of as a means of communication. But to some it offers great cultural significance and is regarded as a thing of beauty.

Language is a powerful instrument that both unites and divides the world. Translators act as that bridge between the cultural divide. One such translator is Sue Chang, a Taiwanese-American, who is currently a translator for an Asian entertainment site called *OneHallyu*.

We had the honor of interviewing Ms. Chang and learning more about the art of translating as well as her cultural Taiwanese upbringing.

Hello Ms. Chang, tell us a little about yourself! Where did you grow up? And where did you study?

I was born in Tainan, Taiwan - the southern part of Taiwan where Taiwanese is spoken more than the colloquial Mandarin. I don't remember much about my childhood in Taiwan because our family immigrated to Washington during the summer of 1995, when I was six.

I attended the University of Washington (Seattle) after graduating from high school, double majoring in English and Chinese.

What influences persuaded you to pursue a double major in English and Chinese?

Originally, pharmacy was my first choice when I first enrolled in college. However after taking few chemistry courses I seriously questioned my choice. I started thinking about what I really want to do, and it made me think about my Chinese roots and cultural background.

I'd say that my dad played a huge role when I was considering to major in Chinese. My parents are really traditional, especially my dad. Even after we've moved to a new country, he was especially firm on not forgetting one's roots. Therefore, he would require me and my brother to practice writing Chinese after we were done with our homework from school.

We would copy text from the Analects, writing line after line. Moreover, we would only speak in Mandarin at home. Because of this, my roots with the Chinese language were never lost to me.

Majoring in English came naturally to me when I decided to pursue the Chinese language. I started to translate for my parents after I started school because my parents weren't fluent in English. Therefore it was something that didn't require much thought because English and Chinese goes hand in hand for me.

"LEARNING WITHOUT
THOUGHT
IS LABOR LOST;
THOUGHT WITHOUT
LEARNING IS
PERILOUS."

CONFUCIUS

「學而不思則罔
思而不學則殆」



"NEVER PUT OFF
UNTIL TOMORROW;
WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY"

When did you first realize you had a knack for translating? What are some of the first instances where you translated for others?

As I said earlier, I started to translate for my parents since I was little so interpreting was something that I did on a daily basis. We used to run a vegetarian restaurant, and I would serve as the cashier/server while my parents would cook in the back. On the other hand, I didn't really start translating until middle school when I joined a Jay Chou forum (a famous Taiwanese singer), translating his songs from Chinese to English.

Is there a process or routine to how you do your translations? Are there any hurdles you face while translating?

First, I'll read over the text in order to get the general vibe of the piece. Chinese language has two forms: vernacular and classical.

Written vernacular Chinese is the easier one to translate because it's more colloquial. On the other hand, written Classical Chinese is akin to the English counterpart of Shakespeare where the language requires more knowledge in understanding the context, meaning, history of the characters.

Classical Chinese is extremely concise, compact where one character have lots of meaning based on context and features a different set of syntax.

Secondly, I look up any characters, proverbs, slangs, etc that are foreign to me. Then I begin translating by sentences. I would say the biggest hurdle for me in translating would be the grammatical aspect.

After fixing any grammatical errors, I type up the pinyin (pinyin is the romanized spelling for transliterating Chinese).

There are 2 common forms of pinyin: Hanyu Pinyin which is used in Mainland China and other parts of the world. Wade-

Giles is an older form of pinyin still commonly used in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

I use Hanyu pinyin because it is more commonly used it makes more sense to me. Finally I review what I've translated and make sure everything is correct.

Do you feel there are times things are often lost in translation? Are there culturally different phrases and metaphors that would be lost on someone who was not Chinese?

Yes. This is especially true with translating Chinese idioms to English. With translating, one has to take in the cultural roots of the text and with English and Chinese idioms encompassing great cultural differences, it brings difficulties to translation.

I feel that translation itself, always loses the original meaning. Therefore unless one knows the culture, the language, it would be difficult to grasp in the beauty of the text.

Thank You Ms Chang! It was a pleasure learning about your culture and translating. Any last words to our readers?

I'll end with this beautiful Confucian proverb. Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous. It sounds even prettier in Chinese.

「今日事今日畢」