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What Lies Behind Hope and Blessing for The Taiwanese Identity

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Prompt: A translation project or analysis (approx. 3000 words); either a short translation of literary work preceded by a translator's preface; or an analysis of different translations of the same work, even translations of the same work into different languages (e.g. translation of the same Hafiz ghazal into English and Spanish). 50 points (due during finals period)

Translation Theory Lit. 102, Winter Quarter 2015

What Lies Behind Hope and Blessing for the Taiwanese Identity

Taiwanese literature is a body of work that has been submerged in a myriad of cultures. From the Aboriginal tribal communities in Taiwan, this nation has had Dutch, Portuguese, Chinese and Japanese influences. All of these cultures have influenced the language of Taiwanese Mandarin which is the dialect used to express many genres of Taiwanese literature. This paper dives into understanding the socio-cultural and political influences on Taiwanese Mandarin and how that translates into English when working with bodies of literature. The primary source that I will be translating is a poem by 幾米 (Jimmy Liao). This poem is titled 幸福的滋味 (124-125). It was published in a small book of poetry called , 照相本子 (2001) , the literal translation of this title is *Photo Album*, but the official English translation on the cover is *The Moments*.

Blessing's Touch

幸福的滋味

¹*Even after , we did not feel the need to speak anymore*
後來，我們甚至不再說話了。

²*No longer did we open our eyes*
不再睜開眼睛。

³*We did not even (need to) wonder what the other one was doing
or to ask what the other one was thinking.*
不再在乎對方在做什麼，想什麼？

⁴*Even after, we fell asleep,*
後來，我們甚至睡著了，

⁵*blessings are not aware of sleeping*

幸福地不知不覺地睡著了。

⁶ *and as we were tossing in the midst of each other's dreams*
我們在彼此的夢中，

⁷ *Our blessings ever so slightly awoke*
幸福的慢慢醒來。

照相本子 is a book compiled with poetry written by Jimmy Liao, each of the poems capture some aspect of life that is related to nostalgic memories immersed in hope. As posted on a fan forum, "You find yourself identifying with the stories in Jimmy's books, which are about people who live in lonely and desolate urban environments but still make the best of it. His books reflect what life is all about nowadays and in his stories you can find reflections of yourself and a gleam of hope" (Huang, tr. Paul Frank) . With the semblance of hope intertwined into Liao's poetry in general and then the theme of 幸福 blessing in *Blessing's Touch* 幸福的滋味, let us take a look into how I arrived at using the word blessing and how this poem creates a semblance of hope that appeals within Taiwan's socio-cultural and political context.

Being a 1st generation Taiwanese-American and a fluent speaker of Taiwanese Mandarin , when I heard 幸福, I immediately thought of happiness. A dictionary definition (MDBG Chinese Dictionary. Holland, 2015. MDBG.net) simply says that 幸福 means happiness or blessed, but within that meaning the root found in colloquial usage has been lost and in English, happiness and blessing are two words that seem to be unrelated.

To find out more about this word. I spoke to my mom who grew up in Taiwan during the Chinese Martial Law period. I learned that my family is considered Native Taiwanese *benshen-*

gren (Lee, Williams, 2) meaning that my family was in Taiwan before the KMT Nationalist party colonized Taiwan in 1945 and even before the Japanese occupation of Taiwan in 1895 to 1945. I also learned that I have great-grandparents from an aboriginal village in Taiwan. After knowing my family's background, 幸福 started to take shape in a very different way. From my mom's point of view, 幸福 is a term that transcends time and it is used to denote blessing upon an individual or groups of people for long periods of time (Cheng, Charlotte. Personal interview. 6 Mar. 2015). An example of 幸福 being used, is that often times married couples are often wished by their friends to be 幸福, meaning that their friends hope that the married couple will be blessed in their marriage.

From this colloquial context, it can be seen that hope is often intertwined with blessing because one might generally hope for positive attributes and experiences for a certain subject. Within the literal translation of 幸福, to mean happiness, the definitions of happiness in written Chinese normally attribute to good fortune and blessing. This shows that happiness and the state of being blessed, are all interrelated to each other in Chinese culture.

The inter relative state of happiness and blessing in Chinese culture plays a role in Taiwanese culture because of Taiwan's martial law period where there was an ethnic cultural purge of Japanese culture, Aboriginal culture and other Taiwanese cultures that had intermarried with Aboriginal, Japanese or Chinese people that have settled in Taiwan before 1945 (Lee, Williams, 93-96). Taiwan's martial law period from 1945-1987, was a time of ethnic Taiwanese cultural cleansing also known as the White Terror where it was the beginning of the Taiwanese holocaust. It is estimated that 10000-30000 (Lee, Williams, 184) Taiwanese died due to government perse-

cution of being falsely accused to be communist or because they were simply against the Chiang Kai Shek Chinese regime. During this time, the Chinese culture was forcedly brought by Chiang Kai Shek and his followers and then enforced upon the Native Taiwanese. The Chinese refugees that fled with Chiang Kai Shek, had Chinese privilege to elevate themselves into higher social standing and often times had more social leverage economically compared to the Native Taiwanese (Lee, Williams 2).

Seeing as how there was a Taiwanese cultural cleansing that resulted in people seeing themselves as “Chinese”, Taiwanese people *benshengren* were forced to take on a false “Chinese” identity in order to assimilate into the government’s regime that was attempting to replace all influences of Aboriginal, Taiwanese and Japanese cultures with a dominant Chinese culture. In essence, trying to understand what is Taiwanese 幸福 during the martial law era is rather difficult. In order to even understand what is Taiwanese 幸福 in the Chinese Martial Law era, one must look at what does 幸福 *blessing* mean in a Chinese identity? Along with blessing, there are two other terms that are often paired with it. These terms are prosperity and longevity (China Culture. Ministry of Culture, P.R.China) 福 or “Fu” is the main component of the three terms. “Fu represents the common people's greatest expectations from life and reflects their dreams and desires from different angles and levels,”

Drawing from this definition of 福 It makes sense for 幸福的滋味 to describe blessings being tied into dreams as seen in these lines:

7 and as we were tossing in the midst of each other's dreams
我們在彼此的夢中，

⁸ *Our blessings ever so slightly awoke*
幸福的慢慢醒來。

It's also interesting to denote that 福 has an etymology that creates a rooted meaning of divine communication between God or heaven (Sears). The etymology of the word ties in a sort of spiritual significance between the people in Liao's poem. So in the poem, I wanted to create an atmosphere of connecting spirits from these two people, especially in the lines that denote the concept of "we" or a unity of two people in lines 1-5, 7-8, and how they were in the middle of each other's dreams as seen in lines 7-8.

Conclusively, the reason that I examined 幸福 through the Chinese lens is because this poem was written in Mandarin Chinese, yet the colloquial usage of this poem is under the identity of Taiwanese-Mandarin that is made up of several cultures. Because this poem is under several influences, this paper will be further examining the Japanese and Aboriginal histories and cultural identities intertwined into other parts of this poem so as to give a broader range to the socio-cultural and political implications of this poem and its translation.

Even though Japan only officially ruled over Taiwan for 50 years, Japan has had contact with the island even before 1895. Before that time period from the 1600s-1800s Taiwan was settled by various colonial powers from the Dutch, Portuguese, Han Chinese, and Japanese workers vying to take advantage of Taiwan's natural resources or to set up trading ports in Taiwan (Taiwan History: An Overview). During the beginnings of Japanese colonization, there was much resistance against the Japanese but during and after the end of the Chinese Martial Law era, cultural influence of Japan began to deeply resonate with the Taiwanese in creating warm sentiment

between the two nations (Homma, 222). This warm relationship between the two countries goes back to 1895 when Japan began to gradually expand economical foundations for Taiwan such as a standard school system and economical, sanitary and political systems (Homma 222-227). Also in interviews with elderly Taiwanese people, most of the older generation believed that the Empire of Japan has treated the Taiwanese more humanely than the Chinese Nationalist Party that aggressively pushed the Taiwanese into Han Chinese culture (Homma, 225).

Japanese-Taiwanese warm sentiment are even seen in Taiwanese pop culture like in films, television, fashion and food. Japanese culture is also seen in the household lifestyle of the Taiwanese through the introduction of Shintoism and the minimalistic style architecture (Homma, 225). For the Taiwanese language, specifically Hokkien, the reason Taiwanese is distinctive and has progressed to be much different than what was originally spoken in Fujian province of China, is because there are many word borrowings from the Japanese culture that influenced the language of this country. (Homma, 222-223)

Even on a political and economical level Taiwan has warm relations with Japan, even though China has very cold political and historical sentiment towards the Japanese. One of the largest implications of Taiwan and Japan's friendship was shown through the Tohoku earthquake in Japan in 2011. Taiwan was one of the nations that gave the most financial aid to Japan out of all the political nations to reach out to Japan. (Homma,224) Even though Japan does not officially recognize Taiwan as it's own autonomous nation, their friendship has been strong through decades of cultural, economical and political influence (Homma, 227).

With a short context of Japan's history with Taiwan, it is time to take a look into the Japanese influences on 幸福的滋味 poem. From 1895-1945, there was the gradual colonization of

Taiwan by Japan, by the 1920s, most Chinese printed books or articles were out of date and in replacement were Japanese printed texts such as news articles and books. Most of these Japanese printed texts were either written by Japanese immigrants in Taiwan or Taiwanese people that assimilated into Japanese culture. Through this Japanization of Taiwan, the influence of Japanese style literature can also be seen in Taiwanese poetry (Tu, 8-10) .

In 幸福的滋味, I wanted to interweave the wavering sentiment of hope that can be seen. This sentiment of hope intertwined with blessing coincides with the Japanese etymology of blessing that combines 祝 which means wishful and 福 which means blessing (Google Translate). The connotation of wishful lies in the boundaries of hope and so in the poem's usage of 幸福 . it takes on a more Japanese lens when looking at how the poem creates a vision of blessing waking up in line 7. So in essence this poem seems to imply that hope is a form of being blessed.

In addition, Japanese poetry tends to be minimalistic in length whereas Chinese poetry has the flexibility of being longer or short (Wheeler). From my own observations, Japanese poetry is also minimalist in terms of it's syllables and descriptions, which leaves much to the imagination (Poetry Japan: Haiku and Tanka). The minimalism in description and length is seen where 幸福的滋味 is a seven line poem and for each line there is not more than 13 syllables per line in the Taiwanese-Mandarin version. For the minimalist tradition in description, this trend is seen in this poem where the author does not aptly describe who the two people in the poem are, nor does he describe what the blessings mean to the people. He also takes out the forms of physical and tactile communication and instead uses one mode of communication in the poem, the form of

dreaming, in order for the two people to communicate. In Japanese poetry there is a lack of long wordy descriptions, this trait points to openness of interpretation and thus this parallelism can be seen in this poem as well. To keep to the tradition of minimalism, I did not want to use wordy sentences to describe the feelings of this poem. Instead I stuck to giving this poem an openness to interpretation for the reader by trying to create a dream like quality of fluidity and softness so as to gently beckon the reader to think about what the meaning of this poem has to offer for themselves.

Lastly, the Aboriginal 原住民 cultures have withered but persisted throughout about 400 years of colonization in Taiwan by both the Japanese and Chinese and other European counterparts. Most recently in the 2000s, Aboriginal people have been able to make their voices known (Tsai). A part of the reason for this uprising came from the Taiwanization period in the late 1980s when the issue of Taiwan's national identity came to the fore front. This period of a rising of national identity has also flowed into ethnic identity for the Taiwanese. The push for a distinctive national and ethnic identity has played strategic roles in Taiwan's literary movement in the 1990s just as Taiwan was coming out of Chinese Martial Law (Tsai).

The literature of the Aboriginal 原住民 people have often been suppressed due to the implications of colonization. Many aboriginal villages in Taiwan are suffering under the heavy consequences of colonization. From my own experience visiting an Aboriginal village called, Jian Tzu, or Sharp Rock, I learned the factors that play into suppressing these people groups. These factors included drug usage and alcoholism, a poor educational system and a lack of resources economically for these villages to thrive. Although a rise of Aboriginal cultural preservation has been at work since the 1990s and this is most notably seen in their literature. Walis Nokan, is an

advocate for preserving aboriginal cultures. He has been a leading figure in bringing literacy in the form of poetry to the elementary school in his aboriginal village, Atayal (Tsai). His poetry speaks of the suffering of colonization that the native peoples have had to endure and also the exploration of his cultural heritage.

Aboriginal 原住民 cultures in Taiwan are the panhandle of Austronesian cultures. These cultures have long been formally suppressed through ethnic genocide, even with this knowledge, about 1/4 of the Taiwanese population of *benshengren*, in fact do have a significant markers of Austronesian blood and genetic traits (Lee, Williams 93-96). This history stems from the late 1600s when only Han Chinese men were allowed to come to Taiwan and from that most of them had sexual relations with the Aboriginal women of the island (Lee, Williams 93-96). A mixing of heritage through religious customs, daily living customs and language customs were interchanged between the two groups. From knowing this, I wonder what sorts of Austronesian cultural influences are in the works of poetry by Taiwanese writers.

Just as the fan from a 幾米 forum mentioned how the author explores themes of hope in the most loneliest and sorrowful places (Huang, tr. Paul Frank), perhaps this poem can also identify with themes of the Aboriginal poems where the poets are exploring themes of finding hope in the midst of cultural preservation that is pitted against or even working with a culture in Taiwan that is still unraveling ways to preserve it's own national identity and ethnic identity. When exploring the concept mentioned from above, I want to bring up the concept of dreaming in 幸福的滋味 . In line 7, I added the word “tossing in the midst” to denote a sort of spiritual battle when dreaming. So when translating this work I wanted to take into account of the three most

prominent cultures that have influenced Taiwanese poetry. I wanted to take the influences of these cultures and bring it into the translation of the text. I wanted to have the resurfacing question of what are the dreams of the Taiwanese people that either identify as Aboriginal 原住民, *benshengren* 本省人 or *waishenren* 外省人. Both Aboriginal 原住民, and 本省人 *benshengren* , share a history of being colonized by dominant powers and for the *waishenren* 外省人, if they identify with Taiwanese nationalism, then they too face a looming threat of China wanting to dominate and recolonize Taiwan.

The reason I ask what are the dreams of the Taiwanese people, is to assert the notion of a distinctive Taiwanese identity in the Taiwanese literary scene that is mostly comprised of being written in the language of the colonizer, Chinese Mandarin. In Adorno's work, *On Lyric Poetry and Society* he talks of how instead of taking into the account of "so called social perspective or the social interests of the works or their authors" (38, Adorno) one must take into account how an entire society has the privilege of interpreting the art work (39, Adorno). I agree that society should be given the privilege to interpret art such as 幸福的滋味. From my own research, the artist 幾米 (Jimmy Liao) does not reveal much of his personal life and political views of Taiwan. The only relevant information that I can find is on his biography page on his website. Because of this lack of information from the author, this really gives the reader the chance to reinterpret what his work might mean for society especially for Taiwanese readers who are looking to find a part of their own identity in his work. The author himself also identifies nationally and ethnically as Taiwanese. Adorno points out that both knowledge of the work itself and knowledge of the society that the work is being exposed to, is important to compose the meaning of the work (39,

Adorno) .I believe that when translating this poem and contracting the context of Taiwan's socio-cultural and political background as well as examining the structure of the poem itself, these factors contribute to a body of translated works that should help to retain the originality and the history of Taiwan that is ingrained into the original and translated works of Taiwanese literature.

In a sense, this translation is a way of bringing about the decolonization of the mind in order to bring forth a culture and people that on the international stage is not known to even have their own distinctive identity because of the present day political power of China, but also there is the confusion of identity in the Taiwanese culture due to the past colonial powers persuading and forcing the Taiwanese people to subconsciously believe that they are a sub group that belongs to a more dominant cultural group (Lee, Williams,1).This wrestling with identity is prevalent as the two people mentioned in the poem through my translation and the original, are not even described as individuals but described as people communicating through dreaming. In fact their identities were communicated through the hopes of having their dreams be the reality of a blessing in life. Although at the end of the poem, their blessings or dreams become reality, that seems to hold symbolic significance that the Taiwanese identity has been struggling to come forth and assert itself for almost 30 years. With the semblance of hope their identity should continue to reemerge in every generation.

