

'There aren't many people whose names adequately describe what they are like in reality (and often the opposite is the case and the name represents something they need or lack...) ... But no matter how or in what manner, names inevitably become entangled with appearance and character in the process of creating a complete impression of a person.'

The Essential Is That The Name Be Right, Eileen Chang

The same might be said of names in novellas. There are no novellas or stories whose names fully reflected their contents. With this acknowledgement, the reader shall find it understandable that the author of the quote above, Chang, carefully leans the reader in a direction when naming the novella.

There are four Chinese characters, Qīngchéng Zhī Liàn (傾城之戀), in its original title. The first two, 'Qin Chen' (傾城), are suggestive of a femme fatale in which the heroine's beauty will compel people to behave contrary to their norm, literally leading to a city sliding obliquely into the earth, drawing a comparison to Helen of Troy. The love between the two, Liàn(戀), is a product of -- Zhi(之) -- this 'femme fatale'. With this impression created by its title, the reader is to find this novella darkly revealing the complexity behind marriage in terms of survival; Chang does not let her heroine struggle through traditional values unscathed, it does not set out to be a romantic story although some parts of it have to be associated with romance so as to create an 'equivocal contrast because it is relatively true to life' (Chang, Jones & Huang, 2005, p. 17). With surrealistic imagery of a city obliquely sliding into the earth due to a woman's beauty, Chang's title launches the reader into relishing the make-believe romance before he or she is awakened to a cruel reality; 'Qīngchéng' (傾城) refers to the city, Hong Kong, at war. It is this war that makes the protagonist, Fan Liu Yuan acts contrary to his better judgment and marry the heroine, Bai Liu Su.

Eileen Chang points out in *The Essential Is That The Name Be Right* that naming is 'a small scale of creation'. However, for the translator, there should be very little room, if any, for creativity. It is important to get the name right. Translated by Karen S. Kingsbury, a scholar who has years of experience teaching in both Taiwan and China, who intends to offer the English speaking reader the 'sensory experience' (Kingsbury, 2007) that she experienced herself, has faithfully translated its title into 'Love in a Fallen City'. The English title is suggestive of a 'love' which is largely motivated by the need for survival during wartime. Although it is not a romance that goes against all odds and passes the test of war, the translated title leads the reader to associate with a romantic story between two star-crossed lovers. The major divergence in the translation is that it creates no impression of a femme fatale, lacking Chang's intention to make an equivocal contrast through poetic fantasy.

Many critics say that Chang's novellas are dark and sad. Indeed, Chang denies her characters any naivete: there are no fairytale endings, even despair is a luxury. From Bai Liu Su's suffocating life in Shanghai to her first arrival in Hong Kong, the reader notices how Chang lightens the darkness of reality by caricaturing sibling and in-law rivalry.

After Mistress Four and other families have 'beat the drum', 'banged the drums', and said about Liusu being a liability 'straight out', it is Mrs. Xu who makes Liusu determine on 'gambling' her life chances. This part of the novel and its translation is important. To justify Liusu's unsentimental view of the cruel reality when interacting with Liuyuan afterwards, Chang has isolated her character with no confidante. Mrs Xu acts almost like a mentor with wisdom, compassion and useful advice, she is the start of Liu Su's new life. Mrs. Xu tells her,

*"Looking for a job won't get you anywhere. But looking for **a somebody**, that's the way to go."*

*“That kind of talk is for **the rich**, for people who don’t have to worry about food and clothing.*

*People who don’t have money can’t just give up, even if they want to. Shave your head, become a nun, and when you beg for alms you’ll still have to deal with **people**—you can’t just leave **the human race!**”*

「找事，都是假的，還是找個人是真的。」

「這句話，只有有錢的人，不愁吃，不愁穿，才有資格說。沒錢的人，要完也完不了哇！你就剃了頭髮當姑子去，化個緣罷，也還是塵緣 ----- 離不了人！」

Despite being a crude remark as such, sadly, it is still a truism to most women to this day. The first two Chinese character, ‘人’, apparently refers to ‘a man who provides a lifelong paycheck’ and ‘a rich man’; the translator has replaced the word ‘人’ with ‘a somebody’ and ‘the rich’. While ‘a somebody’ and ‘the rich’ rightly conveys the subtlety of Mrs. Xu without mentioning the need for ‘men’ straight out, the last translation ‘人’, ‘human race’, is also literally translated. The translated version follows the original Chinese version, subtly the reader is led to figure out on his or her own that companion in quest will have to be a reliable man. Therefore, Kingsbury does not translate ‘塵緣’ fully by reducing its complex meaning. ‘塵緣’, is the recurrent intricate connection with the ordinariness and the painful trivialities. By translating it into ‘human race’, the reduction of meaning directs the focus of the English speaking reader, who may find the concept of ‘塵緣’ odd and complicated, solely on Mrs. Xu’s view of how women ‘who don’t have money can’t just give up’, implying that despair is a luxury.

After Liusu’s arrival in Hong Kong, by using dialogue to reveal the calculations of Liuyuan, Chang has made him come alive. Fan Liuyuan, a man who womanises narcissistically appears too happy

to meet a woman like Bai Liusu, whose predicament and lack of experience strip her off all possible defence against his plan. To translate his snappy wisecrack is extremely hard. In the scene in which Liuyuan meets Liusu in Repulse Bay Hotel:

*Liuyuan laughed. "Did you realize? Your specialty is **bowing the head**."*

*Liusu **raised her head**, "What? I don't understand."*

*"Some people are good at talking, or at laughing, or at keeping house, but you're good at **bowing your head**."*

"I'm no good at anything," said Liusu, "I'm utterly useless."

*"It's the useless women who are **the most formidable**"*

柳原笑道：「你知道麼？你的特長是低頭。」流蘇抬頭笑道：

「甚麼？我不懂。」

柳原道：「有人善於說話，有的人善於笑，有的人善於管家，你是善於低頭的。」

流蘇道：「我甚麼都不會，我是頂無用的。」柳原笑道：

「無用的女人是厲害的女人。」流蘇笑著走開了道：「不跟你說了，到隔壁去看看罷。」柳原道：「隔壁？我的房還是徐太太的房？」流蘇又震了一震道：「你就住在隔壁？」柳原已經替她開了門道：「我屋裡亂七八糟的，不能見人。」

In the English version, 'bowing the head' and 'raised her head' risks misleading the reader to visualise Liusu as behaving too submissively, as if 'kowtowing' to Liuyuan. Although the reader is able to realise from the context that it means Liusu always lowers her head, a sign of constant self-

effacement, compromise and being agreeable, it would better be translated as ‘keeping your head down’ to imply the dual meanings of the Chinese phrase ‘Dītóu’ (低頭), which means ‘remaining inconspicuous in difficult or dangerous times’ (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). If translated to be ‘keeping your head down’, it will effectively show that the message articulated by Liusu using this body language, laying a thread to the reader that Liuyuan, despite his narcissistic personality, is able to see through Liusu’s shyness as strategy to survive. It foregrounds that Bai Liu Su’s self-denigrating remark, ‘I’m utterly useless’ not only reflects how inferior she feels about herself, it also emphasises her awareness to the power relationship she has to struggle through. In other words, it helps the English reader understand Liusu in a more rounded way, seeing through her witty survival strategy in dealing with the patriarchal values in society. Thus, it seems that there is a lack of effectiveness in bringing out Liuyuan’s wisecracks to translates ‘Tècháng’ (特長) as ‘specialty’. It would be better to translate it as ‘a special strength’, ‘a unique talent’ or even better, ‘a rare gift for’:

*Liuyuan laughed. "Did you realize? You have **a rare gift for keeping your head down.**"*

Despite this slightly less effective revealing of Liuyuan’s character, both versions handle his appraisal of the ‘useless women’ well. In Chinese the original wordings are, ‘Zuì lìhài’ (厲害), which often indicates a capability to inspire respect and fear (Oxford Dictionary, 2017); **‘the most formidable’** in the English version has retained this impression, highlighting the way in which Liuyuan sees through the passivity, self-denigration of most women. It also suggests that Liuyuan has met many ‘utterly useless’ women who impress him by pretending to be less smart than they truly are.

Narrating how war tests man's survival love, Chang writes about resilience as being more important than right timing, which is the coincidence that brings people together. This acceptance of everyday life as security against uncertainty is the positive, warming spirit of Chang. Holding on to something solid is therefore an important metaphor in *Love in the Fallen City*. Shortly before the Japanese air raid, Liu Yuan tells Liusu under the shelter of a wall:

“Someday, when human civilization has been completely destroyed, when everything is burned, burst, utterly collapsed and ruined, maybe this wall will still be here. If, at that time, we can meet at this wall, then maybe, Liusu, you will honestly care about me, and I will honestly care about you.”

「.....有一天，我們的文明整個的毀掉了，什麼都完了——燒完了、炸完了、塌完了，也許還剩下這堵牆。流蘇，如果我們那時候在這牆根底下遇見了.....流蘇，也許你會對我有一點真心，也許我會對

你有一點真心。」

However, after Liu Su has married Liuyuan, the wall is not visited ever again. This is because they are each other's protective wall — their relationship is something solid that they can hold on to. Together, they braved through 'yellow cliffs, then red cliffs, more red cliffs, then yellow cliffs again.' When Liu Su brings up the wall, Liu Yuan says, 'Haven't gone to check.' Despite sighing, Liusu lets go, 'Doesn't matter.'

Hong Kong's defeat had brought Liusu victory. But in this unreasonable world, who can distinguish cause from effect? Who knows which is which? Did a great city fall so that she could be vindicated?

「香港的陷落成全了她。但是在這不可理喻的世界，誰知道甚麼是因，甚麼是果？誰知道呢？也許就因為要成全她，一個大都市傾覆。」

In this translated text, the phrase 'Chéngquán' (成全) is translated as 'victory', such an over-translation aims to make the outcome clear, but in fact unwittingly distorts Chang's intention to be more open but grateful for the 'arrangement' of fate. In fact, when Liusu and Liuyuan cuddles in their bed, everything is rather blurred. Liusu has been scheming but she doesn't fight Liuyuan like a warrior. At least after the war has started, she has been relying on Liuyuan to go through a tough time in life. The fact that Liuyuan marries her as a result of the war is a surprise, even a shock for her. If this part could be translated in the way which corresponds with the title, it would be something like:

'The fall of Hong Kong drew a graceful arc for Bai Liu Su's quest for settling down with someone.'

By the phrase 'drawing a graceful arc', the reader is able to picture how 'Chéngquán' (成全) is completed with a suggestion of roundness — harmony. Kingsbury translated another 'Chéngquán' (成全) as 'vindicated', however, this may sound over translated again for it carries the meaning of avenging. A more moderate articulation could be:

Did the fall of Hong Kong pave a way for her?

Again, if the translator consistently uses 'the fall' instead of 'defeat' it would help the reader get a sense of cohesion.

As I read the same story in Chinese, I am trapped in the familiarity of Chinese tradition conveyed in the conversation between the Liu Su's families. The brutal, mean remarks of Fourth Mistress do not surprise me. It is as if the cliché ridden soap opera on TV is being played in front of my eyes, my visualisation of all does not fascinate me as the English translation, a language that filters away the feeling of familiarity.

Defamiliarization slows down the linear reading process, provoking the reader to be aware of the common things with renewed perception (Grodén et al, 2005). As a reader who has read most of Chang's works in the original many years ago, revisiting her works through the lens of an English speaking translator refreshes my understanding about the context in which the marriage in which Fan Liuyuan and Bai Liusu takes place, reexamining their interaction in terms of the power relationship, class and the interplay between the public persona and personal feelings.

The English version helps me notice the universality of ideas reflected by Chang. The reception by a reader living in a peaceful Hong Kong in modern times, is concerned with patterns of connection in literatures across both time and space (Bassett, 1993). In other words, I feel that there is a 'dialogic nature' (Bauer & McKinstry, 1991, p.189) between the English translated version and the original Chinese version. As some critics suggest, we can consider Chang as Jane Austen who takes off her gloves. For women, getting married is the best 'arrangement' for life, more like a lifelong paycheck; yet, Austen's characters do not admit this as crudely as Chang's. Mr. Darcy won't tell Elizabeth that her mother, Mrs. Bennet is like a pimp who sells off her girls as if they are

prostitutes; Fan Liuyuan has no reservation in acknowledging this, and he takes it as the most hurtful, heart aching aspect in his relationship with Bai Liusu.

It is said that many writers have wrestled with three Aristotelian questions: To whom? As whom? In whose interest? For Chang, she is not interested in observing society through a top-down intellectual gaze, like Jane Austen, who does not mention the great political events and wars of her day, Chang focuses on writing about what most other people would see as trivial and unremarkable life. It is because these are new and essential to the survival of ordinary people during the war time. The popularity of Chang's novellas in her time proves that there was a large audience that needed a mental space of understanding, where there would be no patronising lecture about revolutionary ideals, but something down to earth that offered a readily comprehensible and accessible emotional connection.

As her omnipresent narrator commented on both Bai Liu Su and Fan Liu Yuan:

He was just a selfish man; she was a selfish woman.

Chang does not consider that is shameful to attend to one's own needs : the essential is that one's needs are met. It is with survival that one can have other pursuits. In a society like today's Hong Kong when the road to a democratic, free society is long and rough, Chang's works are essential — before we talk about all ideals we need to acknowledge who we are, and how we connect with each other with compassion, empathy and acceptance. This is how the rediscovery of our humanity can begin.

As Calvino says, every rereading of a classic is as much a voyage of discovery as the first reading. A classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say, and bears upon them the traces of readings previous to ours, bringing in their wake the traces they themselves have left on the culture or cultures they have passed through.

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