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A Tautology or Two While We Translate Chinese Classics

Sabina Knight and Kidder Smith

What is a Chinese classic, and why do we translate one? These innocent questions lead Sabina Knight and Kidder Smith into a mandala of paradox, metaphor, and tautologies. En route they must negotiate a field of errant nouns, shifty images, and undisclosed participants. Relying on maps drawn by Borges, A. A. Milne, Quine, and Zeno, they find themselves in a landscape where little is certain and much is in transit—from here to here. The generic passports of poetry, prose, and philosophy have been stamped Invalid. So everyone acts like a resident alien. The authors discover that what they don't know is as useful as what they do. And, strangely, translations materialize.

Introduction

Sabina Knight: What do we mean by a classic?

Kidder Smith: A classic's a text with strong gravitational attraction. Lots of things are drawn to it. This gravity gets its force from our attention. Without that attention, the text just dies away.

Sabina Knight: So a classic competes in an on-going popularity contest? And we vote with our interest?

Kidder Smith: Yes, like the deities who inhabit a local shrine in China. For a few hundred years they receive offerings. But then the offerings may fall into neglect. And the deity disappears. Everything has a life and death, even a deity.

Sabina Knight: As I conceive it, the gravity you mention attracts attention in layers. Like the circles of orbiting bodies, great planets and tiny asteroids. When we read a classic in Chinese, straightaway it pulls us into a larger field, the commentaries.



Kidder Smith: Yes, the classics are that way, be they philosophy, history, or poetry. Those commentaries mean that the reader already finds an explicit conversation.

Sabina Knight: Even long novels come with commentaries, though fiction was a low-status genre. The *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglong meng* 紅樓夢, 1791) has inter-linear notes that translators never render into Western languages. It's too bad, because the commentaries begin the discussions that readers go on to study and debate.

Kidder Smith: Yes, those conversations are built right in. And all this reminds me of what Hindu psychology calls a "subtle body"—a nonmaterial extension all around the text. But the conversation is much more diffuse than that. It's with everything that the "culture" throws at you.

Sabina Knight: Reminds me of Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

Kidder Smith: Exactly. Wittgenstein examines street sign markers. Oh, just put up an arrow to indicate a one-way street. But someone might not know what the arrow signifies, so you could write on it "one-way street." But someone might not know what "one-way street" means, so you could give them the whole booklet of traffic regulations. No separation.

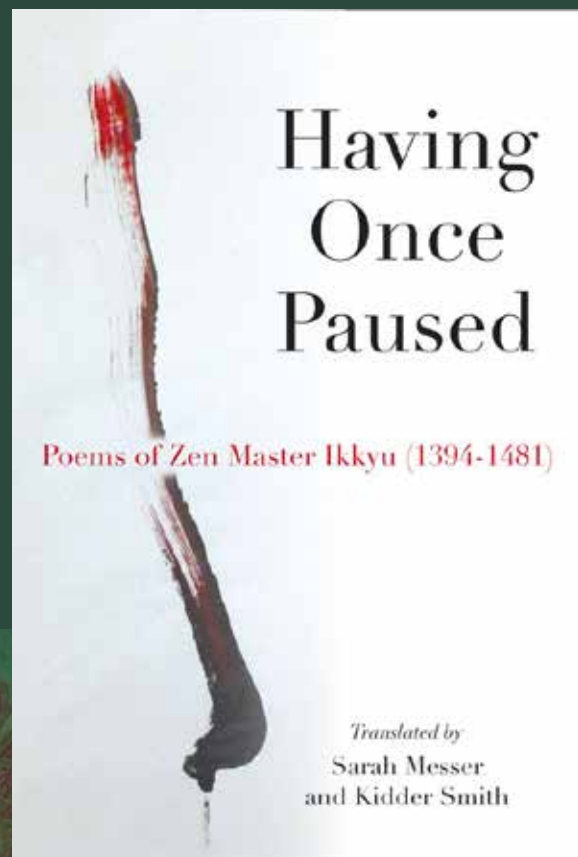
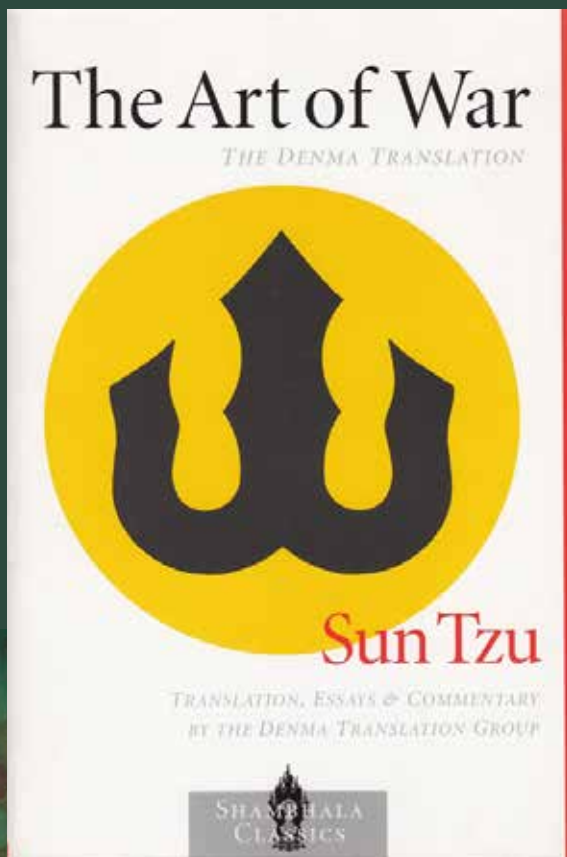
Sabina Knight: If you see no separation, why, in your *Art of War* (*Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法) translation, did you put the commentary at the end? The traditional presentation of the *Sun Tzu* (*Sunzi* 孫子) mixes the commentary in with the text.

Kidder Smith: From the perspective of separation, separation is a problem. But from the perspective of non-separation, separation is a non-problem. We stick it at the end of the book, after people have had a chance to examine the bare text (which of course is only bare to them). Then, if they have questions, they can get a bit of help. But they need to go looking for it.

Sabina Knight: You handle commentaries differently in your other translations. I'm thinking in particular of your translation of Ikkyū 一休 (1394–1481), the fifteenth-century Japanese Zen master. Do you want to explain why?

Kidder Smith: Most Chinese poetry is filled with allusions. But Ikkyū goes much further than most poets, with frequent allusions pulled out of the full range of China's cultural history. He draws as well from a wide variety of Buddhist texts, including kōans.

Sabina Knight: And as far as I know, Ikkyū never explained an allusion in his life. He simply assumed a



readership as well educated as he. It's not clear, though, how many readers he had in medieval Japan. And today's readers will be even more in the dark. So what do you do as a translator?

Kidder Smith: Translators have generally chosen one of two solutions to this richness: some have expanded Ikkyū's line to include as much information as possible, while others have added extensive annotations.

Sabina Knight: I can imagine the drawbacks of both, especially as publishers don't want numerous footnotes.

Kidder Smith: Yes, so for this project we developed a new approach. We wondered, what would fifteenth-century readers bring with them to Ikkyū's work? How could we reproduce that knowledge for a twenty-first-century audience? Our solution was to write a brief essay to introduce each poem, identifying Ikkyū's otherwise invisible interlocutors through a mixture of story, translation, history, and lore.

Sabina Knight: What about interpretation or analysis?

Kidder Smith: These essays are more assemblages than narrative, one piece placed beside another until they create a cloud of knowledge.

Sabina Knight: It's funny you say that about Ikkyū. Because a cloud might be the way I'd characterize Li Bo 李白 (701–762), perhaps China's greatest poet. Would you want to compare *Having Once Paused* with your new book, *Li Bo Unkempt*?

Kidder Smith: When Ikkyū invokes a story, it's always very pointed. You know who the actors are, and why. But Li Bo invokes landscapes and inscapes, alternative axioms of reality, the moon. So the Li Bo book has many long digressions—tendrils that somehow attached themselves to his verse, somehow to my mind.

Sabina Knight: Then there's always the *I Ching* (*Yijing* 易經), the Book of Change, which multiplies these unknowables through further dimensions. It gives us sixty-four images in sixty-four hexagrams made up of solid and broken lines, like ☰. Each has a name. This one's called "attending" (*xu* 需). Early on, each acquired a text, and each text attracted commentaries. Is it a book of wisdom? A fortune-teller's guide? Abstruse poetry? All you have is image and advice, like "It's profitable to ford the great water."

Kidder Smith: The *I Ching* is only a collection of opinions—in practice it's about how to sustain uncertainty amidst all these hypotheses. Now *that's* a modern practice. And so we swim in these.

Sabina Knight: When you say that we swim in uncertainty, amidst all the hypotheses, what do you mean by "swim"?

Kidder Smith: Oh, you know, just paddle about in them. The meanings sometimes engulf you, sometimes you surf them. It's a bit like Pooh Bear, when he has to travel forth on a honey jar he's made into a boat. He climbs on, it turns over, he gets wet, he climbs back on. Milne remarks, "It took a while for them to decide which one was to be on top." Words are like islands in the ocean. The ocean is the soup we've spoken of. You can navigate between them, and try to land on them, and so on. They have relationships with one another.



Sabina Knight: And maybe the deeper you go into the soup, the more you realize that all the islands are just parts of the surface of the earth.

Kidder Smith: John Donne claimed that “No man is an island,” but no island is an island, either.

Sabina Knight: And there is always the sky.

Kidder Smith: Yes, and sometimes islands float away. This was the problem for Doctor Doolittle in chapter five of his *Voyages*—an island that was supposed to be off the coast of Brazil drifted toward the Antarctic, and had to be pushed back north by whales.

Who Knows?

Sabina Knight: Why do we translate classical Chinese literature?

Kidder Smith: We don’t know. Love doesn’t ask why.

Sabina Knight: So true. As Pascal says, « Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point. » The heart has its reasons that reason cannot know.

Kidder Smith: Yes. And the heart has its reasons that the heart itself does not know. Not at all. People speak of emotional IQ, and so on. So we could speak as well of Love as an organ of knowledge. The way the physical body is an organ of knowledge, albeit opaque to us—we have no idea how we even raise our arm. And literature, especially poetry, is sweet because it makes demands on us that ordinary knowing cannot satisfy.

Sabina Knight: What knowing *would* be ordinary? Many people know sex. And maybe know the Divine through good sex. After love and sex, maybe poetry would be a close third. Especially as people hear it in blues, pop, rock, or rap. Song lyrics are poetry, no longer ordinary, if they ever were.

Kidder Smith: Ordinary knowledge knows a lot of Love. That it is demanding, uncompromising. That it is complete. That it does not stop. That it translates anything into beauty. That it is endlessly generous.

Sabina Knight: Might that understanding let us approach poetry too?

Kidder Smith: Sure, and poetry will write us love letters like this, and inhabit us like this, and then something interesting might happen. We don’t know.

Sabina Knight: We do know that the poem is there, speaking to us if we notice. So how does a poem come to be?

Kidder Smith: The usual way. Like anything. A Daoist might say that from “unknowing Nothing” (*wu* 無) emerge energies (*qi* 氣) dark and indistinct, and from these energies coalesce the “Ten Thousand Things” (*wanwu* 萬物).

Sabina Knight: In case your answer doesn’t speak to readers unfamiliar with the *Daodejing* 道德經, can you give a concrete example?

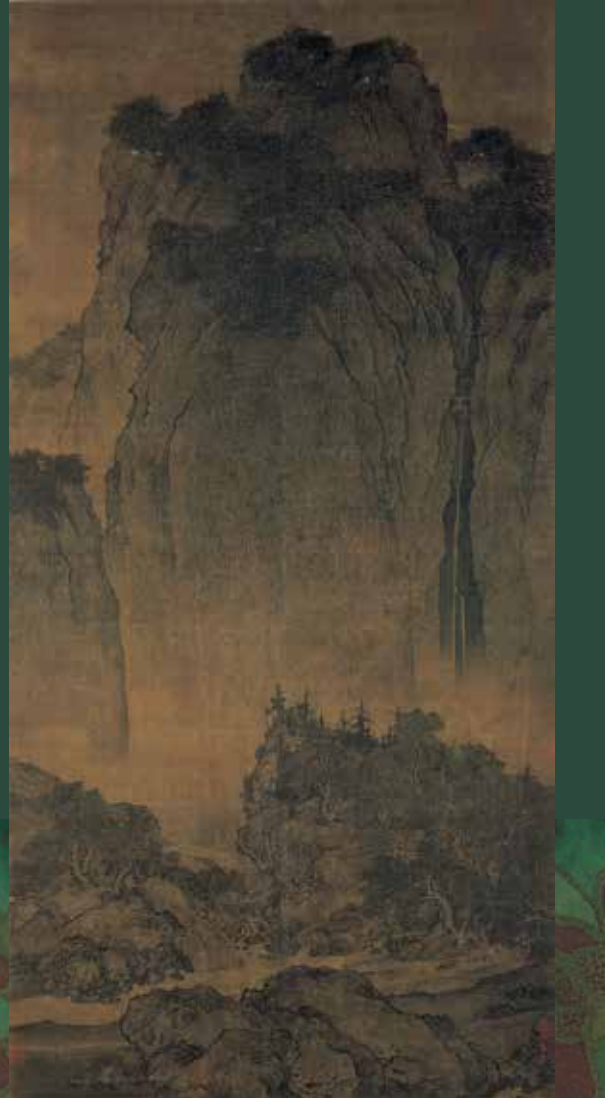
Kidder Smith: Sure. It’s like the man who goes to the doctor.

The doctor says, “Sir, you’re pregnant.”

The guy asks, “How can a man get pregnant?”

“Oh, the usual way. You go out for dinner, have a few drinks, go dancing.”

You see, the guy asked “How,” because he already knew it was true.



Sabina Knight: When I asked how a poem comes to exist, I meant my question on a more practical level. You're saying that the Daoist "unknowing Nothing" is a beginning, the dark energies are a middle, and we end up with a poem that contains little pieces of the Ten Thousand Things. Still, how does a poem itself come to have a beginning, a middle, an end?

Kidder Smith: Yes, those three heuristics. Each with its own way. Starting off from an unnamable, we get to the soup, all in Brownian motion, like dust particles colliding with each other under a microscope. But it's an alphabet soup. We make words from these letters, and these words make a poem. And this poem nourishes us.

When the Baal Shem Tov (c. 1698–1760) was shipwrecked and forgot *every thing*, the letter Aleph א was all he needed to hear, and everything came back.

Sabina Knight: I know only a little about the Chassidic tradition, but I do remember the Baal Shem Tov's conviction that revealing the Torah of the heart is more important than studying the Torah of the mind. That said, I don't remember a Baal Shem Tov parable about Aleph א. Can you tell me the story?

Kidder Smith: It's such a short story, like the letter א! The Baal Shem Tov and his disciple, they were on their way to the Holy Land, and their ship went down, and they woke up on an island, not knowing anything at all. "Help," he said to his student, "do you know anything at all?" "I only know the letter Aleph א," he replied. "That's all we need! Now the whole alphabet will come back, and all words, and all the worlds."

The Noun Problem

Sabina Knight: What aspect of translation do you find most vexing?

Kidder Smith: Nouns.

Sabina Knight: I agree, especially when it comes to ancient Chinese. Classical Chinese texts often abjure static things and categories. Certain scholars, and I'm one, see verbs as the engine of classical Chinese. In Indo-European languages, the predominance of nouns foregrounds essences and substances. In making verbs central, Classical Chinese emphasizes processes of change.

Kidder Smith: Ahh, and Borges rescues us in another way. The languages of Tlön offer two ways out:

In the southern hemisphere there is no word corresponding to the word "moon," but there is a verb which in English would be "to moon" or "to moonate." "The moon rose above the river" is *hlor u fang axaxaxas mlo*, or literally: "upward behind the onstreaming it mooned."

In the languages of the northern hemisphere the prime unit is not the verb, but the monosyllabic adjective. The noun is formed by an accumulation of adjectives. They do not say "moon," but rather "round airy-light on dark" or "pale-orange-of-the-sky" or any other such combination.



Li Bo uses the word “moon” 300 times in his 1,000 poems, and each time it’s going somewhere different. It has its own mind, which we only vaguely discern.

Sabina Knight: Willard Quine found this vagueness upsetting. He countered it with his idea of “radical translation.” In his thought experiment, an intrepid linguist sets out into the field, only to discover a lot of rabbits and indigenous people who pronounce what sounds like “Gavagai” whenever a rabbit passes by. After suitable testing of this stimulus-response situation, the linguist concludes that the natives may mean something like what he’d mean when he says “Lo, a rabbit!”

Kidder Smith: But, Quine argues, though this *may* be a good translation, it is not objectively correct. Such cannot be—after all, we have only shabby knowledge of the informants’ intention, among other contextualities, and the possibilities are literally endless.

Sabina Knight: And so the indeterminacy may be far more radical than Quine ever dreamed. Quine thought translation was still possible, even as he grasped that it could be only “multiply possible.” For Quine translation ultimately questions the very existence of objective

propositions, the currency in which his philosophy is denominated.

Kidder Smith: I think he really believed there were such things as words and objects.

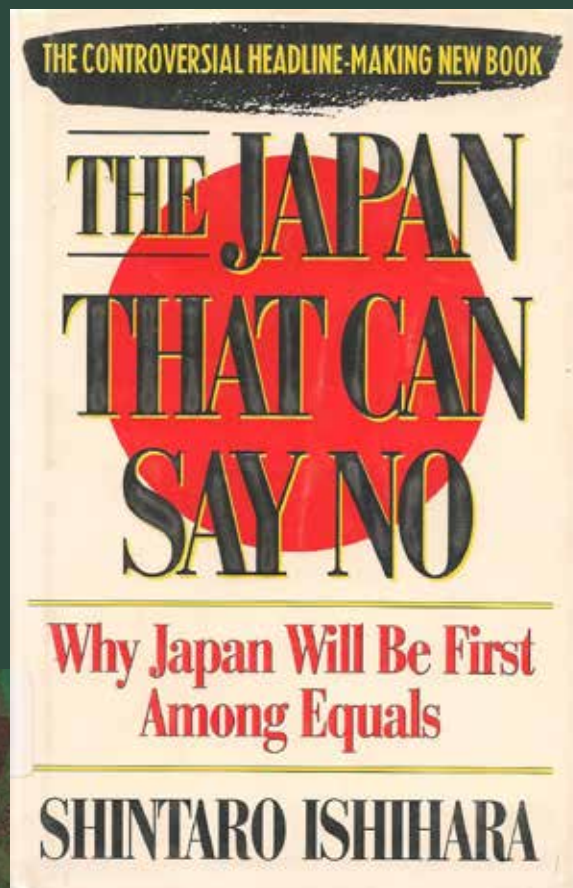
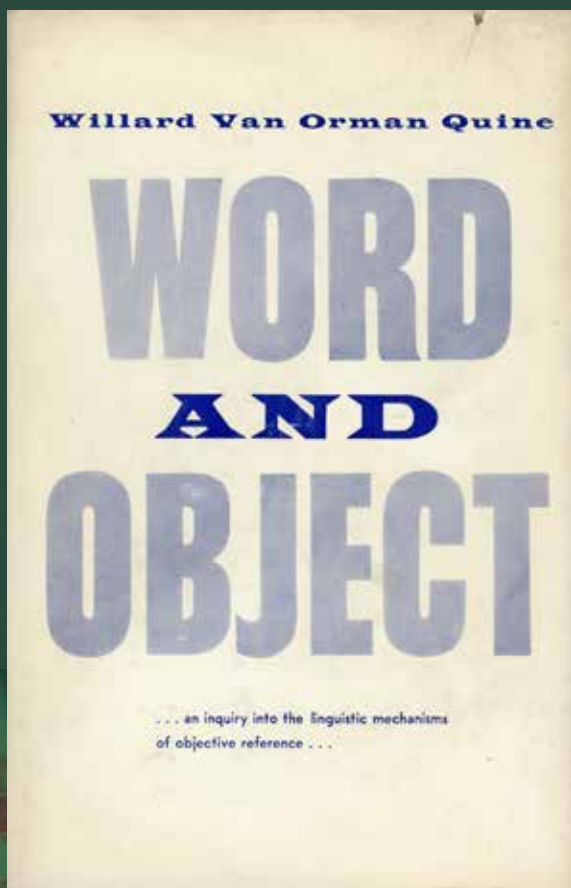
Sabina Knight: At the core we may find certain untranslatable, symbolic orders that can’t be made into other words.

Kidder Smith: Some are pretty simple, like the word “No.” In his 1989 essay *The Japan That Can Say “No”* Shintarō Ishihara found himself impaled upon English, so the book’s Japanese title is “No” to Ieru Nihon 「NO」と言える日本。

Sabina Knight: Or like the hexagrams of the *I Ching*. What can you say about such ambiguous symbols?

Kidder Smith: It’s because you can’t say anything that the commentators have said everything. Beginning at least with Confucius.

Sabina Knight: Maybe Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) gets it right? I mean in his injunction to go directly to the hexagrams.



Kidder Smith: Yes, he is the only one. Confucius wrote the first commentaries. But instead of praising the First Sage, Zhu Xi condemns him for putting obstacles in the way of understanding. Go to the hexagrams, he says. Not even to their names, but to their configurations. And then go to the understanding from which the configurations arose. No translations! No explanations! Just do it. Completely uncompromising. (Smith et al., *Sung Dynasty Uses*, 223ff.)

Sabina Knight: So the names are inevitably a shady business practice. Whatever we call it, the named becomes like a shadow with huge holes in it. It's often so disfigured that it's unrecognizable as the subject that might be casting the shadow.

Kidder Smith: It can get worse. "Lo, a momentary rabbit," says Quine. But where the heck did that rabbit come from? Ask Zhu Xi. He'll direct you to mind training. If we take him seriously, our graduate studies must be supplemented with strict and assiduous esoteric practices. Until there's nothing left. But to swim.

Sabina Knight: So various other scholars have written commentaries, whereas for Zhu Xi they were just making problems.

Kidder Smith: Two Jews are arrested in Warsaw for being Jewish. The Nazis are about to shoot them. "Before you shoot us, may I have a last cigarette?" one asks. His friend says, "Shmuel, don't make problems!" He's right—just pull the flipping trigger.

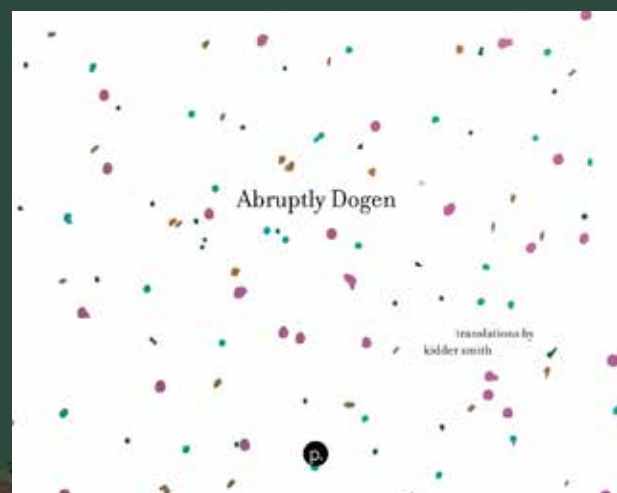
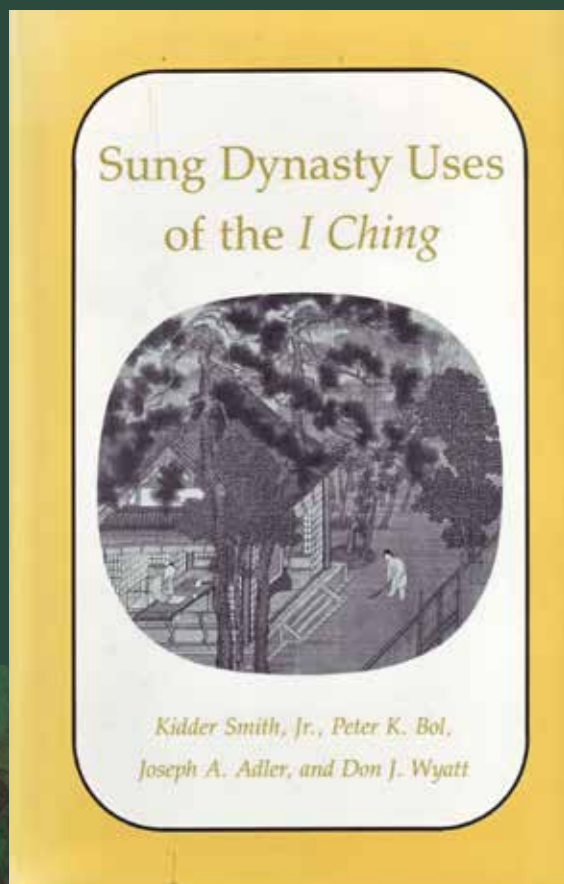
Untranslatables

Kidder Smith: That anecdote reminds me of Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), the Japanese monk. He says:

Right now, we mountains and waters,
we embody old ways, with you, on
thrones, we accomplish all activity.
This life, from before something or nothing,
secrets of riding cloud and wind.
Green mountains constantly walking.
Holding all activity, constantly abiding,
constantly walking. Because it's walking, it's
constant. Please look at this closely.

Sabina Knight: Perhaps Dōgen is untranslatable.

Kidder Smith: Absolutely. Giving with one hand, taking away with his left foot. Sliding dimensions of knowing in



through the middle of other dimensions. In the words of an old hymn, “Unresting, unshaking, and silent as Light.”

Sabina Knight: So we could say that, in practice, translation is not different from writing?

Kidder Smith: Quite so. Both are a bringing down of the (((what))). If you’re a nihilist, you’ll call that “what” a Nothing. If you’re religious, you’ll call it Divine. If you like murder novels, you’ll call it Mystery. Same same. A practice of great devotion. The possibility that something will be revealed.

Sabina Knight: So the divine descends and in doing so translates itself. Always tumbling down. Octavio Paz felt that the “original” was the first translation.

Kidder Smith: The mother pour, yes. Sometimes it goes well, sometimes badly. Zeno saw Achilles running and knew Achilles always got only half way there before he could get all the way, and then half of the remaining distance, and again half, forever. He never gets there, too many half-lives to run.

Sabina Knight: This is just a bad translation. Zeno’s paradox arises because he was speaking math as it was known before Leibnitz and Newton.

Kidder Smith: Achilles runs to a different algorithm. He could run before he could count past three. As in *One Two Three. . . Infinity* by George Gamow.

Sabina Knight: Math didn’t know the word “Whole” until Leonard Euler popularized Σ in the eighteenth century to denote the sum of an infinite series: half of x and half of that and so on infinitely only equal x . Space and time don’t translate well into Zeno.

Kidder Smith: Achilles’ running is otherwise not paradoxical at all. He just does, and he gets there, and then maybe he goes out for a cigarette, we don’t know. Zeno wanted to capture the feminine matter/*mater* within the masculine realm of math. So it’s like a sex-change operation. You can stir molten chocolate into cake batter. But you can’t un-stir it. Most things go in only one direction. Once you wink your eye at someone, you can’t un-wink it. Unwinking just means not winking.

Sabina Knight: It took a village of scientists to translate a light bulb into something that can change both ways.

Kidder Smith: We are always grateful to them for this.

Sabina Knight: Theorists of translation now sometimes speak of an original text and its translation as a guest and its host. Lydia Liu used this metaphor to suggest something new and important. Still, a better metaphor might be teacher and student. The originating text is our teacher. We venerate it. We seek to preserve its noble qualities. We fail. But the teacher says, “Keep trying. See if you can speak my heart in your own words.” Eventually we may find sufficient confidence to say what we’ve learned.

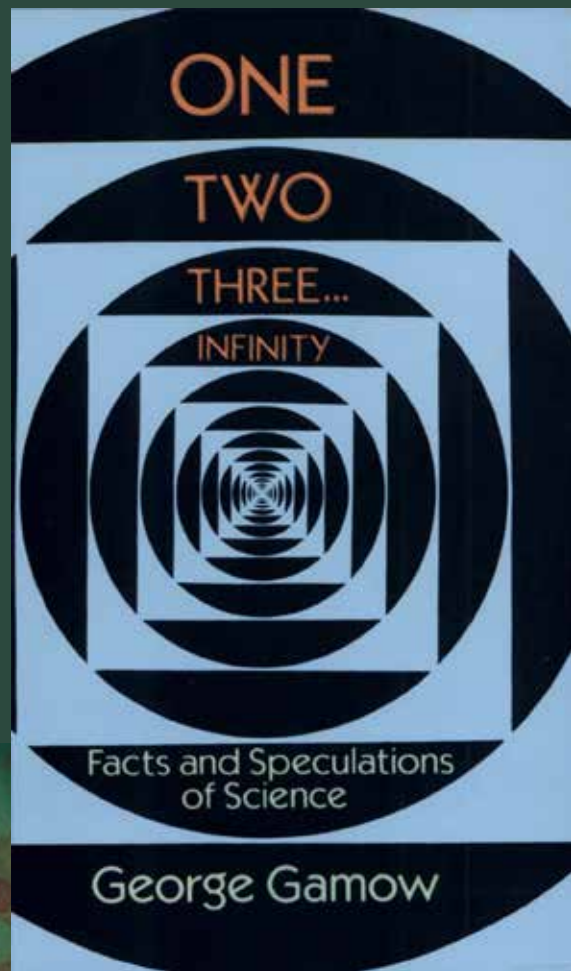
Trans

Sabina Knight: This teacher-student bond is also how musicians make music.

Kidder Smith: You may know the Bach sonatas that are usually played on unaccompanied violin. Lutenist Hopkinson Smith transcribed these sonatas for his instrument, in the process adding about 30 percent new material, primarily in the bass register. The British magazine *Gramophone* called it “the best recording on any instrument.”

Sabina Knight: So the teacher is born in a new body.

Kidder Smith: Yes. It’s not so different from the Hindu theory of reincarnation. A something becomes a some-



thing else, so it's not the same something. Nor entirely different. When you eat a rabbit, the rabbit becomes you. Sort of.

Sabina Knight: Translation, then, implies movement. Trans, with the sense of "across, through, over, to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of, from one place, person, thing, or state to another" (*OED*, trans, s.v.).

Kidder Smith: Another damn paradox. Quite so, translating is a movement.

Sabina Knight: And when it stops moving, you have a translation.

Kidder Smith: But I had a friend, a colleague at Bowdoin. I dropped by one of his classes, and he was asking his students, "How does Heidegger say we go from here to here?" If you've only got a here, how do you get here? Or anywhere? I think as translators we are oath-bound to honor this, so that when we go from here to here, we have no illusions about it.

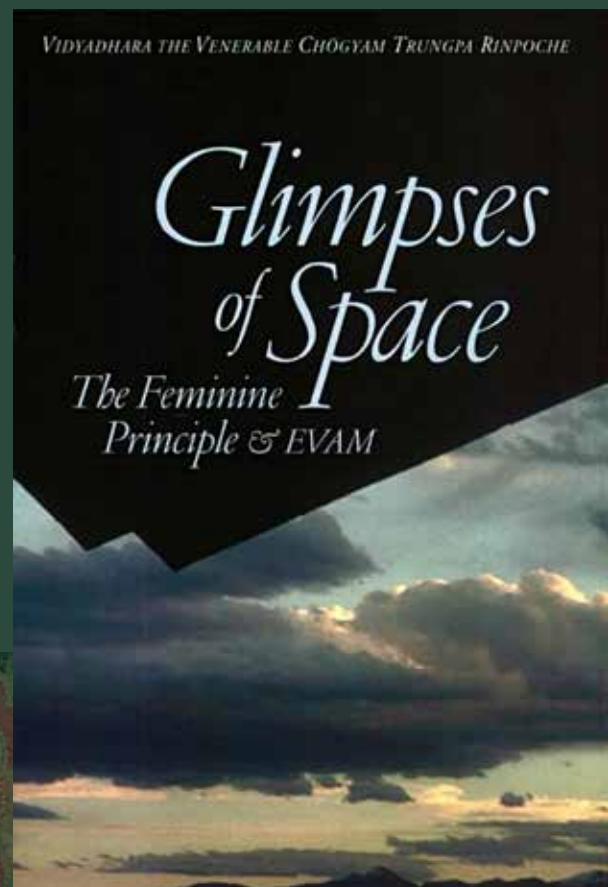
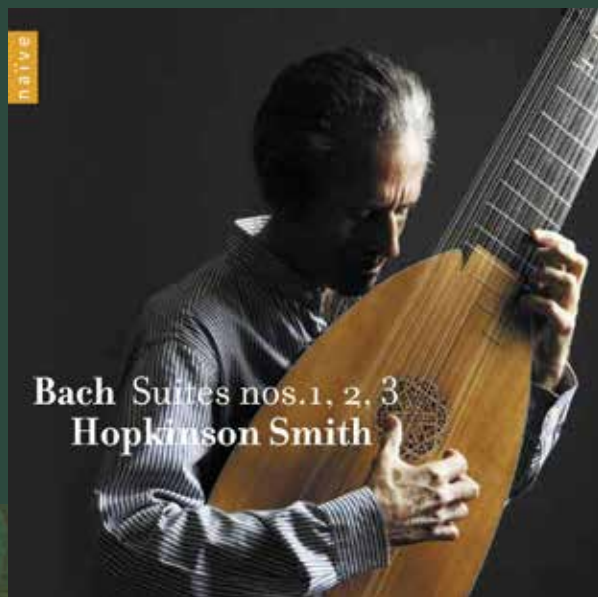
Sabina Knight: And something more subtle is going on. All the time. In between the words. No?

Kidder Smith: Yes. In "The Feminine Principle," Chögyam Trungpa addresses what underlies these movements.

On the quiet, the unborn begins to manufacture a world, an underworld, in mid-air, the bottom of the ocean. It cannot be obstructed or prevented. If this underground world is very active, the overground world of the established administration cannot see it. We are talking here about the black market of the mother. It is some kind of invisible atomic bomb that's been manufactured in the basement. (12–13)

Sabina Knight: And what is that? A poem?

Kidder Smith: Yes, but something still more subtle is going on. All the time. An activity. In between, and between every reference point we can conjure. And consuming these reference points, so that "from here to here" is just a pale simulacrum of the tiniest portion of this constant intercourse. So there is movement, "trans," and there is here, and it is intensely vibrant, but, at the same time, nothing happens. If there even is a same time.



Sabina Knight: We make a quick nod to the venerables—accuracy, euphony, et cetera—and keep moving. But what makes a translation acceptable?

Kidder Smith: That we accept it. It's like what makes someone lovable, it's that we love them. Here are two acceptables of some lines by Du Fu 杜甫 (712–70) from the seventh of his nine poems of a soldier on the frontier (《前出塞九首》之七). One is by me, and one is by a friend, Kid Cooper Levy.

徑危抱寒石，指落層冰間
已去漢月遠，何時築城還
浮雲暮南征，可望不可攀

The trail is dangerous.
We hug the icy rocks, but our fingers slip off.
Long ago we left to build the Wall.
When will we go home?
Clouds float in the dusk.
We see them but can never climb them.
In paths perilous I hold a boulder, grown colder,
losing my damn grip.
Hand's slip, land on what once was a man's hip.
Moon used to come round town but he had to dip.

Hey, I forget. . . did we build the great wall yet?
See the setting sun?
Tonight, we ain't getting none.
In the twilight night where do the clouds travel?
Can't really see much beyond the gravel.

We could go further. Here is the first line from the poem by Wang Zhihuan 王之渙 (688–742) that opens your *Chinese Literature: A Very Short Introduction*. In conventional translation, the poem begins:

The Yellow River flows into the sea.

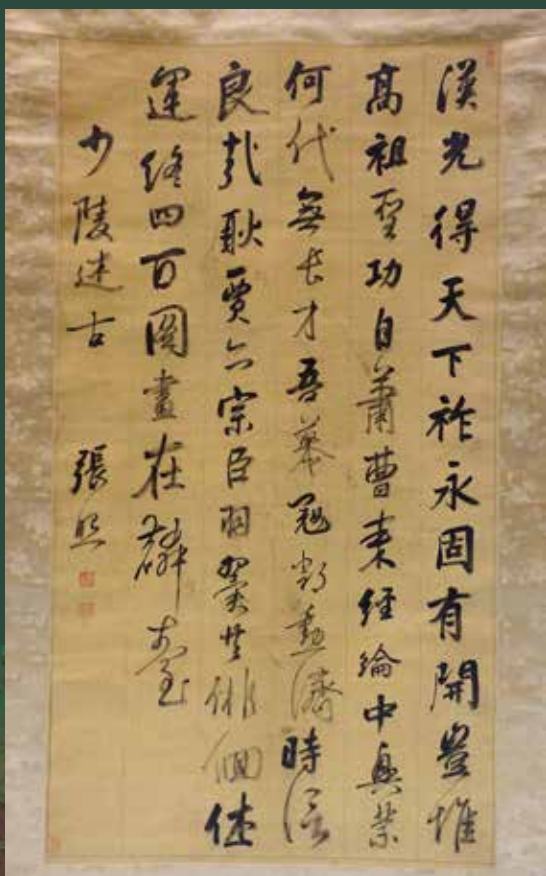
黃河入海流

A friend translates this line as “Lunchtime.” She explains, “Yellow is egg is lunch, and flow is time.” A picnic.

We like these two for different reasons. We could adduce various reasons for these reasons.

Sabina Knight: And such reasoning opens further possibilities.

Kidder Smith: Or closes them off. It's really up to us. Acceptability has its reasons. Love leaves them in the dust.



Leonard Cohen said to his teacher Jōshu Sasaki, “M.P. is a real Zen student. He never misses a meditation session.”

“That is not Zen. That is. . . com-pu-tah.”

“What is Zen, Roshi?”

“Oh, you know. It’s like music or poetry. The spiritual life charms you or it doesn’t.”

Images beyond the World of Forms

Sabina Knight: How do we work with images?

Kidder Smith: Well, as John Thorpe puts it,

Poets have an easy time with images because they are so rife, or they have a hard time with images because they are too rife. Any loony-bin harbors idiot-savants of image who go on and on. (*Poetry as Air Traffic Control*, n.p, n.d.)

Sabina Knight: “Image” is also rife in the discourses we call poetics. The Purdue On-line Writing Lab tells us why we need poetics:

What is an image? This is a question that philosophers and poets have asked themselves

for thousands of years and have yet to definitively answer.

Kidder Smith: And “Image” can also translate the word *xiang* 象, as explains Isabelle Robinet, the scholar of Daoism:

The *xiang* are images that make things apparent; they are part of reality, and inherently contain and manifest the cosmic dimension of things and their structure. This is why the *xiang* are often considered to be the “real forms” (*zhenxing* 真形) of things, or the “fundamental substance” (*ti* 體) of beings. They are visible but lie before and beyond the world of forms. They allow us to understand the world and to get along in the universe; hence they are guides and models of conduct. (1086)

Sabina Knight: Are images, then, a layer between Nothing and Something, mystery and form?

Kidder Smith: Also an intermediary—a message and a communication. Before it all gets so solid that you can’t see a thing but things.

Sabina Knight: “Image” *xiang* 象 can also translate the word metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson maintain that *all* discourse is metaphor. Conceptual metaphors underlie how we understand one conceptual domain in terms of another. When we say, “I won that argument,” we at once cast argument as warfare, and the blood of the battlefield domain bleeds into that of dispute.

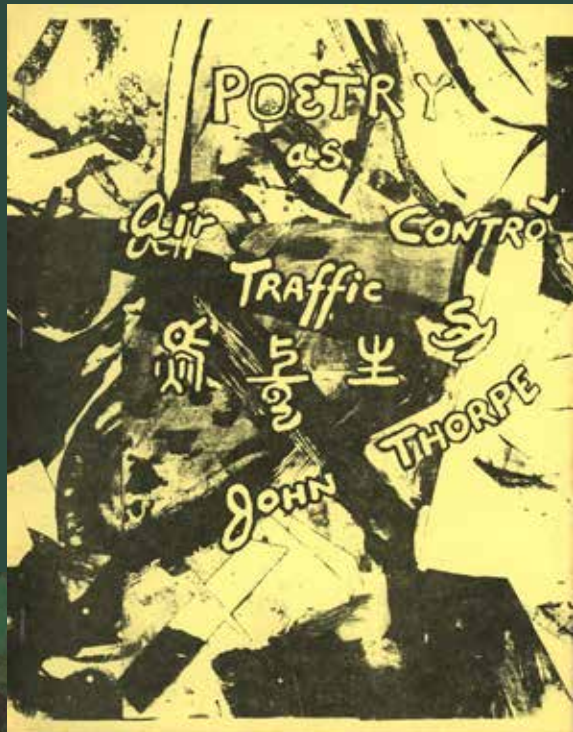
Kidder Smith: We only understand anything in terms of something else, and so all our assertions are positing similarities between unlike things. The first salvo in this war on reality was fired by Oscar Hammerstein II, when he wrote

There is nothin’ like a dame—
Nothin’ in the world!
There is nothin’ you can name
That is anythin’ like a dame.

Not even a dame is like a dame. Gentlemen, I hope you all already know this.

Sabina Knight: Statements, then, function imagistically, suggestively, incompletely. Thus “all discourse is metaphor” claims that our speech is always a figure of speech.

Kidder Smith: That brings us to tautology. . .



A Tautology or Two

Sabina Knight: As translators, why are we intrigued by tautologies?

Kidder Smith: Tautology means “the same” (ταυτο) “word” (λόγος). So of course we are always looking for the same word when we go from Chinese to English. Or from English to English, as when a Scots comedian on the British telly has to use subtitles. In ordinary language a tautology just says the same thing twice—redundancies, like “tuna fish sandwich.” As we know from Strunk, a tuna is already a fish.

Sabina Knight: In a broader sense, though, tautologies can go much further. In logic, a tautology is a type of circular reasoning. “If A, then A.” A proposition true for all values of A.

Kidder Smith: You can’t beat that!

Sabina Knight: Some argue that a proposition is true if and only if it has this formal structure. Everything else is contingent. For Russell and the early Wittgenstein, only tautologies are true; everything else is metaphor. Further-

more, in a sense there is only one tautology, since there is only one language system. But if there’s only one, how can there be even one?

Kidder Smith: It’s like being in love. It has no opposite, and it turns everything into itself. So love and tautologies just do the same thing in different ways. Both hold to the same epistemology/ontology.

Sabina Knight: If A, then A. If love, then love. No one knows why. Love’s not asking why is not some willful, wiley, wanton excess. Or, well, maybe it is all three. But that’s not the reason. Love simply doesn’t know how to ask why. There’s no place for it to start. No loose end of the tapestry to pull on. The only way we can realize something is if it’s already true.

Kidder Smith: So if we’re already here, how do we go from here to here? How do we translate? We don’t really know, do we?

Sabina Knight: But we might dwell in this disposition.

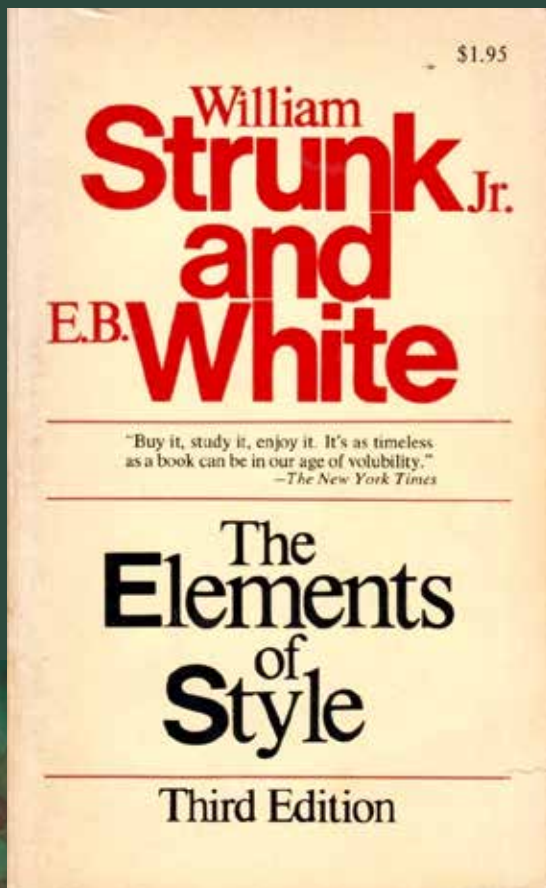
Kidder Smith: And then something happens, and we like it, or not. This seems to be what’s called “aesthetics,” our love of beauty. I’m afraid all of this is somewhat out of control.

Sabina Knight: Just somewhat? Who knows. We can only not know. But if I were to suggest a practice, it might be intimacy. Our intimacy with the text, its jumble, the world, and thus with one another.

Kidder Smith: And soon enough these intimacies coincide. No way out. We are completely free in this, and completely unfree. Just like real life.

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