

The Translation and Interpretation of Tujia Love Songs “Six Sips of Tea” and “Tangerine Tree”

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Abstract: Tujia love songs is one of the important types of Tujia folk songs. The paper analyzes the typical features of folk songs, regards song translation as a constrained translation and mainly introduced Peter Low's Pentathlon Principle in the west and Jun QIN's five rules on Chinese song translation. The principle and rules have been considered and applied in the paper, which then focuses on case analysis of two Tujia love songs “Six Sips of Tea” and “Tangerine Tree”. For the first song “Six Sips of Tea”, the authors translate and interpret it by involving tea culture and view of marriage. They also make a comparative study between their translated version and singable version online rendered by Jun QIN. For the second song “Tangerine Tree”, after translating it, the authors interpret it from different aspects. In the process of translating and interpreting two songs, unique Tujia culture and dialect have been displayed. The paper concludes that whether folk songs are to be translated for singing or for comprehension, the constraints such as rhymes or melodies shall be taken into consideration. Generally speaking, translating Tujia folk songs is of complexity and the interpretation of these songs need comprehensive knowledge of Tujia Culture.

Keywords: Tujia Love Songs, Translation Criteria and Strategies, Tea Culture, View of Marriage

1. Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that there are fifty-six nationalities in China. Each nationality has its own history and unique culture. Tujia nationality is one of Chinese minorities who are mainly inhabited in Enshi of Hebei Province. One of typical features of Tujia culture is their folk songs. “Six Sips of Tea” and “Tangerine Tree” are two famous folk songs which will be discussed specifically in this paper.

Tujia people, as an ancient nation, are famous for their diligence, bravery, simplicity, enthusiasm and heroism. They are good at singing and dancing. During its long process of development, Tujia people created a unique Tujia culture. However, they only have oral language, no written language, so the Tujia folk songs, with strong original ecological beauty, are mainly inherited and developed in the way of oral transmission generation after generation. Tujia folk songs are characterized by various types, rich content and various forms, mainly including labor songs, ceremony songs, love songs, waving songs and children's songs. These folk songs reflect all aspects of lives of Tujia people. Since the songs are created by

the Tujia people in the long-term social practice, they bear true and simple inner emotions, sincere feelings, positive tone and can be easily sung.

However, little research has been carried out on Tujia folk songs, let alone being known or transmitted to western countries. By learning about Tujia folk songs, we can know about the living habits, customs and viewpoints of local people. It is significant to spread and transmit Tujia culture to other nations.

2. Previous Studies on Translating Folk Songs

Song translation does not fit into any established translation categories, such as literary translation or scientific translation. It does not draw too much attention as other branches of translation studies. Just as Susam-Sarajeva [12] observes: “Musical material has mostly been considered somewhat outside the borders of translation studies, as traditionally conceived” (p. 189). Concerning untranslatability, songs are

similar to poems which cannot be easily translated. There are relatively fewer studies concerning song translation, let alone folk song translation.

2.1. General Introduction to Song Translation Studies

Song translation studies is a marginal academic field in translation studies, although it became a little thriving in the past ten years. Due to the entertaining feature of songs, the relevant studies seem to be less serious than literary translation. According to statistics of CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure)¹, there are nearly 300 papers and Master theses on song translation studies, but relevant papers published on core journals are less than 30 and on top-level journals are less than 10. The situation is a little better in western countries and a few papers on song translation have been published on top translation journals such as *Babel*, *Perspectives*, *The Translator*, *Target*, etc.

In China, some translation concepts and theories have been applied in the research of song translation, such as domestication and foreignization, Skopos Theory, Three-Beauty Principle, Functional Equivalence Theory, etc.. Fan XUE [14], who translated a large numbers of songs and published a book entitled *Exploration and Practice of Song Translation* in 2002, is a good representative as both a practitioner and a theoretical researcher. Song translation studies in China focused on the direction from foreign languages into Chinese from the end of last century to the first several years of the new century. In recent years, with the better transmission of Chinese culture to other countries, more researches began to focus on direction from Chinese to other languages.

In the west, song translation studies can be traced back to around 1920s. In the past twenty years, song translation studies are sometimes carried out under the domain of multimodality or audiovisual translation. Peter Low [7] is a great contributor, who published several important papers and a monograph entitled *Translating Song: Lyrics and Texts*. He proposed famous "Pentathlon Principle", which will be introduced later in this paper.

2.2. Song Translation as a Constrained Translation

Due to its typical features, song translation or lyric translation is a kind of constrained translation. The concept of "constrained translation", first introduced by Mayoral et al. [10], includes texts like comics, films, songs. "Constraints already indicate that non-linguistic elements are seen as obstacles for the translator and his/her actual linguistic work, and that non-verbal modalities are not seen as communicative text elements" [6] (p. 260). As Zabalbeascoa [15] puts it: "The concept of constrained translation has sometimes been used as a label to brand any variety of translation that forced the unwilling theorist to consider the important role of nonverbal elements" (p. 23). Song lyrics translation is different from literary translation or other types of translation due to some

innate limitations. "When translating musical production, the translator is going to be faced with a series of restrictions related to music (melodies, instrumentation), text (rhyme, rhythm, literary figures of speech) or even interpretation (stage directions)" [8] (p. 202). Song lyrics translation can actually be divided into two types: translating for comprehension and translating for singing. It is a very ideal translated version if the lyrics can be faithfully translated and meanwhile can be sung perfectly. Usually a translator should be a musician as well if he wants to translate song lyrics for singing, or at least he should be good at musical knowledge. But even for songs translated for comprehension, a translator also need to bear all the above constraints in mind. As depicted by a translator, "It is impossible to translate the text as if one had never heard the song. The melody and its expressions plays in the head. I tried to translate 'the song' rather than the 'lyrics'" [7] (p. 22). Any song translator should set up the goal of singability in translation.

2.3. The Translation Criteria and Strategies for Rendering Folk Songs

Song translation is actually much complex than it seems to be. Franzon [2] provides five choices for song translation: 1) Leaving the song untranslated; 2) Translating the lyrics but not taking the music into account; 3) Writing new lyrics to the original music with no overt relation to the original lyrics; 4) Translating the lyrics and adapting the music accordingly – sometimes to the extent that a brand new composition is deemed necessary; 5) Adapting the translation to the original music (p. 376). Among them, item 2 and item 5 are most concerned in real translation practice. What's more important is that a translator should ask himself what kind of song lyric translation he is carrying out, for the purpose of singing or just for the purpose of reading. Gorlée [5] states that song translation task can be tackled from two different points of view: logocentrism and musicocentrism. In the first case, the translator must focus on the lyrics and not the music (*prima le parole e poi la musica*) and in the second, they must pay more attention to the music and not the lyrics (*prima la musica e poi le parole*) (p. 8). In other words, how the lyric translation will be used decides what kind of translation strategy will be applied.

Peter Low [7] proposed his famous "Pentathlon Principle". He made a metaphor of pentathlon: this image likens the five criteria to the five events in which athletes must compete to maximise their points. Peter Low believed most considerations in song translation can be summed up under the following five headings: 1) Singability; 2) Sense; 3) Naturalness; 4) Rhythm; and 5) Rhyme (p. 79-80). The criterion of Singability is judged by the phonetic suitability of the TT² for singing, with reference to the physical organs involved in singing – the mouth, throat, lungs and vocal folds. The criterion of Sense is judged by comparing the TT with the ST: is the meaning well transferred? The criterion of

1 Refer to the website: <https://www.cnki.net>.

2 TT refers to target text; ST refers to source text; TL refers to target language and SL refers to source language.

Naturalness is judged within the SL: how natural is the style of the TT? This is best assessed by native speakers of the TL. The criterion of Rhythm is judged with reference to the music: how well does it fit? This is best assessed by people with a good sense of rhythm: drummers, dancers etc. The criterion of Rhyme focuses on a specific formal feature of the TT, the sounds of the line-endings. Rhymes typically match final vowel and preceding consonant or final consonant and preceding vowel. How well does the TT rhyming match the rhyming found in the ST? These five criteria can be used to evaluate singable translation. And for readable translation, sense and naturalness might be more important than the other three.

In China, CHEN & HE [1] raised six standards, i.e., singability, enjoyability, adaptability, situation emotion, style, and sense in accordance with characteristics of song translation. GAN [3] proposed three translating strategies for rendering folk songs: Firstly, to convey the original meaning faithfully; Secondly, to put emphasis on tempo and melody of translated version; Thirdly, to achieve communicative purpose (p. 181-183). QIN [9] proposed five rules to translate Chinese songs: 1) One note for one character in Chinese and one note for one syllable in English³. Generally speaking, one character in a Chinese song accounts for one note. When a Chinese song is translated into English, a translator must assign one syllable of an English word to each note. 2) Be faithful to the musical tune and stressed part fits into strong beat. Each Chinese character may have four tones while each English word only has one stressed syllable. When translating an English song into Chinese, a translator should make the tone of the translated words conform to the melody of the music. Meanwhile, when translating a Chinese song into English, the stressed and unstressed syllables of English words should conform to the strong and weak beat of the music tune, otherwise it is difficult to sing. 3) Flexible rhyme patterns and harmonious rhyme. Good rhyming can increase singability. When translating a Chinese song into English, a translator can apply one rhyme from beginning to the end if possible or he can also follow rhyme pattern like “abab” or “aabb”. 4) Similar tone and similar intonation. If the translated words are consistent with the original words in intonation, pronunciation and pause, a singer will have a strong sense of recognition as soon as he starts to sing. 5) Summarize the meaning and be creative. In order to fit original music well, a translator does not have to follow the source text strictly, and he can replace it in target text creatively. QIN’s rules are more applicable in translating Chinese songs into English.

To sum up, in this section, the most important and influential criteria and strategies for rendering songs have been introduced in both China and abroad. Although the above strategies and rules all focused on singable translation of songs, they definitely will benefit song translation for comprehension.

3. Translation and Interpretation of the Two Songs

Folk songs are different from other songs like pop songs, opera, classic songs etc. There are some features with folk songs. Their features can be summarized as following. First of all, folk songs are created by working people, which reflect many aspects of their common daily lives. The language is often simple and the melody is usually mild and smooth for the purpose of easy learning and wide spreading. Secondly, the lyrics of folk songs often contain some dialects and even include some supplementary words or liner words, which has no specific meaning. Thirdly, folk songs for love are often presented in antiphonal style between a man (men) and a woman (women). Especially in mountain areas, it is quite natural for two (groups of) singers to stand on two face-to-face sides of mountains and sing the song by turns. Fourthly, the melody of a folk song is usually less complex and often repetitive for the purpose of fitting in different lyrics easily by the singer (s). “Six Sips of Tea” and “Tangerine Tree” are two typical Tujia folk songs, which will be translated and interpreted respectively.

3.1. “Six Sips of Tea”

“Six Sips of Tea” is one of the best-known folk songs of Tujia. The lyrics can be translated as in Table 1:

3.1.1. The General Interpretation to “Six Sips of Tea”

The song tells a love story in which a man asks questions one by one and the girl answers them one by one. From the translated lyrics, we can find that the man asks whether the girl’s family members are at home, from her parents to her elder brother, elder sister, younger sister, and younger brother. And the last question is to ask the girl’s age. What is interesting about the girl’s answer is the phrase “哪來這多話”, which is a dialect and literally means that “Why are you talking so much?” and is seemingly a blame to man’s talkativeness. “Normally one translates between standard forms of two languages. Yet many oral texts, naturally including songs, have non-standard features like slang or popular syntax or dialectal vocabulary” [7] (p. 28). The implied meaning of the phrase is that when the man asks the first question, the girl clearly knows he is beating around the bush and she encourages him to express his feeling frankly. By drinking tea, the man relieves his nervousness and abruptness to ask whether the girl is willing to accept his love or not.

A few puzzled points need to be explained in the song. The first one is that the parents are eighty-eight years old but the younger brother is still a sucking baby, which is almost impossible in reality. This can be explained by the art form of folk songs. Folk songs are derived from daily lives of local people. As an art form, folk songs often exaggerate details of lives. The huge age gap between the parents and younger brother indicate the attitude of the girl: my parents are too old and my little brother is too young to interfere with my love affair. Secondly, why does the man ask about all the girl’s family members? On the one hand, the man is trying to hide

3 The original expression in QIN’s paper is highly summarized in two groups of four-character phrases. The author of the paper translates five rules semantically.

his shyness and avoid embarrassment if asking directly about the girl's feeling towards him. On the other hand, it is a ritual to inquire the advice of the girl's family members, especially her parents. Thirdly, Why does the man ask the girl's age? A man in western countries make proposals to make sure if his

beloved girl is willing to marry him. While a Chinese man is more implicative to ask for willingness of the girl he is fond of. It is a roundabout way to ask for girl's willingness to accept his love.

Table 1. The Translation of “Six Sips of Tea”.

No.	Source Text	Target Text
1	男：喝你一口茶呀問你一句話，你的那個爹媽（嚟）在家不在家	Over the first sip of your tea, I have a question to ask you: are your parents (sai) at home or not?
2	女：你喝茶就喝茶呀，哪來這多話，我的那個爹媽（嚟）已經八十八	Drink your tea and why do ya fuss to ask me. My dad and mum (sai) are eighty-eight already.
3	男：喝你二口茶呀問你二句話，你的那個哥嫂（嚟）在家不在家	Over the second sip of your tea, I have a question to ask you, are your brother and his wife (sai) at home or not?
4	女：你喝茶就喝茶呀，哪來這多話，我的那個哥嫂（嚟）已經分了家	Drink your tea and why do ya fuss to ask me. My brother and his wife (sai) live on their own already.
5	男：喝你三口茶呀問你三句話，你的那個姐姐（嚟）在家不在家	Over the third sip of your tea, I have a question to ask you, is your elder sister (sai) at home or not?
6	女：你喝茶就喝茶呀，哪來這多話，我的那個姐姐（嚟）已經出了嫁	Drink your tea and why do ya fuss to ask me. My elder sister (sai) has got married already.
7	男：喝你四口茶呀問你四句話，你的那個妹妹（嚟）在家不在家	Over the fourth sip of your tea, I have a question to ask you, is your younger sister (sai) at home or not?
8	女：你喝茶就喝茶呀，哪來這多話，我的那個妹妹（嚟）已經上學囉	Drink your tea and why do ya fuss to ask me. My younger sister (sai) has gone to school already.
9	男：喝你五口茶呀問你五句話，你的那個弟弟（嚟）在家不在家	Over the fifth sip of your tea, I have a question to ask you, is your younger brother (sai) at home or not?
10	女：你喝茶就喝茶呀，哪來這多話，我的那個弟弟（嚟）還是個奶娃娃	Drink your tea and why do ya fuss to ask me. My younger brother (sai) is still a sucking baby.
11	男：喝你六口茶呀問你六句話，眼前這個妹子（嚟）今年有多大	Over the sixth sip of your tea, I have a question to ask you, how old is this pretty girl (sai) in front of me?
12	女：你喝茶就喝茶呀，哪來這多話，眼前這個妹子（嚟）今年一十八	Drink your tea and why do ya fuss to ask me. The girl (sai) in front of you is eighteen years old.

Table 2. The Singable Translated Version of “Six Sips of Tea” by Jun QIN.

1	The first sip of your tea Brings a question to me How are your dearest parents? And now where are they? Just enjoy your tea and try to save your words My dear father and mother are all in eighties The second sip of your tea Brings a question to me	4	The fourth sip of your tea Brings a question to me How is your younger sister and now where is she? Just enjoy your tea and try to save your words My dear younger sister has by now gone to study The fifth sip of your tea Brings a question to me
2	How is your dearest brother? And now where is he? Just enjoy your tea and try to save your words My dear elder brother is living on his own. The third sip of your tea Brings a question to me	5	How is your younger brother and now where is she? Just enjoy your tea and try to save your words My dear younger brother now is a little baby. The six sip of your tea Brings a question to me
3	How is your elder sister and now where is she? Just enjoy your tea and try to save your words My dear elder sister has married her sweetie	6	How old is the pretty girl who's in front of me? Just enjoy your tea and try to save your words The girl who's in front of you is in her eighteen

Table 3. The Translation of “Tangerine Tree”.

No.	Source Text	Target Text
1	柑子樹來啲 啲 柑子葉	Many tangerine trees. Yo, Tangerine trees grow leaves.
2	柑子的乾妹 幹妹妹麼 舍呀不得呀嘛	I am under the tree, but can't bear to depart.
3	乾妹兒的幹哥哥	My beloved brother.
4	柑子成樹啲 啲 樹成林	Tangerine trees have grown into woods. Yo. Grown into woods.
5	柑子的乾妹 幹妹妹麼 長呀成人呀嘛	I've grown up to be marriable.
6	乾妹兒的幹哥哥	My beloved brother.
7	柑子結果啲 啲 姐出門啊	Tangerine trees grow fruits. Yo. I am going to get married.
8	柑子的乾妹 幹妹妹麼 兩呀分離呀嘛	My tangerine tree, we have to be departed.
9	乾妹兒的幹哥哥	My beloved brother.
10	乾妹兒的幹哥哥	My beloved brother.

3.1.2. The Tea Culture Concerning “Six Sips of Tea”

China has a long history of tea culture, which bears rich cultural connotation. The Chinese tea drinking habit can be dated back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907). It gradually became a national tradition and led to the development of delicate tea drinking rituals. Over the centuries, poets and artists in China wrote many marvelous masterpieces in appreciation of tea and Chinese people's love for tea drinking.

Tea culture has regional and ethical characteristics. Tea culture is much more developed in South China nowadays, especially in Guangdong and Fujian. In Guangdong, when local people say “Drink Tea” (hē chá in Chinese pinyin), it means going to have some dimsum while drinking tea. Tea culture in Enshi is different from that in Guangdong. Enshi is well-known for Enshi Yulu, a kind of green tea. There are plenty of tea plantations in mountainous areas of Enshi, and Enshi Yulu is unique in its taste and smell. Generation after generation, many Enshi people labour in or live on tea plantations, and many love stories are connected to tea or tea plantations. Some of these love stories appear in the form of folk songs, and “Six Sips of Tea” is one of them. Tea is the form while love is the content.

3.1.3. The View of Marriage Concerning “Six Sips of Tea”

Chinese view of marriage has changed greatly during last century. Before the founding of People's Republic of China, the arranged marriage was dominant. Since 1949, the new government of China advocated freedom to choose one's spouse. However, due to the influence of Confucian culture and the facts of extended family, the view on free marriage of Chinese people is different from that in western countries. Chinese young couples expect total agreement and blessings from their born families, especially their parents.

The particular view of marriage of Tujia people results from their living conditions and daily lives. As SHI [11] wrote: “The development of social productive forces determines the relations of production and also determines the status of women in social life” (p. 56). Since Tujia people live in the remote mountainous area, the productivity is fairly low, and women participate in labor work as much as men and play a very important role in supporting their family lives. Tujia women thus earn their social and family status and enjoy freedom in love affairs. When they work together with men, they can understand each other and communicate well with them. In this process, a Tujia woman may fall in love with someone and they are likely to express their affection through songs. Compared with Han people, ethnic minorities in China tend to be bolder to express their feelings on love affairs. Among young people, there are many ways to show their love to each other. In mountainous areas, singing folk songs especially singing in antiphonal style is the best way to express love to each other.

3.1.4. A Comparison of Singable Version of “Six Sips of Tea”

The author has mentioned different types of song lyric translation: song translation for singing and song translation for comprehension. Since “Six Sips of Tea” is such a famous Enshi folk song, it has been already translated by a

well-known song translator, QIN Jun, and shot into video which can be watched online⁴. Table 2 shows the singable translation.

The translator QIN was born and grew up in Enshi. He is quite familiar with the culture and folk songs of Enshi. This singable version takes music rhymes and rhymes into consideration. But we can see for the purpose of fitting lyrics into music, some words in source text have been omitted and some meanings have been changed. For instance, in the second section, the wife of brother or brother-in-law is omitted. All the liner words “sai” are omitted. All questions are changed into where is XX, which is shorter. According to an informal interview, QIN said this was his first publicized translated song online. He himself didn't think it was a satisfying translation. For example, “save your words” was too formal to be applied here. We can see clearly some sacrifice has to be made for a singable version.

3.2. “Tangerine Tree”

Unlike “Six Sips of Tea”, folk song “Tangerine Tree” is a sad love song. The translation of the song can be referred to as in Table 3.

3.2.1. The General Interpretation of “Tangerine Tree”

This song depicts a sad love story, sung by a girl who was waiting under a tangerine tree and calling for her beloved man. The hidden line is the tangerine tree while the explicit line is their love story. Tangerine trees began to grow leaves, became thriving into woods and bore fruit. However, the love affair between the girl and her beloved man began to grow and proved to be fruitless. The girl finally got married to some other man. The lyric of “姐出门” literally means “the sister goes out of the door” and its implied meaning is that the girl gets married, which makes a sad ending to the love affair between the girl and her beloved man.

3.2.2. Chinese Address Between Lovers

One puzzle might be the address forms between lovers. In “Tangerine Tree”, the addresses between two lovers is respectively brother (哥哥) and sister (妹妹). The above translated version used the first person to retell the story, so all “sister”s have been translated into “I” or “my”. But how can lovers address each other like this? There is the same translation problem in Chinese literary translation. For instance, when Chinese novel *Three Sisters* (《玉米》) written by Feiyu Bi (畢飛宇) was translated into English by Howard Goldblatt and his wife Sylvia Li, the heroine Yumi called her beloved man “brother” and the man called Yumi “sister”. American editor wanted to delete this part because western readers might feel shocked by this incest relationship between “brother” and “sister”. Bi explained that in China, it was quite common for the two in love to call each other “brother” or “sister” mainly due to the following two reasons: the intimate addresses were derived from the concept of extended family;

4 The video can be watched on different online platforms, such as <https://v.qq.com/x/page/k0164bsp91o.html> or https://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNTczMjg5MzQ0.html.

Chinese people were lack of suitable expressions to address intimate relationship in love affairs in old days [13] (p. 95). Thus, the address of “brother” and “sister” has nothing to do with incest but intimacy.

Another typical lyric needs to be explained is Chinese character “幹” (gān in Chinese pinyin), which has been deleted in the above translated version since it is untranslatable due to cultural default, i.e. there is no equivalence in English for this word. In Chinese culture, a child may have his 乾爸 (gān father) and 乾媽 (gān mother). Some dictionaries may offer English translation as “foster father” or “foster mother”, which connotation is actually very different from “gān father” and “gān mother”. In the song of “Tangerine Tree”, the reteller called herself as “幹妹妹” (gān sister) and her lover as “幹哥哥” (gān brother). There are two indications: to avoid misunderstanding of their relationship by using Chinese word 幹 (gan); there is a euphony pun between “幹” (gān) in “幹妹妹” and 柑 (gān) in “柑子樹”. The different fates of “gān sister” and “tangerine” tree constitute a sharp contrast, which produces a tragic beauty of the song.

3.2.3. The Pursuit of Free Love Versus Restraint of Arranged Marriage

Most Tujia songs express positive attitude towards love and marriage. Tujia women are brave enough to find their ideal spouse by themselves and pursue free love. However, “Tangerine Tree” is a depressing song, which reflects the pressure of feudal ethical code on Tujia women. Art is derived from real lives. In reality, some Tujia women have to accept the arranged marriage under the pressure of family. In old days, especially before the founding of People’s Republic of China, a woman, whichever class she was from, either upper-class or laboring class, was very likely to be forced to accept her marriage under the arrangement of her parents. Most arranged marriages were doomed to be a failure since the couple might only meet for once or twice or even never meet before the marriage, and there was no mutual understanding. Unlike “Six Sips of Tea” which shows courage and bravery of Tujia women, “Tangerine Tree” shows tragic side of Tujia women’s destiny. The significance of the song, on the one hand, is to reflect dark side of life in old days; on the other hand, is to praise free love enjoyed by Tujia women nowadays.

4. Conclusion

Song translation is one of most difficult text types to be translated, especially for a singable translated version. The study on song translation is far behind its practice at present. More research needs to be carried out on this newly-thriving domain. Although textual, intertextual and extra-textual investigations have been carried out on song translation by scholars from different fields, more disciplines have to be integrated into the research.

The interpretation of Tujia love songs should be based on comprehensive knowledge on Tujia Culture, which contains special dialects, marriage rituals, living habits, laboring

conditions, Tujia festivals, personality of Tujia people and so on. All folk songs are derived from lives of Tujia people. A vivid and profound interpretation must also derive from the observation of their lives.

Translation and interpretation are closely related. As Gadamer [4] writes, “Every translation is at the same time an interpretation. We can even say that the translation is the culmination of the interpretation that the translator has made of the words given him” (p. 402). How a translator interpret a folk song will be reflected in his translation. Therefore, the better interpretation is, the better translated version will be.

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