Designations of Poetry in Translations of Liu Xie's (??) Work on Literary Genres

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Abstract: In her article "Designations of Poetry in Translations of Liu Xie's (劉勰) Work on Literary Genres" Ying Liu discusses how Liu Xie (劉勰 465-521 AD) in his 文心雕龍 (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*) followed the tradition of the *Book of Songs* (詩經) and synthesized the original concept of *sung* (genre of classical poetry) in the *Book of Songs* with some later variations and thus constructed and shaped the notion of the genre *sung*. Liu analyses translations by selected scholars and explores the subtle nuances between *sung* and its English counterparts historically including "ode," "panegyric," "eulogy," and "hymn" in order to explain the change of the notion and inconsistencies in translations of *sung*.

Ying Liu, "Designations of Poetry in Translations of Liu Xie's (劉勰) Work on Literary Genres"   page 2 of 6
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 17.1 (2015): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss1/7>
Thematic Issue *The Study of Chinese Literature in the Anglophone World*. Ed. Shunqing Cao

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Designations of Poetry in Translations of Liu Xie's (劉勰) Work on Literary Genres

Liu Xie's (劉勰 465-521 AD) 文心雕龍 (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*) is one of the most important texts of literary theory of Chinese literature. Some scholars argue that the book consists of three parts: the first five chapters are regarded as a whole, the second part includes chapters 6 to 25, and the rest the third part. Others thought a dichotomous division is adopted where the first 25 chapters are the first part and the rest of further 25 chapters is the second part. Whatever approach is taken, what remains acceptable to almost all is that the definition and classification of literary genres are a significant part in the organic structure of the text, while another significant part is the analysis of the creation and criticism of different genres. Of course, we cannot ascertain which is closer to the original idea of Liu, but what we can extrapolate is that "genre" is one key concept in Liu's construction of the work and that the work contributed much to the development of genre theory in the history of Chinese literature and references to it are important to any study of genres in Chinese literature. The study on 頌 (*sung*) both as the name for the genre of classical poetry and a key concept in the discourse of Chinese literary theory is one effective endeavor to explore the field of genres.

Liu established a large number of genre designations and named most of them in the titles of chapters in his text. Generally speaking, the book is a framework of genre theory and sets the principle of naming genres or types of literature. For example, when indicating the origin of different literary genres in chapter three, *sung* is translated by Vincent Yu-chung Shih as "sacrificial poetry" (Liu Xie, *The Literary* 25) and as "panegyric" in *The Book of Literary Design* and translators Siu-kit Wong, Allan Chung-hang Lo, and Kwong-tai Lam explain that it includes "two types known as *sung* and *zan* (9) and Guobin Yang translated it as "hymn" (Liu, *Dragon-Carving* 31). At the same time, in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* the title of chapter nine has been translated as "ode and pronouncement" by Vincent Yu-chung Shih (69), "eulogistic songs and summaries" by Wong, Lo, and Lam (30), and "hymn and eulogy" by Yang (Liu, *Dragon-Carving* 102). Yang is the only one who remains consistent in the translation. It is obvious that the translators perceive the subtle discrepancy between the different genres and that between Chinese words and their English counterparts. Clearly, they struggle to seek for the most suitable terms according to their comprehension. However, even a native Chinese reader may feel tortured to give clear definition of each of the genres.

sung is mentioned several times throughout in Liu's *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* and is discussed intensively in chapter three and four. In the chapter three, Liu developed the general principles of genres from their classic genesis and argued that five classics are "the great treasure house of literature" (Zhou 19; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine) and *sung* with other three genres "have their foundations in the *Book of Songs*" (Zhou 19). Later, in chapter nine Liu's focus is on the definition and historical variation of the two genres of *sung* and *zan*. According to comments on the *Book of Songs* (詩經)—in order to make a differentiation between the genre mentioned in Liu's text—the former is written in italicized small caps while the latter is capitalized—*sung* is put in the final position in the list of the "four beginnings" (肆始): *feng* (風), "greater ya" (*da-ya* 大雅), "lesser ya" (*xiao-ya* 小雅) and *sung* (頌). About the "four beginnings" there are two major explanations: one includes *feng*, *da-ya*, *xiao-ya*, and *sung* while the others as *guan-ju* (關雎) as the beginning of *feng, lu ming* (鹿鳴) as the beginning of *da-ya, wen wang* (文王) as the beginning of *xiao-ya* and *qing miao* (清廟) as the beginning of *sung.* In either interpretation, *sung* follows the other three beginnings and occupies the final position. According to Liu, *sung* derives from the genre as found in the *Book of Songs*. As the "Great Preface" to the book indicates, *sung*-s "give the outward shapes of praising full virtue, and they inform the spirits about the accomplishment of great deeds" (Zhou 95; see also Owen 49). The distinction of the three genres rests on that argument that *Feng* is about the "customs" and affairs of a single state and related to individuals, where as *Ya* expands to the whole world "under heaven" (*tianxia* 天下), describing customs common to all places and *sung* "informs" the spirits of the earthly incarnation of the divine virtue (see Tőkei 33).

Liu followed the tradition of the Great Preface and repeated the idea in chapter nine by interpreting *sung* as "description, outward appearance" by using the Chinese character *rung* (容) which is in rhyme with *sung*. Phrases as "praise full virtue" ("美盛德") and "inform the spirits" ("告神明") are ap-

Ying Liu, "Designations of Poetry in Translations of Liu Xie's (劉勰) Work on Literary Genres"   page 3 of 6
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 17.1 (2015): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss1/7>
Thematic Issue *The Study of Chinese Literature in the Anglophone World*. Ed. Shunqing Cao

parently identical to the description in the Great Preface. Liu continued to say that *feng* and *ya,* connected to human affairs, can be divided into the "mutated" (degraded) and the "authentic" according to the status of the states and the people there, while *sung* appealing to the spirits should be pure and noble because the spirits are always sacred. The Great Preface discusses much about the mutations of *feng* and *ya*, but never mentions any mutation of *sung*. Liu seems to indicate that no mutation of *sung* should be allowed, but he mentions a number of examples of the genre in his own work. Besides *sung* glorifying the living emperor, songs praising "human affairs" ("人事") and "insignificant things" ("細物"; e.g., "the Ode to the Orange Tree" by Qu Yuan; on this see Hong 153-55) are all considered variations of *sung*. Later *sung*-s mixing praise with criticism, admonition or advice, were considered by Liu errant tendencies of the genre. It seems that Liu identified *feng* and *ya* with how they are described in the the *Book of Songs* and merged his notion with that *sung* in the *Book of Songs*. In doing so, he managed to trace the origin of the genre in the classics and admitted acceptable mutations of *sung.* Scrupulous readers may find inconformity between Liu's idea that *sung* should be pure and noble in meaning and the fact that he juxtaposed some variations of *sung* with the authentic *sung* without any derogatory comments. It is reasonable to suppose that Liu believed it necessary to associate any genres to the classics in order to make them legitimate. At the same time, he tended to compromise the proper variations of the genre in a historical way. After criticizing errant tendencies of *sung*, he turned to the principle of *sung*, namely that a *sung* "should be elegant and graceful, its rhetoric has to be pure and luminous" (see Zhou 96). Thus the most important matter is that "it has finesse and artifice but it varies according to the feelings aroused" (Zhou 96). That is to say, Liu Xie changed from the metaphysical requirement for *sung*—purity, nobility, authenticity—to the literary requirement of elegancy, grace, finesse, and artifice.

Based on above, authentic *sung*-s derived from the *sung* section of the *Book of Songs* are usually addressed to spirits in ceremonies and inform them about earthly accomplishment (especially of emperors). Meantime, some variation is allowed. Primarily singing and dancing were included in the performance of *sung* in order to adapt to the description of the performance *rung* (容). As Guowei Wang noted, *sung*-s sound slower than *feng* and *ya* and the style may be gentle and mild, but not prosaic (249). Liu synthesized the original style with some later variations and gave the very exact principles for *sung*, namely a genre in development and wrote that they should be "elegant and graceful, and its rhetoric has to be pure and luminous. In its exposition it is similar to the *fu*, but it must not be sumptuous and excessive in language. It is of reverence and prudence like the *ming*, or inscription, but differs from it in not being admonish or warning. It praises its subject in beautiful expressions, and expresses its theme with content deep and broad. It has finesse and artifice but varies according to the feelings aroused" (Zhou 96). Further, through Liu's explanation of the origin, variation, and definition of *sung*, readers can understand the main characteristic of *sung*. However, translators are a special type of readers because they are supposed to not only understand the meaning of the original, but also to infer the purpose of the authors and to choose an expression in the target language who know nothing about the language of the author. The difference between classical Chinese and modern Chinese even adds difficulty to this.

Shih, who translated Liu's book to English first, used "*sung* or sacrificial poetry" in chapter three and "ode" in chapter nine. As mentioned previously, the original *sung* were performed in ceremony and sacrifice accompanied by music and dance. They are important elements which cannot be taken apart from rituals. Therefore "sacrificial poetry" states clearly the characteristic of the authentic *sung*. Since "sacrificial poetry" appeared in chapter three of Liu's text where he focused on the origin of different genres, the expression sounds acceptable in context. However, Liu spared no efforts to expand his statement on the variation of *sung* in chapter nine while "sacrificial poetry" meant only one aspect of *sung* and suggested the necessity to choose some other word to cover more in the context of his framework. Hence Shih choose "ode" in the following text when referring to *sung.* Shih's choice came from the fact that the English word "ode" originates from the ancient Greek *ōdē* (song) meaning choric song usually accompanied by dance. It is also related to the Greek word *aidein* meaning "to sing" and *audē* meaning "voice" and thus *ōdē* was analogous to *sung* in that both are songs performed in certain ceremony accompanied by dance. According to William Fitzgerald in his *Agonistic Poetry: the Pindaric Mode in Pindar, Horace, Hölderlin, and the English Ode*, William Jackson Bate commented on Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" writing that "the theme of much of the greater poetry to come—certainly of

Ying Liu, "Designations of Poetry in Translations of Liu Xie's (劉勰) Work on Literary Genres"   page 4 of 6
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 17.1 (2015): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss1/7>
Thematic Issue *The Study of Chinese Literature in the Anglophone World*. Ed. Shunqing Cao

the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and the 'Ode to a Nightingale'—may be described as the drama of the human spirits 'greeting' of objects in order 'to make them wholly exist'" (Bate qtd. in Fitzgerald 211). And hence it is my contention that the English ode is similar to Liu's conceptualization of *sung*.

Further, in Liu's text there are references to Qu Yuan's *sung*-s when demonstrating the variation of *sung*. As an aristocrat of the Kingdom of Chu (1042-223 BC), Qu lived around 340-278 BC. Although a man of loyalty and integrity, he was mistrusted by his lord because of lies and slanders from his own countrymen. It is under such circumstances that he created poems motivated by his strong emotions and belief in virtues. The 橘頌 ("Ode to the Orange Tree") is one of those works: Qu's hometown was located in the south of China, where people plant orange trees which bear small white flowers with a clear scent and sweet fruit. These qualities are described in the first part of the poem as the external virtues of the trees. However, the most important quality is that the trees can only bear fruit in the south. Once the trees leave the hometown, the fruit becomes bitter and acerb. In the second stanza, the Qu praises the internal virtue of the orange tree and expresses his admiration to it, saying that he wanted to plant the orange tree as a model for himself. Since Qu's "Ode to the Orange Tree" was listed as an example of *sung*, we can thus infer that Liu accepted the "proper" variation of *sung* in addition to authentic *sung*-s. Also Stephen Owen translated *sung* as "ode" in his 1996 *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*; however he chose "hymn" to refer to *sung* in the Great Preface of the *Book of Songs* and "ode" for *ya* (45). This may bring confusion to the readers. What made him choose different terms for *sung*? Which word would he use for *sung* in Liu's chapter nine, hymn or ode? I suggest that the dilemma comes from the complicated ambiguity and the intertextuality of the Chinese language and even Liu takes advantage of these linguistic (and cultural) features when he connected his understanding of *sung* to the *Book of Songs* thus leaving much confusion to later interpreters of his text.

"Panegyric" is another translation worth mentioning. In *Dryden and the Tradition of Panegyric* James D. Garrison presented a thorough examination on the etymology of "panegyric" and discussed its various definitions around the time of the Renaissance. According to Garrison, two important sources of panegyric are usually considered: one comes from the tradition of festival assembly in ancient Greece. Other scholars define panegyric as "oration in the praise and commendation of Kings, or other great persons" following the Roman tradition (Garrison 9). While the term had not been used frequently in the period of the Roman Empire, from the fourth century it began to refer to speech made in the praise of important figures, especially the emperor. One good example was the poet Claudian who had written five such texts for celebrating the new year and the inauguration of new heads of state. The use of the term in English can be traced to the period of the Stuarts and Samuel Daniel and Ben Jonson translated some traditional panegyric from Latin literatures. Then writers like them began to create new panegyric in English and therefore make it a special genre in English literature. The new genre contains several layers where the most important meaning includes the praise of the king and the cheer of crowds. The English panegyric is somewhat similar to Chinese emperors' seeking for noble ancestors before they established new dynasties. For example, Liu Bei (劉備 161-223 AD), the first king of Shu Han in the Three Kingdoms claimed to be a descendant of Liu Bang (劉邦 256-195 BC), the founder and first emperor of the Han dynasty. Thus Liu Bei's claim established his ancestral eminence because Liu Bang was said to be a descendant of the mythical Emperor Yao, who in turn descended from the Yellow Emperor (a legendary Chinese sovereign among the ancient Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors).

Similarly, most *sung* chapters in the *Book of Songs* are poetry immortalizing ancestors and admiring gods from the perspective of the rulers. The poem "閟宫" ("Peih kung"; see Legge 378) praises the achievement and glory of the ancestors of the Lu People when they built a new temple. However, it is lord Xi of Lu (659-627 BC) who is the real hero of the poem: the poet claims that the lords of Lu were descendants of the King Wen of Zhou (1152–1056 BC) and his son King Wu of Zhou then traces his ancestry to Jiang Yuan (姜嫄) and her son Houji (后稷) who was a legendary Chinese cultural hero credited with introducing the millet to humanity during the time of the Xia Dynasty (2070-1600 BC). Houji was claimed as the ancestor of the Ji clan (姬) including King Wen and King Wu who became the ruling family of the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BC). King Wen and King Wu were two model kings in the historical records of Chinese People, thus Lu's relationship with the Zhou Dynasty indicated the authenticity of the sovereign. The poem also includes praise of the Duke; however, the first half of the

Ying Liu, "Designations of Poetry in Translations of Liu Xie's (劉勰) Work on Literary Genres"   page 5 of 6
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 17.1 (2015): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss1/7>
Thematic Issue *The Study of Chinese Literature in the Anglophone World*. Ed. Shunqing Cao

text is dedicated to the genealogy of Lu's royal family, and the admiration for the ancestors shows between the lines. Other pieces collected in *the Book of Songs* have similar functions and it can be compared to panegyric in English and it is because of this that Wong's, Lo's, and Lam's choice of the panegyric designation in their translation is understandable. But, interestingly, they adopt "eulogistic songs" when they refer to *sung* in chapter 9 while Shih and Yang both apply eulogy to another genre of poetry, namely 贊 (*zan*). The word "eulogy" is also ancient Greek in origin meaning a speech or writing in praise of a person or thing originally. Later pieces of eulogies are always oration in praise or honor of a deceased person, such as Ben Jonson's eulogy for Shakespeare and Emerson's eulogy for David Thoreau.

As mentioned above, Yang is the only translator who has translated *sung* consistently in one term, "hymn." "Hymn" derives from the ancient Greek *hýmnos* meaning songs in praise of gods and heroes. In the middle ages some church fathers began applying the term as a synonym for psalm. Gradually the term has been used in more occasions, in praise of different objects, but mostly deities. It is possible that Yang chose hymn as the counterpart of *sung* because he believed that *sung* in Liu's text derives from its usage in the *Book of Songs* and that bears strong religious sense if we consider the sacrificial rituals in the ancient China a religious activity. However, Liu expanded the range of *sung* based on its usage in the *Book of Songs* to a looser sense of literary genre, so the same character carries different connotation in chapter three and chapter nine. Owen's choice of hymn for the same character may be explained from this point, too.

In conclusion, genre theory is one of the most important features of Liu's text: he followed the tradition of Chinese literary thought and established a new genre system synchronically and diachronically. In Liu's text there are 78 genres discussed and the third chapter is the basis of classification of genres for the whole work (20 genres are discussed in the following chapters). However the complexity of genres in Chinese literature leads to inconsistency in Liu's argument. As already Yun Ji (紀昀 1724-1805) argued, "it is difficult to make a general classification of genres because of their great variety, so Liu had to generalize vaguely" (Ji qtd. in Zhou 281). The interpreters and translators of Liu's text endeavored to choose the best words for the genre of *sung* and employed designations such as "ode," "sacrificial poetry," "eulogy," "panegyric," and "hymn." In general, each translator placed particular emphasis on certain aspect. Owing to inconsistencies in Liu's text, it is hard for translators to make adept choices; however, the same inconsistencies allow scholars and readers to consider alternatives to Liu's notion of *sung*.

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Ying Liu, "Designations of Poetry in Translations of Liu Xie's (劉勰) Work on Literary Genres"   page 6 of 6
CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 17.1 (2015): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss1/7>
Thematic Issue *The Study of Chinese Literature in the Anglophone World*. Ed. Shunqing Cao

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