Rebirthing Joyce: Fidelity, Afterlife, and the Chinese *Ulysses*

Introduction: Two *Ulysses* and Two *Wakes*

2025 marks a significant year for Joyce fans in China, as the official Chinese translation (simplified Chinese) of *Finnegans Wake* has finally been released in its entirety in August. This monumental project, undertook by Professor Dai Congrong from Fudan University, spanned over 18 years, one year longer than Joyce's own composition of the *Wake*. Earlier in the year, Professor Liang Sunjie from National Taiwan Normal University also published his translation of *Wake*, instead done in traditional Chinese.

As we move forward then to a new era of Joyce studies in China with the publication of the two *Wakes*, I believe we now have the opportunity to revisit the two Chinese translations of *Ulysses*: only by paying attention to the translational complexities offered in Joyce's first magnum opus can we approach the problem of receiving the translation of his last. The earlier translation of *Ulysses*, published in 1994, was a joint effort by the translator couple Xiao Qian and Wen Jieruo (Xiao-Wen). The later version, subsequently published in 1996, was translated by Jin Di. Since Xiao-Wen's version was somewhat rushed, Jin's version is often regarded as the superior version among fans and scholars of Joyce.[1]

Since the publication of the two *Ulysses*, Joyce scholars in China have published numerous articles on the translations. Yet, most of their analyses, I argue, only consider

[1] Aiping Zhang, "Faithfulness through Alterations: The Chinese Translation of Molly's Soliloquy in James Joyce's *Ulysses*," *James Joyce Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 572.

superficial problems related to translation: sentence length, syntax, and punctuations.[2] While I am not against linguistic analysis that centers on a translation's faithfulness to the original, such meticulous comparisons risk the negligence of assessing the fidelity of the translations in regard to Joyce's broader aesthetic project. For example, Joyce scholar Aiping Zhang is in favor of Xiao-Wen's translation of "Penelope"—the final episode of *Ulysses*, and argues that it is faithful to the original, despite the fact that their version has seven sentences instead of eight.[3] Zhang simply glosses over this fact as an "innocent, carless error."[4] However, contemporary Joyce scholars would almost unanimously agree that Joyce intended the episode to be divided into eight sentences, because a sideways eight in Arabic numerals resembles Molly's hip and signifies the lemniscate.[5] By reducing the sentence count to seven, Xiao and Wen effectively efface Joyce's allusion to the infinite, thereby foreclosing the text to any possible interpretations on Molly's relation to the infinite. Zhang's analysis serves as a synecdoche for the broader

[2] For instance, Wang Yougui and Wei Z. Gao argue that Jin's translation of "Cyclops" is more faithful than Xiao-Wen's because it had almost the same number of punctuations than the original: "In Jin's translation, there is only one comma added at the beginning of the sentence, the rest staying the same as the original (509-10). In Xiao and Wen's version, the translators added twenty nine markers such as commas, colons, quotation marks, ellipses, and full stops (584-85). In close comparison, I have found that Jin's translation is very close to the original in format, punctuation, and reading effect." Wang Yougui and Wei Z. Gao, "Translations of the Century: A Careful Reading of Two Chinese Versions of *Ulysses*," *James Joyce Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 274.

[3] Zhang, "Faithfulness through Alterations: The Chinese Translation of Molly's Soliloquy in James Joyce's *Ulysses*," 573.

[4] Zhang, "Faithfulness through Alterations: The Chinese Translation of Molly's Soliloquy in James Joyce's *Ulysses*," 574.

[5] Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 610: "The Linati Schema lists as Time, the recumbent 8, ∞, the sign for eternity as well as a symbol of female genitalia."

scholarlily reception of the Chinese translations of *Ulysses*, in that it overlooks the relation of the translated material to Joyce's aesthetic project.

Certainly, there are aspects of the text that are inherently untranslatable in Chinese. For instance, the famous SMP, or Subject–Middle–Predicate/Stephen–Molly–Poldy, referring to the first letters of the opening words in each main section—"Stately," "Mr. Bloom," and "Preparatory"[6]—simply cannot be translated into Chinese because of how vastly different the Chinese writing system is from English. To overcome the difficulties of translatability, translators must find ways to reimagine equivalence not through direct linguistic correspondence, but through cultural resonance. In confronting what cannot be rendered literally, translators must uncover new possibilities for expressing Joyce's thought in Chinese, thereby extending the spirit of *Ulysses* beyond the limits of its original language; or, as Walter Benjamin describes it in his essay "the Task of the Translator," translation is the means by which a work attains its "afterlife (*Überleben*)."[7]

This essay will concern the Chinese translation of "Oxen of the Sun" and "Penelope." To properly translate "Oxen," one must understand how the linguistic gestation of *Ulysses* anticipates *Finnegans Wake*.[8] "Oxen" is the episode which dramatizes linguistic gestation; *Finnegans Wake* fulfills it through a polyglot rebirth of language itself. To translate *Ulysses* into Chinese, therefore, is to reenact Joyce's experiment—to conceive the English language anew

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[6] Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses*, 12.

[7] Walter Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," trans. Steven Rendall, *TTR: Traduction, terminologie, rédaction* 10, no. 2 (1997): 153.

[8] See John D. Schaeffer, "'Ordovico or viricordo': Joyce's Road from Newman to Vico," *James Joyce Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 75–87.

through the morphology and rhythm of Chinese. The act of translating "Oxen" is not reproductive but creative, not imitative but generative. Finally, the problem of translating "Yes" encapsulates the entire challenge of *Ulysses* in Chinese. The monosyllable that closes Joyce's novel—an erotic, affirmative, feminine "Yes"—demands not mere equivalence but rebirth. To translate "Yes" in Chinese is to bring it home to the pictographic and cultural soil of the Chinese language. The Chinese *Ulysses*, then, is not a mere shadow of the original but its continuation: its new life, its second birth.

In what follows, I will first briefly recount the story of how the two Chinese translations came into being, and the translators' approach to translating *Ulysses*. Second, I will pay close attention to "Oxen of the Sun," and analyze how the Chinese translations succeed or fail in the recreation of the embryonic development of language. Finally, I will assess the Chinese translation of the final "Yes" in "Penelope."

Accessibility and Fidelity

The Xiao-Wen translation of *Ulysses* was commissioned by Yilin Press in 1990. The couple were tasked to deliver a readable, nationally accessible *Ulysses* for the Mainland.[9] Xiao's interest in Joyce's works had already emerged by the 1940s, when he was working on his master's thesis in the University of Cambridge.[10] Convinced that he would be able to resume his studies in China after WWII, he gave up his degree and took on the role of a war correspondent

[9] Hoi Fung Cheu, "Translation, Transubstantiation, Joyce: Two Chinese Versions of *Ulysses*," *James Joyce Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 60.

[10] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, Xiao Qian and Wen Jieruo, trans. *Yulixisi* (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2010), "Preface: The Crystallization of a Half-century Literary Wyrd," 1.

in Europe in 1944.[11] However, after the Chinese Civil War and the political turmoil of the Cultural Revolution that soon ensued, Xiao was unable to pursue a career in literature until the second half of the 1970s. In the economic reform era of the 1980s, Xiao gradually regained prominence as a writer and translator. In 1990, Xiao and his wife Wen took on the project of translating *Ulysses* into a Chinese context that was only beginning to reengage with the Western literary canon. Together with his wife Wen Jieruo, Xiao began revisiting his long-suspended interest in Joyce. Published in 1994, their version was celebrated for its accessibility and encyclopedic annotation.[12] Xiao and Wen were successful in introducing Joyce to an entire generation of Chinese readers and establishing itself as the definitive Mainland edition.

Xiao and Wen's vision was to translate *Ulysses* into something that would be comprehensible to the general public: "our goal is to try our very best to transform the original, obscure, and abstruse as it is, into something colloquial and smooth."[13] A prime example of their vision was the controversial "Penelope" episode, where they added spacing in between words and sentences.[14] This criticism might sound strange to a Western reader of Joyce, since the final episode of *Ulysses*, as avant-garde as it is, still included word spacing in its typography. However, the contemporary Chinese writing system typically lacks breaks between words and sentences. Since Chinese nouns are mostly compound words composed of two or more characters, it is easy for Chinese readers to comprehend the syntactic structure of "Penelope" by

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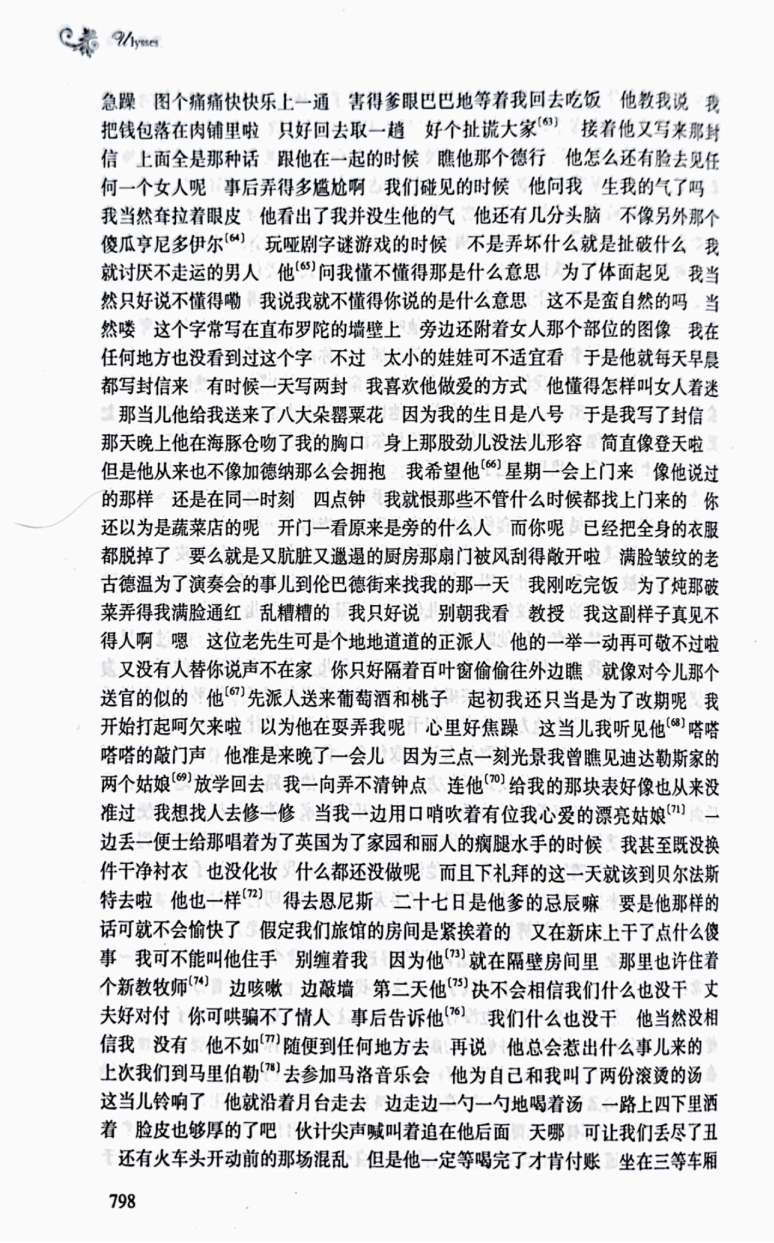
[11] Cheu, "Translation, Transubstantiation, Joyce: Two Chinese Versions of *Ulysses*," 63.

[12] Zhang, "Faithfulness through Alterations: The Chinese Translation of Molly's Soliloquy in James Joyce's *Ulysses*," 574.

[13] Xiao Qian and Wen Jiero, trans. *Yulixisi*, "Preface," 15-16.

[14] Zhang, "Faithfulness through Alterations: The Chinese Translation of Molly's Soliloquy in James Joyce's *Ulysses*," 575.

acknowledging the clusters of characters between the added spaces. Introducing the breaks between each word made the text accessible to the general public (see fig. 1. and fig. 2.). Jin's version, on the other hand, does not introduce the breaks.[15]



Ulysses

急躁 图个痛痛快快乐上一通 害得爹眼巴巴地等着我回去吃饭 他教我说 我把钱包落在肉铺里啦 只好回去取一趟 好个扯谎大家[63] 接着他又写来那封信 上面全是那种话 跟他在一起的时候 瞧他那个德行 他怎么还有脸去见任何一个女人呢 事后弄得多尴尬啊 我们碰见的时候 他问我 生我的气了吗 我当然耷拉着眼皮 他看出了我并没生他的气 他还有几分头脑 不像另外那个傻瓜亨尼多伊尔[64] 玩哑剧字谜游戏的时候 不是弄坏什么就是扯破什么 我就讨厌不走运的男人 他[65]问我懂不懂得那是什么意思 为了体面起见 我当然只好说不懂得喽 我说我就不懂得你说的是什么意思 这不是蛮自然的吗 当然喽 这个字常写在直布罗陀的墙壁上 旁边还附着女人那个部位的图像 我在任何地方也没看到过这个字 不过 太小的娃娃可不适宜看 于是他就每天早晨都写封信来 有时候一天写两封 我喜欢他做爱的方式 他懂得怎样叫女人着迷 那当儿他给我送来了八大朵罂粟花 因为我的生日是八号 于是我写了封信 那天晚上他在海豚仓吻了我的胸口 身上那股劲儿没法儿形容 简直像登天啦 但是他从来也不像加德纳那么会拥抱 我希望他[66]星期一会上门来 像他说过的那样 还是在同一时刻 四点钟 我就恨那些不管什么时候都找上门来的 你还以为是蔬菜店的呢 开门一看原来是旁的什么人 而你呢 已经把全身的衣服都脱掉了 要么就是又肮脏又邋遢的厨房那扇门被风刮得敞开啦 满脸皱纹的老古德温为了演奏会的事儿到伦巴德街来找我的那一天 我刚吃完饭 为了炖那破菜弄得我满脸通红 乱糟糟的 我只好说 别朝我看 教授 我这副样子真见不得人啊 嗯 这位老先生可是个地地道道的正派人 他的一举一动再可敬不过啦 又没有人替你说声不在家 你只好隔着百叶窗偷偷往外边瞧 就像对今儿那个送官的似的 他[67]先派人送来葡萄酒和桃子 起初我还只当是为了改期呢 我开始打起呵欠来啦 以为他在耍弄我呢 心里好焦躁 这当儿我听见他[68]嗒嗒嗒嗒的敲门声 他准是来晚了一会儿 因为三点一刻光景我曾瞧见迪达勒斯家的两个姑娘[69]放学回去 我一向弄不清钟点 连他[70]给我的那块表好像也从来没准过 我想找人去修一修 当我一边用口哨吹着有位我心爱的漂亮姑娘[71] 一边丢一便士给那唱着为了英国为了家园和丽人的瘸腿水手的时候 我甚至既没换件干净衬衣 也没化妆 什么都还没做呢 而且下礼拜的这一天就该到贝尔法斯特去啦 他也一样[72] 得去恩尼斯 二十七日是他爹的忌辰嘛 要是他那样的话可就不会愉快了 假定我们旅馆的房间是紧挨着的 又在新床上干了点什么傻事 我可不能叫他住手 别缠着我 因为他[73]就在隔壁房间里 那里也许住着个新教牧师[74] 边咳嗽 边敲墙 第二天他[75]决不会相信我们什么也没干 丈夫好对付 你可哄骗不了情人 事后告诉他[76] 我们什么也没干 他当然没相信我 没有 他不如[77]随便到任何地方去 再说 他总会惹出什么事儿来的 上次我们到马里伯勒[78]去参加马洛音乐会 他为自己和我叫了两份滚烫的汤 这当儿铃响了 他就沿着月台走去 边走边一勺一勺地喝着汤 一路上四下里洒着 脸皮也够厚的了吧 伙计尖声喊叫着追在他后面 天哪 可让我们丢尽了丑 还有火车头开动前的那场混乱 但是他一定等喝完了才肯付账 坐在三等车厢

798

Fig. 1. Xiao Qian and Wen Jiero, trans., *Yulixisi*, 798.

[15] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, trans. Jin Di, *Yulixisi* vol. 2 (Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 2016), 887.

诗意蓝色的海洋月亮的清辉是那样的美坐晚班轮船从塔里法①回来那欧罗巴角的灯塔那人弹的吉他是多么情意绵绵我还会不会再回去呢都是新面孔了两只窥视的眼睛在格子窗后隐匿我就为他唱这一首那对眼睛就是我的眼睛只要他有一点诗人气质两颗乌黑的眸子明亮如爱神的星星这些词儿多美啊如爱神的年轻的星可以换一换样了天主知道可以和一个有灵性的人谈谈你自己而不是老听他那一套比利·普雷斯科特的广告啦岳驰的广告啦魔鬼汤姆的广告啦然后他们的买卖出一点事我们就要倒霉我想他一定是个出类拔萃的人物我愿意结识这样一个男人天主啊不是其他那种庸庸碌碌的人而且他是这么年纪轻轻的我在马盖特海滩②的岩石后面可以看到那些讨人喜欢的后生赤条条地站在太阳光下像天神还是什么的然后纵身跳下海去带着那个为什么不能叫所有的男人都像那样呢那才让女人舒心呢像他买来的那个可爱的小雕像我可以整天地看也看不厌的一头的鬈发还有他的肩膀还举着一根指头叫你听呢那才真叫美真叫诗意呢我常感到自己想吻他的全身也吻一吻他那儿那根逗人爱的小鸡儿是那么的纯洁要是没有人看见我真愿把它含在嘴里它那样子仿佛就是在等你去吮它似的那么干净那么白他的模样儿他的脸还带着孩子气呢我真愿意马上就那样即使咽下一点儿也可以怎么呢和稀粥或是露水差不多没有什么危险的而且他一定很干净和那些猪男人大不一样我琢磨他们大多数人一年到头都从来想不到洗一洗的所以才害得女人们嘴唇上长小胡子我敢说我这年龄要是能交上一个英俊的青年诗人那一定是妙极了明天早晨我第一件事就是要摆一副牌看看那张吉利牌出来不出来要不然我设法给王后配对看看他是不是出来我要尽量多找一些诗来看一看学一学还要背一些才行不知道他喜欢谁免得他认为我没有脑子假定他以为所有的女人都是一样的我还要教教他另外那一门我要让他全身都发酥把他弄得神魂颠倒他将会写诗写我的情人情妇而且是公开地等他出了名之后所有的报纸都会登我们两

① 塔里法在西班牙半岛最南端，距直布罗陀二十八英里，在晴朗的夜晚来自塔里法的轮船半途即可见到直布罗陀的灯塔。

② 马盖特海滩在直布罗陀与西班牙联接处，上有男人专用海滨浴场。

Fig. 2. Jin Di, trans. *Yulixisi*, vol. 2, 887.

To get the literal meaning of the text across to the reader, Xiao and Wen sacrifice an important aspect of the "Penelope" chapter. They fail to rise to what Walter Benjamin refers to as the task of the translator. As Benjamin writes,

> When seeking knowledge of a work of art or an art form, it never proves useful to take the receiver into account. Not only is every effort to relate art to a specific public or its representatives misleading, but the very concept of an "ideal" receiver is spurious in any discussion concerning the theory of art, since such discussions are required to presuppose only the existence and essence of human beings. Art itself also presupposes man's corporal and spiritual essence—but no work of art presupposes his attention. No poem is meant for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the audience…What does a poem "say," then? What does it communicate? Very little, to a person who understands it. Neither message nor statement is essential to it. However, a translation that seeks to transmit something can transmit nothing other than a message—that is, something inessential. And this is also the hallmark of bad translations.[16]

By taking the receiver of the text into account, Xiao and Wen completely disrupt the flow of Molly's consciousness in "Penelope," reducing Joyce's art to a transmission of inessential message.

In contrast, Jin's *Ulysses* is much more celebrated among scholars and avid readers of Joyce. Unlike Xiao and Wen's rushed translation, Jin began the task in the late 70s, granting him

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[16] Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 152.

more time to produce a polished translation of *Ulysses*.[17] Jin's translation is fidelity-driven. He emphasizes his point in the foreword: "My objective is to re-present the original work in Chinese as fully and as faithfully as possible, so that it might produce on Chinese readers an effect as close as possible to what the original."[18] This "effect" is a reference to Jin's well-known theory of "equivalent effect" of translation, which holds that a good translation should "follow the original like a shadow." Sher-shiueh Li provides us with an example of the "equivalent effect" theory from the ORTHOGRAPHICAL section in "Aeolus:"[19] after watching Joseph Patrick Nannetti check the spelling of a newspaper article, Leopold Bloom recalls Martin Cunningham's spelling conundrum—"It is amusing to view the unpar one ar alleled embarra two ars is it? double ess ment of a harassed pedlar while gauging au the symmetry with a y of a peeled pear under a cemetery wall."[20] Jin transforms Joyce's wordplay into a pun on Chinese characters and their radicals: "*xiaofan shoujiong xiamian shi ge jun, kan ta chou you pang shi gui tai shi neng xin baichu; gongmu weiqiang kouli you wei, caotou weizi weizai waitou*."[21] Though what Jin describes here is the composition of Chinese characters instead of the English equivalent in spelling, the Chinese reader is able to imagine the linguistic playfulness embedded in the original text. Conversely, Xiao and Wen's translation of ORTHOGRAPHICAL fails in comparison to

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[17] Jin Di, trans., *Yulixisi*. Afterword to *Yulixisi*, 901.

[18] Jin Di, trans., *Yulixisi*. Foreword to *Yulixisi*, "An Epic in the Twentieth Century," 7.

[19] Sher-shiueh Li, "'Proteus' Revisited: A Critical Note on the Stylistics of Jin Di's Chinese *Ulysses*," *James Joyce Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 264.

[20] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (New York: Random House, 1986), episode 7, lines 166–69. Hereafter parenthetical citations are to this edition, by episode and line number.

[21] Jin Di, trans., *Yulixisi*, 158.

Jin's as they translate Bloom's interior monologue word-for-word, rendering the section unintelligible in Chinese.[22]

Taken together, the contrast between Xiao-Wen's accessibility-driven method and Jin's fidelity-oriented "equivalent effect" theory reveals a deeper question that underlies any translation of Joyce: what does it mean to carry *Ulysses* across languages when the novel itself dramatizes the birth, decay, and regeneration of language? The problem is no longer merely one of readability or accuracy, but of how a translation positions itself within Joyce's aesthetic of linguistic evolution. Nowhere is this tension more dramatically exposed than in "Oxen of the Sun," the episode that stages language as biological gestation. To assess the two Chinese *Ulysses* in light of Joyce's broader project, we must therefore turn to "Oxen" itself, for it is here that the translator confronts the challenge Benjamin describes: not merely to communicate meaning, but to participate in the continued life of the original.

"Oxen of the Sun:" Translation as Continued Life

While Jin's equivalent effect theory of translation proves remarkably effective for certain parts of *Ulysses*, I argue his approach reaches a limit for other difficult areas in the text, none of which more noticeable than his translation of "Oxen of the Sun." There, Jin decides to refuse the task of the translator altogether and leaves whole phrases untranslated. For instance, lines like "*parceque M. Léo Taxil nous a dit que qui l'avait mise dans cette fichue position c'était le sacré pigeon*" (14.306-07), "*Ut novetur sexus omnis corporis mysterium*" (14.347-48) and "*Talis ac tanta depravatio hujus seculi, O quirites, ut matresfamiliarum nostrae lascivas cujuslibet semiviri libici titillationes testibus ponderosis atque excelsis erectionibus centurionum*

[22] See Xiao Qian and Wen Jiero, trans., *Yulixisi*, 144.

Romanorum magnopere anteponunt" (14.707-10) are left untranslated in Jin's text. Of course, Jin is not obligated to translate non-English phrases into Chinese. However, the biggest problem with Jin's translation of "Oxen," I argue, is the fact that he is unable to translate the opening paragraph "Deshil Holles Eamus. Deshil Holles Eamus. Deshil Holles Eamus" (14.1). To understand why the inability to translate the first paragraph is so problematic, we must first understand Joyce' larger project in "Oxen."

"Oxen of the Sun" is written in a constantly shifting, parodic style because Joyce designed the episode as an allegory of the viviparous gestation for both human life and the English language itself.[23] Set in a maternity hospital, the episode mirrors the process of conception, development, and birth through language: each stylistic stage imitates a different historical period of English prose, from Anglo-Saxon alliterative rhythms to Victorian writing and contemporary slang. The evolution of style parallels the stages of embryonic growth, suggesting that the English language, like life, is something organic, mutable, and generative. At the same time, Joyce's literary stunt proves that older styles of English literature are still fertile.[24] By evacuating the historical styles of writing, Joyce anticipates the birth of his dream-language in *Finnegans Wake*.[25] Therefore, it is imperative that we revisit the translation of "Oxen" in the wake of the two *Wakes*. Benjamin's theory of translation might also be helpful in understanding the particular problem presented by translating "Oxen."

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[23] Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses*, 408.

[24] Susan Bazargan, "Oxen of the Sun: Maternity, Language, and History," *James Joyce Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (Spring 1985): 274.

[25] See Schaeffer, "'Ordovico or viricordo': Joyce's Road from Newman to Vico."

According to Benjamin, the "afterlife (*Überleben*)" of a work refers to the way a literary text continues to live and transform through its translations.[26] Translation, for Benjamin, is not a secondary transmission of a message, but a means by which the original work extends its life beyond its initial historical and linguistic limits. Just as living beings can be survived by their successors, a literary work achieves its afterlife when it is reborn in another language:

> Just as expressions of life are connected in the most intimate manner with the living being without having any significance for the latter, a translation proceeds from the original. Not indeed so much from its life as from its "afterlife" or "survival" [Überleben]. Nonetheless the translation is later than the original, and in the case of the most significant works, which never find their chosen translators in the era in which they are produced, indicates that they have reached the stage of their continuing life [Fortleben].[27]

In this sense, translation is interrelated with the original through "pure language," the universal potential of meaning that transcends any single linguistic form: "All suprahistorical kinship of languages consists rather in the fact that in each of them as a whole, one and the same thing is intended; this cannot be attained by any one of them alone, however, but only by the totality of their mutually complementary intentions: pure language."[28] Each translation contributes to the unfolding of this potential, adding new layers of expression and resonance: "Thus translation, although it cannot claim that its products will endure, and in this respect differs from art, does

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[26] Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 153.

[27] Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 153.

[28] Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 156.

not renounce its striving toward a final, ultimate, and decisive stage of all linguistic development."[29] Thus, for Benjamin, translation is not about serving the original, but about fulfilling its destiny—allowing the work to evolve, survive, and find new life across time, languages, and cultures.

As metaphysical and mystical as Benjamin might be, his theory of translation is appropriate in assessing "Oxen" precisely because Joyce himself metaphorizes the development of the English language as the embryonic development of a human fetus. To properly translate "Oxen" is to develop a new life in a different language and culture. Thus, *Finnegans Wake* and a translation of "Oxen" are both the "continued life" of the original text of Joyce's "Oxen." In effect, Joyce's work undergoes a kind of linguistic metempsychosis: the translation of "Oxen" into forty-three languages symbolically exhausts and reanimates the historical styles of those tongues, a process that anticipates—and is ultimately fulfilled by—the polyglot fusion of more than sixty languages in the *Wake.*[30]

Thus, to develop a new life through the process of translation, the translators of *Ulysses* should view the "Oxen" episode as the embryonic development of their own language instead of English. Jin's failure in translating certain sentences in "Oxen" is due to the fact that his "equivalent effect" theory of translation is not really about recreating the original text in a new language (Chinese), but about letting the reader "imagine" the original text hidden behind the veil of the Chinese language. Jin refuses to let his translation to take on a life of its own. This is evident in his inability to translate the first paragraph "Deshil Holles Eamus. Deshil Holles

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[29] Benjamin, "The Translator's Task," 157.

[30] C. George Sandulescu, *A Lexicon of "Small" Languages in Finnegans Wake* (Bucureşti: MTTLC Press, 2012).

Eamus. Deshil Holles Eamus." To leave the incantations as they are is problematic because the incantation "Deshil Holles Eamus" marks the germinal stage of gestation of the English language by evoking the Roman Goddess of fertility and plenty.[31] Jin's "Oxen" is a false conception, an English embryo growing within Chinese, unable to fully individualize.

Jin's "equivalent effect" theory of translation echoes what Lawerence Venuti terms as the "instrumentalist model" of translation: the widespread assumption that translation's purpose is to faithfully reproduce or transfer an invariant meaning or effect contained in the source text.[32] Venuti claims that this model, dominant from antiquity through modern translation studies, distorts how translation actually works. Instead, Venuti proposes a "hermeneutic model," which understands translation as an *interpretive act* that inevitably varies the source text's form, meaning, and effect according to the intelligibilities and interests of the receiving culture: "[the hermeneutic model of translation] indicates a belief that a translation can never communicate the source text itself, only an interpretation of it, which can vary, moreover, with the historical moment when the translation is produced.[33]" Translation, in this view, is not mechanical substitution but a creative, historically situated intervention that transforms the source text. Every translation is thus both autonomous and interpretively related to its source.[34]

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[31] Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce's Ulysses*, 408.

[32] Lawrence Venuti, *Contra Instrumentalism: A Translation Polemic* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 1.

[33] Venuti, *Contra Instrumentalism: A Translation Polemic*, 17.

[34] Venuti, *Contra Instrumentalism: A Translation Polemic*, 69: "The aim is not to consider her translation as an original composition, but to analyze it as a text in its own right, intervening into a particular cultural situation at a particular historical moment and for that reason relatively autonomous from the source text it translates."

Jin operates on his vision of the principle of faithfulness in his translation of the "Oxen" episode. He attempts to inform the reader of Joyce's brilliance in structuring the episode as the embryonic development of English by intentionally leaving certain sections untranslated. However, if Jin's vision is to represent "Oxen" as close to the original text as possible, then he might risk the question of whether the episode is even translatable under his theory of "equivalent effect" in the first place. If something that is not English is untranslatable, then how could one translate *Finnegans Wake*—the other continued life of "Oxen"—that is composed of over 60 languages? Furthermore, although it is true that "Deshil Holles Eamus" is not written in English, and that even an English-speaking reader would find the phrase obscure, the incantations themselves are still situated within the broader scope of the development of English. If Jin has already made the decision to translate "Oxen," then he should hold fidelity to the representation of the embryonic development of the language into which he is translating, in this case Chinese. Henceforth, the text of "Oxen" should end in the same language-genealogy in which it begins. Despite the fact that Jin is able to generate an "equivalent effect" of ancient Chinese to modern Chinese to match Joyce's stylistic shifts from the old English to the new in "Oxen," leaving the initial conception of "Deshil Holles Eamus" untranslated is an abortive gesture, a move towards the prohibition of a new life and the text's own autonomy in Chinese.

This is where Xiao-Wen's "Oxen" accidentally becomes the superior version of the two translations. Since their vision was always to represent Joyce's *Ulysses* as accessible as possible to the general public, they translated the episode of "Oxen" in its entirety in Chinese, without any section untranslated. Like Jin, they also traced the development of English and recreated the gestation of language in Chinese. In this case, Xiao-Wen's translation is able to generate a true

"equivalent effect," as their translation of "Oxen" instead allows the reader to imagine Joyce's full intended project, and permits the text to take on a life of its own.

If "Oxen of the Sun" exposes the stakes of translation at the level of linguistic genesis and how a text conceives its own afterlife, then "Penelope" brings this question to its most intimate and compressed form. After the long arc of gestation and stylistic metamorphosis of "Oxen," Joyce ends *Ulysses* not with a system of language but with a single syllable, "Yes." The problem of translating "Yes" is therefore the final and most delicate test of whether a Chinese *Ulysses* can truly take on a new life. If "Oxen" asks how language is born, "Penelope" asks how it affirms.

Hao and the Feminine "Yes"

The final interjection of "Penelope" is Molly's "Yes," marking the comedic ending of *Ulysses*. To translate a simple "Yes" into Chinese may sound easy on paper, but in actuality it is extremely difficult because the binary yes-no system of English applies less to Chinese. Unlike English, Chinese does not have a strict two-form yes-no system. Instead, Chinese is a context-dependent, echo-based system: the reply typically repeats or negates the main verb or adjective of the question.[35] For example, the question to the answer "have you eaten yet" is either "I have eaten" or "I have not eaten," instead of a simple "yes" or "no" answer. A Chinese interjection that resembles the English "yes" is *en*, which expresses agreement, acknowledgment, hesitation, or attentiveness, although its exact meaning depends on tone, context, and intonation. It is not a

[35] Wendy G. Lehnert and Brian K. Stucky, "Understanding Answers to Questions," in *Questions and Questioning*, ed. Michel Meyer (New York: de Gruyter, 1988), 224, 232.

formal lexical "yes," but rather a paralinguistic marker, a vocal cue that functions much like the English "uh-huh," "mm-hmm," or "hmm."[36]

Xiao and Wen translate the final "Yes" of "Penelope" as *en*.[37] The strength of using *en* as the final word of Molly's internal monologue is that *en* can be orgasmic and can act as an indication of masturbation. *En* as masturbatory works vis-a-vis with the interpretation of the final "Yes" of *Ulysses* as both orgasmic and masturbatory. Critics like Kay Young argue that "Yes" marks the eruption of Molly Bloom's soliloquy in a rhythm of mounting intensity of "yeses" that mimics sexual climax.[38] Joyce's cascading language, devoid of punctuation and restraint, renders language itself a vehicle of bodily pleasure, where words become the medium of release; a masturbatory affirmation where language and pleasure become one, closing the novel in a gesture of both sensual fulfillment and affirmation.

The problem with *en*, however, is that it isn't a resounding yes. As mentioned before, *en* is hesitant, and mostly functions like the English "hmm" or "uh-huh." Another alternative to *en* would be *shi*, which in some instances can be directly translated into English as "yes."[39] However, *shi* comes off as obeying, submissive, and too formal. Molly's monologue is not about submitting herself to Bloom as a figure of the patriarch, but to say yes to the possibility of future companionship.[40] *Shi* is also not associated with orgasm.

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[36] *Hanyu Da Zidian*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Chengdu: Sichuan Cishu Chubanshe; Wuhan: Hubei Cishu Chubanshe, 1986), 668, char. 3.

[37] See Xiao Qian and Wen Jiero, trans., *Yulixisi*, 826.

[38] Kay Young, "Joyce's *Ulysses* and the Neuroaesthetics of 'Yes,'" *Narrative* 28, no. 3 (October 2020): 283.

[39] *Hanyu Da Zidian*, 1497, char. 5.

[40] Young, "Joyce's *Ulysses* and the Neuroaesthetics of 'Yes,'" 284.

Jin's translation of the final "Yes" is instead rather confounding. He translates "Yes" as *zhende*, which signifies something that is real or true.[41] *Zhende* does not mean "Yes," and it is not even monosyllabic. Joyce's decision to end *Ulysses* with "yes" rather than with a word like "true" or "real" is profoundly deliberate. "Yes" embodies affirmation, vitality, and openness, in contrast to the closure implied by truth or reality. Where "true" or "real" would signal judgment or definition, "Yes" remains fluid and generative. It is an act, not a final conclusion. That is why we don't ever see Bloom reconcile with Molly. For thinkers like Derrida, "Yes" is performative rather than descriptive.[42] It does not state the truth. "Yes" creates in the moment of its saying. For Joyce, "Yes" resonates with the feminine principle he builds into "Penelope:" rhythmic, bodily, and fluid. "True" or "real," staying within the Derridean parlance, belong to *logos*—the masculine logic of certainty and rationality,[43] whereas "Yes" belongs to the rhythms of acceptance and return. In ending with "Yes," Joyce closes *Ulysses* not with epistemological resolution, but with an erotic affirmation.[44]

If Jin, Xiao and Wen all fail to comprehend the essence of the final, resounding and erotic affirmation of *Ulysses*, then what should the final "Yes" be translated as? I propose a different

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[41] For *zhen*, see *Hanyu Da Zidian*, 249, char. 7. For *de*, see *Hanyu Da Zidian*, 2644, char. 16

[42] "Yes, condition of every signature and performative, addresses itself to some other, which it does not constitute, and it can only begin by asking, as a response to an always prior demand, to ask him or her to say yes." From "Ulysses Gramaphone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce," trans. François Raffoul, in Andrew J. Mitchell and Sam Slote, eds., *Derrida and Joyce: Texts and Contexts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 74.

[43] For Derrida, logos is connected with the phallus, "phallogocentrism." See for example "Tympan" in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[44] Young, "Joyce's *Ulysses* and the Neuroaesthetics of 'Yes,'" 284.

alternative: *hao*. To understand the significance of translating "Yes" as *hao*, one must write the word pictographically as opposed to phonographically (see fig. 3.).[45]

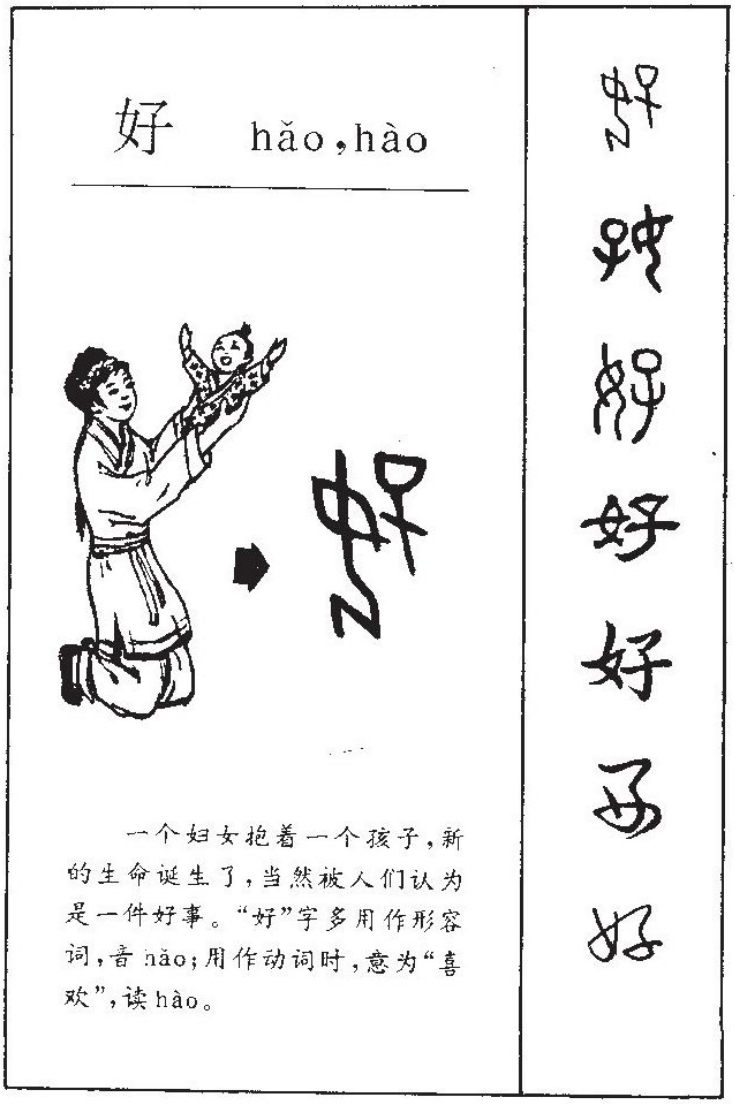

Fig. 3. The inscription reads: "a woman is holding a child, a new life is born, of course it is seen by people as a good thing. The character hao is often used as an adjective; when used as a verb, it means 'to like.'" From Li Leyi, *500 Common Chinese Character Evolution Examples*, 125.

[45] Li Leyi, *500 Common Chinese Character Evolution Examples*, 2nd ed. (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2006), 125.

The pictograph of the monosyllabic *hao* represents a woman holding a child. It is an associative compound character that is composed of two radicals that are also pronounceable characters, *nü* on the left and *zi* on the right, meaning "woman" and "child."[46] Thus, there is also a pictographic pun in *hao—nüzi*, which literally means "female" or "woman."[47] *Hao* can be roughly translated into English as "okay," "good," or "yes."[48] This word would then embody a two-fold meaning in the context of *Ulysses*: Molly holding Rudy, and Molly's own female body.

To integrate *hao* as "Yes" would require us to read the pulsing "yeses" of Molly's monologue as Molly's own body, her own subjectivity. Kay Young argues that the climatic "Yes" is an embodiment of Molly herself: "[*Ulysses*] reaches its climax as the "yes," finally, that is Molly's mind. The internal monologue begins and ends with "Yes" and flows from one to the other through the ongoing, repeating pulses of 'yes.' 'Yes' is Molly's body, Molly's language, Molly's subjectivity—in a word, 'yes' is Molly."[49] By interpreting "Yes" as Molly, Young opens up the possibility of translating "Yes" as *hao* through the inherent pictographic pun in the word.

The French translation of the final "Yes" may serve as a framework in understanding the femininity of *hao*. It is of course Jacques Derrida who wrote on the femininity of "*Oui*"—the translation of the final "Yes" in French:

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[46] For *nü*, see *Hanyu Da Zidian*, 1023, char. 23; for zi, see *Hanyu Da Zidian*, 1006, char. 6

[47] See for example "*nüzi*," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed November 6, 2025, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/chinese-traditional-english/%E5%A5%B3%E5%AD%90

[48] *Hanyu Da Zidian*, 1028, character 1

[49] Young, "Joyce's *Ulysses* and the Neuroaesthetics of 'Yes,'" 283

> The final "Mummum," maternal syllable or infant's apostrophe of the mother could, if one so wished, be made to resound with the final yes [oui] of *Ulysses*, said to be feminine, the "yes" of Mrs Bloom, of ALP, or of any "wee" girl, as has been noted, eve, Mary, Isis, etc. The Great Mother on the side of the river, of time, of vowel and of life, but the Father on the side of the law, creation, consonant and fall. In William York Tindall's book on *Finnegans Wake*, I came across the following sentence where the word hill plays more or less innocently with the personal pronoun, the third-person masculine in our language, il. Not to speak of the île, the island, and of whore: "As he [HCE] is the hill in Joyce's familial geography, so she is the river [. . .]. This 'wee' (or *oui*) girl is eve, Mary, Isis, any woman you can think of, and *a poule*—at once a riverpool, a whore, and a little hen."[50]

Derrida here reads yes (*oui*) as "wee," as the river Liffey, as ALP. "Yes" becomes *Oui*, which in turn becomes the maternal figure of the fertile river.

Molly waiting for her husband Bloom's return reminds us of the washers at the shore waiting for HCE's return: "My hands are blawcauld between isker and suda like that piece of pattern chayney there, lying below. Or where is it? Lying beside the sedge I saw it. Hoangho, my sorrow, I've lost it! Aimihi! With that turbary water who could see? So near and yet so far!"[51] The Yes-wee girl is then the Yellow River (Huang-he/Hoangho, also known as *Muqinhe* or "Mother River") as a figure of maternity that nurtured the civilization of the Chinese people. By

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[50] Derrida, "Two Words for Joyce," trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in *Derrida and Joyce*, 38.

[51] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 213, lines 4-7.

translating Yes-Oui as *hao*, the image of fertility is invoked through the final utterance of Molly's stream of consciousness.

In this light, *hao* does more than merely solve a lexical problem: it crystallizes the entire trajectory of the Chinese *Ulysses*. From Xiao-Wen's accessible but lively reinvention of Joyce to Jin's fidelity-driven but ultimately restrictive "equivalent effect," the two translations trace the tension between preserving the original and permitting its rebirth. "Oxen of the Sun" revealed how a translation must do more than transmit meaning: it must allow the text to undergo a second gestation, to be conceived within the rhythms and morphology of a new linguistic body. The final "Yes" of *Penelope* is the terminal point of that embryonic logic, the place where Joyce condenses affirmation, femininity, and futurity into a single syllable. The monosyllabic *Hao*, with its pictographic fusion of woman and child, restores to the Chinese text the fecundity and erotic openness that Joyce inscribes in Molly's last breath. In choosing *hao*, a translator would not merely approximate Joyce's closing word, but would participate in the continued life of *Ulysses*, allowing the novel to be reborn within the maternal currents of a different language.

Conclusion

Through the comparative study of Jin Di and Xiao-Wen's *Ulysses*, it becomes clear that the question of fidelity in translating Joyce cannot be reduced to linguistic accuracy alone, but must be understood in relation to his aesthetic project: the creation of life through language. Jin's fidelity-driven *Ulysses* succeeds in conveying Joyce's intricate syntactic texture but often halts at the threshold of translatability, gesturing to a refusal to allow the text to be reborn in Chinese. Xiao and Wen, though criticized for their accessibility and colloquialism, paradoxically allow Joyce's text to take on an afterlife, to live again within a new linguistic and cultural body. In this

sense, they achieve what Benjamin calls the “continued life” of a work: the transformation of the original through the act of translation.

Beyond the immediate problem of rendering Joyce into Chinese, the comparative study of these translations reveals a broader insight into how world literature circulates and transforms across cultures. Joyce’s works, themselves preoccupied with the instability and evolution of language, become a test case for how literary modernism is reanimated outside its original cultural, linguistical, and historical soil. The Chinese *Ulysses*—whether through Jin’s restrictive fidelity, Xiao-Wen’s accessibility, or the proposed interpretive potency of *hao*—demonstrates that translation is not merely a bridge between texts but a site of literary creation and recreation in its own right.

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