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LABOURING IN THE "SHELTERED FIELD": REWI ALLEY'S TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

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Tu Fu, writer of poems whose lines
will last as long as time, the refugee
by this city of Brocade; Tu Fu who has tasted
the bitterness of poverty, the loneliness
of long roads; his own child dying
because there was not food enough.

—Rewi Alley, "Lines Written at Tu Fu's 'Tsao Tang', Chengdu"
(Chengdu, 12 December 1957)[1]

Given that texts are radically situated . . . as material forms with a specific status in the field, the first task of any literary analysis is not to interpret their meaning, but to reconstruct their predicament.

—Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880–1914* [2]

We must not trust the translation whose words are entirely "unbroken". As with a sea-shell, the translator can listen strenuously but mistake the rumour of his own pulse for the beat of the alien sea.

—George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* [3]

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1 Shirley Barton, Papers relating to Rewi Alley, 87-038 and 87-038-2/04, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. A Chinese translation of a selection of more than 100 of Rewi Alley's poems, including this one, was published in 1984: *Aili shi xuan* 艾黎詩選 [Selected Poetry of Rewi Alley] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe). In this paper, I make no attempt to standardize the romanization of Chinese names and terms; in general terms, in his translations and other writings, Rewi Alley himself employs the Wade-Giles system of romanization, once prevalent throughout the English-speaking world, whereas I make use of the now standard and official *Pinyin* system, except for certain place names. I would like to take this early opportunity to acknowledge the contribution to this short essay of another remarkable New Zealander and colleague of Rewi Alley: Max Wilkinson, who spent the years 1948–52 at the Shandan Bailie School, sent by CORSO and in charge of the sheep. I have greatly benefited from (and much enjoyed) our many conversations, and in many cases the versions of the translations I discuss below are found in books from Max's collection. I do not imagine that he will agree with everything that I have to say here.

2 Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13.

3 George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 378.

In June 1952, Rewi Alley (1897–1987) received a telegram from a senior Chinese official instructing him to quit the Shandan Bailie School in Shandan, Gansu Province, and to present himself in Peking in order to serve, initially, as New Zealand's representative at the preparatory conference for the Asia–Pacific Peace Conference.[4] Alley, who had arrived in China in 1927 and who had helped establish the school in the early 1940s, was later to write of his Shandan years that they "were the richest and happiest of my life."[5] His last few months there, however, cannot have been entirely pleasant ones. The nation-wide "Three-Antis Campaign" (*Sanfan yundong* 三反運動), aimed at eradicating corruption, waste, and bureaucracy from within party and state organizations and which had reached the Shandan Bailie School early in that same year, saw a number of his closest Chinese colleagues there denounced at public "Struggle Sessions," whilst he himself faced accusations of one sort or another. In a self-criticism written, apparently, late in 1952, Alley was to state: "I feel that I have done too little for the revolution and that work in Shandan, which should have been the best, has been so full of mistakes as to make it of small value";[6] one can only assume that his actual view of events at the school was somewhat closer to that expressed in a letter to him from Hugh Elliot, a fellow foreign colleague at Shandan: "The whole business stinks and is stupid."[7]

Whatever the actual details of Alley's enforced removal from his beloved school, Alley's stated resolve now was nonetheless "to be used in the best way possible for the revolution, whatever that may be."[8] For the next thirty-five years, until his death in Peking in 1987, Alley devoted his very considerable energies to the production of propaganda on behalf of the newly established government of the People's Republic of China, in prose and in poetry, most of it unreliable, much of it unreadable, but all of which found willing (indeed, captive and, in the case of those in the People's Republic of China, highly subsidized) publishers in China or in New Zealand and all of which extolled the achievements of the "New China." It is a new life of letters rather than of labours which begins with the book still most readily associated with him, *Yo Banfa* (We Have a Way), first published in Shanghai in 1952, the title of which rings with bitter irony, given the despair and sense of dislocation in which it was written and the loss of agency Alley now had over the trajectory of his life in China.

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4 On Rewi Alley, see Roderic Alley, "Alley, Rewi 1897–1987," Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/ (accessed 18 November 2011); Rewi Alley, *At 90: Memoirs of My China Years—An Autobiography of Rewi Alley* (Beijing: New World Press, 1986); Geoff Chapple, *Rewi Alley of China* (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980); and Anne-Marie Brady, *Friend of China: The Myth of Rewi Alley* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

5 Alley, *At 90*, 232.

6 Cited in Chapple, *Rewi Alley of China*, 184. Chapple footnotes this section of his book to a typescript entitled "History"; sadly, his bibliography implies that he had access to only a single page of this document.

7 Brady, *Friend of China*, 57.

8 Chapple, *Rewi Alley of China*, 184.

Bulking large in the voluminous outflow from his manual typewriter throughout these years of enforced physical idleness were a series of collections of his translations of Chinese poetry,[9] both classical and modern, elite and demotic, the first of which, *Peace through the Ages*, was published in 1954.[10] Roderick Alley's biography of Alley in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, however, devotes only one short line to Alley's labours as a translator: "In the 1950s he turned to translations of early Chinese writers." Chapple, for his part, in his authorized biography, gives slightly longer consideration of Alley's work as a translator, quoting him to the effect that "The poems of Bai Juyi, Tu Fu and Li Bo do contain the essential elements of—what shall I say?—ancient Taoism perhaps, a partial Taoism, but anyway, an idea of oneness with nature."[11]

This paper hopes to redress something of this lacunae in previous treatments of Rewi Alley's life and work. Here I provide a preliminary reading of some of the products of his two distinct periods of activity as a translator, 1952–64 and again 1980–84. I do so in the context of the particular circumstances which led him to turn, in the first few years after "Liberation" and as a result of his ideological commitment to the purposes of that event, to an intense engagement with one of the quintessential products of China's past, and later, after the death of Mao Zedong (1893–1976) and the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), to pick up again on work he had left off two decades earlier.

If poetical genius is no guarantee of one's skills as a translator, as Han Dihou 韓迪厚 reminds readers in her discussion of Xu Zhimo's 徐志摩 (1897–1931)

9 Anne-Marie Brady says of Alley's initial appointment to the Asian and Pacific Peace Liaison Committee that "Alley's duties were light; it was a symbolic appointment rather than an activist's one." She continues: "Along with other foreigners working for the Chinese government at this time, Alley was initially on the 'supply system,' whereby his basic necessities were provided for, as well as being given a small living allowance. He reported to Pip Alley [his younger brother], 'Quite busy with this and that, reading and writing and so on. On living—one does not worry much. If there is work, there will be food. I have some books and some shirts and shorts for summer, cadre uniform for the winter, and a room to live in. A typewriter and some paper'. As the economy stabilised, Alley was given a generous salary and a comfortable apartment," for which see Brady, *Friend of China*, 73–74.

10 For a listing of Rewi Alley's published books of translations of Chinese poetry, arranged chronologically, see the bibliography attached to this paper.

11 Chapple, *Rewi Alley of China*, 197. This is a characterization of the three (very different) poets that few critics would find convincing.

translations of a number of short stories by Katherine Mansfield, published in 1923,[12] neither, necessarily, is ideological commitment. An annotation that Alley appends to his translation of the Tang dynasty poet Li Bai's 李白 (701–62) celebrated *yuefu* 樂府 poem "Shu dao nan" 蜀道難 (Down into Szechuan), as found in his 1954 anthology *Peace through the Ages: Translations from the Poets of China*, his first published book of translations, is perhaps illustrative of both his particular strengths as a translator and the ideological context of his work in the field:

> Anyone who has been down the back valleys of Szechuan will understand this poem well. All fighters of the Chinese Red Army who were on the Long March would understand it. The vast tumbled mass of jagged mountains, the huge clefts made by earthquake, the roaring torrents the sound of which drowns all speech, the steps through green clay mountains. The translator himself has been terrified going on all fours over some of the bamboo rope suspension bridges.
>
> At the time written of by Li Pai the refugees were fleeing the horrors of the civil war that followed the rebellion of An Lu-shan, a ruthless militarist seeking power for himself.
>
> The whole point of the poem is that the savagery of the civil war behind them is even more to be feared than the dangers of the road and even the uncertainty of the welcome ahead; will they find that having reached their refuge, wolves in human form await them, as fierce as those from which they have escaped?[13]

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12 Han Dihou, *Jindai fanyi shihua* 近代翻譯史話 [Modern English–Chinese Translation: A Critical Survey] (Hong Kong: Chenchong tushu gongsi, 1969), 109. In all likelihood, the earliest published translation into Chinese of an item of New Zealand literature was that by this noted modern Chinese poet of Katherine Mansfield's "An Ideal Family," published in the influential Shanghai literary journal *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報 [The Short Story Monthly] 14 (5) (1923). Xu Zhimo had met the ailing Mansfield in London in late August of the previous year, and, upon hearing of her death in January 1923, he commemorated the "eternal twenty minutes" he had spent with her in both an elegy and then an essay that was first published in the same issue of this journal. For a translation of both the elegy and the essay to which it was later attached and for a fuller treatment of the reception of Katherine Mansfield in China, see Shifen Gong, *A Fine Pen: The Chinese View of Katherine Mansfield* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2001). Understandably, Xu seemed quite unaware of Mansfield's New Zealandness; in China, this recognition awaited—in print anyway—a short review of John Middleton Murry's edition of the *Journal of Katherine Mansfield* (1927) by the literary historian Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 (1902–85) (*Xiaoshuo yuebao* 19 (1) (1927)). Mansfield seems also to have been the first New Zealand poet to have been translated into Chinese, for Xu Zhimo, again, published translations of three of Mansfield's poems ("The Meeting," "The Gulf," and "Sleeping Together") in the pages of the journal *Changfeng* 長風 on 15 August 1930.

13 Rewi Alley, *Peace through the Ages: Translations from the Poets of China* (Peking: n.p., 1954), 50.

Here we have Alley's characteristically emphatic insistence on the connection between the poetry of the past in China and contemporary realities as testified to by his own China experiences, just as the translation that this annotation is attached to itself embodies the particular muscular qualities of his language:

Down into Szechuan

A wild, steep road
more hazardous to take
than to try to climb
the heavens, it would seem;

in the dim, forgotten ages
men came and settled in this country
yet never building roads
to the centre of our Empire; just
leaving us the kind of path
birds can walk over, winding onward from Shensi
to the Mountain of Omei; a road,
such as it is, that was rent by earthquake
so that the ground subsided, mountains
split asunder and brave men
were lost; and now there is but
this track, steps cut here and there
in stone, suspension bridges over
raging torrents; crawling across,
one catches a glimpse of the way
high up ahead, then looking down
in terror finds below the seething
waters; not even the Yellow Crane
could pass easily here; better for us
to go on four feet like monkeys; around
and then around that mountain of green
clay we wind, nine twists to each hundred
steps, panting for breath, each holding
his chest with his hands, staggering towards the stars;

but why take such a road,
one asks? Why go into the unknown
through such dangers, the only sign
of life mountain birds on ancient
trees wooing each other; hearing
on moonlight nights their mournful
cries echoing over the waste; surely this
march is more difficult than trying
to fly; even the tales of peril

leave the faces of listeners white;
ahead, the peaks seem just one foot
below heaven; ancient pine trees hang
down the face of the cliffs; and the wild
waters tempestuously roar; boulders crash
and through all the valleys resounds
the thunder of their falling;

and you who have travelled this long
and weary way through all these dangers,
why have you come? Truly, here stands a pass
which one man could hold against many
but should this man be a traitor like
those we have left, a wolf or a tiger,
what then?

for we have slipped away
from savage tigers, from
treacherous snakes; from where
men were chopped to bits like hemp
with wild beasts chewing their flesh;

therefore look we to the cities of Szechuan
with longing; yet facing the reality
of the road wonder if it were not better
to turn back; harder to go on
than to climb to heaven—then grimly
facing the way forward
we march again.[14]

Not altogether coincidently, one suspects, this poem was also, it seems, one of Mao Zedong's favourites; one of his own copies of the poem carries his marginal annotation: "This poem bears some significance" (Ci pian you xie yisi 此篇有些意思), and he is reported to have commented to his personal assistants that "'The Hard Road to Szechuan' is excellently written, and its artistic quality is very high, giving particularly fine representation of the steep and precipitous mountains and rivers of our ancestral land and serving to transport one completely to a magical and beautiful mythical realm, as if one had indeed 'Climbed to the Heavens.'"[15] Mis-readings of the original of one kind or another occur on almost every line of Alley's translation of the poem, and, through means of both commission and omission, Li Bai is made to address directly

14 Ibid., 48–50.

15 Hu Weixiong 胡為雄, *Mao Zedong shifu rensheng* 毛澤東詩賦人生 [Mao Zedong's Poetical Life] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 2007), 347.

contemporary concerns. When Alley published a second version of this poem, twenty-six years later as part of a collection of Li Bai's poetry, the translation had been shorn of its earlier annotation, just as his approach to translation, too, had undergone marked changes, as evidenced by this later version in which the translator has been disciplined by a greater fidelity to the words and form of the original poem:

> *The Hard Road to Szechuan*[16]
>
> A wild, steep road, more
> dangerous than even trying
> to climb the heavens.
>
> > From the dim, forgotten ages
> > of Tsan Tsung and Yu Fu
> > until now forty eight thousand years, there were none
> > to build roads from Shu to Chin;
> > from Taipai Shan onwards
> > only the birds could fly over the way
> > until the mountains exploded
> > and the heroes were killed;[17] then
> > was formed a way of natural bridges
> > and steps; so steep, a chariot
> > drawn by six dragons could not pass;
> > below whirlpools that swift currents
> > form as they meet rocks, swirl waters
> > back upstream; not even the Yellow Crane
> > could pass easily here; even monkeys
> > stand staring anxiously wondering
> > how they might cross; the track twists
> > around Black Mud Mountain, with nine
> > turns for each hundred steps, round
> > and round one goes as if reaching
> > out to the stars, panting for breath
> > clasping chest with hands, sighing;
>
> One comes, but when can one return
> over a road so hazardous, it is so
> hard to be climbed; here you can but

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16 Translator's annotation: "Li Pai, who had grown up in the rugged part of Szechuan, would be familiar with the wild nature of the country. Some commentators say the poem was a warning to the Tang Emperor against his retreat to Szechuan in the An Lu-shan Rebellion, but this is not convincing enough."

17 Translator's annotation: "The story of the heroes is that five men were sent from Shu to bring the five daughters of a northern king. On the way home, they tried to pull a big snake from a cave. The whole area erupted, and they with the princesses were killed."

see hoary trees with birds flying
amongst them, unable to cross the ranges
where under the moonlight
the call of the cuckoo sounds
tearfully, dismally; a youth climbing
this way and hearing such sad
cries would lose the freshness
from his cheeks; one peak rises
high above the other, each seeming
but one foot from heaven; dead pines
hang downwards over cliffs, and as if
flying, waterfalls smash headlong
into rocks, hurling them onward
stone crashing against stone like
peals of thunder; truly a hard road!
then why do you from distant parts
come here?
The pass at Chienke is rugged
and high; so narrow that should
one man stand there, not ten thousand
could pass him; then if the commander
of the pass is not loyal, he too
may become an enemy, and like
a wild beast, turn and devour you.
On your way by day, must you
prepare to meet fierce tigers,
great snakes, who each day grind
their teeth and drink the blood
of those they meet;[18] here every day
men are killed like animals; though
Chengdu is a pleasant place yet it
is not so good as being back at home,
easier to climb to heaven than go
over the road to Shu; on the way
I turn back and look into the west
and ever sigh.[19]

18 Translator's annotation: "The wild animals referred to are the wild tribesmen of Shu—modern Szechuan."

19 Rewi Alley, *Li Pai: 200 Selected Poems* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1980), 50–52.

Reviewing the earlier volume in the same year as its publication, James Bertram remarked of Alley that, "Rarest qualification of all for a European in this sheltered field of translation, he knows most of the roads to China, and especially those frontier lands of the northwest that provide the setting for so many of the old Chinese poems of war and exile."[20] He goes on to compare, to the former's advantage, Alley's translation with the opening lines of Arthur Waley's (1889–1972) translation:

> Eheu! How dangerous, how high!
> It would be easier to climb to Heaven
> Than walk the Szechwan Road.
> Since Ts'an Ts'ung and Yu Fu ruled the land
> Forty-eight thousand years have gone by,
> And still from the kingdom of Shu to the
> frontiers of Ch'in
> No human hearth was lit.[21]

"Where the Waley version is graceful, mannered and a little futile, Alley's rendering carries something of the physical sensations of a man who has crawled over rope bridges in Szechwan gorges, and knows what it feels like."[22] If Alley's second published version of the poem is perhaps a better and more faithful translation of the original, his first version strikes me as inestimably the better poem. Significantly, given the ideological purpose underlying Alley's praxis as a translator, the two versions of the poem end with the travellers facing in opposite directions.

Although, by his own account, Rewi Alley's education in written Chinese had begun (at the hands of "a kindly old Manchu") soon after his arrival in Shanghai in 1927, proceeding through the traditional curriculum and sequence of primers, such as the *Bai jia xing* 百家姓 (Hundred Names), *San zi jing* 三字經 (Three Character Classic), and so on,[23] his labours as a translator of classical poetry in particular only really seem to have begun once the enforced sedentariness resulting from his removal

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20 James Bertram, "Rewi Alley: Chinese Poetry in Translation," in *Flight of the Phoenix: Critical Notes on New Zealand Writers* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1985), 99. This review, occasioned by a visit to the Rewi Alley collection in the Canterbury Museum, was first published in *Landfall* 8 (4) (1954): 313–16.

21 Arthur Waley, "The Szechwan Road," in *The Poetry and Career of Li Po 701–762 A.D.* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), 38.

22 Bertram, "Rewi Alley," 100.

23 For an excellent recent treatment of these primers, see Limin Bai, *Shaping the Ideal Child: Children and Their Primers in Late Imperial China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2005).

from the Shandan Bailie School had become a reality.[24] "The main purpose" of the translations that he turned his hand to in the early sixties, working with an unnamed Chinese collaborator, was "to try to transmit the poet's idea in a language which would enable the ordinary people of the English-speaking world to understand the message—whether or not they were in the habit of reading poetry or were familiar with the long history of China."[25] In the same section of his memoirs, he further elaborates his view of the nature of his task, somewhat hazily it must be said: "It seems that the first task of a translator of Chinese poetry should be to carry its spirit, though it is not possible to pass on the power and cadence of the original . . . If any attempt is made to use poetic rhyming or academic language, the translation will fall flat. Language must not be contrived, but must flow easily, like a stream running over round stones . . . I have tried to make my translations readily understandable, usually by clear, simple language."[26]

Despite the fact that the poems largely in question were the quintessential and elitist products of one of the world's most refined and sophisticated poetic traditions, this is a demotic view of translation that, for obvious political reasons, was picked up upon by a number of Alley's Chinese interlocutors. Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896–1981), the novelist and later (until 1965) party literary apparatchik, for instance, in his preface to Alley's *Bai Juyi: 200 Selected Poems*, speaks of the extent to which Alley's translations "pay less heed to the form than to the spirit of the original poems," constituting something by way of "re-creations."[27] And although the poet Feng Zhi 馮至 (1905–93),[28] himself an eminent translator and the compiler of the selection of Du Fu's 杜甫 (712–70) poetry that Alley translated, in his "Compiler's Preface" to the second edition of their *Tu Fu: Selected Poems*, passes over the nature (and quality) of Alley's translation in complete silence, Zhao Puchu 趙樸初 (1907–2000), calligrapher, Chairman of the Buddhist Association of China, and (concurrently) Vice-Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, by contrast, waxes lyrical about what he believes to be the strengths of Alley's "special style":

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24 "One of the persistent rumours against Rewi Alley was that he could not read or speak Chinese fluently and that Chinese translators did his translations. Both well-known translators Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi and Courtney Archer have attested to Alley's Chinese skills. Archer described how he and Alley used to argue over Alley's translations of Tang poetry when they worked at Shandan." Brady, *Friend of China*, 189 n. 127. To my mind, however, the issue is not so much whether or not Alley's command of classical Chinese was such that he was able to work directly from the originals of the poems he translated, but rather whether or not he did so, particularly given the extraordinary volume of translations published under his name, or were his tasks in this respect more akin to those of "polisher" of early English-language drafts produced for him (and his Chinese publishers) by his various collaborators (named and unnamed)?

25 Alley, *At 90*, 260.

26 Ibid., 263.

27 Mao Dun, preface to *Bai Juyi: 200 Selected Poems*, by Rewi Alley (Beijing: New World Press, 1983).

28 On Feng Zhi, in English, see Dominic Cheung, *Feng Chih* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979).

> Mr. Alley has broken away from the rigid conventions many English translators observe when putting various forms of Chinese poetry into English poetical styles. For instance, a poem of the *seven word short* style must be set out in four lines, and one of *seven word regular* is always set out in eight. Ways have even been devised so that lines of irregular length are given a corresponding arrangement in the English version, and so on. By translating directly in his own special style, Rewi Alley has made a clean break with these conventions. Using natural, everyday spoken language, he faithfully expresses the meaning of the original poem in an implicative and, when necessary, indirect way. In doing so, not only has he avoided many strained and affectatious [*sic*] translations, but has in fact created another way of bringing out Li Pai's style, which is like "Lotus out of water, so natural without make-up."[29]

What of Alley's tools for his craft, apart from the manual typewriter that he thumped away at with a characteristic two-fingered energy, his own mastery of the classical language and its various forms of expression, and that of his various Chinese helpmates and collaborators?[30] Although the Rewi Alley Archive made over to the Alexander Turnbull Library by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries in 1999 did not include his extensive personal library, the People's University, to whose library these books did revert, fortunately had the year or so previously produced a catalogue of his former holdings.[31] Of relevance to any discussion of his work as a translator is the extent to which he had at his immediate disposal the range of reference works and originals appropriate to his task, as well as an impressive collection of existing English-language translations of the poets on whom he worked.

In terms of the first category, for instance, as well as having copies of all the lexicographical (both Chinese and multi-lingual) and reference works becoming available again in the mid-to-late 1970s in Beijing, Alley owned a copy of an 1821

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29 Zhao Puchu, introduction to Rewi Alley, *Li Pai: 200 Selected Poems* (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1980), x.

30 In his preface to *The People Speak Out: Translations of Poems and Songs of the People of China* (Peking: n.p., 1954), Alley acknowledges the assistance of both Zhu Guangqian 朱光潛 (1897–1986), the eminent Chinese philosopher of aesthetics and sometime translator, and the pre-eminent Chinese translator of the second half of the twentieth century, usually in tandem with his wife Gladys, Yang Xianyi 楊憲益 (1915–2009). His longest-standing collaborator, however, acknowledged in many places, including Alley's autobiography, was the writer (and, later, translator into Chinese of Studs Terkel) Bi Shuowang 畢朔望 (1918–99). At the other end of the process, all Alley's manuscripts seem to have undergone the rigorous editing of the indefatigable Shirley Barton. My ex-colleague Don J. Cohn informs me that, whilst he was working in Peking for the Foreign Languages Press in the 1980s, he worked extensively on Alley's draft translations of the poetry of Bai Juyi.

31 This catalogue lists a total of 6,800 works, 1,145 of which are in Chinese, the remaining 5,352 in English, for which, see *Luyi Aili cangshu mulu* 路易艾黎藏書目錄 [Bibliography of Rewi Alley Collection] (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin daxue tushuguan, 1997).

Chinese–English *Dictionary of the Chinese Language*, Herbert Giles' *A Chinese–English Dictionary* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1892), and of course the standard *Mathews' Chinese–English Dictionary*. Thinking about the latter two categories of books, and with reference particularly to Du Fu, Alley possessed not only a good array of the best thread-bound editions of this poet, including the 1930s World Book Company edition of the annotated version of the poet's complete corpus produced by the late-Ming, early-Qing scholar Qian Qianyi 錢謙益 (1582–1664),[32] but also, amazingly, particularly given the circumstances in China until quite recently, an all-but complete collection of published English-language translations of Du Fu, including works by William Hung, Florence Ayscough, David Hawkes, A.R. Davis, A.C. Graham, Witter Bynner, Burton Watson, Wong Man (both his *Between Two Worlds* and *Poems from China*), and so on, as well as other important books, such as Kalgren's glosses to *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Songs) and everything published by Arthur Waley.

In the same review of Alley's early translations cited earlier, James Bertram argues that it was "the content of these verses [that] Rewi Alley is most concerned to make available," rather than "the fixed metres and tone-patterns … [which] are the despair of Western translators,"[33] and he is largely right in this respect, as perhaps, formally, best expressed through Alley's characteristically eccentric line-breaks, which I read as a manner employed to signal the extent to which the translation would make no pretence of replicating the architecture of the various forms of Chinese poetry (regulated and not) that Alley chose to translate.[34] In this respect, the translations from his earlier period have both an integrity of voice and a directness of expression that lends them some considerable and lasting value, however many mistakes they may or may not perpetrate.

Some years ago, in his treatment of Chinese aesthetics, Haun Saussy addressed the issue of translation directly in the following manner:

> translation is nothing but problems . . . We who translate tend to talk less about successes and more about trade-offs, and our modesty is usually justified. If a translation is a trading post, it is one in which "the most precious and the lowliest wares do not always lie far apart from one another—they mingle in our eyes, and often, too, we catch sight of the bottles, boxes, and

32 In his memoirs, Alley mentions his visits to Liulichang, the old second-hand book and antiques district in Peking in the early 1950s, and the ready availability of bargains—the result, although he does not make this point, of the dislocations of war and "liberation." For an extraordinary account of the "Peaceful Liberation" of Peking, see Dai Qing, "1948: How Peaceful was the Liberation of Beiping?" *China Heritage Quarterly* 14 (June 2008), this being the English-language translation of the Chinese text of Dai Qing's Sixty-Eighth Morrison Lecture, delivered at the Australian National University on 5 September 2007.

33 Bertram, "Rewi Alley," 100.

34 In the one (short) review of Rewi Alley's translations of classical Chinese poetry that appears to have been published in a major Sinological journal, William Nienhauser labels Alley's procedure in this respect both "unorthodox" and "senseless," for which, see his review of *Li Bai: 200 Selected Poems* in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 3 (2) (1981): 302–3.

> sacks in which they were transported". The piling-up of disposable externals (synonyms, glosses, footnotes, parenthetical remarks) marks a translator who is honest or confused, or both, for although it is good to know what is essential and what is incidental, the translator who is also a diligent reader may be of several minds about that question and prefer, when possible, to save the original wrappings.[35]

Sadly, such is the nature of the Rewi Alley archive, we now have limited access to the "disposable externals" of his work as a translator—no drafts or corrected proofs, no substantive letters between the translator and his collaborators discussing problems of selection and of translation. All we have before us are, in George Steiner's terms, Alley's "finished products":

> But even if we take the modest view, even if we regard the study of translation as descriptive-taxonomic rather than properly theoretic ("theoretic" meaning susceptible of inductive generalization, prediction, and falsifiability by counter-example), a severe difficulty arises. In the overwhelming majority of cases, the material for study is a finished product. We have in front of us an original text and one or more putative translations. Our analysis and judgement work from outside, they come after the fact. We know next to nothing of the genetic process which has gone into the translator's practice, of the prescriptive or purely empirical principles, devices, routines which have controlled his choice of this equivalent rather than that, of one stylistic level in preference to another, of word "x" before "y". We cannot dissect, or only rarely. If only because it was deemed to be hack-work, the great mass of translation has left no records.[36]

We are forced, therefore, in seeking to understand his work as a translator, towards a procedure whereby we either read between early and late published versions of the same poems, as illustrated above, or read Alley's in juxtaposition with translations of the same poem produced by other translators. This is the procedure adopted, for example, in Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz's elegant introduction to Chinese poetry, *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* (1987), or for many of the selections found in the best English-language anthology of Chinese literature, John Minford and Joseph Lau's *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations* (2000).

In this vein, for instance, what can be said of Alley's efforts in cases where the content is not concerned with themes of easy contemporary resonance such as war and peace? Here again is a poem from his *Li Pai: 200 Selected Poems* of 1980, but a poem of a very different form and kind, of a sort that he would in all likelihood not have chosen to translate in his first phase of activity:

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35 Haun Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 1. The internal quotation here is from Goethe, "Allgemeines," in *West-Ostlicher Divan*, 154.

36 Steiner, *After Babel*, 273–74.

On the Jade Steps

On the jade steps
in front of her room,
in the night she stands
with the dew wetting
her socks, so that she
goes back into the house
pulling down the bright
crystal screen through
which she gazes
at the autumn moon.[37]

By contrast with Alley's version, we may refer to the rendition of this particular poem by Ezra Pound (1885–1972), the man who, famously and according to T.S. Eliot, was the "inventor of Chinese poetry for our times."

The Jewel Stairs' Grievance

The jewelled steps are already quite white with dew,
It is so late that the dew soaks my gauze stocking,
And I let down the crystal curtain
And watch the moon through the clear autumn.
By Rihaku

NOTE.—Jewel stairs, therefore a palace. Grievance, therefore there is something to complain of. Gauze stockings, therefore a court lady, not a servant who complains. Clear autumn, therefore he has no excuse on account of weather. Also she has come early, for the dew has not merely whitened the stairs, but has soaked her stockings. The poem is especially prized because she utters no direct reproach.[38]

As was so often the case with Pound, despite (or because of) his lack of direct knowledge of the Chinese language, with the alchemical art of the great translator, he has managed to produce a moving poem in its own right whilst also retaining something of the original's architecture. Alley's translation, by contrast, seems to have been included in the anthology simply in order that it achieve the 200 poems of its title.

As a reader and translator of classical Chinese poetry and in something of a contradistinction to both his own ideological purpose in translating and the prevailing political orthodoxy, Rewi Alley appears to have been most drawn to the poet Du Fu, commonly regarded down through the ages as the "Sage of Poetry" (詩聖), rather than

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37 Alley, *Li Pai*, 186.

38 Ezra Pound, trans., "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance," in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928), 131.

Li Bai.[39] Here are two further examples of Alley's work as a translator, of, in this case, two of the greatest poems in the Chinese corpus, contrasted with translations by two other hands.

Spring—The Long View

Even though a state is crushed
Its hills and streams remain;
Now inside the walls of Changan
Grasses rise high among unpruned trees;
Seeing flowers come, a flood
Of sadness overwhelms me; cut off
As I am, songs of birds stir
My heart; the third month and still
Beacon fires flare as they did
Last year; to get news
From home would be worth a full
Thousand pieces of gold;
Trying to knot up my hair
I find it grey, too thin
For my pin to hold it together.[40]

This is how Peter Harris, in the most recent English-language edition of the celebrated traditional anthology of the poetry of the Tang dynasty, *Three Hundred Tang Poems*, translates this poem:

39 Mao Zedong's pronounced preference for Li Bai (along with the late-Tang poets Li He 李賀 [791–817] and Li Shangyin 李商隱 [813?–58]) rather than Du Fu is well attested. On this issue see, for instance, Hu Weixiong, *Mao Zedong shifu rensheng*, esp. 346–48. In contemporary terms, the Chairman's predilections were given their most exaggerated expression in Guo Muoruo's 郭沫若 *Li Bai yu Du Fu* 李白輿杜甫 [Li Bai and Du Fu] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1971), a book that opens with an epigraph taken from Mao Zedong's essay "On New Democracy" to the effect that "A splendid ancient culture was created during the long period of China's feudal society. To clarify the process of development of this ancient culture, to throw away its feudal dross and to absorb its democratic essence is a necessary condition for the development of our new national culture and for the increase of our national self-confidence; but we should never absorb anything and everything uncritically. We must separate all the rotten things of the ancient feudal ruling class from the fine and ancient popular culture that is more or less democratic and revolutionary in character," for which, see *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 3 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1954), 155. Wing-ming Chan suggests that so bad is the scholarship employed in the course of this book that, far from being an egregious case of political toadyism, in fact it should be understood as "a brilliant, satirical parody of a time when the whole country was going political insane," for which see his "*Li Po and Tu Fu* by Kuo Mo-jo—A Reexamination," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 4 (1) (1982): 90.

40 Rewi Alley, *Tu Fu: Selected Poems* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964), 36.

Looking out on the Spring

The state is in pieces, mountains and rivers stay.
It is spring in the city, where grass and trees grow thick.
Moved by the times, the flowers scatter tears;
Grieved by separations, the birds are startled and afraid.
The soldiers' beacon fires have burned three months
in a row;
Family letters are worth their weight in gold.
I scratch my white hair so much, it has grown
even shorter,
And soon it will simply be too thin to hold a hatpin.[41]

Or a late verse, written, it is commonly understood, in either 765 or 767:

Night Thoughts of a Traveller

Thin reeds, and from the land
A soft breeze; our mast stands
Tall and stark in the night
And I am alone; stars hang
Over the great plain, and
The moon moves with the flowing river;
Fame may not come together
With literary merit;
A broken-down, worn-out
Official should simply rest!
It seems I am but as a sand bird
Blown before the elements.[42]

By contrast with this translation, here is that of David Hawkes, from his *A Little Primer of Tu Fu*, a book in Alley's private library, a translation that, in the words of Hawkes' introduction, was intended as no more than a "crib" but which nonetheless seems to capture something of the power and despair of the original:[43]

"Thoughts Written While Travelling at Night"

By the bank where the fine grass bends in a gentle wind, my boat's tall mast stands in the solitary night. The stars hang down over the great emptiness of the level plain, and the moon bobs on the running waters of the Great River. Literature will bring me no fame. A career is denied me by my age and sickness. What do I most resemble in my aimless wanderings? A seagull drifting between earth and sky![44]

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41 Peter Harris, trans., *Three Hundred Tang Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 68.

42 Alley, *Tu Fu*, 135.

43 David Hawkes, trans., *A Little Primer of Tu Fu* (Hong Kong: Renditions Paperback, 1987), ix.

44 *Ibid.*, 202.

In his final published anthology of translations from the Chinese, *Light and Shadow along a Great Road* published in 1984, Alley returned to the modern Chinese verse that had been a feature of his earliest published collections. The collection as a whole, with its introduction by He Jingzhi 賀敬之 (1924–), co-author of the Revolutionary Opera "The White-Haired Girl" (Baimao nü 白毛女) and Deputy and then Acting Minister of Culture between 1989 and 1992, is not without its political interest, including as it does poets and poetry then on the very margins of acceptability. Sadly, here, too, the translations, of poems largely written in vernacular Chinese and abiding with none of the prosodic rules that govern the classical traditions of poetry in China, seldom rise above the prosaic and fusty voice of Alley's earlier and extensive corpus of translations, with their severely restricted diction and ubiquitously awkward line-breaks. The anthology includes several poems by Ma Fan-to 馬凡佗 (Yuan Shuipai 袁水拍) (1916–83), the journalist and editor and a man who joined in the conservative attack on the young poets in Chinese who emerged after the death of Chairman Mao in 1976. Ma was a poet whom Alley had included in the second of his collections of 1954, *The People Speak Out*, with this poem, a poem that takes us back to the time and place where Alley's own biography became entwined with the modern history of China:

Winter in Shanghai

One could knock on numberless doors
finding each one closed so tightly
and behind each door would be people
upon whom one has no claim;

one could glance over numberless rice bowls
seeing each bowl clutched so firmly,
each single bowl with so many dependents
guarded so carefully from being snatched away;

Shanghai the vortex drawing in people from all sides,
bits of timber that were floating in the sea
with the bitterness of winter and the cold north winds—
how many hundreds frozen to death today?

One could ask numberless people
who in this China has happiness and freedom?
And the reply would be dead silence
broken only by the sound of weeping.[45]

This poem was also included in the remarkable little anthology produced by the progressive, English-educated Hong Kong doctor Wong Man, as follows:

45 Alley, *People Speak Out*, 35.

Shanghai Winter

I knocked on a billion doors,
Each one was closed tight and tight,
Each one has its people inside,
To which I had no right.

I looked over a billion rice bowls,
Each single bowl was grasped firm and firm,
Each single bowl held many souls dependent,
On snatches the watch was stern.

From all quarters men crashed Shanghaiwards,
As flotsam drifting in the sea,
Winter comes, north wind blows,
What numbers freeze to death the day be?

I asked over all the people,
In China who is happy and who is free?
Reply to me in silence,
Reply to me was noise of sobs.[46]

As with so many of the other translations contained in this small and unpretentious bilingual collection of poems from the beginnings of Chinese poetry down to the popular songs of the immediate pre- and post-49 era, this version of Ma Fantuo's poem shows a playful willingness to experiment with the target language that seems able to retain both something of the original's lightness of touch and its moral seriousness.

The veiled reference in James Bertram's review of Rewi Alley's translations cited at the beginning of this paper to "this sheltered field," as was made explicit two decades later when Bertram wrote the citation of the Honorary doctorate awarded Alley by Victoria University in 1972, was in part, one must assume, to both Arthur Waley and Ezra Pound, neither of whom ever visited China in person. The later citation reads in part: "today he is considered to be among the three greatest translators of Chinese poetry, his knowledge of colloquial Chinese being unrivalled by other scholars in this field. But it is in his translations of the Chinese classical poets of the T'ang dynasty that he achieves his greatest literary distinction and here he demonstrates a strength and directness no other translator has yet commanded."[47] This assessment of Alley's

46 Wong Man, trans., *Poems from China* (Hong Kong: Creation Books; London: Hirschfeld Brothers, 1950), 167–69. On Wong Man, see Elaine Ho, "Connecting Cultures: Hong Kong Literature in English, the 1950s," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 5 (2) (2003): 5–25. Wong Man also produced a collection of his translations of the poetry of Mao Zedong, for which, see Wong Man, trans., *Poems of Mao Tse-tung* (Hong Kong: Eastern Horizon Press, 1966).

47 For which, see *Rewi Alley Seventy Five* (Hamilton: National Committee for the Commemoration of Rewi Alley's Seventy Fifth Birthday, [1972]), n.p.

abilities as a translator of Chinese poetry can only be said of some of the translations included in the publications of his first period of activity as a translator, the years 1952–64. In his second period, 1980–84, we find him often translating poetry that he seems to have had no great affinity with or liking for and, however closer the translations of this period cleave to their Chinese originals, doing so with none of the ideological purpose that drove his earlier labours in this particular realm.

In the absence of the "disposable externals" that would allow us insight into the actual processes of his labours as a translator and the supporting documentary archive that would provide us with something of a context—emotional, political, as much as scholarly—and in the attempt to better understand aspects of Alley's contributions as a translator of Chinese poetry, ancient and modern, elite and demotic, I have here been forced towards the procedure adopted above. Such a procedure leaves us, I believe, with a series of related and somewhat ironic considerations. As a man who celebrated all his life the joys of manual labour, his most prolific output was the result of mental processes. This output, of perhaps the most prolific translator of Chinese poetry of the second half of the twentieth century, was in large part the result of his frustration at his enforced idleness. Although Rewi Alley spent much of his life extolling the socialist virtues of "New China," his lasting published legacy will most probably be found only within the footnotes of treatments of one of "Old China's" most refined and elitist products. This contribution to the reception of Chinese poetry in the west was produced with access to but little discernible influence of existing translations of Chinese poetry into English but seems nonetheless completely innocent of the quite remarkable impact of translated Chinese poetry on poetic developments in the English-speaking world.

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Chronological List of Rewi Alley's Published Translations

Peace through the Ages: Translations from the Poets of China (Peking: n.p., April 1954). [A total of 116 poems, from the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Odes), the oldest collection of Chinese poetry and, later, one of the Five Classics of the Confucian Canon, to contemporaries such as Guo Moruo (1892–1978) and Ai Qing 艾青 (1910–96). The Tang dynasty, with seventy-two poems, is the best-represented period, and Du Fu, with thirty-six poems, is the best-represented poet. The copy of this anthology held in the Menzies Library of the Australian National University was presented to the library on 30 July 1954 by the poet A.D. Hope (1907–2000).]

The People Speak Out: Translations of Poems and Song of the People of China (Peking: n.p., May 1954). [A total of eighty-nine poems, again from the *Shijing* onwards, all of which are different to those translated in the earlier anthology but only twenty-five of which are classical poems.]

The People Sing: More Translations of Poems and Songs of the People of China (Peking: n.p., April 1958). [A total of 272 poems, arranged chronologically, beginning yet again with the *Shijing* but also including three poems selected from that other great foundation stone of the Chinese poetic voice, the *Chuci* 楚辭 (Songs of the South), and including poems from the Song (eighteen), the Yuan (seven), the Ming (thirteen), and the Qing (fourteen) dynasties, as well as a large selection (eighty-

eight) of poems from the Tang dynasty. The modern period Alley divides into two phases: 1920–49 (twenty-three poems) and 1949–56 (fourteen poems), whilst the last category of poem that Alley includes in this anthology, “Folk Songs,” he divides into those “Prevailing before the Liberation” (twenty-six poems) and “Love-Songs” (fourteen).]

Tu Fu: Selected Poems (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1962).

The Eighteen Laments, by Tsai Wen-chi (Peking: New World Press, 1963). [This book was labelled a “Poisonous Weed” (*ducao* 毒草) during the Cultural Revolution and withdrawn from circulation. The holdings of the library of Victoria University of Wellington include a copy of this work sent by Rewi Alley to James Bertram and which bears the inscription: “Jim/With best wishes/Rewi/Peking. Aug. 19, 1963.”]

Tu Fu: Selected Poems (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1964). [This collection includes over 120 of the poems of the man commonly regarded as the greatest Chinese poet. The anthology is explicitly based, in terms of its selection and its sequence, on one compiled by the noted modern Chinese poet Feng Zhi, himself also an important translator.]

Li Pai: 200 Selected Poems (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Company, 1980). [This collection of translations includes 200 of Li Bai’s poems, arranged chronologically, in accordance with the sequence given in the anthology *Li Bai shi xuan* 李白詩選 [A Selection of Li Bai’s Poetry] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1977). As cited earlier in this article, the anthology has an introduction written by Zhao Puchu.]

Selected Poems of the Tang & Song Dynasties (Hong Kong: Hai Feng, 1981). [This collection, of previously published translations, includes forty-three poems from the Tang dynasty, ten from the Song.]

Bai Juyi: 200 Selected Poems (Beijing: New World Press, 1983). [A total of 200 poems, arranged thematically (“On Life among the People,” “Social and Political Poems,” and so on) rather than chronologically. The volume carries a preface by the eminent novelist, critic, editor, and literary apparatchik Mao Dun (Shen Yanbing), dated November 1978. Alley’s “Translator’s Preface” acknowledges the assistance of the poet Bi Shuowang.]

Light and Shadow along a Great Road (Beijing: New World Press, 1984). [This anthology has a foreword by He Jingzhi (1924–), the poet and literary apparatchik, ending with the following: “Just as the name of this book implies, all fine poems are lights and shadows that mark the passage of men and women down the great road of history. Fortunately, for us, Rewi Alley has worked untiringly and so late in life to collect and translate poems that illuminate the road to the future” (34). The anthology includes more than 400 poems dating from the 1920s to the 1970s by almost 400 poets, arranged alphabetically, including two poems by Mao Zedong (“The Long March” [1935] and “Reply to Guo Moruo” [1963]) and one each by Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1966) and Yu Pingbo 俞平伯 (1900–90). The first poem in the anthology, by A Long 阿壟 (1907–67) and entitled “The Caves of Yan’an,” ends with the lines: “Why ridicule our simple life in caves? / The hope of our culture / lies here” (37). The final poems in the anthology, two anonymous “Tiananmen Poems,” carry Alley’s footnote of explanation, as follows: “On April 5, 1976, thousands of poems were displayed in Tiananmen Square. On that day, *Qingming*, the festival of the dead that year, a special remembrance was held for Premier Zhou Enlai there, expressing the people’s longing for political change. This was brutally suppressed by police, armed units, and thugs under the command of the Gang of Four” (403).]

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