

THREE POOR JOBS: JEWISH, AMERICAN, AND HONG KONG

Chapman Chen

Hong Kong

kivilonnrot@yahoo.com

Abstract

Objective: To find out how how *Ngo Loudou Hai Dongfui* [My Father is Ash of the Party], a Hong Kong Cantonese rewriting of Neil Simon's *God's Favorite*, which is in turn an American rewriting of the Biblical story of Job, reflects the *socio-political ideology* of Hong Kong.

Methodology:

1. *Andre Lefevere* (1992) argues that translation and adaptation are rewriting informed and influenced by the rewriter's ideology.
2. *Sirkku Aaltonen* (2000) argues that whatever its self-proclaimed intentions, the selection of foreign plays is *never* an *innocent* decision, but rather a response to a wholly specific situation within one's own culture and society.
3. In 2003, *five to six years after the handover* of Hong Kong from Britain to China, the Hong Kong government had proved itself to be grossly incompetent and the *frustration* of the Hong Kong citizens can be seen, for example, in one of the representative translated play performed there during the period, which originated from Neil Simon's *God's Favorite*. The religious theme of the former is turned political, and the time-space of the latter is changed from Long Island Sound in the 70s to Hong Kong in 1995.

Key Words: Drama; Hong Kong Cantonese; Lefevere; Neil Simon; Rewriting;

Socio-politics.

1. Introduction

Since the eighties, numerous Western plays have been translated into Hong Kong Cantonese and performed there, but not much research has been done about them. This paper aims at finding out how *Ngo Loudou Hai Dongfui* [My Father is Ash of the Party], Si-tou Waigin's Hong Kong Cantonese rewriting of Neil Simon's *God's Favorite*, which is in turn an American rewriting of Job's story in the Old Testament, reflects the *socio-political ideology* of Hong Kong.

2. Methodology

The theories employed are Andre Lefevere's and Sirkku Aaltonen's. Lefevere (*Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* 15, 41, 42) argues that translation and adaptation are rewriting informed and influenced by the rewriter's ideology. Rewriting is defined by Lefevere as a range of processes that re-interpret, change or manipulate an original text in some manner. It is intimately linked with the political power structures which exert influence within a given culture, as the processes of adaptation and manipulation in a general manner tend toward the production of texts which reflect the prevalent or controlling ideology (*Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* 8). The ideology concerned refers to that of the professionals within the literary system – critics, teachers, translators, etc.; as well as to that of the patronage¹ outside the literary system.

According to Andre Lefevere,

¹ Lefevere's definition of patronage is any power that may contribute to the generation and dissemination of literary works, but may also hinder, prohibit, and destroy literary works. The patron can be either a person, or a religious institution, or a class, or an imperial court, or a publisher, or mass media (Lefevere, "That Structure in the Dialect of Man Interpreted" 92).

translators have to strike a balance between the Universe of Discourse (i.e. the whole complex of concepts, ideologies, persons, and objects belonging to a particular culture) as acceptable to the author of the original, and that other Universe of Discourse which is acceptable and familiar to the translator and his or her audience... “Fidelity” in translation can therefore be shown to be not just, or even not primarily a matter of matching on the linguistic level. Rather, it involves a complex network of decisions to be made by translators on the level of ideology, poetics, and Universe of Discourse. (Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame 33)

Aaltonen argues that whatever its self-proclaimed intentions, the selection of foreign plays is never an innocent determination, but rather a response to a wholly particular situation within one’s own culture and society. The decision-making and rendition strategies divulge more of the translating ego than of the translated Other (*Time-sharing on Stage* 75, 88, 94). Moreover, “the role of foreign plays is significant in lending a voice to a range of issues which are on the agenda of the entire society or important for some section in it. There are many examples where foreign [plays] have been ... subverted to serve local issues” (Aaltonen, *Time-sharing on Stage* 90).

A brief look at the societal background of Hong Kong during the period concerned will be taken before Si-tou’s rewriting of Neil Simon’s *God’s Favorite* is examined.

3. Societal Background of Post-handover Hong Kong

In 2003, *six years after the handover* of Hong Kong from the United Kingdom to China, the fiscal deficit was around eighty eight billion Euros; and the rate of unemployment was around 8 per cent (compared with 2.2 per cent in 1997) with the number of the unemployed nearing three hundred thousand. Meanwhile the Hong Kong Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa, who had been handpicked by Beijing, began to tighten his grip by introducing unpopular measures such as an anti-subversion law known as Article 23² and new taxes. The popularity of Tung³ and his regime consequently fell to a record low and the *Hong Kong citizens* were *full of frustration, anger, and angst*.

Now, the translated play, *My Father is Ash of the Party*, is going to be analyzed with reference to the Hong Kong situation. This particular play is chosen because it was performed when the economic and political conditions of Hong Kong were at their worst since the handover (see below), and the translation strategy employed is very bold - the religious theme of *God's Favorite* is turned radically into a political one (though the sub-themes remain faith amidst adversities and familial love enhanced through a crisis).

4. The Transformation Process

Si-tou Waigin's *My Father is Ash of the Party* (2003) reflects the plight of the people of Hong Kong in 1995 - the background era of the Cantonese version - as well

² On 1 July 2003, anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to Beijing, more than 50 million Hong Kong people took to the street, protesting against Article 23 and demanding the Chief Executive, Tung, to step down.

³ According to surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Programme (POP), University of Hong Kong, the popularity of the Chief Executive had dropped from 64.8% in July 1997 to 35% in July 2003. Between 2 July and 4 July, and on 5 July, POP respectively interviewed 1046 and 1160 people. 70.9 per cent of the respondents indicated that if they were given a chance to elect their chief executive next day, they would not vote for Tung. Subsequently, on 20 December 2004, J.T. Hu, the successor of Jiang Zemin, publicly demanded C.H. Tung to look for his shortcomings in governing Hong Kong. On 10 March 2005, Tung finally resigned.

as in 2003 - the year of performance of the Cantonese version. The Cantonese rendition is a Hong Kong modern political version of Neil Simon's *God's Favorite* and, in turn, of the Biblical Job. The transformation process is as follows. Job, a prosperous Jewish farmer in the Old Testament, is transformed by Neil Simon into Joe Benjamin of Long Island, a wealthy manufacturer of cardboard boxes, but nonetheless a devout and simple man, grateful to God for his success, his rags-to-riches story. In turn, Joe is transformed by Si-tou Waigin into Gwok Zungseon, a rich Hong Kong businessman devoted to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). God is transformed into Chairman Jiang of CCP and Satan into Governor Patten, whom Beijing used to call "the guilty figure of all time." As a result of a bet between Chairman Jiang and Governor Patten, Jiang sets out to test Gwok's loyalty to the CCP by depriving him of his business, his properties, his wealth, his family in 1995. Still, Gwok would not renounce the CCP.

5. The Socio-political Background of Hong Kong in 1995

Let us take a look at the socio-political background of Hong Kong in 1995. When Governor Patten announced his election proposal for the Hong Kong government in October 1992, which fully used the gray areas and undefined areas in the Basic Law⁴ to maximize the degree of democracy, China set up the Preparatory Working Committee to show that China could impose their own blueprints for the future SAR government. The 1995 election was conducted according to the Patten formula, and Beijing reiterated that all councilors elected under the Patten formula would be abolished in 1997. In 1996, a Provisional Legislature, handpicked by Beijing, was set up. According to Wong Siu-lun, an authority in Hong Kong

⁴ The constitutional document of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and the blueprint for HKSAR's future development.

sociology, in 1995, the Hong Kong economy slackened and unemployment grew (384). Furthermore,

Different surveys have revealed the existence of gloomy perceptions about the future among the local population. There is a widespread belief that things will deteriorate after 1997; civil rights will be curtailed; personal freedoms will be reduced; the legal system will degenerate; living standards will fall; corruption will rise; and, the government will become less efficient and trustworthy. (Wong Siu-lun 387)

6. The Subversive Strategy of the Cantonese translator

The Cantonese translator of *God's Favorites* has spared no chance of satirizing or attacking Communist China. He frequently manipulates and makes use of concepts, events, characters, objects, etc. in the original as a kind of pretext for his criticisms of Communist China from a typically Hong Kong perspective. To borrow Aaltonen's words as quoted above, he "subverts" the foreign "to serve local issues" (*Time-sharing on Stage* 90) such as Hong Kong people's impression of the horrors of the Cultural Revolution, the emigration waves of Hong Kong people before 1997, and the Chief Executive Tung's blind loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party.

7. How Come Joe/Gwok Has to be Tested?

The test of Joe's/Gwok's religious/political faith originates as follows:

God and Satan were sitting around having one of those boring philosophical debates – this was a week ago Tuesday... And Satan

says there is not one man on the face of the earth, in the entire universe – regardless of race, religion, Polish, whatever – who would not renounce God once the Devil put enough heat on... God said...one man would never renounce. And that man is ... JOE BENJAMIN!... So they make a bet... the Devil will make your life so miserable, you'll renounce God! (41)

Si-tou translates:

Last week Jiang Zemin and Patten were arguing through ICQ such boring issues as the through-train and the triple violation⁵. Unexpectedly, Patten suddenly said, “Chairman Jiang, do you know how many Hong Kong people have secured a foreign passport since we announced that Britain will stop administering Hong Kong?... Patten went on to say, “Chairman Jiang, don't think that Hongkongers are very patriotic. They only care about easy money and profits and they cannot stand hardships. If only they are made to go through what pains and disasters the Communist Party has imposed on its people, I am sure not a single Hongkonger will continue to support the handover... Chairman Jiang said... “At least one Hongkonger will not renounce their mother country, let alone the Communist Party... Mr. Gwok Zungseon.”... So they make a bet... the bet is that the communists will torture you so horribly, you'll renounce the Party and the mother country, just like those

⁵ No sooner had Chris Patten put forth its constitutional reform proposal of Hong Kong in October 1992 than Beijing called it a triple violation – violating the Sino-British Joint Declaration, agreements between Britain and China, and the Basic Law.

who have emigrated.

The foreign passport matter with which Si-tou replaces the renunciation of God is a matter of fact. Ever since the 1980s, two major emigration peaks had taken place in Hong Kong. The first occurred in early 1980 when Beijing first asserted its intention to take back the sovereignty of Hong Kong. The emigration figure for 1980 was twenty-two thousand, which accelerated year by year. The second emigration peak occurred right after the Tiananmen Massacre. The figure for 1989 was forty-two thousand while the figure for 1990 was as high as sixty-two thousand. Between 1980 and 1990, more than three hundred seventy-seven thousand people emigrated from Hong Kong. The annual average between 1991 and 1997 was around fifty thousand.

It is also noteworthy that in *God's Favorite*, according to Lipton, the messenger of God, it is the Devil who will implement the test of Joe Benjamin's faith (Simon 41), just as Satan is allowed by God to torture Job in the Biblical version. In the Cantonese version, however, Chairman Jiang Zemin plays both God and Devil. This implies that the Chinese Communist Party is at the same time posing itself as God and maltreating the people like the Devil.

8. What Does the Hong Kong Job Represent?

Neil Simon's religious billionaire, Joe Benjamin is rewritten by Si-tou Waigin into Gwok Zungseon, a rich Hong Kong businessman politically devoted to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Gwok represents HK pro-Beijing elements who are blindly patriotic and loyal to CCP like the Hong Kong Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa. Just as he waits patiently for his rebellious eldest son to understand him, he waits most patiently and lovingly for the Party and for the nation to get better,

despite the numerous unspeakable sufferings the CCP has caused the Chinese people.

Joe tells his eldest son, Ben, about how he grew up and became rich as follows:

I grew up in a tenement in New York. My mother, my father and eleven kids in one and a half rooms... My father... was a piano mover. He died at the age of thirty-two... My mother had to take a job in a sweatshop working six days a week, fourteen hours a day. At night she washed floors at Madison Square Garden, and on Sundays she sold hot sweet potatoes... What she didn't sell was dinner for the rest of the week... she never complained or cried out against the world, because she knew it was God's will. That was the lesson my mother taught us. "What God has given, God can take away. And for what God has given you, be thankful"... When I was fourteen years old I went to work for the Schreiber Corrugated Box Company. A rotten man who made a rotten box. When I bought the business from him in 1942 with six thousand dollars my mother saved, I started to make quality boxes... In the first three months I lost my mother's six thousand dollars. "It's God's will," she kept telling me. And then suddenly business began to pickup... My mother never lived to enjoy my success... But when I ask myself, "Why so much? Why all this?" I hear the voice of my mother say, "It's God's will"... I give half of what I have every year to charity.

(23-25)

Si-tou translates:

I grew up in an extremely wealthy family...My father was a comprador of the British...He contributed part of his earnings to the revolutionary cause of the Communist Party in China...During the Korean War, due to a catastrophic business failure, we had to move from Victorian Peak to Diamond Hill...He sent my seven younger siblings to China...Unexpectedly, hardly had six months elapsed, the Cultural Revolution broke out, all my younger brothers and sisters were blacklisted and exiled to Heilongjiang, where they were either frozen or starved to death...My father found a cleaning job, working six days a week, twelve hours a day. At night, he sold rice rolls in front of a theatre together with me. What he didn't sell was dinner for me...He had never complained against the Communist Party, because he knew that was our country's destiny...Father also often reminded me, "What we do for the country, the Chairman of the Party will know and will make appropriate arrangement." ...

I went to work in a handbag factory in Dungguan. The boss of the factory stank because his mind was set only on making fast money...I worked in that factory for ten years... I told my father that I wished to buy the factory. Without further enquiry, my father handed over to me the money he had saved for his funeral and what he had borrowed from other, and told me, "Ah Seon, don't do any business detrimental to the State." ...

I refused to manufacture piracy goods... The debt I owed was ten times what was owed by my father when he became broke...Suddenly, the policy of cracking down on piracy goods was implemented... Many orders for non-piracy handbags were not

taken up. I took whatever orders there were as long as they did not demand piracy goods...My father never lived to enjoy my success...I am so rich, earning so much in Mainland, but I never pursued it. This is in fact the result of the open policy of the State... So I donate half of what I earn every year for the construction of the mother country...

This piece of rewriting sets the background for Gwok Zungseon's blind loyalty to the CCP just as the original passage sets the background for Joe Benjamin's deep faith in God. While Joe grew up in a poor God-fearing family, Gwok grew in a rich and "patriotic" family. This reminds us of Hong Kong's Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa, who had a rich and "patriotic" businessman father, Tung Chao Yung. It makes the audience pity and laugh at the hero at the same time, as while Gwok's seven siblings have been persecuted to death by the CCP, he is still thankful to the CCP when he out of luck and his own honest, hard work became an upstart after the opening-up of China in the 80s.

When everybody in the family of Joe Benjamin except Joe himself is worrying that someone is going to break into their house, Joe shouts:

I guarantee it... but I can't promise it! Because whatever happens, happens. How we live and how we die is in the hands of our maker. We go to sleep and pray we get up in the morning. But if we don't, it's because it's God's will... God's will, do you understand? Do you?

(20)

Si-tou translates:

*I believe we will live well until 97! (Pause) But I can't guarantee it.
Because if something does happen, it must be due to the conspiracy
of the British, who want to ruin the smooth transition... But we
must believe: when the State is fine, Hong Kong will be fine; when
Hong Kong is fine, every family will be fine. (My translation)*

This piece of rewriting also associates Gwok with Tung Chee-hwa. The last two lines had appeared in the election platform of Tung Chee-hwa as publicized on 23 October 1996. Six years after the handover, this assertion had proved to be incorrect, because when China could directly do business with the West, Hong Kong's useful role as a go-between became diminished. In fact, the offices and even headquarters of many big companies, both local and international, had already moved to the Chinese Mainland.

9. What do Gwok's Family Members Represent?

Gwok's wife and second son and daughter represent ordinary HK citizens. They fear losing their properties to the communists after 1997 and they despise the uncivilized, unhygienic, unscrupulous, and backward people of the Chinese Mainland. For example, when the Gwoks suspect an illegal China-immigrant is breaking into their luxuriant house, Gwok's wife yells, "I don't want the communists.... I only want us to remain what we are now – under the British rule – and live here very safely and stably." On the other hand, the counterpart in Neil Simon's version is just, "I want to know that we'll be safe in our beds tonight and that some lunatic isn't going to break into the house and cut our throats and steal our jewels" (1975: 20).

When even the wife of the hero is fed up with his blind loyalty, she threatens to

renounce him if he continues with it:

*I demand! I demand, Joe Benjamin, that you give up your precious
God. How can you love someone who makes us suffer so much?...
If you don't renounce him, Joe... then I'm going to renounce you!*
(74)

Si-tou translates:

*If you are already totally disappointed by this country and this party,
then stop being a citizen of China... I am free to utter what I feel;
you have your choice but I also have my feelings. These are our
basic rights as human beings, rights that everybody on earth is
entitled to, be they Chinese, American, or European. (My
translation)*

The rewriting here again reflects the psychology of most Hong Kong people who want to secure a Western passport – to strive for the basic dignity of being a human being.

In addition, Gwok's daughter is concerned that her limbs will be cut off by some mainlander and she will be coerced to beg for them in the streets of Shengzhen; while the counterpart in Neil Simon's version is just Sarah yelling, "I'll never sleep. I keep picturing some horrid man rubbing his clammy hands all over me..." (9)

Gwok's eldest son, Gwok Zoumong, represents pro-democracy HK people, mourning the June Fourth Massacre, distrusting the communists, and being worried

about loss of human rights after 1997. Towards the end of the Cantonese version, he explains frankly for the first time to his father why he began to loathe his father so intensely upon entering university:

Do you remember in which year I entered university? 89! The earth-shaking 89!⁶ I witnessed a businessman betraying his conscience after 1989 and continuing to do business with Mainland China. I witnessed a father saying things will eventually become good as long as we believe in the Communists! I despise you! I hate you! (My translation)

The same young man is also deeply concerned about Hong Kong's future, "What I'm sad about is that I sense that Hong Kong is going to be unlike before... people living here are gonna be very insecure, very hopeless!"

No doubt, Zou finally reconciles himself with his father, just like his counterpart, Ben, in Neil Simon's version, where, Ben, however, does not say so many things apart from disclosing to his father that he has been struck stone blind!

10. The Comic Messenger and the Tortures Announced and Witnessed by him

Both Lipton, the messenger of God in Neil Simon's play, and Ah Seoi, the messenger of Chairman Jiang, in *My Father is Ash of the Party* are rather comic. The contact between the messenger Lipton and his God is sometimes described by the former in a humorous way, which is rewritten by Si-tou in a way equally humorous

⁶ This refers to the June Fourth Tienanmen Massacre in 1989.

but connected with some ulterior motive:

Joe: You met God?

Lipton: Twice on business, once on a boat ride. (36)

Si-tou translates:

Gwok Zungseon: You are in frequent contact with Chairman Jiang?

*Ah Seoi: Twice on business. Once I taught him English; he asked me what
“simple” and “naïve” mean. (My translation)*

“Simple’ and ‘naïve’” is in fact a piece of satire on Chairman Jiang. On 27 October 2000, when repeatedly pressed by Hong Kong journalists as to why Beijing made known its backing of Tung Chee-hwa’s reelection after his first term ended in 2002, Chinese President Jiang Zemin yelled at Hong Kong journalists for being “too simple” and “naïve.”

Note the physical ordeals to be imposed on Joe as announced by the messenger
Lipton:

*The previews. The coming attractions...A hernia, gastritis, a double
impacted wisdom tooth, a root canal job, the heartbreak of psoriasis,
constipation, diarrhea, piles, dysentery, chills, fever, athlete’s foot,
lumbago, a touch of gonorrhoea and a general feeling of loginess...
All this, mind you, is on the left side of your body. (Neil Simon
78-79)*

Si-tou translates:

*The previews. The coming attractions. Let me read the list to you.
Today you have lost your family and your friends. Next week you'll
be paraded through the streets for public humiliation; the week after
the next, you'll kneel on broken glass; and the next, you'll go to Shap
Pat Heung⁷; and the next, O Dear, you'll be exiled to Potoi Island⁸...*
(My translation)

Here, the diseases to be inflicted on Joe are replaced by even more terrible tortures used by the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution. This shows that the Chinese Communist Party are even more atrocious and awful than the actual Devil.

On the other hand, one disease actually inflicted on Joe as announced and then witnessed by the messenger, Ah Seoi, is retained for Gwok, and that is itchiness. But there Si-tou again does not let go of the opportunity to denounce the internationally notorious market culture of Mainland China. In Neil Simon's version, the immediate earthly cause of the hero's itchiness remains unexplained. Contrastively, Ah Seoi tells Gwok:

*Haven't you noticed signs of your skin disease coming back?... What
you've used for the fortnight is a fake product. The more you apply
it to your skin, the more you itch... There are really fake products of
everything in Mainland China!*

⁷ A rural village in New Territories, Hong Kong. During the Cultural Revolution, numerous intellectuals were sent to countryside and mountainous areas in Mainland China to do hard labor under most difficult circumstances.

⁸ A small, almost uninhabited island of Hong Kong.

Now, according to numerous reports published in China, Hong Kong, and elsewhere, “each year, millions of US dollars’ worth of counterfeit and substandard goods are produced in China” (“Toxic Liquor Death Toll Hits 11T”) – from pirate LV handbags to pirate electrical appliances, from fake liquors mixed with lethal formaldehyde to milk powder causing the “big-head disease” in the infant, from poisonous fake cookies to poisonous fake drugs.

When it comes to the middle part of Joe’s ordeals,

The house is gone – burnt to the ground. Parts of the brick walls are still standing, but the roof and wooden-beamed ceilings are no more. Some of the burnt timbers can still be seen on the ground of the “former” living room, where they have crashed during the fire.

(65)

Si-tou translates:

All the windows are broken. Big-character posters are also posted on the walls. There are many slogans written on the posters, but all of them are in the style of Cultural Revolution, accusing Gwok of exploiting and underpaying his workers. (My translation)

These persecutions in the style of Cultural Revolution would reawake Hong Kong people’s fear of the CCP.

Talking about ordeals, *My Father is Party Ash* also reflects the despondency of the

Hong Kong people in 2003 in that the citizens of Hong Kong, therefore, were going through an ordeal in 2003 comparable to that suffered by Gwok, Joe, and Job. As mentioned before, the unemployment rate in early 2003 was nearing 8 per cent, compared with 2.2 per cent in 1997. The fiscal deficit was 8.8 billion Euros. And according to the HK Monetary Authority, the number of residential mortgage loans in negative equity in Hong Kong in the first quarter of 2003 was 83,000 with a value of 17 billion Euros⁹. The local government had put out the consultation document about the national security law, which would undermine the human rights of the Hong Kong citizens. The ministerial responsibility system adopted by the Chief Executive in 2002 was seen to be a failure in the sense that the ministers had to be accountable to the Chief Executive alone, instead of the public.

When God is angry with Ben for his defiance of Him, Joe begs Lipton to explain to God for Ben, saying that he, Joe, will give Lipton whatever he has. Lipton then replies:

Are you trying to bribe me, a messenger of God?...

*Why not? Too good for you? I'll take anything – cash, clothes,
canned goods, sheets, linens – whatever you got. (57)*

⁹ To quote Mary Kwan,

Disillusion with the Chief Executive Tung set in as early as 1997 when he announced a programme to build 85,000 public housing units a year to help more Hong Kong people own their own homes - ignoring advice, including from government architects, that the government did not have the resources to meet the housing target. Then the Asian financial crisis swept the region. Mr Tung abandoned his housing plan in 1998 but disclosed the decision only in 2000. In the interval, property prices plunged. As property has always been central to the fortunes of Hong Kong's people, public discontent swelled. More than 200,000 people saw their real estate assets turn into negative equity.

Si-tou translates:

Are you trying to bribe me, a messenger of Jiang Zemin?...

Why not? It's perfectly all right. The Communist Party is like that. Bribe me, pay me off! I'll take anything – cash, clothes, cans, visa card, whatever!

The rewriting here insinuates that the CCP is notorious for being corrupt.

When the messenger is laid off by his boss, he complains:

Sure. The poor carry their burdens and the rich have them delivered. Where's the justice?... I give You up, God! Thanks for nothing. The Devil cares more about people. At least he entertains them... The Exorcist grossed over a hundred and thirty million dollars – domestic! (1975: 81)

Si-tou translates:

The people up there simply do not regard us as Chinese. In their eyes, we Hongkongers are illegitimate children, orphans, bastards. They never ever believe that we truly support the handover... On second thoughts, it is the British that have treated us better... Now, immediately before their departure, they have organized a direct election for us, set up a luxurious airport, and left hundreds of billions of dollars for us. Mainland China?... They have also cursed us, saying that our car will crash and our people will perish;

they will also derail the through-train and disallow us to elect the Chief Executive. (My translation)

Here, the rewriter again voices Hong Kong people's preference for Great Britain's rule to China's and airs Hong Kong people's grievances concerning China's attitude towards them. In 1995, Chen Zuor, a China official dealing with Hong Kong affairs, lashed out at Governor Patten's generous social welfare policy, saying that it would result in crashing of the vehicle and death of the people on board. And when the 1995 election was conducted according to Patten's way, Beijing reiterated that there would be no through-train for all councilors elected under Patten formula beyond 30 June 1997. In 1996, a Provisional Legislature, handpicked by Beijing, was set up. Moreover, so far, despite Hong Kong people's repeated protests, no direct election of the Chief Executive has been allowed by Beijing. In both 1997 and 2002, the Chief Executive was "elected" by a 800-member election committee handpicked by Beijing.

11. The Impact of the Ending

Last but not the least, the impact of the ending of the Cantonese version is more powerful than that of Neil Simon's *God's Favorite* and the original Biblical story in that in contrast to his two counterparts, it remains uncertain whether Gwok will be rewarded for his sufferings by his master or not. This makes the CCP much more villainous and cruel than God in both Neil Simon's version and the Old Testament, implying that it has no credibility. Equally importantly, it may reflect many Hong Kong people's fear that the ordeal they were going through in 2003 might be endless like the sufferings of Gwok.

That *God's Favorite* is politicized by the Hong Kong translator to serve the needs of the target language society is confirmed by the fact that on the cover of the

manuscript of the translator cum playwright appears the following lines:

An adaptation that breaks conventions and norms

A performance that challenges Article 23

A comedy that agitates even Buddha

However, maybe because the second line is too politically sensitive in the post-1997 context, it has been struck out by the producer in the leaflet of the play, while the other two lines remain. Moreover, the souvenir program stresses the theme of familial love at the expense of the political theme. This may be an indication of the more conservative ideology of the producer and of the invisible political censor in the post-colonial society.

12. Significance and Conclusion

In conclusion, in Hong Kong, the selection of foreign plays for translation and for performance has not been arbitrary. Translated plays there reflect the local society's socio-political ideology. In particular, the translated play concerned echoes the frustration, anger, and anxieties of Hong Kong citizens amidst a severe socio-political cum economic crisis that started right after the handover in 1997 and climaxed in 2003. The significance of this paper lies in its shedding light on how particular Western cultural experiences may be manipulated by post-handover Hong Kong. It confirms Sirkku Aaltonen's theory that translated drama reflects the ideology of the target language community more than that of the source language community. In Si-tou's rewriting of Neil Simon's *God's Favorite*, American values of the seventies, religious faith crisis, and generational conflict of the seventies are replaced by Hong Kong socio-political concerns and generational conflict of 1995 and 2003.

The findings of the article will be a useful reference for drama translators and

theatre practitioners when naturalizing foreign drama. If one wants to localize a foreign play and change its space-time background, one must comprehensively and meticulously seek local equivalents for the whole Universe of Discourse in Lefevere's sense, including concepts, ideologies, food, clothes, furniture, means of transport, idioms, names, dialects, etc., just as how the translator of *God's Favorite* has done his job.

The translator may give air to his or her political views or ideology either implicitly or explicitly, depending on considerations of patronage and poetics. But appropriate pretexts in the original had better be found. For example, as aforementioned, Si-tou Waikin voices in a natural, convincing, and moving manner the preference of most Hong Kong people for British rule to Chinese rule through the mouths of the messenger and the hero's wife and three children.

The linguistic status of Hong Kong Cantonese¹⁰ can also be further enhanced as it is shown in this article that Hong Kong Cantonese can function very well as a medium of drama translation.

References

AALTONEN, Sirkku. *Time-sharing on Stage: Drama Translation in Theatre and Society*.

Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto, Sidney: Multilingual Matters, 2000.

¹⁰ According to Robert Bauer (245-248) and Chapman Chen (144-145), Cantonese with a history of more than two thousand years is much more time-honored than Mandarin. Cantonese preserves a huge lot of ancient Chinese pronunciations and characters and phrases. It is the mother tongue of more than 97 per cent of the Hong Kong population as well as a language being used by sixty to seventy million people all over the world. In Hong Kong, it is spoken in all government bodies, on TV, in schools, and in all aspects of everyday life. Its written form is also used in newspapers, magazines, plays, advertisements, books, etc. side by side with modern standard Chinese. The written form has not been standardized, though. After the handover in 1997, some pro-Beijing elements in Hong Kong have proposed that Cantonese be replaced by Mandarin as the medium of instruction at school. It is high time that Hong Kong collected and produced high-quality Cantonese texts in order to standardize Cantonese. There is a large number of excellent Cantonese plays and operas and Western plays in Cantonese translation. These works may well be used to standardize Cantonese in the same way the plays and fiction of Aleksis Kivi (1834-1872), the father of Finnish literature, were used to lay the foundation of the Finnish language in the 19th Century.

- BAUER, Robert S. "Written Cantonese of Hong Kong". *Cahiers de Linguistique Asie Orientale* XVII. 2 (1988). Pp 245-293.
- CHEN, Chapman. "On the Hong Kong Chinese Subtitling of English Swearwords". *Meta* (Canada) (refereed) 49. 1 (April 2004). Pp 135-147.
- CHUNG, Ting-yiu Robert. Public Opinion Programme (POP). Online documents at Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Hong Kong. 30 June 2003 <http://hkupop.hku.hk/>.
- KWAN, Mary. "Out-of-touch Tung and his Political Culture Draw Flak". *The Straits Times Interactive*, 10 July 2003. 11 July 2003 <http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg>.
- LAU, Naaikoeng. "Six Years after Reunification". *Hong Kong Economic Journal* 18 June 2003.
- LAU, Siu-kai. "Public Attitude towards the Old and New Regimes". Lau et. al. *Indicators of Social Development – Hong Kong 1997*. Pp 157-200.
- LAU, Siu-kai et.al., eds. *Indicators of Social Development – Hong Kong 1995*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1997.
- LAU, Siu-kai et.al., eds. *Indicators of Social Development – Hong Kong 1997*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies. The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1999.
- LAU, Siu-Kai, ed. *The First Tung Chee-hwa Administration – The First Five years of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002.
- LEFEVERE, Andre. "That Structure in the Dialect of Man Interpreted". *Shaffer*. Pp 87-100.
- LEFEVERE, Andre. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- SHAFFER, E.S., ed. *Comparative Criticism VI*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
-

1984.

SIMON, Neil *God's Favorite – A New Comedy*. New York and London: Samuel French, 1975.

SI-TOU, Waigin, trans. *Ngo Loudau Hai Dongfui* [My Father is Ash of the Party]. Dir. Sin Zandung. Trans. of *God's Favorite*. By Neil Simon. Perf. Ding Gaasoeng. Baat Caujat Theatre. Cultural Activities Hall, Sha Tin Town Hall, Hong Kong. 23 February 2003.

“Toxic Liquor Death Toll Hits 11T.” *Shanghai Star, China Daily*, 20 May 2004. 12 March 2005 <http://app1.chinadaily.com.cn/star/2004/0520/bz9-1.html>.

WONG, Siu-lun. “Hong Kong: Past, Present, Future”. Lau et. al. *Indicators of Social Development – Hong Kong 1995*. Pp 383-392.

ZENG, Jyusek and Lo Siuhing, ed. *Gaucat Gwodou – Hoenggong dik Tiuzin* (From Colony to SAR: Hong Kong's Challenges Ahead). Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1997.