

Keywords in Wuxia Xiaoshuo English Translations of Martial
Arts Fiction and a Sample Translation of Gu Long' s *Chu
Liuxiang Chuanqi zhi Xiehai Piaoxiang*

武俠小說中特殊詞彙之英譯研究及《楚留香傳奇之血海飄香》譯文分析

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Institute of Translation
and Interpretation

National Taiwan Normal University

國立台灣師範大學翻譯研究所碩士論文



Evan Michael Moore
慕容豪

Thesis Advisor: Professor Daniel Hu
指導教授：胡宗文教授

December 2017
2017年12月

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Chapter One.....	
Wuxia Xiaoshuo and the Western Reader	5
Research Goals and Methodology	6
Evolution of Martial Arts Fiction	10
Authors of Martial Arts Fiction.....	13
Huanzhu Louzhu	13
Jin Yong.....	14
Gu Long.....	17
Challenges in Martial Arts Fiction Translation.....	19
Translating Gu Long and a Guide to Wuxia Translation.....	27
Chapter Two.....	
Wuxia Genre Specific Terms and Translations	29
Venuti on Foreignization and Domestication.....	30
Jianghu—Martial Society of River and Lake.....	33
Wulin—Order of the Martial Forest.....	54
Lülin—Outer Greenlands.....	60
Qinggong—Light Body Arts.....	64
Fighting Moves and Styles.....	71
Character Names and Nicknames	81
Chapter Three.....	
Translating a Martial Arts Novel	91
Vocalization of Characters	92
Character Titles and Various Forms of Address.....	94
Filling in the Gap.....	97
Conclusion.....	102
Works Cited.....	104
Appendix.....	
List of Terms.....	106
The Legend of Chu Liuxiang—Scents from the Blood Sea	108

Abstract

Martial Arts Fiction has been one of the most popular forms of literature in Chinese communities around the world for decades. However this genre remains relatively unknown to the English-speaking world due to lack of translations. Complicated cultural and genre specific terms present a great challenge to translating said genre into English. Through this paper I present a guide to translating martial arts fiction through analysis of genre specific terms as found in existing English translations in addition to producing my own sample translation of famed martial arts fiction writer Gu Long's (古龍) *Chu Liuxiang Chuanqi zhi Xiehai Piaoxiang* 《楚留香傳奇之血海飄香》.

Key words: wuxia fiction, Gu Long, translation, Jin Yong, jianghu



摘要

幾十年來，在全球的華人圈中，武俠小說一直是最受歡迎的文學類型之一。然而，由於缺少翻譯，像這樣的小說形式在英語世界裡，卻鮮少被一般人所熟知。且武俠小說往往蘊含著濃重豐厚的傳統文化內涵與特殊的文體用法，要將其詳實的翻譯成英文，著實是一大挑戰。但透過本論文，筆者將會以分析現有英譯版武俠小說中之特殊文體用法、詞彙，來提供這類型文學的中譯英引導參考，此外也將筆者所翻譯之知名武俠小說作家—古龍的《楚留香傳奇之血海飄香》一併附錄於本文中。

關鍵詞：武俠小說，古龍，翻譯，金庸，江湖



Chapter One

Wuxia Xiaoshuo and the Western Reader

Wuxia xiaoshuo, known as martial arts fiction or wuxia fiction in the West, is a form of modern Chinese literature with roots dating back to the Warring States period in ancient China. The meaning of the term wuxia comes from the two Chinese characters *wu* (武)—meaning martial or military, and *xia* (俠)—altruistic and independent individuals and the values they practice (Hamm, 2005, 11). Though incredibly popular in the East, wuxia, or martial arts novels have yet to make a significant impact in the West. However, in the year 2000 many westerners were given their first taste of martial arts fiction with the movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The film was both a critical and commercial hit, becoming the highest grossing foreign language film of all time in the United States, as well as winning four Academy Awards. The movie is based off a martial arts novel of the same name from author Wang Dulu's (王度盧) Crane Iron Pentalogy 《鶴—鐵五部曲》. While noteworthy for its many successes, the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* can also be seen as the first major introduction of Chinese martial arts fiction to the West. It was because of this film that other wuxia films such as 2002's *Hero* and 2004's *House of Flying Daggers* were marketed towards western audiences. Despite such cross-culture success on the silver screen,

martial arts novels themselves have remained relatively unknown to the average western reader mostly due to lack of translations.

Nowadays martial arts fiction holds a prominent standing in Chinese literature, and is also an important part of Chinese culture not just in China, but also throughout Chinese and other Asian communities around the world. Wuxia fiction has also expanded outside the confines of literature into other mediums such as television, movies, comic books and videogames, further cementing its cultural significance in the East.

Research Goals and Methodology

Even with such success and recognition in the East, wuxia novels and their forms in other medium have yet to reach anywhere near the same heights of popularity in the West. Much of this is due to major cultural barriers such material presents. These novels rich in adventure and fantasy, also contain unique elements of Chinese history and culture the average English reader has never been exposed to, leading certain important aspects of the novels difficult for western readers to relate to even if translated into English. Reading a translation is the only way for many western readers who lack the time or energy to learn enough (or any) Chinese to read the original texts. For those wishing to enter the world of wuxia, the language barrier is the first and most

difficult obstacle in their path. Translation, the tool for overcoming this obstacle, as specifically applied in wuxia novels is what I wish to discuss in full throughout this thesis. Wuxia novels contain many genre specific items that lack an equal counterpart in English, leaving it up to the translator to sort out the best way to relay the message in the target language—English. Some common methods for tackling this issue have included expansion through in-text explanation, footnotes, adding an index of terms, and omission. Although these methods can be somewhat successful, many can end up changing some of the unique Chinese specific elements for the target audience, sacrificing a certain loyalty to the text while also losing their Chineseness. Through a comparative analysis of multiple wuxia English translations I wish to discuss certain key terms found specifically in the wuxia genre and their corresponding English translations.

Out of the thousands of wuxia novels in Chinese, only a select few have been officially (published) translated into English. Indeed there are many online fan sites such as spcnet, wuxiatranslations, and wuxiasociety dedicated to the translation of martial arts novels; however many translations suffer from severe quality issues. For sake of brevity, as well as said quality issues, this paper will only focus on the select few novels officially published in book form. To date, there

are only four wuxia novels that have been translated into English, and one *xianxia* novel (similar to wuxia novels but with more fantasy elements such as magic, demons, and immortals) that is only half complete (book one of two). Of these five novels three are written by the same author: Louis Cha, pen name Jin Yong (金庸). *The Book and the Sword* 《書劍恩仇錄》 [Sword], translated by Graham Earnshaw, *The Deer and the Cauldron* 《鹿鼎記》 [Deer], translated by John Minford, and *Fox Volant of the Snowy Mountain*, 《雪山飛狐》 [Fox], translated by Olivia Mok. One novel written by Gu Long, *The Eleventh Son* 《蕭十一郎》 [Son], has been translated by Rebecca Tai, and book one of the *xianxia* novel *Blades from the Willows* 《柳湖俠陰》 [Willows], by Huanzhulouzhu (Li Shoumin) was translated by Robert Chard. Apart from the fact each novel is a separate story, they also have different translators, resulting in different overall translation strategies and wholly different reads. Thus the English reader is presented with a plethora of different translation techniques and ideas, all with their perspective merits and drawbacks. Through a close analysis of each English text compared to the original Chinese text, and through a comparison of certain genre specific terms between all the English translations, I wish to discuss the techniques, merits, and drawbacks of certain translated terms and further expand upon the lexicon of wuxia terms in the English language

for future translators of wuxia novels. With a more established English lexicon of common wuxia terms and translation strategies these novels should become more approachable by the average English reader, and help take some of the burden of translating the original text off the translator by having a tool for reference. Through most of the textual analysis I will be comparing terms specific to the wuxia genre—*jianghu* (江湖), *wulin* (武林), *lulin* (綠林), *qinggong* (輕功), names of fighting styles and moves (招式), and character names and *waihao* (外號) or nicknames—in other words, elements specific to wuxia novels, not found in western culture, or are specific to Chinese culture. It is my goal to provide a comprehensive analysis of genre specific terms taken from multiple English translations of wuxia novels and create a comprehensive guide much like that of John Minford's extensive glossaries titled: *Important Dates in the Historical Background*, *Glossary of People and Places*, and *General Glossary of Terms* found at the beginning of his translation of *Deer* filled with entries about historical figures, fictional characters from the novel, and wuxia specific terminology all designed to help the reader. With this newly created guide as my framework for translating martial arts fiction it will then be used to help me translate book one of Gu Long's wuxia novel 《楚留香之血海飄香》 *Chu Liuxiang Chuanqi zhi Xiehai Piaoxiang*

(*The Legend of Chu Liuxiang: Scents from the Blood Sea*—my translation title) and hopefully used by future English translators of the wuxia genre. Along with said translation I will also discuss certain issues faced while translating the novel as well as how the analysis of the genre specific terms helped the translation process.

Evolution of Martial Arts Fiction

To gain a better understand of martial arts fiction, one should first understand the evolution the genre throughout history as well as the authors who brought them to life. The term *Wuxia* did not appear in China until the early 20th century, when brought over from Japanese (Hamm, 2005, 11). However, literary works on the topic of *xia* (俠) can be traced back to the Warring States period (403–221 BC), first appearing in Han Feizi' s Wudu 《五蠹》 text (曹正文, 1998, 2). The term *xia* would also continue to appear throughout historical texts, often seen as *youxia* (游俠), or wandering knight (Hamm, 2005, 12). During the Six Dynasties (AD 222–589) period, literature inspired by historical records of *xia* started to appear, and continued through the Tang Dynasty (618–906). Further literary contributions on *xia* in classical-language prose were still being produced after the Tang Dynasty, during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties (Hamm, 2005, 16). It was not until the Ming Dynasty


that *Water Margin* (also known as *Outlaws of the Marsh*, or *All Men are Brothers*) appear. Many consider this novel, written in vernacular Chinese as opposed to the more popular classical-language Chinese of the time, to be the inspiration for not just Qing Dynasty fiction but also modern wuxia fiction of the 20th century (Hamm, 2005, 17). However, wuxia fiction did not become a major cultural phenomenon until the late 1950' s, when serialized in newspapers by such authors as Jin Yong, Liang Yusheng, Sima Ling, and Gu Long (曹正文, 1988, 148). Twentieth century wuxia fiction can be separated into two different time periods, Old School, mainly produced in Shanghai, Tianjin and other major urban areas in China before World War II, and New School, mostly produced in Hong Kong and Taiwan starting in the 50' s and continuing through the 70' s due to a ban on wuxia novels in Mainland China until the 1980s (Hamm, 2005, 32). Most English translations come from New School wuxia novels, with the one exception being *Willows*, which was written during the Old School period.

The 1950' s to 1980' s, the era of New School Martial Arts Fiction, is considered by many to be the golden age of modern wuxia fiction. According to Cao Zhengwen author of *Xiakexing* 《俠客行》 (1998) and expert on wuxia novels, authors from this era were usually split into two groups, those from Taiwan and those from Hong Kong. Hong Kong gave rise to such authors as Liang Yusheng (梁羽生), Ni Kuang (倪匡), Tifeng

(蹄風) and Jin Yong (金庸). While such authors as Lang Hongwan (郎紅浣), Wolong Sheng (臥龍生), Sima Ling (司馬翎), and Gu Long (古龍) (曹正文, 1998, 148) produced their works in Taiwan. According to Cao, the first peak in popularity of new martial arts fiction was from the early 1950' s to early 1970' s. Despite being the first author to start writing serialized martial arts stories in a newspaper (大華晚報) in 1952, Taiwan' s Lang Hongwan is often overlooked as the trailblazer for New School Martial Arts Fiction, a title usually given to Liang Yusheng from Hong Kong, whose works according to Cao, were not masterpieces themselves but showed a strong shift from the more fantasy based martial arts novels from Old School martial arts fiction like those of Li Shoumin, to stories more grounded in reality. Liang Yusheng' s background in history, his love for poetry, and career in the newspaper business helped him flesh out his own style of wuxia fiction. The newspaper gave his stories better visibility, and his writing style boasted better readability than earlier works, helping his rise to prominence as one of the earliest writers of New School martial arts fiction. Although more readable than previous martial arts fiction, Liang Yusheng' s characters often lacked depth, usually decidedly good or evil with very little grey area; typical tropes of old school martial arts fiction. According to Cao, Liang Yusheng is often seen as the middleman,

leading the stylistic transition from old school to new school (曹正文, 1998, 158). Although no longer reaching such heights as the seventies and eighties, new school martial arts fiction has remained popular to date becoming the basis for many television shows and videogames.

Regardless of new or old school many authors of martial arts fiction were able to enjoy a large amount of success due to fiction being one of the more popular forms of entertainment of the time. Prior to delving into issues of translation I would first like to introduce the three authors whose works are discussed in this paper.

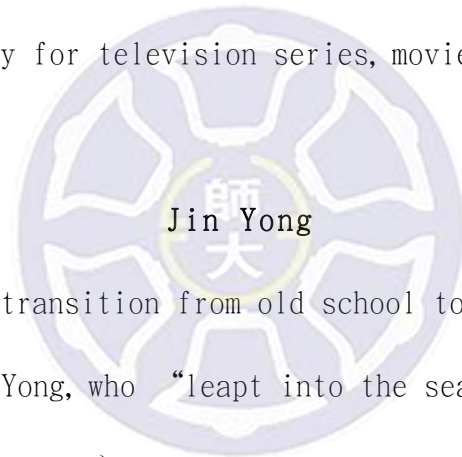


Authors of Martial Arts Fiction

Huanzhu Louzhu

Li Shoumin, pen name Huanzhulouzhu (還珠樓主), was a writer of xianxia novels, similar to wuxia novels with more fantasy elements. He was known as the head of the northern school of wuxia writers, having written many of his books in Tianjin. His books are filled with such fantasy elements as wild fantastical beasts, monsters, poisonous snakes and critters. His novels also include gods, immortals, devils, demons, and a variety of magical weapons. Some of what Li Shoumin is best known for is his description of geographical locations and character emotions. He also wrote extensively on local customs from all over China in his

novels as he often traveled and liked to visit with locals wherever he went. Due to the fact Li Shoumin used his fantastical characters and themes to make references to contemporary inequalities, his books were banned in Mainland China until the late 1980s. According to Cao, some issues critics point to of his novels is they can be lengthy as well as some being written over long periods of time resulting in plot inconsistencies. However, regardless of said issues Li Shoumin is still considered a major contributor to martial arts fiction as his novels are still being used today for television series, movies, and videogames (曹正文, 1998, 159).

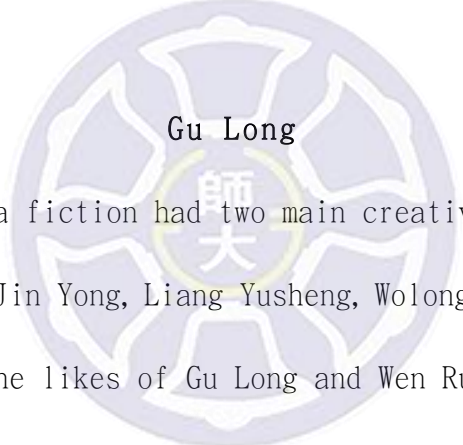


Completing the transition from old school to new school martial arts fiction was Jin Yong, who “leapt into the sea of martial arts fiction” (曹正文, 1998, 159) about one year after Liang Yusheng. Jin Yong is often considered the master of new school martial arts fiction. He is also the author of three novels that will be discussed in this paper. When he was young while working in a library his love for literature moved from east to west, becoming very fond of western authors such as Alexander Dumas, Walter Scott, and Robert Louis Stevenson as he got older, which would go on to become major influences on his own writings. According to Cao, three breakthroughs for martial arts fiction

came from Jin Yong' s novels helping to complete the transition from old to new school martial arts literature and bringing it to the mainstream. The first was his heavy use of historical backgrounds. He used historical backgrounds as a way to show his thoughts and reflections on both modern and ancient society, as well as on historical events. Readers are often “woken up” (曹正文, 1998, 159) from epic battles of good against evil in jianghu to real life historical figures throughout his novels. Jin Yong' s second breakthrough, was turning martial arts fiction into a branch of study, Jinology (金學). Besides sprinkling in historical events and figures into his books (three parts history, seven parts martial arts adventure according to Cao), Jin Yong also mixed in elements of Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism along with a more realistic approach to learning kungfu than previously seen, describing both the physical and mental changes his characters went through while training. He also added in specific cultural elements like real Chinese music, alcohol, and medicine. The third breakthrough was his handling of character development. His characters were more complex and had deeper inner thoughts than those in the novels of his predecessors. Jin Yong' s body of work and the evolution of his writing can be split into three creative periods, according to Cao. The first period includes his earliest works like *Sword*, which is seen as a meeting point of old

and new school martial arts fiction. His next novel, *Sword Stained with Royal Blood* 《碧血劍》, was the first real introduction to new school martial arts fiction, employing western writing techniques such as flashbacks and more complex characters containing elements of both good and bad, capable of love and hate. His next creative period, the mid 1960s, starts with *Fox*, which further streamlined his flashback style of story telling with the entire story taking a day in real time but covering over a hundred years of events through flashbacks. With his next novel, 《射雕英雄傳》, *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* (unofficial English title), Jin Yong's writing style showed vast improvements, creating an immense world for his story and filling it with colorful characters that Jin Yong would continue to use for another two novels, *The Return of the Condor Heroes* 《神雕俠侶》, and *The Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber* 《倚天屠龍記》. His third creative period started in the late 1960s with the aforementioned *The Heaven Sword and Dragon Saber*, and includes other works such as *The Smiling Proud Wanderer* 《笑傲江湖》, *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils* 《天龍八部》, and *Deer*. Throughout Jin Yong's career as a martial arts novelist (1955-1972) he wrote a total of fourteen novels, and is considered by most to be the best writer of martial arts fiction. However Jin Yong was not the only new martial arts author to come to prominence during the period of New School martial

arts fiction. He is also not the only author whose works have been translated into English. At around the same time Jin Yong was hitting his literary stride another author from Taiwan was just beginning to make a name for himself. The main creative period for New Martial arts fiction in Taiwan was from the early 1960s to mid 1970s. However, out of the four to five popular wuxia authors during that period, only one is considered able to go toe to toe with Jin Yong from an artistic quality standpoint— Gu Long (曹正文, 1998, 178).



Gu Long

New School wuxia fiction had two main creative peaks, the first with authors such as Jin Yong, Liang Yusheng, Wolong Sheng, and Sima Ling, and the second with the likes of Gu Long and Wen Ruian. From the mid 1970s to late 1980s Gu Long is often considered the main flag-bearer for this second peak. Gu Long wrote a total of 71 novels during his career as an author. While born in Hong Kong, Gulong moved to Taiwan at 13 years old. He got his start writing wuxia fiction as a ghostwriter for some of the other Taiwanese wuxia authors of the time like Zhuge Qingyun, Wosheng Long, and Sima Ling. Just like Jin Yong, Cao also separates Gu Long' s writing career into three creative periods. Gu Long' s first novel *Cangqiong Shenjian*《蒼穹神劍》, was published in

1960 marking the start of what Cao considers his first creative period, 1960 to 1964. During this time Gu Long wrote 16 novels but still had not developed his own distinct writing style. The authors he helped ghostwrite heavily influenced his writing at the time, and his plots sometimes mimicked those of Jin Yong. His second creative period, 1965 to 1968, is when he started to come into his own in terms of writing style and innovation, at the same time also establishing himself as an important author of wuxia novels. During this time he wrote 10 novels including such works as *Wulinwaishi* 《武林外史》, *Juedai Shuangao* 《絕代雙驕》, *Xiadao Chuliuxiang*, 《俠盜楚留香》, and *Son*. Realizing he would never surpass Jin Yong if he continued to emulate his style of writing, Gu Long made major stylistic changes to his writing, and brought in elements of detective novels with *Xiadao Chuliuxiang* helping him become the most popular writer of wuxia fiction in Taiwan at the time. Gu Long's third creative period started in 1969 and went until the early 1980s up until his death. This period is marked by his writing style's continuous evolution, using more western style writing techniques like short concise sentences and sharp, witty dialogue. Through his bold writing style choices and innovation Gu Long was able to set himself apart from Jin Yong and cement himself in the upper echelons of modern wuxia writers. Unfortunately the quality of his work deteriorated

towards the end of his career, until his early death at the age of 47 in 1985 due to illnesses related to alcoholism (曹正文, 1998, 243).

Gu Long and Jin Yong are considered the two great writers of New School martial arts fiction. Their writing styles however, are vastly different. Gu Long's innovative writing style, taking major cues from western writing, is fast paced using short sentences and sharp dialogue. Jin Yong on the other hand uses more of a classic Chinese style of writing, incredibly detailed and methodical, full of historical and cultural references. There is however one more wuxia author who has been translated into English, and that is Li Shoumin, a wuxia writer from the Old School period of martial arts fiction.

Challenges in Martial Arts Fiction Translation

Translating any novel from Chinese to English is no small undertaking, which makes the task of translating a novel from the wuxia genre into English all the more daunting. The cultural differences that exist between the English-speaking and Chinese-speaking world can be so vast that translating even the most mundane of sentences can be difficult. On top of this the genre of martial arts fiction has its own set of terms that don't exist outside the genre, and more specifically don't exist in western culture, creating major hurdles for the

translator. Jin Yong is considered by many Chinese readers to be the very best wuxia author, however his novels can pose quite the challenge to the translator. In her paper titled, *Translating Jin Yong: A Review of Four English Translations*, author and translator Sharon Lai begins by laying out what makes it so challenging to translate wuxia novels stating, “Some of the obstacles are obvious: the gap between source culture and the target culture, the absence of martial arts tradition and martial arts literature, the lack of corresponding lexicon...” (Lai, 1998a, 356). Lacking the above mentioned elements in the target language means the translator has significantly less tools in the translation toolbox to rely on; from the onset the translator is already fighting an uphill battle. Sharon Lai then goes on to further discuss what makes Jin Yong’s novels even more challenging, explaining that his novels are a “deliberate celebration of Chineseness” (Lai, 1998a, 356). They contain many cultural specific references, and feelings of nostalgia for the Chinese reader, to which Sharon Lai wonders whether this will lead to boredom for the non-Chinese readers (Lai, 1998a, 356). There are certain elements of a Chinese martial arts novel, thoroughly enjoyed by the Chinese reader that when bought over to the target language/culture of English might not be interesting to the average reader. John Minford echoes this statement in his paper *Louis Cha through the Translator’s*

Eyes, when he brings up translating Tang Dynasty Poets as a metaphor, “...it has not always been the ‘best’ Tang poets who come over ‘best’ in translation, so it is not necessarily those things that Chinese readers like the most... that come over best in English” (Minford, 1998, 305). Minford hints at the fact that while Jin Yong’s novels may be the best-written wuxia novels in Chinese they might not come out as the best wuxia novels in English. Part of the Chineseness Sharon Lai mentions has to do with historical background. What makes Jin Yong’s works so enjoyable for many Chinese readers besides the plot and interesting characters is the historical background the stories take place in. In fact, in his very first novel—*Sword*, the main character Chen Jialuo (陳家洛) is the fictional younger brother of Emperor Qianlong, placing the reader right in the middle of the Manchu reign of the Qing Dynasty in Chinese history; something other wuxia authors such as Gu Long avoided. Chinese history is a remarkably dense subject, over 4,000 years worth of material to which most westerners would be lacking a significant amount of background knowledge. It would take a tremendous effort for the translator to introduce every historical figure via in-text introductions or footnotes just to bring the English reader up to speed. Even then, the target audience would still not be on a level playing field with the average Chinese reader who at a glance would

probably know the historical figure and their historical significance allowing them to pick up and enjoy all the small nuances in the text that make up the Chineseness. Furthermore, even if the translator succeeds in introducing all the necessary historical information what's to say the target reader reads it. Aside from the average Chinese history enthusiast, it would be hard to find a reader who would get so much enjoyment from the historical references when they can be so numerous and sometimes irrelevant to the overall plot of the story.

Another issue with translating wuxia novels into English is writing style. It is widely accepted that out of the two main authors to come out of the era of New School of Martial Arts fiction (post 1950s), Jin Yong and Gu Long, Jin Yong is considered to be the superior writer, “the heir of traditional Chinese fiction in the vernacular” according to Sharon Lai (Lai, 1998a, 361). By mixing two different styles of Chinese writing, vernacular and classical Chinese, translating Jin Yong's works “has much in common with translating classical Chinese fiction” (Lai, 1998a, 362). The difference between classical Chinese and vernacular (modern) Chinese is considered by some to be equivalent to that of Latin and modern day English. To embark on translating one of these works is no small task that requires an extremely high level of competence in Chinese.

Another element that can often get overlooked in translation is the length of source text. In the Translator's Preface for the English version of Li Shoumin's *Willows*, Robert Chard states, to him it is not so much the language, "more archaic and sophisticated" than found in more modern (post 1950s) wuxia novels that he found difficult but the length of text because writers like Li Shoumin were paid by the word, and their novels were serialized in newspapers so it was in the best interest of the writer and publisher to keep the story going (Li, 1991, 10). Indeed many of the modern martial arts novels like Li Shoumin's, Gu Long's, and Jin Yong's, were first serialized in newspapers, resulting in dialogue and narration sometimes being overly repetitive and wordy (Li, 1991, 10). To western standards (and Chinese), many wuxia novels are incredibly long reads, some spanning over 2,000 pages of text. One of the main reasons Jin Yong's novel *Fox*, one of his lesser beloved has been translated is simply because it is more manageable in length than most of his other epics; around 130,000 Chinese characters in length compared to around 710,000, the average length of all his *wuxia* novels ("金庸作品," n.d.) and *Fox* is only one volume in length. In the Preface for Olivia Mok's translation of *Fox*, Margaret Ng states that the shorter works of Jin Yong are more manageable (for translators) even though they might not be enough for the diehard Jin Yong reader, however through

translating these shorter works Olivia Mok hopes to “whet the appetite of the English readers enough to induce them to ask for more” (Yong, 1996, xv). Another Jin Yong novel *Sword*, while coming in almost four times as long as *Fox* at 513,000 characters and two volumes (“金庸作品,” n.d.) is still considered one of his shorter works. However, the translator Graham Earnshaw still elected to omit a large amount (to be discussed later) resulting in the entire story being contained to a single volume in English. The third Jin Yong novel to be translated, *Deer*, just so happens to be on the other end of the length spectrum, consisting of five volumes in Chinese and 1.23 million characters (“金庸作品,” n.d.). A herculean effort was indeed needed for such an arduous translation.

In his paper titled, *Louis Cha through the Translator’s Eyes*, John Minford writes about the steps he took to grasp the lengthy source text, Jin Yong’s *Deer*, before even attempting translation stating he spent the first years becoming familiar with the detail of the text, writing a lengthy synopsis, and compiling lists of characters and historical background information. He also began to read a wide variety of English historical romance literature (Minford, 1998, 310). He even goes on further to discuss creating a research group at his university to explore certain ideas about translating martial arts fiction in general.

The research group did sample translations of another Jin Yong novel *The Legend of the Condor Heroes* 《射雕英雄傳》, investigating the best ways to tackle tricky translations, even going as far as collecting and rehearsing “traditional repertoire of the novelist of action and adventure, creating generous wordlists to refresh our memories for possible use in translation,” (Minford, 1998, 310). A multitude of steps were taken in order to undertake the task of translating this single Jin Yong novel, further outlining the difficulties translating such epically long novels into English can present.

In an interview for the podcast *The Biblio File*, *Sword* translator Graham Earnshaw discusses his translation, including his reasons for choosing said book, as well as difficulties he faced translating a wuxia novel. In the same vein as Sharon Lai, according to Graham Earnshaw one of the main challenges he discovered was that as a Chinese novelist Jin Yong is writing for Chinese readers, which means they can make assumptions about certain understandings their readership will have. Certain actions take place, and there is no need to explain. However for an English readership outside the source culture, explanations would certainly be needed for clarification and getting readers up to speed (Robotech_Master, 2009). Graham Earnshaw continued stating his main issue with translating *Sword* was whether or not he should add in

explanations or expand descriptions to make the story more clear for the English reader. In the end he elected to do neither, going with simplification (omission) when deemed necessary, stating he simplified some sections, mainly fight scenes (Robotech_Master, 2009). He was also adamant that he and Jin Yong agreed he could never add anything to the story, as seen on his website' s description of *Sword*, “there are some differences between the original and my translation, but they are differences only of omission. In other words, I have added nothing” (“The Book & The Sword,” n.d.). During the podcast interview Mr. Earnshaw further elaborates on what made the fight scenes in particular difficult to translate discussing the names of fighting styles and moves stating his translations are basically direct translations word for word, which are then left up to the imagination of the reader to figure out what is going on (Robotech_Master, 2009). Once again from this interview one can see one of the main challenges facing translators of wuxia literature is a lack of cultural context and corresponding English lexicon for many of the genre specific terms that Chinese readers have become so accustomed to yet are almost nonexistent in the English speaking world. Furthermore, in the foreword to her translation of *Fox*, translator Olivia Mok writes that her translation is “an attempt to translate and make accessible” (Yong, 1996, ix) an important

work of Chinese wuxia fiction to the average English reader. From using words like “attempt” and “accessible” it is clear that the translator is admitting to a certain level of dissatisfaction with her own English translation illuminating, to some extent, the level of difficulty translating such a text presents.

Delving into what the translators themselves have said about working martial arts fiction one can see translating them is no simple undertaking. Lacking equivalent terms in the target language, cultural gaps, challenging source language, historical references, and source text length all contribute to an enormous burden placed upon the translator to put forth a readable, loyal, and enjoyable text, further highlighting the need for a more established English lexicon of wuxia terms and the significance of having a genre specific guide to help the translator along the way.

Translating Gu Long and a Guide to Wuxia Translation

Much of this paper has been focused on translating Jin Yong’ s novels for several reasons. First, three of the five English translations are Jin Yong novels. Second, many consider Jin Yong to be the golden standard for modern wuxia fiction, thus more academic research has been done on his novels, i.e. Jinology (金學). Out of the

other two authors of wuxia fiction that have had their works translated into English, Gu Long author of *Son*, has not had nearly as much research done on his works when compared to Jin Yong. Some of which can be attributed to his writing style, which is less dense, made up of short sentences and paragraphs with mostly dialogue between characters. His writing style is said to have been influenced by the likes of Ernest Hemingway, Jack London, John Steinbeck and Friedrich Nietzsche and his novels are not set in any particular historical period due to the political climate in Taiwan at the time of writing. All of which makes Gu Long's novels a somewhat easier choice for translating into English as pointed out by Ryan Kueck in his thesis *Wuxia as Fantasy: An English Translation of Juedai Shuangjiao* (Kueck, 2013). For the many reasons above I have elected to translate book one of Gu Long's *Chu Liuxiang Chuanqi zhi Xiehai Piaoxiang* 《楚留香傳奇之血海飄香》 as an exercise in translation and an attempt to prove the benefits a *wuxia* genre specific translation guide and general translation strategy provide the translator. It is my hope that this guide will help reduce some of the mental burden caused by having to create new words and help solidify certain *wuxia* terms in English by first bringing together all English versions available from the published translations of genre specific terms followed by an analysis of said terms to find what works best for

which situations, allowing the translator to simply “plug-in” the English term they deem most appropriate for the situation.


Chapter Two

Wuxia Genre Specific Terms and Translation

Martial arts novels are filled with genre specific terms and lore that can be thought of as the backdrop and costumes to the many stories they are found in. Without them one ends up losing out on many of the rich details and characteristics these novels all share that make them stories of the martial arts novel genre. When translating martial arts fiction the translator must take care in preserving these terms so as to not lose the flavor or Chineseness previously mentioned. The following is a list of the genre specific terms or elements I have deemed necessary to preserve and to provide the target reader with a better understanding of martial arts fiction and more a authentic, faithful rendition of the source text itself; *Jianghu* (江湖), *Wulin* (武林), *Lülin* (綠林), *Qinggong* (輕功), fighting styles and moves (招式), and character names and *nicknames* (外號).

In the section below I will analyze and discuss the translations of some of these genre specific terms and elements from the five

English translations as well as include my own translations and suggestions to which ones work best. I should note that not every genre specific term or element appears in all five novels so some terms might have more translations to discuss. Furthermore although I have done a thorough read through both Chinese and English texts, I may have missed certain terms from any of the novels throughout the several years I spent reading through all the source texts and translations. It has been my goal to produce the most comprehensive gathering of terms as found in all published English translations. Regardless of how successful I was at this, I still believe I have amassed enough information for a thorough analysis and discussion.



Venuti on Foreignization and Domestication

Before going into a lengthy discussion on various wuxia genre specific terms it would be pointless to not discuss what qualities one looks for in a translation in order to deem it acceptable. When translating genre specific terms, terms with complex cultural undertones, or culture/language specific terms etc., the translator is left with two options, leaving the author in peace and moving the reader towards the author, or leaving the reader in peace and moving the author towards the reader (Venuti, 1995, 20). What this really means is does the translator

attempt to bring the target audience closer to the target text, ie foreignization, or the source text closer to the target audience, ie domestication. These two methods of translation are often used (consciously or not) when confronted with a term that may not exist in the target language, often the case with martial arts novels and the genre specific terms mentioned above.

When using domestication translation techniques, the “otherness” or “foreignness” (Chineseness in this case) of the text virtually disappears, leaving a fluent yet possibly inaccurate representation of the source text, a blending of the source text into the target language. According to Venuti, in contemporary English language translation many texts are often judged acceptable based on readability or fluency. When a text is lacking any linguistic or stylistic oddities it appears as if the original was written in the target language (English) and considered a good translation regardless of what level of contortion the source text receives (Venuti, 1995, 1). Venuti continues to argue against the over emphasis on fluency and domestication in English translations when he brings up the fact that most authors themselves are not concerned with translations of their text when writing. Thus when attempting fluency, source language features not recognizable in the target language are often replaced with ones

that are, possibly changing the meaning (Venuti, 1995, 7). With foreignization translation techniques, the reader is brought closer towards the source text by “disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language,” (Venuti, 1995, 20), which means presenting the reader with something written in a way they may not be accustomed to, or an entirely new thing or concept. It could be anything from customary writing styles of another language, syntax oddities, to completely alien terms or ideas that do not exist in the target language itself—lexicon oddities. Venuti argues that in this way the reader gets a closer adaptation of the original source text, sometimes at the expense of readability. However in this case, when the reader happens upon a strange term or oddly worded sentence they are wholly aware it is a translation. Venuti continues to explain foreignization translation techniques can be used to resist dominant target-language cultural values to signify, or make visible the cultural differences of the foreign text (Venuti, 1995, 23). It is in his hopes through understanding foreignization translators and readers alike will be able to recognize the linguistic and cultural differences of foreign texts.

As previously mentioned martial arts novels are full of many unique cultural elements that are not found in the English language. It is from these elements that the novels’ inherent “Chineseness” can

shine through. As a translator I find it pertinent to present these terms in English as intact as possible (after all they are Chinese characters being represented in a completely different language system) while at the same time helping the reader understand their meaning without needing to add wordy explanations or descriptions that can take away from the reading experience while also avoiding washing away cultural specific content by dumbing down foreign terms, echoing what Sharon Lai points out when stating, “A fixed stock of expressions is often better than a wealth of redundant and repetitious descriptions” (Lai, 1998b, 132). In the end, martial arts fiction is still meant to be read for leisure; rather than disrupt the text with footnotes or repetitious descriptions disrupting the flow of the novel, it would be better to simply use terms that signify to the reader it is part of the “other culture” and can provide enough information for understanding. Through repeated use of the same or similar terms in various context the reader should be able to develop a firm grasp on most if not all terms by the end of the reading.

Jianghu—Martial Society of River and Lake

When discussing martial arts fiction the term *jianghu* (江湖) must be addressed. Like the elephant in the room, *jianghu* for wuxia novels is

too large (geographically), and too important from a literature and plot sense to just ignore. It is one of the most important, complex, and culturally loaded of key terms that will be discussed in this paper. The term itself includes elements of geography, society, history, and culture (林保淳, 2004, 2). Even to native Chinese speakers this term can be difficult to explain. Due to its complex nature it is also incredibly difficult to translate into English. For sake of simplification only *jianghu* in martial arts fiction will be discussed as the term is also used in many different modern settings with a varying degree of meanings and undertones. Starting from the most basic point of view for western readers *jianghu* is an imagined world in which all martial arts fiction takes place (Lai, 1998b, 144). The term *jianghu* literally means “rivers and lakes” in reference to the three rivers (Yangtze, Pearl, and Yellow rivers) and five lakes (Lake Tai, Hongze Lake, Chao Lake, Poyang Lake, and Dongting Lake) which geographically place its location in Central and Eastern China (Five Lakes n.d.). However *jianghu* in martial arts fiction has no clearly defined boundaries, and the characters who inhabit it often leave the geographical location of “rivers and lakes” whether that be out to sea, north to Mongolia, or west to Tibet. According to Professor Lin Baochun, the real *jianghu* exists but simply as an idea; a special place in Chinese culture (林保

淳, 2004, 7). Where this term becomes even more complex is the alternate sociological system it also implies (Hamm, 2005, 17). According to an interview with Professor Lin Baochun (2017), the author of such works on martial arts fiction such as 《台灣武俠小說發展史》, 《縱橫今古說武俠》, and 《俠客行：傳統文化中的任俠思想》, from a political power structure standpoint *jianghu* is the antitheses of the imperial court or government. It is a place that is far away from the central powers outside the reach of the government. In martial arts fiction geographically speaking the farther one is away from the government the less reach or power they have over you. According to Professor Lin the same laws that might rule most of society under the imperial court would not necessarily apply to those in *jianghu* simply because the government has little to no presence. Due to this fact many who live in *jianghu* are those who wish to flee government rule—colorful characters from all walks of life living freely out their days on the margins of society with their own rules and moral code. A unique feature of the *Jianghu* in martial arts fiction is the way *yiqi* (義氣), or loyalty between friends, is portrayed. In *jianghu*, *yiqi* is everything (Lin, 2017), often worth much more than fortune, fame, family, and even life itself and can be almost seen as a form of currency in itself. Another

important aspect of the *jianghu* in martial arts novels worth mentioning is this setting it is always some time in “ancient China” .

Historically speaking *jianghu* was a place for bandits, robbers, and outlaws to escape the government’ s reach (林保淳, 2004, 2). In martial arts novels *jianghu* has its own members, organizations, hierarchy, and moral code (Lai, 1998a, 377), some of which will be discussed later on in this paper. Geographically speaking *jianghu* does not just strictly include natural formations such as the lakes, rivers, and mountains that make up the landscape, but also the complex of inns highways, temples, shops, and bandit lairs (Hamm, 2005, 17). One thing that makes the *jianghu* in martial arts fiction different than what the term might be associated with in a more modern setting is the fact that in martial arts fiction most of those who live in *jianghu* all practice some form of martial arts. When two people cross paths in *jianghu* one can never be too sure if the counterpart across the way could in fact be another martial arts master, creating an air of tension in every twist and turn of the story. In many martial arts novels servants, maids, inn keeps, merchants, and bankers might be the only ones generally shown as lacking any real martial arts prowess.

When translating the translator often tries to draw on parallels from his or her own language or culture for complex terms such as

jianghu as it can help the reader get a better understanding (if accurate). What's important for a term like *jianghu* is for the translator to draw the reader in close to the "other" culture of the source text. This is done through foreignization, as opposed to domestication techniques that render the term "invisible" (Venuti, 1995, 61) by striving for a certain level of fluency. It's best to tackle such terms head on through some form of foreignization letting the source culture shine through to the reader.

Not surprisingly, the term *jianghu* appears in all five martial arts novels discussed in this paper. Every translator has taken a different approach as to how to handle the term, with varying degrees of success. How the term *jianghu* is used in the original Chinese also has to be taken into consideration. For example, apart from being used as just a noun, the term can also be used as an adjective 老江湖 (古龍, 1998b, 23) literally *old jianghu*, used to describe one who is well experienced with the ways of *jianghu* or has been living in *jianghu* for a considerable amount of time as seen in the novels *Son* and *Willows*. There are also instances where it is used as a verb phrase, such as 亡命江湖 (金庸, 1996a, 60) literally to cast one's life away in *jianghu*, meaning to give up or flee one's life in "normal" society and enter the realm of *jianghu*. There is no perfect one-size-fits-all translation for

jianghu, it mostly depends on context and how it is used in the original Chinese. However, there are certain ways it can be handled that fare far better than others that paint a clearer picture of such an important aspect of martial arts novels. A single, yet flexible translation of the term should be able to clearly signify to the reader of such a foreign term while at the same time allowing some form of understanding at first glance without having to go into further description of said term through either a glossary, in text description or side notes. Below I will discuss all the translated versions of *jianghu* that were found throughout reading the five English translations while keeping in mind the definition of the term as discussed above, especially in regards to the geographical, social, and martial arts aspects the term implies. These aspects should be taken into consideration when translating for a native English speaker who is generally unfamiliar with the term. In addition foreignization techniques will also be considered so as to ensure some level of “otherness” is maintained to help the reader understand new and different aspects of the source language and/or culture. In the end I will try to establish an argument for the most appropriate translation of the term.

The term 老江湖 (old *jianghu*) appears in both books *Son* and *Willows*. The translator for *Son*, Rebecca Tai, has translated it as *martial arts veteran*:

「風四娘雖然是老江湖了…」 (古龍, 1998b, 23)

“Though a *martial arts veteran* herself…” (Gu, 1970, 13)

While this translation does carry over the idea of someone with a lot of experience, at least in martial arts, it fails to really capture the remaining aspects of the term. There is no way to relate to the terms geographical or social aspects leaving more to be desired from a translation standpoint that would be necessary for a native English speaker to get a better understanding of the term *jianghu* as a whole. This is the first time in the novel the term appears, a prime opportunity to bring the reader closer to the source text with a more foreign looking translation. In *Willows*, Robert Chard translates 老江湖 as *old and experienced wanderer*:

「到了湘西，遇見一個老江湖…」 (李壽民, 1946, 145)

When they crossed into western Hunan Province, they

encountered an *old and experienced wanderer*… (Li, 1991, 185)

Like Rebecca Tai's *martial arts veteran*, Robert Chard's does contain some of the aspects needed for the term *old jianghu* such as the most obvious being using both words *old and experienced*. The other 1/3

of this term (sans and) *wanderer* does somewhat address the geographical elements of the term. *Wanderer* might imply one who is not in line with societal norms, much like those who have chosen to live in *jianghu* fleeing the central powers. It gives the idea of one who roams the land, living on the margins of society. What Robert Chards translation is lacking is the element of martial arts. However when taken in context of the story it is not known to the main characters whether this *old and experienced wanderer* indeed possess martial arts abilities. To the main characters he is just a helpful old man who gives them directions. While a translation lacking any notion of martial arts for the term *old jianghu* is not ideal, for this character it is still acceptable. One noteworthy issue is it leans more towards a domestication of the original term since *jianghu* is basically rendered invisible in English except for the aforementioned references to it. Perhaps translating it to something more a kin to *an old and experienced wanderer of River and Lake* might better key in the reader.

In Olivia Mok's translation of *Fox*, she uses a few different translations for the term; the first being *outlawry*:

「若是做出這等事來，天龍門聲名掃地，在江湖上顏面何在？」

(金庸, 1996b, 7)

“...it would be a shattering blow to the name of the Dragon Lodge if anything were to happen between us. How are you going to preserve your honour among the outlawry?” (Jin, 1996, 8)

Unfortunately this translation fails to adequately address most of the elements necessary for an appropriate translation of the term for a non-Chinese speaker, in addition to essentially neutralizing the term in English through domestication. Furthermore, the term *outlawry* could actually be quite misleading for the target audience. While *outlawry* does address the societal aspect of *jianghu*, mainly being one who is avoiding the central powers on the run from the law; it does not do enough in terms of the geographic or martial arts elements for it to be deemed suitable. Furthermore this term is actually quite misleading as it categorizes all who are part of *jianghu* as outlaws even though this is certainly not the case. While it may be true there are many outlaws in *jianghu*, it cannot be implied for the majority, especially not for all the monks, innkeepers, and a variety of other minor characters that also make their lives there. Even though the term outlaw has gone through various meanings throughout history, in more modern times it has taken on a meaning of one breaking the law and being on the run, living outside the reach of the government. Even if an outlaw might have broken

the law or gone against the government for the greater good, which can often be the case for our heroes in martial arts novels, not all who reside in *jianghu* have gone down said path thus it is inaccurate to paint everyone in *jianghu* as an outlaw. In addition, in the context of the novel one character is asking the other how they are going to preserve their, “honour among the outlawry?”, which is an odd question to ask considering one is worried about keeping their honor amongst outlaws, which can be depicted as without honor in modern culture. A better translation might be something like “honour among the Martial Society” as it’s really in reference only to the people of *jianghu* and not the geographic location itself.

Olivia Mok’s second translation for *jianghu* is *people moving in our circle*:

「若是江湖上傳揚出去，說我天龍門暗施偷襲…」(金庸, 1996b, 11)

“If word reaches *people moving in our circle* that we of the Dragon Lodge make surprise attacks on our adversaries…” (Jin, 1996, 15)

This term also leaves the target audience with a bland misrepresentation of the term through a heavily domesticated translation. There is no martial arts aspect, no geographical sense, and only a vague reference to some sort of counter culture or marginal

society. According to Merriam-Webster, the definition for circle as it is used by Olivia Mok is “a group of persons sharing a common interest or revolving about a common center.” While this may be true for a group of closely related people, it cannot be extended to the entirety of *jianghu*, the scope is too small thus becoming somewhat of a stretch when taken in the larger context of the world in which they live and the actual term being translated. When expanded even further to encompass all those who reside in *jianghu* this translation quickly becomes less applicable. Monks from the Shaolin Temple are certainly not going to have much in common (be in the same circle) as members of the Shenlongjiao Cult. Olivia Mok simplifies a complex term and an integral part of martial arts novels to the point it becomes completely washed out and vanishes to the English reader.

When translating martial arts novels some translators chose to not translate *jianghu* every time they come across it. Some have elected to skip it at times while occasionally translating it when necessary. Graham Earnshaw, the translator of *Sword*, on the other hand seems to have taken great effort to translate the term as much as possible. In total he has used five different translations for *jianghu* or any other form of the term (such as verb and adjective forms as addressed above). For his first translation Graham Earnshaw presents the reader with the term

in the verb form mentioned above (亡命江湖), which literally translates as to cast one's life away in *jianghu*. Here the translator chose to translate it as *become an outlaw in the world of River and Lake*:

「…回來把土豪刺死，從此命亡江湖，後來加入了紅花會。」

(金庸, 1996a, 60)

“He returned and sought vengeance for his father's death. He killed the rich landlord and then became an outlaw in the world of River and Lake…” (Jin, 2005, 34)

Although the translator has also used the term *outlaw* just as Olivia Mok, we see firsthand from the context that this character has just murdered a landlord, so the term fits this specific character and is not being applied to all those in *jianghu*. While slightly long, this translation does a competent job by also incorporating the term *River and Lake*, giving the term a geographic clue while also including a literal nod to the Chinese term itself.

The fighting community is Graham Earnshaw's second translation of *jianghu*:

「武功也頗不弱，江湖上送他一個外號，叫做武諸葛」

(金庸, 1996a, 84)

“…and the fighting community had dubbed him the Kungfu Mastermind.” (Jin, 2005, 50)

This term does contain a somewhat loose reference to martial arts, *fighting*, while also bringing the idea of being a separate societal body. While it does not contain any of the geographical notions it still seems to encompass almost enough to give the reader a solid grasp of the idea that *jianghu* is a place where a lot of fighting takes place. From a foreignization standpoint however it does wash away the martial arts aspect by using the verb fighting (to be discussed in section on Wulin). Although this is a more acceptable translation than some of his other attempts, unfortunately Graham Earnshaw proceeds to use it for the terms *Wulin* (武林), *Lülin* (綠林), and *Heidao* (黑道) (of which, *Wulin* and *Lülin* will be discussed further on in this paper). All four terms are different, and represent smaller groups that reside within *jianghu*, and are not an equivalent to *jianghu* itself (it is worth noting that *Wulin* can sometimes be used interchangeably with *jianghu* as it is usually used to reference the people of *jianghu*). Even though the English reader would not know the difference when reading, it does them a disservice to not differentiate the terms. By grouping all four terms into one, the target audience is missing out on staple features of martial arts novels from unnecessary oversimplification.

The next two translations from Graham Earnshaw, *the underworld*, and *underworld society* can be used almost interchangeably as they are quite similar both making reference to an underworld:

「明明是黑沙掌所傷，江湖上黑沙掌的好手寥寥可數…」

(金庸, 1996a, 196)

“ ‘…the two soldiers were obviously victims of Black Sand Palm kungfu’ he said. ‘There are very few masters of that kungfu in the underworld.’ ” (Jin, 2005, 126)

In terms of containing the necessary information for it to be deemed acceptable both translations still come up short. While underworld might carry some weight as to being another society separate from government rule, it still lacks a martial arts and geographical reference to the source language. Regardless of either translation, from a foreignization standpoint both also miss the mark as an underworld or underworld society could exist anywhere, not just specifically in martial arts novels, which takes away from the unique Chinese element that comes from a term like *jianghu*. A slightly more fitting term for this translation might have been something like *underground society of Rivers and Lakes*.

The last translation Graham Earnshaw uses for the term *jianghu* in *Sword* is a literal translation of the term—*River and Lake*:

「江湖上人稱禿鷲雪鷗，合成天山雙鷹。」(金庸, 1996a, 448)

“Her husband who was universally referred to on River and Lake as Bald Vulture…” (Jin, 2005, 289)

While this provides the strongest translation in terms of the geographical elements needed as it is a literal translation of the actual Chinese term, it is lacking in the other two categories — a martial arts reference and the societal aspect. However in this context such references are not entirely needed. Strangely this translation is not used very frequently. In my reading I only found two instances. While it is capitalized to appear as the name of a location, being that the target reader might not be familiar with martial arts novels or have a thorough understanding of the term *jianghu*, it might be difficult for the reader to make the connection to what it actually references to, especially when compared with other terms Mr. Earnshaw has used like *the fighting community or underworld society*. It does not fit in as it merely looks like the name of a place and not the same thing as any of his other translations for the term. With that being said from a foreignization standpoint it is probably the most dramatic example of the “other” or bringing the reader closer to the source culture. River and Lake is a literal translation of *jianghu* to which the target culture has nothing equivalent to, cluing in the reader they are in fact reading

a translation. The problem remains however that the term is rarely used and has no explanation hence the reader is left without an understanding of what River and Lake actually is.

Although Mr. Earnshaw can be commended for translating the term *jianghu* more times than some of the other translators, due to the fact he uses so many different translations (*become an outlaw, the fighting community, the underworld, underworld society, River and Lake*) for the same term in Chinese, and uses the English term *the fighting community* to encompass four different Chinese terms (江湖, 武林, 綠林, 黑道), the real *jianghu* and all the various groupings of people that reside in it start to become fairly convoluted, leaving the target reader with a disjointed understanding of a very complex term. While multiple translations of the same term can be used effectively in some situations, if the translator is mixing them up, especially such mainstays to the genre, it can lead to a watered down version of a martial arts novel and in this case loss of a key feature to wuxia fiction; the backdrop to almost every martial arts novel. Although the novel still reads well in English it might have been more accurate and left the reader with a better understanding to use the same term with just slight variations when needed in addition to providing different

translations for the aforementioned Chinese terms that were grouped together under one umbrella term in English.

The final translations of the term *jianghu* to be discussed in this paper is from John Minford' s translation of *Deer*, which he translates as *Brotherhood of River and Lake*, to which he then uses various alterations of this term such as *Brothers of River and Lake* (59), *Brotherhood Code* (105), *Friends of River and Lake* (315), *Brotherhood* (310) to fit the context of the novel:

「自宋朝以來，便是江湖上的一個大幫。」(金庸, 1996c, 33)

“Ever since that time they have been a part of the outlaw world, part of the Brotherhood of River and Lake.”

(Jin, 1997, 40)

Although lacking a specific martial arts reference, this translation does contain both geographical and societal elements offering a literal translation of the term while adding the English word *Brotherhood* to include some sort of societal notion. Adding in *Brotherhood* to further establish a notion of a society or group of people does enhance the translation, painting a clearer picture of *jianghu*. However, using the term *brotherhood* can still lead to some confusion on the readers' end. Just like the Olivia Mok' s translation of *people moving in our circle*, *brotherhood* also might lead the reader

to believe everyone who resides in *Brotherhood of River and Lake* is on the same side, working in the same profession, or have a common goal when in fact *jianghu* is made up of many different factions, often outright opposing each other and are usually involved in some plot of revenge or doing their utmost to stop the opposition from reaching their goal. Furthermore the term *brotherhood* itself does not feel far reaching enough to encompass the entire society that makes up *jianghu*. One part or one group residing in *jianghu*, could be called a brotherhood, perhaps using it in the term *Wulin*, but once again *jianghu* and its citizenry are too complex to be lumped together and defined as just simply a *brotherhood* when it is much more than that. One important thing to note is that John Minford's translation contains a general glossary of terms explaining a few of the more complex terms. In this glossary professor Minford does give an in depth explanation of the term, describing some of the complexities such as the origin of the name *River and Lake*, the counter-culture societal aspect, and some examples of the colorful characters that reside in *jianghu* educating the reader ahead of time. Whether or not the reader will actually read it is another issue.

Jianghu is very much an integral part of martial arts novels. It is the ancient Chinese backdrop to which almost all martial arts

fiction takes place. Thus it is imperative when translating martial arts novels this term is translated often and appropriately to help the uninformed English reader understand. If done properly the more it is translated in the various context it appears the more the complexities and nuances of the term will be understood by the target audience. Even if at first a translation feels awkward or too foreign, for such an important term in martial arts novels as *jianghu* it is pertinent it be kept intact and not overly simplified or skipped, as has been the case with some translations. Rather than skip over or try to describe something that doesn't exist in the target culture/language it is better to come up with new terms for that thing itself, so as to create a new lexicon or vocabulary to enter the target language. Although there may never be a perfect translation of *jianghu* in English, as long as it contains most if not all necessarily elements discussed above (containing geographic, societal, and martial arts references), is context appropriate, and does not overly domesticate—the translation should be sufficient enough. While some translators have done admirable jobs with their overall translations of the martial arts novels, the term *jianghu* has not always been handled in an appropriate manner, either by ditching the term altogether or not going far enough to keep it in place to let the reader understand its importance in martial arts

fiction. After analyzing each translator's own take on the term keeping in mind the definition of the term itself, the three major elements that it should contain to better inform the reader, and staying in line with foreignization translation techniques I have been able to come up with what I believe to be the most all encompassing English version of *jianghu*—*Martial Society of River and Lake*. By using the word *Martial* there exists a reference to martial arts. *Society* is a reference to the counter culture, the people that exist in *jianghu* and the rules of law to which they live their lives. Putting them together and one is left with a separate society having something to do with martial arts while also feeling larger in scope than if such words as *community* or *brotherhood* were used. The last part, *River and Lake* is a literal translation of the term itself to help preserve some of the Chineseness notifying the readers of the existence of a foreign item as well as make reference to the geographical aspects and the origins of the term itself.

While to some this translation may seem overly long, it can be used to introduce the term *jianghu* as early as possible in a translation and adjusted as needed throughout so long as it remain clear to the reader it is in reference to the same thing, a technique some translators have decided to forego. As an example, the Chinese term 老江

湖 (old *jianghu*) could be translated as *an experienced (noun) of the Martial Society* (able to use whatever noun seems most suitable to the character described), *well versed in land of River and Lake*, or *an old wanderer of River and Lake*. When coming across *jianghu* in noun form, the translator could either choose to use the full translation or even simplifying it to either *Martial Society* or *River and Lake* based on context. As the terms *Wulin* and *Jianghu* are sometimes used interchangeably so could the translation. If more of an emphasis is being placed on the people in the source text, then the translator could choose to use *Martial Society*, if more emphasis is placed on the location then *River and Lake* would suffice. All of these translations are enough to make reference back to the original translation notifying the reader of its ‘otherness’ while being flexible enough to fit the context and even the structure of the sentence the term is being translated from. From a reader standpoint the more exposure to a new term or idea the better understood the term or idea becomes, allowing for more opportunity for the reader to become familiar with a previously unknown from a different culture.

Wulin—Order of the Martial Forest

The term *wulin* (武林) literally meaning martial forest, is a reference to many capable martial artists gathering together in a condensed area, much like bamboo in a bamboo forest, hence *martial forest* (Lin, 2017). According to professor Lin Baochun, *wulin* was originally the name of a place near present day Hangzhou and was not in any way related to martial arts novels. However the term did appear in the New Book of Tang 《新唐書》 dating back to the 10th century (林保淳, 2004, 6). Professor Lin also states the idea behind *wulin* could have originated from the *Four Books* 《四書》 where *rulin* (儒林) originates. The term *rulin* means many Confucians gathering together, or a forest of Confucians (Lin, 2017). Later on terms like *Wenlin* (文林) and *Yilin* (藝林) were also used to describe men of letters and capable artists gathering together. In martial arts novels the term *wulin* did not appear until the author Baiyu (白羽) of old-school martial arts novel fame. Up until that point many novels simply contained the terms *jianghu* and *lulin* but not *wulin* (林保淳, 2004, 6). *Wulin* was meant to be a more all-encompassing *lulin*, including martial artists and groups from both the just (白道) and unjust (黑道) sides. In more modern martial arts novels the term has gone through a slight change. Since *wu* (武) or martial arts is practically a basic necessity for residing in *jianghu* (or at least a

proficiency enough to protect oneself from enemies), according to professor Lin, in the later years of martial arts novels the terms *wulin* and *jianghu* have been used interchangeably. One of the key differences as noted above is that *jianghu* can also be used to reference a geographic location, the main setting of a martial arts story, while the term *wulin* cannot, as it is only in reference to the people that inhabit this setting. So long as one lives in *jianghu* and knows some form of martial arts they are a part of *wulin*. When compared to *jianghu* or *lulin*, the organization that is *wulin* places much more emphasis on the morality of using martial arts, (武德), and as a place to demonstrate one's own martial arts abilities, as opposed to being the backdrop of the story or someone who mainly resides in the wilderness or *lulin* (林保淳, 2004, 6).

In terms of translation, *wulin* is not as complex a term as *jianghu*. It has no reference to a geographical location, merely a reference to the martial artists and citizens of *jianghu*. Out of the five translated martial arts novels, the term *wulin* shows up in four; only in Li Shoumin's novel *Willows* does it not appear. Three out of the remaining four translators, Rebecca Tai, Olivia Mok, and John Minford all share similar translations for *Wulin*; *Martial Order* (Gu, 1970, 17), *Martial Brotherhood* (Jin, 1996, 10), and *Martial Arts Fraternity* (Jin, 1997, 318)

respectfully. While none of these three are bad translations, Rebecca Tai' s *Martial Order* stands on its own for being the only one that can be decidedly stated as gender neutral in English. Both Olivia Mok' s *Martial Brotherhood* and John Minford' s *Martial Arts Fraternity* use wording that is commonly associated with male only groups. The words *Brotherhood* and *Fraternity* might be deemed slightly inappropriate in today' s society as well as being slightly inaccurate from a translation standpoint, as the term *wulin* is not gender specific. It may be the case when the term *wulin* first came to be it was seen as a group consisting of mostly, if not only males, but in more modern martial arts novels there are certainly plenty of female characters, many of which also happen to be quite adept martial artists. Since the term *wulin* has been defined to include all those in *jianghu* who posses some martial arts ability, it should also include the many highly skilled female martial artists, hence both *Fraternity* and *Brotherhood* could be seen as inaccurate from a translation sense. *Martial Order* on the other hand is a perfectly suitable translation that also happens to remain gender neutral. From a foreignization standpoint all three terms can be deemed successful as the concept or idea of *wulin* doesn' t truly exist in western culture/English and the translators do not try to wash out the

term through over-domestications such as simplifying it to fighters, or try to borrow a similar concept that already exists in English.

As previously discussed, when translating *Sword*, Graham Earnshaw has used a variety of translations for *jianghu* while occasionally simplifying four terms into just one. The most common simplification used—*the fighting community* is also his translation for *wulin*:

「咱們武林中人，就算不能捨身報國…」 (金庸, 1996a, 184)

“We of the fighting community may not be able to save our country…” (Jin, 2005, 115)

From a target language standpoint when compared to the other translations, *the fighting community* almost feels too large, too encompassing. This falls on the fact the word fighting is not the same as martial arts. Anyone can get into a fight, but not everyone is a martial artist. The word fighting slightly waters down the essence of the term *wulin* by not being specific enough. In martial arts novels martial arts is practiced and perfected through years of hard work and dedication with a multitude of techniques and styles from various martial arts schools in addition to the complex master and disciple relationships that exist. To replace this with a simple verb—fighting significantly changes the feeling of the term. The *fighting community*

could very well exist in any number of settings whereas something like the *Martial Order* feels more unique to the genre.

Unfortunately as previously mentioned *the fighting community* is also used as a blanket term for some other key terms from the martial arts genre, *jianghu*, *lulin*, and even *heidao*. As mentioned above, *jianghu* and *wulin* can be used interchangeably when appropriate, therefore using the same translation for both can be deemed acceptable when necessary, however *lulin* (綠林) (金庸, 1996a, 335), *heidao* (黑道) (金庸, 1996a, 366) and *wulin* are decidedly not the same, hence other translations should be created. When compared to the other *wulin* translations, *the fighting community* seems to be too broad of a term, failing to distinguish the difference between an experienced martial artist and someone who likes a good brawl every now and then. From a foreignization standpoint simplifying the *wu* (武) of *wulin* to fighting in English takes away some of the more intriguing, unique ‘Chineseness’ that comes from the source material.

After careful analysis of the various translations for *wulin* I propose the English translation of *Martial Forest Order* or *Order of the Martial Forest*. Just like the previously proposed *jianghu* translation, this English translation for *wulin* still pays homage to the original source language by containing a literal translation of the two

characters 武 and 林 while at the same time borrowing *Order* from Rebecca Tai's translation. In keeping the source language intact, the reader will be clued in that the term is distinctly 'other', bringing them closer to the foreign culture through literal translation. Furthermore I believe *Order* to be the most appropriate term to carry the idea of *wulin* being a grouping of people rather than an actual forest as the term could be misinterpreted at first glance. While both *Fraternity* and *Brotherhood* can convey the same idea for reasons stated previously *Order* is more appropriate than either two. *Community* feels too wide-ranging and loose of a term, almost as if members are there by default rather than because they possess martial arts abilities. The term itself, *Order of the Martial Forest* is also flexible enough to fit a variety of context for which it would need to be used. For example, due to the translation's length perhaps it's not suitable to write it in full every time. One could then modify it to something such as *Martial Forest*, *The Order*, or *Martial Order*. So long as it remains clear to the reader they are all in reference to the same idea, the original translation—*Order of the Martial Forest*, the term should hold up well. Just like *jianghu*, *wulin* is an integral part of martial arts novels. To ensure the term does not get lost on the reader in the target language and to maintain a certain level of 'Chineseness', a more foreignized

translation would be preferable to a non-translation or a loose, vague descriptive term like the *fighting community*.

Lülin—Outer Greenlands

The next martial arts novel genre specific term to be discussed in this paper is *lülin* (綠林). Literally meaning Green Forest, *lülin* is a term used to describe people or groups of people that generally reside in the forested or mountainous areas in *jianghu*, as opposed to those centrally located in a city or more populated area. The term has gone through an evolution over time as martial arts novels have become more and more complex in narrative (林保淳, 2004, 4). Prior to being mainly associated with *jianghu* and martial arts novels *lülin* appeared in such works of literature as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* 《三國演義》, and *Water Margin* 《水滸傳》 and was very much a place considered to harbor those of poor moral standing such as bandits. From there *lülin* continued to be seen as a place or term used to describe the bandits, bandit groups, or guilds considered unjust or evil. The main difference between the guilds of *lülin* and other guilds (黑道, 幫會) that are considered unjust was that those who were part of *lülin* were always located in mountainous or forested areas and not in the more prosperous city centers (Lin, 2017). For a time, if the reader saw that someone or a

group was part of *lülin* they would understand two things; they were considered “of the unjust” in *jianghu*, and located in a mountainous or forested area.

However as mentioned before, over the years the term has gradually evolved to not just include the unjust guilds or people but also those on the just side. It has changed so much to the point that in most modern martial arts novels *lülin* is a term used to specify location of a group or person only and not their moral standing. So long as the group opposes the imperial court or at least does not want to be under its rule. Whether or not considered to be morally just by the constituents of *jianghu*, the group can still be considered to be a part of *lülin*, almost like an extension of the term *jianghu* (林保淳, 2004, 6).

Although similar to *wulin*, *lülin* is smaller in scale as it only includes those in mountainous or forested areas. When all three terms (*jianghu*, *wulin*, *lülin*) are summarized together, *jianghu* is the setting of limitless possibilities for the martial artists who populate the stories; *lülin* is where the martial artists and bandits can congregate together, mixing just and unjust in the wilderness of *jianghu*; and *wulin* is the community to demonstrate ones martial arts prowess, for all martial artists. Mix all three together and you have a true

understanding of the fictitious world of which martial arts novels take place (林保淳, 2004, 6-7).

Due to the fact the term *lülin* appears less in the source material than either *jianghu* or *wulin*, there are fewer English translations. Olivia Mok uses a literal translation technique coming up with *the Greenwood* (Jin, 1996, 237) while Graham Earnshaw uses two separate terms when translating *lülin*; *outlaws* (Yong, 2005, 7) and *the fighting community* (Jin, 2005, 214) both of which have already been analyzed and discussed in detail. From a basic foreignization standpoint Olivia Mok's *the Greenwood* captures the essence of the term, as opposed to the oversimplification or domestication of *lülin* by using two separate terms as Graham Earnshaw has done. Unfortunately in the novel *Fox*, the term *lülin* does not appear very often, just three times all on the same page (金庸, 1996b, 153) with Olivia Mok translating it just once:

「陶伯伯，我爹爹也說，綠林中儘有英雄豪傑，誰也不敢小覷了。」

(金庸, 1996b, 153)

“Uncle Century, my father also told me that no one ever dared to belittle the famed heroes and celebrated fighters of *the Greenwood*.” (Jin, 1996, 237)

From context it's very hard to tell what the *Greenwood* actually is, especially since there is no previous mention of this term, which could lead some confusion on the readers part. In this situation it would probably have been better to leave it out as the translator did for the previous two mentions on the same page. Either that or translate every single one so the reader can get a better understanding of the term as opposed to the single mention where it is not clear in the context.

Lülin is a convoluted term. The meaning has gone through a significant amount of change throughout its existence in martial arts novels. Considering this, it is not surprising that it doesn't appear as much as other similar terms like *jianghu* or *wulin*. However, from a translation perspective it is still important to know the difference and when to apply said knowledge to help benefit both the reader and the translation as a whole. Mok's translation—*Greenwood* works well enough from a foreignization standpoint it is a literal translation of *lülin*, and fairly self-explanatory. However, I propose taking it a step further to paint a better picture of the counter-culture, living outside the reach of the government by translating it as the *Outer Greenlands*. Adding *outer* helps bring home the sense of distance from the government, whether literal or figurative. Keeping the word *green* in the title is a

literal nod to its Chinese roots to keep with the theme of foreignization. *Outer Greenlands* could also be changed to *Outer Lands* slightly to fit a geographic location if the location is known to be somewhere would not normally be considered “green” like a barren desert or mountain side cave.

Qing Gong—Light-body Arts

Although martial arts fiction consists of hundreds upon thousands of novels written by numerous authors there are certain terms that can almost be guaranteed to show up in each and every story. Much like the terms discussed above, the term *qinggong* (輕功) (literally light skill or technique) can be found in practically every martial arts novel. *Qinggong* is a form of martial arts where the practitioner is able to defy the laws of gravity, as if they are temporarily nearly weightless, light as a feather moving through the air fast and free with the occasional tap of the foot on a solid object that sends them shooting back through the air covering large distances in a single bound. There are a few different kinds of *qinggong* techniques, the main one being as just described, being able to cover large distances in a short amount of time with giant leaps, close to flying. Another technique allows the practitioner to “fly” over water, only occasionally coming down with a

gentle tap of the foot on water to send them catapulting back in the air. Other techniques include running up near vertical walls, lightning fast speed, and stepping on one's own foot mid-air to allow oneself to ascend even higher (Lin, 2017). All of these techniques fall under the umbrella of *qinggong* and are a common, accepted "fantasy" aspect of martial arts fiction.

Just like the term *jianghu*, *qinggong* is found in every single one of the English translations, further cementing it as one of the martial arts fiction genre specific terms that must be handled accurately and with care. Two novels, *Sword* and *Deer* share a common translation, most likely for the fact that the translator of *Deer*, John Minford, served as one of the editors for *Sword* (curiously some of *Sword*'s other translations for genre specific terms were left alone). Their translation (originally found in Minford's *Deer*) for *qinggong* is *Art of Flying* (Jin, 2005, 15). When using *qinggong* the characters themselves are not actually flying but are very close to it, only having to lightly touch the ground or something solid beneath their feet every so often before launching themselves back into the air at great speed. Although the term *qinggong* does encapsulate slightly more than just this vast leaping move, "flying" as deemed by this translation, I believe when

taken into context the reader will know the character is not literally flying:

「陸非青想見識這位請童兆和吃泥巴的是何等樣人物，施展輕功，悄沒聲的跟在後面…雖然出步迅速，前面那人卻絲毫未覺。」

(金庸, 1996a, 32)

“Lu wanted to know who had treated Tong to a mouthful of mud and, making use of his highly developed kungfu skills in the Art of Flying, he followed…The pace was fast but the person he was following was not aware of his presence.” (Jin, 2005, 15)

While the action being taken is slightly unclear in the context adding “*Art of*” gives the translation a definitive boundary, letting the reader know it is a form or technique and might not be literal. Where the term does falter is in the foreignization department as it deviates quite a lot from the Chinese source. When simply looking at the term 輕功 (*qinggong*) there is no direct mention of flight. When compared to some of the other translations Earnshaw’s (Minford’s) *Art of Flying*, reaches furthest away from the original source language and meaning, yet is still able to mostly capture the meaning, while being only slightly misleading.

While *Art of Flying* is neither a complete domestication nor foreignization of the term *qinggong*, Olivia Mok' s translation however seems to lean more towards the former rather than the latter. *Levitate*, is her English translation for *qinggong*. Where this term goes awry is that it boils all forms of *qinggong* into a single verb:

「殷吉等都下了馬，將馬匹繫在大松樹下，翻起長衣下襟縛在腰裏，展開輕功提縱術，從山坡右首上山。」（金庸，1996b, 9）

“They dismounted from their horses, tethered the animals under the pines, tucked up the lower front of their robes and strapped them in with their girdles. Then they began to levitate up the mountainside, bounding along the right hand track of the slope.” (Jin, 1996, 12)

Where Minford' s translation employs a similar technique, he has smartly added *art of* to allow the reader to understand it is a type of martial arts rather than the actual verb the translation uses. Olivia Mok' s *levitate* on the other hand is just a single verb, limiting *qinggong* to a singular action in the eyes of the reader—levitation, and not the variety of different moves as discussed earlier. Looking at the example above if it weren' t for the use of the verb *bounding* following

the term, the image the English reader would receive would be quite different from the actual movement of the characters due to the fact the term *levitate* leads one to believe the practitioner is simply hovering over the ground at the same level, whereas in martial arts fiction when the characters use *qinggong* they are usually running fast and leaping a great distance, gradually floating up then back down in rhythm. With levitation this rhythmic rise and fall, along with a sense of speed are both lost on the English reader, leaving more to be desired from a translation standpoint. Adding in *bounding* after *levitate* is also confusing to the reader as they are two different actions, putting them back to back creates a mixed image.

The last two translations also share similarities. Rebecca Tai's *lightness kungfu* (Gu, 1970, 10) is basically a literal translation of *qinggong*, while Robert Chard's *light-body techniques* (Li, 1991, 33), is similar but he goes a step further with his translation by adding the word *body* to make it clear to the reader exactly what the 輕 or *light* is being applied to. One issue to take into consideration with Rebecca Tai's translation is the difference between *kungfu* and martial arts as portrayed in martial arts fiction. While to some these two terms may seem similar if not the same, they are actually quite different as Sharon Lai notes in her dissertation (Lai, 1998b, 5). Using the term

lightness kungfu instead of something like *lightness martial arts* could be seen as a slight mistranslation. From a foreignization perspective I believe both to be sufficient as they are both near literal translations of the source text and still appear unlike anything the average English reader would be familiar with. One thing worth mentioning on Robert Chard' s translation is his unique ability to “read between the lines” of the source text and “fill in the gaps” . Throughout his translation there are countless examples of his ability to make clear the meaning of the source text in the target language, especially when only involving very short terminology in Chinese. His translation of *qinggong* is a prime example. As opposed to Rebecca Tai' s translation of *lightness kungfu*, by adding in the word *body* Robert Chard makes clear that light (輕) is describing the body of the practitioner and not perhaps an the attack style or power of attack. This clarity allows the English reader to quickly understand the meaning of the term at first glance. Resulting in a quick “built-in” explanation in the term itself that can prevent the need for the translator to add anything extra into the text allowing for a smoother read, while remaining loyal to the source text.

It is for these reasons that I believe Robert Chard' s translation to be the best out of the four translations of *qinggong*.

While three of the four translations are acceptable, (Olivia Mok's levitate being the lone translation worth revisiting), Robert Chard's translation is able to take a short, complex term in Chinese and rework it into English in a way that establishes the foreignness of the Chinese while still being clear enough in English to help the reader get a solid understanding of its meaning.

While acceptable on its own I believe there can still be one slight alteration to make the translation that much better and bring forth the Chineseness buried within the source language. I propose taking his translation and changing the word *techniques* to *arts* to get *light-body arts*. Using *arts* instead of *techniques* will help the reader link the term to martial arts while at the same time bringing a more poetic feeling to the term itself that is more in line with some of the various forms of *qinggong* such as the rhythmic vaulting through the air mentioned above. *Qinggong* is uniquely wuxia fiction. It is a part of what gives many of the martial artists their superhuman like feel, pushing the boundaries of reality while not completely blowing them away allowing martial arts fiction to still remain in a somewhat plausible realm of reality. *Qinggong* coupled with martial arts fighting moves (and the fights themselves) are some of the most memorable parts of martial arts fiction and incredibly integral parts to establishing the overall

feel of a martial arts novel. When translating it is critical to make sure these two aspects are carried over into English as frequently as possible (not skipping translation opportunities) to continue to bring the English reader closer to the Chinese martial arts fiction world.

Fighting Moves and Styles

Perhaps one of the most important aspects to most martial arts fiction is the portrayal of martial arts itself. Many westerners who grew up watching martial arts or kungfu films are probably already somewhat familiar with the idea of different fighting styles and the naming of various moves. While some of the moves do exist in real martial arts, the authors of martial arts novels (and said films) have taken many artistic liberties (e.g. *qinggong*) with the source material. In addition different authors can have quite a varying degree of style when it comes to portraying the fighting itself. Certain bouts in Jin Yong novels can go on for pages, with hundreds of moves being exchanged between the combatants in the process. Gu Long on the other hand tends to make quick work of his fight scenes. As mentioned previously when compared with Jin Yong Gu Long's writing is decidedly less descriptive, so it is unsurprising that the fight scenes in his novels also tend to be much shorter.

Writing styles aside one of the main reasons the reader chooses to pick up a martial arts novel is for the fight scenes—a quintessential necessity to any martial arts fiction. Thus translating the fight scenes and various moves is all the more necessary. One of the more interesting aspects of translating these fighting moves and styles is that they are fairly open to interpretation. As previously mentioned, they are often fictitious moves, made up for the story and have no grounding in real martial arts. Depending on where they take place in context of the novel, they very well may not even have a description of what the move looks like, perhaps just an exotic sounding name. For this reason I believe the translator is allowed to really flex their writing muscles as it were and get creative, as they are not as bound by the certain limitations found in some of the other more complex genre specific terms like *jianghu* or *qinggong*.

Below I have chosen a few examples of various fighting moves for a variety of reasons that will be discussed during their respective analysis. It is important to note that for mostly all of these fighting moves the names will almost automatically sound foreign, as western society does not have a similar style of naming fighting moves, thus for most cases a discussion on foreignization or domestication is not necessary. Any criticisms leveled against a translation mostly revolve

around style or word choice and not necessarily meaning, as the terms are rather open ended even in the source text.

For the most part Rebecca Tai has done decent job of translating the various fighting moves and styles throughout *Son*. The first one I wish to discuss is one of the better examples. It is a form of *qinggong* employed by one of the many side characters in the novel, 「飛大夫」公孫鈴 (古龍, 1998b, 18), ‘Flying Doctor’ Gongsun Ling (Gu, 1970, 10). The *qinggong* technique is called 「燕子三抄水」(古龍, 1998b, 18), in English *Sparrow Thrice Skimming Water* (Gu, 1970, 10). This is a very literal translation of the Chinese that works well due to the fact the Chinese, along with its English translation both paint a picture of the kind of movement going on for this particular type of *qinggong*, even when said description is missing in the text. Most likely where the practitioner crosses a body of water, leaping out over the water only to gently touch down on the water and leap back up into the air much like how a sparrow or other small bird might be seen skimming over the water. In the novel the move is only brought up by the author and never described in “action” so for this move, like many others, it is left up to the reader’s imagination based on the descriptive name.

The next move I wish to discuss is also that of another side character in *Son*, a man called 厲剛 (古龍, 1998b, 192), Li Gang (Gu, 1970,

240) who when attacking the protagonist of the story, Xiao Shiyilang, uses the punching technique called 「大摔碑手」(古龍, 1998a, 192), *Great Slab-Smashing Hand* (Gu, 1970, 241). Once again the translator has used a very literal translation to great effect as it also is able to be descriptive enough for the reader to get a basic understanding of what this move is all about—a powerful attack with the hand or fist. Fortunately for the reader, the move and how it's executed is also described in the story on the next page:

他肩不動，腰不擰，腳下向前踏出了一步，掌尖前探，堪堪觸及蕭十一郎的胸膛，掌心才突然向外一吐。(古龍, 1998b, 193)

His shoulders and waist remaining still, Li stepped forward and reached his fingers out to touch Xiao's chest. And then he suddenly pushed out his palm. (Gu, 1970, 241)

As one can see from the description the attack is done from a very close distance and with little movement and is said to be able to “pulverize rocks” (Gu, 1970, 241), which the reader would probably be able to tell from the name itself.

While both of the previous two martial arts moves were translated quite well, the next and final one to be discussed from Rebecca Tai's translation of *Son* has a few issues. The move in question is called 「金剛掌」(古龍, 1998c, 193), with Rebecca Tsai's translation being *King*

Kong Palm (Gu, 1970, 282). The most glaring issue with this is the mistranslation of 金剛 (*jingang*) as King Kong. While it is true 金剛 is the Chinese translation for the King Kong of western cinema, it is also the Chinese name of Buddha's warrior attendant, Vajrapani (金剛手菩薩) (金剛 n.d.) and the name for the Diamond Sutra 《金剛經》 (金剛經 n.d.). Although there is no exact historical date for any of Gu Long's novels, the reader is always led to believe the novels take place in ancient China. There is no way for the King Kong of cinema, first revealed to the world in 1933, to be known to anyone in an ancient China setting, let alone having a martial arts move named after the movie monster. There is also no contextual description of this move, so it is solely left up to the reader's imagination to envision what this attack may look like. If instead of using *King Kong Palm* the translator used *Vajrapani Palm*, *Buddha Warrior Palm*, or even *Diamond Sutra Palm*, the overall feeling is drastically different. While not having much of an impact to the novel overall it still may briefly pull the reader out of the ancient Chinese setting, something we as translators must be very careful to avoid. When translating one must always be conscious of date and setting of the novel and avoid word usage that is not setting appropriate unless the translator is actively trying to make said changes for another purpose.

The next fighting moves to be discussed are those found in Olivia Mok' s translation *Fox*. From an entire translation standpoint I found this translation to be the weakest of the five. The English writing often feels stilted and the translator uses too many archaic words that can easily disrupt the reader, taking away from the reading experience. With that being said she can be commended for at least translating every single one of the fighting moves in the source text. The quality of said translations varies slightly yet I found no egregious mistakes such as the *King Kong Palm* technique previously mentioned. The first move to be discussed is called 龍翔鳳舞 (金庸, 1996b, 17), *Dragon Prancing and Phoenix Gambolling* (Jin, 1996, 23) in English. The main issue I take with this translation is the order of which the translator has arranged the English translation—a subject participle construction, the same order of the Chinese source text that leads to a stilted translation. A more preferable order would have been a verb-object construction leading to a smoother sounding name, *Prancing Dragon and Gambolling Phoenix*, a la the most well known martial arts film in the western world to date, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (臥虎藏龍). In terms of word choice there is not much to critique as the move is barely described in the text itself:

…劉元鶴叫一聲「着！」一招「龍翔風舞」，雙拐齊至…(金庸, 1996b, 17)

Prime whirled both his staves raining blows by practising the Dragon Prancing and Phoenix Gambolling. (Jin, 1996, 23)

From context it is clear that it is in fact some sort of attack involving two stick-like weapons—which represent the dragon and phoenix. Apart from that however there is not much else for the translator to go on, which leaves more freedom for word choice.

The next move is called 沙鷗掠波 (金庸, 1996b, 112), translated as *Seagull Skimming the Lake* (Jin, 1996, 175). Although word choice is not as important for fight moves, there is one glaring error in the English translation. For some unknown reason, the translator has chosen to translate the character 波, Chinese for *wave*, as *lake*. Although both English words have to do with water, lake and wave are decidedly different terms, and they paint a slightly different picture of the move itself, which unlike the previous move discussed, this one is described quite clearly in the source text:

…當下使一招「沙鷗掠波」，本來是先砍下手刀，再砍上手刀… (金庸, 1996b, 112)

In a moment my father brought off the Seagull Skimming the Lake, intending first a defensive blow, followed by an instantaneous offensive stroke. (Jin, 1996, 175)

Perhaps part of the issue with the translator's word choice is the fact she does not quite understand what is going on with the description of the move itself. From the Chinese text it is not clear whether the two movements done by the practitioner are offensive or defensive. One is a slicing movement down low, the other up high; much like a bird swooping down over a wave, coasting closely almost as if surfing it then taking off back up into the sky.

While being of a slightly different genre of literature, Li Shoumin's xianxia, or fantasy martial arts novel, still has very many ties in common with wuxia fiction, including the use of naming various fighting moves. From a translation standpoint Robert Chard's *Willows* is quite a work to behold. As previously mentioned his ability to read between the lines of the Chinese text and fill in the gaps has created an incredible translation that holds true for his translation of fight moves as well. The first move to be discussed is 騰蛇遊壁之法 (李壽民, 1946, 18), *Flying Snake Traverses the Wall* (Li, 1991, 35). This move also happens to be one of the various *qinggong* techniques as commonly seen in many martial arts novels. Here the protagonist applies a technique to help him ascend a dangerous cliff face. Unfortunately there is no real description as to what the technique exactly looks like as it is simply described in the text as 「見王謹身法，真個輕快」 (李壽民, 1946, 18),

“applying his climbing techniques with extraordinary deftness and speed” (Li, 1991, 35) which leaves the translator a little more room for interpretation. What’s beneficial for this specific move is the name is very descriptive in itself painting a decent picture of the action in the minds of the readers. Robert Chard has gone with a basic literal translation, word for word of the Chinese that carries over the same descriptive title into the target language English.

For the second fighting technique to be discussed Robert Chard once again uses a similar direct or literal translation technique—飛叉法術 (李壽民, 1946, 92), or *Flying Trident* (Li, 1991, 127) in English. Like the previous technique the *Flying Trident* technique also has no textual description so the translator has only the name itself to go on. However this translation varies slightly in that the translator decides to rearrange the final two characters 法術, which means magic or spell in English. Instead he moves this to the front of the move and changes it to “*the deadly arts of the Flying Trident*” (Li, 1991, 127) removing the magical spell portion of the source text without really changing much meaning.

One of the main areas of Graham Earnshaw’s translation of *Sword* falters is his depiction of fight scenes, or lack thereof. Earnshaw has made a conscious effort to remove some of the fight scenes (along with

other subplots) and for this reason many of the moves were either left out or not translated which is unfortunate as the translation as a whole is decent. While the English reader would never know the difference they are left with a trimmed down version of the novel lacking some of the key ingredients to martial arts fiction.

With that being said one of the translations of the few martial arts moves that were translated is still worth taking a look at. The move is called 金剛伏虎 (金庸, 1996a, 293), and *Buddha Ambushing the Tiger* (Jin, 2005, 198) for its English counterpart. Once again this is a literal translation of the Chinese source text into English. In the portion devoted to discussing Rebecca Tai's translation of fight moves 金剛, or Vajrapani the protector Buddha was found in a different move. Here Earnshaw has a more appropriate translation going with a simple *Buddha*, as opposed to King Kong, which fits the setting much better. Unfortunately there is no description of this move in context of the novel itself so the reader has no way of knowing what it looks like but at least it does not stand out for the wrong reasons.

This is just a small serving size of the countless number of fight moves found in martial arts fiction, a few hand-picked examples worth discussing for a variety of reasons. As mentioned before fight moves are usually open to interpretation as what is often seen in the story is

only the name of the move without an accompanying description. If the translator simply uses a literal translation technique the result usually ends up sounding foreign and even somewhat mysterious, which is the same feeling one often gets when reading the source text, a sign of a good translation.

Character Names and Nicknames

The final aspect of translation in martial arts novels to be discussed in this paper is the translation of character names and in certain instances character nicknames or “fighting name” (外號). Character nicknames are often born from a wide range of character traits such as (but not limited to) martial arts technique, style, weapon, affiliated school; familial history, or any other aspect unique to a specific character. These types of nicknames are specifically unique to martial arts fiction and are a must as it sometimes gives some one-dimensional characters distinction.

When translating the name of a character there are a variety of different techniques that can be adopted. The first, most straightforward technique is a direct romanization of the Chinese name using pinyin, a la the titular character from the novel *Son, Xiao Shiyi Lang* (蕭十一郎) (Gu, 1970, 9). While sounding foreign, one of the

drawbacks to this technique is it does not carry over the meaning of the Chinese characters, as each character in a Chinese name carries a particular meaning. From the translator's introduction we know the name *Xiao Shiyi Lang* means *The Eleventh Son* (Gu, 1970, x), so it is clear there is a major loss of information about the character for the English readers when just using a romanization translation technique. *Xiao Shiyi Lang* is by no means the only example as there are many other characters throughout all the English translations that just use the romanization of the Chinese characters. For certain characters, such as the many side characters of lesser importance, this technique is perfectly acceptable, as they may only appear in the novel a handful of times if even. While not ideal for a main character, sometimes employing other translation techniques such as the following are not an option due to a myriad of reasons.

The next technique is a combination of romanization and literal translation. For most cases, a character's surname is left as is; a romanized version in English, while a literal translation of the (usually two) Chinese character name will be used for the rest of the English name. While the Chinese characters in a name have meaning, the single (sometimes double) Chinese character surnames are just a surname and are not looked at for meaning so much as familial ties. Take one of

the main characters from Li Shoumin' s xianxia novel *Willows* for example. The character, a best friend of the protagonist, is named 朱人虎 (Zhu Renhu) (李壽民, 1946, 13) in Chinese, while his name in Robert Chard' s English translation is *Zhu Man-Tiger* (Li, 1991, 28). Zhu is the romanization of his surname 朱, while *Man-Tiger* is a literal translation of the characters 人 and 虎. If used properly I believe this technique, a combination of both romanization and literal translation, to be one of the more successful ways of translating character names in martial arts fiction. Indeed this is the most common method seen throughout all translations as it can be seen as a compromise between both languages. However at times this technique does not quite work as well, especially when the translator is left with a character name that is either too abstract or difficult to adeptly carry over into English. Olivia Mok' s translation often runs into this issue as four of the more prominent characters in her English translation all have abstract names like *Curio Cao* (Jin, 1997, 4) 曹雲奇 (金庸, 1996b, 4), *Peace Tao* (Jin, 1997, 6) 陶子安 (金庸, 1996b, 5), *Century Tao* (Jin, 1997, 14) 陶百歲 (金庸, 1996b, 14), and *Prime Xiong* (Jin, 1997, 18) 熊元獻 (金庸, 1996b, 14) which can lead to confusion on the readers end, perhaps partly due to the fact three out of the four have the surname Cao or Tao, which look similar in English yet significantly different in Chinese 曹 (Cao) and 陶 (Tao).

Furthermore Curio, Peace, Century, and Prime are difficult to keep track of in the novel because these names feel more like abstract concepts, less concrete than something like *Man-Tiger*. When using the above technique and the following full English translation it is important for the translator to pick names that create imagery for the English reader as a lot of distinction is lost when going from Chinese characters, with built in imagery, to an English word, which might not necessarily create the same effect.

Another technique for character name translation is a complete literal translation of the entire name, taking the meaning from the Chinese characters and translating that into English without a surname attached. In Rebecca Tai's translation of *Son* the main character *Xiao Shiyi Lang* comes across an old man with an odd temperament. This character's name is 木尊者 (Mu Zunzhe) (古龍, 1970, 110), which translates to something along the lines of Honored/Respected Mu. His surname 木 (Mu) also happens to be the same Chinese character for wood, which the translator incorporates into the English translation of his name, *Wooden Oldster* (Gu, 1970, 69), a rather creative translation. However in a land filled with Chinese sounding names, as almost every other name is a romanization or a mix of pinyin and English, something like *Wooden Oldster* might stick out and feel slightly out of place

momentarily pulling the reader out of the setting, similar to the previously mentioned *King Kong Palm* technique from the same novel. Another example of this worth mentioning is from Olivia Mok's translation of *Fox*. One of the minor characters is named 平阿四 (Ping A Si) (金庸, 1996b, 118), while his English name is *Quad* (Jin, 1996, 185). The English translation most likely comes from his surname 平, which can also mean flat, even, or level, and 四, the Chinese character for the number four to get *Quad*, a form of four in English. Just like Rebecca Tai's *Wooden Oldster*, *Quad* also tends to stand out simply because it is so different from many of the other names found in the novel. While both examples do not impact either of the translations in any major way, it is important to remember setting when translating to maintain some form of uniformity throughout especially when dealing with something so important as character names in the novel.

John Minford uses this same technique but with more success only due to the fact that there are a number of characters with names that have been translated completely into English. When the main character Trinket Wei first comes in contact with the Triads, the reader (and Trinket) meet a variety of characters from *Tertius* (Jin, 1997, 303) 祁老三 (金庸, 1996c, 277), *Scarface* (Jin, 1997, 304) 賈老六 (金庸, 1996c, 278), *Squinty* (Jin, 1997, 304) 崔瞎子 (金庸, 1996c, 278), and *Big Beaver* (Jin,

1997, 305) 關基安 (金庸, 1996c, 279). None of these English names feels out of place as they often help the reader understand one of the character's traits or a physical feature about the character itself. This creates an image the reader can attach to the character, which in turn helps make each character more unique and memorable.

For the next portion of this section I would like to discuss the translations of specific character names and nicknames. One of the more famous characters in martial arts fiction also happens to be one of its weakest martial artists. 韋小寶 (Wei Xiaobao), from Jin Yong's novel *Deer* is one of the more divisive characters in all of martial arts fiction. He is the anti-hero, a young man who was born in a whorehouse perhaps more famous for his foul language and silver tongue than any real martial arts ability. His name in Chinese 韋小寶 if literally translated is something along the lines of *Wei Little Treasure* or *Little Treasure Wei* by western naming conditions. The translator John Minford has gone one step further however. Taking the meaning of both 小 and 寶 he has combined the two Chinese characters into the name *Trinket*, *Trinket Wei* as he goes by in the English version. This translation works well for multiple reasons. One it gives a decidedly unique character of martial arts fiction a decidedly unique English name. The word trinket is a good literal translation for 小寶, as there are many play on words

with the meaning of his two-character name throughout the source text that can still work with the English translation *Trinket* as opposed to a romanization where said double entendre would not work.

Another character name worth discussing is that of a character in Jin Yong' s *Fox*, 金面佛 (Jinmian Fo) (金庸, 1996b, 33), which has been translated by Olivia Mok as *Gilt-Faced Buddha* (Jin, 1996, 46). This is a literal translation of the Chinese characters—金 means gold or in this translation' s case Gilt, 面 is face, and 佛 is Buddha. While there is nothing wrong with the literal translation of characters, something worth thinking about is how a name may sound in the target language. When read aloud, gilt sounds exactly the same as guilt, two decidedly different things. While reading the translation I couldn' t help but think of a Buddha with a guilty looking face, as opposed to what the actual meaning is supposed to be, a gold covered Buddha. There are certainly other words the translator could have used instead to avoid this situation such as gold, gilded, or golden, and this issue would have been avoided completely.

Another name worth discussing that is representative of many names found in martial arts fiction is from the novel *Sword*. The character' s nickname and name are as follows, 奔雷手文泰來 (金庸, 1996a, 46), or *Rolling Thunder Wen Tailai* (Jin, 2005, 25) in English. This

is a classic example of a combined name and nickname found in many a martial arts novel. The nicknames can be very beneficial for the translator if the character's name is difficult to translate using any other method besides simple romanization. 文泰來 is a rather difficult name to translate. Both characters 泰 (*tai*) and 來 (*lai*) have various, rather abstract meanings. A literal translation is not so clear cut as something like the previously mentioned 小寶 (*Trinket*). However when combined with the nickname 奔雷手, *Rolling Thunder*—a description of the type of fighting moves or style he employs, it breathes more life into what would be a simple romanization of the character's Chinese name *Wen Tailai*. When combined together the name *Rolling Thunder Wen Tailai* paints a more colorful picture to an otherwise unremarkable English romanization. Of course this is usually only applicable if the character also has a nickname or “fighting name” (外號).

The final name translation that I wish to discuss in this paper is that of the main antagonist in the novel *Son*, 逍遙候 (古龍, 1998a, 47), or *Count Carefree* (Gu, 1970, 29) in English. Part of what makes Rebecca Tsai's translation of this character's name is the way she handles the rather abstract character name. 逍遙 (*xiaoyao*) in Chinese means to be free and unfettered, while 候 (*hou*) is a rank or title for aristocracy in ancient China. The translator stuck with a literal

definition of the Chinese characters and added a *Count* at the beginning as the character resides in a large and mysterious manor. On top of this *Count Carefree* is a great use of alliteration, the name rolls off the tip of the tongue.

The above examples are just a minute portion of the various names and nicknames found in martial arts novels. The three translation techniques, full romanization, combination of romanization and English, and full English translation are three different styles of techniques all with merits and drawbacks. What's most important is to generate character names that are memorable by taking advantage of the unique wuxia specific characteristics found in many of them to further bring the English reader closer to the source text, and closer to Chinese culture and wuxia tradition.

Through an extensive analysis of genre specific terms *jianghu* (江湖), *wulin* (武林), *lulin* (綠林), and *qinggong* (輕功), in addition to fighting moves and styles (招式), and character name (外號) translations it is clear when translating martial arts fiction the translator must have a complete strategy in mind. Wuxia novels are an expression of Chinese culture and a certain level of "Chineseness" should also be carried over into the English text for western readers. Through analysis of the above terms it is my hopes to provide the

framework needed for the translator to make the “Chineseness” found in wuxia fiction stand out without disrupting the flow of the novel bringing the target audience—the English reader, even closer to the foreign text and providing a better understanding of the foreign culture.



Chapter Three

Translating a Martial Arts Novel

With the knowledge gained from researching Chinese martial arts novels and their English translation counterparts the next step is to put said knowledge into practice. For my translation I chose the first book of the novel *The Legend of Chu Liuxiang: Scents from the Blood Sea* (楚留香傳奇之血海飄香) written by Gu Long. As previously noted Gu Long's novels present a much more approachable source material for English translation as opposed to Jin Yong. This is due to his distinct writing style with fast paced dialogue and lack of historical background that a Chinese speaker might inherently know but the average English reader would not. Such material can put a heavy burden on the translator; often leading to either removal of the historical information or to introduce them to the English reader via in text addition or footnote, both options coming with merits and drawbacks.

The entire process of translating this novel has been difficult but mostly in unexpected ways. Where I anticipated having the most difficulties prior to starting was not necessarily the case by the end. Part of this is due to the research done before hand, the collection and analysis of genre specific terms. Having already decided how to translate key terms before starting the translation was largely helpful

in saving time and in some cases mental capacity, creating a more smooth translation process. Due to this I do strongly believe the translation guide I have put forth to be helpful to future translators of the genre. However in the next section I will discuss the issues that I was plagued with most, particularly the unanticipated areas.

Vocalization of Characters

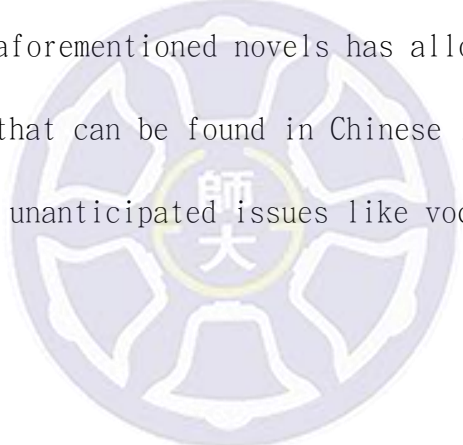
During literature translation every translator faces the task of bringing something foreign into one's own language, thus a solid understanding of the foreign language and culture is a must. Something many outside the translation world forget is a firm grasp of one's own mother language could be considered just as important if not even more important than knowledge of a foreign language. This issue makes up most of what I found to be challenging about this translation. Due to differences in language usage certain practices deemed acceptable in one language might not carry well in another. In *Chu*, Gu Long often uses the same character 道 (dao, to say, speak), e.g. 「楚留香道」 (Chu Liuxiang said) for the verb to say. There are slight variations such as 笑道 (xiaodao, to speak while smiling), 大笑道 (daxiaodao, to speak while laughing), or 冷笑道 (lengxiaodao, to speak while coldly smiling), however all appear quite frequently leaving quite a monotonous English

translation if left as is (direct translation) and leaving the reader in wonder as to why the characters are always smiling at each other. In English repetition is often frowned upon, and can make for dull writing, especially in literature, which when all is said and done is still just a source of entertainment. This has forced me to be more creative and search out a multitude of terms that can be used to express vocalization. Before beginning this translation I had no idea I was going to be tripped up by something I had often taken for granted and never truly appreciated in writing—expressing the way characters speak.

Through a rereading of John Minford's *Deer* and Rebecca Tsai's *Son* I have been able to focus on certain aspects of translation that I did not consider important during the first read through, including the aforementioned verbs of vocalization and expression. This has allowed me to build a more formidable vocabulary to deal with the occasional monotony that can be found in Chinese literature. For the simple verb 道 (to say or to speak), I have accumulated and put into practice such verbs as claim, counter, elucidate, issue, pipe, retort, reflect, muse, protest, and comment just to name a few. For 笑道 (to speak while smiling), I have collected and used such verbs and sayings as grin, beam, smile, glow, squeal in delight, and face adorned with a smile. The term 大笑道 (to speak while laughing), I have found and used such verbs and

sayings as: laugh, burst, howl, peals of laughter, snort of laughter, burst of laughter, crow (with delight), and uncork (laughter). By far the most problematic of the sayings has been 冷笑道 (to coldly smile while speaking). Perhaps due to such specificity, it has been harder to find and come up with a variety of ways to translate. Smiled coldly, frigid smile, ice-like smile, frosty smile, biting smile, and cold grin are most of the translations that I could come up with.

Building up such a word bank through careful reads of English material such as the aforementioned novels has allowed me to break through the monotony that can be found in Chinese literature, especially when it comes to such unanticipated issues like vocalization of characters.



Character Titles and Other Forms of Address

Another unanticipated issue I encountered during my translation was the many various titles for people found not just in martial arts fiction but in regular everyday Chinese as well. In the Chinese language there are a variety of ways to express personal humility or reverence to another through certain “title” phrases. Nowhere is this more apparent than in martial arts fiction, where the master/disciple relationship dynamic plays such a prominent role. In Chinese one can

refer to themselves in the third person using said “titles”, often used to show humility or a lower status. For example in *Chu*, a servant (程三, Cheng Three) comes walking into a room he is not supposed to be in and refers to himself as 小人 (literally little person) when speaking with his superior, 「小人怎敢隨意進來…」 (古龍, 1998, 57). Because this is not common practice in modern English it can create issues for the translator. Does one simply ignore it and translate it as I? Or is there a better option available to maintain a certain level of foreignness in the translation. In going with my assessment that if at all possible, foreignization if used appropriately is the best technique for translating martial arts fiction I chose to translate the above phrase as, “The ignoble Cheng would not dare enter at will…”, translating 小人 as *the ignoble* to mimic both the structure and meaning of the Chinese.

Some further examples of terms (and their English translations) used to express humility found in the novel *Chu* include, 貧僧 (humble monk), 小弟 (little brother), and 晚輩 (literally of a later generation).

On the other end of the spectrum there are quite a variety of “titles” to express respect and reverence to a superior, elder, or someone considered of a higher rank or class. Such examples from *Chu* include, 公子 (prince, sir, nobleman), 大少爺 (venerable young master), 掌

門人 (head or leader of a martial arts school), 長老(elder), 宗主 (high ranking leader), 幫主 (guild leader), 大長老 (great elder), 前輩 (literally of a previous generation—honorable predecessor), 大師 (Great/Grand Master), and 高手 (martial arts master/adept). Seeing as all the terms are slightly different in meaning it was important from a foreignization standpoint to do my utmost as the translator to not use the same couple of words to cover a variety of different terms, as that would cause the translation to lose some of the Chineseness and martial arts flavor from the source text.

Out of these terms by far the most difficult to translate has been 前輩 (honorable predecessor). This term first appears at the very beginning of the novel when several martial arts adepts are lying in wait for the protagonist, Chu Liuxiang, to come steal a statue:

「還有天下盜賊聞名喪膽的英老前輩在這裡…」(古龍, 1998, 5)

“We are still with our honorable predecessor, known to strike fear in bandits throughout all the lands by mere mention of his name” (my translation)

Here the speaker is showing reverence to someone who is older and perhaps well respected in the Martial Society of River and Lake. I chose the term *honorable predecessor* as both words can be used to carry the meaning of 前輩, honorable pays respect, and predecessor to show

difference in age. While some of these translations may seem obvious or unimportant many of these terms in the source text appear frequently. From a foreignization standpoint having these scattered about the text helps let more of the Chineseness shine through, hence it's so important to get them right.

Filling in the Gap

As previously mentioned in this paper, when translating from Chinese to English there can be a need for the translator to add in some information for clarification. This is what I have deemed “filling in the gap”, previously mentioned when discussing Robert Chard's translation of *Willows*. If the translator sticks too close to the source text sometimes it can lead to not having enough information in the target language of English due to common language practices in Chinese. The translator then has to “fill in the gap” adding in the missing information necessary to make a decent sounding sentence in English. For example:

「瘋狂般轉身躍回窗內，只見那紫檀木匣還是安然無恙，但另一扇窗子的窗簾，卻在不住漂動。」（古龍，1998，7）

(1) Spinning around in a frenzy he leapt back through the window only to see the rosewood case safe and sound; however the curtains from another window were fluttering. (near literal translation)

(2) Spinning around in a frenzy he leapt back through the window only to see the rosewood case safe and sound; however across the atrium the curtains from a newly opened window fluttered in the wind. (my final translation)

At first glance this sentence in Chinese looks fairly straightforward, Chu Liuxiang has come to steal a statue from a wealthy family's estate that hired skilled martial artists to prevent this from happening. Here one of the 'protectors' has been duped, jumping out a window in chase leaving the statue unprotected while Chu Liuxiang swoops in from another window to steal the statue. The translation directly below is an almost literal translation without "filling in the gap". The final sentence from the literal English translation, "however the curtains from another window were fluttering" feels rather odd in English as it does not have enough detail to mean much of anything other than a description of some window in the room. However by "filling in the gap" and adding such filler content to the

translation as, *across the atrium, a newly opened window, and in the wind* to extract the true meaning of the Chinese, one can see from the second translation it becomes clear what has happened, Chu Liuxiang entered through another window and didn't shut it, which is why the curtains were fluttering which is apparent to the Chinese reader without having to explicitly write out.

Another example comes from after Chu Liuxiang had a late night run-in with the mysterious practitioner of ninjitsu. His clothes had been wet from jumping in a lake and he was heading back into Jinan City early in the morning.

「入城後晨光已露，街上已有了稀落的行人。
楚留香衣服也乾了，三轉二彎，竟又轉到那快意堂…」
(古龍，1998，107)

(1) The first rays of the morning sun were just peaking as he entered the city. The streets were sparsely littered with pedestrians. Chu Liuxiang's clothes had dried, after *three turns and two bends*, and he was again at the Court of Elation. (near literal translation)

(2) The first rays of the morning sun were just peaking as he entered the city. The streets were sparsely littered with pedestrians going about their morning business. Chu Liuxiang's clothes dried as he walked through the city streets promptly finding himself back at the Court of Elation after a quick *three turns and two bends*.

From the first translation example the English reader is able to get a decent understanding of what is going on in this scene, although the translation feels uninteresting and parts of it feel slightly disjointed—specifically at the end where in the source text, 三轉二彎 (*three turns and two bends*) is used to express a sense of speed, quickly reaching one's destination, not necessarily a literal *three turns and two bends*. However due to the phrases unique Chineseness I have decided to keep it in my final translation, adding the words *promptly* and *quick* to clue in the reader that this action of travelling three turns and two bends is meant as fast.

Some disjointedness is due a lack of detail in the Chinese to which English readers might be accustomed to seeing. For example after describing the street setting, we abruptly learn that Chu Liuxiang's clothes have dried. Obviously there was a passing of time and action that is happening to allow his clothes to dry which is not described in

the text. That is where the translator comes and fills in some of the details. In the second translation example I have added in “*as he walked through the city streets,*” after stating his clothes have dried to show the passing of time and the action that was taking place in order for his clothes to dry. This also allows the abrupt detail of his now dry clothes to naturally fit in with the previous sentence.

Translating this novel has been an exhausting but rewarding experience. It has also helped illuminate the shortcomings in my own writing, as well as the previously mentioned translation difficulties found with vocalization, “filling in the blanks”, and translating titles of characters. Even though prior research, analysis, and knowledge of genre specific terms and the corresponding English lexicon has been incredibly helpful, until actually sitting down to carry out the translation one never knows where the true difficulties lie. No matter how much prior research was done on a genre of literature, it is during the actual process of translation where the true difficulties in the text rear their ugly heads. Patience, a desire for the correct translation, and an overall translation strategy (foreignization vs domestication) are three crutches that can help carry the translator through difficulties.

Conclusion

Chinese martial arts fiction to this day remains a virtually untapped resource for English translation. Out of the thousands of existing novels only a select few have been translated into English. With a better understanding of the genre itself as well as a solid grasp on the most important terms and common themes of martial arts fiction more and more translations should begin to appear. My attempt at a structured analysis of genre specific terms has been carried out in the hopes of helping future translators of martial arts fiction, particularly ones who aren't as familiar with the source material or have struggled figuring out what to do with cultural and genre specific terms. The more familiar these ideas become the more structured and established the English lexicon for this genre will be, making for better quality translations.

Martial arts fiction is not just limited to the five novels discussed in this paper. Although I tried to be as thorough as possible in my collection of data there are still a few English translations that I was unable to get a hold of. One being Robin Wu's serialized translation of *Fox* in the 1970's for a magazine called *Bridge*. In addition I was unable to obtain the final two volumes of John Minford's translation of *Deer*, volumes two and three, as they are out

of print and too expensive for me to purchase. With that being said, this paper still contains a large enough sample size of the existing published English translations of martial arts fiction (five out of the six total, sans volumes two and three of *Deer*) to garner at least some merit. Apart from martial arts novels there is a wealth of other sources that are also worth looking into. Wuxia has been popularized not just in books but also in television shows, movies, and videogames. Further analysis of translations in these mediums could also yield helpful techniques for translation and provide more examples of the handling of genre specific terms in Chinese to English translation.



Works Cited

English

- Earnshaw, Graham. (n.d.). *The book & the sword*. Retrieved from <http://www.earnshaw.com/book/the-book-and-the-sword>
- Five Lakes. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved August 12, 2017 from, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Lakes_\(China\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Lakes_(China))
- Gu, L. (1970). *The Eleventh Son* (R. Tai, Trans.). Paramus, NJ: Homa & Sekey Books. (Original work published 1969)
- Hamm, J. C. (2005). *Paper Swordsman Jin Yong and the modern Chinese martial arts novel*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Jin, Y. (1996). *Fox Volant of the Snowy Mountain* (O. Mok, Trans. Second ed.). Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong. (Original work published 1959)
- Jin, Y. (1997). *The Deer and the Cauldron* (J. Minford, Trans. Vol. 1). New York: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1969)
- Jin, Y. (2005). *The Book and the Sword* (G. Earnshaw, Trans.). New York: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1955)
- Kueck, R. (2013). *Wuxia as fantasy: An English translation of Juedai Shuangjiao* (Master' s thesis). National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei.
- Lai, S. (1998a). *Translating Jin Yong*. Proceedings from the International Conference on Jin Yong' s Novels, Taipei.
- Lai, S. (1998b). *Translating Chinese Martial Arts Fiction, With Reference to the Novels of Jin Yong* (Doctoral thesis). The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong.
- Li, S. (1991). *Blades from the Willows* (R. Chard, Trans. Vol. 1). London: Wellsweep Press. (Original work published 1946)
- Lin, B. (2017, June 15). Personal Interview.

Minford, J. (1998). *Louis Cha through the Translator's Eyes*. Proceedings from the International Conference on Jin Yong's Novels, Taipei.

Robotech_Master. (Producer). (2009, March 7). *Interview: graham earnshaw* [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <http://www.talkshoe.com/>

Venuti, L. (1995). *The Translator's Invisibility*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Chinese

古龍. (1998) 《楚留香傳奇》血海飄香。台北市：風雲時代。

古龍. (1998a) 《蕭十一郎》割鹿刀。台北市：風雲時代。

古龍. (1998b) 《蕭十一郎》狼之歌。台北市：風雲時代。

古龍. (1998c) 《蕭十一郎》危崖上。台北市：風雲時代。

李壽民. (1946) 《柳湖俠隱》。台北市：河洛。

金剛. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved October 20, 2017, from <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/金剛>

金剛經. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved November 26, 2017 from <https://zh.wikipedia.org/zh-tw/金剛經>

金庸. (1996a) 《書劍恩仇錄》。台北市：遠流。

金庸. (1996b) 《雪山飛狐》。台北市：遠流。

金庸. (1996c) 《鹿鼎記》。台北市：遠流。

金庸作品. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved June 8, 2017, from <https://zh.wikipedia.org/wiki/金庸作品>

曹正文. (1998) 俠客行 縱談中國武俠. (1 ed.). 台北市：雲龍出版社.

林保淳 (2004)。金庸小說中的「江湖世界」。淡江人文社會學刊【第二十二期】。1-28頁。

Appendix

List of Terms

The following tables are a summarized list of genre specific term translations (including my own) and character name and nickname translations discussed in this paper.

Table 1. Genre Specific Terms and Corresponding English Translations

	Chard	Mok	Minford	Tai	Earnshaw	My translation
江湖 Jianghu	Old and experienced wanderer	The outlawry People moving in our circle	Brotherhood of River and Lake Brothers of River and Lake Friends of River and Lake Brotherhood	Martial arts veteran	An outlaw in the world of River and Lake The fighting community The underworld Underworld society River and Lake	Martial Society of River and Lake
武林 Wulin		Martial Brotherhood	Martial Arts Fraternity	Martial Order	Fighting community	Order of the Martial Forest
綠林 Lülin		Greenwood			Fighting community	Outer Greenlands
輕功 Qinggong	Light-body techniques	levitate	Art of Flying	Lightness kungfu	Art of Flying	Light-body arts

Table 2. Character Name and Nickname Translations by Translation Technique

	Chard	Mok	Minford	Tai	Earnshaw
Direct romanization				Xiao Shiyi Lang 蕭十一郎	
Combination Translation	Zhu Man-Tiger 朱人虎	<i>Curio Cao</i> 曹雲奇 <i>Peace Tao</i> 陶子安 <i>Century Tao</i> 陶百歲 <i>Prime Xiong</i> 熊元獻	Trinket Wei 韋小寶		Rolling Thunder Wen Tailai 奔雷手文泰來
Full English Translation		Quad 平阿四 Gilt-Faced Buddha 金面佛	<i>Tertius</i> 祁老三 <i>Scarface</i> 賈老六 <i>Squinty</i> 崔瞎子 <i>Big Beaver</i> 關基安	Wooden Oldster 木尊者 Count Carefree 逍遙候	

The Legend of Chu Liuxiang—Scents from the Blood Sea

著：古龍
譯：慕容豪

By : Gu Long
Translation by: Evan Moore

Chapter One—The Ivory Jade Beauty

I have heard my good sir possesses the Ivory Jade Beauty, an exquisite figurine carved by the deftest of hands. My yearning for it I can no longer endure. Tonight, during the hours of midnight, under the black of night I come. I know you to be a proper man of etiquette and shall not have me leave empty-handed and disappointed.

At present, this letter was spread out across a glistening marble table. The light blue paper glowed a royal light purple hue under candlelight radiating from a pink-shaded lamp, giving the handwriting an even more graceful and refined appearance. The note was left unsigned but carried the fragrance of tulips. The faint, poetic like aroma was more than sufficient to shed light on its author.

The gentleman who received the letter, Jin Banhua, was from an affluent family in Beijing. He was sitting aside the table; his face, fair and delicate like that of a well-kept man, was contorted in agony as if being slashed by a knife. His eyes were glued to the letter in fright as though staring at his arrest warrant from King Yama the King of Hell.

There were three others present in his decadent atrium. An intense looking elderly man with a grey beard clad in embroidered robes was incessantly pacing back and forth, hands resting on his lower back. No one knew how many times he had strolled to and fro, might well be enough for a trip from Beijing to Zhangjiakou. Another man dressed all in black was seated next to Jin Banhua. He had high cheekbones and eyes as sharp as a hawk. There was a menacing air of ruthlessness about him—a demeanor wrought with a deep-seated sense of violence. His hands were lightly stroking a pair of stainless steel forged panguan fighting pens that rested on the table. Under the lamplight, his withered, slender, knuckly fingers, appeared forged from stainless steel as well.

The two men sat with heavy looks on their faces. Their sharp eyes darted from window to door, door to window back and forth in nervous succession.

Far off in the corner sat another elderly man resting his eyes. He was short, skinny, bald, and dressed in plain attire. From head to toe not a thread of uniqueness about him except his ears, which for reasons unknown no longer sat upon his head. Resting in their place was a pair of white-grey false ears forged from an unidentified material.

The man in the embroidered robes walked over to the table and picked up the note with a cold smile, "What is this? An invitation? A receipt of debt? From this letter alone he thinks to just *steal* the Jade Beauty—the most precious of the Four Capital Treasures..."

"Chu Liuxiang ah, Chu Liuxiang! You've gone too far underestimating we Heroes of the Nine Cities," he snapped, smiting the table with his hand.

Jin Banhua furrowed his brow, a bitter look adorned his face. "But he *has* sent letters like this before. Who knows how many a rare and precious valuable he's stolen already," he stammered, "If he claims to be coming during the hours of midnight to steal something, never on your life would you be able to protect it, not even for a couple hours."

"Oh, really?" scowled the man in black.

Jin Banhua sighed heavily. "Last month Qiu Xiaohou from Juan Lianzi Alley received a letter saying Elder Hou's family heirloom, The Nine Dragon Chalice, was to be stolen. Xiaohou sealed the chalice in a hidden room and invited 'Duel Fist Earth Shaker' Que Zihe and 'The Plum Blossom Swordsman' Fang Huan, two martial arts adepts from the imperial guard to stand watch. You might say it was so secure nary a drop of water could seep through. But after the time had passed they opened the door for a look and...aye! The Nine Dragon Chalice was gone"

The man in black scoffed at his story. "Old Wan the armed escort *is not* Que Zihe, and I, The Supreme Arbiter, am decidedly not Fang Huan, furthermore..."

He glanced over at the old baldheaded man before drawing on. "We have our honorable predecessor, known to strike fear in bandits throughout all the lands by mere mention of his name. If the three of us are unfit to handle Chu Liuxiang, I fear no one else in this world is."

The old bald man squinted his eyes as a smile crept across his face. "Brother Ximen, don't go about boasting for Old Decrepit here. Ever since the battle of Yuntai this old, decaying man has been rendered useless. A man who once relied on his ears to put food on the table has

had his ears sliced off. Is this not the same as *a snake charmer with no snake?*”

If anyone else were as defeated as this old man—having both ears chopped clear off, not only would they absolutely not mention the matter, if anyone else were to, it could very well result in an immediate duel of blades to the death. Oddly enough, *he* said it with a slight grin; frank and confident as though pleased with himself.

Stroking his long beard the man in the embroidered coat smirked, “Who in The Martial Society of River and Lake doesn’ t know the acuteness of your ears is second to none? Although the battle of Yuntai *was* a minor defeat for you Bald Vulture, as the saying goes; *when the old man on the frontier lost his mare, who could have guessed it was a blessing in disguise.* With this new pair of White Deity Ears your hearing is far superior to before” he voiced. This man in the embroidered coat was none other than ‘Iron Fist Gilded Escort’ Wan the Invincible, chief escort of the capital city’ s Wansheng Armed Escort Company.

Bald Vulture shook his head smiling, “I’ m old. Worthless. If it weren’ t because I wholeheartedly wish to catch a glimpse of the bandit pack’ s general—a so called noble among knaves, I would never again set foot in matters of The Martial Society.”

A smile suddenly appeared on Jin Banhua’ s face. “I’ ve heard tales amongst those in the Martial Society of River and Lake. They say you, honorable predecessor, only need hear the sound of one’ s breath to derive whether man or woman, their age and identity. No matter the individual, so long as the sound of their breath reaches your ears, they’ d better abandon thoughts of escaping you in this lifetime. To wherever they flee, you will find them”

Bald Vulture squinted his eyes until just a sliver remained, “The rumors amongst those in River and Lake are always exaggerated to a point,” he smiled.

Upon hearing the faint sound of the night watchman’ s gong carried by the night wind The Supreme Arbiter suddenly sprang to his feet after, “The hours of midnight are upon us,” he declared.

Jin Banhua stormed over to the corner and lifted a traditional Gongbi painting of a palace maid off the wall revealing a hidden door. Behind the door sat a rosewood case etched with floral carvings resting exactly as it had always been. Jin Banhua couldn’ t help but let out a heavy sigh of relief. Turning his head he smiled, “I never imagined the martial reputation of you three gentlemen could frighten Chu Liuxiang to dare not come”

The Supreme Arbiter threw his head back with a grin, "Chu Liuxiang, ah, Chu Liuxiang, after all you are nothing but a—"

"Shhhh," hissed Bald Vulture. Outside the window came a deep yet undoubtedly attractive voice accompanied with laughter, "The Jade Beauty and I have made acquaintances. I, Chu Liuxiang, have come specifically to express my gratitude."

Like an arrow, Wan the Invincible bolted towards the window throwing it open with one hand. All he could make out was a tall silhouette of a man standing upright off in the dark distance. In tow was a three-foot tall object; smooth and lustrous, shimmering under the moonlight. The man continued, "I came to steal this beauty several hours ago. During the hours of midnight I return to thank thee. My apologies for the untimely visit, please pardon the offense," he cried out, voice filled laughter.

"After him, chase after him!" quivered Jin Banhua, his face now completely deprived of color.

The candlelight waned red in a flicker as two gusts of wind blew past. The Supreme Arbiter and Wan the Invincible were out the window in chase.

Bald Vulture lowered his voice, "Was it really the Jade Beauty?"

"I caught a clear glimpse, there's no mistake," Jin Banhua replied stamping his foot down in anger.

In the midst of his stamp he vaulted through the window. To Bald Vulture's surprise this son of an affluent family was no pedestrian martial artist after all.

Gingerly shaking his head Bald Vulture smiled coolly. "Others might fall for your schemes, but me...humph!"

His eyes remained fixed on the rosewood case as he walked towards it one step at a time.

"*DONGGGG*," a loud noise suddenly rung out from behind. Bald Vulture sprang upwards, his feet leaving the ground completely. In a state of panic he flipped round midair releasing a flurry of fists, yet no one was behind him. As it turns out his White Deity Ears had been forged from a silver alloy with incredibly strong acoustic conductivity. A thunderous sound as such was near enough to burst his eardrums. Having always been most pleased with his pair of divine ears by no means could he ever have dreamt they might cause such grave harm.

Another "*DONGGG*," reverberated from outside the window. Bald Vulture backpedaled then with both feet burst forth in flight hurdling out the window; beneath it the gong still resounded without cease.

“Not good!” croaked Bald Vulture as a look of despair flashed upon his face realizing he’ d been duped.

Frantically spinning around he leapt back through the window only to see the rosewood case safe and sound. However across the atrium the curtains from a newly opened window fluttered in the wind.

Bald Vulture stood petrified, a peculiar expression spread across his face. Not knowing whether to laugh or cry he muttered to himself.

“Chu Liuxiang ah, Chu Liuxiang, you truly are remarkable. Don’ t let it go to your head. The sound of your footsteps has reached my ears. One of these days I *will* catch you.”

Woosh, woosh, woosh, came several gusts from behind in quick succession as Wan the Invincible, The Supreme Arbiter, and Jin Banhua bounded back through the window. In his hand Wan the Invincible carried a three-foot tall figurine of a woman carved from jade. “I guess it was all a ruse. It’ s a fake,” he chortled.

“It may be fake, but it ought to be worth a few silver taels,” said The Supreme Arbiter. “This is called *losing your rice used to bait the chickens*. It seems our admirable bandit has stumbled,” he quipped.

“Are you sure it was *just* a ruse?” muttered Bald Vulture, his eyes staring absent-mindedly at the rosewood case.

Jin Banhua’ s complexion went from bad to worse. “I’ m sure...of course the real one...the real one is in the case,” he quivered.

Before finishing his sentence he stormed over and opened the case. What Ivory Jade Beauty? With a cry of shock he abruptly fainted.

Wan the Invincible walked over peering into the box. To his surprise inside was another light blue note emanating the same faint, romantic fragrance, written in the same refined handwriting:

Sir Banhua, I was hoping not to chance upon you tonight, instead I leave this aromatic note and depart under the moonlight.

□ □ □

Chu Liuxiang rested comfortably on the boat deck, the warm May sun shining on his broad, bronzed back. His dark hair was waving in the gentle, wet sea breeze blowing over the side of the boat. His arms—sturdy, were stretched out in front while his strong wiry fingers grasped the smooth crystal-like Ivory Jade Beauty.

He appeared fast asleep in the bosom of the sea.

He lay resting on an exquisitely crafted long and narrow three-masted ship with white sails. The boat was constructed from a solid smooth wood, giving it a feeling of speed, stability, and opulence.

It was an early summer day. The sun's dazzling rays were shining over the deep blue ocean while seagulls nimbly glided between the ship's masts. The colors of life were vibrant and brimming with youthful bliss. The sea and sky stretched on and on together in an arresting flow of azure. A dim grey sliver was all that was left of the distant horizon. Chu Liuxiang was in his own world, not to be bothered by visitors he so detested.

The door leading to the cabin was open. From time to time the sound of a sweet, charming voice resonated from below.

As he lay, a striking young woman stepped out on deck. She was dressed in a free-fitting bright red garment. Her hair was loosely tied up, while her long, smooth, jade-like legs remained exposed. She delicately crossed the deck on her flawless feet over to where Chu Liuxiang lay. Lightly tickling the sole of his foot with her toe, an enchantingly sweet smile spread across her face; *like hundreds of flowers blooming in unison.*

Chu Liuxiang pulled his leg in sighing lightly. "My sweet, can you really never let it rest not even for a moment?" His voice was filled with incitement goading her.

"You're finally wrong," she replied in a tender laugh like the sound of a silver bell.

Lazily rolling over, the sun was now shining on his face.

His eyebrows both long and thick were brimming with a man's rugged charm. His eyes were clear, elegant; his nose straight and upright—symbolizing his strong, resolute heart of stone. The thin corners of his mouth made him look cold and ruthless, yet his smile gave way to tenderness and compassion, like a warm spring breeze sweeping across the land.

Chu Liuxiang lifted his hand to block the piercing rays. Blinking he let out a laugh. A mischievous look flashed across his eyes brimming with wit.

"Miss Li Rouge Sleeves for heaven's sake don't you go turning wicked on me. There's already one Song Treatie onboard. You think me able to handle the both of you?"

Miss Li bent over laughing, "Venerable young master Chu, no one else is allowed to misbehave besides her?" she smirked, gradually gathering herself.

Chu Liuxiang patted the deck beam next to him. "Be a good girl and have a seat, keep me company out here in the sun—tell me story, a happy story, it should have a happy ending. The world is packed with too many tragedies as is."

"I *will not* sit down, I *will not* tell you a story, and I *don't* want to sit in the sun—that devil of a sun, it makes me dizzy. I can't comprehend why you so enjoy sitting under the sun," sassed Miss Li, biting her lip.

As she said, "I *will not* sit down," she had already sat. Before she finished saying, "I don't want to sit in the sun," her legs were stretched out soaking up the rays.

"What's wrong with sitting in the sun?" smiled Chu Liuxiang.

"If one's out sitting in the sun they shan't be doing despicable, shameless deeds. No one could conspire to do wicked deeds while seated under such a lovely sun."

"I'm thinking of something wicked at this very moment," replied Miss Li as she glanced around.

"You're thinking about how to get me up and tending to business?" he quipped.

"You truly are the devil. I can't hide anything from you," she laughed.

Gradually her laughter died down to a stop. "But you really should get up and start tending to *something*. Since returning from Beijing you haven't a single thought of lifting a finger. If you keep up this lackadaisical manner you'll become just another hoodlum."

"You are just like my teacher when I was young, only two whiskers short," chuckled Chu Liuxiang heaving an intentional sigh.

Li Rouge Sleeves shot him a glare. He returned her a smile, "This time in the capital I got a close up look of the faces on quite a few of those 'famous' heroes. Apart from that old head Bald Vulture and two others, the rest were good-for-nothing *rice buckets*. It is said The Supreme Arbiter is a skilled martial artist with his dual panguan fighting pens; allegedly able to strike all two-hundred and eighteen vital points of the human body. Yet I blew right past him, he looked fast asleep in dream."

Miss Li curled her lips. "Great young master Chu, your light-body arts have no equal in all the lands. Throughout the Martial Society of River and Lake who *isn't* attune to this...Are you done *inflating your cowhide*, oh venerable young master Chu?"

"Yes, I'm through boasting," he smiled. "What will you have me do Miss Li?"

“Let me start with a few matters; listen up,” she stated.

Pulling out a small booklet from her red, oversized sleeves, she flipped through the pages while reading aloud; “The last batch of goods you ‘acquired’ from Jinan City have been sold for three-hundred thousand taels. Apart from the ten thousand taels you need give the widow of Chief Escort Wang from the Dragon-Tiger Armed Escort Company for relief aid; the five thousand taels to the wife and children of the two company callers Zhang and Zhao, there’s still the one thousand taels for Provincial Scholar Huang’s funeral expenses, the one thousand five hundred taels to assist Zhao Lizheng in paying for the wedding banquet and bride wealth, and Mr. Zheng’s—”

“You think I’m unaware of these matters,” he sighed.

Rolling her eyes at him she continued, “In any case, the three hundred thousand taels have already been divvied out. As for the fifty thousand taels from your estate, I have spent forty thousand for you.”

“Excuse me Miss, were you unable to leave just a pinch more for me?”

“Have you not enough already?” she scoffed, “Plenty of folk from The Martial Society gossip about you. No one knows you spend your own money, they speak of jobbery, that you act in your own interests.”

He scrunched his brow in disappointment. “Whatever the people are saying, what has it to do with us? Why shan’t one enjoy life while still living in this world? Why must one always suffer? How did you become such a square like everyone else?”

Her lips formed a sweet smile. “I didn’t mean I want *you* to suffer, I just—”

Suddenly a voice sounded from the cabin below, “You two placin’ bendie wildin langis? Wu wanna eatin’?”

The beautiful, sweet sound of a southern girl’s speech is an altogether different kind of alluring, a different kind of flavor. Miss Li burst forth with laughter raising both hands high in the air in dismay. “For goodness sake, is she unable to speak in a way we can understand?”

“You mustn’t blame her, she’s been hard at work preparing our meal but no one is eating. No wonder she’s mad. As soon as anyone becomes angry the native tongue always takes over,” replied Chu Liuxiang.

He pulled Li Hongxiu to her feet seemingly without moving an inch.

“You’re always partial to Treatie no matter the case,” she replied in a playful pout, “That’s why she—”

Her sentence was cut short as a grave expression appeared on her face, "Look, look what is that?" she groaned.

□ □ □

To their astonishment on the sun soaked surface of the water floated a person—

A corpse.

Chu Liuxiang spun around, in a split second he was at the side of the boat gathering rope. Tying a slipknot, he lightly tossed the long rope towards the corpse. It flew straight as an arrow.

The rope wavered not, as if having eyes of its own, fastening onto the body.

The body was clad in an expensive brocade robe. Hanging off the waist was an emerald green snuff bottle. The face was dark and swollen from soaking in seawater.

After pulling it up on deck Chu Liuxiang laid the body out shaking his head, "Far beyond rescue."

Li Rouge Sleeves, however, was staring at the hands. On the middle and ring finger of the left hand were three peculiar rings made from stainless steel, inlaid with a black gold alloy.

Although the right hand was ringless, there were vestiges of wear.

"The Great Dipper Flying Rings!" exclaimed Miss Li scrunching her brow. "Could it be a member of the Celestial Star Guild?"

"Not just any member from the Celestial Star Guild; this is none other than the head honcho himself, 'Seven Star Spirit Ripper' Zuo Youzheng. The Celestial Star Guild occupies the Wannan region. How could he end up dead here?" puzzled Chu Liuxiang

"His body has no visible wounds, is it possible he drowned?"

Chu Liuxiang shook his head. Upon opening the man's lapel Chu Liuxiang received quite the shock as his eyes laid witness to a crimson purple imprint of a hand under the fifth rib on the left side located between the Rugen and Qimen vital points.

"The Red Palm Technique," sighed Miss Li.

"Granted the past few years The Red Palm School *has* experienced a burgeoning of talent, said to have over 170 disciples. However at most no more than three could send the 'Seven Star Spirit Ripper' to his death," stated Chu Liuxiang.

"Correct," replied Miss Li. "Feng, Yang, Ximen—I fear the three of them may be slightly more skilled martial artists than Zuo Youzheng."

Chu Liuxiang mulled it over aloud replying, "But what grievances could the Red Palm School have with the Celestial Star Guild?"

Li Rouge Sleeves pondered that thought for a moment. "Thirty-seven years ago the Master of the Punishment Hall from the Celestial Star Guild married the second daughter of Feng Breeze, the head of the Red Palm School. Two years later Miss Feng abruptly perished. Feng Breeze personally went to Wannan to denounce the Celestial Star Guild for their crimes. Although it was later cleared up his daughter had died of illness, the damage was done. From then on the two parties never had further dealings."

"Anything else?" he pressed.

"Thirty-six...perhaps thirty-five years ago," she carried on, "the Celestial Star Guild also ransacked a delivery members of the Red Palm School were escorting. At the time Feng Breeze had just died from illness and the Red Palm School had to choose a new head, thus the armed escort incident went unresolved for the following year. Although the Celestial Star Guild members involved in the robbery had visited in person and offered a humble apology to the Red Palm School, the pay to be earned for a safe delivery of goods was never repaid."

Miss Li diligently described these events of The Martial Order, which happened over twenty years prior almost as if she herself had witnessed them.

A slight smile crept across Chu Liuxiang's face, "Your memory has certainly never disappointed...however all those events are old news and the times have changed. Such events are not cause for great enmity and such hostilities. I doubt the Red Palm School would pursue Zuo Youzheng all the way out here to murder him for any of the events you describe; there must be another motive."

Suddenly a young woman came storming up from the cabin, "What are you two placin' bendie wildin langis?" she protested. The young woman was also dressed in free-fitting, comfortable looking attire; yellow in color like the feathers of a young goose. Her legs were a light brown, equally beautiful, with gentle lines like that of an exquisite figurine.

Her dark hair was braided into two long ponytails that swayed with her petite, dainty frame. Her face was oval shaped, like the seed of a melon, accompanied by two large, distinct eyes that exuded both charm and quick wit. Her expression, at first a deliberate pout had quickly turned to fright as she glanced upon the corpse. She immediately turned and ran with an accompanying abrupt scream, moving far faster than when she first stormed on deck.

Miss Li let out a laugh, "Treatie—courageous in whatever matter she attempts, yet as soon as she sees a corpse she's frightened to death. I often like to think not a single living person has power over her, only in death does one fare better."

Chu Liuxiang stared off in the distance. "You wait and see," he slowly declared, "by day's end this most certainly won't be the only corpse floating by from over yonder."

Miss Li's eyes wondered off in that direction. Before having a chance to speak, a delicate arm stretched out from the cabin below holding a sizeable plate of food drawing her attention away from the sea. The plate was filled with two squab roasted a yellow hue with lemon, several juicy slices of beef, half a white cut chicken, one steamed fish, one large bowl of thick tomato soup, two cups of hong kong-style meat meal, and one full glass of red wine—beads of water condensing on the outside as if kept cold for an extended period of time.

"Ey, get o'er 'ere oh!" summoned Treatie from inside the cabin door in her sweet, blissful voice.

"I can't understand you," laughed Miss Li, "Why don't you bring it up yourself?"

"Little she-devil, can't understand, how did you know I wanted *you* to come grab it?" chirped Treatie in retort.

She managed a reply in the pure dialect of the capital; muttering but in a soft, charming manner—an altogether different kind of amusing.

"Everyone come listen, Our Miss Treatie has finally spoken in the common tongue," whooped Miss Li clapping her hands.

Chapter Two—A Sea of Corpses

With the anchor already dropped the boat sat afloat at sea.

Chu Liuxiang carefully squeezed lemon juice over the two squabs, eating one then washing it down with a half glass of wine. By the time he finished as predicted another corpse came floating by.

The corpse was dressed in a short scarlet robe that stretched down to the knees. Although having been afloat at sea for some time, the face was still fair in color—a clean white, looking to be only forty some odd years of age. The chin was spotted with a few whiskers. Around the eyes however not a wrinkle could be found. The left hand was long, sinewy, and fair, but the right was rough, bulging with bone and muscle, almost twice the size of the left; the open palm was the same color as his robe.

Miss Li's radiant eyes fixated directly on the corpse as she cried out in shock, "The Scholarly Assassin, Ximen Qian! Not in a million years would I have guessed it to be him!"

"He killed Zuo Youzheng yet his life ended at the hands of another," sighed Chu Liuxiang.

"But who killed him?"

Before finishing her question she caught sight of the wound on Ximen Qian's throat. The blood having been washed away by the sea left the fleshy skin splayed open above and below the wound ashen in color.

"Done in by a sword," she breathed.

"Precisely!" exclaimed Chu Liuxiang.

"The wound is not yet one-inch wide. In all the Order of the Martial Forest only the disciples of the two main sword sects Hainan and Laoshan use such a thin sword," stated Miss Li.

"Correct," chimed Chu Liuxiang.

She continued, "Hainan and Laoshan aren't far from here, however the sword techniques of The Laoshan Sect both peaceful and wide ranging, are passed down through generations of Taoist priests. This Ximen Qian was stabbed in the throat with a sword, straight and through, leading me to believe it must have been a disciple of the Hainan Swordsmen Sect who had a hand in his death, known for their sharp and treacherous swordsmanship...Why this is most peculiar."

Chu Liuxiang crinkled his brow, "Peculiar?"

"The Hainan Swordsmen Sect and Red Palm School have no injustices between them, no enmity; in fact the two parties share a common origin. Eight years ago when The Seven Swords Guild of Minnan had the Red Palm School surrounded in attack, the Hainan Swordsmen rushed to their aid,

traveling a significant distance. Yet now we have a master from the Hainan Swordsmen killing an elder from the Red Palm School. How could this be? I don't understand," she groaned in dismay.

"Zuo Youzheng was killed at the hands of Ximen Qian for no rhyme or reason; Ximen Qian foolishly got himself killed by someone from The Hainan Swordsmen...what is the mystery behind of all of this?" mused Chu Liuxiang, muttering aloud.

"It appears as if you are once more considering involving yourself in the affairs of others," smiled Miss Li.

"Were you not just implying me too lazy? As it happens to be I've found something to do," he chuckled.

"But the implications in this are certainly wide ranging, and undoubtedly dangerous. Sister Rong has been sick again for the past two days; I think it better if we not get involved," implored Miss Li.

"The greater the danger, the more excitement to be had, the wider the implications, why the more riches to plunder," declared Chu Liuxiang with a subtle grin. "Can I really afford not to get involved?"

"I realize if you don't get to the bottom of this conundrum you're not going to get a wink of sleep," replied Miss Li heaving a heavy sigh. "Oh you, it seems like your whole purpose in life is to meddle in other's business." Her face suddenly lit up with a smile.

"Fortunately for us this ought to be as easy as *finding a needle in the sea*," she smirked. "We've nary a single clue to go off of. Even if you wished to involve yourself I think it not possible"

"Just you wait and see, naturally the clues will reveal themselves more and more," replied Chu Liuxiang with a smile, taking a sip of wine. He proceeded to tear off another chicken leg; leaning against the side of the boat he munched away.

"I'm in true admiration of your appetite, at a time like this you're still able to eat," wryly joked Miss Li as she absent-mindedly walked over to the side of the boat; her eyes fixed off in the distance.

□ □ □

And just like that, another corpse floated over. Unforeseen however, was the corpse belonged to a Taoist priest. He was dressed in green robes; his face was dark with curly sideburns and his body large in stature. Although his four limbs were already frigid, his hands still tightly clutched half a broken sword. The sword was long and narrow; a forest green light reflected off the surface of the blade onto the priest's head which was topped in a disheveled bun of hair.

The crown of which had been split in two.

Turning her head away, even Miss Li could no longer bear the barbarous sight.

“As predicted, a member of the Hainan Swordsmen,” stated Chu Liuxiang.

“Do you recognize him?”

“Ling Jiuzi of the Three Swordsman of Hainan—a man of ferocious swordsmanship,” he slowly replied. “Throughout the Order of the Martial Forest I fear only a select few would be able to best him in a bout.”

“He stabbed a man straight through the throat with his sword never imagining his own head would be hacked in two by another,” sighed Miss Li.

She couldn't help glancing back down at the corpse, “Looking at the situation, as the attacker was slashing downwards Ling Jiuzi had no way of ducking the blow. He was only able to lift his sword in parry not knowing such a blow would cut his long sword in half yet still have enough leftover force to slice his head in two. These swords of Hainan are all forged of iron found in the frigid waters of the deep sea; his attacker was able to cut one in half. What a sharp and heavy sword it must have been.”

“How do you know his enemy used a sword?”

“Of all the famous blade masters in the Order of the Martial Forest, who could force someone of such caliber a martial artist as Ling Jiuzi—one who poses vicious, brutal sword techniques of his own—into a corner having no way of evading an oncoming strike…” replied Miss Li.

“The Hainan Swordsmen would never use such a technique to parry a direct attack. If it weren't for having no other option why would he use his sword to block a blow aimed straight at his head?”

Chu Liuxiang nodded in approval. “Correct, variations of blade techniques are certainly not as agile or quick as those of a sword. For anyone wielding a blade it would be unquestionably difficult to overwhelm a sword wielder with speed, forcing them unable to evade oncoming strikes.”

A slight grin adorned his face before he continued. “Is it possible you have forgotten someone?”

Miss Li's eyes lit up. “If you're thinking of the ‘Shadowless Blade of the Gods’, Zha Muhe then you're wrong.”

“Why must I be wrong?”

“It is known Zha Muhe is the most skilled blade master in all the Central Plains. His blade is so swift it appears without shape or shadow. Happening upon his downward strike, perhaps Ling Jiuzi couldn't

discern where it was coming from; naturally all he could do was lift his sword in parry,” explained Miss Li. “Furthermore, the blade Zha Muhe wields, The Gale-Force Saber, is one of the Thirteen Divine Bladed Weapons within the Four Seas; sharp enough to cut through a famed sword forged in Hainan.”

“Does this not prove me correct?”

Miss Li gave him a gentle smile. “Don’ t forget, Zha Muhe has been roaming the Gobi Desert for over thirty years; free and unrestrained. He’ s called The Desert King. Why travel here from such a great distance?”

“You say he wouldn’ t; however I say he would,” said Chu Liuxiang, a grin slowly forming.

Miss Li fixed her gaze upon him—doubt written all over her face, “Shall we place a wager on it?”

“No wagers with you, you’ d most certainly lose.”

A charming laugh travelled up from the cabin, “Make a wager, the loser helps me wash dishes for the next half month.”

“That little devil, eavesdropping,” cursed Miss Li with a laugh.

“Although I dare not a look, a listen I do,” giggled Treatie.

Li Hongxiu turned towards Chu Liuxiang. “Ey, would you look at this little devil. A shrewd one to be sure, always trying to get the best of every situation.”

Chu Liuxiang continued leaning against the side of the boat lost in thought—as if not hearing what she said.

Miss Li walked over, “What are you waiting for? That Zha Muhe fellow?”

“Perhaps…”

“You’ re waiting in vain. The Desert King’ s body will not show up. I also think no one capable of sending him to his grave,” she smirked.

“Ximen Qian had very few dealings with Zuo Youzheng, why kill him? Ling Jiuzi and Ximen Qian had no ill blood; why would Ling Jiuzi want Ximen Qian dead? Zha Muhe resides in a distant desert by himself and Ling Jiuzi near the sea, even less of a chance of interaction, so why murder Ling Jiuzi?” he mulled.

After pausing to let out a sigh, he carried on. “From this it can be said in this world many things are utterly uncertain.”

The sun was already heading west. Upon discovery of the first corpse four hours had lapsed. Currently three bodies lay spread across the boat deck.

Just as predicted, a fourth soon followed.

When the other corpses had floated by the bodies were half submerged half afloat; this corpse looked like a leather raft pumped full of air—the entire body floating atop the water.

While at least courageous enough to steal a few glances at the other corpses, one glance at this one sent Miss Li trembling from head to toe. She dared not a second look.

Whether the person had been fat or thin Chu Liuxiang could not resolve for swelling had swept the entire body; even showing signs of rot.

Old or young he couldn't tell as every strand of hair over the entire body had been lost to the sea.

The eyes were bursting out of their sockets while the skin had become a sickening scarlet color. Chu Liuxiang dare not lay a finger on it.

“What a potent poison. I'll get Sister Rong to examine just what kind of poison we're dealing with,” uttered Miss Li, her voice still trembling.

“Rong Rong won't be able to determine what poison it is,” stated Chu Liuxiang.

“Here you go blowing your cowhide once more,” retorted Miss Li.

“Although your prowess in martial arts might be respectable, when discussing hidden weapons you're no match for Treatie. As disguises and poisoning techniques go, why you're not even close to Sister Rong's level.”

“What afflicts this man is not entirely poison,” grinned Chu Liuxiang pleased with his assessment.

“If not poison, do you mean to tell me its sugar?” she snickered.

“You could call it sugar—a kind of syrup in fact.”

“Syrup?” gasped Miss Li.

“It's the essence refined from the natural water found in the Divine Water Palace in Tianchi. Throughout River and Lake it's referred to as First Water of the Divine, but disciples of the Divine Water Palace call it 'gut-burst water' ,” explained Chu Liuxiang.

Her face lit up, “You really think it First Water of the Divine, the most lethal poison in all the lands?”

“Naturally,” chimed Chu Liuxiang. “According to legend one drop of it is heavier than three hundred vats of water. If an ordinary person consumes even a drop, the body will instantly burst open resulting in death!”

Heaving a quick sigh, he continued, “Moreover this First Water of the Divine is both colorless and odorless; devoid of any method for

detecting oddities. Even for this Desert King it would be difficult to avoid.”

“This Desert… this is Zha Muhe?” exclaimed Miss Li.

“Yes”

“Given the state of the body how can you be sure?”

“Although he’ s dressed in the average attire, he wears leather boots like a nomad. His skin may be soft, yet his face is coarse from roaming the desert battered by the wind blown sand. His sash has a steel ring for a saber, yet the sheath and blade are missing; he is known to wield a treasured blade, hence why it was stolen,” explained Chu Liuxiang.

“From these specific details,” he continued slowly picking up where he left off, “It can be determined that this is in fact The Desert King, ‘Shadowless Blade of the Gods’ Zha Muhe.”

“I think you ought to switch professions becoming a prefecture policeman,” voiced Miss Li. “Any case you handle would certainly fare far better than that of Bald Vulture, considered the best law enforcer under the heavens.”

Smiling, Chu Liuxiang continued, “There’ s also a silver medallion etched with a winged camel hanging from his body. If I were still unable to figure out this is The Desert King than a fool I truly must be.”

Miss Li couldn’ t help but bellow with laughter, “Beyond doubt you are a gifted *child*.”

Her laughter however was short lived, quickly replaced by a furrowed brow. “This incident has now hooked The Desert King and disciples of the Divine Water Palace into the fray; this creates considerable implications; with The Desert King dead this means—”

“You *still* want to convince me to drop it don’ t you?” Chu Liuxiang interrupted her.

“I’ m not trying to convince you to drop it, I simply wish you to be a little more vigilant that’ s all.”

Chu Liuxiang gazed up at a cloud above. “I’ ve heard the disciples of the Divine Water Palace are some of the most stunningly gorgeous women to grace this earth. I wonder how they compare to our three ladies?” he said with a sly grin.

“Are you ever going to better conduct yourself?” asked Li Hongxiu, shaking her head in helpless laughter.

□ □ □

Another two hours passed with nothing a foot at sea.

“Afraid you can’t wait any longer?” idly asked Miss Li.

“If there are no further deaths then it falls on the shoulders of the Divine Water Palace disciples. If it’s treasure they’re fighting after then this treasure has already fallen into their hands,” he commented.

“And if there are other corpses yet?”

“No matter how many others, all you need do is figure out whose hands the last corpse perished at and you have the next clue to follow.”

“Would all these martial arts masters really die fighting over some treasure?” lamented Miss Li.

“People die for wealth and fortune—martial arts adepts are also people,” scoffed Chu Liuxiang.

Miss Li gazed off at the distant horizon. “A treasure evoking such greed from a great many martial arts masters, unrivalled for their time, must certainly be an astonishing treasure indeed,” she slowly proclaimed.

A glimmer flashed across her eyes; the affair was getting more exciting by the minute.

Suddenly Treatie called out from the cabin below, “You two knowin’ Sister Rong got a second cousin een Divine Water Palace.”

“Oh? Rong Rong’s second cousin is a disciple of the Divine Water Palace?” asked Chu Liuxiang aloud. “Has she been doing better these past two days? I wonder if she still has the sniffles?” he voiced.

“You just want her to come on deck don’t you?” smiled Miss Li.

“Forget it, she’s got the chills, better stay resting in bed,” he proclaimed.

A soft voice suddenly cried out from below, “It’s fine, I’m almost over this cold. Just hearing you say that I—”

“Sister Rong don’t be fooled,” Treatie loudly interrupted her.

“He knew you were coming up so he deliberately said such kinds words”

A gentle laughter came from the soft voice, “Even if it was deliberate, so long as such words came from him I’m happy.”

Following the voice, a gentle, graceful looking silhouette fluttered up on deck. She was dressed in a large, cozy robe that swathed across the deck beams covering her feet as she moved. The evening sunset lit up the sky illuminating her loosely tied hair, limped eyes and warm smile. She appeared like a heavenly maiden come to earth, *not having feasted on the lowly foods of men for an eternity.*

“Sister Rong, with such strong gusts of wind should you really be up here?” chided Miss Li stamping her feet. “Please take care or you’ll get sick—bed stricken yet again. Sentimental Sir Chu here would certainly blame us.”

Su Rong Rong smiled sweetly. “But so much is happening up here, how could I bare being cooped up in the cabin any longer? Besides I want to see if any disciples of the Divine Water Palace do come floating by.”

In her hands she carried a heavy robe, which she gently draped over Chu Liuxiang. “It’s a frigid night, do be careful not to catch a cold,” she whispered softly.

Flashing a smile in her direction he let out a sigh, “You only know of caring for others yet when it comes to yourself…If you had a shred of concern for your own wellbeing how could you let yourself become ill again?”

Miss Li’s lips pursed unamused. “Exactly! Those of us who never worry about him don’t ever get sick.”

Sister Rong gingerly patted Miss Li’s face smiling, “Being so overly sensitive has really aged you.”

Miss Li wrapped her up in a great embrace. “I *am* an overly sensitive, jealous, *bad egg*,” she giggled. “Sister Rong how *are* you so good to me?” she chided lifting the slender Sister Rong completely off the ground.

At precisely that very moment a fifth body floated over to the boat.

□ □ □

Strictly speaking not an entire body. The left side had been severed completely off, arm and shoulder included. Fortunately the face—that of a beautiful woman—remained untouched almost as if her ruthless killer could not bear defiling such beauty.

She was dressed in a beautiful sheer gown with a wrap of silver silk draped around her waist. Shoes of the same material covered her delicate feet.

The remainder of the gown still clinging to her body was stained red with blood. If it weren’t for the silver silk sash the gown would have long been ripped away by the sea, as she already looked almost completely naked.

Miss Li pressed her eyes shut. “Sister Rong, is she a disciple of the Divine Water Palace?”

Rong Rong somberly nodded her head.

“Who would have the heart to lay such murderous hands on a woman so beautiful as she?” sighed Chu Liuxiang.

“The murderer is already dead,” replied Miss Li.

“You mean Zha Muhe?”

“Of course I mean Zha Muhe, who else could strike with such a devastatingly quick blade?”

“Who indeed,” uttered Chu Liuxiang.

“Realizing he’ d been poisoned and facing imminent death Zha Muhe used what was left of his strength to hack her down,” explained Miss Li. “His veins coursing with rage, naturally his strike would be so utterly violent, so violently destructive.”

“That sounds not completely without reason,” assessed Chu Liuxiang after considering it for some time.

Sighing Miss Li concluded, “All leads are gone. Nothing left for us to attend to.”

“Nothing left for us to attend to?” chortled Chu Liuxiang.

“They’ re all dead, what more can we do about it?” she affirmed.

“You believe her to have died at the hands of Zha Muhe?” pressed Chu Liuxiang.

Miss Li shot him a glance, “Did she not?”

“Lest we not forget, after Zha Muhe was killed The Gale-Force Saber fell into the hands of another. *They* used his blade to hack her down so as to make someone think the entire incident was over and done with,” explained Chu Liuxiang.

“You’ re right,” cried an almost speechless Miss Li.

“If the culprit really wishes us to believe it’ s over and done with, then it’ s decidedly not the case. If you ask me, it has yet to begin!” declared Chu Liuxiang.

“This attacker does not want other people meddling in this affair, right?” asked Su Rong Rong suddenly speaking up.

“If so, why not fully destroy the bodies?” piggy-backed Miss Li cutting her short. “If no one’ s able to establish their identities how could anyone interfere?”

“All these corpses belong to people of renown in the Martial Society of River and Lake,” began Chu Liuxiang grinning ever so slightly, “Some even high ranking guild leaders; if they suddenly were to go missing, would their disciples, their clansmen not want to investigate?”

“Which means—” puzzled Su Rong Rong wrinkling her brow.

Chapter Three—First Water of the Divine

“Which is precisely why they didn’ t destroy the bodies; to make people believe the five murdered each other. With all parties dead their disciples and fellow clansmen would have no target for revenge, thus what is there to investigate?” explained Chu Liuxiang.

“The perpetrator never imagined living amongst us a man who loves nothing more than to pry, a professional meddler” spoke Miss Li.

“Perhaps,” smiled Chu Liuxiang.

“But who is the culprit? It could be anyone,” she stated. “You haven’ t a single lead. Even if you wanted to take the case it certainly would be a kin to finding a needle in the sea.”

“Exactly,” replied Chu Liuxiang and with a quick leap he was air bound hurtling towards the water.

“What the hell are you doing?” Miss Li shouted after him.

“Finding the needle!” he replied with a laugh as he flew careening towards the water.

‘*Flup*’ came the sound as he entered the water disappearing like a fish released back to sea. Not a single droplet of splash disturbed the leaden hue of the setting sun reflected across the water’ s surface.

“Sister Rong, you—you don’ t want to interject?” asked a flabbergasted Miss Li stomping her feet.

“Can anyone truly stop him?” she faintly replied.

□ □ □

Rong Rong proceeded to search for a large piece of sailcloth to cover the five bodies.

Only after did Treatie come back on deck.

In her right hand she carried an exquisitely crafted lantern, in her left a basket of fruit to snack as they patiently awaited Chu Liuxiang’ s return.

Little by little the night sky filled with stars lighting up the sea like blanket made of satin. The three of them sat comfortably on deck soaking in the cool sea breeze; their minds however were far from a state of comfort.

Next to them rested the bodies of five strangers; not a single one of them felt at ease.

Off in the distance the lights from a fishing boat could be seen, appearing like a star rising from the bosom of the sea. "I sincerely hope no one thinks him a fish and catches him," mused Miss Li groaning slightly as Chu Liuxiang had now been gone for some time.

"If he's taken for a fish and caught, it must be yousi beeg brother" giggled Treatie.

Miss Li shot her penetrating glare, "There is something strange afoot and I can't put my finger on it. The Suzhou dialect undoubtedly sounds best yet Sister Rong is unwilling to speak it; Cantonese sounds like screeching birds, yet *someone* insists on speaking it."

Treatie puckered her lips in laughter. "I knowin' you don't like to 'ear it so I speaking it to make you ang—"

Before Treatie could finish she shot up in fright, jumping up and down screaming as something slid out from her sleeve—a fish.

"How marvelous! Someone's taken revenge for me," revealed Miss Li clapping her hands in delight.

Chu Liuxiang stood behind Treaty chuckling to himself. In his left hand he clutched a fish; his right was empty as it previously held the one that just slithered out of Treatie's sleeve. As to how long he'd been standing there the three women could not say.

Treatie's face, aghast with fright, had turned pale. Stamping her feet in dismay she rushed over to give him a pinch.

"I just bumped into the man you wish to meet most, if you squeeze too hard I won't tell you who," he smiled.

Grabbing his wrist Treatie gave it a quick twist and a pinch before wrapping her other arm around his neck. "Hurry up then, tell me who," she demanded.

Chu Liuxiang glanced down at her with a smile, his eyes gleamed like the shining stars overhead.

"Let's see, who's the person you most wish to meet?" he replied. "Who plays the best guqin zither? Who paints the most beautiful of paintings? Who prepares the most delectable of dishes? Who writes poems so stirring it can send ones emotions to fleeting states of both overwhelming joy and sorrow?"

"Monk Wuhua the Incredible," clapped Miss Li in delight interrupting him.

Treatie squeezed Chu Liuxiang's hand, "Did you really see him, where is he?"

"He was by himself on a boat over yonder reciting scriptures and writing a poem or whatnot; I snuck up on him, shooting out of the water.

It's quite unfortunate you couldn't catch the look of surprise on his face when he saw me." he said.

"You met with him?" asked Treatie.

"I've been in his company all of three times. The first we drank for three days and three nights. The second we played chess for five days and five nights, while the third we chanted Buddhist scriptures for seven days and seven nights."

"Naturally when it came to reciting Buddhist scriptures I was no equal. But drinking he stood not a chance."

"And chess?" asked Miss Li unable to withstand her curiosity.

"I'd call it a draw but the Monk didn't want to give in," lamented Chu Liuxiang.

"Apart from drinking and fighting I reckon you're afraid he'll beat you at everything else," giggled Miss Li.

"Rubbish, I can at least eat more than him," he protested with a straight face.

Miss Li pealed over in laughter.

"Why not invite him on our boat?" asked Treatie yanking on his sleeve.

"He wanted to. However when I informed him some ladies over here wished to meet him he looked like a hare caught by an arrow looking to skitter away in the opposite direction."

"But he sa monk, whad he afraid a few girlies gonna do?" griped Treatie.

"Precisely because he *is* a monk that's why he's afraid. If not what's there to fear from a few ladies?" laughed Chu Liuxiang.

"If he weren't a monk I fancy he'd be over here faster than that hare," squealed Miss Li in delight.

"I've heard he's well known in Buddhist circles, not only an accomplished poet, he writes classical lyrics, novels, and paints wonderfully. He's also quite proficient in martial arts," stated Su Rong Rong flashing a warm smile.

"He's not merely proficient at martial arts—he's the most talented disciple of all Shaolin Monks. It's regrettable..." sighed Chu Liuxiang, "He's become all too well known, too smart, excelling at too many facets. When Shaolin's Grandmaster Tianhu was choosing a successor, to everyone's dismay he selected another monk not even close to Wuhua's caliber."

"I'm sure one such as Monk Wuhua needn't care much for that sort of thing," chimed Miss Li.

"I never knew our Miss Li Rouge Sleeves to be Wuhua' s best friend, knowing his heart' s aspirations," replied Chu Liuxiang clapping his hands in a feigned admiration.

"Regardless, he has nothing to do with the bodies of course. Did you notice anyone else?" asked Su Rong Rong.

"All five corpses floated over from the east. I checked all boats from that direction. Apart from Wuhua' s, only one other belonged to someone from the Order of the Martial Forest."

"Who?" asked Su Rong Rong.

"The Beggars Guild boat; on it was their four Great Protectors, four Guild Elders, and their newly appointed guild leader. I' m sure you' re aware guild leader Ren passed away last year. Care to speculate who the recently appointed leader is?" asked Chu Liuxiang.

"Who?" replied Su Rong Rong

"Take a guess—he' s my friend, he can drink and eat about as much as I, and he once painted a portrait of you," grinned Chu Liuxiang.

"Nangong Ling?"

"Precisely."

Sister Rong' s face brimmed with a coquettish smile, "If *he*' s able to serve as the leader of the Beggars Guild it seems the common practices of old in River and Lake have begun to change; no longer idolizing age and experience or fussing over youth. To see such an emphasis on talent is something worth celebrating."

Miss Li cut in, "Of course Nangong Ling would have absolutely nothing to do with these dead bodies so—"

"So I' m stuck," replied Chu Liuxiang smiling in defeat.

"I think it for the best, better to not get involved in such a messy affair," gently implored Su Rong Rong.

Chu Liuxiang stared at the sails draped over the five corpses before continuing, "Think about it, do these five have anything in common, for example—"

"For example—they' re all people," chortled Miss Li.

"Besides that," replied Chu Liuxiang flashing a contemptuous smile. "Is there nothing else? Think harder."

Sister Rong gently rose to her feet. "If you wish to keep mulling over the matter go below deck, I' ll put on a pot of tea. At least this way you can keep at it all night. No one is allowed on deck anymore in this wind."

□ □ □

Down the stairs revealed a smartly crafted cabin of elegant design. Not an inch of space was wasted nor a single item left feeling out of place. The room was of refined taste; it glowed under the freshly lit lamplight that gradually filled the darkness. First to enter, Chu Liuxiang suddenly stopped in his tracks like a nail hammered into the floorboards. There was someone in the cabin—a woman!

She was sitting in Chu Liuxiang's favorite chair with her back facing the door. From his position all Chu Liuxiang could see was her hair, tied up high upon her head, and a hand—the most gorgeous of hands.

In it she held a cup brimming with his favorite wine; making herself right at home.

Chu Liuxiang, Su Rong Rong, Miss Li, and Treatie, stood in shock with mouths agape not uttering a word.

They hadn't a clue as to when this woman came aboard.

Perhaps when Chu Liuxiang was out at sea. Even so, avoiding detection by the sharp ears of Su Rong Rong, Miss Li, and Treatie was no small feat.

"You—entering the room, could it be 'The Master Thief' Chu Liuxiang?" came a beautiful, yet cold voice.

"It is I. Am I in the wrong room?" replied Chu Liuxiang grinning awkwardly.

"You're not, it's your room."

"Since this is my room," he spoke, "May I inquire as to why the Miss has situated herself in my chair?"

"Because I'm feeling joyous."

"Not a bad reason, not bad at all," he replied with a chuckle.

"I've also heard Chu Liuxiang never to refuse a woman," she continued.

The chair suddenly swung round revealing the woman under the dim glow of the lamp.

If ever there existed a woman's face so divine it could take a man's breath away, hers was it. If ever there existed a woman whose eyes so alluring it could stop a man's beating heart, then she had such eyes. At this moment that face and those eyes were staring directly at Chu Liuxiang.

"Is this not a good enough reason?" she mused.

"Yes, your reasons have instantaneously improved, quite good in fact," he stammered.

His gaze finally drifted from her face, discovering her body draped in a long lace robe white as snow; wrapped around her waist was a strand of silk silver in color.

“Perhaps you already know where I’ m from,” she stated.

“I’ d rather not know,” he sighed.

“Why not?”

“If on earth there ever existed a group of women I’ d rather not have dealings with, it would be those of the Divine Water Palace,” he professed.

Promptly standing up she turned towards the shelf at her back to grab a silver pot of wine and pour herself another full glass. Chu Liuxiang let out a heartfelt sigh—pained to watch his favorite drink consumed by another. “I’ m curious what other business have you visiting us aside from drinking my wine?”

As he spoke he grabbed the chair and pulled it over, sitting himself as quick as possible.

Leaning her head forward the woman stared him in the face, “Proud, rude, and callous,” she said stating each word one at a time for emphasis, “Yet still one or two things the young ladies might find enchanting… Sure enough you’ re nearly as the legends state.”

“My dear thanks…” he replied, “Yet I find myself wondering if these tales of River and Lake mention anything else about me.”

“Such as?”

“Such as if a strange woman enters *my* cabin uninvited, sits in *my* chair, and drinks *my* wine—by and large I toss her back to sea; especially when said woman thinks herself of such high beauty and class when in fact she is not.”

Gingerly stretching out his legs Chu Liuxiang waited to enjoy the assured rage filled look about to adorn her face.

Unsurprisingly she turned an angry pale, as her hands began to tremble.

Miss Li rushed over to her side gently grabbing the gilded cup from her hands. “If the lady wishes to smash a cup, please let me get the iron one for you,” she added with a warm smile and nod.

The woman’ s face went from an displeased green to a pale white, then red before bursting with laughter. “Wonderful, you’ re all so much fun, yet the time for jokes is over.”

“Time for a cry then?” chirped Chu Liuxiang.

“If you don’ t return my belongings, after I’ m done with you I fear even if *you* wanted to cry you wouldn’ t be able to,” she coldly declared.

“Return? Have I borrowed something of yours?”

“Borrow? Of course you didn’ t borrow it. Everyone under the sky knows Chu Liuxiang is never one to borrow anything from anyone.”

"You stole it," she bellowed.

"Stole? What have I stolen from you?"

"First Water of the Divine."

Chu Liuxiang's eyes suddenly doubled in size. "I stole what?" he gasped almost speechless.

"First—Water—of—the—Divine," she replied repeating each word one at a time.

"You're telling me First Water of the Divine was stolen from The Divine Water Palace?" mumbled a shocked Chu Liuxiang.

"You think me to travel such a great distance only to play a ruse on you?"

Chu Liuxiang's eyes flashed in delight, "Stupendous, stupendous," he muttered to himself. "This is becoming so much fun. How much of your First Water of the Divine was stolen?"

"Very little," she growled. "Merely a few drops, enough to kill thirty plus first rate martial artists from the Order of the Martial Forest without leaving a trace. Thirty-seven if used properly."

"You think *he* stole it?" snorted Su Rong Rong.

"Besides the 'Master Thief' Chu Liuxiang, is there really another capable of sneaking such a small haul from inside the Divine Water Palace?"

"Such high praise," snickered Chu Liuxiang, "If you really think this is true, suppose I told you I didn't do it. I think I'd still find you unwilling to believe me."

"Make me believe?"

"Perhaps...perhaps I can."

Without warning he heaved himself out of the chair grabbing hold of her hand. "At least let me take you to have a look at something. I promise it won't disappoint. It most certainly will not disappoint."

This proud, chilly woman somehow suddenly found herself being pulled up the stairs and out the door.

A long sigh escaped Su Rong Rong's lips. "If he wants to hold a girl's hand, I doubt there's many who can refuse."

"If'n all the members of the Divine Water Palass was men, that'd be great," stated Treatie, face awash in disbelief.

"Women are fine too, just not so pretty," laughed Miss Li.

"If all them in the Divine Water Palass be as ugly as the demigod Yaksha then I'da be most grateful," giggled Treaty.

□ □ □

The sailcloth no longer covered the corpses.

Under the starry night sky the bodies appeared even more grotesque.

“First take a look at her, you should recognize her right?” asked Chu Liuxiang.

Her eye’s fixated on the young woman’s corpse with the severed shoulder. The woman looked as if it might as well be stone she were staring at; her face remained stoic—completely emotionless, “This is no member of the Divine Water Palace.”

“No?” garbled Chu Liuxiang finally surprised.

“I’ve never laid eyes on this girl in my life,” she stated.

Chu Liuxiang rubbed his nose as if just having taken a punch. Forcing a smile he conceded, “I thought the water was stolen by one of your own—this girl, but now—”

“You think this whole thing fun still do you?” she glared at him.

“If this girl isn’t from the Divine Water Palace why dress as so?” he muttered aloud. “Obviously this was not her idea but that of the real killer to create a diversion.”

“A diversion?”

“The suspect wants people to believe Zha Muhe was killed by this girl, and since she was killed at the hands of Zha Muhe the whole matter wraps up nicely. *They* certainly don’t want people making further inquiries on the matter. So this poor girl becomes the scapegoat.”

“If so then you must know who the killer is?”

“If only I did,” he humphed.

Chapter Four—Drawer Number One Hundred And Thirty

The woman's lips began to curl into a wicked looking grin, as if about to speak her mind when Chu Liuxiang grabbed her hand. Staring into her eyes he interrupted her train of thought. "Miss Frigid, if you wish to help me get to the bottom of this you need trust me."

Having remained near unflappable for so long she finally couldn't contain herself, "My surname is not Frigid" she laughed.

Chu Liuxiang's eyes lit up, "What shall I call you then?"

Her expression instantly soured. "Just call me Miss Frigid," she growled.

Heaving a sigh he continued, "As it cannot be traded for riches and won't help improve one's martial arts, we must first consider why steal First Water of the Divine."

"You should be asking yourself that," she scoffed.

"Well, it's sole use is to harm; to kill without detection. The killer went through great efforts to steal it clearly for one reason alone," he deduced.

"Reason enough as is"

"From this we can determine the person *they* wished to kill must be someone immune to just any ordinary poison and deemed unkillable by sheer strength," he continued.

She nodded in agreement. "Otherwise why risk stealing the water."

"Yet if the killer really were able to steal the water from such a place, how many people in the world would *they not* be able to kill?" continued Chu Liuxiang, "Stealing from the Divine Water Palace, why *they* would have to be as skilled as someone as yourself."

A grin crept across his face as he continued. "Hence one can deduce *they* must have had help from the inside."

"Just who are you trying to implicate by this?" she argued.

"After the water was stolen, did anyone disappear from the palace?" asked Chu Liuxiang, his eyes transfixed on her.

"What you mean to say is the killer had help stealing the water from one of the palace disciples," she stated coldly. "Thus after it was stolen did one of them flee fearing punishment?"

"Is it not possible?"

“Of course it’ s possible. Fortunately over the past few decades no disciple has ever fled the palace, and absolutely no one has gone missing,” she replied.

Chu Liuxiang furrowed his brow deep in thought, “Did nothing unusual at all happen in the palace after the water was stolen? Did anyone take their own life, for instance…?”

Her expression promptly changed. “How did you know?”

Chu Liuxiang’ s eyes lit up once more. “Someone committed suicide yes? Why did she kill herself?”

“You think to just ask anything about the inner workings of our Divine Water Palace?” she snapped.

Chu Liuxiang grabbed her hands, pulling them towards him. “Miss Frigid, you need to tell me this is crucial information, you—you must believe me.”

Pulling her hands away, she turned her back silently mulling things over for some time. “She was a lovely young girl, beautiful and full of youthful vigor, the youngest of us, she—I mustn’ t go on about the dead like this…”

A light glimmered in Chu Liuxiang’ s eyes. “She was pregnant, she felt ashamed and did not want to be seen by anyone no?”

The woman did not answer, yet she tightened the grip of her hand resting at her side, throttling her silk sash and revealing her grief stricken, volatile heart.

“Of course, she must have been deceived into giving her body to this man, then coerced into stealing the water. Yet *he* neglected his vow to bring her with him, leaving death as her only road left!” declared Chu Liuxiang.

The woman instantly began trembling, “That’ s enough!” she shouted.

“Passionate young women have always struggled avoiding such tragic fates,” sighed Chu Liuxiang. “Rather than hurt for her, would it not be better to consider how to find the one responsible and get revenge in her name?”

She quickly turned back around. “How can we find this person?” she asked in trembling tones.

“Just before death, did she say anything?”

“Only that—that she has done wrong by the child in her womb,” she sobbed.

“Under such circumstances why be so unwilling to profess who this man is? She must have greatly feared someone might hurt him—ugh!

What magic powers can this man possess to make young women so infatuated?” sighed Chu Liuxiang in protest.

“She had certainly never mentioned *him* before. In fact she never made mention of any man,” explained Miss Frigid. “Even in my wildest dreams I could never have imagined such a thing happening to her.”

“Did she have any male acquaintances she come in contact with on a regular basis?” asked Chu Liuxiang.

“She has almost never spoken to any man”

“How peculiar, why so many strange happenings on a day such as this…five unrelated people all die within the same timeframe, all in the same location. Not to mention First Water of the Divine from the Divine Water Palace was mysteriously stolen, and a girl who’s never spoken to men was with child,” reflected Chu Liuxiang. “What’s more, these three matters look as if they have absolutely nothing connecting them, yet they are certainly tied together in some way…”

Lifting his head he mumbled to himself, “Who could resolve such a thing?”

“You!” bellowed the woman.

“Me…”

“For your own sake you must expose the truth” she protested staring at him.

“But what of any leads, I haven’t barely a clue to follow,” he replied.

“There most certainly are leads, you simply have to find them,” she growled turning her back to Chu Liuxiang once more.

“I give you one month, if you fail to find any leads, those of the Divine Water Palace will come for you!” she issued.

“Why turn your back to me? Are you unable to utter such unreasonable demands while facing me?”

The woman paid him no heed as she slowly meandered towards the back of the boat.

Hidden behind the back of the ship floated a small exquisitely crafted skiff.

Vaulting off the deck she gently glided down towards the hidden boat, which took off as soon as she touched down upon it.

Leaning against the side of his ship, Chu Liuxiang quietly watched her go.

Beneath the resplendent night sky the skiff moved through the water sending ripples through a sea of stars; the woman’s light gown danced in the wind like the plumage of a fairy maiden descended from

the sky above. "My name is Gong Nanyan!" she suddenly cried out turning back round, a warm smile spread across her face.

□ □ □

Chu Liuxiang comfortably stretched his legs as he reclined in his chair. "She *is* beautiful, especially her smile. When she smiles it's like all the starlight in the sea and sky is cast upon her face, before quietly sinking back into the mysterious darkness of night," he mumbled to himself gazing at the amber colored wine swirling in his cup.

A snort of laughter escaped Miss Li's lips, "You're afraid in one month's time you won't find her so beautiful, especially with her sword pressed against your neck..."

"She doesn't wield a sword"

Miss Li turned in his direction a look of annoyance cast upon her face, "Then what weapon *does* she use? A vegetable knife?"

Suppressing a smile Chu Liuxiang gave her a stern look, "She fights with a bowl."

"A bowl?"

"Otherwise how could she handle all the *bitter vinegar* one so jealous as yourself would pour on her?" he commented bursting with laughter.

"You shouldn't offend Miss Li, she's far more fierce than Gong Nanyan" squawked Treatie swallowing her laughter.

To everyone's shock Treatie's canton accent briefly disappeared, solely for fear Miss Li might not understand her.

"Oh?" asked Chu Liuxiang.

Unable to contain herself, Treatie bent over gasping for air from laughter. "At most Gong Nanyan is just a member of the Divine Water Palace, our Miss Li Rouge Sleeves however is the queen of the Divine Vinegar Palace."

Miss Li charged at Treatie, snarling through clenched teeth.

"Little devil, looking for a death sentence are you?"

Treatie had rolled up in a ball splitting with laughter, "Sister Rong save me! The head of the Divine Vinegar Palace's powers are so overwhelming—"

The bickering turned to laughter, then play fighting, as one ran, one chased, and out the cabin the two of them went.

Su Rong Rong looked over at Chu Liuxiang, "What do you plan to do now?"

“At this moment we haven’t a single thread to follow. However, at least it’s finally known we seek an attractive looking man, otherwise how could the young girl be so taken by him?” he sighed.

“Girls don’t necessarily desire handsome men,” smiled Su Rong Rong.

A grin crept across Chu Liuxiang’s face, “As you see it just what kind of man you think *him* to be?”

“He’s silver tongued, intelligent, and knows his way to a girl’s heart; certainly a talented man of letters and a romantic. The kind of man forever irresistible to young women,” she contemplated.

“But would this kind of man be able to infiltrate the Divine Water Palace?”

“If such a man were to gain entry to the Divine Water Palace I fear he wouldn’t be coming out alive… In this world there’s less than a handful of men capable of leaving that place life intact,” grinned Su Rong Rong.

“Hence I must ask a favor of you,” replied Chu Liuxiang heaving a sigh.

“You wish me to infiltrate the Divine Water Palace.”

“I—I only worry about your health”

“You think me weak enough the wind might blow me over,” she laughed sweetly.

“It is in the hopes you’ll be able to find you’re father’s cousin to ask what kind of men are allowed to enter the Palace; to discover what the girl was like, and what she liked to do. It’d be best if you could find some of her belongings, even better if she left a note.”

“As soon as the it’s light I’ll head out,” she replied.

Chu Liuxiang gazed at her tenderly, “It’s just that you—”

Su Rong Rong gently covered his mouth smiling back at him. “I already know what you want to say—after I leave what about you?”

“In seven days I will be waiting for you in the Storm Pavilion on the banks of the Daming Lake in Jinan,” replied Chu Liuxiang.

“Is Jinan not Red Palm territory?”

“The Hainan Sect and Celestial Star Guild are too great a distance from here. Zha Muhe is from the outside territories, an even greater distance. My sole hope is to hear something straight from the mouth of one of the Red Palm disciples,” explained Chu Liuxiang.

A grave look of concern flashed upon Su Rong Rong’s face, “You must take extra care, if they discover you are—”

“While they may detest me, there’s no way they can catch me,” he grinned.

He opened his hand suddenly laying out his palm; in it rested a small delicately crafted crystal bottle—as to when it got there who knew. Upon removing the stopper a curious tulip fragrance filled the cabin.

“The Master Thief leaves his scent at night, overwhelming emotions lead one’s spirit to flight,” recited Chu Liuxiang in an emphatic tune.

“You want me to spread this fragrance wherever I go for you again?” she asked.

“Correct. As soon as you set out start spreading this scent, it will render everyone clueless to my exact whereabouts. Most certainly no one would think me to have already arrived in Jinan,” he replied.

“But what—what identity will you be assuming this time?” she asked.

“Most members of the Red Palm School come from families of wealth, if I wish to obtain their trust and respect, the only way is to disguise myself as someone even more affluent,” grinned Chu Liuxiang.

Leisurely rising from his chair he gave the wine shelf a ginger push to one side, revealing a cramped, hidden room.

□ □ □

Behind the narrow door was a bizarrely designed six-sided hold. A mirror was inlaid in each of the six walls. The light of just one lamp was enough to brighten the room ten fold.

Running along the mirrored walls were short wood cabinets with hundreds of small drawers each bearing a number; akin to something one might find at a pharmacy.

“I worry you only think of number sixty-three? Or maybe number one hundred thirteen?” quipped Su Rong Rong propping herself up against the door.

Chu Liuxiang pulled open the drawer numbered sixty-three. Inside was a shirt and pants of a sturdy dark blue satin with a worn, weathered look. Underneath rested a pair of durable cloth boots, a black sharkskin bag and a thin paper booklet.

“Is it numbered correctly?” he asked with a confused look.

“It shouldn’t be wrong” she replied.

“But these aren’t clothes of a wealthy man.”

“There are only two kinds of wealthy merchants in Jinan City,” she stated, “The first being private bank owners from Shanxi. An outfit such as this would already be deemed quite expensive in their eyes.”

“Of course!” he exclaimed, “Somehow I’ve forgotten people from Shanxi spend most of their silver on medicine. Sometimes I find it odd, just what are they saving all that money for?”

He picked up the paper booklet and flipped through the pages, on it was written:

Name: Ma Baiwan

Identity: Shanxi Sitong Private Bank owner

Age: around 40

Interests: none

Special characteristics: When walking if encounter water must remove shoes. When raining must think of way to borrow someone’s umbrella. Always have the body odor of one who has not showered for a considerable time.

Before he finished reading he quickly chucked the booklet back into the drawer shutting it tightly. “I’d rather you kill me and be done with it than disguise myself as such a man,” he professed shaking his head and heaving a lengthy sigh.

“It was you who had me prepare a disguise of every type of persona imaginable. You’ve already disguised yourself as a beggar, why can’t you just—”

Chu Liuxiang immediately threw his hands up in disgust, “I would rather be disguised as a beggar than go as a private bank owner.”

“Then why not take a look at number one hundred thirteen,” she insisted.

Chu Liuxiang pulled open drawer number one hundred thirteen revealing a richly ornate set of clothes, a shiny pair of leather boots, two iron balls with chimes that rang out when rotated around in the hand, and a broadsword inlaid with jade at the hilt. There was also a black sharkskin bag and a thin paper booklet.

“Apart from private bank owners from Shanxi the next wealthiest visitors of Jinan City are the leaders of the ginseng guilds from the Zhangbai Mountain region in the outside territories.”

“This looks undoubtedly more exciting” smiled Chu Liuxiang

Name: Zhang Xiaolin

Identity: large medicinal ginseng seller from the outside territories
Age: 35-36
Interests: strong alcohol, gambling, women...

Once again he did not finish reading the booklet. However this time he shut it clapping his hands in delight, "Much better, you were correct, this one is far more interesting."

"I *knew* it would be more to you're liking. Regardless, you still must take this chest with you. I'll prepare numbers three, seven, twenty-eight, and forty for you," she replied softly.

"Beginning now and for the next several days I assume the identity of Zhang Xiaolin!" exclaimed Chu Liuxiang.

Amidst his declaration he had already opened the black sharkskin bag pulling out a delicate mask made of human flesh.

Su Rong Rong rested against the door; the reflection of his grinning face could be seen in every mirror. One Chu Liuxiang had already become countless.

□ □ □

'Court of Elation' three golden words, shaped like a dragon and phoenix entwined in dance were shining under the lanterns written above Jinan City's largest gambling hall.

As the evening lanterns were being lit a ruckus of cheers and shouts filled with the cries of gambling jargon could be heard coming from within; the gambling hall was bustling with excitement. Inside the three expansive halls the air was filled with the odors of liquor, tobacco, perfume powder worn by the woman, and the stench of perspiration emanating off the men. An oily ring of sweat could be seen glowing on the top of every patron's head.

Some people were beaming with joy—like the early spring light, some had their heads down in a crestfallen look of despair, some appeared focused, and some were afflicted with nerve-wracked tremors.

The hall furthest from the entrance had two Pai Gow tables, two dice tables, and two single-double tables; all receiving a fair share of action from a variety of characters. The sound of cheers and jeers reverberated around the hall. Several stalwart looking fellows dressed in black with red colored belts were made to stand next to the tables, no matter who won they would always take ten percent.

Further in was a parlor less crowded and much less noisy. Beside three tables sat all the wealthy, gluttonous traders—*their brains full*

of broth and bellies full of fat shuffling through piles of silver with sweat soaked hands. Bottles of exquisite tea and wine were strewn about while a dozen or so girls—heads adorned with pearls and jade, faces brimming with coquettish smiles, were fluttering about amongst them swiping a piece of silver from one, then running over to pinch a piece of gold from another.

They were wealthy traders in a gambling hall, who really cared? Naturally those of them who lost left with empty purses, but those who won didn't necessarily leave with a heavier purse.

Little by little the gold and silver pocketed by the deft, sinewy ring covered fingers of the young women flowed into the pockets of the casino owner, already amassing into quite the hefty sum. This gambling hall just happened to be run by the Red Palm School.

A thick door-curtain hung from the door to the inner most building of the casino.

There were only seven or eight guests inside, yet they were accompanied by over a dozen young ladies—some serving tea, some pouring wine, and some snuggled in tight on the laps of the guests, deftly placing shelled melon seeds in their mouths one seed at a time. The young ladies' fingers were slender like spring onions and their eyes were as sweet as honey.

Not a single piece of gold or silver could be seen on the table; only a few strips of paper were being exchanged. Each strip however had a large enough amount written on it for a commoner to comfortably live out the entirety of their life.

A ghastly pale young man wearing emerald robes stood watching from the side, his face awash with a grin. Occasionally he would walk over to one of the high rollers, pat them on the shoulder, smile and say, "You've run out of luck, how about you have Pearl accompany you for some rest then come back and try again."

Of course they would howl with laughter. "Don't rush me," they would say, "I'm not even at five hundred thousand taels yet!"

Thus the young man would remove his hand from their shoulder, smile and caress the thin strands of hair on his chin that had just recently sprung forth. He always used his left hand in doing so. His right remained hidden inside his sleeve.

This was the manager of the Court of Elation who also happened to be a disciple of a Red Palm guild master. This was 'The Gentleman Jade Assassin', 'Pretty Boy Meng Chang'—Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit.

Chapter Five—Three Hundred Thousand Taels

Suddenly an elegantly dressed man with the face of a buck and eyes like a rat scurried in through the door curtain. “Greetings Young Lord,” he sounded bowing from a distance, his face remained replete with a smile.

Suppressing his displeasure, Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit walked over, both hands resting behind his back. “Cheng Three, is this a place you should be?” he scolded furrowing his brow.

Cheng Three bowed even further, “The ignoble Cheng would not dare enter at will, it’ s just—”

His eyes squinted in smile as whispered softly, “Last night a high roller spent thirty thousand taels on our dear Little Emerald. As soon as little Cheng heard this man was itching to gamble I decided to bring him here to you my Lord.”

“Oh? Who is this man?” queried Leng.

“His surname is Zhang, he goes by the name Xiaolin,” replied Cheng.

“Zhang Xiaolin, I’ ve never heard such a name,” scoffed Leng.

Cheng Three continued, “I’ ve heard he rarely leaves the outside territories, so—”

Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit quickly silenced him speaking in a subdued tone, “You should know the kinds of people that come here to gamble. If someone’ s background is unknown, even if they come to lose money, they are still to be turned away”

“Young Lord please rest assured, the ignoble Cheng would never dare bring someone unknown in *here*—Guest Zhang is from the first tier Medicinal Ginseng Sellers of the Zhangbai Mountains. He’ s come to Jinan to spend some money on entertainment,” he replied with a sequacious smile.

“So he’ s a ginseng picker, let me have a peak...” Peeling back the curtain and sticking his head out for a look, Leng glanced a regal-faced man with a short beard and stately appearance; his hands lay resting behind his back with two iron balls rotating around in a constant ring.

Although he stood unmoving, he certainly had a grand demeanor, so much so that others around him began to look more like *hens standing beside the Immortal Crane*.

Leng quickly lifted the curtain taking a great welcoming stride forward. Clapping his fist in hand he smiled, "Brother Zhang what a journey you've made, younger brother has been an inconsiderate host, please forgive me."

Grinning from ear to ear he grabbed Zhang Xiaolin's hand as if they had been friends for ages.

□ □ □

As expected, this Zhang Xiaolin was indeed a high roller, staking thousands of taels in one go without batting an eye. Playing at the Pai Gow table he had already lost fifty thousand taels after only several hands of betting.

Surrounded by young ladies fighting to pour wine or help him place a bet, Zhang Xiaolin rumbled with laughter as he held one girl in his left arm while pulling in another with his right. Suddenly he reached into his robe and pulled out a stack of banknotes, "How about a few games?"

From the corner of his eyes Leng peaked over at the stack noting its thickness. The note on top read Wen Bank, One Hundred Thousand Taels. "Brother Zhang please have a go, in a moment younger brother will accompany you," hastily smiled Leng.

At present the owner of forty or so Lianhao rice shops was still at the table already up over one hundred thousand taels. He was just about to call it quits when a smile flashed across his face as he showed his tiles, "Brother Zhang, younger brother bets on Tianmen."

Zhang Xiaolin placed the two iron balls on top of his bank notes pressing down hard, "Come on little friends help me keep those notes in my hand, don't let a single one slip away," he revealed as he rolled up his sleeves revealing an expensive, white silk-weave, unlined gown.

Zhang's skilled betting was like a *lively dragon and animated tiger*, spirited enough to send sweat dripping down the spine of every onlooker. After a single round the rice merchant was forced to cough up over half the money he had just won. Thus he took his mistress and left for bed. The other two at hand were the famed Pa couple. Although still wanting to break even they too were forced to reluctantly leave the table.

After midnight there were only four or five left gambling.

Zhang Xiaolin was shuffling tiles while smoking from a long stemmed pipe held for him by one of the accompanying young ladies. His

eyes floated over to Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit, "Why don't you come and place a few coin my good brother?" he smiled.

"Younger brother was just thinking of doing so," replied Leng with a grin.

Pulling out a stack of bank notes his eyes quickly glanced about the room like a canine on a hunt. "Three hundred thousand taels, all in, no matter win or lose, only one bet" he declared placing the entire stack on Tianmen.

Although everyone in the room could be considered a high roller, the moment he threw down his three hundred thousand tael bet not a single face was left with color—not one dared take on such a bet.

A quick laugh escaped Zhang Xiaolin's lips, "Alright, I'll take you on."

With a toss of the dice up came seven, and Leng picked up the first tile. Zhang Xiaolin was third to pick. Leng took a quick glance then gently flipped over his tile, a Teen, and a red eight, a Teengang!

An 'ahh' of admiration could be heard from the others, accompanied by sportive laughter from the young ladies as they clapped their hands.

Zhang Xiaolin clasped one hand over his fist in salutations, gathered up his two pieces rubbing them in his hand, gave them a quick glance and slapped them down on the table.

Everyone anxiously looked on, "Well what is it?" chirped an onlooker unable to hold back any longer.

Without skipping a beat Zhang Xiaolin counted out three hundred thousand taels in bank notes and presented them before Leng with a smile, "*The wooden bench has met his match in Old Three, I've lost*"

Leng glanced around the room before smiling at Zhang Xiaolin, "I think everyone has had enough for the day, how about we save it for another time?"

With a collective sigh the spectators gave their condolences to Zhang Xiaolin trying to console him while at same time secretly enjoying his plight. After all none had lost as much money as he.

Thus everyone left in good spirits and a beautiful young lady in tow searching for pleasant dreams.

Zhang Xiaolin stretched out his arms and leaned back letting out a long sigh, "My good brother" he smiled, "You really know how to play—saw me through and through and took your strike."

"Really..." replied Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit, a feeble smile spread across his face.

As quick as lightning his right hand shot forth grabbing hold of the blade at Zhang Xiaolin' s waist. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?" he barked pressing the cold sharp edge against Zhang Xiaolin' s neck.

Zhang gave a light chuckle; his facial expression wavered not. "My good brother let this please be a joke. I haven' t a clue what you' re talking about."

"Do you really not understand?"

His left fist slammed against the table catapulting Zhang Xiaolin' s two pieces into the air flipping them over. They landed face up on the table.

Both tiles were the same, a pair of sixes.

Leng' s eyes were sharper then the blade he held pressed against Zhang Xiaolin' s neck. "You are the clear winner, why pretend to lose?" he seethed.

"Poor eyesight I suppose, I misread them," smiled Zhang.

"Do you think me one to rub sand in my eyes. I' m not so easily fooled. What' s you' re reason for coming here *friend*. Let me be a little more frank," he barked, "What are you trying to rope me into? What is your purpose?"

The smile suddenly disappeared from Zhang Xiaolin' s face. Lowering his voice he replied, "Brother Leng, as expected your eyes are sharp. Indeed I have come here with a request not only beneficial to me, but also to your esteemed guild..."

A mysterious smile crept across his face, cleverly stopping himself mid-sentence.

Leng stared at him not daring to blink. His penetrating gaze gradually softened as he removed the blade from Zhang Xiaolin' s throat, spinning it round as if in dance then sliding it back into the scabbard with a resounding 'thwoop' . "That being the case, why not first come to me in the open, clear as light?" he slowly asked.

"If you' re looking to do the unusual, you must take an unusual path. If I could not make an impression on you Brother Leng, would you believe what I have to say?"

A faint smile spread across Leng' s face. "Three hundred thousand taels to buy an impression. You don' t think it a little expensive?"

"If greeted by success, why this three hundred thousand taels would be the equivalent to *a single hair off the back of nine cows*," whispered Zhang Xiaolin.

Leng' s face suddenly went flush with color. His voice however, remained cool and calm. "This guild does not involve itself in any law-breaking activities."

"My humble self may be poor, but I still have thousands of family members and ancestors to think of," replied Zhang, "Dangerous law-breaking matters I most certainly would never partake."

In a flash Leng slapped the table with his hand once more, "If this matter is not illegal or dangerous and has such plentiful a reward, why not seek someone else to help? Yet instead you ask for this guild' s assistance?" he bellowed.

"The matter at hand needs the assistance of one of your honorable guild elders. Otherwise we face surmounting difficulties, even impossible odds," explained Zhang.

"Which elder do you speak of?"

"The Scholarly Assassin, Ximen Qian"

Leng slowly turned his back. Taking two strides he gingerly seated himself.

Zhang Xiaolin continued, "Only with the honorable Ximen in the saddle can immediate success be a certainty. So long as Brother Leng invites the honorable Ximen to meet and hear me out, he most certainly would not refuse."

"Our revered master does not casually receive guests, speaking with me is the same as speaking with him," cautiously stated Leng.

"These matters I must directly speak to the honorable Ximen."

Leng the Cold Autumn spirit suddenly turned his head round in anger, "Could it be you' re playing me a fool?" he growled.

"Spending three hundred thousand taels just to play a joke on someone? I think no such person exists in this world," laughed Zhang Xiaolin.

Leng fixed his eyes on him once more. A moment passed before finally answering, "You have come at a time of inconvenience, our master is currently not in Jinan City."

Zhang Xiaolin' s smiled disappeared, "Really?"

"I' ve never been one to joke," snapped Leng.

Zhang Xiaolin froze in dismay for quite some time. An expression of profound hopelessness lingered on his face. He tilted his head upwards before heaving a heavy sigh, "What a shame! What a shame! I could see the three million taels right in my hand, yet today it' s turned to nothing."

Upon expressing his displeasure he turned towards Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit clasped his fist in salutation before starting towards the door, head down, spirits low.

Leng quickly grabbed hold of him, “Did you say three million taels?”

A wry smile crept across Zhang Xiaolin’s face, “I am a businessman, if there’s not a chance for ten times the profit why would I be willing to part with three hundred thousand taels?”

“You cannot wait for our master to return?” asked Leng appearing slightly anxious.

“Something like this naturally cannot wait. Unless—”

“Unless what?”

“Unless right before leaving the honorable Ximen left a note explaining where he was headed. Well then you and I could go seek him out, that would give us enough time.”

At this point Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit could no longer resist.

“Every time our master departs he leaves a message, only this time... He received a letter and was gone by morning,” he stated stamping his foot in frustration.

Zhang Xiaolin’s eyes lit up instinctively, “A letter? Where is this letter?”

The Cold Autumn Spirit grabbed his hand, “Come with me,” he beckoned.

“To where?”

“To meet Spirit Chaser Yang Song, you must have heard his name before?”

“The letter, you’re telling me it’s at the honorable Yang’s house?” asked Zhang.

“Precisely. I recall just before our master left he placed the letter in another paper envelope and gave it to Martial Uncle Yang to look after. If we can take a look at this letter, I think it certainly will tell us where my master has gone,” replied Leng.

“But do you think the honorable Yang is willing to let us see the letter?”

“Three million taels—no matter who you mention this number to no one would find it a small one,” grinned Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit.

□ □ □

They didn’t need to take a sedan to Yang Song’s as they arrived at his home after crossing only two streets.

It was located on a quiet, clean street of decent length. There were only six houses on this street; Yang Song's was the second on the right.

Without needing much inspection Zhang Xiaolin could tell those living on this street were all wealthy aristocrats of Jinan City. Even the cobblestones and cracks between them had been neatly swept clean. However, one would think someone with such status as Yang Song would have their own separate complex outside the city.

"Although my master may appear somewhat eccentric at times, for reasons unknown he has insisted upon living in the city," stated Leng appearing to read Zhang Xiaolin's mind. "Although he doesn't like speaking with people, he does enjoy being able to listen."

"Your master... but isn't this Yang—"

"My master and Martial Uncle Yang have always lived together," interrupted Leng.

They came upon the pitch-black door, which to Zhang Xiaolin's surprise was not latched shut.

Leng pushed it open without knocking and walked in. The courtyard was silent, no sound of people.

The main hall, grand in size, glowed under the dim light of a single lantern. The candle inside had burned almost to its end having remained uncut for an extended period of time. The atmosphere inside was desolate, mysterious.

"Martial Uncle Yang always goes to bed early. As soon as he does all his servants sneak out, especially when my master is gone. Those servants are so unruly," sighed Leng.

Zhang Xiaolin smiled, "Even the women and maidservants go out at night?"

"There have never been any maidservants in the house," replied Leng.

They walked around the main hall to the rear courtyard, which was even more devoid of sound. To both their surprise a faint lamplight could be seen shining from the western room. "Strange, has Martial Uncle Yang not yet retired?"

Leng was just about to cross through the middle of the courtyard lined with Wutong parasol trees when he suddenly felt a drop of water land on his shoulder. He quickly brushed it off without thinking. The light shining from the window at his back illuminated his hand as he glanced down to look at it.

Blood. His palm was covered in fresh blood.

Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit hastily glanced up in fright, a hand was reaching down for him from the tree above.

He vaulted forward leaping away while reaching out to grab hold of the wrist lightning quick. However, all that came with him was a hand. A hand and nothing else; a hand dripping with fresh blood.

“Martial Uncle, Martial Uncle Yang!” cried Leng in a panic stricken terror.

No response came from inside the room.

Rushing over he shoved through the door charging in, Yang Song was asleep on the bed, a deep sleep. The quilt was pulled all the way up completely covering his body; only the grayish white top of his head remained exposed. The room itself was torn asunder. Nothing rested its original place, all three camphorwood wood chests aside his bed had been flipped over.

Overcome with emotions Leng lifted the quilt.

Blood. Underneath the quilt Yang Song’s body was drenched in blood; hands and feet both missing.

Leng’s entire body shook as if trembling from the cold, “Dismemberment by Five Ghosts…” he quivered.

Turning towards the door he bolted out the room. The other hand was hanging from one of the roof eaves—still dripping with blood. Not even an hour had passed since Yang Song met his grisly fate of dismemberment.

Zhang Xiaolin looked to be in a frightened state of stupor.

“The Red Palm Guild and The Five Ghosts have no bones of contention, why would the Five Ghosts of the Sanguine turn to such deadly means?” whistled Leng in despair.

“How do you know it was the Five Ghosts of the Sanguine?”

“Dismemberment by Five Ghosts is their signature martial arts technique,” angrily scoffed Leng.

“Such an occasion a signature technique could be borrowed by someone else,” Zhang Xiaolin mumbled to himself.

Leng did not hear him as he already began scrounging every inch of the room in search.

“Why even bother looking, the letter is most certainly not here,” Zhang Xiaolin continued mumbling to himself.

□ □ □

Naturally the letter was gone.

By this point Leng' s face was an even more pallid shade of white. Suddenly he rushed over seizing hold of Zhang Xiaolin' s sleeve, "How are you connected to all this?" he barked.

"If I were connected would I be here still?"

Leng continued to stare at him eyes aflame with anger. After a moment he slowly relaxed grip, "How could you be here at such a coincidental time?" he asked in a more restrained manner.

"Only due to the fact these past several days luck has not been on my side," bitterly replied Zhang Xiaolin.

A glimmer suddenly flashed across his eyes, "Why not go to your master' s room and take a look, you never know there could be a new discovery."

Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit thought to himself for a moment then headed over toward the eastern room with lantern in hand. The door was also unlocked. Peering in, he could see the eccentric guild elder of the Red Palm School had kept his room incredibly simple; the four walls were almost completely bare.

However, on one of the walls hung a painting. It was not a painting of a mountainous or seaside scenery; not one of flowers, insects, or birds; but a half-portrait of a woman, popular for the time. It was painted so realistic she almost looked alive. Zhang Xiaolin wished not to take another glance for the more he looked the more he noticed her goddess-like beauty, to which he was at a loss of words to describe. Even though it was just a portrait, it had an irresistibility to which none could repel.

Zhang Xiaolin couldn't help a heavy sigh, "I never would have imagined your master' s wife was such an unrivaled beauty"

"My master remains unmarried to this day," snapped Leng.

Zhang Xiaolin was slightly taken aback. "Oh... No wonder he and the honorable Yang live together and have no female servants."

Although his mouth said one thing, in his head he was thinking something quite different. "Why is Ximen Qian still unmarried? Why is this woman' s portrait hanging in his room, and what does she mean to him?"

Perhaps it was just your normal, run-of-the-mill portrait.

But how could a half-portrait be considered normal?

□ □ □

Zhang Xiaolin returned to his room at the inn he was lodging at. Outside his window seven or eight full-bodied men dressed in black wearing cinnabar red colored belts patrolled to and fro.

It was these men that had escorted him back to the inn, half in front and half in back forming an imposing retinue. At the moment they were unwilling to move an inch, keeping watch on all fronts, like a personal guard troop.

Naturally they were ordered by Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit to keep watch over him.

It wasn't as if Leng was suspicious of him, he simply didn't want that "three million taels" to fall into the hands of another. Of course Zhang Xiaolin couldn't be clearer of this.

He found himself unable to suppress a laugh, a hearty laugh at that.

If he truly desired to leave, was there really a difference between these eight men and eight wooden practice dummies?

Blowing out the candlelit lantern and removing his clothes he lay in bed doing his utmost to completely relax his four limbs. The clean bed sheets felt quite agreeable pressed up against his bare skin.

Although assuming the identity of a medicinal ginseng merchant from the outer territories had been enjoyable, it still paled in comparison to being himself.

Forcing oneself to play another is also never particularly fun, especially wearing the mask—it often makes the nose itch.

Gradually his body slipped into a state of rest; his mind however, had not stopped turning.

Suddenly the faint sound of moving roof tiles could be heard from above.

Instantly a dim ray of moonlight showered the dark room.

Someone had lifted up several tiles from the roof without making a thread of noise—their movements exceptionally succinct. Whoever this nocturnal traveler was they were no novice.

Wriggling like a fish, a figure suddenly slipped through the gap in the roof tiles. Still holding on to the roof they lingered above listening for movement. Upon not hearing anything a miss, they gently floated down to the floor.

Zhang Xiaolin remained motionless, staring ahead with squinted eyes. He chuckled silently to himself, "If this person really is a thief," he thought, "They must have been less than virtuous in their past life to be so unlucky as to run into the likes of me this evening."

Under the moonlight all he could distinguish was a black, cloth-covered face and a full-figured yet sproutly thin frame that was tightly wrapped in black garb. The thief was a woman.

In her hand she grasped a short, light, willow leaf saber that glimmered under the moonlight. She stared ahead, two large white eyes fixated on the person in bed.

What great fun thought Zhang Xiaolin, what superb fun.

This woman was an assassin.

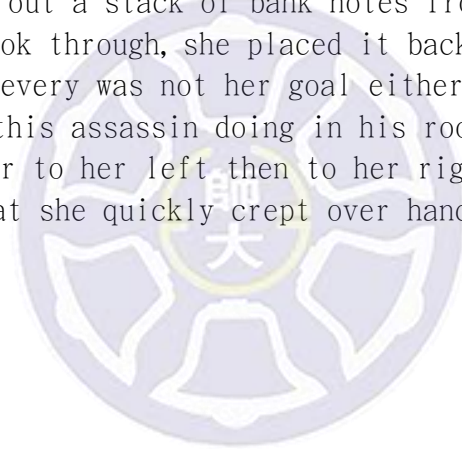
Throughout his life Chu Liuxiang had experienced his fare share of oddities. However to have such a beautiful young lady attempt to assassinate him, well this was a first.

Afraid of scaring her away, he controlled his breathing to appear as if still deep asleep. However his assassin seemed uninterested in actually sending him to his grave.

With light feet and gentle hands she rummaged through his clothes on the floor, pulling out a stack of bank notes from his pockets. After giving the stack a look through, she placed it back exactly as it was.

It appeared thievery was not her goal either. Not here to kill, not here steal, what was this assassin doing in his room?

She glanced over to her left then to her right spotting a black box. Like a leopard cat she quickly crept over hand extended ready to open it.



Chapter Six—A Red Dot Beneath The Sword

Who's there? Who are you?" muttered Zhang Xiaolin acting as if suddenly startled awake from a dream.

Taken aback, the female assassin seemed more afraid he might alert the guards outside the window.

Without saying a word she turned round with a smile, the black cloth had already disappeared from her face. Beneath the pale moonlight was the stunning facade of a beautiful woman.

Zhang Xiaolin purposely opened his eyes wide in shock, his mouth agape not saying a word.

She smiled sweetly giving him a friendly look. Her sinewy lily-white hands had already gone to work unbuttoning the top half of a long row of clasps that held together her taut black outfit.

"What—What are you..." he stuttered.

Waving her hand she signaled for his silence, then with a twist of her waist the black outfit peeled away like a soft layer of skin.

Her naked body—ivory white, was instantly showered in moonlight. Zhang Xiaolin seemed unable to catch his breath as he felt a soft, smooth, flexible, yet icy cold body slither under the sheets.

A smell of fresh soap emanated from her, as if just having bathed.

While not an entirely pleasant smell, when emanating from her body it was enough to awaken one's deepest desires.

She coiled her smooth body around him squeezing tight.

"In the middle of the night, suddenly there's a woman of stunning beauty removing her clothes and slipping under the covers with me," he mumbled aloud. "I fear even the most outlandish of literati would never be able to write such a tale."

Leaning her head in close to his ear, she whispered to him in a silvery voice filled with gentle laughter. "Does having such a romantic encounter with a beautiful woman not satisfy you?"

"Could it be possible you're an immortal fox vixen? A ghost even?"

"Precisely so, I'm an immortal fox vixen come to seduce you to your death," she tantalized.

Zhang Xiaolin immediately started to tremble, "To be honest, I'm... I'm quite intimidated by you."

"No need to fear me," she reassured him gently stroking his head.

"When a fox becomes an immortal vixen they still have a tail. Why don't you feel and see if I have one," she replied with a sultry smile as she guided his hand...

"Well... then who are you?"

"Lord Leng feared you lonely, he sent me to accompany you. Does this put your doubts to rest now?" she replied in a hushed tone.

"How nice of Sir Leng... you're also very nice. Whatever you wish of me I'll do," he mustered.

"I find it strange, Lord Leng is always so cold and indifferent," she replied, "To you however, he has been ever so gracious. Could it be... he has requested something of you?"

"Yes..."

She maneuvered her body to a more appealing position, "Good boy, now tell me, what have you two discussed?"

"Uh..."

She wiggled her hips while quietly continuing, "Lord Leng appears rather busy tonight, something happened no? Why has one of the three guild elders gone missing?"

"Oh..."

She gently pushed him in a flirtatious manner, "If you don't pay me any attention, I won't pay you any."

"Now is not the time for talking," mumbled Zhang Xiaolin.

Giggling she countered, "As of now you're going—"

Before she could finish her entire body was suddenly engulfed with a numbing sensation unable to move a muscle.

"What... what did you do!?" she cried out finally feeling started.

Zhang Xiaolin sat up in a flash, his eyes were alight with laughter as he directly in the face. "Tell me first who you are, then I'll tell you."

"Haven't I already told you, Lord Leng sent me," she protested.

"Why would someone sent by Sir Leng come climbing into my room through the roof?" he asked with a ginger smile.

Her alluring eyes were now filled with fear, "You...you saw?"

"I'm terribly sorry, I regrettably did," he replied.

"Why...why not say something?"

"You never asked me to say something, besides I don't enjoy others prying out my secrets. However, when a beautiful girl such as

yourself wishes to remove her clothing in front me... Well I could never plead enough," he grinned.

"You...you little devil," she muscled out through gritted her teeth.

"At this point you might as well tell me everything."

The young woman sat glaring at him, one could almost see the flames of anger roaring from her eyes.

"How I wish to kill you!" she hissed.

"So you won't tell me?"

"If you don't hurry up and kill me you most certainly will regret it," she replied clenching her teeth so tight Zhang Xiaolin could hear them grinding together.

"Fair enough, if you won't talk there's always someone to make you talk." Suddenly Zhang Xiaolin grabbed the quilt wrapping her up inside.

"Stop thief...traitor!" she screamed out in alarm.

Her face immediately drained of color never having imagined him to be so wolfishly rapacious.

At this very moment the burly men dressed in black from outside came charging into the room, "Where is the spy?" they chorused.

Zhang Xiaolin pointed to the woman wrapped in the quilt laying on the bed, "There, quickly take her to Sir Leng and have her thoroughly interrogated."

After some deliberation, the men both shocked and pleasantly surprised, finally picked her up wrapped in the sheets and carried her away on their shoulders.

Unable to move a muscle, all she could do was yell and curse, "You beast, you dog, you will meet your untimely demise soon enough!"

Zhang Xiaolin sat there gently rubbing his nose thinking aloud, "Someone taking me for a womanizer I can tolerate, but a fool, well then they must be taught a lesson," he smiled.

□ □ □

Her willow leaf saber lay on the floor.

Zhang Xiaolin picked up the saber giving it a look over, "I never figured her from the Celestial Star Guild. What would they be doing here?" he perplexed.

He continued to ponder this thought for a while before putting on his clothes and latching the blade to his belt. Positioning himself just

right, he gave a quick two shrugs of the shoulder and sprang upwards through the small hole in roof.

Pressing his body against the rooftop he laid prostrate carefully surveying his surroundings, "She came from the east. The Celestial Star Guild must be put up to the east."

Employing his light-body arts Zhang Xiaolin sprang forth into the night, launching himself from roof to roof which soon began to fly beneath his feet as if he were soaring over grey clouds. The cool night breeze blew against his face.

The sensation of speed gave him a rush, a feeling of pure joy started to overtake him.

There were many different kinds of roofs, underneath them the lives of many different kinds of people. But who's life could be more colorful, more exciting than his?

All was still between the sky and earth; the lanterns in most courtyards had already been extinguished. As he sped through the night sky every so often he would hear the sound of a crying infant, or the delight filled laughter of a husband and wife...

Besides such joyous sounds, one would be hard pressed not to also hear the bitter yelling of a couple fighting; the wild tussle of a cat catching a mouse, or the clinking sound of the cups of men at drink accompanied by the crisp sound of a game of dice at play.

In the depths of night with the wind at his back soaring from roof to roof—to Zhang Xiaolin nothing could replace such euphoric heights; such a sensation of superiority.

He very much loved this feeling.

Before long he noticed a brightly lit courtyard below. In an unlit corner there looked to be the shadow of a man and his blade lying in wait.

Zhang Xiaolin came to a stop ducking down, "I fear this is the place," he muttered to himself.

He hid himself behind the ridge of the roof, observing for some time.

A man stepped out from the house, spitting in the courtyard he asked, "Third Sister still yet to return?"

"I have not seen her," replied the man hiding in the dark corner.

Stretching out his hips he continued, "Strange, could something have happened to her?"

"Third Sister Feng is sharp-witted and vigilant, no harm could come to her," came a response from inside the house.

Without warning Zhang Xiaolin hurled the willow leaf saber towards them, "Your Third Sister has fallen into our hands, lets see what you do about it!" he yelled.

'Thud' came the sound of the saber as it sunk straight into the door.

A man suddenly darted out of the house, like a sword shot from a bow. He was dressed in tight black attire, the sword grasped in his hand glimmered a jade-like green.

Such quick movements startled Zhang Xiaolin, "His skills are greater than 'Seven Star Soul Seizer' Zuo Youzheng," he thought in amazement, "How could Celestial Star Guild have a martial artist of this caliber?"

As light as smoke Zhang Xiaolin leapt off the ridge of the roof in flight, the man in black chased closely behind.

He purposely brought his speed down chancing a backwards glance. Under the moonlight the man in black's face looked like that of the dead, his piercing eyes were glowing bright, more frightening than the glimmering light off his blade.

Zhang Xiaolin came to a halt as the man charged towards him. A light flashed from the man's dancing sword accompanied by 'shua shua shua', the sound of three sword strikes pulled off instantaneously. All three just missing Zhang Xiaolin.

Not only were these three strikes brutal and swift, each point of strike was aimed to deliver severe bodily harm. His sword skills may yet to have reached the peak of perfection, but the level of anger, aggression, and lethality behind each attack was nearly unmatched in the Martial Society of River and Lake. With each strike his eyes lit up in a beast-like ferocity, as if his greatest passion in life was to kill; killing was his entire purpose for living.

While wielding the sword, this man's stance was also exceedingly unique. From the elbow down it seemed as if nothing moved except for his wrist—exerting a force with each thrust.

He never expended more energy than completely necessary.

A thought suddenly popped into Zhang Xiaolin's head as he watched this man—his morbid face and distinct sword stance. He thought of a name.

□ □ □

The man in black continued his clever onslaught of attacks—wrist waving and rotating—flashes of light dancing from his sword like

fireworks as he stabbed onwards. His movements so swift they were near impossible to see through.

In the blink of an eye he had struck forth thirteen times as Zhang Xiaolin fled. They had already vaulted over four roof ridges; the dancing sword chasing him from behind like a poisonous snake trying to ensnare its victim, yet however fast it strike, it had still yet to touch even his clothing.

The man in black' s sword technique was faster than lightning, but so was Zhang Xiaolin.

Slashing for the fourteenth time the sword came to an abrupt stop an inch in front of Zhang Xiaolin' s throat halting him in his tracks. Although each strike came fast and ferocious, the man in black was still in complete control of his movements. The sword rested completely still, nary a single tremor in the blade. The two men stood face to face as if frozen in mid air.

A strange demonic light shot out from the man' s dark green eyes as he spoke one word at a time. "You are not a member of the Red Palm School."

His voice was bizarre and distinct. It sounded cold, deep, raspy, and short as if not coming from the throat of a human. Although it was deep his voice resonated with a sharpness that could pierce straight through the heart with every last word leaving an impression impossible to forget.

"How do you know I' m not from the Red Palm School?"

"None of them can dodge my thirteen strikes," replied the man.

"I assume you' re not from the Celestial Star Guild either," smiled Zhang Xiaolin.

"True"

In the midst of answering the sword suddenly plunged forward towards his throat.

The thrust was unbelievably fast. Not a chance in the world one could evade such a strike from an inch away.

However, just before the man thrust forth with his sword, Zhang Xiaolin had already shifted back three inches in anticipation, avoiding it completely. Although the man wished to pierce his throat straight and through, Zhang Xiaolin took no offense. On the contrary he continued to smile. "Since you' re not from the Celestial Star Guild and I' m not a member of the Red Palm School, you and I are merely strangers in passing. Why do you wish to kill me?"

Before Zhang Xiaolin had even spoken thirty-six words—quickly at that—the man in black had already struck forth another thirty-six times; his sword more violent, more lethal than before.

This man was never one to enjoy talking. Usually before having a chance to speak his sword in hand would already have given the most succinct of responses.

Death! The most frequent answer it gave to others.

“What a swift sword technique, what lethal skill with a blade.

‘*The Fastest Sword in the Central Plains*’ a decidedly well deserved name…” thought Zhang Xiaolin to himself.

“The Unseen Sword Soul Seeker, Red Dot of the Central Plains,” grinned Zhang Xiaolin.

The man gave no response, yet continued his onslaught of thirty-six strike attacks.

Zhang Xiaolin still offered no counter, only a smile coupled with evasive moves. “If one is seeking an assassin and reaches out to Red Dot of the Central Plains,” he stated, “Rumors from River and Lake say so long as the price is high enough, even if the target is a friend of flesh and blood, you Red Dot, will still strike them down. Is this true?”

Red Dot stared coldly, “I have no friends to kill!”

Before finishing his response, he began his third round of thirty-six strikes.

Face still awash with a faint grin, Zhang Xiaolin couldn’t help but heave a sigh. “For a considerable time now I’ve heard many a different story concerning you. It’s unfortunate you’re unwilling to speak, otherwise I’d be delighted to have a word with you. It’d be much more interesting than brandishing our swords.”

Red Dot’s sword once again came to a sudden halt as his eyes instantly fixated on Zhang Xiaolin in awe. A ghastly set of white teeth emerged as his lips twisted into a smile. “The Master Thief revels in emotions, leaving his trace under the moon’s glow—You’re Chu Liuxiang!”

This time it was Zhang Xiaolin’s turn for a shock. “Who are you calling Chu Liuxiang?” he replied nearly speechless.

“You’ve not once tried to counter under the pressure of my one hundred and forty-four assassinating strikes, yet still your smile lingers. If not the Master Thief Chu Liuxiang, is there another in this world who could pull off such a feat?”

Zhang Xiaolin let out a great laugh. "Perhaps you are right. I certainly don't like using martial force or spilling blood in fight. Out of all the things we as humans could do, these are the stupidest."

A glimmer flashed across Red Dot's eyes. "You've never killed anyone?"

"You do not believe me?"

"If you've never killed how could you comprehend the joys of killing?"

"You've never *been* killed, in that sense how could you know the pain of being killed. If one can only build joy on the pain of others, well then they are a rather useless person," said Zhang Xiaolin.

Once more sparks of rage erupted from Red Dot's eyes.

"Red Dot, get on with it! Why do you not attack?" came an unexpected shout from afar before Red Dot could answer.

As it turned out, some members of the Celestial Star Guild had just caught up to them; four cowered off in the distance. Only one staunchly built fellow dressed in embroidered robes had leapt up on to the spine of the roof they shared. "We have paid for you to come here but not for you to chit chat with others," he chastised him stomping his foot down.

Red Dot paid him no heed, not even bothering a glance. Zhang Xiaolin however turned towards him flashing a smile. "From the looks of his sword skills I wonder how much your mightiness has paid for such a swordsman as he."

The large fellow returned him a cunning grin. "I'm beginning to suspect the two taels of silver was far too high a cost. Others talked of Red Dot's amazing feats, I'm stunned to find he's merely a man who dares not a single attack, a coward"

Just as the word 'coward' escaped his lips the flash of a sword lit up his face. Before the brute could even utter a cry he toppled over onto the roof; a hole suddenly appearing in his throat as a drop of fresh red blood secreted outwards from deep within the wound.

A single Red Dot of blood.

Beneath the star lit sky Zhang Xiaolin could just make out the man's expression—a face twisted in agony as soybean-sized beads of sweat began to drip down his head. Try as he might he was unable to vocalize a single sound other than the panting of a wild beast.

Red Dot was truly a fantastic swordsman. Even when killing he wasted not a single ounce of energy, his strikes connecting on the most lethal of locale for a killing blow. His sword loathed to thrust even a half-centimeter more than necessary.

Red Dot slowly lowered his weapon. A single drop of blood rolled off the tip as he stared downwards at it not lifting his head. "Of the living, no one can call me a coward," he slowly declared.

As the sound of beastly panting gradually ceased, the rest of the Celestial Star Guild members had turned a sick pale color.

Zhang Xiaolin tilted his head up towards the sky letting out an extended sigh. "An astounding killer barely spilling any blood, merely a single red dot beneath his sword."

He pulled out a silk cloth, white as snow, gently covering the dead man's face.

As Zhang Xiaolin was tending to the man, the other Celestial Star Guild members began expressing their displeasure in chorus. "Red Dot, you... you so often talk of justice, but today how could you... today..."

"I sell my *sword* for hire, not my *dignity*," shouted Red Dot coldly silencing them on the spot. "If anyone insults my dignity, death is the price to pay."

One of the disciples roared out in anger. "We hired you to kill for us, why do you still dare not attack *him*?"

Red Dot glanced over at Zhang Xiaolin. "You hired me to handle the Red Palm School. This man is not of the Red Palm School," he replied turning to leave.

A light 'clang' could be heard as he sheathed his sword and leapt off the roof ridge stalking off into the distance.

Both shocked and irate, one of the Celestial Star Guild members abruptly shouted, "*This* is the man in question, the one who was with Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit this evening. *He's* the one Third Sister sought out."

"Precisely so, and if you want to get her back at this moment you may want to try the Court of Elation," he grinned.

Before he finished speaking Zhang Xiaolin had already leapt away in flight shouting back at the men. By the time the Celestial Star Guild members had rushed over, he was over one hundred feet away.

□ □ □

Fifteen exquisite, copper lamps were cleverly stacked into the shape of a pagoda, and covered by a large lampshade forming a pillar of light.

The oddly shaped lamp tower hung over the large, green cloth-covered gambling table. At this moment however, Leng had converted the table to a torture platform.

Leng had the young woman tightly bound to the table. The intense blaze of light from the lamp pagoda shone directly on her pale, yet beautiful face.

Her eyes stared ahead, opened wide with dilated pupils. Her mind had been completely broken. She was in a detached state of bewilderment, incessantly muttering to herself, “My surname is Shen, my name is Shangu… My surname is Shen, my name is Shangu… I am a member of the Celestial Star Guild… I am a member of the Celestial Star Guild…”

Leng the Cold Autumn Spirit sat in the large chair at the head of the gambling table turned torture platform. His face was blank, expressionless. Only in his eyes could one read the glint of pleasure he got from such cruelty.

Zhang Xiaolin walked in shaking his head with a sigh, “It seems this cunning vixen has already turned a sheep. Has she told you everything?”

“Women who appear to be outwardly strong tend to be incredibly weak willed. If someone wants a woman to keep any secret for them they are certainly an idiot,” callously replied The Cold Autumn Spirit.

“This adventurous kind of affair in truth is not suited for women,” remarked Zhang letting out a sigh. “In the kitchen or next to the cradle is where they ought to be. It’s too bad the smarter the woman the less they understand this principle.”