

**LESSONS IN ENGAGEMENT FROM A MALAY CLASSIC:
THE TRANSLATION OF *SYAIR SITI ZUBAIDAH PERANG
CHINA***

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Poetry has always played an important role in sustaining languages, as well as in conveying both the "outward" or literal and the "inward" or hidden meaning of words. The classic poem from the oral tradition of the Malay world, Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China, conveys the nature of relationships between different cultures and traditions. One aspect of this relationship is the apparent conflict and war between the people of Kembayat Negara (or Malay-Muslims) and those of China (the Chinese tradition). However, in the process of translation of the text from Malay to English, a harmonious engagement between the Malay and the Chinese cultures has been unravelled. The contention is that through a hermeneutical reading of the text, and through observation of the exacting demands of literary translation, rich reflections of acceptance of "the other" are found, at a level that might otherwise have remained hidden. By revealing the meanings beyond the apparent theme of war and conflict, this paper offers a model for the translation of classical Malay poetry.

Keywords: Malay classics, literary translation, hermeneutics, engagement, tolerance

INTRODUCTION

The important role of poetry in the sustainability of language is well acknowledged. Poetic expression has the power and the vigour to convey not only a specific message, but also the essential nature of things. This paper will consider the nature of the relationship existing between two different cultures of the past, from a renowned 19th century

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syair or classic poem from the Malay world, *Syair Siti Zubaidah Perang China* (Ballad of Siti Zubaidah at War with China). As the title indicates, there existed a relationship of conflict and war between the people of Kembayat Negara (of the Malay-Muslim cultural tradition) and those of China (of the Chinese cultural tradition).

Based on a current work-in-progress on translation of this text, however, it is the contention of this writer that the title of the *Syair* (henceforth SSZPC) belies the true essence of the work, and the real sentiments of the Malay poet. In the process of translation, a harmonious Malay worldview of the Chinese, which goes beyond the title and a surface reading of the text, has been unravelled. Through a hermeneutical reading of the original text, and conformance and observance of the exacting demands of literary translation, rich reflections of acceptance of "the other" have emerged from the original Malay text at a level that might otherwise have remained hidden. It is crucial that the element of engagement between the cultures in the original text be sustained and preserved in the translated English version. To this end, an attempt will be made to unveil and reveal the "hidden" meanings that have emerged from beyond the apparent theme of war and conflict.

Outline

I will begin with a brief introduction to the text, followed by an explanation of the bases on which the text is interpreted. In this context, I will argue for my position on engagement with the other, which is counter-posed to the commonly-held advocacy for "tolerance" of the other. Hence the title of my paper reflects this position for engagement and encounter. To evidence and support my position, I will present illustrations of engagement with "the other" from the text and a discussion of their possible translations. In this section, which constitutes the core of the paper, I point out essential or "hidden" facets of engagement between two cultures. In the final section, based on the observance of the examples, I will draw certain conclusions from the claims made about the hermeneutical basis of understanding and translating SSZPC, in relation to the Malay engagement with the other.

Objective

The paper has two main objectives, viz: to uncover "secrets" of harmony and engagement between two different cultural traditions of the past; and to offer a model for translating classical Malay poetry, by demonstrating the intricacy and depth of literary translation in retaining the essence of this engagement. The data consists of examples from my own attempts to translate the work, which was commissioned by the National Institute of Translation Malaysia (ITNM). Comprised of some 7,000 verses the original text is being translated for the first time from Malay into English. The excerpts presented are a first draft, however, and it is indeed acknowledged that to do justice to the original Malay classic, much fine-tuning will be required.

THE ORIGINAL WORK: SSZPC

SSZPC, appreciated as an exceptional work of Malay literature, originated from the Malay oral tradition. The first, hand-written manuscript was produced in Jawi script early in the 19th century, and typical of traditional works, produced anonymously. Subsequently there were many versions transliterated into Roman script. The work is in the genre of a ballad or *syair*, composed of rhyming quatrains and verses of four or six lines that resemble the Malay *pantun*. The language, typical of classical Malay poetry, has "powerful oral and aural impressions" (Muhammad Haji Salleh, 1991). The foregoing attributes, and its status of excellence in the Malay world, pose certain challenges to its translation, such as in retention of the rhyming scheme, preservation of the musicality of the language, and most importantly, the subtext that emerges from a scrutiny of the language of the original.

The Story of SSZPC

The story of SSZPC is focused on Siti Zubaidah and her husband, on the loyal subjects of Kembayat Negara, and "others", primarily the Chinese. The setting is Kembayat Negara somewhere in the Malay world, as well as China, between the 14th–18th centuries. This period witnessed a rich exchange of trade and culture in the Nusantara region. The male protagonist, Sultan Zainal Abidin (henceforth ZA), who is the son of the King of Kembayat, voyages forth and lands on a beautiful island. Here

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he meets Siti Zubaidah, the enchantingly lovely daughter of a religious teacher. Falling in love with her at first sight he marries her and takes her back with him to Kembayat Negara. Meanwhile in Kembayat Negara, a trade dispute arises between a Chinese junk-ship owner and a local merchant. The matter is brought before the King, who, finding the junk owner at fault, issues a decree for the junk to be burnt and the crew imprisoned. The ship owner manages to escape and on returning home, reports this to the King of China. The King retaliates by sending his seven princesses to wage war on Kembayat Negara. In the process, the Chinese kidnap ZA and take him prisoner to China, and they keep him and his followers in a poisoned well.

When news of her husband reaches Siti Zubaidah, she disguises as a man and sets out to rescue him. After much trial and tribulation, Siti Zubaidah succeeds in rescuing ZA from his captors. Meanwhile, one of the Chinese princesses, the beautiful Kilan Cahaya, falls in love with ZA. Siti Zubaidah grants permission to ZA to marry, and together they return to Kembayat Negara.

The Text, the Subtext and the Metatext

Fictional realities of the text reflect certain literary/cultural/historical realities of a particular time and place. Specifically, SSZPC reflects the Malay-Muslim world in a trade relationship with "the other", in this case, the Chinese cultural and religious traditions. This is the metatext, denoting a nature of a higher order or more fundamental kind that influences and shapes the text, or lower order. Here the metatext influences the Malay worldview which reveals consonances, affinities, and parallels between the different traditions. This affinity or engagement is seen to exist spontaneously and experientially, rather than purely for a social, political or monetary agenda, as may be expected. By giving credence and recognition to this worldview, the fullness of text, beyond the apparent conflict and war, comes to light.

What I am claiming for SSZPC is that – at the core of the work – the events and the elements depicted are in fact indicative of the shared cultural universe that shaped and defined the nature of the interaction of the Malays with "the other". In particular, the "shared universe" here refers to the ancient culture of chivalry and honour in conflict. This culture displays interaction on a basis of engagement, not tolerance,

between two different human societies/environments, as will be explicated and exemplified in the following paragraphs.

Tolerance vs. Engagement

The word "tolerance" has been widely touted as the answer to conflicting cultural religious and differences. If the anticipated result of tolerance is harmony, then such an expectation is fundamentally flawed. Therefore I would soundly dispute the applicability of tolerance. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of the verb, to "tolerate" is as follows: "Endure or bear (pain or hardship)". The negativity attached to this understanding in the context of human relations in the present globalised world is self-evident. In a different sense, to tolerate means "to allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of (esp. a particular religion) without authoritative interference". While this appears to be a more neutral, even conducive stance, the flaw lies in the fact that it involves no understanding or interest at the level of the individual. Rather, the placing of responsibility squarely on authorities, and the authorities allowing a certain situation to exist. For the individual, the approach implies endurance of an inconvenient fact (or), which is precisely that of cultural diversity. Further definitions: "Treat with forbearance; find endurable, adopt a liberal attitude towards; accept without protest" are similarly flawed and inadequate. The freedom of a "liberal attitude", or the apathy of "without protest" do not guarantee the far-reaching demands of responsibility for, and engagement in, a situation, apart from being stoical in acceptance. Thus, it may be said that on the whole, tolerance may be rejected because it is an attitude that falls far short of requirements. It is ineffective in overcoming deep-seated and grave challenges of diversity between different cultural and religious communities of the world, especially in the context of globalisation.

On the other hand, if one looks to "engagement" and "encounter", the challenges of human diversity may not only be adequately met, but may also yield a fruitful and harmonious acceptance. Engagement and encounter involve a number of deeply ingrained principles such as the aprioristic "acceptance" of human diversity, the "conviction" that diversity is a purposeful act of pre-ordained Divine Will, and the "celebration" of diversity by recognising and highlighting differences as well as shared values. Thus both diversities and commonalities of

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humanity may be accommodated harmoniously, not by passive toleration, or apathy, but by actively engaging, dynamically encountering, and positively relating with other cultures and religions. It does not mean the homogenising of cultures, but on the contrary, the recognition and maintenance of heterogeneity, multi-culturalism and plurality (Lalita Sinha, 2008: 100). Thus, the richness of individual cultures may be shared and understood *on their own terms* rather than by being held up to designated templates and norms of one's own. This can engender a meaningful dialogue, sensitise one's sense of human relatedness and interdependence, and heighten the highly-desired awareness of "the self" in "the other". In this regard, literary texts, particularly those of an uncontrived, traditional worldview that directly nourish the mind and imagination, are indeed catalysts in nurturing understanding and harmony (Md. Salleh Yaapar, 2007: 4). On the other hand, an approach of tolerance becomes intimately associated with agendas—social, political, economic, religious, national, and international.

A Hermeneutical Interpretation

The interpretation of the text of SSZPC is informed by general principles of Hermeneutics in view of its pertinence to enquiry of an interdisciplinary character. Hermeneutics is associated with "revealing the hidden" (Preminger and Brogan, 1993), particularly in the interpretation of works of Divine origin. Of particular interest with regard to "hidden" meaning is that meaning exists as an anteriority in the text, that is, it is not that meaning is behind the text, i.e. read into or ascribed to something, but rather, what is *in front of a text*. Stated differently, the maxim "seeing is believing" may be turned on its head as "believing is seeing" in this context. Only if one believes is the meaning visible. This belief is not arbitrary or blind, but based on specific factors, as follows.

In the hermeneutical view, texts entail a specific context determined by a "historical tradition," or "milieu" or "worldview," and situated in a particular time and space. This context, or milieu, constitutes the historicity of the text. As the author's act of composing a work is his construction of the human reality situated in a particular context, his text should therefore be understood through its historicity, rather than as an autonomous entity.

In this understanding, it is important to the process of interpreting or translating a text, to be aware that the author and text originate from cultures or traditions, or, in Gadamer's terms, "horizons" that are different from readers' horizons. Awareness of this difference invariably influences and colours the understanding of the interpreter or reader. As Gadamer points out, the text must be expounded for contemporary readers so that they are placed in a position to experience the original impact of the story. What results is a recognition of two important, yet *different* horizons. In this process, a dialogue between ancient text and contemporary reader ensues. The initial concerns must be with the external features of the text and the context in which it was placed. Meaning can be discovered through dedicated effort by the interpreter to reach back and read the text in its original context and settings. Yet, as Gadamer points out, our understanding is in some sense limited. Consequently, there has to occur a "fusion of horizons," in order for understanding to take place. This is a process whereby the horizons of the text are merged and adjusted with the horizons of the reader. According to Ricoeur (in Quito, 1990), this process is underpinned by *aneignung* or appropriation, meaning "genuinely to make one's own what is initially alien".

It is equally important to be aware that the subject matter of the text is answering a specific question as well as responding to a particular demand. Therefore, rather than attempt an "objective" interpretation, it is the responsibility of the interpreter first to reconstruct the question that the text is answering, and subsequently, to engage in a dialogue about it. On this basis, a "text" is not only what is visible in print but also includes a subtext and innate meaning, a metatext and milieu, expressed in some form or other, through language.

Language is the bridge, or conveyor of meaning. It allows us not only to understand a particular experience, but also the world in which it occurs. In this connection, Gadamer has argued that even from the world of our own language we can grasp the world of another language. If this principle of hermeneutics is applied to the process of translation, it may fulfil conditions sufficiently for a translation to be considered a true representation of the original work (Lalita Sinha, 2008b). In this regard, the demands of literary translation sensitise the translator to the "guiding spirit" of the text in question. This is elaborated in the following paragraphs.

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The Approach of Literary Translation

In close accord with the hermeneutical approach, the views of influential scholars of Translation Studies guide and inform the translation of the original text, in this case, from the original Malay text of SSZPC, into English. Similar to the principle of appropriation in hermeneutics, and the call for engagement between cultures, Bassnett (1983) sees literary translation as a discipline that focuses its attention on the issue of difference and the appropriation between cultures. Besides, in the words of Umberto Eco (n.d.), "one could say that a good translation" is not concerned with the denotation but with the connotation of words...in the translation of poetry, one often aims at *rewriting*, as in accepting the challenge of the original text so as to recreate it in another form and another substance, trying to keep faith, not with the letter, but with the 'guiding spirit' of the text". In this regard, recreation of the original text in keeping with the connotation and the spirit of the text suggests a revealing and unveiling of the inner meaning, similar to the methodology of hermeneutics. In as much as conveying the beauty of a work of art is concerned, according to Edith Hamilton (1867–1963), "There are few efforts more conducive to humility than that of the translator trying to communicate an incommunicable beauty. Yet, unless we do try, something unique and never surpassed will cease to exist except in the libraries of a few inquisitive book lovers".

Finally, I am convinced that if one has a love for the art of translation, and a desire to preserve the spirit of the original text, the maxim, "Love will find a way" may well be reworded thus: "Love will find a way... and so will a committed translator". In other words, the overriding intention of recreating the original text into another language is driven by a love for it. The Malay maxim: *tak kenal, maka tak cinta* (not to know something, therefore not to love it) appropriately encapsulates this situation. If one can understand this work, one can love it. Thereby this great Malay work, till date of obscure significance in the arena of world literature, will have an opportunity to be understood and appreciated in a global language, English.

TRANSLATING THE TEXT AND THE SUBTEXT

This section of the paper presents examples from the original Malay text of SSZPC to highlight both the external meaning in the text, and the inner aspects, or subtext, of the interaction between the Malay-Muslims and the Chinese. It also proffers my attempts to retain these aspects in English in translation. The discussion will illustrate that there are two dimensions to the interpretation of the portrayal in the original text. The examples have been organised according to three different themes to facilitate illustration and discussion. These themes, firstly, conflict with the other, secondly, conciliation, and thirdly, commendation, may be seen as progressive levels of engagement, namely, the active level, the dynamic level, and the positive level. However, it should be noted that each of these levels may not be mutually exclusive, and in fact tend to overlap. For example, in conflict, there are traces of conciliation; or in conciliation, commendation is discernible.

Conflict, Confrontation and War

The extract below is an illustration of the cause of the conflict in SSZPC. It depicts the falling out of the Chinese junk ship owner and the Malay merchant. The merchant accuses the ship owner of defaulting in their original agreement, by selling off the goods that were originally promised to him. This angers the ship owner:

Example 1

*Cincu wangkang terlalu marah,
tubuh gema(n)tar mukanya merah,
"Funi Cokong! Pigilah nyah!
Dagangan aku habislah sudah".*

The owner of the junk ship, outraged was he,
his body trembling, face as red as could be,
*"Funi Cokong! Be gone with thee!
All my goods I've traded for a fee."*

(p. 22)

In the verbal or articulated expressions, there is apparently anger on the part of the Chinese junk ship owner, indicated by his swear words, "*funi cokong*". Furthermore, his body language conveys extreme anger: he is red-faced and trembling. This shows apparent discord between the Malay and the Chinese characters. The translation has attempted to retain this information in both cases, in the second line.

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However, there is more information beyond conflict there, that is actually apparent: there is engagement. The narrator/writer has provided cultural information about the Chinese by using Chinese-specific terms: *cincu wangkang* (Chinese junk ship owner), the Chinese swear words, the phonetically altered term, *pigilah* (from *pergi* ["go away"] + *lah* [intensifier] meaning "get lost"). This produces a colloquial or dialectal register that is different from the register of the narrative register in the verse. By highlighting a different (foreign or alien) way of speaking, the poet indicates recognition and acknowledgment of the presence of the other. The verbal distinction made between the self (the narrator) and the other (the Chinese articulation) is a recognition of plurality and heterogeneity. Thus by adapting and adopting the other, the text celebrates diversity. If one reverts to the issue raised earlier, that is, if it tries to address the issue of what question the text is answering, this hermeneutical reading allows the possibility that beyond the apparent conflict, the text is trying to display engagement.

Subsequently, it turns out that judgment is passed against the Chinese junk ship owner and the King of Kembayat issues a decree to seize his goods, and burn his ship. In the following extract, the junk owner bemoans his fate:

Example 2

*Seraya berkata, "Wahai Cengkoa,
ayuhai tuk pekong tolonglah goa,
satu pun tidak salah dibawa,
sekarang sudah dapat kecewa."*

"Ah *Cengkoa*", the junk captain complained,
"Help me, god *Tuk Pekong*", he exclaimed,
"not a single fault, nothing wrongly gained,
only disappointment is all that I've obtained."

(p. 25)

Undoubtedly, in this instance the Chinese captain is a victim of circumstances that are against him. The decree may rightly be interpreted as harsh, and the Malay King as being biased against the Chinese foreigner. In brief it apparently represents a negative form of interaction.

Having said that however, information which constitutes, again, linguistic appropriation of the Chinese culture merits attention: references in the captain's supplications to the Chinese gods, *Cengkoa*, and *Tuk Pekong*, as well as the appropriation of the Chinese term *goa*

(rather than the Malay term *aku* or *saya* to refer to the self). In this instance too (as in Example 1), recognition is accorded to plurality and heterogeneity. Furthermore, the narrator gives voice to suggestion of wrong-doing towards the Chinese captain. The Chinese point of view is clearly forwarded: he has done no wrong. This shows a willingness on the part of the narrator to accommodate the voice of the other. All of these factors point to engagement: differences are understood and possibilities of mistakes are accepted. In portraying the Chinese point of view, the narrator indicates that (s)he is amenable to self-reflection, and the possibility that an injustice has been committed against the other. Again it becomes evident that the text displays engagement with the other.

The foregoing examples show an innate engagement from verbal altercation. The following discussion turns to physical action in battle, to provide interesting insights. The scene at the battlefield, portraying hand-to-hand combat, and a particular type of conduct of the warriors, is a case in point. The following extract portrays two armies in battle, and warriors on each side as being on par with each other.

Example 3

*Kedua pihak sama berani,
banyak mati tidak terperi,
usir-mengusir ke sana sini,
manakala bertikam samalah mati.*

In bravery matched were the foes in action,
those who died too many to mention,
each pursuing the other in similar fashion,
a fight to the death, stabbing with a passion.

(p. 215)

What comes across clearly, apart from the combat and killing, is an ethical, in fact, honourable view of the combatants, regardless of whether they are the self or the other. The enemy is viewed not as a hated or feared entity, but as a worthy opponent. Thus, even though the depiction is of war between two nations, the likeness in bravery of two opposing forces, as in *sama berani* (equally brave), and significantly, the consequence of that is an honorable death, because the enemy is courageous. Thus, each side respects the other.

A hermeneutical reading of the attitude relates to the code of chivalry that prevailed among opposing factions in battle in ancient times. This code demanded civility, generosity and high honour. This element places

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the passage in its historical context, namely in the traditional or pre-modern setting. The recognition of the other is articulated in the following verse, in which the warrior princess Kilan Sura confronts the valiant prince ZA, who is hopelessly outnumbered:

Example 4

*Katanya, "Wahai Sultan Kembayat,
menyalahkan dia hendaklah ingat,
pedangku ini sangat berkilat,
gagah beranimu juga kulihat."*

"Hail Sultan of Kembayat", yet unfazed,
"who is at fault, remember to appraise,
just as my sword in the sun is ablaze,
by your dauntless courage am I amazed."

(p. 220)

What has been eloquently stated by Smith (1991) in a different context, precisely encapsulates the attitude in the above verse: "As in the Homeric age, warriors of opposing armies, recognizing each other, would exchange haughty compliments from their chariots, drink together, and even trade weapons before doing battle". More specific to the meta-text of SSZ, the attitude of Kilan Sura underscores exhortations of the Qur'an about the proper treatment of prisoners of war: *O Messenger, say to those who are captives in your hands: "If Allah findeth any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful."* (8: 70). Thus, in the context of its culture and religion, it is possible to recognise that the poet has deployed the same concept to motivate not only the victorious, but also the vanquished who faces overwhelming odds.

Negotiation and Conciliation

The following verse shows an attempt to settle the matter of the trade disagreement through royal arbitration.

Example 5

*Kata saudagar, "Jangan demikian,
nakhoda wangkang naik sekalian,
mari menghadap Yang di Pertuan,
sama menanti datang kemudian,
biarlah kita dia bicarakan,
salah dan benar supaya dihukumkan."*

"Don't be like that", the merchant said,
"junk captain, let us all go up instead,
take this matter to the king, unafraid,
together to wait for His Highness' aid,
a trial to conduct on this matter of trade,
right or wrong, judgement will be made."

(p. 23)

Some valid bases of recognising complementarity and engagement may be observed here. It was stated earlier that complementarity is constituted of active, positive and dynamic elements in interaction. Let us observe this example for these elements. The suggestion on the part of the Malay merchant, and a ready compliance on the part of the Chinese junk-captain, to resolve their differences constitutes an "active" element. The conciliatory position of both sides is heightened by the expressions, *sama* (together), and *kita* (we), which reinforce the interaction as "positive", indicated by the fact that both are equally willing to subject themselves to trial and judgment over who is right and wrong. This positive action is taken in the hope that it will change the situation for the better, indicating "dynamic" interaction. In this sense, the verse epitomises engagement and complementarity.

The following example exhibits genuine concern for another, and supports the point being made about engagement between self and other. As a result of the calamity that befalls the junk-captain, he is forced to return alone to his homeland under dire circumstances. The following extract portrays this return:

Example 6

*Dengan kudrat Tuhan Subhana,
sampailah ia ke negeri China,
terus masuk menghadap rajanya,
dipersembahkan segala hal ehwalnya,
Raja Kembayat membakar wangkangnya,
cincu sudah dipenjarakannya.*

Since it was His will, praise be to God,
at last on Chinese soil he finally trod,
directly meeting the king on his fate abroad,
presenting all matters of treatment flawed,
Kembayat's royal decree to burn and maraud,
and the captain's imprisonment for fraud.

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Obviously, this is a situation of potential conflict. In fact, it actually leads to war between the Chinese and the Malays. Yet, there is a subtle voice of goodwill: in the first line, firstly it resembles a prayer or a petition (on the part of the narrator), on behalf of the Chinese captain. The narrator applies a Malay-Muslim formulaic utterance, *Dengan kudrat Tuhan Subhana*. The word *subhana* is an abbreviation of the formulaic expression, *subhana wa taala* (or SWT), meaning "by Allah, Most Exalted in He." The application of this utterance to the petition on behalf of the junk-captain exhibits an extension of the self to the other. It is as if to say that, the God that is praised by the Muslim narrator is the same God that saves the life of this non-Muslim Chinese human being. Secondly, the narrator again gives voice to the Chinese character in presenting facts about the incident, and of "treatment flawed". In other words, the narrator provides both sides of the story. It may be noted that had the consideration of the narrator been only for the self, the voice of the other need not have been portrayed.

The ultimate honour and esteem accorded to the "enemy" against whom Siti Zubaidah had initially waged war, is the willingness with which she allows the Chinese princess, Kilan Cahaya, who is in love with her husband, to marry him.

Example 7

<i>Memberikan suaminya terlalu rela, sedikit tidak berhati cela, terlalu suka hatinya pula, kerana besar mendapat pahala.</i>	To permit her husband was she entirely willing, no hurt in her heart, only joy was she feeling, her heart was full, great happiness brimming, with thoughts of heavenly reward fulfilling.
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(p. 357)

Although Siti Zubaidah's motivations have puzzled scholars and drawn criticism from a feminist viewpoint, she appears to have transcended self-interests. Perhaps it is a gesture of magnanimity and generosity to the other. From a religious context, Islam allows polygamy, subject to fulfilment of certain conditions. From the sentiments of Siti Zubaidah in empathising with Kilan Cahaya, it may be argued that in willingly doing a good deed for the love-lorn princess, she derives joy and "thoughts of heavenly reward". This echoes the Qur'anic verse: *If there is any good (done), He doubles it, and gives from his own presence a great reward* (4: 40).

Apparently, as the title and the contents of SSZPC indicate there is opposition and war between the Malay and the Chinese people. However, as the examples so far have demonstrated, beyond the enmity, there was mutual esteem. Understanding and recognising this element of reciprocity between cultures of the past, provides us with valuable lessons in interaction and engagement with the other, as well as a sound basis for interpreting and translating classical poetry.

Praise and Honour

In China, in light of the grave conditions that have arisen in Malay-Chinese relationships, one may well expect swift and violent retaliation. This is indeed the case as we are told in the original Malay text. Yet, when it comes to a "close-up" portrayal of the "enemy", the description runs surprisingly contrary to expectations. In the following extract, the worldview of the other moves beyond a neutral or favourable view, to a superlative, favourable view of the other. With the expression "handsome beyond description", it is as if the narrator is intent on giving credit where it is due. The description of the Chinese king and his daughters (representative of a hostile force) conveys a Malay goodwill and magnanimity. Furthermore, it is not just the looks of the Chinese that are praised, but more importantly, the positive qualities, e.g. "well-bred" and "moderation". In this encounter and engagement with the other, there is no trace of negativity whatsoever.

Example 8

*Adapun raja Cina yang bahari,
puteranya tujuh orang puteri,
semuanya perempuan muda bestari,
baik parasnya sedang ugahari.*

The Chinese king, exceedingly handsome,
and all his daughters, royal princesses seven,
each one of them a well-bred young maiden,
faces delightful, yet tempered by moderation.

(p. 261)

Siti Zubaidah joins forces with a female companion from Yunan on the way to China in quest of her husband. They disguise as dancers, and attempt to get into the palace of the Chinese princesses to rescue her husband. If the former verse is an instance of positive portrayal of the Chinese, this instance is a positive portrayal of both the Malay and the Chinese characters. It is a verse in which the beauty of the traditional Malay dance, the *joget*, is highly admired by the Chinese princess:

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Example 9

*Kilan Johor pulak bermadah,
menarilah engkau joget yang indah,
dinar seribu sedialah sudah,
emas dan perak padaku mudah.*

Kilan Johor spoke then in rapturous praise,
do perform your exquisite joget dance as always,
for you, a thousand dinar have i raised,
silver and gold for your enchanting sways.

(p. 26)

Several literary devices are apparent here, in terms of semantics and imagery. First, the name of the character, Kilan Johar may be associated with the Malay word *kilan* (flash of remembrance of a person) or *kilau* (a radiant light), with is collocated with *Johar* (the planet Venus). Both support the image of a surpassingly beautiful and feminine woman. Secondly, the image of light is consistent with the imagery of silver and gold *dinar*, or gold currency, which is promised as payment to indicate the value and the unparalleled esteem in which the *joget* is held. Another point of note is that in appreciating the Malay *joget*, the Chinese princess is portrayed as someone of refined, artistic tastes. In this instance, the gift of giving (praise to the Malay dancer) is equal to the gift of receiving (praise for the Chinese princess).

The view of beauty mentioned earlier in the paper might be recalled in relation to a positive portrayal of the other. As mentioned, one of the functions of translation, in the words of Hamilton, is "to communicate an incommunicable beauty." It is well known that different cultures have different perceptions of beauty. However, in the Malay text, the beauty and majesty of the Chinese princess is easily detectable and recognisable between cultures. She is compared with elements of nature, as follows:

Example 10

*Kilan Jali puteri yang bijak,
senjatanya tembung emas dimasak,
keningnya seperti awan ditulis,
laksana bunga cempaka wilis,
parasnya elok sangat majlis,
anak rambutnya melentik wilis.*

The wise princess Kilan Jali in battle did forbear,
a seasoned gold mace her weapon of warfare,
her brows like painted clouds delicate and rare,
just like an emerald frangipani beyond compare,
beautiful was she, most exquisite and fair,
and curly were the ringlets of her dark, jade hair.

(p. 211)

The eyebrows of Princess Kilan Jali, likened to painted clouds, are evocative of the well-known traditional Chinese nature paintings of mountains enveloped in dream-like mist. There is an interesting use of

the Malay/Indonesian/Javanese word *wilis* here: one sense of the word refers to a colour – greenish-blue, or dark green; in another sense it refers to green jewel (*ratna wilis*); in a third, it is associated with an emerald (*wilis*) frangipani (*cempaka*). It is significant that the hair of the Chinese princess is described in a localised Malay floral image, the *cempaka*, which is an exceptional illustration of a cross-cultural appropriation of beauty, that is, the Chinese princess is extolled in Malay images of beauty. The last line, *anak rambutnya melentik wilis* (her beautiful curly ringlets) describing her hair also has a remarkable cross-cultural association. This element has been exploited in the translation: in keeping with the green colour and the imagery of jewels in previous lines, this line is translated as "curly were the ringlets of her dark jade hair." I would definitely associate this particular verse with the understanding of encounter/engagement, that is, to thrive *as a result of* differences, rather than as tolerance, to coexist *in spite of* differences. In this case, the result can only be mutual enrichment.

CONCLUSION

Various cultural, religious, geographical and historical settings that have influenced or formed the production of SSZPC, the foregoing hermeneutical approach has sought to discover the intended meaning, by reading the text against the metatext. On the basis of the examples and arguments forwarded, it is possible to say that the intention was to exhibit the innate accord and harmony that existed between the two different cultures of the past. Attempts at interpretation in consideration of the textual background can produce a relationship of dialogue and thereby identify and affirm the "originary" intentions of the text to be such.

The foregoing discussion of SSZPC has shown how words in the text lend themselves easily to the formation of a valid impression of affinity and engagement between the two cultures. The nature of this accord between two different cultural and belief systems, namely, the Chinese and the Malay-Muslim, is believed to be not incidental or accidental or even coincidental. Rather, because it is so persistent, it is seen as spontaneous and inherent to the worldview of the traditional Malay and Chinese societies. Thus, beyond diversity in traditions there is a unity in worldview. On this basis, this paper offers the present mode of

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translation as a suggested model for translation of classical Malay poetry.

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