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Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies: An Interview with Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek¹

Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (European Academy of Sciences and Arts)

Zhang Cha (Sichuan Normal University)

Abstract:

In this interview, Professor Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek discusses his personal and scholarly background and what he believes a comparative literature scholar ought to have training in. Further, Tötösy de Zepetnek comments on comparative literature and his theoretical framework “comparative cultural studies”. Tötösy de Zepetnek closes the interview with his thoughts about the notions of the “American Dream” and the “Chinese Dream” and his suggestion about how to improve comparative literature scholarship in China.

Keywords: comparative literature, digital humanities, literary canon, comparative cultural studies, the Chinese School of Comparative Literature

1 This article is a part of the Social Science Research Project of Sichuan Province “Interviews with World Celebrities of Comparative Literature”, funded by Sichuan Provincial Key Research Base of Comparative Literature (Project No. SC16E036).

Zhang (henceforth “Z”): Professor Tötösy de Zepetnek, I conduct this interview with you because you have been invited several times to teach at Sichuan University. Please allow me to start with regard to your background as a person and as a scholar.

Tötösy de Zepetnek (henceforth “T”): Indeed, I have been invited to Sichuan University three times: in 2013 as a guest professor and in 2014 and 2015 for the university’s summer program. I was born in Hungary in 1950 and left the country in 1964 because at that time (during the Soviet colonization of Hungary) “bourgeois” (i.e., “class alien”) people’s children were not allowed to attend high school. I attended high school in Germany and Austria and graduated in Switzerland. Following high school I worked in a fiber glass factory in Switzerland and then decided to leave Europe and immigrated to Canada where I completed my undergraduate and graduate education with a PhD in comparative literature at the University of Alberta in 1989. I taught at the University of Alberta until 2000 when we moved to the U.S. because my spouse Joanne, who has a PhD in neuroscience and pharmacology, received an offer in the pharmaceutical industry. Although I had a faculty appointment at Purdue University until my retirement in December 2016, I was also professor of media and communication studies at the University of Halle-Wittenberg (Germany) from 2002 to 2011, as well as had guest professorships in the U.S., Europe, India, Mainland China and Taiwan, etc. With regard to scholarship—and this has to do with my “cosmopolitan” and “migrant” upbringing and life—it is based on the use of several languages and an awareness of the benefits of “migration” resulting in familiarity with differences of culture, hence my natural affiliation with the “comparative.”

Z: You are an accomplished scholar in comparative literature and cultural studies and your list of publications² include more than two dozen single-authored and edited books and over 200 peer-reviewed articles in a variety of disciplines and fields of study in the humanities and social sciences. What would in your opinion be required to be a good scholar in general and in comparative literature in particular?

T: One matter I would insist on is that scholars of literature and culture in comparative literature (but also in the study of any literature) ought to be able to speak and read several languages. For example, in the U.S. most humanities scholars know at best one other language and this, in my opinion, is detrimental to scholarship. And the situation is similar in China where in the humanities including literary studies focus is more often than not on English only.

Z: It is interesting that one of your books appeared in Chinese. In 1997 Peking

2 <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/totosycv>.

University Press published your *Wenxue yanjiu de hefahua: yizhong xin shiyongzhu yi, zhengtihua he jingyanzhuyi wenxue yu wenhua yanjiu fangfa* (Legitimizing the Study of Literature: A New Pragmatism and the Systemic Approach to Literature and Culture, Trans. Jui-ch'i Ma). How did the book come about?

T: The book was the result of having been invited to Peking University as a guest professor in 1995 and 1996 (three months each) and I put the book together based on lectures I delivered there to graduate students. Some of the material in the book is available in English in my 1998 book, *Comparative Literature: Theory, Method, Application*³.

Z: In addition to comparative literature and cultural studies, you taught and published in diverse fields including comparative media and communication studies, postcolonial studies, (im)migration and ethnic minority studies, digital humanities, film and literature, audience studies, European, US-American, and Canadian cultures and literatures, history, and bibliography. I am particularly interested in canon formation because you often discuss the concept of the literary canon. What are the criteria for a literary canon?

T: There is no single canon, but several canons and my take on this is that, in principle, canon formation is “cumulative.” The theory of cumulative canon formation consists of theoretical, as well as methodologically operational and functional aspects which prescribe the necessity of studying multiple and combined factors of the literary system in order to arrive at an understanding of canon formation. In other words, the “cumulative” factor consists of the combination of systemic categories, an innovative definition of the canon and canonicity and *catacaustics* (my term), while the operational and functional postulate must be satisfied by elements of observation (empirical data) and application. Among other factors such as critics’ and scholars’ work when “bringing” a text to attention, one of the most important components of cumulative canon formation consists of the situation, mechanisms, status and altogether systemic impact of readership.

Z: You propose in your framework of “comparative cultural studies” — a field of study you have been developing since the early 1990s—that the methodology of the systemic and empirical approach understood as “contextual” ought to include ethics. Would you please give us a brief explanation of your idea?

T: Indeed, ethics in its widest definition is a concern of mine when doing work in literary and cultural scholarship. Perhaps the quickest way to explain is to quote from my 1999 article “From Comparative Literature Today toward Comparative

3 Rodopi; the book is available online in the *Library Series of CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* at <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/totosycomparativeliterature1998>.

The second principle of comparative cultural studies is the theoretical as well as methodological postulate to move and to dialogue between cultures, languages, literatures, and disciplines. This is a crucial aspect of the framework, the approach as a whole, and its methodology. In other words, attention to other cultures—that is, the comparative perspective—is a basic and founding element and factor of the framework. The claim of emotional and intellectual primacy and subsequent institutional power of national cultures is untenable in this perspective. In turn, the built-in notions of exclusion and self-referentiality of single culture study and their result of rigidly defined disciplinary boundaries are notions against which comparative cultural studies offers an alternative as well as a parallel field of study. This inclusion extends to all Other, all marginal, minority, border, and peripheral and it encompasses both form and substance. However, attention must be paid of the “how” of any inclusionary approach, attestation, methodology, and ideology so as not to repeat the mistakes of Eurocentrism and “universalization” from a “superior” Eurocentric point of view. Dialogue is the only solution (Tötösy de Zepetnek 1999: 12).

The notion and application of ethics based on “dialogue” has also practical reasons, and the current migration crisis in Europe and the historical lack of policies and practices of and for the integration of immigrants in European countries is a good example. One can neither physically shut down all borders nor is it possible to wish away the impact of (im)migration. Hence, my argument that apart from a “universal” ethics of humanism, it makes no sense to insist on the maintenance of cultural homogeneity and its hegemony in any society. Positive cultural diversity means recognition and consequently inclusion and cultural homogeneity and hegemony means marginalization and consequently exclusion. Importantly, it makes no sense to do such in terms of the basic force of existence of the industrialized and technologically advanced world, that of business capitalism and market orientation: (im)migrant populations constitute a presence (and they are a significant market, as well as a significant job creation force). Therefore, it is preferable and a demonstration of business acumen to create an environment where positive cultural diversity is officially sanctioned and promoted by the various levels of government, the business community, the educational system, etc., in other words, in the whole of social discourse and practices.

Z: Since its birth in the early nineteenth century, the discipline of comparative

literature has been criticized for having no theoretical framework. What is your understanding of this?

T: We should note that the “comparative” in comparative literature is, in principle, already a theoretical (and applied) approach. However, indeed, comparative literature is a discipline that borrows theories, approaches, and ideas from other disciplines and fields of scholarship. I do not see this as a problem, but as an advantage, although comparative literature could do better when developing specific, that is, “home-grown” theoretical frameworks. And this is precisely what I am doing in comparative cultural studies, a combination of tenets of comparative literature and cultural studies: “I believe that to make the study of literature and culture a socially relevant activity of scholarship we ought to do contextual work parallel with regard to professional concerns such as the job market, the matter of academic publishing, and digital humanities and, put more broadly, with regard to the role of social, political, and economic aspects of humanities scholarship. Hence my proposal that with the comparative and contextual approach—practiced in interdisciplinarity and employing new media technology—comparative cultural studies could achieve in-depth scholarship and the social relevance of the humanities” (Tötösy de Zepetnek 2017: 191).

Z: What is in your opinion the biggest problem in comparative literature studies today?

T: Your question is difficult to reply to in a brief manner because it depends on “where.” In the so-called centers of the discipline (Europe and the U.S.) I think one of the problems is that the knowledge of foreign languages is diminishing. In the U.S. comparative literature is mostly done in translation, i.e., texts are read and analyzed not in their original, but in English translation. While it is better to read and study literatures of the world in translation than not at all, when it comes to scholarship, in my opinion, it would be necessary to be able to read texts in the original, and of course it is also necessary to be able to read scholarship in foreign languages and not only in English. Another problem is what you asked about—namely the question of theory: because since the 1970s theoretical frameworks have been developed not in comparative literature, but (mostly) in departments of English and this—despite my contention that “borrowing” should not be a problem—not only devaluates comparative literature, but most importantly diminishes the number of graduate students who then would further the discipline in faculty positions. Yet a further problem is that in the U.S. comparative literature is undergoing a constriction meaning that faculty positions are less and less available. At the same time, said constriction is much less occurring in China, Latin America, and in several European countries including Spain (but there is constriction in other European countries including

France and Germany).

Z: For years scholars in China have been talking about the formation of the Chinese School of Comparative Literature. As to whether or not there exists such a school, there are different views from both at home and abroad. Cao Shunqing, Professor at Sichuan University, China, concludes: “The development of comparative literature has experienced three stages, that is, the first stage (European stage) with the French School as its representative, the second stage (American stage) with the American School as its representative, and the third stage after the rise of comparative literature in Asia (Asian stage). One of the discipline theory systems of the third stage is the formation of the Chinese School.” (Cao Shunqing 128) While Gayatri Hakravorty Spivak, Professor at Columbia University, the U. S., asserts: “I don’t know yet anything about the French School or the American School, not to say the Chinese School.” (Zhang Cha, Huang Weiliang 60) What do you think about it?

T: My reply would have to be tentative, as I do not read Chinese. What I can say is that in the last several years scholars in China published work with the objective to develop theoretical frameworks which are not based on Western thought only, but also on Chinese thought. In the open-access (and Thomson Reuters indexed) quarterly I founded and edited 1999-2016—*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*⁴—we are paying attention to these developments and there are a good number of studies available on this topic in the journal.

Z: In literature as well as comparative literature studies, we usually need to probe into politics, economy, society, history, religion, etc. The “American Dream”, for instance, is an important theme in American literature. It may be traced back to the early North American colonists. It is rooted in *the Declaration of Independence*, issued on July 4, 1776, and it is a national ethos and a set of ideals of the United States. In in a visit to the National Museum of China on November 29, 2012, Xi Jinping, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, put forward the concept of “Chinese Dream”, and likewise it is a national ethos and a set of ideals of China. What from your viewpoint would be basic points concerning the “American Dream” and the “Chinese Dream”?

T: In general, the “American Dream” refers to the possibility of finding freedom and opportunities in the U.S. However, while this was and still is true in many instances, the “American Dream” is also a construct of mythology because it does not always offer a new start away from poverty and persecution. We cannot forget the situation of African Americans and immigrants from Latin America for whom

4 <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>

the “American Dream” often did not and does not materialize. As for the “Chinese Dream,” I am not sure what to think about this although it remains a fact that China today is an economic world power. It is another question whether the “West” (I mean not only the U.S., but also Europe and Latin America, India, Africa, the Middle East, etc., thus the metaphorical all Other outside of China) would become interested in the richness Chinese culture offers. In other words, if the “Chinese Dream” refers to matters material only, it will not achieve excellence; but if it is a construct based on matters material (financial, industrial, technological) AND cultural including education in a global context, it will advance China and the Chinese. If the “Chinese Dream” means that the humanities are relegated to a second-class status and science and technology receive exclusive preference, while it may achieve much in the short term, it will fail in the long term (and this is the case also with regard to the U.S. and the discussion about the advancing of STEM subjects in education to the detriment of the humanities).

Z: Such a productive scholar as you deserves popularity and respect. However, “there are still some differences between this kind of pursuit of the intellectual elite and the stars in the entertainment circles, such as music, television, film, etc. It can be said that the popularity of stars in academia is dwarfed by that of the stars in the entertainment circles.” (Zhang Cha, Yue Daiyun 178-179) What do you make of this phenomenon?

T: I think your question is directed at the U.S. where scholars do not figure as “public intellectuals” similar to European cultures. Although there have been and are attempts to engage scholars in U.S. public discourse, I think the responsibility and function of scholars is first and foremost scholarship and if in the U.S. the function of “public intellectuals” does not develop, as I assume, so be it. I should like to add that while as said there is limited recognition of scholars in public discourse or in the media in the U.S. or Canada, in European countries this is different. It is in this context that I am an elected member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts / *Academia Scientiarum et Artium Europaea*.

Z: In closing, I have a specific question: would you be able to offer suggestions to young Chinese scholars in comparative literature with regard to how to conduct research in our discipline?

T: One important matter in my opinion would be that Chinese scholars of literature in general and of comparative literature in particular should have knowledge of several foreign languages and not English only. While English would have to be one of the languages, another one or two (whether another Western language or Hindi or any other foreign language) would raise the quality and impact of Chinese schol-

arship. In my opinion, the current focus in the humanities on English (thus meaning the U.S. in most instances) is restricting knowledge. Another important matter would be that when Chinese scholars analyze Western or other texts, they ought to refer to not only Western sources, but analyze texts based on Chinese theoretical thought. This implies that Chinese students and scholars ought to have substantial knowledge of Chinese literature and literary history no matter what discipline or field they are working in or studying.

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Author Profile:

Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's research, teaching, and publications are in comparative literature, comparative cultural studies, and media and communication studies including postcolonial studies, (im)migration & ethnic minority studies, feminist & gender studies, film & literature, digital humanities & data science, education & cultural policy, readership & audience studies, Holocaust studies, online course design in the humanities, editing & publishing in print & digital, conflict management & diversity training, history (genealogy and heraldry). Education: Ph.D. 1989 Comparative Literature University of Alberta; B.Ed. 1984 History and English as a Second Language University of Ottawa; M.A. 1983 Comparative Literature Carleton University; B.A. 1980 History and German Studies University of

Western Ontario. Languages: English, French, German, Hungarian & reading Latin, Italian, Spanish, Russian. Publications: 6 single-authored books; 226 articles, bibliographies, book reviews, research resources; 34 edited volumes & guest-edited issues of learned journals. Tötösy de Zepetnek's work is also published in Chinese, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Macedonian, Mahrati, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish translation.

Zhang Cha is professor of English at Sichuan Normal University and a PhD candidate in comparative and world literature at Sichuan University. He is Editor-in-Chief of *Waiguo yuwen luncong* (Collected Essays of Foreign Languages and Literatures).

“I’m an Old-fashioned Chinese-style Scholar Who Writes in English”: An Interview with Professor Richard John Lynn

Richard John Lynn (University of Toronto)

Shi Guang (Beijing Normal University)

Abstract:

This interview commences with Professor Richard John Lynn’s recalling his academic career, full of intellectual exploration and varied research interests. Then Professor Lynn gives his own opinions on topics concerning the achievement of Professor James J.Y. Liu, methods of translating classical Chinese poetry, the function of review articles and the evaluation of such research on Ming-Qing women writings. Professor Lynn also refers to his friendship with Professor Zhang Longxi and his writing plans in the future.

Keywords: classical Chinese poetry, translation, James J.Y. Liu, English-speaking world

Shi Guang (henceforth SG): Let’s start this interview with a question that perhaps you have often been asked heard. You researched Chinese literature for decades, but what led you to choose Chinese literature as your lifelong occupation? Are there any special motivations involved?

Richard John Lynn (henceforth RJL): Well, I have to give you some history of my training. At Princeton, I wandered from various disciplines for two years and then I settled on Art and Archaeology. I was going to do Greek-Roman antiquity, so was going to be a *kaogu jia* (archaeologist 考古家), archaeologist in the Roman and ancient Greek, Mediterranean world. But then, I took a course in Chi-

nese art by Professor Fong Wen¹ and I became very interested in Chinese art, so I changed course to start focusing on East Asian subjects, and I wrote a dissertation on the influence of Japanese art on European painting in the 19th century. Professor Fong arranged for me to study at Yale University for a summer semester, intense beginning Chinese, so I began to study Chinese there. Two years later, I entered the Princeton graduate school to study Chinese painting, which was a mistake. I should have moved to another university at that time. I could have gone to Harvard to study with Professor Max Loehr (1903-1988)², who was the Professor of Chinese art there, but I decided to stay at Princeton at that time. Actually, what I really wanted to do was travel to see the world and to do different things somewhere else. When I had the chance the following year to go to Taiwan, Stanford University was in charge of the Inter-university Center for Chinese Language Studies at Taipei 台北 on the National Taiwan University campus. I went there for a year. While I was there, by chance I read James J. Y. Liu's 刘若愚 (1926-1986) *The Art of Chinese Poetry*. I thought this was very interesting, and I liked his approach, and decided that I wanted to study literature that way. Well, I did have a chance to move to another university, and went to the University of Washington in Seattle for the MA degree, for which I wrote a dissertation on *Yuandai Sanqu* (free lyrics of Yuan dynasty 元代散曲), directed by Professor Hellmut Wilhelm (1905-1990)³, who is very famous Sinologist. You know, his father was even more famous, Richard Wilhelm (1873-1930)⁴. Anyway, that got me into literary studies. The next year I finally was able to study with Professor Liu, when he took me on as a Ph.D student at the University of Chicago, so I moved from Seattle to Chicago. But as soon as I met him, the very first day I met him, he told me he was going to Stanford University the following academic year. He said if I wanted to go with him, he would arrange a fellowship for me, and he did just that. That's why I did my Ph.D at Stanford. So, that's how I got interested in Chinese literature, especially poetics. While I studied at Chicago, I

1 Fang Wen (方闻), born in Shanghai in 1930, Edwards S. Sanford Professor of Art History Emeritus, taught Chinese art history at Princeton University from 1954 until his retirement in 1999. His publications include *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th-14th Century*, *Returning Home: Tao-chi's Album of Landscapes and Flowers* etc.

2 Max Loehr (罗越) was an art historian and Professor of Chinese art at Harvard University from 1960 to 1974. As an authority on Chinese art, Professor Loehr published eight books and numerous articles on Chinese bronzes, jades and ancient Chinese painting.

3 Hellmut Wilhelm (卫德明) was a German sinologist known for his studies of Chinese literature, thought, and history.

4 Richard Wilhelm (卫礼贤) was a German sinologist, theologian, and missionary. He lived in China for 25 years. He is best remembered for his translations of philosophical works from Chinese into German that in turn have been translated into other major languages of the world, including English.

did nine courses in the graduate school, half of them were just one-on-one with Professor Liu. He had no other Ph.D students, so this was terrific opportunity to study with such a scholar. The rest of the time I took courses in the English department, the “Chicago School of literary criticism”, so-called “Neo-Aristotelian”. You might look into who they were and what they did. That was a very exciting and revelatory experience, I learned to think properly there in Chicago, because the systematic way, philosophical way of approaching literary study from such scholars as Wayne Booth (1921-2005)⁵, Elder Olsen (1909-1992)⁶, Richard McKeon (1900-1985)⁷, and other scholars, these were really important in 19th and mid-20th century scholars of English literature and Philosophy, who specialized in literary theory and approaches of literary analysis and study.

At that time, I chose Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634-1711) as a dissertation topic. I was meeting with Professor Liu, we were reading *Shihua* (discussions of poetry 诗话), a survey of original texts for me to translate: I would prepare passages and we would go through them in minute detail. In the English department, I read much of the literary criticism of T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) in one course, a poet and literary theorist, as well as a practical critic. I remember I asked Professor Liu one day: “Is there anyone like that in the Chinese tradition?” He immediately responded with the name “Wang Shizhen”, which is why I chose him as my dissertation topic, which I began two years later after finishing coursework at Stanford, this was 1966-67 in Chicago and 1967-68 at Stanford. Earlier, I had done three summers at Stanford studying Japanese and had one year at the Inter-University Center in Taiwan, and all of those counted for Stanford credit. So, all I needed was one more year of residency to fulfill the residency requirement. I took my general examinations in June of 1968 and passed them. My committee was a quite impressive bunch of people, Professor Liu, David Nivison (1923-2014)⁸, Patrick Hanan (1927-2014)⁹, who was soon to go to Harvard, I think, two years later. The committee chair was George

5 Wayne Booth was an American literary critic. He was the George M. Pullman Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in English Language & Literature and the College at the University of Chicago.

6 Elder Olson was an American poet, teacher and literary critic. He was one of founders and leading figures of the so-called “Chicago school” of literary criticism.

7 Richard McKeon was an American philosopher and longtime professor at the University of Chicago. His ideas formed the basis for the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

8 David Nivison (倪德卫) was an American sinologist and scholar known for his publications on late imperial and ancient Chinese history, philology, and philosophy, and his 40 years as a Professor at Stanford University.

9 Patrick Hanan (韩南) was a New Zealand scholar of Chinese literature who was the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Chinese Literature at Harvard University. As a sinologist, he specialized in pre-20th-century vernacular fiction.

William Skinner (1925-2008)¹⁰, a sociology and history scholar of Chinese society. This was quite a powerful committee, and they asked me some very hard questions, but I passed. I remember that Professor Skinner asked me the most difficult one, because I did one field in the intellectual history of Ming and Qing China, he asked me whether I thought Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398) was insane or did he pretend to be insane in order to intimidate the court. Who can answer a question like that! So, I argued both sides and that seemed to satisfy both him and the committee, but it was a really tough question. I was very pleased to have studied with David Nivison in particular, I did courses with him both in philosophy and also Chinese thought. We did an interesting seminar in causality, which has helped me a great deal ever since. Patrick Hanan was very helpful. He just died a few years ago. I got to see him later in New Zealand, for he was a New Zealander and was there in the early 70s on a visit with his family. He came by Auckland where I was teaching then, and was a good friend of the chair Professor Douglas Lancashire¹¹, so I saw him there. After I moved back to the United States, I was often at Harvard and I saw Professor Hanan quite often during the later 1970s, and also got to know some of the other professors there: James Robert Hightower (1915-2006)¹² and William Hung 洪业 (1893-1980)¹³. William Hung was a delightful man, I treasure the memory of meeting him. Anyway, I had a marvelous career in graduate school, and I was able to study with many very prominent scholars in Chinese history, Chinese art history, literature and other fields. Europeans, Americans, Chinese scholars who were then working in the United States. So, I had a very rich training experience.

Then in June 1968 I went back to Taiwan again and to research and write my dissertation. I worked at *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan* (Academia Sinica 中央研究院), *Taida* (National Taiwan University 台大) and a few other places. I had a good friend who was working at the National Palace Museum. So, I often was able to work there and I remember reading Wang Shizhen's works in the *Siku quanshu*

10 George William Skinner (施坚雅) was an American anthropologist and scholar of China.

11 Douglas Lancashire was born in Tianjin, China. He graduated with BA Hons. (University of London) in Chinese in 1950, BD (London) in 1954, and MA (London) in Classical Chinese in 1958. He commenced his teaching career at the School of Oriental & African Studies in January, 1945, while serving in the Royal Air Force. From 1966-1981 he served as Professor of Chinese (Foundation Chair) and Head of Department of Asian Languages & Literatures, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

12 James Robert Hightower (海陶玮) was an American sinologist and Professor of Chinese at Harvard University who specialized in the translation of Chinese literature.

13 William Hung (洪业) was a Chinese educator, sinologist, and historian who taught for many years at Yenching University, Peking, which was China's leading Christian university, and at Harvard University.

(complete library in the four branches of literature 四库全书), you know, the original texts contained in sandalwood boxes, big and beautiful handwritten pages. It is amazing that they let people touch it in those days. I copied out page after page by hand (no copy machines yet!) and prepared various ways of approaching the material. After almost a year in Taiwan, I decided that I should go to Japan and use the Japanese that I had learned earlier at Princeton and Stanford. Fortunately, I then had the opportunity to conduct research at Kyoto University. That was a really good experience that allowed me to use my Japanese and gradually improve it. However, once I entered the Humanistic Science Research Institute (京都大学人文科学研究所), I found I could speak Chinese with most older Japanese scholars there, because they all had been in Beijing in the 1920s. I've used Japanese scholarship ever since, as you can see there's quite a lot of Japanese books on the shelves here. I've usually found Japanese scholarship on whatever I do to be very helpful. I remember asking Donald Holzman¹⁴ who, though originally an American, taught at the University of Paris for many years. He's now quite elderly, 92 this year, I think, long retired and no longer engaged in scholarship. He once said to me: "Well, the Japanese study Chinese literature the way Westerners do except, they're a lot better at it (because of the language advantage)". We've been in touch often ever since, he was a major influence on me too, I have all his books. He stayed with in the Six dynasties period pretty much his whole life, it produced a lot of wonderful books on Ji Kang 嵇康 (ca.224-ca.263) and Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210-263). His wife, Jacqueline, was French, but, alas, passed away five years ago. Though he had his entire career in Paris, he often came to the United States as a visiting professor, at Princeton, Harvard and a few other places. I learned a great deal from this earlier generation of scholars and I treasured that. I knew most of the great scholars of the generation prior to mine, and that has been a very good influence on me.

Well, this brings us up to the dissertation. After that, I just kept working on Yuan, Ming and Qing literary studies and literati culture until I got involved with translating early philosophical texts. This happened at beginning of the 1980s, and I largely concentrated on this area from the mid-1980s on, when I began working on the *Wang Bi zhu Zhouyi* (Wang Bi's commentary on *Zhouyi* 王弼注周易). That was very difficult to do and took me a very long time, but then it was done

14 Donald Holzman (侯思孟) was a scholar of Chinese literature who lived and worked in France for decades. As a sinologist, he specialized in the poetry of Wei Jin and the Northern and Southern dynasties.

and published in 1994¹⁵. And then, I decided to do the *Wang Bi zhu Laozi* (Wang Bi's commentary on *Laozi* 王弼注老子), that I did entirely from beginning to end in one year¹⁶. After that, I started the *Guo Xiang zhu Zhuangzi* (Guo Xiang's commentary on *Zhuangzi* 郭象注庄子), which when complete means I have done all of the *sanxuan* (three arcane works 三玄) of ancient-medieval Chinese philosophical works. I hope to finish the *Zhuangzi* book by the end of this year, so I can then get on to other works. For example, along the way, I've gotten interested in Huang Zunxian 黄遵宪 (1848-1905) during his time in Japan and translating the *Riben za-shi shi* (poems on miscellaneous subjects from Japan 日本杂事诗). I want to finish that perhaps next year. I have some other projects on Wang Shizhen and especially want to complete a monograph, book-length study of Wang, about whom I published a dozen article-length studies up to now, but no book. Recently, I have been collecting research material concerned with Wang. More recently, I've also gotten involved with Ming dynasty poetry and poetics, especially that of a generation or two before Wang Shizhen and which have connections with Wang's literary thought and practice. If I'm asked to do a book review or book article review on some Ming writers, I usually accept, and that's what I've been doing lately, such as a review article on Li Mengyang 李梦阳 (1473-1530)¹⁷.

SG: Recently Chinese scholars have a lot of discussion on the question “what is China?”. This concept has changed according to different contexts, times, and perspectives, so it's not a stable concept. From a personal perspective, what is China for you?

RJL: It is a hard question to answer. Questions like this can involve a larger or smaller set of issues. I gave a lecture in 2005 to the University of Toronto Alumni Association, 500 people in a big lecture hall, about China and Chinese Studies. Afterwards someone asked me: “Who are your graduate students? How do they find jobs?” I said: “Well, many of our graduate students, in fact, the majority are from China.” This seemed to surprise people. Why would any Chinese young people come to study China in a foreign University? I said: “Within China, there is the tradition of *guoxue* (national studies 国学), in which one studies China as a domestic mode of learning, but to come to the University of Toronto or Harvard or Princeton or UC Berkeley, you study China as an international discipline, with an international global perspective, a comparative perspective and this is very often a very

15 Lynn, Richard John. *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I-Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

16 Lynn, Richard John. *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Daodejing of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

17 Lynn, Richard John. “Literary Archaism, Personal Expression and Self-Cultivation in Ming China: Li Mengyang and his World.” *China Review International* 23.1 (2016): 10-27.

different way of doing it. So many Chinese are now interested in studying China from this non-Chinese point of view for comparative purposes and also simply to expand one's own worldview and enhance one's own intellectual life." That seemed to satisfy them. So, that's really why I'm studying China. It's a way to cultivate my own intelligence and expand my experience, allowing me to become bicultural as much as possible: it's a way to enrich one's life. The works that I've written and the lectures about these things have been done for the same purpose, to expand people's perspectives and sensibilities and so forth. I think that's the best goal that an academic career can have. Now, as far as what China is to somebody like me. It's, first of all, an object of intellectual inquiry. I'm glad I studied China rather than Japan or India or some other non-Western culture. It's a very rich culture and I engage with its texts as a kind of game that I play at to figure out what they really mean. I have had a great deal of satisfaction doing this, and after all these years, I finally think I have become rather good at it, but it's taken a long time. For instance, you're a young Chinese person and you have a perspective on your heritage and your culture of pre-modern times, but you're not a pre-modern Chinese, you're not an *gudai wenren* (ancient literati 古代文人). In a way, we have a similar thing in common. I'm not a *gudai wenren* either, but I try to be, I mean, imaginatively, creatively. I think that's the way I try to approach Chinese studies. I get at it by through the text themselves. I am not at all inclined to study Chinese literature or poetry or anything else about China from a Western perspective, to use some post-modernist, post-colonial approach, all that stuff. I don't do that at all, I think it's a distortion. The only way of getting to know the real *gudai Zhongguo* (ancient China 古代中国) is through its own texts directly. So, I'm quite at odds with the whole raft of post-ist approaches which in some circles have become so fashionable these days. Actually, pre-modern Chinese Studies has largely escaped attention by post-modernist approaches, whereas contemporary Chinese Studies is infested with them. Pre-modern studies escape because it's so much more difficult to deal with the texts involved and these people who are so wedded to post-ist, ideological positions, apparently don't have the patience to learn how to read literary Chinese well enough. It's a big effort, they would far prefer to spend their time studying Saussure, Foucault and Derrida, instead of learning how to read these things. I believe in the integrity of texts that they actually mean something and I believe in authorial intentionality. I think we owe it to these people in the past to study them on their own terms and not try to twist them to fit some literary theory developed entirely outside of China.

SG: I have read James J.Y. Liu's several books, such as *Chinese Theories of Literature* and *The Art of Chinese Poetry*. In these books, it seems Professor Liu's in-

tent is to interpret Chinese Literature in a systematic way, wanting to give Chinese literature a theoretical framework. The most important source of this framework seems to have been M.H. Abrams' theory. What's your opinion about this?

RJL: I can claim to have introduced him to Abrams' work. When I was reading Abrams's work while taking courses in the English department at the University of Chicago, I once said to him: "Look at this, don't you think it's interesting?" In fact, he did develop his own hermeneutical circle out of Abram's methodological framework as it appears in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critic Tradition*. However, at the high level of analytical abstraction Professor Liu developed, can one say that he distorted the history of Chinese literary thought in any way? I don't think so. He simply organized it in a way that no Chinese ever did before and nobody else ever did since. I have played about with this approach myself. I did one critical review of *Chinese Theories of Literature*¹⁸. Have you read it? I think I come to terms quite successfully with the main issues involved. When Professor Liu produced this book, he received a lot of criticism, people expected either a chronological history or at least a survey of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist theories of Chinese poetry. He didn't do it that way but organized it entirely differently, so though different, it is not distortion. Earlier, he went through several stages of shifting theoretical positions. Before he went to England, while still in China, once graduated from Fu Jen Catholic University, he went to Tsing Hua University to study English literature, where one of his professors was William Empson (1906-1984)¹⁹, Empson was a student of I.A. Richards (1893-1979)²⁰, and I.A. Richards invented the intrinsic, self-contained approach to literary works, the so-called "New Criticism," which influenced so many for so long, including Professor Liu was through his own early career. In fact, much of that is apparent not only in *The Art of Chinese Poetry* but also his book on Li Shangyin 李商隐 (ca.813-ca.858)²¹. That book also outraged many since he read poems of Li Shangyin the way the New Critics did: as dramatic performance, which really irritated some people, who were stuck in the view that Chinese poetry cannot be anything but personal expression. This kind of thinking is very simple-minded and quite wrong. By the time we

18 Lynn, Richard John. "Chinese Theories of Literature, A Review of a Recent Study". *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association*. XIII. 1 (1978), 64-67.

19 William Empson was an English literary critic and poet, widely influential for his practice of closely reading literary works, a practice fundamental to New Criticism.

20 I. A. Richards was an English educator, literary critic, and rhetorician whose work contributed to the foundations of New Criticism.

21 Liu, James J.Y. *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin: Ninth-century Baroque Chinese poet*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

arrive at the late Tang, even before that to the later poetry of Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), one can see a shift to a kind of dramatic, fictional performance among Chinese poets themselves, which from an Orthodox mainstream point of view was deplorable. That's why the *qianhou qizi* (the former and later seven masters 前后七子) of the Ming era, who approved only of the High Tang style, did not like late Tang poetry at all. I think Professor Liu was quite sensitive to all this and realized that the only way one could understand Li Shangyin's poetry is to read it intrinsically rather than trying to relate it to personal biography the way Romantic critics in the West did, you know, the poetry is the person, the man is his works and so forth, all that personal, expressive, individualistic stuff, from the later 19th century, which so influenced early modern Chinese views of literature. I should say, at this point, that Chinese literary thought and the practice of literary criticism is a very complicated subject. When I started working in it in the 1960s, I was practically the only person in the Western world to do so, besides Professor Liu, of course. I was hoping that I would be at the start of a major trend, the first of many, and now there are, to be sure, a few others, but it really hasn't developed into a major field of inquiry. If I live long enough and if I'm healthy long enough, I'd like to do a general study of Chinese literary thought, however it's a daunting, formidable project that requires a lot of work. I don't know whether I can manage to do it or not, but I think a good way of getting into it might be to write the book on Wang Shizhen.

SG: Will this new book be based on your dissertation or be something quite different?

RJL: It's going to be very different book. The dissertation was essentially a very brief and sketchy, kind of life and time approach, an attempt to relate Wang Shizhen's literary thought to contemporary developments in Neo-Confucianism, and then a description and account of his literary theory, and then thirty poems in annotated translation, and finally an attempt to relate the poems to the theory. That's it. The book will be very different. I don't know exactly what it might turn out to be. You missed Daniel Bryant (1942-2014)²², who passed away before you arrived at UVic, but he wrote a magnificent book²³ on He Jingming 何景明 (1483-1521). Daniel was a very close friend, a very good scholar, a very good man too. The He Jingming book was something he worked on for practically his whole career. I don't

22 Daniel Bryant (白润德), Professor Emeritus of Chinese Studies in the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies at the University of Victoria, passed away in 2014. As a sinologist, he specialized in the poetry of Ming dynasty.

23 Bryant, Daniel. *The Great Recreation: Ho Ching-ming (1483-1521) and his World*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008.

think I want to do that, we'll see. The way I go about scholarship is, first, I have a general idea, which I begin to develop, allowing the sources that I encounter shape what I do, rather than trying to impose a pre-determined framework. However, before I get to this book, I want to finish off a book about Huang Zunxian in Japan. I have published so much on it already, I've translated probably close to half of all the poems in the *Riben zashi shi*, so it might be quick to bring out. I may even bring out a smaller monograph on a particular area of his experience in Japan, his experience with the Japanese literati and their exchanges of poetry, there's a small volume of this poetry published in 1880, I think, in Tokyo, where someone collected all the poetry Huang exchanged with his friends. I've discussed this briefly with Victor H. Mair²⁴. You see, I've got a lot of plans to do, I've got to be healthy for a long time. I'm going to be 78 years old soon (June 28, 2018). I feel not bad, so far so good.

SG: Thank you for sharing your research plans. As for Huang Zunxian, we know there already have several monographs discussing him and his poetry, for example, Professor Jerry Schmidt's²⁵ *Within Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian, 1848-1905*, how will your work differ from his?

RJL: Well, Professor Schmidt didn't deal with the *Riben zashi shi* very much, he has one chapter on Huang Zunxian in Japan. I was dissatisfied with it, I thought he didn't do a good job on that part at all, so that's what got me interested in Huang in the first place. Have you seen my review article on his book? We also differ greatly on our ways of translating. I think he paraphrases it rather than translates, so he gets only the *dayi* (main points 大意) of poems. That's not translation. So, it'll be a certainly different style of translation and it'll be far more extensive both in scope, and also in depth and detail concerning Huang's experience in Japan, especially his experience with literary figures. Kamachi Noriko 蒲地典子, I met her only once, we had lunch in Ann Arbor in Michigan, probably back in 2001 or 2002. I was invited to give a lecture at the University of Michigan and then I contacted her before I returned to Toronto. We had lunch and discussed things. Her approach to Huang

24 Victor H. Mair (梅维恒) is an American sinologist and Professor of Chinese at the University of Pennsylvania. Among other accomplishments, Mair has edited *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* and *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature*.

25 Jerry Schmidt (施吉瑞) is Professor of Asian studies in the University of British Columbia (UBC). He gained his doctorate from Professor Ye Jiaying at UBC, and his research focuses on classical Chinese poetry with an emphasis on Qing-dynasty poetry. His publications include *Within the Human Realm: The Poetry of Huang Zunxian, 1848-1905* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), *Harmony Garden: The Life, Literary Criticism and Poetry of Yuan Mei, 1716-1798* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) etc.

was historical, she was especially interested in diplomatic history. Her book²⁶ was originally a dissertation directed by John King Fairbank at Harvard. I think she got one thing very wrong, she seemed to think that Huang was quite critical of Japanese writing in Chinese and that he didn't think very much of it and was even disparaging. I don't agree, I think he was very impressed by the quality of *Kanbun* (漢文) and *kanshi* (漢詩) written by Japanese at the time. This view is readily apparent throughout Huang's writings. In fact, he exchanged poetry with Japanese literati, some, in fact, were close friends. His life was actually saved by one of his Japanese friends in Beijing in 1898. At that time, the secret police from the palace were arresting everybody connected with the reform movement, leading to that horrible scene where many were beheaded *en masse* in the palace grounds. He was going to be arrested too, but, was hidden by a Japanese diplomat in his house until the crisis had passed. This was a man whom he befriended, while in Tokyo (1877-1882), then learning spoken Chinese (*guanhua* 官话), who later was posted to Beijing, a few years later, he died in the Boxer Rebellion defending the foreign legation quarters. After Huang returned in retirement to his native place in Meicheng 梅城, Guangdong, he wrote many poems about his friends in Japan, which all express positive feelings about them. I'm going to deal with these things too in the book. That's easy to do now that there are digital editions of his complete works. Chinese-Japanese cultural history is very interesting and now becoming quite a kind of hot topic. Certain scholarly circles in China are also quite interested in *Guangxu shidai* (Emperor Guangxu's era 光绪时代), which is a good thing too.

I've always wanted to do a book on Buddhism and Chinese poetry. I don't know if I will ever have time to do it, but that's another possibility. That's another project. I keep attending conferences and presenting things. I usually do three or four presentations a year. I keep myself very busy. I probably work on the average close to five or six hours a day. Being retired helps, I don't have to teach students. I don't have to mark papers, and if a professor is involved in university administration, you know that's very time-consuming. Now, I don't have to do any of that, so I have all this time. I usually work after breakfast until lunch, and maybe one or two hours afterwards. I've maintained a very large network of associates and friends through email contact practically every day. I'm going to do something for Victor Mair this summer: translating a Tang dynasty tale, *chuanqi* (legend of Tang dynasty 传奇), *Liushi zhuan* (biography of Miss Liu 柳氏传). My wife (Sonja Arntzen, retired professor of classical Japanese literature, University of Toronto) and I also get com-

26 Kamachi, Noriko. *Reform in China: Juang Tsun-hsien and the Japanese Model*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1981.

missions from various international Chinese art dealers to translate inscriptions on Chinese works of art, this is interesting work and pays very well. It all helps.

SG: You mentioned translation several times. When I read your review articles, I think you have a very strict standard for translating Chinese texts. And I also found that you worked quite hard on translations of your own during your own early academic career. So, could you talk about your method, standard and principles of translation?

RJL: When I now read earlier things I've written, I'm sometimes quite embarrassed about how I got things wrong. Being good at translation is simply a matter of experience. I think I'm better at it now than ever. Taking the whole issue, I think the key element of translation is context. If you want to get the right translation of something, you have to be very aware of the context involved. I think of translation in terms of a series of nested contexts, starting from the largest, and then coming down to the very text itself. For example, one starts with "China", and then pre-modern China, and then the historical period in which it is written, and then perhaps there's a certain circle of writers or part of that literary culture that is distinct from others, maybe that's another context, and then there is the context of genre, and then you even have the context of sub-genre, and finally one works down to the individual and his close associates, and then that writer's collected works. This is why global search in digital editions is so important. Now, you can compare the same expression used in different places by the same author. Of course, traditionally scholars had all this in their heads, right? I can never do that, no matter how long I live, but I can do it now thanks to computer databases and digital files. I use these a lot, especially with philosophical texts, such as the *Zhuangzi* with Guo Xiang's commentary. I find it very useful to compare the use of a term in the *Zhuangzi* that appears in perhaps three or four places, and then compare them all. If I am still uncertain as to the meaning, I can consult the *Huainan zi* (master of Huainan 淮南子), which is a close contemporary text. I avoid the argument about which came first. So, this is how I focus closer and closer on what the most likely meaning is of difficult terms, that's how I do translations. It's very time-consuming, and often extremely difficult, but I tend to be pleased at the result, for I think I am getting at such meaning much closer than other translators now at work.

SG: From my perspective, this sounds like *xiaoxue* (philology 小学) conducted by traditional Chinese scholars.

RJL: It has been quite a long time before I began to realize that this was so. Even though I write in English, my research methodology is very traditionally Chinese. It's unusual, I mean, there are not so many people like me in the Western

world. Daniel Bryant and I were very similar in this respect.

SG: I remember that you published a serious review article, arguing with Professor Daniel Bryant on how to translate Chinese poetry.

RJL: No, that was not with Daniel Bryant but with Jonathan Chaves²⁷. I wrote a review²⁸ of the Mei Yaochen 梅尧臣 (1002-1060) book that Chaves published. He didn't like my argument at all. My basic assumption is that the grammar, the *wenfa* (syntax 文法) of lines of poetry are the same as in classical Chinese prose, except that it is more elliptical. Word order is essential. It's not just chosen for the *pingze* (tonal patterns 平仄), rhyme schemes. I think one is led astray if he ignores word order in translating Chinese poetry, as I claimed Chaves did in that review article. I have been very good friends with Chaves for many years. I've known him since 1969, when we were both graduate students in Kyoto, but we disagree on this. Anyway, he responded²⁹. I think things then became focused on Du Fu's famous couplet in Tang poetry, "Shanuan shui yuanyang" (沙暖睡鸳鸯). Jonathan translates it into something like "the sand is warm and on it the mandarin ducks sleep", whereas I translate it as "the sand is so warm, it puts the mandarin ducks to sleep", turning intransitive "sleep" into causative "put to sleep." Jonathan's response, if I remember rightly, was something like "Then there must be thousands of such causative verbs and putative verbs in Chinese poetry!" Implying that that is impossible. And then, unfortunately, he went on to say something to the effect: "This is Edward Schafer's (1913-1991)³⁰ way of translating, Schafer would probably would do it in this way." Of course, Professor Schafer then took offense and wrote a surrejoinder against Chaves. It was a big argument, indeed. Bryant also criticized Chaves in much the same way in a review article on another of Jonathan's books, which outraged Chaves as well. Anyway, the core of the argument is whether it is best to translate Chinese poetry with a strict grammatical approach, very philological, or use para-

27 Jonathan Chaves (齐皎瀚) is Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. He is a translator of classic Chinese poetry.

28 Richard John Lynn, "Review: *Mei Yao-ch'en and the Development of Early Sung Poetry*. by Jonathan Chaves; *Heaven My blanket, Earth My pillow: Poems from Sung Dynasty China* by Yang Wan-li. by Jonathan Chaves.", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 36.3 (1977).

29 Chaves, Jonathan. "On Translating Chinese Poetry", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 37.1 (1977).

30 Edward H. Schafer (薛爱华) was an American Sinologist, historian, and writer noted for his expertise on the Tang Dynasty, and was a Professor of Chinese at University of California, Berkeley for 35 years. Schafer's most notable works include *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand* and *The Vermilion Bird*, which both explore China's interactions with other cultures and regions during the Tang dynasty.

phrase to obtain fluency. Burton Watson (1925-2017)³¹ often tends to paraphrase in his translations, sacrificing the precise syntax of Chinese poetry for the sake of a good English line. You should know that Chaves was Watson's student.

SG: Well, I agree with your interpretation of “Shanuan shui yuanyang”. However, due to the limited number of word in lines of traditional Chinese poetry, is it possible that there are several different ways to understand it?

RJL: Well, there's no hard evidence, poets don't tell us how we should read their poetry, it would be wonderful if they did, but they don't. And rarely did editors or commentators interpret Chinese poetry in those terms. This feature of Chinese poetry, I think, makes translation more interesting. That's why I choose to follow the word order in a very strict way, which, I believe, presents the true meaning of poems. Comparing this one line, “the sand is warm, on it the ducks sleep”, to “the sand is so warm, it puts the ducks to sleep”, I think the latter one is better. It's just more exciting. It conjures up more interest and charm. It's almost dramatic. By using this way to translate, you can get more of this, I think, in Chinese poetry. I rather think that's what poets meant, but again, I can't prove it. Anyway, I prefer to do it this way, though occasionally, it doesn't work, and then I try something else. There's no way of proving that one way is right and the other way wrong, but I often find that following a strict syntactic model helps enormously, otherwise it's too much guesswork. You know, at least you have a rational, empirical reason for doing it one way, rather than another. You just go with what feels right, which, though vague and impressionistic, is my way. Actually, I found when I was translating the *Zhuangzi* with Guo Xiang's commentary, my experience with poetry has helped a great deal. There's another large study of Guo Xiang's commentary done by Brook Ziporyn³², who teaches at University of Chicago. He apparently has little or no experience with Chinese poetry and in translating Guo Xiang, I think he often gets Guo's texts quite wrong. Though he translates them literally and grammatically, I think he misses the point very often, because of his inability to appreciate the putative and causative verbs. Again, I can't prove it, but that's just the way I do it.

SG: Sometimes, I feel poetry is a tricky game played by poets, so it is really interesting to read them.

RJL: Yes, you can do it in several ways, they are deliberately different, it is sort

31 Burton Watson (华兹生) was an American scholar best known for his numerous translations of Chinese and Japanese literature into English.

32 Brook A. Ziporyn (任博克) is a scholar of ancient and medieval Chinese religion and philosophy who works at University of Chicago. Professor Ziporyn received his BA in East Asian Languages and Civilizations from the University of Chicago, and his Ph.D from the University of Michigan.

of deliberate ambiguity as a rhetorical device. I agree that you can read a line of poem in several different ways. In some cases, that may have been because of the threat of the state, like Su Dongpo 苏东坡 (1037-1101) and his problems back in the Song dynasty and with the Qianlong 乾隆 Emperor scrutinizing works of contemporary poets to see who was really seditious and causing trouble, so poets tended to hide what they mean in poetry by being deliberately ambiguous.

SG: We have talked about your method of interpreting Chinese poetry, another question I want to ask is about the beauty of Chinese poetry. In your opinion, is it possible to convey it to readers in the English-speaking world?

RJL: We can but only try. I've been trying for many years and I think I'm getting better at it. I try to convey what the original poet seems to have tried to convey himself, that's my goal. Again, this is context sensitive. For effect, the translator has to imaginatively become the poet, to understand his circumstances at the moment, what the subject means as a collection of tropes or devices and the new creative approach it thus takes. It means a lot of effort on the translator's part. Probably, it's impossible to get it exactly right with the same exact meaning, but I try. Sometimes I succeed better than others, and certain poems work better than others. I tend to translate complete works of individual poets or by some group of poets, therefore, have to do all the poems involved whether the poems lend themselves to translation well or not. Watson was very careful, he wouldn't publish translations of poems that didn't translate well; he was very selective. So, all of his translations are *xuanben* (selected works 选本), not *quanji* (complete works 全集). Chaves does the same thing, you don't get any complete works ever from either. I'm sure that I will choose when I do the work on Wang Shizhen, for it will be impossible to translate all his poems, there are far too many! So, literary quality aside, when there's something essential in a poem that must be addressed for some reason, say, an essential biographical fact or insight, I shall still translate it. As for prose, when I translate the Guo Xiang's commentary, I'm do every single word of it, since all of it is essential for the work as a whole. There are some passages that are so extraordinarily difficult that I am never sure of the exact meaning, but I still have to do it. So, it's an imaginative act, you have to imagine yourself as the writer himself, which involves being a rather literate person in both his and one's own culture. I read a great deal and take language very seriously, so I try to get better and better at it. I don't know what else one can say about it, it's a question of sensitivity and experience, the one contributes to the other.

SG: There is another interesting phenomenon relating to the translation: sometimes, readers in the West don't care about the original meanings of works from

other languages, it seems as if they just expect what they want to expect, for example, Ezra Pound's (1885-1972)³³ translation is very representative of this.

RJL: Well, his are not translations. Pound didn't know any Chinese. He used existing translations. Achilles Fang (1910-1995)³⁴ at Harvard helped him to read the texts and told him literally what they meant in the original Chinese, out of which he created something completely different. Here is a problem that relates to my antipathy to the post-ist agenda, which assumes that one can never know a literary work from another tradition in the same way as when it is one's own. This is a basic assumption underneath post-ist critics do, therefore why try? Any reading of any foreign text is as good as any other, this is another conclusion that they draw. I'm totally opposed to that, the more you know about where, for instance, a particular poem comes from, the closer you are likely to get to a translation that is close to the original meaning. Simply giving up at the beginning and say: "Well, it's impossible to get anyway, so why bother with it?" Emphasis on "reader reception," so prominent among such critics, focuses so much on the limitations and cultural prejudices of the reader, which are supposed to make it impossible for him to understand and appreciate works outside his own tradition on their own terms, that the reader is free to make of such works whatever he wants. I don't agree with this view of that camp at all, I'm totally opposed to it in my own work.

The translation of Chinese poetry into English, French or into other Western languages started in the 1880s. These Victorian era Sinologists occasionally translated Chinese poetry, but they tended to turn it into English, French, German or other Western verse forms. This is the domestication route: if you turn a foreign poem into a Western poem, this is "domestication". On the other hand, if you try to expand or alter English or another Western language, twist it or do something new with it, trying to incorporate features from Chinese or other non-western languages, this is "barbarization". I seem to find myself somewhere between domestication and barbarization. I don't try to barbarize the English language to fit Chinese grammar, some of the worst translations in English have tried to do that. For instance, Wai-

33 Ezra Pound was an expatriate American poet and critic, as well as a major figure in the early modernist poetry movement. His contribution to poetry began with his development of Imagism, a movement derived from classical Chinese and Japanese poetry, stressing clarity, precision and economy of language.

34 Achilles Fang (方志彤) was a Chinese scholar, translator, and educator, best known for his contributions to Chinese literature and comparative literature. Fang was born in Japanese-occupied Korea, but attended university in mainland China. After completing his undergraduate degree, Fang worked for *Monumenta Serica*, a prominent scholarly journal of Chinese topics. He then moved to the United States, where he took up residency in Cambridge, Massachusetts, studying and teaching courses at Harvard University.

lim Yip's 叶维廉 translations of Chinese poetry, which I think are dreadful. I also am totally opposed to Yip's theory of translation, which I address in my *Guide to Chinese Poetry and Drama*³⁵. After all these years I still believe he has done an enormous amount of damage to the appreciation of Chinese poetry, with his view that there's no grammar to it, that is instead simply a series of images, like frames of motion pictures with no syntactic relations among them. Michael Duke³⁶ early in his career did a book³⁷ of Lu You 陆游 (1125-1210) before he got into modern Chinese literature, in which his translation try to follow Chinese word order. I don't think this works well at all, because English grammar is not Chinese grammar, and though they share certain features in common, for both are subject-verb-object language, the way subordinate clauses work in different word order. I mean even though they are similar in one way, they're very different in others. Therefore, you just can't do it in Duke's way. That's why I've always tried to find syntactic equivalence when translating, an essential feature of my work: Chinese syntax or grammar is the basis of translating lines of Chinese poetry, for poetry shares the same basic syntactic rules as prose.

SG: Translation is really an interesting question, while poetry creation is also an interesting question. I found a lot of English poems are inspired by Chinese culture and full of Chinese elements. How do you think about this?

RJL: That's something else. Gary Snyder³⁸ must be a major figure here. I got to know him years ago when we both attended a conference on the influence of Chinese poetry on contemporary American poetry, held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. I remember that Snyder made no attempt to say his works are meant to be translations but that his was a new way of writing poetry, inspired by his undergraduate training in Chinese poetry at UC Berkeley with Professor Chen Shih-hsiang 陈世骧 (1912-1971).³⁹ As for the Imagist Movement, whereas the original poetry by Amy Lowell (1874-1925)⁴⁰ is terrific, her translations of Chinese po-

35 Detailed information could be found at pages 40-42 of *Guide to Chinese Poetry and Drama* (G.K. Hall & Co., 1984).

36 Michael Duke (杜迈克) is an Emeritus Professor of University of British Columbia, his publications include *The author of Blooming and Contending: Chinese Literature in the Post Mao Era* (1985) etc.

37 Duke, Michael S. *Lu You*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977.

38 Gary Snyder is an American poet (often associated with the Beat Generation and the San Francisco Renaissance), he is also an essayist, lecturer, and environmental activist.

39 Chen Shih-hsiang was a Professor who taught at the University of California, Berkeley, he specialized in traditional Chinese literature and Comparative literature.

40 Amy Lawrence Lowell was an American poet of the imagist school from Brookline, Massachusetts. She posthumously won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1926.

etry are just awful. It's interesting to read her *Fir-Flower Tablets* as English verse, but it had nothing to do with Chinese original meaning whatsoever. Bishop William Charles White (1873-1960)⁴¹, who collected many great Chinese art works for the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, translated some Chinese poetry once, which was reviewed in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, where it was condemned as mere guesswork⁴²: you have a line of poetry and you might know what each individual character means, and then, I guess, the method was to sit back and to do the translation like a puzzle. How can you put this all together into an English sentence? It's just doesn't work, but that's the way Chinese poetry was translated by some of these early figures involved in Chinese scholarship in the West. I'm quite interested in these early people, the range of competency was enormous, some were very good and some were just awful, it's an interesting subject that I'd love to spend some time on and publish the results. I think some missionaries probably knew Chinese better than anyone today in the West, since they lived in China and hired Chinese tutors to teach them one on one, for example, Tomas Francis Wade (1818-1895)⁴³, Herbert Giles (1845-1935)⁴⁴ and James Legge (1815-1897)⁴⁵. Legge often wrote to Wang Tao 王韜 (1828-1897), their correspondences are in the New York Public Library, Legge's ability to compose in elegant literary Chinese is quite extraordinary.

SG: These early missionaries also have a close relationship with the development of the Chinese printing industry, I found a lot of early books in China were published by factories sponsored by these missionaries. This is a hot academic topic now.

RJL: It was mixed information, mixed construction. We usually think that many terms such as *wenxue*, *wenhua*, *zhengzhi* (literature, culture, politics 文学, 文化, 政治) were invented by Japanese. Actually, they weren't. They were invented probably by the *yesuhui huishi* (Jesuits 耶稣会士), back in the Kangxi 康熙 and

41 William Charles White (怀履光) was an Anglican missionary bishop to China and later an academic specializing in the study of Chinese culture and art. In addition to his missionary work, he was a great collector of Chinese artifacts. A majority of his collection are the foundation for the Chinese collections at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Canada.

42 Review by George A. Kennedy of *An Album of Chinese Bamboos; a Study of a Set of Ink-Bamboo Drawings, A.D. 1785*. By William Charles White (The University of Toronto Press, 1939). *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 3:3 and 4 (1941), 392-400.

43 Thomas Francis Wade (威妥玛), was a British diplomat and sinologist who produced an early Chinese textbook in English, in 1867, that was later amended, extended and converted into the Wade-Giles romanization system for Mandarin Chinese by Herbert Giles in 1892. He was the first Professor of Chinese at Cambridge University.

44 Herbert Allen Giles (翟理斯) was a British diplomat and sinologist who was the Professor of Chinese at Cambridge University for 35 years.

45 James Legge (理雅各) was a Scottish sinologist, missionary, and scholar, best known as an early and prolific translator of Classical Chinese texts into English.

Qianlong eras. Later 19th century Protestant missionaries just stole them and they found their way into tracts and pamphlets on all sorts of subjects, both religious and secular, which were printed and sold in Shanghai, where Japanese visitors took them to the Japan, then Chinese students learned the terms in Japan and took them back to China. There's a German scholar who has studied this, Joachim Kurtz⁴⁶. He's been studying these missionary tracts and pamphlets for the development of modern scientific and social science vocabulary in Chinese. His research has shown that most of these terms came originally from China, I mean, including those coined by the Jesuits with their Chinese collaborators in the 17th and 18th centuries.

SG: I think that the late Qing is really an amazing era, even though it is a miserable historical period, but it is also an era full of cultural collisions, exchange and syntheses.

RJL: Yes, that's often the case. The times were just terrible and yet a lot of exciting and interesting things happened. Do you know about Edmund Backhouse (1873-1944)⁴⁷? He was a strange Englishman, who arrived in Beijing in 1899, the end of the *Guangxu* era, where he survived the boxer uprising and where he lived the rest of his life, eventually dying in a Japanese prison in 1944. Backhouse was a great forger, who actually forged a diary supposedly by a Manchu official, Jingshan 景善 (?-1900), which he claimed to have found at the home of its recently deceased author when he occupied it after the Boxer Uprising in 1900. He ingeniously wrote all of it by himself, fooling everyone at the time, both Chinese and Western, passing it off as an original court official diary. However, he was eventually caught out since his calligraphy was learned in Japan, and, you know, the Japanese sometimes do not make strokes from right to left but left to right, and one Dutch scholar, J.J.L. Duyvendak (1889-1954)⁴⁸, noticed this and a few other inconsistencies and exposed it in 1940, forty years after it happened. To know Chinese that well! Who among us could do that now, I am certainly not up to it. Backhouse's story published by Penguin Books, as a biography of him by Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914-2003)⁴⁹, *Hermit*

46 Joachim Kurtz (顾有信) is a Professor of Intellectual History at Heidelberg University. His research focuses on cultural and intellectual exchanges between China, Japan and Europe, with special emphasis on practices of argumentation, logic, political theory, rhetoric, translation studies, historical semantics, and the history of the book.

47 Edmund Backhouse was a British oriental scholar, Sinologist, and linguist whose books exerted a powerful influence on the Western view of the last decades of the Qing dynasty.

48 Jan Julius Lodewijk Duyvendak (戴文达) was a Dutch Sinologist and professor of Chinese at Leiden University. He is known for his translation of *The Book of Lord Shang* and his studies of the *Dao De Jing*.

49 Hugh Trevor-Roper was a British historian of early modern Britain and Nazi Germany. He was Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford.

of Peking: *The Hidden Life of Sir Edmund Backhouse*. He was quite an astonishing man, in a way, for he was a crook who made a lot of money out of this and other fraudulent schemes. Anyway, we're getting off onto a very strange corner of history.

SG: After a series of translation questions, next question I want to ask is about the wide scope of your research topics. Most scholars just focus on one specific area, but it seems that you do something quite different. How did it all start, what's behind it and what was it that so influence your academic life this way?

RJL: The reason is rather silly. When I still a senior at Princeton, Professor Frederick W. Mote (1922-2005)⁵⁰ was writing up a state of the field of Chinese studies essay for *The Journal of Asian studies*. I can't remember if it was I was in class or in a seminar or just in conversation, but Professor Mote said something to the effect that now that Chinese studies has reached the point where scholars can specialize by discipline and no longer "have to do it all". But I thought to myself, "I do want to do it all." I didn't actually come out and say that, of course, I just thought it. So that is how my wide range of interests started. The benefit of doing things this way is that one can discover many connections among Chinese language, literature and culture that more narrow specialization often misses. However, it takes a very long time to acquire real expertise here, but eventually one can see how relationships exist across disciplines, chronological periods, literary genres, among all sorts of things. That's the advantage. The disadvantage is that, it's a lot harder, because it involves such a wide range of subject matter. However, I've never been inclined to stick to one chronological period or one particular literary genre or exclusively specialize in literature and not history. For example, I mentioned that my experience with poetry is helping me translate Guo Xiang's commentary. And that would not have happened if I was not familiar with both kinds of texts. For another example, I can translate and appreciate what Huang Zunxian is saying in the late 19th century, largely because I'm aware that he was influenced by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) and Song dynasty poetry, areas which I have worked in, so I can appreciate what he's doing in terms of that particular theoretical and practical tradition of Chinese poetry. So, not to be bound by one particular genre or one particular historical period, is, I think, a good thing. However, I can be envious of some scholars who spend an entire career doing nothing but studying particular eras of literature or just certain poets. Once, I had a conversation with Professor Liu in which I said how much I wanted to use Chinese literary theory to interpret Chinese works of literature, you

50 Frederick W. Mote (牟 复 礼), was an American Sinologist and a Professor of History at Princeton University for nearly 50 years. His research and teaching interests focused on China during the Ming dynasty and the Yuan dynasty.

know, using Chinese poetics to interpret Chinese poetry for a Western audience. At first, he thought that was kind of a crazy idea and that it even couldn't be done. But later, he changed his mind, and in his later works he seems committed to this approach. However, Professor Liu remained very much a comparatist, far more than I am. Whereas I am a rather straightforward literary historian, he always looked for the comparative angle on things. I found my wide scope of interests very helpful, for example, when I wrote that long review of Jerry Schmidt's book Huang Zunxian's book, in which I discuss in detail Huang's place in the tradition of expressionist, individualist poetry. So that aspect of my training can pay off richly.

SG: I read several articles you wrote about Wang Shizhen and found that you do not just focus on Wang himself and his works but explore connections he had with poets before and after him. That relates to a lot of topics. For me, your research method is very inspiring.

RJL: Well, I hope so. One thing might be worth considering when working on one particular author is to find out what other authors did that author read, and which ones influenced him. That was his place in the context of the tradition he's working in. That's an essential issue that immediately comes to my mind. Until you know such things, you're not get that author right. That's my firm assumption. There are certain sort of hints or clues that can be found. When you start to read a literary critic from the post-Song era, try first to find out what that critic thinks of Su Dongpo. Does he like him or not? What is his opinion of Su Dongpo? For to do so, we can clarify what his view is of many other things. For example, Yuan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797) really liked Su Dongpo, which makes sense, because he's in that tradition of expressionist and individualist poetry. Other people in the 18th century did not like Su Dongpo at all but thought he was very dangerous, you know, like Yan Yu's 严羽 (ca.1195-ca.1245) description, *yehu waidao* (Wild-fox heterodoxy 野狐外道). I wrote a long article⁵¹ on all this, in which Yan Yu is the focus. I also trace the later development of Chinese literary thought and what they thought of Yan Yu's *Canglang shihua* (Canglang poetic discourse 沧浪诗话). This of course, falls into two categories: poetry as self-cultivation or poetry as self-expression, which really provides another way to understand Chinese poetics, an extremely interesting area that I'd like to do more with. That's another reason why I want to get back to Wang Shizhen again.

SG: Your academic career started with Wang Shizhen. Why was he so impor-

51 Lynn, Richard John. "The Talent-Learning Polarity in Chinese Poetics: Yan Yu (ca.1195-ca.1245) and the Later Tradition", *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 4:2 (1983): 157-184.

tant for you at that time? Why is he still important for you now?

RJL: Well, I wanted to do something different, one basic inclination that I have is to do something that I can work with primary sources and that there isn't much secondary literature about, to do something new. At the time I finished my dissertation, nobody was writing about Wang Shizhen, while, of course, now a lot of people are concerned with him. To do Qing dynasty poetry at all was very unusual back in the 1960 and early 1970s, so people never knew what to do with me. When I began to look for jobs, there was no advertise for a specialist in Qing dynasty classical verse, not in the U.S. or Canada or anywhere in the Western world. The departments of Chinese literature in the West are still completely influenced by the *wusi yundong* (May Fourth movement 五四运动), which organized Chinese literary history rigidly in terms of *Tangshi Songci Yuanqu Ming-Qing xiaoshuo* (Tang poetry, Song lyrics, Yuan free lyrics and Ming-Qing vernacular fiction 唐诗宋词元曲明清小说). If you look at our departments in Canada or in the U.S., that's how they still hire people. Daniel Bryant and I were going to write something about this simplistic view of Chinese literary history, but we never did, to explode the way May Fourth movement historians and critics warped, twisted, and distorted Chinese literary history, to re-write it for their own polemical purposes. However, their view is largely still the way people think today, which is a pity, for there are so many far more interesting ways to approach it. For instance, a recent book on Li Mengyang⁵² is quite interesting, done originally in part as a Ph.D thesis at Harvard, but the author, Chang Woei Ong⁵³, does not now have a position in the U.S. or Canada, but teaches in Singapore. Daniel Bryant, who authored his magnificent He Jingming book, taught his whole career at the university of Victoria, which is largely an undergraduate teaching University and does not contain an advanced research center of Chinese studies. Daniel was a Ming dynasty literature specialist, but his teaching duties never covered that area but consisted of all sorts of things of a general nature. It is still rare to find anyone in the West who specializes on Ming-Qing classical verse. Jerry Schmidt does, but he did Song dynasty poetry for quite a while before he went on to the later periods.

SG: But there are many scholars who focus on Ming-Qing women's writing.

RJL: That's one way of getting around May Fourth movement-inspired preju-

52 Ong, Chang Woei. *Li Mengyang, the North-South Divide, and Literati Learning in Ming China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016.

53 Ong Chang Woei (王昌伟) is an associate Professor in the department of Chinese studies of National University of Singapore, his research interests include intellectual history of later imperial China, military history of later imperial China etc.

dices and distortions, for it is entirely fashionable nowadays to study women's literature. But to study Chinese women authors, the great majority of sources, especially for classical verse, are from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Grace Fong⁵⁴ at McGill has done much good in this area, as has Ellen Widmer⁵⁵ and several others.

SG: And Professor Kang-I Sun Chang⁵⁶ and Nanxiu Qian⁵⁷?

RJL: Kang-I got hired as a Tang dynasty specialist, once she finished her dissertation at Princeton. Chen Zilong 陈子龙 (1608-1647), the subject of her most important works, was a particular interest of hers that developed later largely because of Chen's relationship with Liu Rushi 柳如是 —so back to women's writing again. It is still rare to find people who work in Ming-Qing classic verse, for their number is very small. I mean, in Western university Chinese literature departments at best there is someone in Pre-Qin texts, and then you someone in *Weijin nanbeichao* (Wei Jin and the Northern and Southern dynasties 魏晋南北朝), and then more positions in the Tang and Song, and then usually more in vernacular literature of the Yuan, Ming, and Qing, plus, of course, a modern Chinese expert. At the most, this usually means five to cover the entire history of Chinese literature—but very few have that many. Harvard does, but where else? I can't think of another place. That's not enough, you know, such under funding of needed positions happens because of university administration priorities elsewhere, the current way things are going is quite frustrating.

SG: Besides the university administration and the May Fourth movement, from your perspectives, what else leads to this neglect of Ming-Qing classical letters in the English-speaking world?

RJL: It's much harder subject to become competent at. You have to have a good

54 Grace S. Fong (方秀洁) is Professor of Chinese Literature in the department of East Asian Studies, McGill University. She received her Ph.D in classical Chinese poetry from the University of British Columbia. She teaches courses on Chinese culture, poetry, fiction, and women writers, as well as Classical Chinese. Her research encompasses classical Chinese poetry and poetics, women writers of late imperial China, and autobiographical writing in pre-modern China.

55 Ellen Widmer (魏爱莲) is a Professor of East Asian Studies in Wellesley College, her research interests include traditional Chinese fiction, history of Chinese women's writing, history of the book in China, and missionaries to East Asia.

56 Kang-i Sun Chang (孙康宜) is a Chinese-born American scholar of classical Chinese literature. She is the inaugural Malcolm G. Chace Professor and former Chair of the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Yale University.

57 Qian Nanxiu (钱南秀) is Professor of Chinese Literature in the Chao Center for Asian Studies at Rice. She received her M.A. from Nanjing University, China (1982) and her Ph.D. from Yale (1994). Qian's research interests include classical Chinese literature, Chinese intellectual history, comparative literature, and studies on the Sinosphere.

foundation of earlier Chinese literature as well, you can't just study Wang Shizhen in isolation or only in the context of the Qing dynasty, you have to know the whole tradition of poetry before him. So, it's just more difficult, people are put off by the linguistic requirements involved.

Here is an issue I don't know if you want to talk about: How I've reached the point where I am now. As a non-native Chinese speaker, I began to learn Chinese only as an adult, I started a few days before my 21st birthday; I should have started at the age of four with grandpa, reciting *Tangshi sanbai shou* (three hundred Tang poems 唐诗三百首). To be truly a good translator, you not only have to be bilingual but actually bicultural, something that Professor Liu once told me. Professor Liu himself learned Italian so he could better appreciate Italian opera, and he also could read French and German. This took much time and effort. He told me that when he first arrived in England, he was terrified to be out in public, even riding in a bus, because he couldn't read the street signs that went by so fast he could not read them and keep track of where he was. The only Chinese scholar nowadays with Professor Liu's level of East/West cultural sophistication is Zhang Longxi 张隆溪.⁵⁸ And if there is now a successor to Professor Liu, it is Professor Zhang, and certainly not me, for I do very different things.

SG: Professor Zhang is an outstanding scholar. His *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* always appears on the booklist of every Chinese student majoring in comparative literature.

RJL: His other works are also very important, he always keeps improving. I put his books together with books by Professor Liu on the same shelf over there, for I believe that they belong to together. When Professor Zhang came to visit here, he noticed them there and approved, saying "That's good!"

SG: You don't think you are the successor to Professor Liu, so what's the major difference between you and him?

RJL: I'm not a comparatist. Professor James Liu was very determined to develop an East-West comparative perspective on Chinese literature. As we were talking about it earlier, I'm an old-fashioned Chinese-style scholar who writes in English. We are very different, I am a literary historian and a translator of complete works, and he didn't want to do that but something different. He was 59 years old when he died from cancer of the oesophagus. He went very fast after diagnosis, dying within

58 Zhang Longxi is a leading scholar in East-West cross-cultural studies. He holds an MA from Peking University and a Ph. D. from Harvard. He had taught at Harvard and the University of California, Riverside, and is currently Chair Professor of Comparative Literature and Translation at City University of Hong Kong.

two months, very quick. If he had lived another 20 years, he would have produced much more interesting and valuable contributions to the field. I remember when he once read an article in Chinese written by Zhang Longxi, and said: “This man is really good, I can hear his footsteps close behind me.” When I told this to Zhang Longxi, when I first met him back in the later 1980s, he was quite pleased.

Actually, Zhang was greatly influenced by Professor Qian Zhongshu 钱锺书 (1910-1998)⁵⁹. They first met when Zhang went to be Qian’s translator when Qian met with Douwe Fokkema (1931-2011)⁶⁰ in Beijing. Zhang told me that at first Professor Qian thought he was just some party functionary who came to make sure that nothing wrong was said about the state. In fact, Douwe Fokkema actually could speak Chinese quite well, and Qian could also speak English quite well, so they could have conducted the discussion either in English or Chinese. Anyway, they started talking about the *Anatomy of Criticism* by Northrop Frye (1912-1991)⁶¹, which Qian had heard about it but hadn’t seen. Zhang told me that he then spoke up and said that he had read it, which astonished Qian. At that time, Zhang was doing his master’s degree at Peking University. That’s how he got to know Professor Qian and they had a close relationship from that point on. Professor Qian help Zhang get accepted at the Harvard graduate School for the Ph.D degree.

Qian Zhongshu was really a hero, just like James Liu. I admire them both greatly. I once thought to translate Qian’s *Tanyi lu* (record of discussing literary art 谈艺录), I think this is a great book. You know, I actually argue with Qian Zhongshu in one paper⁶² that I presented at the University of Hong Kong years ago, in which I say his view of Wang Shizhen’s theory of poetry is quite wrong; and I have written more about this since.

59 Qian Zhongshu was a Chinese literary scholar and writer, known for his wit and erudition. He is best known for his satirical novel *Fortress Besieged*. His works of non-fiction are characterized by their large amount of quotations in both Chinese and Western languages (including English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Latin).

60 Douwe Fokkema (佛克马) was a famous Netherlandish scholars, sinologist and comparatist, his publications include *Literary History, Modernism and Postmodernism* (1984), *Perfect Worlds: Utopian Fiction in China and the West* (2011) etc.

61 Northrop Frye was a Canadian literary critic and literary theorist, considered one of the most influential of the 20th century, his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) is one of the most important works of literary theory published in the twentieth century. Frye’s contributions to cultural and social criticism spanned a long career during which he earned widespread recognition and received many honors.

62 Lynn, Richard John. “钱锺书对严羽和王士禛的了解：洞察和谬误 Qian Zhongshu on Yan Yu and Wang Shizhen: Insights and Errors,” a paper presented at the conference “钱锺书与 20 世纪中国学术国际研讨会 (International Conference on Qian Zhongshu and Twentieth Century Chinese Scholarship),” University of Hong Kong, 11 October 2002. 35 pp.

SG: It seems that Professor Qian doesn't have a high evaluation of Wang Shizhen's poetry and poetics in *Tanyi lu*.

RJL: That's because his own view of poetry was very English romantic, you know, expressionism and individualism. He was a product of the May Fourth Movement, though he belongs to the next generation, and that colored his view of the Chinese literary tradition, so he didn't think highly of the critics and theorists who approached poetry in terms of self-cultivation, which was very much a Neo-Confucian discipline. He didn't like that at all, and I don't think he understood it entirely either, because of his own predilections and the intellectual prejudices of his day. Nobody has called me on that, I mean, no Chinese has ever come up to me and say: "How dare you? Who do you think you are criticizing Qian Zhongshu?" No one has ever done that. But I've always expected someone to, but no one ever has, even though Qian is quite an iconic figure in China. I've profited immensely by looking into things he has to say about various poets and critics, I quote him often, quite favorably, but I do disagree with him on this particular issue. I would have liked to know him, but unfortunately, we never had the chance to meet, but maybe I will have the chance in the next life.

SG: You wrote many review articles in your career, some of which are quite influential, what's the meaning and function of review article for academic research?

RJL: Well, let me put it into a particular context. Bad books are easy to review, because you can easily point out all the things wrong, and good books are also easy to review, because you can just describe how wonderful it is. But if a book is a mixture of good and bad, that makes it difficult to review. For example, Professor Ong's book on Li Mengyang consists of much good information and insight, but I think he completely missed the whole issue of poetry as self-cultivation in the *qianhou qizi* tradition of criticism. Such problems are difficult to deal with because of the complex issues involved and as such are impossible to judge simply "good" or "bad." So, that's the value of review articles, and as for their, one owes it to the field to make value judgements, in effect, one should be a kind of a guide to or monitor of quality. The harsh criticism that I once made of Wai-lim Yip's work, for instance, was quite unusual for me. When I was writing it up, Professor Liu told me: "I couldn't do that, because he is Chinese and I am Chinese, so no one will listen to me, but you're not a Chinese, so you should do it." Professor Liu was actually in agreement with me and didn't like Yip's theory of poetry or his practice of translation at all. Such hostile feeling between them was entirely mutual, by the way. I review many book manuscripts for publishers and articles for journals, for I think it an important duty. The field will only get better if standards are maintained. However, although

I am on good terms with Jerry Schmidt, I still think he could have produced much better work if he had been more careful with his sources, the books on Yuan Mei and Huang Zunxian in particular, his latest book⁶³ on Zheng Zhen 郑珍 (1806-1864) seems much better. Perhaps he's been listening to criticism I and others have made of his work after all. And Jonathan Chaves and I have maintained friendly relations for many years, though he knows we do things rather differently.

SG: Your research began from Qing poetry and poetics. Recently, there are several scholars in the English-speaking world focusing themselves on Ming-Qing women's writing. How do you evaluate this phenomenon?

RJL: I think the primary focus here is on women's history in China and those who are researching this nowadays are using the writings of Ming-Qing women writers to explore the role of Chinese women in pre-modern society in general. That's a good thing, because it's dispelling the myth that Chinese women weren't educated and they had no place in literary culture, which now has been clearly proven to be quite wrong. Elite women were often very well-educated, and in many cases, they were better educated than their brothers who became officials. It is good that this is resulting in a radical revision of social history of pre-modern China. Though it may be true that the scholars involved are not studying women's poetry chiefly as poetry but studying it as primary source material for the lives of Chinese elite women, so what? I mean, that's okay. It'll probably progress beyond that as time goes on and as more and more scholars tend to it. Professor Grace Fong has done a marvelous job of putting together the Ming-Qing Women Writing database, by utilizing the resources of the Harvard-Yenching Library. That's fantastic, it's really going to revolutionize our research, for it's a genuine ground-breaking foundational work. From this, a new, wonderful light should illuminate areas of Chinese literary history that up to now have been too long neglected.

SG: I think I have already covered all the questions I want to ask. Thank you so much for your time to conduct this interview, it is really a nice experience to talk with you. Hope you can keep healthy and look forward to reading your new books.

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The Interdisciplinary Nature of Literature and Theology and its Potential Value¹

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Abstract:

Responding to the questions of “theory and theology in Chinese literary studies” and tracing back to the interaction of literature and religion in the tradition of Chinese *jingxue* (study of the classics/scriptures), the author concentrates on the correlation of “poetry” and “classics/scriptures” that were really valued in the process of cultural exchange between China and the West, with the translation of Christian missionaries as typical cases. In such a context, the author argues for a “non-religious” understanding and even an “atheist theology” to provide a methodological model for interdisciplinary studies of literature and religion, which not only plays an important role in comparative literature but has also been quietly exerting an impact upon the integral character of the humanities.

Keywords: *jingxue* (study of the classics/scriptures), missionaries’ translation, non-religious interpretation, atheist theology

Sharon Kim’s introduction to the workshop “Theory and Theology in Chinese Literary Studies” provided me with much inspiration. She writes, for example:

1 This article is translated by Chloë Starr and Zhang Jing, based on the presentation of the author at the workshop of “Theory and Theology in Chinese Literary Studies”, Yale University, 2016.

“One major strand of the Chinese work specifically uses theology to enable a cross-cultural dialogue between China and the West ... to allow both China and the West to preserve their own identities while allowing the other to speak on its own terms in dialogue. ... Theology provides an answer to a key question ... —how to preserve a Chinese mentality while entering into a conversation with world systems of thought.... Chinese intellectuals thus describe theology as the opening through which an authentically Chinese voice can speak to the West instead of lapsing into ‘aphasia’.” Chinese scholars who are in the midst of this might not themselves come to this realization. And this sort of inspiration is precisely the attraction of cross-cultural dialogue. I believe that interdisciplinary research into literature and theology is similar. My presentation, based on the questions Kim posed, concentrates on three aspects. The first is the traditions of Chinese *jingxue* (study of the classics/scriptures), and whether these might enable interdisciplinary readings to become natural. The second is whether it was “poetry” or “the classics” that were really valued in the process of cultural exchange between China and the West. The third question is: what is the significance for us of a “non-religious Christianity” and an “atheist theology”?

I

The teaching classics of “the six arts” are often regarded as the representative works of Chinese classics and culture: that is, *The Book of Odes* (Shijing), *The Book of History* (Shangshu), *The Book of Rites* (Liji), *The Classic of Music* (Yueji), *The Yijing* (I-Ching); and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chunqiu), collectively known in Chinese as the “Six Classics” (*The Classic of Music* was later lost, and these became the “Five Classics”). Scholars often concur with Ma Yifu’s comment on the classics found in his book *Speeches in Taihe* (Taihe huiyu): “It is widely acknowledged that all scholarship in our nation in over two millennia has its source in these.” The arts of the Zhou dynasty (ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy and composition and mathematics) were merely the refinement of skills, or what Zhang Taiyan (a philosopher in the late Qing dynasty) called the “minor arts” (Liu 92). According to a commentary on *The Book of Rites* and on the *Zhuangzi*,² the “Six

- 2 *The Book of Rites*: “When you enter any state, you will know what subjects its people have been taught. If they show themselves to be gentle, sincere and good, they must have been taught from the *Book of Poetry*. If they have a wide comprehension and know of things ancient and faraway, they have been taught from *The Book of History*. If they be generous, simple and honest, they have been taught from *The Book of Music*. If they be refined, dialectic and subtle, they have been taught from *The Book of Change*. If they be generous, modest and respectful, they have been taught from *The Book of Rites and Ceremonies*. If they be rhetorical and coherent, they have been taught from *The Spring and Autumn Annals*.”

Classics” of the “Great Arts” are all rooted in human character, self-cultivation and profound thinking, and so, from the very beginning, contributed to the formation of the Dao, to education, and to the development of humanity, while the “Six Arts” or “Six Classics” added literature, history and philosophy to these three.

What is interesting is that the “Yiwenzhi” section of the *The History of the Former Han* (Hanshu) records nine types of books in the “classics/scriptures section” of the “Six Arts”: the six works given above and also *The Analects of Confucius* (Lunyu), and, in addition, *The Classic of Filial Piety* (Xiaojing) and *The Minor Learning* (Xiaoxue), the latter being essentially a textbook for learning characters. *The History of Former Han* also includes such reference texts as the *Erya* (a very early dictionary) in the “classics of filial piety” category, clearly regarding these as “scriptural/classics” (*jingxue*) materials; this is the reason why later generations included the *Erya* within the “Thirteen Classics”. When we get to the collections of the Tang, edited by Wei Zheng, the category of “Minor Learning” located within the category of “scripture/classic”, includes texts for learning characters, texts explaining the meanings of characters, and reference materials on sound, meaning and rhyme. As late as the Qing dynasty, the *Siku quanshu* (the imperial library, or “Emperor’s Four treasures”) retained the category of “Minor Learning” in the category of “scriptures/classics”.

Assigning “Minor Learning” to the category of “Scriptures/Classics” is not just a question of library categorization, because while “Minor Learning” begins with the learning of characters, it is also preparation for the later “Great Learning” involved with reading the scriptures/classics. In Zhang Taiyan’s *Lectures on National Learning* (Guoxue jiangyanlu), he wrote, in similar vein: “In ancient times people first learnt to recognize characters, and only afterwards studied the way of the Great Learning.” From the Song dynasty onwards, “Minor Learning” gradually developed as an independent discipline, and was no longer subordinated to *jingxue*, but the original use of the “Minor Learning” in service to *jingxue* continued. This is probably similar to the study of grammar, rhetoric and logic of “Liberal Arts” in medieval Europe, where these were also intended to cultivate the abilities of the average student so that the latter could eventually approach sacred texts (Hardison 9).

Jingxue traditions were once thought of as “representing an intrinsic scholarship, broad and subtle, where everything is accounted for” (Liu 93), but the advent of modern Western scientific systems in China challenged that perception. Confucian scholars such as Qian Mu began also to suggest that: “The world of scholarship knows no national boundaries; the term ‘national studies’...will not be tenable in the future.” At the same time Qian was convinced that only by “understanding the

vicissitudes and changes in China's academic thoughts over the last two thousand years" could there be "the ability to respond to the newly- recreated opportunities" and so when arranging his thoughts for that year's lectures, he still felt "the delight of teaching, where what accumulates over a long time is not forgotten, and memories extending to the present still bring great sweetness" (Qian Mu 3-4).

China's present academic scholarship has long been westernized, but an increasing number of questions are being raised in the Chinese academic world regarding the inclusion of *The Book of Odes* in literature, or the *Zuo Commentary* (Zuo zhuan) in history, or the *Zhouyi* in philosophy, all in line with western classification. In terms of methods, the questions and methodologies that cohere in comparative literature, religious studies and classics probably most clearly echo the original traditions of *jingxue*. If we consider the number of "High-Level Consultation on People-to-People Exchange" (CPE) signed between China and the US, Russia, the UK, the EU, France, etc. and their related content, then all of the clues point to "*guoxue* (study of Chinese classics)" and "*hanxue*" (sinology) as the best fit for such study.

Whatever the level of "vicissitudes and changes", the historical memory of the study of the "Six Arts" is in reality everywhere, and the internal reasons for studying literature and religion together have always been natural and compelling. If we take the *Complete Tang Poems* (Quan Tangshi), for example, you will find 115 "monk poets" among them, and more than 2,800 "monastic poems", including many known to western scholarship as the "poems by the monk Han Shan". In terms of research into the relationships between literature and religion, we might first point to the Song dynasty poet Yan Yu's *Canglang's Remarks on Poetry* (Canglang shihua), an early 13th century poetry manual. In Yan Yu's opening piece, Buddhist terminology leaps out, in phrases such as "entering directly to the source," "going straight in with a single blade," "achieve enlightened insight" or "the gate of sudden [enlightenment]," (Yan, "Making" 394-395)³ showing how "speaking generally, the Way of Chan (Zen) is concerned only with enlightenment; the Way of poetry also lies in enlightenment," and hence "the enlightenments of poetry and Zen (禪) are very similar (论诗如论禅 Lun shi ru lun chan)" (Yan, *Canglang* 11-12).

In line with the tradition of "using Chan to speak metaphorically of poetry," research into the relation between Chinese literature and Buddhism has been continuous throughout later generations. Zhang Mantao's edited collection *Anthology of Contemporary Buddhist Research* gathered the fruits of recent representative

3 Translations taken from Stephen Owen's version of Yan Yu's Chapter I "Making the Right Distinctions in Poetry." *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Ed. Stephen Owen. Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992. pp. 394-395.

research projects in the three volumes, *Buddhism and Chinese Culture*, *Buddhism and Chinese Literature*, and *Buddhist Art* (Taipei, Dacheng, 1976). Since the 1980s, scholarship on the mainland has included Zhang Zhongxing's *Buddhism and Chinese Literature* (Anhui Education Press, 1984), Ge Zhaoguang's *Zen and Chinese Culture* (Shanghai Renmin, 1986) and *Daoism and Chinese Culture* (Shanghai Renmin, 1987), Jiang Shuzhuo's *Transmission and Translation of Buddhist Scripture and Ancient Chinese Thought* (Jiangsu Renmin, 1990), *Buddhism and Chinese Literature and Arts* (Guangdong Higher Education, 1992); Zhan Shichuang's *History of Daoist Literature* (Shanghai Arts, 1992), Sun Changwu's *Buddhism and Chinese Literature* (Shanghai Renmin, 1996) and *Daoism and Tang Literature* (Renmin, 2001), Chen Yinchu's *Sui and Tang Buddhist Studies and Chinese Literature* (Baihuazhou Arts, 2002) and so on.

Since Christianity's arrival in China, whether the Assyrian Church of the Tang dynasty, the Society of Jesus of the Ming era, or the Protestant Christianity of the "Opium Wars" period, it has influenced indigenous scholarship, and the relationship between Christianity and literature has assumed an ever more important place in interdisciplinary research of religion and literature. As early as 1930, the YMCA Press in Shanghai brought out a large-scale series of works, including Wu Leichuan's *Christianity and Chinese Culture* and Xu Baoqian's *Christianity and Chinese Culture*. Included in the same series was a later work that had an enduring effect on research into literature and religion: Zhu Weizhi's *Christianity and Literature*. In the field of comparative literature, Qian Zhongshu's work has also received special attention: from 1936 when he was studying in Europe to 1998 when he died, Qian wrote 211 volumes of notes (biji) on foreign language literatures, dealing with more than four thousand works of literature. Religion occupied a significant place in these notes, alongside philosophy, linguistics, literature and literary theory. The first sentence Qian extracted when reading L. A. Reid's *Preface to Faith* was "What we need is not a new religion, but a renewed religion" (Qian Zhongshu 368). This was undoubtedly particularly inspiring to Chinese scholars of later generations.

Of the two threads that began here, one is related to Christianity and Chinese culture—especially research into modern Chinese literature—and the second one to reading Christianity, Western literature and literary theory from the perspective of a Chinese scholar. In 2008 the University of San Francisco and Peking University jointly organized a workshop for young scholars on "Christianity in China: Comparative Perspectives and Methods". This was probably the first time that the methodologies of comparative literature and religious studies were clearly linked together, and a question that came out of this was: why are studies of literature and

religion fated to have this sort of dialogue?

In 2000, Gayatri Spivak put forward the idea of “the death of a discipline”, and in 2003 she drew together various writings on the topic and published a book under the same title, which led to a fierce debate in the world of scholarship.⁴ As a professor of comparative literature, Spivak put forward the concept of “death of a discipline” not as an attempt to get rid of this academic subject, but in the hope that it could truly become an “international” and not just “Western” discipline. That is to say a discipline that displayed the inherent “comparative” dialectical spirit of its roots, and that reestablished the concept of “world literature”. At a broader level, this also relates to the premise of all scholarship in the humanities.

In 2014 Allen Miller (University of South Carolina) took part in a dialogue in Beijing on “The Task of Comparative Literature Today”, and gave a talk on “Wisdom as Knowledge and Wisdom as Action: Plato, Heidegger, Cicero and Confucius”. In 2015, David Damrosch of Harvard, Galin Tihanov of London University and Princeton’s Martin Kern, together with Matthias Freise of Gottingen and various other scholars took part in Beijing in a “Forum on Ideas and Methods: What Is World Literature” where the panel topics included “Frames for World Literature”, “The Location of World Literature”, “Ends and Beginnings of World Literature” and “Four Perspectives on World Literature from a Functional Point of View”. As I see it, no matter what frame or location, end or beginning, the most fundamental questions lie in the multi-dimensions of wisdom as “action” or “operation”, because “once we look beyond a single culture and era, the term ‘literature’ itself has to be defined in varied ways.” So, “world literature” is not static but dynamic, and is by nature a set of types of relation, and actually composed out of relations. This is why I very much applaud Matthias Freise’s warning: “World literature does not exist, but takes place.” This also makes me think of a quotation Alain Badiou takes from Mallarme: “Nothing took place but the place.”

From a perspective of religious studies, Max Müller’s famous dicta are often reduced to one symbolic saying: “He who knows one, knows none”. The comparative consciousness and spirit of dialogue latent in this saying lies precisely in the shared basis for existence that sustains comparative literature and religion. If this idea must extend beyond the inertia of “the center”, then it must also transcend disciplinary boundaries. Its most fundamental direction is “interfaith”, “cross-cultural”, “cross-disciplinary” or the inner implications of “mutual subjectivity”.

The essential factors latent in Chinese traditions of *jingxue* are exactly those ac-

4 Spivak, Gayatri C. *Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

tivated through the interaction of comparative literature, religious studies, the classics, and even “*guoxue*” (study of the Chinese classics) and sinology.

II

In this second section of this essay, I take the history of translation of western poetry into Chinese as a case study to consider, in context of the process of China-West exchange, whether the focus of these translations has been on “*shi*” (poetry) or “*jing*” (scripture).

The translation activities of Christian missionaries represent a typical hermeneutical event in the history of China-West cultural communication, and have attracted much scholarly attention. Scholars have studied not only the translations of the Bible into Chinese and of Chinese classics into western languages, but also the translation of western literary works into Chinese by the missionaries.⁵ “Western poetry” is not “Western learning” in the ordinary sense, and translating Western poetry as a part of missionary works does not necessarily satisfy the reader’s “literary pleasure”, but the translations have to be assessed as “poetry”. This process happened at the birth of modern Chinese literature when Western poetry was introduced and being read by Chinese literati. Aside from the question of what gains or losses these Western literary works have brought to Chinese literature, they have left some obvious linguistic marks. This topic is therefore closely related to the complicated relations between literature, religion, time and tradition, which constitute a unique nexus of problems, and which might re-activate or unearth multiple elements that once were “evaporated” or “buried” (Luo 283).

A related issue is that missionaries’ translation activities under the rubric of “Chinese learning” also include translations of Chinese poetry. For instance, all three famous missionaries, that is to say, Nicolas Trigault, Alex de la Charme and Joseph de Prémare translated *The Book of Odes*.⁶ James Legge even published three versions of *The Book of Odes* (Pfister 5): an 1871 “complete version” (1st edition Hong Kong, repr. London, 1895), an 1876 “rhymed version” (London), and an 1879

5 Luo, Wenjun 罗文军. *A Study on the West Poems Translated by Christian Missionaries in Late Qing Dynasty* 晚清民初新教传教士西诗译介研究 (Wan Qing Minchu Xinjiao chuanjiaoshi xishi yijie yanjiu). Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 2016.

6 Nicolas Trigault, Alex de la Charme and Joseph de Prémare were Roman Catholic missionaries of the 16th and 17th century. James Legge was a well-known Scottish missionary in the late 19th century who later became Chair of Chinese Department at Oxford University.

“selected religious poems” (for his series *Sacred Books of the East*).⁷ James Legge’s versions remain problematic because he did not care whether his translation were done in the form of poetry or not. Although he discusses in detail meter, rhyme and tone patterns in the Chinese language (Legge, *Chinese* 102-111), and expresses his hope that one day someone might present “a faithful metrical version”, he still holds that it is “not worth the trouble of versifying” (Legge, *Chinese* 116). Legge explains that the reason he translates *The Book of Odes* is because it is one of the Chinese classics, and he is not interested in judging its “poetical value”. Earlier missionaries had introduced Chinese literature to Europe and praised *The Book of Odes* as something “beautiful, harmonious, sublime and pure”, which Legge thought was not only “absurdly extravagant” but that also displayed “astonishing audacity” (Legge, *Chinese* 114-115). As for this, Legge is the representative of many other later missionaries. Our question is: did their primary interests and reasons for translating *The Book of Odes* lie in it being “*shi*” (poetry) or in it being “*jing*” (scripture)?

In other words, if what the missionaries who translated *The Book of Odes* first looked at was not just the “poetry”, then were the missionaries who translated western poetry into Chinese destined to face the same choices? To take this a step further: if there has been a similar tradition of “poetic education” in China and the West, or if the principle of “education through entertainment” (Horace 42-44) is similar to that which holds that “the essence of poetry is gentleness and kindness” described in *The Book of Rites*, and if the “healing and purifying power of music” (Aristotle 285) is also akin to the phrase “as customs change and traditions evolve, nothing is better than music,”⁸ then, for the missionaries at least, was the purpose of “*jiao*” (education) definitely superior to that of “*shi*” (poetry)? If we follow this train of thought, then perhaps it is easy to understand the initial purpose of the missionaries in translating *The Book of Odes*, however, we still have to face the following questions: why was *The Book of Odes* regarded by Westerners as one of the Sacred Books? And yet why was the Song of Solomon regarded by Chinese primarily as a literary work (Luo 279-281)?⁹ If even the “Songs of Songs”¹⁰ is treated as a literary

7 See Max Muller edited, *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol.3. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879, which included some “religious texts” in Chinese classics and was entitled “The Sacred Books of China”.

8 Zengzi 曾子, “Chapter 20: Broad and Crucial Doctrine,” in *The Classic of Filial Piety* (Xiaojing).

9 See Luo, Wenjun 罗文军. *A Study on the West Poems Translated by Christian Missionaries in Late Qing Dynasty* 晚清民初新教传教士西诗译介研究 (Wan Qing Minchu Xinjiao chuanjiaoshi xishi yijie yanjiu). Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press. 2016, pp. 279-281.

10 *The Song of Songs*, which is Solomon’s, see Newly-revised Standard Version.Chinese Protestant Council, 2002, p. 1062.

work, then what of other Western poetry?

There is no doubt that for missionaries, culture was a necessary supplement to their evangelical purpose, and this is quite obvious in their translation activities. For example, James Legge states clearly that: “In order to bring our Chinese readers and hearers to think as we do about God, missionaries must supplement largely the statements in the Confucian books about Him ... we have to supplement the testimony concerning Him in *The Old Testament*. But is there one of ourselves who has not from year to year been adding, by various study and effort of thought, to his knowledge of God, enlarging to himself the meaning of the name?” (*Confucianism* 3) This strategy, in fact, worked well. In Legge’s translation of *The Book of Odes*, when the two characters “*Shang di* 上帝” appeared in one poem, he chose the word “God” to translate the term: “This king Wan, watchfully and reverently, with his entire intelligence served God.” In other places where the character “*ming* 命” appears, Legge translated this as “the appointment of God” (*Chinese* 433, 427). Because of such translations and interventions, in current Chinese language the word “*Shang di* 上帝 [Lord on High]” is regarded as a Western concept, and few recall its roots in the ancient Chinese classics.

However, the Church (as well missionaries themselves) has been suspicious and cautious about this kind of “evangelizing through culture” (intercultural evangelism). While Elijah Coleman Bridgman complained about the mission society’s supervision of the *China Repository*, the magazine he founded (Luo 253),¹¹ it was he who criticized the Delegates Version of the Bible for “sacrificing the correct translation in many places” and “having few insights in accordance with Christian doctrines” because it used “Chinese philosophical terms” (Zhao 21). Because James Legge “spent too much time translating Chinese classics,” his colleagues suspected him of “not serving God well” (Pfister 3). An even more extreme example can be seen in the strength of the evangelical and missionary purpose of these missionaries, with some church universities even foregoing courses in English in order to resist secular western ideas, while others forbade the use of Chinese in order to overcome the powerful Chinese traditional customs. The results of such efforts were the same: student stroke in both universities (Corbett 76; Xu Yihua 28).

Similar paradoxes are plentiful. For instance, Wang Tao’s contribution to missionary translation works has been widely affirmed, but his own descriptions of his works contradict the impressions of others: “Every day I start working in the early

11 See Luo, Wenjun 罗文军. *A Study on the West Poems Translated by Christian Missionaries in Late Qing Dynasty* 晚清民初新教传教士西诗译介研究(Wan Qing Minchu Xinjiao chuanjiaoshi xishi yijie yanjiu). Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press. 2016, p. 253.

dawn and finish after the sun sets, working as hard as a street vendor. My status is as low as a hired worker pounding rice day and night. By nature I am lazy and dislike constraints, but now I am living among the stone animals [which represent laws and regulations]. The writings I read all day are in conflict with each other, like ice and fire, and impossible to reconcile. To all appearances I am the one who writes, but in fact, I am used by others, and what I have written are but broken sentences, of limited vision. So my writings can be used to paste up windows or just thrown into the toilet” (Wang xxx)¹². The American scholar Michael Gibbs Hill quotes Wang Tao in a book discussing the translations of the famous modern translator Lin Shu, explaining that Wang Tao was regarded by his colleagues as “a man who had forfeited the self-respect of a scholar for the sake of regular wages.” As Wang Tao wrote, “relying on the barbarian pygmies for a living is ... like being in prison,” and as for the paper on which his work was written, if “not used for covering pickle jars or pasting up windows, one might as well throw it straight into the privy” (Hill 28). Hill notes that it was Joseph Jardine, a wealthy opium trader, who paid for Wang Tao’s printing costs, and for this reason, “Twenty-first-century readers might also find his labors suspicious” (Hill 28).

Whenever we encounter intercultural translation activities, it is common to find paradoxes in investigating the motivation, methods, results, or the role of “ideology” or of patrons in regards to the translation. Hill’s book title serves as a good example—*Lin Shu, Inc., Translation and the Making of Modern Chinese Culture*, in which “Lin Shu, Inc.” can be translated into Chinese as “the workshop of Lin Shu” or as “Lin’s Store”, a version more familiar to ordinary Chinese people because of a famous movie “*Lin’s Store* 林家铺子 (Lin jia pu zi)” in 1960s. “*Puzi* 铺子” (store) is not wrong, but the reason why we could not choose this term may be precisely because the term is too “appropriate” or too Chinese, and so easily swallowed up by the “presuppositions” of the “target culture”. This kind of issue is very obvious in the case of Western poetry translated by Westerners. In straightforward terms, “the translation and introduction of western poems by western missionaries” brings out a series of paradoxical motifs: that Western translators, whose mission was to spread the Gospel, were motivated by educational aims, under the supervision of their mission societies and various kinds of sponsorship, and translated selected Western poems into Chinese, which were then ultimately integrated into Chinese religious

12 Wang Tao 王韬. *Private Writings*, see Cai Jintu 蔡锦图 edited, *Selected Works of Christian Writings in Late Qing Dynasty* 遗珠拾穗：清末民初基督教圣经选辑 (Yizhu shisui: Qingmo Minchu Jidujiao Shengjing xuanji). Xinbei: Chinese Oliver Press, 2014, note 38 on p. xxx.

life or literary history through the secondary selection of readers. There is no single constitutive factor in this process, instead all have become “constituted results” (Badiou 37)¹³.

In Western philosophy there is a famous dictum by Aristotle: “even in mere melodies, there is an imitation of character” (Aristotle 280), and because of this “the Republic” should design a kind of “meter and melody” for the “guardian of the state” (Plato 365-366), which is similar to the Confucian saying, “Banish the songs of Zheng [because they are decadent], and keep far from specious talkers.”¹⁴ In this regard, even if the missionaries’ translations of Western poetry are merely accepted or understood by readers as “poetry” in the literary sense, the basis for this understanding still lies in the conceptual and formal function of “poetry”, and not in pure enjoyment. And even if the history of missionaries as the subject of the translation is unlikely to be repeated, they have highlighted a historical period when the two cultures enjoyed exceptional interactions; this may well come to serve as a unique inspiration for research into “translated literature”.

According to a theologian Gerhard Ebeling, the New Testament’s canonicity “requires its unity,” but it is always “an unfinished book” (Ebeling 23-28). Translation as the text as well as the activity of comprehension and interpretation tied to the translation process might be the same: Dao Yuan, who came to China in the Song dynasty and tried to learn the dharma, wrote a book entitled *The Very Dharma* (Zhengfa yancang), whose meaning became much clearer and comprehensible when it was later translated back into Chinese.¹⁵ American sinologist Haun Saussy also notices an incomplete intercultural “fusion” in his study on Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound. He points out how Fenollosa’s essay has been re-edited and expanded, and how this unfinished essay of Fenollosa itself cannot “be finished in one single language” (Saussy 40). Does this mean that the subsequent journey to search for the meaning has to go back to the original language itself? If not, is it true, as T. S. Eliot claims, to say that, “The Chinese poetry we know is nothing but what Ezra Pound has invented?” (Saussy front flyleaf)

The original purpose and target of the missionaries’ effort in translating poetry lay outside “poetry”, but when translating the Bible into Chinese became the dominant trend, why did these missionaries still go on to “translate poetry” in this King-

13 Alain Badiou: “the subject always being constituted, ... not constitutive”. Badiou, Alain. “The Event in Deleuze”. Tr. Jon Roffe. *Parrhesia*, no. 2 (2007): 37.

14 Confucius, *Analects*, chapter 10.

15 Dao Yuan 道元. *The Very Dharma* 正法眼藏 (Zhengfa yancang). Tr. He Yansheng 何燕生. Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 2003.

dom of Poetry? Have the Western poems translated by them left some “constitutive” possibilities in the shape of forms and ideas? How are we going to evaluate these changed texts and the context that has changed the texts? Here we may achieve some deeper understanding about the reason why translation studies must touch upon—and be involved in—fundamental hermeneutical questions.

III

One intriguing and maybe also controversial topic is the assertion of the contemporary Italian thinker Gianni Vattimo that “perhaps true Christianity must be nonreligious” (Vattimo, “Toward” 37). If a “nonreligious Christianity” is a possibility, then perhaps there can also be an “atheist theology”—and indeed “atheist theology” has already been the subject of much research (Boscaljon 1-14)¹⁶. Is this simply some paradox, or post-modern rhetoric of contemporary intellectuals, or some sort of mysterious word play?

If we trace the source of such thinking, we find that phrases like “nonreligious interpretation of Christianity”, “nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts”, etc. (Bonhoeffer 344), were originally used by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and so were not criticisms originating from outside the Christian community at all. In his book *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith discusses how religion is not equivalent to faith; and if you want to distinguish “faith” from “the cumulative religious traditions” (Smith, *The Meaning* 154),¹⁷ then “faith” is precisely “non-religious”. If the faith of Christians is not one of the religions in the world, then “neither is the faith of any other people” (Smith, *The Meaning* 139).

As Smith mentions, the word “*religio*” occurs 9 times in the Vulgate Old Testament and carries varied meanings, including “service or ceremony” (Ex. 12:26), “ordinance” (Ex. 12:43), “statute” (Lev. 6:31) and “requirement” (Num. 19:2). The related term “*religiositas*” occurs 3 times, in Ecclesiastes 1:17, 18 and 26, translated into English as “religiousness” or “godliness” (Smith, *The Meaning* 210). In John Hick’s foreword to the 1991 version of Cantwell Smith’s book, he sums up the mat-

16 Boscaljon, Daniel R. “Žižek’s Atheist Theology.” *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, 4 (2010):1-14.

17 Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1991), p. 154. In Smith’s words, “By ‘cumulative tradition’ I mean the entire mass of overt objective data that constitute the historical deposit, as it were, of the past religious life of the community in question: temples, scriptures, theological systems, dance patterns, legal and other social institutions, conventions, moral codes, myths, and so on; anything that can be and is transmitted from one person, one generation, to another, and that an historian can observe”. (156).

ter: “Nor within the European tradition did the Latin word *religio* mean a religion in our modern sense. The title of St. Augustine’s *De Vera Religione* should not be translated as *On the True Religion* (i.e., Christianity in contrast to other religions), but as *On True Religiousness* or *True Piety*. This was still true a thousand years later, when Zwingli wrote his *De Vera et Falsa Religione*: the subject was not Christianity as the true religion in contrast to false religions, but rather the true or false religio, i.e., ‘piety’ of Christians” (Hick vii).

The nuanced differences of these words cannot help but remind us of Derrida’s question: “[W]hat if *religio* remained untranslatable?” Derrida further points out that “As its name indicates, it would be necessary, therefore, one would be tempted to conclude, to speak of this essence with a sort of religio-sity. In order not to introduce anything alien, leaving it thus intact, safe, unscathed.” And that is “the very matter – the thing itself – of religion” (Derrida 67, 61)¹⁸. Thus, from “*religio*” to the “very matter-the thing itself-of religion”, there exists a process of dynamic generation of semantic meaning, which occurs not only in Western languages, but also in Chinese. The term “*zongjiao* 宗教” (religion) and “*shenxue* 神学” (theology) share a similarly complicated process of emergence. It is worth to investigate this process and to see how the current meanings of these terms were finally settled.

In ancient Chinese, “*zong* 宗” refers to the origin or root inscribed in the ancestral shrine, and “*jiao* 教” refers to that which elders and teachers instruct and which children should follow (Xu Shen 127, 342). It was only in the modern period that the two characters were joined together. In classical Buddhist scriptures, we find frequent use of the terms. For example, in the North Song, Buddhist Master Qi Song said: “We should make Zen the origin (*zong* 宗), and Buddha the ancestor (*zu* 祖). The ancestor (*zu* 祖) is the great pattern for the teaching (*jiao* 教) while the origin (*zong* 宗) is the fundamental system of the teaching.”¹⁹ Reading further, we are told that the “way of education” focusing on “transmitting from mind to mind instead of the transmission of mere doctrinal teachings” is the most profound mystery and se-

18 Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Religion*. Ed. Gil Anidjar. New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 67,61. Emphasis in the original. He also says, “One must in any case take into account, if possible in an areligious, or even irreligious manner, what religion at present might *be*, as well as what is *said* and *done*, what is *happening* at this very moment, in the world, in history, *in its name*.” (61)

19 Qi Song. “Chuanfa zhengzong ji: shanghuang dishu,” in *Chinese Electronic Taisho Tripitaka*, Vol. 51, Normalized Version, No. 2078, Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association. http://www.cbeta.org/result/normal/T51/2078_001.htm

cret of orthodox Zen doctrine.²⁰ Other scholars have noticed that when Yan Fu translated Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* into Chinese, he borrowed from Buddhism the term “*jiaozong* 教宗”, whose semantic meaning should be “the origin of education” (*Jiao zhi suo zong* 教之所宗) in the context of “*zong* as the fundamental system of education” (Masini 73). As Yan Shou of the Five Dynasties (907-960) wrote, “If you have heard of the treasures of Tathagata, and spent all of your life chanting and transmitting them, meditating day and night without wearying, however, your own eyes are not opened, you are merely counting outer treasures; if your eyes of wisdom are not developed, how can you dispute the origin of doctrine (教宗)?”²¹ In this context, “*zong* 宗” means “revered” and “acknowledged as ruler and honored”.²² The sense of “reverence” in “*zong*宗,” as in the phrase “*Jun zhi zong zhi* 君之宗之” and of “education” in “*jiao*教”, as in “the sages laid down their education in the way of Heaven” (*shen dao she jiao* 神道设教)²³ were very far from their later meaning within the compound term “*zongjiao*宗教” (religion).

The changes following the introduction of Western ideas and science and technology into China left a strong imprint on the modern Chinese language. According to records, 129 Chinese books were translated into Japanese between 1660-1895, with only 12 books translated from Japanese into Chinese, while between 1896 and 1911 the situation was completely reversed, with 958 books translated into Chinese from Japanese. (Masini 127-128) New terms appeared for “Japanese-made Chinese” (*Wasei-kango* 和制汉语), with much new Chinese vocabulary “borrowed-back from

20 Qi Song. “Chuanfa zhengzong lun: juan xia,” in *Chinese Electronic Taisho Tripitaka*, Vol. 51, Normalized Version, No. 2080, Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association. http://www.cbeta.org/result/normal/T51/2080_002.htm.

21 Yan, Shou. “Zongjing juanlu: book 43,” in *Chinese Electronic Taisho Tripitaka*, Vol. 48, Normalized Version, No. 2016, Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association. http://www.cbeta.org/result/normal/T48/2016_043.htm.

22 “*Jun zhi zong zhi*, 君之宗之”, in the poem “Gong Liu 公刘”, in “Greater odes of the kingdom: decade of sheng min”, Tr. James Legge, in *The Book of Poetry*, vol. IV of *The Chinese Classics: with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*, vol. IV. London: Trübner, 1961, p. 487. See also “*Ji yan yu zong* 既燕于宗” (The feast is spread in the ancestral temple) in poem “*Fu yi* 鳧鷖” (“Greater odes of the kingdom: decade of sheng min,” 480); or as said in the interpretation of poem “*Fu yi*”: “*Lai zong ju zun wei ye* 来宗居尊位也,” to be put at the most reverend position. See Li Chu and Huang Xun, *Mao shi ji jie*, <http://ctext.org/library.pl?if=gb&file=10743&page=161&remap=gb>.)

23 “Tuan: When we contemplate the spirit-like way of Heaven, we see how the four season proceed without error. The sages, in accordance with (this) spirit-like way laid down their instructions, and all under heaven yield submission to them.” See “Guangua” (no. 20), of “*Zhouyi zheng yi: shangjing*.”

Japanese” or “borrowed directly from Japanese”. Long before Yan Fu borrowed the term “*jiaozong* 教宗” from Buddhism, Huang Zunxian had adopted the Japanese term in his 1887 translation *Annals of Japan*, using “*zongjiao* 宗教” (shukyō, religion). In 1896 when Liang Qichao published a series of articles entitled *On Reform* (Bian fa tong yi 变法通义), the term “*zongjiao* 宗教” was also used (Masini 119-120).

The history of China’s exchanges with the outside world and relative power and status changes provokes a range of responses and emotions now, and perhaps the fate of Chinese terms like “*zongjiao* 宗教” is just like that of “*religio*” in the west: we cannot ignore the “cumulative traditions” embedded in the term. For the literary leaders of the 1900s, it seemed entirely appropriate to borrow terms from Chinese translations of Western works. For example, when Kang Youwei wrote the preface to his book *Catalog of Japanese Books* (Ribenshumu zhi), he wryly ridiculed the debates over the borrowed terms: “The cream of Western books of learning has been mostly translated by the Japanese. I make use of their success: I treat the West as the ox, Japan as the peasant, and I am the one who sits and eats... all of the most important books have been collected for me” (Masini 126).

Given that the meaning of the term “religion” has been so complicated in both Chinese and Western history, what it connotes has long gone beyond debates of absolute “true or false”. In Hick’s analysis, “some of those definitions include Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism among the religions, while others exclude one or more of these. Some definitions regard Marxism and Maoism as religions, while others do not.” Therefore, “there are not only no religions as contraposed socio-theological entities, but also no religion as a definable essence” (Hick ix). This is why the Westerners often feel confused at the notion of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism as being three religions in one (*san jiao he yi* 三教合一), and fail to recognize that the Chinese do not perceive these three religions as alternatives but “something more analogous to three interpenetrating fields of force within the continuous religious life” (Hick viii). By a similar token, a born rebel like Derrida is taken as writing about “Religion without religion” by the more radical “post-modern theologians.”²⁴

Having analyzed “religion” in detail, we can be assured that the term “theology” (*shenxue* 神学) has as least as much to deliberate over, as seen in Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s book *Towards a World Theology*,²⁵ echoing Gianni Vattimo’s article “Towards

24 Caputo, John D. *The Prayer and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

25 Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *Towards a World Theology*. London: Macmillan, 1981.

a Nonreligious Christianity”, or in Slavoj Žižek’s article “Towards a Materialist Theology” (Žižek 19-26).²⁶ At a more radical level, Žižek not only deploys a range of argumentation for his “perverse theology” (Yang 781-798),²⁷ but even argues, on the basis of Jesus’ last prayer on the cross— “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34) and his close reading of theologian G. K. Chesterton, that Christianity is the only religion in the world “in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist” (Chesterton 145). Australian scholar Roland Boer has extended this a step further, arguing that atheists or Marxist scholars should write about theology (Boer, “Towards” 175-202), and publishing a series of books on “Marxism and theology” which connect together the ideas of some of the most active contemporary thinkers, including Fredric Jameson, Julia Kristeva, Alain Badiou, and Giorgio Agamben.²⁸

How can we talk about Christianity and its theology from a “nonreligious” or “atheist” perspective? Agamben’s book *The Time that Remains*²⁹ might serve as a good model for this. In comparing verses in Ecclesiastes (Qoheleth) with 1 Corinthians, Agamben notes a considerable discrepancy in the descriptions, and uses these to comment on the Christian term vocation, or calling (*klēsis*). Ecclesiastes stresses “a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;... a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; ... a time for war, and a time for peace” (Eccl.3:4-8), while in *1 Corinthians*, St. Paul told his community that “from now on, let even those who have wives to be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it” (1 Cor. 7:29-31). In other words, “*Qoheleth* clearly separates the time Paul melds together” (Agamben 25-26). Potentially, a “nonreligious” sense and an “atheist” reading could be hidden between the lines in this comparison. For Agamben, “those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not,” inspires a form and logic of the “as not” (*hōs mē*), which is Agamben’s focus. The “as if and

26 Žižek, Slavoj. “Towards a Materialist Theology.” *Angelaki Journal of Theoretical Humanities*. 12, 1(2007):19-26.

27 The “Perverse Theology”, in my reading of Žižek, is to express theology through a “non-theological” proposition. For more discussions about this, please see Yang Huilin, “To Reverse our Premise with the Perverse Core: A Response to Žižek’s ‘Theology’ in Chinese Context”. *Positions: East Asian Cultures Critique*, 19, 3 (2011):781-798.

28 Boer, Roland. *Criticism of Heaven: on Marxism and Theology I*. Leiden: Brill, 2007; *Criticism of Religion: on Marxism and Theology II*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

29 Agamben, Giorgio. *The Time that Remains: a Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Tr. Patricia daily. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

yet as not” “from now on” negates our original identity of “possessing” (those who have wives are to be as if they had none) while a new subject is “created”. On the other hand, the newly created subject does not bear any new “identity” as such but is only created in the “relationship” formed by “being called” and “calling” (*klēsis*).

For this reason Agamben reminds us to read 1 Corinthians 7:21 closely: “For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ.” Here the “slave” and “freed person” are both “as if and yet as not.” As he says, “Paul uses a peculiar expression that gave his interpreters much to ponder: *chresai*, ‘make use’. ... this is the definition Paul gives to messianic life in the form of the ‘as not’. To live messianically means ‘to use’ *klēsis*; conversely, messianic *klēsis* is something to use, not to possess. ... The expropriation of each and every juridical-factual property ... under the form of the *as not* ... does not ... found a new identity; the ‘new creature’ is none other than the use and messianic vocation of the old” (Agamben 26-27)³⁰.

Compared to traditional interpretation, we have to admit that Agamben’s reading of Paul and the New Testament passage differs greatly. Yet submerged in the confessional language are some insights that might be recovered and reactivated by this way of reading, just as when Alain Badiou was deeply attracted by “evental forms”, theological topics like “person”, “gift”, “eros” or “body” were given new interpretations. If “the crises, breakthrough and paradoxes of mathematics, the quaking of poetic language, the revolution and provocations of inventive politics, the wavering of the relation between the two sexes” can stimulate “instituted and consolidated knowledge” and manifest as a typical “correlated structure”, then might it possible for seemingly traditional theological topics to incorporate a “correlated existence” inspired by “calling”? In this way, the similar problematic consciousness of “correlation” might succeed in becoming a common direction for disparate thinkers.

Coincidentally, both Badiou and Žižek have considered the “image of Christian Orthodoxy” established by the Apostle Paul, but their real interest lies in the transition between “calling” and “response”, which in their view constitutes the form for a “truth-procedure” (Žižek 9, 173). They each evidently treat Christianity as a set of prototypical narratives, with Žižek even tracing the secular rhetoric of “historical processes” or “the law of the market” back to this archetype. In this way, analyzing the myths of faith is similar to analyzing the myths of history; revealing the struc-

30 Agamben, Giorgio. *The Time that Remains*, p. 26-27. Compare Agamben’s reading with 2 Corinthians 5:17: “So if anyone is in the Messiah, the new creature; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.”

ture of faith is the same as revealing the structure of all “truth narratives”. In the end, the core lies in questioning the “constitutive subject” and the “emergence” of the “constituted” one, just as Agamben’s “new creature” “uses”, rather than “possesses” its identity. In this context, we can understand Vattimo’s assertion: “the thing that is most decisive in the event of Christianity is precisely this attention toward subjectivity” (Vattimo, “Toward” 32).

Vattimo repeatedly refers to “weak thought”, echoing an expression found in the writings of Meister Eckhart and many others, whose root is similar to that which Francis Schüssler Fiorenza sees in the writings of Jürgen Habermas, where the “monological subject” is replaced by “a community of subjects” (Fiorenza 4-5). This is in keeping with, and extends, Vattimo’s other works such as *Hermeneutic Communism*,³¹ which interpret Christianity from a Marxist perspective. Žižek praised the book highly when it was published: “‘weak thought’ does not mean weak action but rather is the very resort of strong radical change. This is a book that everyone who thinks about radical politics needs like the air he or she breathes!”³²

For Vattimo, “Nonreligious” Christianity is a complementary proposition, and “weak thought” can recover the essence of Christianity: charity. On the other hand, Vattimo frequently quotes a saying of Benedetto Croce: “We cannot help calling ourselves Christians,” and goes further to claim that “we cannot even speak but from a Christian point of view.” This comes from a sense that Westerners are “fundamentally incapable of articulating a discourse” without accepting certain culturally conditioned premises (Vattimo, “Toward” 36). The premise can fit any context, and “Christian” can be replaced by any other cultural identity, summed up in his phrase “What makes your house a home is the artificial order you establish” (Vattimo, “Toward” 40).

On the other hand, for Vattimo, “a Christian point of view” does not necessarily mean Christian values, and the relation between identity propositions and the results are far more complicated than we can imagine. Here, Vattimo uses Voltaire as an example, since Voltaire “demanded freedom against authoritarianism”, at a time when authority was the Jesuits, and so attacked Christianity on these grounds. This kind of “standing unconditionally for freedom and against authoritarianism” is precisely what Vattimo defines as Christian values. If what Voltaire fought against was nothing but an empty “identity”, this “being against” was fundamentally a “standing for” Christianity, judged purely from the perspective of value ideals. For this rea-

31 Vattimo, Gianni and Santiago Zabala. *Hermeneutic Communism: from Heidegger to Marx*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

32 *Ibid*, see Žižek’s blurb on the back cover of the hardcover edition.

son, Vattimo believes “Voltaire was a good Christian” (Vattimo, “Toward” 37).

Vattimo also contests, via Wilhelm Dilthey, that the most important spiritual legacy of Christianity lies in the fact that “Christianity accomplished the first attack against metaphysics construed exclusively as objectivity” (Vattimo, “Toward” 31). In this sense, “everything else associated with the tradition and truth of Christianity is dispensable and may rightfully be called mythology” (Vattimo, “Toward” 41).

Vattimo’s contempt for a “dispensable” “mythology” also has its theological root as well. Rudolf Bultmann spoke of “demythologization”, while Reinhold Niebuhr’s wording was even sharper: The Orthodox churches ... try “vainly to meet the social perplexities of a complex civilization with irrelevant precepts, deriving their authority from their – sometimes quite fortuitous – inclusion in a sacred canon. It concerns itself with the violation of Sabbatarian prohibitions or puritanical precepts, and insists, figuratively, on tithing ‘mint, anise, and cumin’” (Niebuhr 2). Such radical attitudes were seemingly not regarded as heretical by other theologians; in criticizing Bultmann, for instance, Bonhoeffer argued that he “went not ‘too far’ as most people thought, but rather not far enough.” If we continue in this vein, we may find Bonhoeffer’s own contribution: “You cannot separate God from the miracles (as Bultmann thinks); instead, you must be able to interpret and proclaim them both ‘nonreligiously’” (Bonhoeffer 285).

The reason why Voltaire’s “standing against” could be regarded by Vattimo as a “standing for” is probably related to Derrida’s argument to “think about religion abstractly” or “to place quotation marks around this word in order to abstract and extract it from its origins. And thereby to announce, ... a possibility that would not be solely Christian” (Derrida 43, 59). This abstraction is directed against that which Vattimo criticized, namely “construing metaphysics as exclusively objectivity,” since only when we are able to “think about religion abstractly,” can fundamentalist ideas, in any form, be replaced. Here, the strange relationship between metaphysics and fundamentalism led Vattimo to claim that “although not all metaphysics have been violent, I would say that all violent people ... have been metaphysical” (Vattimo, “Toward” 43).

According to Bultmann’s “demythologization” theory, the reflections of Derrida and Vattimo can be summarized as a kind of “disobjectivation” or “de-sacralization”. In Badiou’s words, this causes ideas to be legitimately expressed in “the most naked way” - that is, “truth has no object” (Badiou 9)³³. Is this nihilism? On the contrary, it is quite the opposite.

33 Alain Badiou. *Manifesto for Philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 9.

Badiou believes that the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* has exposed how “capital is the general dissolvent of sacralizing representations” but that “philosophy has not known until recently how to think in level terms with Capital.” If we treat the “objectification of causality” and its organic relations as the sacred universal “Order”, then “desacralization” is a necessary condition for ideas to come close to existence and truth. Thus, “for Karl Marx and us, desacralization is not nihilistic at all,” because it demands us to “face meaning in an age of no meaning and disorientation” (Badiou 56, 58, 74).

The ultimate purpose for “nonreligious” Christianity and “atheist” theology is to “get rid of one’s self-centeredness” (*po zhi* 破执). The reason why the dialectic thinking of a “nonreligious” and “atheist” approach cannot be separated completely from religion and theology lies in the fact that pure “performativity” finds its most direct illustration in the “calling in prayer”. Derrida, referring to Aristotle, says that “calling” is a “performative” fact that is “neither true nor false” (Derrida 46). The grounds for this fact rely not on the “pre-assurance” of a “subject of faith” regarding a judgment on truth or falsity, but in the process of action itself. This brings us back to the “emergence” and “semantic meaning” of the noun “religion” (Derrida 48).

Qi Song, the monk mentioned above, once penned a Buddhist chant: “The Ultimate Truth itself has no name. The name only serves to reveal the Ultimate Truth. The one who receives the true dharma, will realize that it is neither real nor unreal.”³⁴ The idea probably echoes with Aristotle’s “neither true nor false” with some connection to natal or postnatal. In any case, there is a common principle at work in Chinese and Western philosophical thinking, and Chinese people have faced the same questions as Westerners, as expressed in Professor Fang Litian’s maxim: “Buddhism is in fact an atheist religion.”

To take such thinking a step further, we might say that when “theology” is pushed to the extreme, it must almost certainly connote the “atheism” described by some institutionalized believers. If this is the so-called “Post-modern Theology”, then its insights and inspirations are not jokes or throw-away remarks at all. The pity is that we have not yet learnt to think in this way.

Research starting from this point cannot just result in a common understanding of comparative literature, comparative culture, or comparative religion, but must point towards the reconstruction of “discourse” itself. If contemporary humanities

34 Qi Song. “Chuanfa zhengzong ji: Buddhmitra, of northern India, the ninth patriarch.” in *Chinese Electronic Taisho Tripitaka*, Vol. 51, No. 2078, normalized version. Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association, http://www.cbeta.org/result/normal/T51/2078_002.htm. 12. Aug, 2018.

do aim to challenge discourses of power and pre-assured truth systems, including the search for assured meaning after the traditional “certainty” was shattered, then this is the most important inspiration that the interdisciplinary study of literature and religion can offer.

Concerning the significance or contribution of Western learning to Chinese intellectuals, genuine understanding and interpretation of Western learning must go beyond the details and investigate cause and reason, trying to detach from a Western discursive pattern. In this way, the cultural distance between us and “alterity” can become a unique perspective and accelerate particular questions. In this way, the Western learning in Chinese context can truly be productive, and China can offer valuable response to the West. In my view, Chinese academia has now paid attention to, and also expanded, the interdisciplinary study of literature and religion, and may be able to accomplish this goal in three aspects: 1) To discover the unique resources for comparative studies through “Scriptural Reasoning” and by studying the missionaries’ translation of Western and Chinese classics; 2) To describe a historical trajectory of interdisciplinary studies through studying the Chinese traditional commentary and annotation methods and comparing it with the Western hermeneutical methods, which connects literature and religion innately; 3) To provide a methodological example for interdisciplinary studies of literature and religion by referring to the religious dimension that has always been hidden within Western humanities studies. Such kind of research not only plays an important role in comparative literature studies but has also quietly exerted an impact upon the integral character of Chinese humanities studies.

If we understand the interdisciplinary studies of literature and religion as discussed above, what Derrida has quoted from Heidegger is worth our attention: “Poets, when they are in their being, are prophetic. But they are not ‘prophets’... We should not... distort Holderlin’s poem: ... ‘His dream ... is divine, but it does not dream a god’” (Quoted in Derrida 54). A God as such can only be “present-absent”, and the “present-absent” God is “absent in place” (Derrida 65). When comparative studies on literature and religion serve to mutually inspire and spur into action different Chinese intellectuals, and when the combination of the two disciplines can dissolve the self-closing, self-interpretation and “pre-assurance” (Derrida 44) of the field, the inspiration and enlightenment contained within these studies might become the fundamental mark of the value of humanities studies.

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Reading/Not Reading Wang Wei

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Abstract:

In this paper I address the question of reading and translating the poetry of Wang Wei. To discuss the issue of translation, my premise is an experiment by Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz to collect nineteen translations of Wang Wei's "Lu Zhai," to show that when we translate a Chinese poem it becomes a Western poem. With a discussion of other poems by Wang Wei, I argue that a translation of "Lu Zhai" does not become an English poem but only a poorly translated one since the translation depends on our interpretation of the poet and the poem. In Wang Wei's case, it is a question of whether we believe he is a Buddhist or a nature poet, or just a poet.

Keywords: Wang Wei, Weinberger, Octavio Paz, David Hinton, Pauline Yu, Marsha L. Wagner.

Wang Wei, together with Du Fu and Li Po, is one of the three great poets of the High Tang lyric tradition. If Du Fu is thought to be China's greatest poet and Li Po the Immortal one, Wang Wei is the pure poet. His reputation as a painter created a landscape poetry that equals the perfection of his paintings where the hand of the poet is invisible and the reader is face to face with nature itself. If his poetry is transparent, this is not the case with how we interpret his poems or translate them. Critics distinguish between Wang Wei the nature poet and Wang Wei the Buddhist poet, which makes it difficult to decide where to place emphasis when we translate his poems. Is the notion of "empty" a Buddhist concept or simply a reference to an "empty" landscape? There are critics who believe that regardless of how we interpret his poems, when we translate them we Westernize them. In this paper I would like to address these two issues: the issue of interpreting and of translating Wang Wei.

The issue of translating Wang Wei was addressed by Eliot Weinberger who in *19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*, lists nineteen different translations of "Lu Zhai"

to show that it is not only impossible to translate the poem but that, in so doing, it becomes a Western poem.¹ The main problem is Chinese prosody, which is largely concerned with the number of characters per line, and the arrangement of tones, which are both untranslatable. The mistake translators often make, according to Weinberger, is to attempt to render Chinese rhyme patterns in the target language, whether English, French or Spanish, which is not only difficult but also “hostile”: “the hostile environment of a Western Language” (W 5).

Weinberger’s experiment is useful not only for how a Chinese poem is translated but for how it should not be, although it would appear that to translate a Chinese poem is a daunting, if not an impossible task for a Westerner. Although the author starts out optimistically by defining poetry as “that which is worth translating,” he demonstrates that the task, although worthwhile, is doomed from the start. He tells us that Wang Wei’s “Lu Zhai” is a four-line poem about the setting sun illuminating a patch of moss, a 1200 years old “scrap of literary Chinese” (W 1) in a language that none speaks anymore. We can barely make out its main features: a mountain, a forest, the setting sun that illuminates a patch of moss; a few strokes of the pen that evoke a mood, an image, which translators will never be able to capture. When and if they do, it will no longer be the same Chinese poem but an English poem. This is essentially what Weinberger sets out to show.

We are first given a transliteration of “Lu Zhai” and a character by character translation. We discover that a single character may be a noun, verb, and adjective, and it may even have contradictory meanings. The character *jing*, for example, the word for brightness, can also mean its opposite, *ying*, shadow. As Weinberger never tires to tell us, context is all. Chinese verbs have no tenses, similarly nouns have no number. But the major characteristic of Chinese poetry, in contrast to Western poetry, is the absence of the first person singular that rarely appears in Chinese poetry because the experience is meant to be universal and immediate. The title of the poem “Lu Zhai,” which he translates as “Deer Enclosure,” refers to a site along the Wang River, and is part of the Wang River Collection, a famous group of poems that Wang Wei wrote in the company of his friend Pei Di. Weinberger speculates that the name comes from Sarnath, the place where Gautama Buddha preached his first sermon. (W 7)

The poem itself presents little challenge. The first two lines, we are told, are fairly straightforward, only the second presents us with a few possible readings, “all of them “correct,” adds Weinberger. (W 7) Weinberger provides a comment to

1 See Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz, *19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei. How a Chinese poem is translated*. Quoted as W and page number.

each translation and comments on their shortcomings : whether the translator feels he must explain and improve on the original poem (Fletcher) (W 9); when he is uncertain and tentative (Witter Bynner & Kiang Kang-hu) (W 11); “dull but fairly direct” (Jenyns) (W 13); generalizes (Margouliès) (W 15); when Chang & Walmsley attempt to improve on the poem, and the poet disappears altogether and one “hears only the translator speaking” (W 17); when the translator stretches the poem from four to eight lines (Chen and Bullock) (W 19), or even when the translation is most accurate but the translator takes liberties. (Liu) (W 21) In the hands of a poet such as Kenneth, Rexroth Wang’s poem becomes what he would have written had he been born a 20th century American poet (W 23). We get a fairly close translation by Burton Watson (W 25), but Wai-lim Yip’s translation while close is less successful (W 27). The one by G.W. Robinson is the most available but not the best (W 28); McNaughton translates the title but renders it “Li Ch’ai” (Deer Park) (W 35); when translated in French by F. Chang the poem is romanticized (W 37); and some translate only a few lines and make up the rest, “the poem is more Chang than Wang” (Chang) (W 41). Gary Snyder’s translation is perhaps one of the best but remains an American poem (W 43).

Weinberger does not give his own translation of the poem, but provides only the original text of “Lu Zhai,” and a character-by-character rendition. He provides a commentary to the translations which are arranged by year of translation. The translators are: W. J. Fletcher, 1919; Witter Bynner & Kiang Kang-hu, 1929; Soame Jenyns, 1944; G. Margouliès, 1948 (French); Chang Yin-nan & Lewis C. Walmsley, 1958; C. J. Chen & Michael Bullock, 1960; James J. Y. Liu, 1962; Kenneth Rexroth, 1970; Burton Watson, 1971; Wai-lim Yip, 1972; G. W. Robinson, 1973; Octavio Paz, 1974 (in Spanish); William McNaughton, 1974; François Cheng, 1977; H.C. Chang, 1977; Gary Snyder, 1978.

Weinberger wrote this study with the Mexican poet Octavio Paz whose translation in Spanish of Wang’s poem is also included in the study together with a note by Paz on the similarities and differences between Chinese and English prosody, and the difficulties of translating from one language to another. Paz’s translation tries to capture the impersonality of the poem and its spirituality, but what is absent in his translation, at least for Weinberger, is “the cyclical quality of the original,” the way the poem begins both lines with “to return,” and transforms a specific time of day into a cosmic event, that parallels the enlightenment of the individual (“satori”) which “in terms of the cosmos, is as ordinary as sunlight illuminating a patch of moss.” (W 33) The translations provided by Weinberger reflect how each translator understands what the poet is doing: an especially difficult task with a poem by

Wang Wei where the poet is doing very little. Just a few strokes of the brush and the poem is done.

“Lu Zhai” belongs to a series of poems that are known as the Wheel-Rim River, or Wheel River, or Wang River poems (depending on the translator), a location favored by Wang where he also built his home. The poem is the fifth of eighteen poems of the Wheel-Rim River poems as they appear in David Hinton’s *Wang Wei’s Selected Poems*, which are not included in Weinberger’s nineteen translations. The poem, translated as “Deer Park,” is as follows:²

Wang Wei: Deer Park

鹿寨

空山不见人，
但闻人语响。
返景入深林，
复照青苔上。

Lu Zhai

Kong shan bu jian ren
Dan wen ren yu xiang
Fan jing ru shen lin
Fu zhao qing tai shang

Deer Park

No one seen. Among empty mountains,
hints of drifting voice, faint, no more.
Entering these deep woods, late sunlight
flares on green moss again, and rises. (H 40)

The scenery is a mountain which is said to be “empty,” there are no people but only echoes of people. There is only bright sunlight which pierces the forest in late afternoon and which lights up the green moss.

Hinton describes the poem as “perhaps his [Wang Wei] most famous individual poem,” which, in his view, evokes “an immediate and deep experience” of the “emptiness of nonbeing.” (H xviii). Hinton reads the poem as an expression of

2 David Hinton. *The Selected Poems of Wang Wei*. Quoted as H and page number.

the poet's Buddhist beliefs and as "a pure expression of the Ch'an insight that is at the heart of all Wang's poetry" (H xxi). In his view, "Wang takes the poem beyond words on the page, as he returns consciousness to its most elemental and resounding dimensions of emptiness and landscape" (H xxi).

Pauline Yu translates "Lu Zhai" as "Deer Enclosure" and as part of the "Wang River Collection." Differently from Hinton she treats it as a nature poem though she makes allowances for "the appropriateness of a Buddhist reading," especially as suggested by the term, "*kong*," ("empty"), which she stresses in her translation:

Deer Enclosure

Empty mountain, no man is seen.
Only heard are echoes of man's talk.
Reflected light enters the deep wood
And shines again on blue-green moss.
(Yu 202, my italics)³

Although she provides the most likely interpretations for each line, she concludes that the poem demonstrates, "Wang Wei's typical reliance on ambiguity and avoidance of distinctions" (Yu 178). Unlike Hinton who gives a decidedly Buddhist reading, Yu's reading favors a reading of "empty" in "its concomitant implication of a general solitude amid nature" (Yu 167).

Marsha L. Wagner, in her account of the life and works of Wang Wei, in the *Twayne's* series, lists the poem among the Buddhist poems.⁴ Her reasons are that "Deer Park" is also the name of the place near Benares where the Buddha preached his first sermon after his enlightenment. That is why, she writes, "an alternate name for the Ch'ing-yuan Temple on Wang Wei's estate was Deer Park Temple." This is her translation:

Deer Park

Empty mountain, no one is seen,
Only the echo of human voices is heard.
Returning light enters the deep grove,
And again shines on the green moss.
(Wagner 148)

3 Pauline Yu. *The Poetry of Wang Wei: New Translations and Commentary*, 202. Quoted as Yu and page number.

4 Marsha L. Wagner. *Wang Wei*, 148. Quoted as Wagner and page number.

Wagner is alone among the translators to suggest that there may be a “deer” in the poem, but for her the lack of mention of a deer not caught in a trap is a conventional Buddhist symbol: “the deer which is not caught in a trap is a conventional Buddhist symbol for the recluse, further connecting the site on Wang Wei’s retreat with its Buddhists overtones” (Wagner 148). Finally, in her view, the image of the “empty mountain” “suggests a transcendent vision of the illusory material world” (Ibid.). It follows, then, that “Wang Wei’s paradoxical tone presents in the form of nature poetry a representation of Buddhist ideals.” (Ibid.)

David Hinton, Pauline Yu and Marsha L. Wagner do not figure among the translators chosen by Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz for their *19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*. They are three more examples that we can add to the 19 and yet, if we were to say that David Hinton, Pauline Yu and Marsha L. Wagner read Wang Wei’s poem as a Western poem, I don’t think they would agree that the poem they translate in English is no longer Chinese but English, or is an English poem. Although they are Westerners, as translators and scholars of Wang Wei, they would disagree with Weinberger’s claim.

Weinberger’s experiment appears to be based on the belief that there is such a thing as an original text, a “pure language,” which can never be translated in another language and which, for this reason, would always make any translation not only impossible but radically removed from what the poet wrote. While one can agree that some translations illustrate this point of view and, indeed, are bad translations that deform the spirit of the poem, we cannot say the same for some of the others and, certainly not for those provided by some of his translators, or by Hinton, Yu and Wagner. While Renato Poggioli’s dictum that “traduttore is a traditore” (a translator is a traitor,) still stands, because translation is impossible, it does not follow that a Chinese poem translated in another language like English, French or Spanish (Weinberger’s examples) becomes, for this reason, an English, a French or a Spanish poem.

Weinberger’s claim, although partly true, is not entirely correct. Although Chinese may present certain structural difficulties that we don’t encounter in Western languages like English or Spanish, a good translator knows the original language sufficiently enough to translate the poem according to what the poem says to them. Where translators differ is in their interpretation which is subjective and determines the choice of terms and the emphasis they give the poem. The example of the translation of “Lu Zhai” is a case in point. For Hinton and Wagner, “Lu Zhai” is a Buddhist poem. Hinton, more than Wagner, believes that the poem expresses

the author's religious views, with its emphasis on nothingness and nonbeing. For Hinton, but also for Wagner, the last word "shang" (on/ascend), meaning "rises," suggests a movement that extends over time, "making it not a momentary state, but an abiding dwelling" (H xx). Wagner does not translate "shang" at all. For her, the poem expresses, sufficiently, the experience of finding piece of mind, "*sunyata*." "Wang Wei's paradoxical tone presents in the form of nature poetry a representation of Buddhist ideals" (Wagner 148). In her reading, there is no movement beyond but a joining of "the physical and the metaphysical, substance and emptiness, a keen visual perception and a vision of an invisible realm." (Wagner 149). Pauline Yu, as I have indicated, does not dismiss the Buddhist elements of the poem, but she opts for the alternate reading of a nature poem. She does not translate "*shang*" either but, for her, its meaning is contained in the "reflected light" that suggests the movement of ascending light.

The issue in translating a Chinese poem is not that it becomes a Western poem but that it becomes the poem the translator believes it to be. Weinberger states that "translators tend to rush in where wise men never tread, and often may be seen attempting to nurture rhyme patterns in the hostile environment of a Western language" (W 5). Rhyme, however, is the least of the problems. Where translators seem to "rush in" is with their preconceived ideas of what the poem is about. This is particularly the case with a poet like Wang Wei who, as Marsha Wagner, makes clear in her Introduction, his work can be categorized under four different categories: Wang Wei the Court poet; Wang Wei the Nature Poet; Wang Wei the Buddhist Poet; Wang Wei the Painter. A translator has to decide which of these Wang Wei persona he/she is reading even before the poem is read.

Weinberger's claim obscures the fact that rather than a Western poem we find ourselves with an ideological reading dictated by the preconceived ideas of the translator, which may be correct but, most often, they are not. If we read only Pauline Yu we have a different idea of Wang Wei than when we only read David Hinton. And even when we read both, the reader does not know which translations is more faithful to the original.

All these translations, however, somewhat miss the point of the poem or poems, since, in the case of Wang Wei, the point is not what the poem is about – nature or Buddhism – but what it is, namely, a poem, an act of writing, and not at all the lyrical or religious landscapes they seem to be. In the case of "Lu Zhai," translators have connected the title of the poem – "Deer Enclosure" or "Deer Park," to a possible Buddhist holy ground. The specific reference to "deer," however, has been completely overlooked. Wagner, as I have indicated, is the only one who has point-

ed to the possible presence of “deer” in the poem but only to make the point that it is another possible Buddhist reference. Although Wang Wei most possibly chose the name “Deer Park” because of its Buddhist implications, he also meant to imply the “presence” of deer in the park. This poetic technique may not be so self-evident in this poem, so it may be best to give examples from similar poems by Wang Wei.

A similar pattern occurs in another well-known poem by Wang Wei, “Mt. Zhongnan,” which has been celebrated as a nature poem but has also received a Buddhist reading. The poem deals with a similar mountain and forest landscape but the main focus is a weary traveler who seeks shelter for the night and calls out to a wood-cutter. This is Pauline Yu’s translation:

Taiyi nears the celestial capital;
Continuous mountains arrive at the edge of the sea.
White clouds, as I turn and gaze, merge.
Azure mists, as I enter and look, disappear.
The whole expanse shifts at the central peak.
Shadow and light differ in every valley.
Wishing to seek lodging among men,
I cross the water to ask an old woodsman.
(Yu 170)

Yu’s translation makes it appear as if the old woodsman is on the other side of the river and that the wayfarer can see him. Since the wayfarer needs a place to spend the night, we assume that he will spend the night in the wood-cutter’s hut. This reading makes the poem intelligible and achieves closure. However, the poem does not actually state that the woodsman is there. Like the wayfarer, we presume he is there because we are in a wood, and in a wood there should be a woodsman or a woodcutter. The presence of the woodsman is only inferred, but his presence is never stated in the poem. In Edward C. Chang’s version, the presence of the wood-cutter is made more real: “I ask a woodcutter/ on the other side of the stream.”⁵ The reader is made to believe that the woodcutter is there, and it is just a question of asking him for a place to spend the night. In his version, which he translates as “Whole-South Mountains,” David Hinton resolves the issue altogether because his wayfarer has not decided yet if he needs company or a place to sleep: “if I wanted

5 Edward C. Chang. *How to Read a Chinese Poem. A Bilingual Anthology of Tang Poetry*, 128-29.

human company for the night,/ I'd cross water, visit a woodcutter, no more."⁶ Now we just have to wait for the wayfarer to decide what to do.

The poem has had also a Buddhist reading implied in the title "Mt. Zhongnan." Wagner translates the poem as "Chung-nan Mountain" and lists it in the category of "Wang Wei the Buddhist Poet." In her reading, the mountain is a "place where divinities dwell," thus, "the poet's view suggests a transcendence of the visual mundane world and a glimpse of the heavens" (Wagner 138). This is the wisdom that the poem brings back to earth and reveals to the woodsman. In her translation the last two lines read: "I will lodge for the night at someone's house:/ Across the river, I will ask the woodsman" (Wagner 137-38).

This is also Pauline Yu's reading. Asked by his friend Pei Di where is Mt. Zhongnan, Wang Wei replied that "Zhongnan lies somewhere 'beyond the white clouds': it cannot be localized within space, nor perhaps, within time, but there is no doubt about its existence" (Yu 131). For Yu this statement amounts to a certainty. The knowledge is intuitive rather than rational, since the poet's "heart" knows. (Yu 131) This suggests to her that Wang Wei is alluding to a kind of cognition which does not draw a distinction between knower and known, or between the wayfarer and the woodsman. (Yu 131) We can safely assume that the issue of the woodsman is resolved because he is at one with the wayfarer.

Mt. Zhongnan, however, is not only a place that is difficult to locate but one that does not even exist.⁷ Mt. Zhongnan exists only in the title of the poem, only as a written name, as a material inscription, and nowhere else. For this reason, the issue of whether the wayfarer is able to reach the wood-cutter or not is not unlike asking whether the sign can reach the meaning it refers to. It does not, as we know, since the sign is arbitrary. It promises meaning but it cannot deliver on the promise. The poem is an allegory of the impossibility of ever reaching the woodcutter, of ever finding rest in Mt. Zhongnan.

A similar example of Wang Wei's technique is the poem "Bird-singing Stream," which Wai-Lim Yip, compares to Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles

6 David Hinton. *The Selected Poems of Wang Wei*, 33.

7 As John Ferguson has stated in *Chinese Painting*, the "Wheel River," or "Wheel-Rim River" poems were not meant to be taken as simple literary descriptions of mundane scenery: "such a place as is depicted existed only in the realm of fancy. Wang Wei's imagination, helped by the genius of his two intimate friends, P'ei Ti and Mêng Hao-jan, clothed a barren hillside with beautiful rare trees, with spacious courtyards, and with a broad stream upon which boats plied and on whose banks stood a pretty fishing pavilion, with a deer park, with storks and birds—all of the delights of the eye and ear were brought together in this one lovely spot by the fancy of a brilliant genius." See John C. Ferguson. *Chinese Painting*,

above Tintern Abbey,”⁸ and finds it wanting. Yip states that despite his emphasis on nature and on landscape, “he [Wordsworth] posits the aesthetic object of his poem within the poet’s mind rather than within the landscape itself – in other words, in the mode of *noesis* rather than that of *noema*” (Yip 115). Wang Wei’s poem, instead, belongs to the realm of *noema*, phenomena, which Yip translates as follows:

Bird-singing Stream
Man at leisure. Cassia flowers fall.
Quiet night. Spring mountain is empty.
Moon rises. Startles — a mountain bird.
It sings at times in the spring stream.

Yip finds that the scenery in Wang Wei “*speaks and acts*,” but there is little or no subjective emotion or intellectuality to disturb the inner growth and change of the objects in front of the poet. The objects spontaneously emerge before the reader’s eyes, whereas in Wordsworth, “the concreteness of the objects gives way to abstraction through the poet’s analytical intervention” (Yip 104). Wordsworth’s approach is *noetic* and Wang Wei’s is *noematic*.

Undoubtedly there are differences between the two poets and possibly very much along the lines that Yip suggests. Yet, “Bird-singing Stream” does not seem to be unlike “Mt. Zhongnan,” or “Deer Park,” where the mountain is “empty” and action is reduced to a minimum. In “Bird-singing Stream,” there is a startled bird, but in this landscape, deep at night, how does the poet know that the mountain is empty and the bird is startled? What is the nature of this entity that “spontaneously emerges” in front of us, before our very eyes, as Yip claims? Don’t we have before us, rather, another rhetorical construct of short epithets, or “brush strokes,” which Wang Wei places before us and which have nothing to do with any “growth and object” in nature? Isn’t Wang Wei’s mind also at work, as in Wordsworth?

As in “Deer Enclosure,” the effect of an emerging and growing nature is based on the rhetoric of parallelism which as the moon emerges, the mountain bird is startled. As the Cassia flowers and the night falls, the Moon rises and the mountain bird is startled. We are told that the birds sing in the Spring but, of course, not now, now it is not spring. Now it is Fall, as the cassia flowers are flowering. May be the bird is startled by the rising moon but who is there to see it? Just as the wood-cutter in “Mt.

8 Yip, Wai-Lim Yip. “Aesthetic Consciousness of Landscape,” *Diffusion of Distances. Dialogues between Chinese and Western Poetics*, 104.

9. Pauline Yu. *The Poetry of Wang Wei: New Translations and Commentary*, .55.

Zhongnan,” is he really there? Just as we do not know if the wood-cutter is there, we don’t know whether the bird(s) are startled, or whether they sing in the valley or not. In fact, we don’t know if there are any birds at all in the poem.

The only singing birds are in the title, “Bird-singing stream,” but these are not birds. This is the name given to the river because birds, supposedly, sing there in the spring, but the birds are not really there. The “Bird-singing stream” is only a metaphor, a figure of speech, to indicate the multitude of birds that crowd by the river in Spring or, perhaps, because the sound of the stream is “like” the singing of birds, but there are no birds. The birds that may be startled by the rising of the moon, can only occur in Spring time, but does not occur in the poem. The only singing birds are written in the title, as a material inscription, and not as a phenomenal or *noematic* entity, as Yip believes. At this level, there is no difference between Wordsworth and Wang Wei. They are both not looking at nature but constructing the poem in abstraction through writing. Both their approaches are *noetic* or, to be more precise, rhetorical or allegorical.

The notion that “Bird-singing Stream,” like other poems by Wang Wei, are a direct representation of nature, or even of an ideal Buddhist landscape, is complicated by the hypothesis that most of these compositions are based on an existing painting. Readers may think they are looking at nature when in fact they are only looking at a painting, at images of nature, only reading words on a page that describe or refer to nature as depicted in a painting. However, even this hypothesis seems unlikely as it is clear from an early poem by Wang Wei, “An Inscription for a friend’s Mica Screen,” which Wang Wei wrote when he was fifteen. Even at a young age, Wang Wei was not deluded by the way a painter or a poet can imitate nature. In the poem, the poet relates how the friend’s mica screen is brought out in the yard and when it is opened mountains and streams are reflected in it.

The mica screen belonging to your family
Is carried out to the rustic yard and opened.
Naturally there are mountains and streams that enter,
Not produced by brightly colored paints.
(Yu 55)

The poem brings up the issue of imitation, of a “natural” representation of nature. The mica screen reflects, perfectly, the surrounding landscape as if “mountains and streams” just flew into it. The imitation is so perfect that one cannot tell if it is a work of art, “produced by brightly colored paints,” or one is looking at nature, un-

assisted by the artful brush stroke of the painter. However, the claim that the mica screen portrays nature as such, or even that the poem is a faithful imitation of nature, is contradicted by the title of the poem that it is an “inscription”: “An inscription for a Friend’s Mica Screen.” Although the poem may well provide the illusion of nature, the author makes clear in the title that the poem is only a piece of writing, only an “inscription. In short, the poem is not a lyric, a symbolic or lyrical composition, but only a prosaic or allegorical construct that place emphasis on language and on the linguistic illusion created by language. The hand of the author, or the “artful brush stroke” of the painter, may not be visible, but the inscription is there as a reminder that the poem is not a phenomenal but a material entity that cannot be erased by the illusion created by words.

The poem “Lu Zhai” follows a similar model as previous poems. The title “Deer Park,” or “Deer Enclosure,” is meant to suggest the presence of a “deer” in the park or in the enclosure, just as in other poems the “presence” of the woodcutter or woodsman, the startling of birds in spring, do not exist except in the title of the poems that suggest their presence. In the case of “Lu Zhai,” readers have ignored the possibility of “deer” in the poem and have looked for either “men” behind the voices, or for a Buddhist experience of nonbeing in the “empty” mountain. These readings are certainly correct to a certain extent, and understandable, because “men” are heard in one case and because we know that Wang Wei was a serious disciple of Buddhism. However, when we read a great poet like Wang Wei we do not really read him, because we already know so much about him that, inevitably, we gloss his poems with our knowledge.

To return to Weinberger’s claim that in translating the poem it becomes a Western poem, it is clear that “Lu Zhai” does not become so much a Western poem as it becomes whatever the translator wants it to become. If we believe with Pauline Yu that it is a nature poem we will translate it accordingly. If we believe with David Hinton or with Marsha Wagner that it is a Buddhist poem we will read it as a Buddhist poem. Similarly, if we limit ourselves to read one translator, or if we believe in one translator, Wang Wei will be either a nature poet or a Buddhist poet. However, Wang Wei was above all a poet. In some of his poems, as Wagner shows in the section on “Wang Wei the Buddhist poet” (Wagner 119-49), Wang Wei wrote overtly of his faith, but in these poems, which cannot be decided whether it is a natural or a spiritual landscape, Wang Wei is being a poet and the “true” nature of these poems is inscribed in the titles which attest to their prosaic and allegorical character. They are like paintings that bear the title on their frame, which tells us what they are about, or, which is the same, they are allegories that tell us what they are.

In David Hinton's *The Selected Poems of Wang Wei*, the last poem is entitled, "Off-hand Poem," written "by the way," a kind of poetic confession from the author to the reader, in confidence.

Off-Hand Poem

I'm ancient, lazy about making poems.
There's no company here but old age.
I no doubt painted in some former life,
roamed the delusion of words in another,
and habits linger. Unable to get free,
I somehow became known in the world,
but my most fundamental name remains
this mind still here beyond all knowing.

(Hinton 100)

It is hard to know how faithful is Hinton's translation but in his admirable translation, it is clear that the poem is a confession of sorts, and this is how I understand it. The poem, of course, is not written either casually or off-hand. A great poet like Wang Wei never writes anything off-hand. The "Off-hand" refers, rather, to the confession that the poet is making, now, that he is old, "ancient," and, perhaps, tired, "lazy," of writing poems. He recalls his past as a painter, "I no doubt painted in some former life," and his other and present life as a poet, as well as the illusion or "delusion" of words, with which he has had to live. The same delusion he creates with his poems which continue to give his readers pleasure, but also delude them. Like painting, writing poems is an exercise in illusion, in deluding the viewer or the reader, but never himself. As we have seen with the poem on the "Mica Screen," in painting the illusion of standing before nature is great, but in poetry is even greater. Even at the young age of fifteen, Wang Wei was never deluded by what he saw and by what he wrote, knowing full well, even then, that he would never be free of language.

In Hinton's translation, painting is for Wang Wei an art form he performed in a former life, now, as a poet, he "roamed the delusion of words" in another [life]." In Marsha Wagner's translation, the delusion of words becomes a "mistake": "In this existence I was mistakenly a poet" (Wagner 163). Similarly for Pauline Yu who translates it: "In this age mistakenly a poet" (Yu 110). Wagner's and Yu's translation give the impression that he was a painter once, and now he is a poet by mistake. Hinton's translation, instead, refers more specifically to the poet's relationship to

words and to the illusion they create. The “mistake,” namely, the illusion that words create, is not meant for the poet, but for the readers who read him.

Although he became famous as an artist and as a poet, and he is known the world over, Wang Wei does not identify with either being an artist or a poet, or even with the name, Wang Wei. That is not his name. Wang Wei is the name the world knows him by, but that is not his “fundamental” name. His “most fundamental name” is what remains, what is left over, the name who speaks now, here, who writes here, his mind, beyond all knowing. The name that we readers can know is only the signature on his paintings or on his poems, or on book covers, the inscription: WANG WEI. Like the deer, the woodcutter, the birds or Nature, he is not there, that is not him, he is “beyond all knowing.”

David Hinton, in a note, explains the “fundamental name” as meaning that Wang Wei’s names (given names, Wei, and literary name, Mo-chieh) are the Chinese translation of Vimalakirti, the central figure in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, which is especially important in the Ch’an tradition” (Hinton 112). Hinton reads the line the way he reads “Lu Zhai,” as a Buddhist reference. From the way, he translates “Off-Hand,” however, this is not the reading one gets. The poet does not state that “my names together are fundamentally true.” He is saying that Wang Wei or Mo-chieh, by which he is known, are not his names, and that the other name that “remains,” the name which is left, which remains, is the name that exists “here” beyond all knowing, even beyond Hinton’s understanding of Wang Wei.

There is a line drawing portrait of Wang Wei at the beginning of Marsha Wagner’s book with a caption which reads: “with his face characteristically turned away from the viewer.” This is what Wang Wei meant by “Off-Hand,” away from the viewer, away from the reader, away from the name Wang Wei, beyond all-knowing, off-limits, Wang Wei the Buddhist.

There is no difference between reading a Chinese poem by a Chinese or by a Westerner. They are both subject to the same rules of reading poetry and they both fail. They both fail because they are both seduced and deceived by the illusion of the poetic word. There are no essential differences between East and West at this level of reading. Any such claim is subjective and self-serving and a matter of convenience. If we truly wish to read poets “differently,” both Chinese and Western, we have to make an effort to read them not for the meaning we believe they convey but for how these meanings are produced. We have to be like Wang Wei in the line drawing portrait, we have to turn our back to the poet, to the delusion of words, just like the poet does, and read.

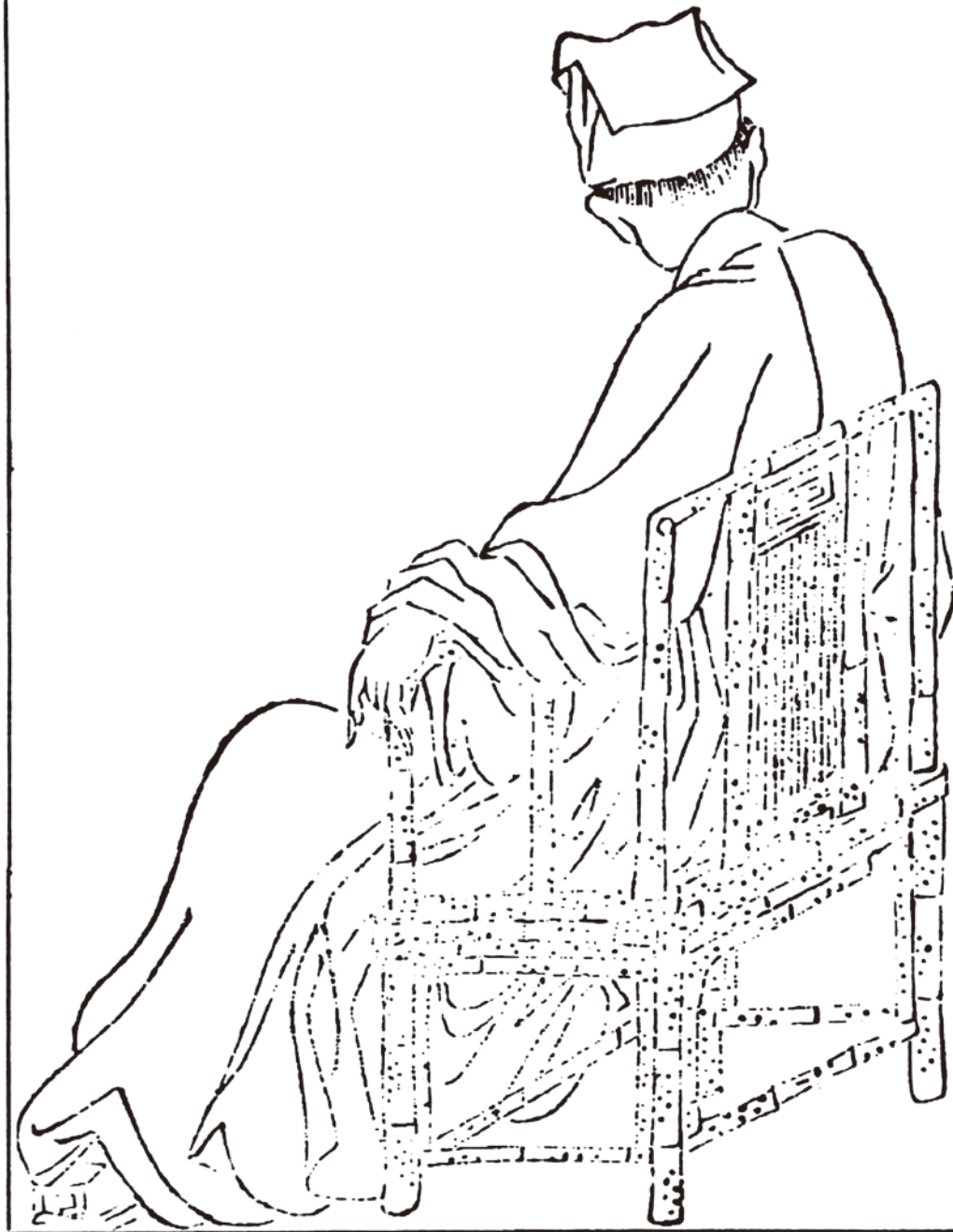
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王摩詰



A traditional line drawing portrait of Wang Wei, with his face characteristically turned away from the viewer.

Writing Uncreated for the World: Zhu Zhu and Contemporary Chinese Poetry

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Translated by Denis Mair

Abstract:

This paper mainly expounds Zhu Zhu's poems written before 2000, and analyzes their idiosyncrasies and style. During his more than ten years of poetry writing, Zhu Zhu has developed a fine poetic language and a restrained, minimalist style, through transforming the tradition of modern poetry between China and foreign countries and dealing with complex socio-cultural contexts and his personal experiences since the 1990s. It shows the remarkable uniqueness he has achieved in the contemporary Chinese poetry field.

Keywords: Zhu Zhu, poetry, language, words & things

For a time Zhu Zhu was deeply affected by a maxim of the French critic Jean Pierre Richard: "An idea is not as important as an *idée fixée*."¹ This is the point that this author wishes to enter Zhu Zhu's poetry and its relations to the world, or the chain of associations triggered by this aphorism can guide our reading toward the unique explorations conducted by the poet in his art of "un-creation." For Zhu Zhu, meaningful poetry emerges from a secluded state in which words are measured out guardedly. This characteristic can be found throughout the intricate linguistic structure of his poems, much like his own self-effacement and reclusiveness on the margin of our superficial, noisy poetry scene. Such is the fate of modern poetry: its verses will never open themselves into a larger space until the process Seamus Heaney called "digging" or "dowsing" has gone into them.

1 Jean Pierre Richard. *Poésie et profondeur* (Seuil, 1955). Cf. Georges Paulet. *Critical Consciousness*. Tr. GuoHong'an. Nanchang: Baihuazhou wenyi Press, 1993. p. 198.

1. “Poetry Is the Theme of Poetry”

Zhu Zhu’s poetry writing began during his period of residence in Shanghai, while he was still a student at an institute of law and government. At that time, an uproarious and powerful poetry movement was beginning to subside. The lingering impact of that movement, in which edifying and destructive qualities were mingled, reverberated through the writing of the subsequent group of poets, and many of their texts make reference to this. The movement’s successors needed to exert tremendous force to piece something together from that grab-bag of linguistic fragments they were left with. As a poet who grew up during the 1990s (his writing spanned that whole decade), what Zhu Zhu faced was not just the massive tradition of modern poetry, both from the East and West; he also found himself situated in the hugely jumbled poetics of that period. All the cultural, poetic perplexities and crises of the 20th Century and particularly the preceding decade constituted a background to poetry writing of Zhu Zhu’s generation. Whether consciously or not, when poets of that era entered the territory of poetry, they had to undergo a bout of self-questioning: Will I be able to sustain my writing? How should I begin, and how will I carry on later? For poets of that era, what they had to bear up under was not merely external reality but also poetry itself. Herein, the quest for “novelty” would perhaps serve as a driving force for poetry writing, but a more fundamental driving force would have to come from within.

In a long poem that was widely praised but to some extent argued over—“Portrait of a Middle-Aged Poet” (1995)—Zhu Zhu depicted (or one should say, “exposed”) the awkward situation of a poet who faced that era of rapid change. The sense of unworthiness that weighed on such a “middle-aged poet” was applicable to the circumstances of many.

The morning star burns all through the night,
During this “Spring and Autumn,” this “Warring States,”
A generation, in its slow coming of age,
Grows weak, perhaps harboring no hope,
Lacking clear marks to recognize each other,
Lacking symbols to weigh each other’s qualities,
Their seething talent congeals at the century’s end,
With thoughts drained of warmth they face the days.

Rather than saying that this poem tacitly conveys their mood of rebellion against fate, one should say that it allegorically evokes the “trench warfare” of language it-

self, with which poets of that period were occupied. Poetry seemed to be a locus of “termite-infested hollowness and gloom, not worthy of being watched over, which shared a common root with external reality and thus lacked capacity to offer solace. There was no spiritual, subjective force of sufficient power to hold up its patch of sky.”² This was what Zhu Zhu said later when he explained the basis for this poem: “I chose a particular type of person, or one could say I chose a particular angle, to give a perspective on the actual artistic setting.”³ Through its many-angled narrative, the poem discretely pulled aside a curtain to convey Zhu Zhu’s musings on the recent past of modern poetry in China, along with his penetrating views on its prospects. For example, “New poetry, inasmuch as it can be called a tradition, is like a starry sky reflected in a pool, an embedded image which takes on richness only after being filled in by memory and imagination...It lacks a genuine image of an individual, or one could say that its ‘individual image’ is not complete: it is woven together out of works by various poets.”⁴ This is one of Zhu Zhu’s insightful assessments of modern poetry in Chinese.

To use Zhu Zhu’s own words, while writing “Portrait of a Middle-Aged Poet,” he was still at the first stage of his poetry writing, and his poems still exuded the air of his youthful period. Although his personal style was becoming apparent, it still needed to be strengthened and reinforced. Defining a poet’s personal style is like fine-polishing a sculpture to bring out the clarity of its conception. Against the background of his “first stage writings” in general, the emergence of this poem was remarkable, as we will see below. Instead of lyrical outpourings it used coarsely heterogeneous phrasing, and its bluntly pointed diction marked a change from the homogenous smoothness that had been the rule. It was as if a slow-rolling current had suddenly given way to rapid eddies, seamlessly transitioning to a turbulent pattern. It is worth noting that in the passage quoted above, the rhyme “-ang” appears with no sign of effort in alternate lines. This kind of open tone is fairly rare in Zhu Zhu’s poems because his poems generally tend toward a restrained, subdued tone. Despite the above-mentioned thematic elements which are dominant in this poem, I am in favor of assigning it to a category defined by Schlegel: “Not only is it a poem,

2 Zhu Zhu. “Anne Kao, or the Fate of a Poem” (An Gao furen, huo yishou shi de mingyun). (unpublished, 2002).

3 Ling Yue. “The Bridge of Words—An Interview with Zhu Zhu” (Ciyu zhi qiao—Zhu Zhu fangtan lu). in *Vertigo* (Yunxuan). Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi Press, 2000. p. 205.

4 Zang Di, Zhu Zhu. et al. “A New Look at China’s New Poetry Tradition,” (Chong shi zhongguo xinshi chuantong) in *Yangtze River Poetry Magazine* (*Yangzijiang shi kan*). No. 1, 2003.

it is a poem about poetry.”⁵This is because it does not only reflect upon history as it played out within poetry, it also broods upon the art of poetry itself. Its stepwise, line-by-line development deals with “poetry as the theme of poetry”—a proposition he would echo in later poems like “A Higher Aim” (1998). As I will show in the discussion below, this proposition possesses seminal implications within the conceptual universe of modern Chinese poetry.

If we say that “Portrait of a Middle-Aged Poet” contemplates the reality of contemporary Chinese poetry, then in his long poem “Crusoe” (2001), Zhu Zhu draws on the situation of a solitary artist (an elder-generation painter who lived reclusively in Paris) to ponder Chinese poetry’s predicament of modernity within a larger sphere:

Flying on an airplane to San Francisco, I thought,
With the Pacific Ocean as my witness,
From now on I want to paint better, but unfortunately
I never painted another painting.

This is not just about the problem of artistic (poetic) creation itself, for it also touches on the problem of relations between the artistic self and the Other. In terms of contemporary Sinophonic poetry, it involves the hot-button issue of ethnic identity and globalization in poetry. Clearly, Zhu Zhu intended, through his parody on the Western literary classic *Robinson Crusoe*, to respond to this unavoidable issue. In fact, his deconstructive revision of the classic text amounts to an affirmation of selfhood by a modern poet, and an effective strategy for conveying his concept of art. In the same way, one critic made this remark on Derek Walcott’s revision of Defoe’s book: “Through reversal of perspective, such works give rise to a different way of reading reality than in the past.”⁶ Although “Crusoe” appropriated a character from a Western text, it turned out to be an ironic account of the artistic (poetic) scene within China: “By now I am remnant sand in an hourglass, keeping track of outdated time. / By now I am a shadow of nothingness, / Or maybe the servant.”

What “Portrait of a Middle-Aged Poet” had to say about the poetry scene, or about the fixed destiny of poetry, was to be echoed and amplified as consummate

5 Friedrich Schlegel. *Athenaeums Fragmente*. Tr. Li Bojie. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1996. pp. 95-96.

6 Elleke Boehmer. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Tr. Sheng Ning, Han Minzhong. Shenyang, Oxford: Liaoning jiaoyu Press & Oxford University Press, 1998. p. 235.

allegory a few years later in Zhu Zhu's "Lamp-Moth" (2000). This poem recasts an image of the poet in a time of rapid change, but here metamorphosis has sheathed him in chitin like a Kafkaesque insect, relegated by time's heartless passing to the space within a dark crypt, in which he desiccates and crumbles through boundless years of expectation, having become "an ink-rubbing in the shape of a man." In "Portrait of a Middle-Aged Poet," "he is shrunken, / A ceaseless migrant through seasons / Losing delicacy and grace, so many would-have-been versions, / Beginning with disgust, / Dredging warmth out of icy rationality, / Striking nimble blows, nimble percussion, / His clumsy frame pressed close to a desk-top, / Pushing himself to erect a fortress, using language." This sense of helplessness later succumbs to despair in "Lamp-Moth":

...Those things I would not have thought of taking first
Will keep me company
Those emblems of love and accursedness.

In "Lamp-Moth," the reader's attention is drawn to light gradients and color blocs against the dim background. Darkness sets off flecks of light on burial objects, just as empty space offsets the futility of the moth's strivings toward the lamp. Patches of color are evoked by phrases like "torch's flame," "glaze" and "moss-green water," but this only deepens the crypt's deathly stillness. As I understand it, the story line for this poem was a supposed incident based on evidence showing that it may have actually happened: the last member of a gang of grave robbers, having handed out all the portable valuables, was sealed inside the tomb by his accomplices. A thousand years later, when light shone into the tomb once more, he had wasted away to a heap of bones.⁷ As for the image of a flame-seeking moth, it is an artistic transmutation of this tale. Here again, a concrete object is re-imagined as a point of view. Possessing the lightness of paper yet fearsomely intent, the "lamp-moth," as it flutters about in an indefinite expanse, is likened by Zhu Zhu to the protracted journey of poetry writing:

7 Though they are different thematically, this reminds me of the gruesome "Bog Queen," "Grauballe Man," and "Punishment" written by Seamus Heaney after viewing naturally preserved ancient corpses. Incidentally, it is interesting to read "Lamp-Moth" side-by-side with the short poem "Ceramic Figurine" (1998). The "figurine" was likewise forgotten under the ground, but its eventual fate was quite different from that of the moth. "I had gone into the earth, / But someone dug me up."

Of course I know it is myself,

I must break away
From existing as this phantom.

The simile is suddenly placed within an observer's perceptions, and this act observation causes the syntactical flow to take a turn (from "I" to "he"), lightly tossing the narrative subject off to the side:

A lamp-moth,

Heading toward a subterranean glow,
En route to death, tallying up
The vileness of its companions
And a subterranean eclipse.

The dark crypt into which the "lamp-moth" plunges is structured by the metaphorical symptomatology of poetry writing. The "dark crypt" belongs to the second stage of writing. Once the poet has passed through the first style-defining phase, the dark crypt awaits as an ordeal to be passed through. Also, this is a trial from which he is fated never to return. For any poet, entering the dark crypt is a test of his wit and endurance. The buoyancy of the "lamp-moth" is fragile. "Giants in the history of writing never give you the slightest chance to let up. Hour by hour you must struggle for your freedom."⁸ Case studies in the history of poetry have proven to us that the "dark crypt" has swallowed up a great many talented poets and writers!

Yet the moment we apply this premise to decode the connotation of "Lamp-Moth," we end up causing the whole poem to crumble into dust. As cautionary notes to himself, of a sort, "Portrait" and "Lamp-Moth" consider poetry writing (or the poetry scene) as the theme of poetry in two respects, the first being the surface meaning. Here I only wish to state that Zhu Zhu writes in full cognizance of what is involved. He is intuitively aware of the predicament that writing can land someone in, and such awareness requires an in-depth historical sense. From another angle, "poetry as the theme of poetry" clearly implies that poetry must eventually return to itself. Even the grandest themes should never be allowed to do harm to poetry.

8 Zhu Zhu. "Awning—On Style and on Those Who Stop Writing" (Zheyangpeng—guanyu fengge he tingzhi xiezuo de ren). *Vertigo* (Yunxuan). Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi Press, 2000. p. 146.

Zhu Zhu's textual edifice depends on the meshing of lexical and syntactic details. Their completeness does not yield to analysis: they must be integrated into the complete structure and be given full play before they can live and breathe. Only thus can the "lamp-moth" exhibit both tremulous lightness and intentness within its sequestered realm.

2. "Language as a Discovery"

According to some people's impression of Zhu Zhu, he fits the classic type of the south-of-the-Yangtze poet. The reason may be his personal temperament, or that his poems may deal with so-called southland settings. For instance, Bai Hua made this observation, in a passage of his memoirs about the famous southern city of Yangzhou: "Along those weathered avenues, in secluded temple groves or in the recesses of old courtyards, one seems to sense the lingering charm of past dreams... embowered in canopies of living green, and here I am reminded of Zhu Zhu, a poet born in Yangzhou and educated in Shanghai. The aestheticism of his finely spun lines seems to hold a remnant image of Yangzhou."⁹ Such a characterization cannot be rejected out of hand, but it does little justice to the poet's uniqueness.

Even though Zhu Zhu has always endeavored to define a style for himself, I prefer to think of him as a poet who eschews style. If what Zhu Zhu calls the "first stage" is the period in which a poet lays a stylistic foundation, then in his case the first stage culminated in a collection titled *Salt on Withered Grass* (2002), wherein he firmly established his own style. This process took approximately ten years (if we do not count his earlier juvenilia). Zhu Zhu's poetry was distinguished from that of his contemporaries by its precise and rigorous formal shape, its restrained exactitude of expression, and its tightly wrought, solid rhythms—if such things can be embraced under the term style. Based on this collection and especially his early pieces like "Small Town Saxophone," "Phantom," "Themes of Summer in Nanjing," and "Stone City," one could easily get the idea that Zhu Zhu is a stylistic poet. In fact, more often than not he warily stays away from stylistic writing: "Some people, from when they first start writing, are very sensitive about style, and their lineage is overly obvious. If they don't solve this problem in the manner of a genius, which would have to be an extreme solution, then at some point they will start parodying themselves." Thus the truth about style is that "only when one wants to change something about oneself

9 Bai Hua. *A Lyrical Poet of the Mao Zedong Era* (Zuobian: Mao Zedong shidai de shuqing shiren). *Tibet Literature* (Xizang wenxue). Vol. 5, 1996.

does one become fascinated with ‘style.’”¹⁰ Perhaps style is totally necessary, but in Zhu Zhu’s first phase, throughout the formative period of his style, delicate changes (modulations and enhancements) were underway all the time:

I am forever a still-uncreated man
Making no unwarranted assumptions.

I eat stones. I write poems.

—“Assumptions” (1994)

Salt on Withered Grass was not Zhu Zhu’s first poetry collection, but its publication marked a stopping point in this phase of ceaseless change. He felt “an almost physical severance from his previous writing.” Prior to that, when his yearly self-published booklets had reached a certain thickness, he published *Cruising to Another Planet* in 1994. In this collection, poems like “Prelude” and “Summer and Other Seasons” still bear the stamp of his youthful taste for dazzling effects, like the surrealist painting on the cover. Yet, when it came time to publish *Salt on Withered Grass*, over half the poems from *Cruising to Another Planet* were left out (having clearly been subjected to some strict criterion).¹¹ From *Cruising to Another Planet* to *Salt on Withered Grass*, we get an idea of a constant process of weeding out in Zhu Zhu’s poetic thinking and practice. This was an ongoing process of defining a style, but it was also a process of resisting and breaking away from style.

Up to today, modern Chinese poetry has a hard time ridding itself of two chronic ailments: one is the pursuit of grandiosity and one is an overindulgence in passion. The first is seen in the way poetry takes on burdens beyond its own capacity, often leading to hollowness of diction. The latter is seen in the way poets use words impulsively just to vent their emotions, leading to otiosity and semantic excess. The former has been corrected somewhat by the “individual writing” of the past few years, but the latter has not been curbed and may even be exacerbated by passing fashions. Both of these flaws have to do with the poet’s mistaken self-valuation: he either overvalues or belittles his position and possible significance. Such misunderstanding hinders the poet’s realization of poetry’s inherent nature, to the point that

10 Zhu Zhu. “Awning—On Style and on Those Who Stop Writing”(Zheyangpeng—guanyu fengge he tingzhi xiezuo de ren). *Vertigo* (Yunxuan). Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi Press, 2000. p. 144.

11 Such rigor is also embodied in Zhu Zhu’s process of revising poems. According to my observation, he never shows a poem to anyone lightly, and he never submits a poem for publication unless he is sure it is finalized.

he cannot give thought to where poetry's secret possibilities might lie within the sphere of Sinopnonic writing. I am of the opinion that Zhu Zhu's poetry has delved down to the hidden nerve center of modern poetry. I concur with what Cai Tianxin wrote in his presenter's remarks for the Anne Kao Poetry Prize: "Zhu Zhu's main contribution to contemporary poetry lies in the poetic vision of his works, which are neither used to release pent-up emotion nor devised for purposes of critique."¹²

Indeed, "language as a discovery" constitutes the core of Zhu Zhu's poetry, and one could say that this is what makes Zhu Zhu's first phase remarkable. In fact, such concern for language carries on an idea of poetics that comes down to us from Baudelaire. (In the words of Paul Valéry, "Poetry possesses the resolve to change the function of language.") This has always been one of the centers of gravity of modern poetry. Each generation of modern poets has sought a breakthrough in language. However, some possessed an attitude toward language that over-relied on its self-sufficiency, treating poetry as no more than an intransitive lexical game. Another group of poets took expressiveness of language as a matter of course, supposing that poetry writing can exploit simple correspondences between words and feelings. Alternately, the surface smoothness or splendor of language becomes an aim pursued by some poets. Undoubtedly the notion of "language as discovery" can renew one's awareness of poetic language. "Discovery" implies awakening of a certain potential in language, to show that writing can touch upon the zone of utmost aliveness in language, bringing about a re-creation of the language medium. At the same time, this is also re-structuring of a person's psychic world in a way that can leave the reader amazed.

The "discovery" of language is an arduous journey. In a conversation among friends, Zhu Zhu once remarked, "You cannot say that I have not undergone hardships. I have frequently been plunged into hardships because of language. One faces a tremendous ordeal in poetry, namely the problem of how to put words together."¹³

12 Cai Tianxin. "A Lion Slashed by Teeth of Mutual Strife" (Yitou shizi de xianghu siyao). *Mountain Flowers* (Shanhua). Vol. 3, 2002.

13 On another occasion, Zhu Zhu described his "hardship of words" as follows: "In order to finish a poem, I would hide in my studio like a mole, or sitting on a night train while other people's heads were hanging down on their chests, I would be consumed by the anxiety of 'having something to say' but not yet finding suitable words for it. I would shudder because I continually got it wrong. The sounds that I could not utter seemed to gnaw away at things I passed on my journey—landscapes, cities, ocean views and even beautiful women. I believed that someday I would set those sounds down in writing, and then I could breathe easily in this world. Then I would be understood by others." Cf. Wang Jifang. "Poetry Can Give Me Dignity, Courage and Pity—An Interview with Zhu Zhu" (Shige hui daigei wo zizun, yongqi he lianmin—Zhu Zhu fangtan lu). *Fault Lines: Fin-de-siecle Literary Incidents* (Duanlie: shijimo de wenxueshigu). Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi Press, 2000. p. 148.

Like Francois Villon, the eccentric medieval poet of whom he wrote, Zhu Zhu was beset by the “thirst” and “bitter chill” of language:

In the protracted winter
A wolf goes searching for the forest of language.
—“I Am Francois Villon” (1998)

By wittily parodying the life-events of that French poet, Zhu Zhu conveys the catastrophic experiences one undergoes while searching for language to finish a poem—perplexity, melancholy and perhaps wild elation. These are the “hardships of language” that he spoke of, because the advent of inspiration comes at the cost of a tireless quest. “This sky full of snow is my uncanny itch.” “The sum of past events inflates outward.” “The mimetic storm makes howling noises.” From these odd lines themselves we can see the re-creation of language, which fits with Valéry’s heartfelt exclamation over Villon: “Masterful lines come out in quick succession, and each line is a new discovery worthy of being called a rediscovery of the classical.”¹⁴

Another meaning of “language as discovery” for Zhu Zhu is “to write crystalline poems” or “being capable of an extramundane gaze” (“A Higher Aim”). This refers to coalescence of language into the kind of physicality and inner texture that is unique to poetry. If we draw a distinction between the “crystalline” and the “flame-like”,¹⁵ Zhu Zhu’s poems undoubtedly belong to the former school. Italo Calvino wrote that “a crystal is a model of perfection, possessing precise facets and the ability to refract light.” Here it should be pointed out that we should not understand “crystalline poems” and “extramundane gaze” in the ordinary sense, for the poem implicitly negates the conventional meaning of such phrases. It would be more fitting to say that “extramundane gaze” implies a change in the function of language (however, I doubt that Zhu Zhu would give too much credence to romantic notions of the poet as “seer”). The image of crystallinity indicates poetic language’s trait of being open to the light. Poetry is tempered and delicately polished until it becomes a means of recollecting language’s special features of prosody, chromatic tone, and poise:

Language, the tail of language
Rife with the peacock’s ringing cries.
—“The Strand” (1994)

14 Paul Valéry. *Variétés*. Tr. Duan Yinghong. Tianjin: Baihua wenyi Press, 2002. p. 18.

15 Italo Calvino. *Memos for the Literature of the Next Millennium*. Tr. Yang Deyou. Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu Press, 1997. p. 49.

Here a highly mobile state is conferred upon “language” (not just the language written into the poem, but the language in which the poem is written). Its dynamic, radiant properties are brought to the fore in poetry. Yet corresponding to this we also read:

Writing, writing

Listening to sand sink towards darkness...

—“Unutterable Afternoon” (1992)

Suggesting a palpable and frangible texture, along with time’s inner stillness and fluidity, his phrase “sand sinking towards darkness” reminds me of another metaphor used by Zhu Zhu for the corporality of poetic language, namely the title of his poetry book, *Salt on Withered Grass*. These two phrases have equivalent force: both make dual use of metaphor and visual effect to convey the genuine implications of poetry writing. The sprinkling of poetic fragments across the body of language is likened to “salt on withered grass.” This not only conveys an aesthetic taste leaning toward refinement, it also embodies a value orientation tending toward inwardness and aloofness. In terms of lines of development in modern Chinese poetry, Zhu Zhu’s language consummately embodies the function of delicate depiction. To a certain extent he reaches the ideal level that poets since Mu Mutian in the 1920s have longed for but have been powerless to attain:

I like to weave poems from shreds of tobacco and copper filaments. Poems should combine the beauties of shape and music. The melodic waves they strike on a person’s nerves are partly visible and partly invisible, partly palpable and partly impalpable. The world of poetry is found in a voice that is partly perceptible and partly imperceptible, as if reaching us through thick mist, like a faint beam wavering yet holding steady as day wanes, a sentiment that can be confided yet cannot really be confided.¹⁶

This is surely an attempt to communicate the amazing richness of modern Sino-phonetic writing.

3. “Spreading Wings Where the Damage Is Least”

Due to his rare sensitivity to language, and due to his many-year residence on

16 Mu Mutian. “Discourses on Poetry” (Tan shi). *Creative Monthly* (Chuangzao Yuekan). Vol. 1, No. 1, 1926.

the outskirts of a city south of the Yangtze, Zhu Zhu's poems convey strong feelings for light, sounds, and rhythms of nature. These attributes of the natural setting, these timeless "storms of lyricism and sublimation," stirred him to respond in language all his own.

Being "an observer limited by experience" sensitized him to capturing the light and shade of his natural setting:

...The balcony at this moment seems shrunken
Into the dappling of winter light.

—"Impromptu" (1994)

Cloud shadows brush the foothills
Like shade of trees on passers-by.

—"Mantuoluo River" (1995)

His lines are filled with an abundance of light: "Ah, thorny bright sunlight / Dipped in poison purple ink" ("Autumn"). His images of light come in abundant variety: "A night of snow rests on branch tips / Sunlight gives it the look of gorgeous lilies." ("A Dream Lion Slashed by Teeth of Mutual Strife"). With help from the natural magic of sunlight, the observer endows various objects with form: "Leaves falling in sunlight are like black-colored threads"; "A gray tone slowly creeps into the sunlight" ("Hurricane"). It also lets him trace the growth, disappearance, and transformations of various things: "Night sucks out the light saved within corrugated curves of birch trunks." ("Spongy Ground"); "Moonlight bends low; / Sucks out the substance of clamshells in water" ("In Agate Eyes"). Of course, mutable light exhibits its properties along particular pathways: "Light on glass is not a return / But an arrival" ("Days in Company with a Swedish Friend"). More often, the variations appear in light itself: "Narrowing tips of light-beams outside the courtyard / Look like palisades" ("Father's Memoirs"), or perhaps it assumes a hallucinatory guise: "An angel grinds dust, birds and a street scene / Into a light-beam that shines into the depths" ("Angel"). What is more, the changes and contrasts in light intensity can induce shifts of perception in the observer:

Only beneath the sun is there such a rose,
A rose that you suspect of being brocade,
Only thus could there be such a butterfly
Spreading wings where the damage is least.

—"Fluttering" (1998)

In the above-quoted poem, there are other similar lines: “Sunbeams shear the wool from our bodies.” Due to sun shining on them, a “rose” and a “butterfly” (suggesting metaphors for language) become two corresponding images. The relations of light to objects, as well as light-triggered modifications of objects themselves, are reinforced by all sorts of skillful metaphors that deserve comparison to the works of “impressionist masters.” “Falling leaves are like black-colored threads” or “narrowed tips of light-beams are like palisades”—I cannot think of alternate wording that could more fittingly express the swift descent of leaves in sunlight or the changing appearance of sunbeams in late afternoon. Perhaps these effects are brought about by what people call synesthesia, which enlivens the energy channels of language. “Sunlight” is a somewhat overused word, but through the graces of synesthesia it gives off bold scintillations. At times in the eyes of this observer we meet with this kind of vista: “Sunlight. The sunlight / Is like a living work of architecture...an opera house” (“One Who Trembles”), in which intimate space and sound are absorbed into the light. In many circumstances, sunlight exerts a filtering effect, dimming one portion that sleeps outside the observer’s field of vision, while illuminating objects that enter the observer’s linguistic field, making them yield up their inherent secrets: “Glaring rays on the hillside / Like phantoms of summer, doing their utmost / To drive the summer away” (“Phantoms”). Sometimes light rays may even pass through the observer’s body and consciousness. One obvious example is “Slowed-Down Beat,” in which transformations of light lead to a progression of color tones from yellow through green and white to blue. Clearly this is a reflection of shifting inner states:

...Or perhaps it is blue—
 It is a blue bus. Then another bus
 Drives by, and the human traffic of the southland
 Covers it up like blue lawn grass.

Set off by contrasts of light, things of the world display a dappled appeal. Closely tied to this is the excellent discrimination displayed by Zhu Zhu among delicate variations of sound. Any sound will be found to be mingled with the breath of nature, but rapt attention is necessary to heed it, distinguish it, and tease out its unique melody. “Strummed like an instrument, the grove of trees has an inverted reflection”; “I have found my own string / Within the unmoving oak my hand rests on / Listening to my voice” (“In the Rain”). This is like the god Orpheus, honored by Rilke, whose song takes the form of a “tall tree” rising in a listener’s ear. Orpheus

stands, after all, for rare strains of music issuing from heaven. In our ordinary world, where things exist in murky chaos, the faculty of inspired hearing is a special gift that finds resonance and connection among all kinds of perceptions.

Tree leaves covered with chalky dust
Give off a sound like the murmur
Of a woman's silk garment

—"Beside the Ocean, You" (1997)

Here we find apt meshing and interchange between the visual and the auditory (as well as the smooth tactile caress of a silk garment). Together they form a marvelous synthesis of feeling which is detached from the background.

In terms of mental mechanism, fine discrimination of sound results not only from heightened concentration by auditory nerves, but also from outward extension of one's yearning to listen: "In the far-off world, someone distinguishes ever more sharply, / Someone digs up houses with a trowel of wind" ("Unutterable Afternoon"). Only by intentness and poise can one "hear sand sink into the darkness." Of course such hearing is fundamentally hearing-through-language, or one could say it is an expansion of perception, or ultimately "perceptual expansion expressed through language." However, as most people know, the shaping of phonetic effects is by no means a strong suit of the modern Chinese language. Chinese is not like Russian¹⁷ or French or other Western languages, all of which are characterized by auditory richness. Yet through acute analysis and incorporation of sound (along with the above-mentioned capturing of light), the properties of language will be changed. Within the linguistic texture of poetry, one will find that a secret listening device is built in, which can aurally capture such things as this: "Feelers of larkspur brushed by wind, tapping like knockers under the sky" ("Untitled"). In fact, this is a feeler sent out by language.

On this basis I think that Zhu Zhu's writing enriches contemporary Sinophonic poetry with a special kind of prosody, a "free-form fugue" that emerges by variation of recurrent strains—"after rainfall, autumn sets shadows of clouds moving."

17 Poets draw on tonality of language to shape their own unique voice. For example, Akhmatova felt that Tsvetaeva's poems were "usually written by starting in the key of high C." As Joseph Brodsky pointed out, "This was a characteristic of her voice. Her speech almost always started from the 'other end' of the normal octave; it began in the soprano range. Her voice possessed a keenness of sorrow sufficient to give one a feeling of continuous ascension." Cf. Joseph Brodsky. *Child of Civilization (Wenming de haizi)*. Tr. Liu Wenfei. Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi Press, 1999. p. 14.

Of course such prosody is internal to the language itself, like a subterranean stream flowing through words, reminding one of “the sound wings make/ Coming together unhurriedly” (“Ancient Capital”), or like “the gray pall of a ballad” (“Portrait of a Middle-Aged Poet”). Through just the right degree of restraint, Zhu Zhu maintains evenness of semantic flow, lucidity of syntax, and a crisp yet tranquil tone:

Suddenly the sound of bells is heard
These chills, fragmentary chills
Drawing a nameless elation along with them.
—“Ancient Capital” (1991-1993)

To carry out reassembly and grafting of syntactic units by means of “linguistic photosynthesis” and synesthesia are important techniques for Zhu Zhu. The key is that an expression seems to gain new life through abrupt intermeshing or impact, causing lines to give off unexpected new meanings. The main result is that amazing metaphors are found sprinkled everywhere through his poems: “Amid ambient light gradually revealed by darkness/ Children in the middle of the street/ Are like flowers that forget to shout in amazement”; “The air outside the performance hall is a flock of birds wheeling up from a valley” (“Autumn Night”); “Opening wings where the damage is least” (“Fluttering”)...In these acts of displacement, the firm material shell of certain phrases is stripped away, allowing their implications and functions to fit together in new ways. If we trace the origin of this technique in modern Chinese poetry, we can see it is a rational extension of what Zhu Ziqing summed up in the 1930s as “out-of-the-way metaphors,”¹⁸ but it is far richer and more highly textured.

Of course this “dislocation” is unlike the juxtaposition of images found in earlier poetry. The latter emphasizes similitude or homology between images; it stresses relatedness of images, whereas dislocation values the independence of an image and amplifies it into a “thought-realm,” which can be entered as a coherent *mis en scene*. “A person’s consciousness is a rainbow in his cornea, / Searching anxiously for oddments in the wilderness” (“A Person’s Consciousness Is a Flying Moth”). This is like these lines from “Conversation Is Always Bewildering”: “Though it may be

18 Zhu Ziqing defined “out-of-the-way metaphors” as follows: “It is to discover new connections between things, and to use the most economical language to organize these connections into a poem. What I mean by ‘economical language’ is to dispense with connecting words, letting the reader use his imagination to form bridges for himself.” Cf. Zhu Ziqing. *Miscellaneous Talks on New Poetry* (Xin shi zahua). Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1984. p. 8.

outmoded, / In my line of sight things are all related.” Displacement is sometimes expressed by dislocation of text and title in poems such as “Restrained, All-Too Restrained” and “Greece,” in which a normal understanding of the title gives us no understanding of the theme and no avenue into the space of a poem. This sets up a tense relation between title and text, but once the text is read through to the end, the veiled reference in the title is found to be borne out in the text. “In perfect clarity an axle is spinning, /And giving rise to unity.” Sometimes displacement comes across in the contrastive tension between stillness and movement (such as in “Stable”), or in elaboration that leaps and synthesizes (as in “Last Station”), while endowing the poem with an appealing suggestiveness.

Viewed from another aspect, displacement in a poem confers on it a surreal flavor or feel. A classic example is “Stone City,” which opens with these lines: “A letter from the Tang dynasty / Is delivered into my hands,” escorting the reader into a seemingly factual yet fantastic world. The shifts in scene between historical imagery (verses 2-4) and real observation (verse 5) are undoubtedly surreal due to the jarring contrast. The whole structure of “Summertime Roofs in Nanjing” unfolds by depiction of surreal details. One can raise countless examples of surreal imagery taking up parts of poems, such as the abrupt linking of “A halo cast off amid tufts of grass, / Meets with a repairman” (“Mantuoluo River”), or the jarring verb-object relations of “Like white fish of summer darting into a boulder” (“Piano Room”) or “Riding a bicycle, he goes across my fingers” (“Phantom”). Other examples are the fusing of perceptual categories in these lines: “Her ear is like a villa/ Asking for a kind of wine / It has never tasted” (“Woman with Earring”) and the witty inversion of private affairs and public context in this line: “His ironed pants, like the *Constitution*, leave nothing to criticize” (“Restrained, All-Too Restrained”). The imperious accuracy shown by such surreal displacements brings about remarkable effects, as in these lines:

...two kinds of life are used
To arrange one kind of life; two cities
Combine to make one city.
—“Slices of Life in the Past” (1993)

Such a rapid succession of displacements may be a cause of semantic obscurity, yet it has been important for forming Zhu Zhu’s poetic syntax, in which streamlining and intricacy are interwoven. This would seem to be a contradiction, for streamlining is marked by an inward retraction of force, a condensation done by

paring down of words and economy of sentence forms (such as “Writing, writing / Listening to sand sink towards darkness”); on the other hand, intricacy is brought about by aggregation and proliferation, marked by lushness and a tendency toward outward extension. Sometimes, in order to balance streamlining with intricacy, Zhu Zhu resorts to using recondite vocabulary and tough-to-crack sentence forms. Here we cannot avoid mentioning the infiltration of translated literature into Zhu Zhu’s poetry.¹⁹ By now it is unlikely that anyone would presume to negate the enrichment of modern Chinese language and literature by translation. There is no denying that emergence and enrichment of Sinophonic writing has been predicated upon openness to and absorption of various translated writings. Huang Canran remarked upon “the power of strangeness from translated works, which has struck sparks within the Chinese language,”²⁰ and this is a power that has functioned constructively all through the modern period. As for modern Chinese poetry, it has been the recipient of transformative influences—in terms of rhythm, tone and other aspects—throughout this process. Embodied in Zhu Zhu’s poems we see changes in poetic modes absorbed from translated literature, for example the use of passive constructions: “Like pulp of fruit left out in the sun / The southland has been made to undergo something, / The sun keeps the lingering image in its eye.” (“Prayer for a Heart”). Another example is the kind of image we find here: “When I love—yes—even on the wall I see / That serving maid smiles and paces forward” (“Lamp-Moth”). Another example is the liberal sprinkling of negatives in “Slices of Life in the Past.” Having been initiated by translations, this mode of writing will continue to expand the expressive range within modern Chinese.

All of his efforts to seek out resonance between melodies of language and the melodies of nature imply a certain conception of modern poetry on Zhu Zhu’s part: “Today, we need to recognize the effectiveness of design, just as we acknowledge the appeal of all poets who show originality. The blending of prior preparation with elements that come out during writing is what I call ‘design.’ It is the ongoing, ex-

19 Like the works of every outstanding modern poet in China, external influences on Zhu Zhu’s poetry are obvious. With great adeptness he has absorbed nutriment from poets like Stevens, Seferis, Montale, Borges, Transtroemer, Char and Brodsky, transforming them into a driving force for his own creative work.

20 Huang Canran. “The Modern Sensitivity in Translation of Poetry” (Yi shi zhong de xiandai mingan). *Necessary Angle* (Biyao de jiaodu). Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu Press, 2001. p. 162.

panding recurrence of patterns from your own psyche.”²¹ This is a poetics that fuses intellectual composition with impromptu inspiration, and thus perhaps it can help to amend the otiose, flaccid, piecemeal condition into which much contemporary Chinese poetry has fallen. Although one part of poetry writing comes from a person’s innate feeling for language, it is far from being a rhapsodic flight requiring no discipline or moderation, as some people might suppose.

4. “Death Has Its Own Inconstant Speed”

The search for novel modes of language is often tied to a particular spiritual orientation. In Zhu Zhu’s poems, blunt yet striking assemblages of words or syntactic forms are not just raw outpourings based on temperamental preference. Instead they trace motifs of experience based on contemplation of the world. Thus his words take on a deeply thoughtful tone: they are particular and immediate, yet at the same time they are far-reaching and weighty. One of the early poems that was retained in *Salt on Withered Grass*—showing his fondness for Borges—uses a personal, fanciful touch to render illusory figments of scenery, presenting a vast unstimulating space:

That was in the South. In a quiet freight yard the train
Came to a stop.
Nobody knew that was the last station. The passing months
Had thoroughly forgotten themselves.

—“Last Stop” (1990)

Of course duration is also important here. This poem appears to be describing a scene, yet it also conveys a mood or mental state: “Despair can only disappear, it can only be made silent, / And contained in silence. That which is / Manifests amid that which is not.” The basic key is somber, filled with the empty sense of being in a featureless setting. It is my opinion that this poem uses a wide-open space to hold the essence of writing up to view. Once “slumbering language” has been awakened, what refuge awaits his pen with its icy touch? If metaphysical discussions are valid, then writing is a way to oppose the ravages of time. If so, it can be used to ward off emptiness in reality, and in one’s inner world—

21 Zhu Zhu. “Awning—On Style and on Those Who Stop Writing”(Zheyangpeng—guanyu fengge he tingzhi xiezuo de ren). *Vertigo* (Yunxuan). Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi Press, 2000. p. 146. Elsewhere Zhu Zhu once remarked, “Even having entered the real writing process, constitutive relations among words are still unexpected, elusive, and beyond control.” This lends support to the above view.

...That which is
Manifests amid that which is not.

For Zhu Zhu, writing poetry indeed goes hand in hand with overcoming a sense of emptiness. Corresponding to the slightly halting tone of his enjambments, while writing he often feels “a sense of depletion upon first waking” (“Mantuoluo River”). The sense of emptiness is not only a hard-to-fend-off experience, it is also a way of looking at the world. “Once again my passing days are so hollow they can contain anything / My frailty is counteracted / It is being cursed, by an ice cube in a liquor glass, / Facing my image that burns in the mirror” (“Returning at Night”). It is the stubborn, ancient idea of “void,” simultaneously implying the void of space and time. Thus, its transcendent interpretation will necessarily imply compassion. He speaks of the glaring sun: “Weren’t you the patterns written in frost, delicate and fraught with human qualities?” (“Day in Autumn”) In the poetic fragments quoted above, the interfusion of light and shade indicates a boundary phase of writing. Once set in motion by inspiration, this becomes an ongoing state of quiet waiting, searching, and winnowing.

However, rather than attributing Zhu Zhu’s fosterage of this habitual practice to the city he lived in, I would rather attribute its source to the suburb where he habitually resided. The city provided his writing with a background of customs and sensibility, but the city’s outskirts gave him a space where he could engage in metaphysical contemplation. In a short essay, Zhu Zhu wrote: “The suburb...is not only a birthmark which the poet can recognize on the motherly body of the city, it is also an omen of estrangement and remoteness. It is a gap through which one goes missing, but also through which one can return. In fact the suburb is each city’s memory of itself.”²² In another piece, he directly states the significance of the suburb:

In writing the history of a city, perhaps we should apportion more pages to the transformations of its suburbs. As distinctness of different city districts is effaced (to the point that they overlap), the comparison of one suburb with another seems to take on increasing value. This discovery is likewise applicable to people.²³

22 Zhu Zhu. “Space as a Guiding Thread” (Zuowei xiansuo de kongjian). *Vertigo* (Yunxuan). Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi Press, 2000. p. 141.

23 Zhu Zhu. “Ten Nighttime Pathways—On Suburbs” (Yewan xiaojing de shitiao daolu—jiaoqu shi). *Vertigo* (Yunxuan). Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi Press, 2000. p. 47.

The elusive breath that wafts through Zhu Zhu's poetic works is indeed unique to the southern city where he resides—"An ancient capital, an unhurried rhythm." However, this elusive breath does not emanate directly from the city's body; rather, it comes from his own imaginary divergence from the objectified city. "In that big black / Spidery web, the dusk / In lonely darkness / Is gathering." ("Ancient Capital") Thereupon, Zhu Zhu attempts to use time-honored artistic tenets to rescue a vision of the city, even while it is losing coherence: "But for its sake you make restitution to the sun of debt / The sun over my crypt" ("Ceramic Figurine"). More often, he is standing in the suburb's wide-open, quiet expanse as he scrutinizes the city's teeming outlines: "Most arrogant of cities / You make me hear the din of coursing blood" ("Transit" II). The suburb is doubtless a unique place to stand, an invisible boundary where visions of the city are engendered and where they disappear. At the same time it is a two-way mirror: here the city's outlines meet with natural landscapes, counter-posing the modern and the traditional, mingling the empirical with the *a priori*.

Like the *flâneur* described by Baudelaire, Zhu Zhu's hours spent frequenting the shadowy, maze-like groves of suburbia doubtless give him many chances to reflect upon the city and to sort out his thoughts about it. The scenes of life he witnesses while returning home, sometimes as a "civil servant," stir a twinge of unutterable compassion: "Amid cursing and bustling / They are gradually reduced to silence—" ("Civil Servants"). At other times, as he strolls on a "road at the city's edge," the spiritual ferment lying hidden under that hazy distant view is like what he sums up in his essay "Standing Watch at the City's Edge":

Waterfowls skim past a gap in the city wall, and a silvery aureole of sunlight over a peak seems to flash asignal, quickly transmitting a rich beauty not caught by the naked eye.

These two aspects of the suburb stand in an intertextual relation, permeated by "a pre-existing influence within my body—namely our ancestors' melancholy and their sensitivity to dew-like impermanence—never despairing but soberly compassionate."²⁴ At the same time, it embraces concern for everyday life.

Pity engendered by a sense of emptiness can be traced back to Zhu Zhu's early piece "One Who Trembles": "For each living person / Penetrating light should only shine / Into his misfortune." In "Twilight in a Suburb of Yangzhou," written at about

24 Zhu Zhu. "Preface to *Vertigo*" (Yunxuan zixu). *Vertigo* (Yunxuan). Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi Press, 2000. p. 4.

the same time, even more sobering considerations of death underlie the pitying mood: “Let youthfulness concentrate on death, / That countenance ever quiet / Through all commotion, / That summons ever arriving through dimmest light.” The pitying mood is founded on a viewpoint that gives broader penetration and sublimation of emptiness, conveying the maturity of the poet’s intelligence. Yet a more rigorous poetic theme is what goes hand-in-hand with emptiness, namely death, because “The emptiness we looked upon lightly / Has swapped death for life” (“Transit” 1). In Zhu Zhu’s poetry, a sense of emptiness becomes the final refuge of death: “On all roads leading here / The dead are holding up banners that resemble thin ice. / Their gloomy armor carries off the last light from the sky” (“Transit” 2); “People want an ornamented, gnawed-upon and approved-of / Concrete pedestal, more than they want / An abstract, poetic, unmoving one of dark color” (“Plague”)—inasmuch a sense of emptiness is thought to be the source of death.

In my view the crux of the problem is not whether death appears in the poetry, but whether it has been integrated into what T.S. Eliot called “a larger body of experience” and furthermore has been poetically converted into an excavation of existence’s profundities. Fundamentally, what the thought of death brings should not be indulgent dissipation; rather, it should be restraint of excessive desires in the search for ultimate meaning. For Zhu Zhu, “Death has a drifting, inconstant speed” (“Twilight in a Suburb of Yangzhou”). It is surely not an offhand, now-and-then feeling; rather, it is a response to existence from right down in the marrow. The speed of death may be so fast that “As soon as I think of death I die” (“Woman Wearing an Earring”), or it may slow down to a long process of resisting the inevitable: “In the moon there is surely patience to make each day more beautiful, / Shining over us as we gradually tilt toward death” (“On the Lake”). Zhu Zhu’s treatment of death shows a rare sense of proportion. One way is to expel the past from one’s own body while taking the standpoint of the future, thus gaining insight into the whole process of death: “I rub the window glass, / Becoming the naked skin of death, two layers / Of lemon-yellow grow out/ From my body” (“Window”). The other way is the opposite, tracing the already-dead self as it glides through time to the origin point, gradually unfolding the awe-inspiring experience of primal union. Thus, it gives rise to what Duo Duo calls “looking from the direction of death.” Two obvious examples are “Lamp-Moth” and “Joint Burial.” As for the latter way, it has increasingly become Zhu Zhu’s own unique poetic mode. Zhu Zhu’s reason for handling death this way is like what Sylvia Plath said, “I cannot help but perform this terrible

little allegory once more, in order to get away from it.”²⁵ Yet when curious viewers go behind the curtain of the puppet show to look, they still cannot unravel the riddle of this skit.

However, it is undeniable that the poet, as he undertakes the painful “search for a nameless object in memory” (“Transit”1), has intense feelings of emptiness and death which are eventually resolved in the act of forging poetry itself:

The powerful wind
Has nuggets more wonderful than gold
Which will be given to a jeweler.
We need only wait in the cracks of hunger
For what should be accepted, what would be worth depicting.
—“Song of the Kitchen” (1998)

Here the poet once again strums out his melody of “poetry as the theme of poetry.” For a true work of poetry, the theme is not an external embellishment using words; rather, it is an internal part of the poem’s body. Not only does it enter into disciplining the poet’s psyche and character, it also enters into shaping the poem. Perhaps in the eye of an onlooker, poetry writing places itself at a distance from ordinary life, or may even run counter to it: “We are farthest away from an ambulance on the street / Or grave mounds on a foothill, / Like fondness for peonies embroidered on an apron / We love the colored motifs of history.” This would in fact be a deep-seated prejudice. As an unspoken rebuttal to such a prejudice, “poetry as the theme of poetry” actually carries out the archaic conception of embracing the “usefulness of the useless”: “With full composure we intend to spread salt across grass, / Sprinkle pepper into slumber.” Thereupon, the most common particulars of kitchen activity constitute veiled treatments of poetry writing itself.

Poetry writing itself—and here I am talking about the intrinsic process that achieves satisfactory expression—is already filled with moral sensibility. We might as well consider, first of all, how it touches upon the appropriate balance of luxury and thrift. As a poet’s wife exclaimed one day, “Writing poetry is a luxury that has no bounds.” Yet from another angle, it may be thriftiest of all in its use of words, and it may practice this in the spirit of an austere discipline. The moment you realize you are caught up in such a

25 This interpretation was given by the poetess Sylvia Plath during a BBC on-air reading of her poem “Daddy.”

paradox, how can you keep from trembling?²⁶

Those poets who “wait in the cracks of hunger” are indeed cognizant of “what should be accepted, what is worth carefully depicting.” Those “nuggets more wonderful than gold” they offer are “things that go on gleaming and give people comfort.”

5. “Nuggets More Wonderful Than Gold”

Can we thus say that Zhu Zhu is offering things—or more precisely a way of presenting things—so that people can better understand or recognize things? In poems with titles like “On the Stairway,” “Small Town Sax,” “The Strand” and “Slumber,” as well as “Figurine,” “Lamp-Moth” and “Imprint,” assorted things open themselves to manifest their connections with the world, with words and with meaning. Due to things being thrown open, language can assume more vivid forms. As Italo Calvino remarks, “Words tie together visible traces with unseen things, absent things and things desired or feared. Like a narrow bridge erected over an abyss in an emergency, properly used language lets us approach visible or invisible things in this world with steadiness, concentration and caution. At the same time they prompt us to heed the information that things (visible or not) impart to us by means other than language.”²⁷

As Rilke put it, a thing is a particular entity that holds experiences and memories of everyday life: “This thing, however lacking in value, incorporates your relations to the world; it leads you into the midst of things and people. By way of its existence, however you catch sight of it, and through its final destruction or mysterious disappearance, you will have passed through the phases of being human, at last gaining entrance to the deepest place, which is death.”²⁸ Heidegger’s explanation for this was that the original meaning of “thing” is “coalescence”: it aggregates heaven, earth, divinity and humanity, causing them to converge, exchange reflections and constitute a world together. The function of language is to affirm the existence of things, to restore the mysterious original nature of things—that is, the “thingness” that makes them things. What is more, the true value of art lies in disclosing the

26 Cf. Zhu Zhu. Mu Duo. “The Nightingale Has Sung Long Enough—Assorted Thinkers 8: Zhu Zhu” (Dujuan de tiku yijing gou jiu le—zhuzi baijia 8: Zhu Zhu). <https://www.douban.com/group/topic/1723978/>

27 Italo Calvino. *Memos for the Literature of the Next Millennium*. Tr. Yang Deyou. Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu Press, 1997. p. 54.

28 Rainer Maria Rilke. *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*. Tr. Zhang Li. Guangzhou: Huacheng Press, 1999. p. 163.

coalescence of heaven, earth, divinity and humanity in a thing, while at the same time maintaining the original state of art's materials.²⁹ That being so, the values of a poetic work will be found firstly in its endeavor to manifest the thingness of a thing richly. Secondly, in the course of utilizing words it does not cause words to lose something of themselves, but rather it should confirm words as what they are. Assessing Zhu Zhu's use of words this way, we will find that it fulfills this criterion quite well.

In Zhu Zhu's poems, things function as perspectives to structure a poem, which means that a thing is shown as a way of seeing the world. Substantively speaking, it is in silent, unspoken interchange with the world. This makes me think of Zhu Zhu's fondness for Walter Benjamin, whose saturnine temperament is similar to his own. Benjamin was given to weighty thoughts on things, and as Susan Sontag observed, "he was aware that the melancholic's relations with the world often transpire himself and things, rather than between himself and people. This is a true interchange which can reveal meanings. Precisely speaking, because the melancholic is constantly being pursued by death, they understand best of all how to read the world. Or one could say that this world only reveals itself to melancholics who scrutinize it minutely, while others have no such luck. The more lifeless an entity is, the more keenness and strength one's mind needs to penetrate it."³⁰ There is a power of stillness congealed in the interior of a thing. In Zhu Zhu's poems, complex views of things—the rich originality of his perspectives on them—correspond to the multiple dimensions of his relations to the world. This is the inner driving force for writing, referred to at the beginning of this essay, which concentrates the inner imperative of Zhu Zhu's poetry.

Yet, people's relations to things are often quite elusive in real life and especially in artistic creation. Hence our idealized notions of embracing things with words and our conventional ideas of naturalism are coming into question. What is more, we find that disconcerting gaps may appear between words and things, such that increasingly minute depictions give an increasing sense of unreality. "We view an object, facing it in isolation, and then we try to describe it for ourselves in the most objective, neutral way. Then it gradually takes over the whole setting. It enlarges until it crowds us and oppresses us; it enters our bodies and deprives us of our own positions, reducing us to a miserable state. Otherwise you have the entirely opposite

29 Cf. Martin Heidegger. "The Origin of a Work of Art". *Holzweg*. Tr. Sun Zhouxing. Shanghai: Shanghai Yiwen Press, 1997. p. 4.

30 Susan Sontag. "Prologue to *The Arcades*". Cf. Sun Bing. ed. *Walter Benjamin: Works and Profile* (Benyaming: zuopin yu huaxiang). Shanghai: Wenhui Press, 1999. p. 248.

phenomenon: We stare fixedly at the object, as if it were demonic; it may seem like something illusory or unreal that we have no way of understanding.”³¹ Eventually, the objectivity (or truthfulness) of words themselves come into doubt.

I feel that Zhu Zhu’s “Blue Smoke” (2001) is a valid instance of writing that probes the relations of words and things without taking a one-track approach. In the intersecting views of artist and model, “Blue Smoke” offers a poetics of seeing. The painter “keeps his eye on the canvas,” concerning himself with the model’s pose and bearing, plus the associations derived from them. At first the model takes a stiff view of things. She is forced to sit there in a daze. “A housefly tries to fly out through the glass; after a while it is nauseating to watch.” After that she “looks through the window behind the painter, where she can see the Bund.” Eventually, “she feels she need not/ Invest herself completely in her sitting posture, or perhaps / She could let it remain there empty.” She could even issue forth from “the outer shell of expression,” removing herself from where the portrait is being done, to look back on the painted image that originated from her. Of course the painter’s view and the model’s view on artistic veracity are not equivalent. She is puzzled as to why “the figure in the painting looks a bit like her, but not quite.” Yet something about it rings true:

That wisp of smoke tendrilling up from between her fingers
Really seems to be there, drifting in the air

Perhaps “Blue Smoke” comes close to Calvino’s understanding of Lucretius’ *De Rarum Naturae*: “It is a poem about invisible things and infinite, unpredictable possibilities—perhaps even about nothingness.”³² The wisp of blue smoke that the painter repeatedly tries to render is just such a “thing.” It has visible shape, color and motion, but due to its borderline perceptibility and semi-existence it also partakes of the invisible world: it is a thing hovering between being and nothingness. The painter “keeps trying to render it,” but it is hard to depict such a gossamer-like thing accurately. This plot element revealed at the end also reveals the dilemma faced by artistic creation in trying to convey the relation of words to things.

31 This statement was made by a participant in a symposium moderated by Michel Foucault. Cf. Du Xiaozhen. ed. *Works of Foucault (Fuke ji)*. Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong Press, 1998. p. 31.

32 Italo Calvino. *Memos for the Literature of the Next Millennium*. Tr. Yang Deyou. Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu Press, 1997. p. 6.

6. “My Pen Records and Searches for Form”

The center of gravity throughout *Salt on Withered Grass* mostly falls upon excavating the latent capability of words in themselves. The impact made by any of these poems mostly comes from the inherent power of words, since the luster, scent and texture of words are enshrined within the ambience that any given poem creates. However, once this collection was published, a latent change which Zhu Zhu had been anticipating began to emerge above ground. Certain determinants of change, lying in wait within his writing, finally triggered a shift which turned out to be a qualitative advance. As if a chrysalis were preparing to break open, a phase of writing in a “dark crypt” had to be undergone. An isolated, pain-wracked “lamp-moth” would gain new life, but how? Such were the circumstances in which a new masterpiece—“Qinghe County”—came to be written, even while the manuscript of *Salt on Withered Grass* was still in preparation at the publishing house. This was indeed a pivotal milestone of Zhu Zhu’s poetry writing, marking his arrival at a higher stage. In this process, the substance of his language was recast, accomplishing a change from crisp to supple.

“Qinghe County” was undoubtedly a new kind of writing for Zhu Zhu, or one could say it initiated a brand new direction in his writing. Of course, the emergence of this phase had an ample foundation. The substantive leap seen in “Qinghe County” was incubated from certain transformative elements that sparkled intermittently in *Salt on Withered Grass*. In fact, this new work combined sparks of change from many previous works and brought them to blazing intensity. Actually any poet carries forward elements (or patterns) from his early writing and tries to make something of them in his later writing. Implicit in this is a hidden pathway of transmission and derivation pertaining to poetics. One can see that in the complex context of the ‘90s, Chinese poetry had not given up its efforts toward renewal in poetics. Regrettably, a whole new round of experiments—“new narrative,” “transitivity,” “bodily writing”—was swallowed up in a faddish series of conceptual manifestos. What has always intrigued me is the question of which transformative elements, beyond ordinary categories of technique, can trigger innovation in poetry? How can those transformative elements be incorporated into new writing? Is there a lesson for modern Chinese poetry in this process of incorporation and how it was experienced by individuals?

A few signs of incipient transformation had appeared in poems of the early 1990s, but later certain tendencies took the fore. The above-mentioned poem “Window” and “Frivolous Family Tree,” from the suite “Small Town Baroque,” displayed a self-absorbed gaze in a state of separateness, a display rendered in leaping yet

distinct details. As for poems like “On the Lake” and “A Higher Aim,” they give an impression of settings and objects being clearer in outline, at least on the surface, letting up on the previous tautness of interlock among words. “Father’s Memoir” brought in a warm narrative tone, but this differed from the lyrical mode adhered to in the somewhat anecdotal works of his early period, because its pose of “recollection” put more emphasis on the ambience engendered by narrative. Especially worth mentioning are his more concentrated efforts at prose writing, starting in the mid-1990s, which influenced his mode of poetry writing. Prose offered a sinuous sentence form and a proficiency in something similar to stitch-work. What is more, the ease and loose expansiveness of prose was to prove helpful in his reshaping of poetic language.³³

The suite “Qinghe County,” composed of six independent poems, still bases its unfolding in the dimension of language. However, a shift has appeared here in language’s center of gravity and function. It has shifted from hammering out refined strings of words towards conveying the relations of language to experience on multiple levels. Fragmentary sentence forms based on horizontal connections among words have given way to holographic sentence forms that unfold vertically by probing from level to level. What follows from this is a gradual fadeout of the ringing clarity of a wordsmith’s handiwork, giving way to silken interlacing throughout. Thus in at least one sense “Qinghe County” can be considered to have paradigmatic significance, of a much-anticipated kind, as an “actionable text”: “It is not only an in-depth excavation of the potential of language, illustrating its ceaseless self-transcendence, but more importantly it is filled with experience beyond mere lyricism. What is more, it is capable of tapping into the reader’s own experience.”³⁴ It is a dual exploration of language and its relation to experience, which can help renew our picture of language and our recognition of the world.

On the surface, “Qinghe County” is a revision or rewriting of a familiar historical tale. Worth noting is that *Plum Flowers in a Golden Vase*—the long narrative work on which the poem is based—is itself a rewriting or elaboration of one segment from another long narrative work, thus setting up a particular mirroring relation among the three texts. This mirroring superimposes the three texts and shuttles in and out among their differing narrative modes—or one could say their linguistic

33 Evidence of this can be found in “Qinghe County” and other poems written in the same period, such as “Joint Burial,” “Lamp-Moth,” and “Blue Smoke.”

34 Cheng Guangwei. “Poetry of the Nineties: Naming by a Different Criterion” (Jiushi niandai shige: ling yi yi de mingming). Cf. Zhao Tingyang. He Zhaotian. eds. *Review of Scholarly Thought* (Xueshu sixiang pinglun). Shenyang: Liaoning University Press, 1997. Vol. 1, p. 210.

formulae for fictionalizing events. The result demonstrates the impressive plasticity of the Chinese language. In terms of language formulae, “Qinghe County” draws on the incipient “pre-modernity” in the two traditional works and develops it into a richly expressive modernity (among contemporary Chinese poems, there is nothing that can replace it). Clearly, rather than saying that “Qinghe County” revises or rewrites a historical tale, one should say that it is a restructuring of space-time by the poetic imagination. In the process of “re-fictionalizing” those tempestuous past events, it navigates the framework of received plot details and their conceptual logic with deconstructive flair. Bringing modern experience to bear, this poem transforms the inner texture of the classical language. At the same time, its structure is a response to contemporary explorations of long-poem structure. This is a paradigmatic instance of the recasting and self-transformation of Sinophonic writing.

In this essay I do not plan to discuss “Qinghe County’s” scenario as a “pseudo-verse-drama” (an appropriation of the verse drama form), even though the list of characters at the beginning and the speeches in first person make people think of a multi-act play. However, this piece’s way of drawing on theatrical form, especially in its outstanding use of personae, deserves to be anatomized. Whoever reads it may notice the thread through the main part (poems 2-6), which unfolds by self-accounts spoken in the first person. Each “I” (representing a different character), assumes a single image in speaking, but behind the speaker’s image lurk shadows of a few other characters. However, a key character who really should stand frontstage at some point, the woman Pan Jinlian, is never presented as an “I,” because she is only present as one of those shadows (spoken of as “her” in the poems “Libertine” and “Instructor Wu”). However, she is placed at the focal point where glaring looks from three important characters intersect,³⁵ so her features are illuminated by all three, making her face more distinct than that of any speaker. The way these characters overlap with underlying, shadowy figures constitutes another “mirroring” relation. By positing an “I,” a platform is set up for projecting these shadows, while functioning as a two-directional filter or colander.

What is more, positing the “I” makes the characters’ speeches have the ring of soliloquies, so they are recollections, but within that we hear confessions poured out into the void. Recollection equips each person with a particular dimension of vision,

35 The relationship of “her” (Pan Jinlian) to these three characters can be explored. These three characters are bound up with her fate, and they are emblematic of three aspects—birth, desire, and death. Thus they serve as a background to her whole biographical arc. However, in dealing with “her” relations to “them” (particularly Wu Song), Zhu Zhu deliberately maintains a complex ambiguity, causing all that happens to be unavoidable and yet completely random.

in which slices of the past are obviously selected by memory. In fact, recollection tailors a suitable speed of utterance, viewpoint and color-scheme for each person. (Especially unconventional is the speech of “Wu the Large,” who spins out half-serious jests in long-winded sentences of up to 27 syllables.) Thus there is no need to reiterate the ins-and-outs of plot adaptation. The important thing is that the whole story has been transformed into the material of language. In order to emphasize the luminous points in experience, language has to move back and forth along the steep, narrow road between reality and memory, setting off beacon fires for all to see.

Right from the beginning, recollection sets up an apparatus to enable the capturing of “scenes”:

We were intently concerned with his rapid dash
Like watching a daisy chain of camera angles...

Setting up this apparatus enables “our” assertive entry into a speech about “him” (Brother Hun), to take place. The setting up of this apparatus is highly important. The structure of “Qinghe County” holds together precisely because of occasional incursions by an underlying narrator, whom we might as well call the meta-narrator. (There is a similar presence in poems such as “Lamp-Moth”). The “meta-narrator” creates a duality in the protagonist, causing the attributes of “I” to hover between meta-narrator and speaker, so that the character is not only the one being written about but also the one writing. The “meta-narrator” helps to split the vector of narration, setting up tension between meta-narrative and the speaker’s soliloquy. Thus the latter takes on chromatic, polyphonic qualities. As Zhu Zhu remarked while addressing his use of the first person, “The use of ‘I’ in literature implies a bidirectional operation with single intent. The ripples one stirs up in the countenance of the Other have their source in the “I,” whereupon one becomes more purely aware of oneself.”³⁶In the Prelude titled “Run Quickly, Brother Hun,” the speakers (“we”) ultimately shrink to the status of a still-life assemblage: “We are a teashop that bottles up all secrets, we are / Spectators who have no time to tell him the conclusion,” and with this they greet the protagonist’s appearance onstage.

Memory invariably leaves the marks of intense experience on the chopping block of language. For instance, in the memory of Xi Menqing (“The Libertine”),

36 Cf. Zhu Zhu, Mu Duo. “The Nightingale Has Sung Long Enough—Assorted Thinkers 8: Zhu Zhu” (Dajuan de tiku yijing gou jiu le—zhuzi baijia 8: Zhu Zhu). <https://www.douban.com/group/topic/1723978/>

the so-called “rain” that is like “a poultice of licorice-root absorbed into the skin” once stirred his lurid imaginings: “Rain seems to take you far away, / The rainbow brought by rain envelopes two or more cities”; “Rain spreads in huge dimensions, like material you can never measure.” As a stimulus which intertwines with the perceiver, rain is a conductor which can induce delirious “inspiration.” It pours from the sky’s expanse, across his sense organs with their remembered lust that was “recklessly spent”: “It spatters down from the eaves like words of that cloistered soul / Who taught me mnemonic verses for emptily spending my life.” As for the recollections of “Wu the Large,” the idea of “strength” gives raw energy to his imaginings and fantasies. Between “strength” and body there is an entanglement that characterizes his awareness of existence, which is a riddle to be unraveled like the motion of washing a window: “As she washes a window she finds that transparency is impossible, / Yet semi-transparency is a trap. / She often reaches toward the outside surface to wipe a splotch, / But the splotch is like a knot of perplexity that comes from her hand.” Yet he finally discovers that the “strength” that supports everything is nothing but “emptiness, a very big emptiness,” whereupon his life-force dodges into “a net wherein the mesh and perforations are all moving at once.”

At the same time, recollection tries to retain the jumbled feel of experience in its original state, letting all details and recessive tendencies appear in plain sight. Language is involved in the cherishing and retention and revaluation of experience, letting it be genuine and palpable. Behind the image of Wu Song the hero (“Instructor Wu”) is someone caught between two horns of a dilemma. One side is “Her body is a potful of sweet sap, / It flexes like wires that have power / To draw me in and swallow me”; “My sense of sight tightens like a band around my head / Not letting me perceive anything else. / A huge temptation/ Is welling upwards.” On the other side is “There is warmth for me in the fence of blood ties/ Standing mottled in grass-green silence.” Caught in this impasse, he feels “disoriented, tied-down and unclean,” like someone “under house arrest in an ancient myth of confinement.” Emptiness and fear constitute the whole core of his experience. “The tiger I killed bare-handed was a projection.” Language captures this dawning sense of illusion as it flashes by, exposing the shadowy bottom layer of his humanity. Similar to the vulnerability of this tough guy, Old Lady Wang has a physique like a dried leaf (“Curio Box”), but it too catches her up in a fictive tug-of-war between tenderness and aloofness: “This body that is fed up with life / Is still giving off bubbles, and each one / Is bigger and rounder than the last.” That curio box in which her withered youth is sealed away is actually a hidden focal point, fashioned from greed and ill intentions:

That'd be quite a spree, but I choose a low temperature to stay alive
A tacky way to stick around,
I choose a long dry season and a dim teashop.

I want to become
The oldest thing,
Hunkering down,
Not like a tornado* but like a wind under a door,*
I keep away from any destructive fate.

(The Chinese word for tornado literally means “swirling dragon wind”;
the expression “wind under a door” refers to private household routines.—
Translator)

Later, memory lifts the lid on shadows that were lurking in experience, throwing them open holographically: “The eastern capital is like a cliff-face / But Qinghe County is worse, an engulfing abyss, / Each residence is an above-ground coffin / All jumbled together, and the dwellers / Live as if they had fallen once from a great height, / Screams from their mouths immediately settle like sediment” (“Credibility”). These nightmarish scenes assault the retinas of one who has fallen from favor. This county, which dominates the whole suite of poems, displays its true features through the speaker’s sideways, terrified glances: more than being a hollow, unsavory place of refuge, it is also a mute stage where the vagaries of gender, wealth and worth play out their illusory dramas. The themes of these dramas are rooted in depths of human nature, exhibiting the common blights of existence. The boundary line of Qinghe County can be extended straight up to the present day. Not only does it show a phantasmal image of a nationality, it constitutes an archetypal picture of the here-and-now world. Its commonplace feel shows that regardless of how human affairs may vary, change does not happen to the collective consciousness precipitated onto the bottom of human nature. It is just such a prolonged passage through collective consciousness that softens the sharp edges of language, making it supple yet tough as whipcord: “The sharp tip of the inkbrush / Touches down with knifelike hardness.” The vast resources and toughness of language give the writer an ability to “think like a filament.” “Within a ball of yarn, / It is intoxicated with the pursuit of a sentence, / As it writes a footnote to emptiness” (“Joint Burial”). In this way a dialogue on any feasible theme can be established.

It is my opinion that in this forever unredeemed locale called Qinghe County, aside from the lowliness and cruelty that people are capable of, one can sense an

underlying current of *yin* attributes and matriarchy. Whether in the form of the “her” upon whom all looks converge (Pan Jinlian), or of Old Lady Wang who “sidled about through the whole county” (viewed by others as a “handed-down black box” and “living fossil”), or of the “uterus” Broker Chen tried to ward off and lived in fear of, all of these embody the strong suction of this culture of *yin*, matriarchal qualities. “Until my voice hits a babyish pitch, and at last / As if I have gone off to sleep, all my underground traces will be gone.” Mixed into the underlying *yin* current of matriarchy, one finds quite a bit of ill will and perversity, in the underbelly of an old civilization where too many dark things sank out of sight. Thus, a discrete critique of chronic, passed-down maladies strikes me as the underlying focus of this work.

Interestingly, due to an inborn Oedipus complex, the attitude Zhu Zhu expresses on many fronts is one of nostalgia for matriarchy and its implications. Thus, the critique carried out in “Qinghe County” embodies a genuine quality of inwardness. Corresponding to this is his rejection of the opposite pole in the *yin-yang* relation, namely the patriarchy. If Terry Eagleton was right in his application of Freud’s theories,³⁷ and if patriarchy is a personification of political rule and state power, then the Oedipal complex shows its face within just such a dichotomy. However, when the dominant coloring of the patriarchy begins to weaken objectively, then another direction of thinking will be stirred up in the minds of those who resisted the patriarchy. This becomes an emotive capacity to contemplate reality intently and to respond earnestly at any moment. Here I would like to point out a piece that fits with this theme, a work that took two years in the writing: *Leather Trunk—Dedicated to My Father* (1999-2001). If we say that “Qinghe County” conveyed a critique of his people’s civilization that embraces nostalgia and repulsion, then *Leather Trunk*—adopting a mini-epic form—tries to display circumstances and features of reality in China during the second half of the 20th century. Both woven out of elastic language, these two pieces form a complementary pair that triggers cogitations on civilization and reality. “A leather trunk... / Never opened before my eyes / With its rigid shell / Heavy as a tombstone, dry under a sheet of ice.” The background of sound (“After half a century, at last its volume was turned to the lowest setting”) offset by visual revelation (“Again he slept, and his head nodded against my chest”) seem to interweave into an unspoken quartet. The end of this poem is as follows:

37 Terry Eagleton. *Politics, Philosophy and Desire in History*. Tr. Ma Hailiang. Beijing: China Academy of Social Sciences Press, 1999. p. 145.

Opening the trunk is like opening a vacuum,

I sob over this vacuum of love,

Aside from it, all other forms of love are empty constructs.

The sense of void which is evoked by the “vacuum of love” manifests a crucial feature of reality as an “empty construct,” which amounts to the only choice one is left with. In fact this is the paradoxical fate which an ancient nationality cannot escape in the transition to modern society. The “vacuum of love” is evoked by a leather trunk that has undergone the ravages of passing time. Once again we are reminded of the vivid nature of words vis-à-vis things in Zhu Zhu’s poetry. As he made plain in “Gold Clasp” (I am reluctant to grow distant from you, love and fear, / But I have enough strength already) or in “Father’s Memoirs” (My pen records and seeks a form / And it tracks every one of its changes), the vacuum of love is ultimately the only reality one can resort to. Thus one’s overcoming of emptiness and death ultimately transforms to a paean for love: “Love is the only wellspring that can be trusted; it is immoral lightness...Only love is the rhythm that truly enlivens someone. Anything can be a motive, but only love catches you up in the beat that drives true passion and power of fancy.” What is more, “the nightingale has sung its tearful song long enough. For the sake of its suffering we should invent an open-hearted song turned toward blessings and brightness.”³⁸ Undoubtedly, this is the voice of language itself:

Behind all language families, the shared source of words is silence

And in that stillness is a voice,

To which we hold the copyright.

—“Signal · Collaborative Translation” (2003)

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***Gao Xingjian and Transmedia Aesthetics*. Eds. Mabel Lee and Liu Jianmei.
Cambria Press, 2018. ISBN-13:
978-1604979466. 362 pp.**

Kate Costello (University of Oxford)

In his contribution to *Gao Xingjian and Transmedia Aesthetics*, Liu Zaifu begins, “When I said some twenty years ago that Gao Xingjian was not just a writer but a great writer, people were dubious; then when I next said he was also a thinker, people again were dubious” (43). Despite Gao’s tepid reception within Chinese literary studies, this volume establishes Gao Xingjian as one of the key multimedia artists of our day—an innovator in all mediums he chooses to explore, pushing boundaries in all aspects of his work. *Gao Xingjian and Transmedia Aesthetics* is the first of its kind in dedicating attention to the entire breadth of Gao Xingjian’s output—from fiction and drama to painting, screenplays, and film—solidifying Gao Xingjian studies as its own subfield of transcultural research.

The most recent addition to the Cambria Sinophone World Series, this volume is the most comprehensive study of Gao’s work to date. Just over fifteen years after the publication of Kwok-kan Tam’s *Soul of Chaos*, *Transmedia Aesthetics* moves beyond the better studied realm of Gao’s theatre and fiction, offering a detailed overview of Gao’s creative and critical output. Editors Mabel Lee and Liu Jianmei provide an introduction to Gao’s life and biography, complete with previously unpublished details that will serve as a valuable supplement for Gao scholars as well as those looking to familiarize themselves with his life and legacy for the first time.

The book is divided into four sections, each dedicated to a different aspect of Gao’s oeuvre: *Philosophical Inquiry*; *Transdiscipline*, *Transgenre*, *Transmedia and Transculture*; *Cine-Poems with Paintings, Dance and Music*; and *Identifying and*

Defining the Self. Of these four sections, *Cine-Poems* stands out as a highlight, bringing together research on Gao's most recent and least discussed work. Gao's venture into film is perhaps the most inaccessible of all his creative explorations, and for this reason the contributions by Megan Evans, Fiona Sze-Lorrain, Wah Guan Lim and Yue Huanyu are invaluable in their examination of Gao's newest foray into a truly transmedial format. Gao's films (termed here *cine-poems* to emphasize the intermediality of his new art form) have mostly found an audience as part of museum exhibitions and retrospectives alongside his painting, and lack the commercial distribution necessary to make his work available, even to the scholarly community at large. While much productive work has been done on Gao's drama based on his scripts, his venture into film has proved even more inaccessible than his theatre. As the exhibition of Gao's cinema has been largely restricted to galleries and museum settings, we can rely only on those who have had the chance to see the films firsthand to share this part of Gao's work.

One of the highlights of this volume is Noël Dutrait's contribution "Gao Xingjian: Autobiography, Auto-Fiction, and Poetry." While the section heading *Identifying and Defining the Self* may initially appear as familiar grounds for Gao scholars, Dutrait's nuanced approach to Gao's biography and life's output is both fresh and a necessary counterpoint to a large body of scholarship that heavily relies on Gao's own novelistic and theoretical writing to explain his fiction. Gao's extensive critical and theoretical writing has been a great source of productivity for scholars, but the sheer volume of his output means that navigating the line between being well-informed and over-dependent is often a fraught activity. Dutrait negotiates this beautifully, writing with a distance and precision that lends a fresh perspective on Gao's oeuvre, despite his close friendship with Gao over the years. Dutrait takes a truly transmedia approach to Gao's work, reading his fiction and poetry against each other to enrich our understanding of his creative process and legacy as an artist.

Stephen Conlon's contribution "The Art of Gao Xingjian" is another stand-out piece, drawing attention to language as a medium, drawing comparisons with Dante and Rabelais in exploring Gao's use of heteroglossia, diglossia, and code-mixing. The focus afforded by this Bakhtinian reading beautifully complements the rich body of scholarship on the transcultural elements of Gao's work. This is a subject that deserves further attention, and this article should pave the path for more in-depth analysis along similar lines. Mary Mazzilli's analysis of Gao's most recent play, *Song of the Night* is also notable. *Song of the Night* is the most understudied of Gao's plays, and Mazzilli brings attention to its pivotal position between his earlier plays and later excursion into cinema. The chapter is in conversation with important

work on Gao's theatre by Claire Conceison and Todd J. Coulter, and its exploration of hallucination will be valuable for scholars working on Gao's drama and his incursions into cinema alike.

Transmedia Aesthetics marks a major step in making Gao's rich oeuvre accessible to scholars outside of the spheres of theatre studies and Chinese literary studies. This volume takes pains to reframe Gao's work within a larger comparative context, building his reputation as an important contemporary thinker as well as a writer and artist. Liu Zaifu lauds Gao as a contemporary Renaissance man, pushing boundaries and making important contributions to whatever medium he experiments with. Renaissance man is a reoccurring label that contributors use to discuss the richness and breadth of Gao's work, and while it is justified, it often seemed to be competing or even conflicting with the transmedia elements of his work suggested in the title. There is a tendency within the book to place Gao within a legacy of Western humanistic tradition rather than to search for his place within the growing body of research on intermediality, where there is undoubtedly room for him to make an important contribution. The volume could have benefited from a chapter that engaged more explicitly with the theoretical possibilities suggested in the title, as there is huge potential for critical engagement with a growing body of scholarship on authors who engage with multiple media in the broadest sense. At a time when terms and conceptions like transmediality, intermediality and remediation remain heavily contested, Gao deserves an important place within this conversation.

The key questions that preoccupy scholars of intermediality underlie the vast majority of contributions to this volume. Gao's creative practice often involves a reworking of his earlier pieces, whether conscious or not. His bold exploration with a vast range of mediums and genres from fiction, drama, screenplays, poetry, painting and cinema and his penchant for technical innovation, crossing medial boundaries and self-referentiality invoke familiar terms like adaptation, filmic writing, *ekphrasis*, and the musicalization of literature, while his opera and cine-poems are explicitly intermedial in the most literal sense of the term. Irina Rajewsky's distinctions between medial transposition (taking an 'original' product in one media and transforming it into a product in a second media), media combination (the integration of two media forms into a single product as with film, theater, and opera) and intermedial references (as with the imitation of filmic form in writing or the invocation of photography in painting) may be useful in defining the extent of Gao's transmedial experimentation (Rajewsky 50-52). For an artist who works both in multiple media and engages in multi-media projects, not setting a fixed definition of transmedia aesthetics is a missed opportunity. Without defining the boundary between trans-

media and intermedia, and without interrogating the relationship between transmedia and intertextuality that underlies many of the contributions, the term remains predominantly a descriptive one, referring to a comprehensive examination of Gao's output rather than focusing on transmedia's potential as a discursive concept.

This volume should be commended for its efforts to make scholarship on the entire range of Gao's creative output accessible in such a comprehensive and convenient format. Bringing together both new work and scholarship previously unavailable in English translation, *Gao Xingjian and Transmedia Aesthetics* charts ambitious new territory. It will prove an important resource for students and teachers of comparative literature, and is a valuable reference companion for anyone researching Gao Xingjian's creative legacy.

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