

Translating Literary Ideology from Ancient Chinese into Modern French: François Cheng's Francophone Poetry in *Double chant* (2000)

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Volume 25 Issue 2 (September 2023) Article 6**Gabriel F. Y. Tsang,****"Translating Literary Ideology from Ancient Chinese into Modern French: François Cheng's Francophone Poetry in *Double chant* (2000)"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol25/iss2/6>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 25.2 (2023)**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol25/iss2/>>

Abstract: François Cheng (1929-), elected to the Académie Française in 2002, structurally introduced the lexicological, syntactic, and semiotic form of Tang poetry to the French academia via his academic works. In the late 1980s, François Cheng shifted his focus from academic writing to creative writing, both in French, winning the 1998 Prix Femina for his novel *Le Dit de Tianyi* (1998) and Prix Roger Caillois for his collection of poems *Double chant* (2000). Focusing on his less-discussed poetry, which reveals higher congruity of his understanding of Chinese literary classics with creative representation, this paper argues that, as an analyst of Tang poetry, Cheng also acts as a contemporary translator of the classical Chinese aesthetic ideology into French modern verses. His subjective creation of poetry is both transcultural and trans-temporal, ambiguously corresponding to his lingual, racial, cultural, and national belonging, and appropriating a new valid form of French literary style. This ambiguity both transcends national identification and universalizes the international flow of knowledge. Beyond Feng Lan's (2017) recognition of François Cheng as a special representative of Chinese diasporic intellectuals who mediate between institutionalized French discourses and Chinese classical philosophy, a close reading of Cheng's poems in the paper will support an investigation of his successive and transformative production of text.

Gabriel F. Y. TSANG

Translating Literary Ideology from Ancient Chinese into Modern French: François Cheng's Francophone Poetry in *Double chant* (2000)

François Cheng (1929-), elected to the Académie Française in 2002, structurally introduced the lexicological, syntactic, semiotic, and musical form of Tang poetry to the French academia via his master dissertation entitled "Analyse formelle de l'œuvre poétique d'un auteur des Tang: Zhang Ruoxu" (1970), later expanded to the monograph *L'écriture poétique chinoise: Suivi d'une anthologie des poèmes des Tang* (1977). He demonstrated the dialectic complexity of *yin-yang* and *xū-shi* hidden in linguistic succession of Chinese text, and discovered the specific relationship between *Han* textual symbols and an intersectional cultural system of calligraphy, painting, mythology, and so on.

In the late 1980s, François Cheng shifted his focus from academic writing to creative writing, both in French, winning the 1998 Prix Femina for his novel *Le Dit de Tianyi* (1998) and Prix Roger Caillois for his collection of poems *Double chant* (2000). Multiple academic attention had been drawn on *Le Dit de Tianyi*, elucidating the Taoist cosmological composition of female image (Yin), the fictional representation of time (Fraise), the obscure merge of Chinese and western cultural elements (Silvester "Lessons"), the diasporic imagination of estranged homeland (Pröll), Cheng's ecocritical consciousness (Jin), and so on. Instead of his scholarly-identified fiction, reminiscent of Qian Zhongshu's intellectual-style novel *Fortress Besieged* (1947), this academic paper focuses on his less discussed poetry, which reveals higher congruity of his understanding of Chinese literary classics with creative representation. Contributing to poetry studies related to Franco-Chinese, classical-modern, and writer-scholar ambiguities, this paper argues that, as an analyst of Tang poetry, Cheng also acts as a contemporary translator of the classical Chinese aesthetic ideology into French modern verses. His subjective creation of poetry, transcending national identification of persons and international flow of knowledge, is both transcultural and trans-temporal, corresponding to his lingual, racial, cultural, and national belonging, and appropriating a new valid form of French literary style. Surrounding this core insight, the following sections will start with foregrounding Cheng's early experience in France and his reflections on Chinese classical thoughts, and then, based on his academic approach, structurally examine the resemblance between Tang poetry from his perspective and his poems in *Double chant*.

Early translation and interpretation between French and Chinese

Generally recognized as the ferryman between Chinese and French cultures via his translation, criticism, and literary practices, François Cheng (originally "Cheng Chi-Hsien" in Chinese) was born in Nancheng in 1929, migrated with his father with a UNESCO position to Paris in 1948, suffered from lingual and cultural "aphasia" for nearly twenty years (of which he rarely provides details),¹ and became active in the intellectual arena after completing his Zhang Ruoxu study. Before overcoming the literary rupture between Chinese ideology and French language through poetic and fictional creation in the late 1990s, over four decades after his arrival in France, he mainly participated in academic research. Besides, he translated Tang poems (1977) and Lao She's modern novel *Camel Xiangzi* (1973) into French, and, through the Chinese academic journal *Foreign Literature Studies*, diligently introduced French poets, such as Arthur Rimbaud (1981), Henri Michaux (1982), Guillaume Apollinaire (1982), Saint-John Perse (1983), Jean Follain (1984), and Paul Valéry (1985) to Chinese readers in the decade between Deng Xiaoping's launch of open door policy and the June-Forth Incident.² The selection of his exchanging translations reflects a preference for poetry, especially that of Classical Chinese (especially in the Tang style founded around 1400 years ago) and Modern French (with regulated vocabulary, grammar and usage since the establishment of the Académie française in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu). In *Le Dialogue*, Cheng differentiated between fictional capacity of experiences and poetic deliverance of essences (Cheng, "Le Dialogue" 75). His early preference for studying poetry reveals his constant exploration of a simplistic genre that could contain the universal complexity of time, language, and culture. This corresponds to his background as belonging to a Chinese diaspora, which entailed encountering the incompatibility between one's racial bonding and cultural estrangement.

¹ As François Cheng remembers, "In nearly twenty years, before I could directly use French to create prose, poetry and fiction, I was the one with aphasia. At that time, around the early 1950s, I almost had nothing: no valid certificate and no job." (*Mei de diwuci* 128)

² Besides introduction of French poets, François Cheng also wrote on the French Surrealist Movement (1983) and commented on Charles Baudelaire (1980) and Victor Hugo (1980) via *Foreign Literature Studies*.

Concerning identity politics of literary representation, Rosalind Silvester, in her juxtaposition between *Le Dit de Tianyi* and Cheng's biographical details, applied Experiential Learning Theory and acculturation theory to reflect on Cheng's fictional assimilation of East and West in his translingual mastery of poetic wording with plot invention and character configuration. She argues that the cultural learning of the author-protagonist, transforming from a disciple to a master, passes through the periods of "the fortuitous encounter, the fruitful exchange and the inevitable separation" (Silvester, "Lessons" 208). During this transformation, ethnic (self-)identity differentiates between cultural values, but art and life universally constitutes a drive to explore convergence. The convergence (or "dialogue" and "mirror," the terms Cheng usually uses) of France and China began not from the composition of Francophone writing, but from an individual's perception and transcendence of linguistic and cultural borders. For Cheng, his original acquaintance with traditional Chinese identity (not the socialistic Chinese identity developing simultaneously in mainland China) determines his methodological emphasis on trichotomy, which he finally concluded as an essentially existing principle, and also the ideal solution to the plights of both the individualistic West and the collectivistic East.

Despite the use of a personal perspective, which is supposed to specify individual uniqueness, François Cheng's development of literary and philosophical ideas corresponds to Muriel Détrie's general characterization of Franco-Chinese novels as "promoting the French culture" and "inventing traditional China" for intercultural dialogue (Détrie 66).³ Cheng, as a novelist, narrates a dialogic semi-autobiography, delivering his post-traumatic retrieval of reality from transcultural memory through the first-person narrator Tianyi (as he, in the Chinese preface of *Le Dit de Tianyi*, recalled Marcel Proust's claim that the real life is a reborn one acquired from re-creation of the language of memory); (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 7) however, the context of the semi-autobiography—Cheng's study in *École Pratique des Hautes Études* and his conversation with French thinkers, including Levi Strauss, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Gernet—shaped his life narrative as proactively performing an equilibrium between French modernity and Chinese convention like other Chinese intellectual immigrants, such as Dai Sijie and Gao Xingjian. The scholarly experiences out of the local Chinese sub-communities thus creates the space for Cheng to compose his Francophone narrative with the relational exchange between form/content and Chinese/French.

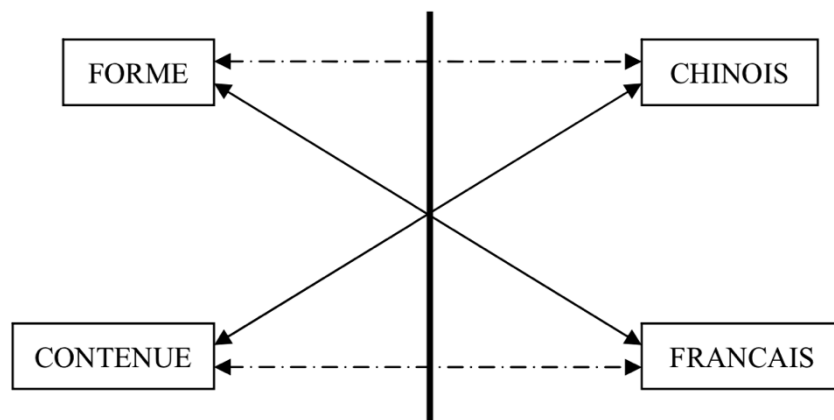


Fig. 1

As shown in Fig. 1, in the graph that Zhu Jing used to illustrate François Cheng's synthesis of two cultures for literary creation (Zhu 5), the intersectional relations between form, content, Chinese, and French are symmetrical, revealing that Cheng's Francophone writing directly adopts the French linguistic form to contain Chinese content, and implicitly coordinates the form and the content with opposite sources. One could also draw two lines between form and content, and between Chinese and French, based on the evidence that avant-gardists, such as Raymond Queneau and Yu Hua, had exaggerated

³ Rosalind Silvester disagreed with Détrie's assertion, claiming that not all the Franco-Chinese novels address identity and intercultural issues, and reminding that those that fit the assertion have various weights. ("Genre" 367)

how form and content could change each other. Also, as illuminated in a historical dialogue between François Cheng and Qian Linsen, four French poets of the twentieth century - Paul Claudel, Victor Segalen, Saint-John Perse, and Henri Michaux - transformed their reception of Chinese cultures into new representation of signification, symbolism, and cosmology in French. (Cheng and Qian 93-97). The big frame of literary and cultural exchanges is dynamic but certainly general to all Chinese Francophone writers, whereas the ambiguity and hybridity of represented cultures vary, depending on personal conception and expression. The following section will expound Cheng's specific integration of two cultures through resonance and trichotomy, which leads to a reflection on universal originality.

Binarism, triangulation and beyond

Usually questioned about the East-West division, François Cheng holds a clear self-identification: "My way of thinking is Western, but my spirit, feeling, and sentiment is Chinese. [...] My belief about life is Western, as in the mundane exploration of tragedy and estrangement in the Western style. However, I also attempt to grasp the invisible from the visible and look for the infinite from the finite. This is Chinese" (Cheng, "Zhongxi hebi" 14). This representative sinologist, active in the French academia, starts his epistemological reflection on the pre-cultural origin from existing binarism. Cross-binary reflection is the base of his imagination of communal possibilities. The French and Chinese names he picked for himself is a case of his intercultural mirroring. As he said, the mysterious significance of "Saint-François" was about praising nature, life, water, and fire, of which he could find Chinese resonance (Liu 156). Symmetrically, he picked Cheng Baoyi as his Chinese name in place of his original one, which he used to endorse his submission of his master dissertation. The given name "Baoyi" means "embracing one" in Chinese. Deriving from the Taoist idea "Out of Tao, One is born; Out of One, Two; Out of Two, Three; Out of Three, the created universe" (Lao-Tzu 54), "one," in François' interpretation, signifies the subject, of which the West is at risk because of individualism (opposite "two" that signifies the collectivist others to which the East granted insufficient respect). Embracing one thus implies Cheng's wish to save the West with Chinese philosophy.

From *L'Écriture poétique chinoise* to *Double chant*, François Cheng uncovered a third space prior to the cultural binarism out of "one," and then found poetic words to delineate the sur-linguistic truth that he discovered beyond the discursively represented Chineseness and Frenchness. This third space, as "three" and *vide median* (which emptily mediating between the conflicting dyads), resembles what Michaël Ferrier suggests for eliminating the Eurocentric bias over Japan: the "triangulation of cultures," where "no culture can be considered the gauge of another," in replace of binary-opposite categorization, such as "East/West" and "Us/Them" (qtd. in Celestine 1). Cheng's ambiguous translation of his connective understanding of fragmented and even disrupted cultural elements into personal poetic expression⁴ is both textualization of the ideally authentic "three" and flexible triangulation of Sinophone and Francophone imaginations. On a global horizon, this transcends his national and diasporic identity, despite his incorporation of French semiotics and Chinese cosmology.

François Cheng's worldly space of literary creation and criticism begins from succession and transformation of classical Chinese literary tradition, which he, rather paradoxically, regards as universally aboriginal. Despite permeated with a Daoist sense that represents a cultural understanding of nature, different from the Western ones (such as the competitive evolution in Darwinism),⁵ Cheng seemingly distinguishes the signified nature from the natural signifiers to preserve an ideally pre-human condition (albeit contradictory to the subterranean existence of human subjectivity in any of the consciously created representation and interpretation of nature). In *L'Écriture poétique chinoise*, he begins his argument over the congruity of nature, art, and life with the pictographic features of Chinese characters. The Oriental logograms innately connect to other artistic forms, such as calligraphy, painting, music, and also to mythology and nature (especially the Earth and the Heaven, which constitute the

⁴ The word "ambiguous" used here follows William Empson's preference of usage. In particular, this corresponds to the fifth type of ambiguity according to his book *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, which occurs "when the author is discovering his idea in the act of writing or not holding it all in mind at once" (155). François Cheng's creative process, including (and sometimes mixing) interpretive, poetic and translative writing, is full of multiplicity and complexity with uncertain transformation of meanings.

⁵ As Hong Zeng argues in her PhD dissertation entitled "A Deconstructive Reading of Chinese Natural Philosophy in Poetry," "although Tao envisioned as origin is pre-human and pre-linguistic, when we restore it to the social and historical discourse, the semi-mystic origin can be regarded as Lao Tzu's autochthonous strategy to escape history by positing an origin" (21-22). This implies that the conceptualization of nature has to pass through a process of cultural constitution, despite aiming to reach a pre-human and pre-linguistic origin.

conventional trinity with the Man).⁶ Throughout his analysis of Tang poems surrounding the ultimate cosmological trinity (specified as "the three relational and hierarchical axes"), which includes "Void-Full, Yin-Yang, and Heaven-Earth-Man," (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 27) Cheng implicitly delivers an insight concerning Chinese discovery and conservation of the ultimate unity of the Universe. This unity is neither a simple conclusion drawn on the transcendental connectivity of the semiotic system, nor a discursively formed idea, which, in the sense of poststructuralism, could fluidly vary in response to power dynamics. It belongs to the Real realm, according to the Real-Symbolic-Imaginary theory of Jacques Lacan, whose study of Chinese philosophy including Confucianism and Taoism with Cheng's assistance helped develop his ideas of metonymy and metaphor, signification chain, and three-realm division (Liu 154-55). The Real, after Lacan's long development (since 1936) from its visual representation to its pre-/sur-psychological connotation, could refer to "an objective, eternal reality, a material substrate which exists in itself, independently of any observer," in parallel to the psychological real, which is impossible to "imagine," "integrate into the symbolic order," and "attain in any way" (Evans 162-63). The external, materialistic side of the Real exists before cultures and languages. It is generally shared and, to a certain extent, representable via imaginative organization of symbolic orders. Therefore, the Real that Tang poetry preserves is also the Real that François Cheng spiritually represents through his Francophone poetry, regardless of its language and cultural background.

Assessing *Double chant*

To elucidate the universal real that François Cheng semiotically studied and poetically represented, here is a comparative analysis of the notable features of Tang poems (especially *lü-shi*, the regulated verses) in *L'Écriture poétique chinoise* and *Double chant*, which Cheng published over two decades after his poetry study. This includes composed of Cheng's trinitarian structure with lexicology (the passive creative procedures concerning Void and Full), syntax (the active creative procedures concerning *yin* and *yang*), and image (aligning Heaven, Earth, and Man). But it excludes an inquiry into the three currents of Chinese thoughts (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism), which Cheng regarded as nourishing the highest spirituality of Chinese poetry (Cheng, *In Love* 2). Only one or two examples are provided in each sub-section below to keep the comparative structural analysis succinct.

1. Introduction

The Latin script system with only 26 international phonetic alphabets delimit François Cheng's connection of text to visualized nature, which Tang poets had achieved through their sensitivity to the pictographic specificity of Chinese characters. Wang Wei's poetic verse "木末芙蓉花" (signifying the concepts "branch" [木], "end" [末], "magnolia" [芙蓉], and "flowers" [花]), which wittily illustrates the gradual blooming of flowers from a branch, is a prominent example that Cheng could not compose in French. However, Cheng uses his calligraphic painting of "石音" (stone-music) and "木聲" (wood-sound) after the title pages of "*un jour, les pierres*" (one day, the stones) and "*l'arbre en nous a parlé*" (the tree told us about it) respectively, to summarize the image of these two core poems/songs of *Double chant* as simplistically soft, continuous, cycling like nature. Moreover, the whole collection of poetry thoroughly renders a simplicity that evokes the imagination of Chinese classism and natural monism. The poetic writing musically responds to the fontal design of text, which is blue in color under the white background reminiscent of sky and cloud. The front cover and the interior pages are almost blank. The vast blank space between and beyond the two songs with few words and no commas, full stops and page numbers seems to display Chinese monochromes or pre-painted nature with vital breath between fullness and emptiness.

2. The Passive Procedures (Void-Full)

(a) Ellipsis of Personal Pronouns

Lü-shi consciously avoid three grammatical persons, placing "the personal subject in a particular relationship with beings and things" (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 35). For instance, Wang Wei's verse "White clouds return, contemplate dissolve / Green rays penetrate, seek invisible" in "Mount Zhong-nan" has first two verbs with the poet as the subject and the last one with nature, revealing "the process of the fusion of man with Nature" (36). Cheng's verse of the first and untitled poem "*Qui se leve d'entre les*

⁶ Wang Ermin asserts that *I Ching* (also known as *Book of Changes*), published around the ninth century BC, had classically founded the conceptual trinity of the Heaven, the Earth, and the Man in ancient China (83).

vivants / N'oublie point le mot de passe" (Who rises from among the livings / Does not forget the password) also hides the contemplative subject, who questions about the awakening of the imagined being / non-being, objectively developed from his observation of the tree propelled by the rock and the rock aspired by the tree in the first two verses.

(b) Ellipsis of Locational Prepositions

To "remove all indication of direction from the verb" and "create a reversible language" for affording reciprocal and dialectic relationships between subject and object, Tang poets would omit the preposition of the type "at," which locates spatial and temporal complements (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 42-44). Like Du Fu's lines "Stars hang, wild plain enlarging / Moon rises, great river flowing," "*Jade lisse au toucher / Soumis aux mille caresse*" (Jade smooth to the touch, subject to a thousand caresses), from Cheng's "*un jour, les pierres*," misses the hint of time and space that posit the subject. The subjective "toucher" and "caresser," as an either conscious or unconscious being, is ambiguous in this kind of projection of intersubjectivity between human and nature.

(c) Complements of Time

As stated with an example of Li Shang-yin's practical exploration of mixing lived time and evoked time in "The Zither Ornamented with Brocade," "in an effort to create an ambiguous state, where present and past may mix, or dream become confused with reality, the [Chinese] poet may break the linear logic of a line by omitting elements that indicate time, or by the juxtaposition of different time" (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 45-46). Restricted by French, not an uninflected language as Chinese, Cheng usually leaves out verbs and utilized present participles to deliver the transtemporal touches between human and non-human subjects. In the last canto of "*un jour, les pierres*," with four very brief stanzas, the first stanza "*Nuit ici / aube ici*" (Night here / dawn here) skips the verb between "nuit" / "aube" and "ici," and the second stanza "*Ombre du bois / Fendant la pierre / incandescente*" (Wood shadow / Splitting the stone / incandescent) has a present participle "fendant" to preserve the sudden passing of an action, which will have passed in eternity under the perpetual works of "*le dieu de passage*" (the god of passing).

(d) Ellipsis of Verbs and Comparative Words

Without comparative and verbal verbs, the alignment of nouns in verses could create "rapprochement of tension and interaction between them" (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 48), with a double-reading possibility allowing the coexistence and implication of elements with one another (50). The examples include Wen Ting-yun's verse, as literally translated, "Cock crow thatched inn moon / Footprints wood bridge frost" (50). In Cheng's case, "*Nuit ici / aube ici*," and also many other examples, such as "*Racines des rosées / et des nuages*" (Roots of dew / and clouds), disclose to the readers a world with equivalent status of subject and object that permits inversive interpretation.

(e) Use of Empty Words in Place of Verbs

Tang poets might replace "a full word (generally a verb)" with "an empty word" (or known as "function word," including prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, grammatical articles and particles) to pour void and oscillation into verses (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 52-53). For example, Du Fu used "often" to connect "old age" and "route-path," and "once more" to connect "late day" and "mountain-river" (51). Acquainted with the universal poetic language, Cheng disintegrated the "subject-verb-object" structure and concisely turned empty words to verbs with ambiguous but "full" significance. Apparently, "*Hors*" (Except), as an empty preposition and the ending word and stanza of the last canto of "*un jour, les pierres*," acts as a verb to extend the significance of "*Désir / D'atteinte*" (Desire / Of reaching), which is the stanza before "Hors," to being excluded, escaped, and/or omitted. This also trickily resonates with the start of the second song "*l'arbre en nous a parlé*," which begins with "*Entre ardeur et pénombre / Le fût / Par où [...]*" (Between heat and penumbra / The barrel / From where). There is a dialogue between the distanced object of desire and the void within ardor and dimness, of which the former "speaker" seemingly withstands the latter one because of the verbal "*hors*" and the empty space created by the preposition "*entre*" (antithetical to "*hors*") speaks simultaneously to the subsequent object "*fût*."

3. The Active Procedures (Yin-Yang)

(a) Cadence

The pentasyllabic and heptasyllabic lines of *lü-shi* have caesuras after the second and fourth syllables respectively. Their remarkable iambic and then trochaic pattern (pentasyllabic: ○● | ●○ and heptasyllabic: ○●○ | ●○○) performs the "fundamental rhythm of the universe" through alternation of unaccented (○) and accented syllables (●) – the *yin* and the *yang* (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 60-61). Though rarely restricting his poetry to four or eight lines that Tang poets most frequently used to contain his universal touch with nature, François Cheng often creates parallel verses with same number of syllables. In "*l'arbre en nous a parlé*," one can find the following canto:

Toute la terre en toi seul (All the land in you alone)
Jet de sang jailli du cœur (Blood stream spurting from the heart)
Toute la neige à toi seul (All the snow to you alone)
Prunus perçant la blancheur (Prunus piercing the whiteness)

The hexasyllabic lines alternate with the heptasyllabic lines can be combined into two decatriasyllabic lines, each with thirteen syllables. Their pattern of stresses and caesuras (●○○ | ●○○ | ○○○ | ●○○) that ends with a trochaic component, appears to assimilate to that of Tang poetry, which spiritually pursued the ideal third space beyond the division of the *yin* and the *yang*.

(b) Rhyme

One simple rule governs the rhyme of *lü-shi*: "except for the first line [...], the rhyme always falls on the even lines" (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 62). Despite in a free style, not following the classical Chinese rhymical pattern, Cheng's poetry, like most of the ancient poems, often rhymes at the end of verses for musical beauty. As the quotation above, "*seul*" rhymes with "*seul*" and "*blancheur*" with "*cœur*" in an ABAB form.

(c) Tonal Counterpoint

There are "rigorously defined tonal rules" that regulate *lü-shi* on the phonic level (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 62). However, French, unlike Chinese, is not a tone language with deflected tones and level tones assigned to syllables. Therefore, the phonic resonance of Cheng's poetry with Tang poetry can only be achieved through speaking with strict tonal control of French pronunciation.

(d) Musical Effects

Through diverse combination of Chinese characters with single vowels, consonants, and tones (such as using pairs whose two elements alliterate or rhyme), Tang poets sophisticatedly express their mood and sentiment (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 66-69). In the case of *Double chant*, Cheng did not rigidly create alliterative and rhyming pairs. He instead flexibly uses the complexity of word combination to deliver musical beauty, such as "*Strates striées / Arêtes des crêtes*" (Strata striated / Edges of ridges), which is a singled-out stanza with an alliterative pair followed by two rhymed words with a preposition "*des*" between them. Other examples include "*Ah perdre le Nord / pour ne plus / se perdre*" (Ah lose the North / for no furthermore / losing), a canto of "*un jour, les pierres*" with clear arrangement of alliterative and unaccented "p" to mimic the restricted nature. Moreover, he often ends his poems with the words whose final pronunciations contain the guttural "r," such as "*mort(s)*" (death), "*lumière*" (light), "*encore*" (again), and "*cœur*" (heart), which were prominently utilized as the ending word of the cantos of *Double chant* for two times. The guttural pronunciation, like the "-an" rhyme in Li Yu's poem to "reinforce the idea of tormented obsession and of melancholy signs" (67), holds a specific lyrical function to release the eternity of breath.

(e) Syntactic Pevl (Parallel and Nonparallel Lines)

The second and the third couplets of *lü-shi* are "obligatorily made up of parallel lines," whereas the first one is not required to be so and the last one is obligatorily nonparallel (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 69). In the two lines of a parallel couplet, poets had to "arrange terms of the same grammatical paradigm, but possessing opposite (or complementary) meanings, in an absolutely symmetrical pattern" (70). Examples include Wang Wei's verse "Flow of the river | beyond sky and earth / Color of the mountain | between being and nonbeing,"⁷ of which the symmetric match of the parts of speech between two words elevates the poet's observation of nature to a reflection on intersubjectivity. Likewise, the decatriasyllabic couplet quoted in 3(a), though not with all the words of a line different from another one, contains syntactically parallel pairs. From "*toute la neige*" to "*toute la terre*," and then from

⁷ In Chinese characters, this *lü-shi* couplet is "江流天地外，山色有无中。"

"prunus" to "jet de sang" and "blancheur" to "cœur," it extends a silent objective space to a vigorously subjective space that vastly absorbs the former one.

4. The Images (Heaven-Earth-Man) / Conclusion: the Synthesis of Imagination

In Cheng's observation of classical Chinese poetry, "an image figure is above all perceived as something equivocal, born of the encounter between the created earth and the human spirit" (Cheng, *Chinese Poetic* 89). The images animated by the original Breath exist throughout the cosmos, and were holistically preserved in Chinese characters and their combined expression of significance. For instance, the Tang poets' encounter with the visual image of the full moon (coming after waning) from the earth could arouse their personal symbolization of the ideas of reunion and happiness, as explicitly represented in the moon-home connection in Li Bai's verse "Raised my head to gaze upon bright moon / Bowed my head, and thought of home." Correspondingly, in Cheng's verse "*Contempler le dernier rayon / Du couchant qui tisse en images / - aves les aiguilles des pins*" (Contemplating the last ray / From the sunset that weaves in images / with pine needles), the ambiguous subject meditates on the last ray from the sunset. The ray is an image of the Imaginary realm represented via an image of the Symbolic realm signifying the image of the Real realm. The image unitarily crosses the boundaries of reality, imagination, and textual representation. As composed by Cheng, the last ray, the sunset, and pine needles are objective in existence but subjective in the author's contemplative horizon, which personalizes the ray of weaving images. These altogether symbolize the transcendental communication between the cosmetic Breath and human perception beyond materials and text that makes textual visualization of images possible.

Despite the non-pictorial nature of French characters, the verses of "*Contempler le dernier rayon*" and others in *Double chant* that develop a lexicological, syntactic, and vocal succession of Tang poetry, as the base of its semiotic connection of signified images to the subjectively imagined Universe, attempts to recover the pre-cultural inter-reflexivity between human spirit and nature with harmony and unity, whose opposite had long baffled Cheng since his arrival in Paris at 19. His poems create a new form of French writing; however, their sophistication is not simply founded on the Sinocentric aesthetics surrounding a center of mediation, but supposedly also the intersubjective and interconnected poetics of the Universe prior to the birth of human.

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