

The Sound of Bombs—  
Translating Chinese Poetry  
from the Second World War

by

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Dedicated to  
Brian,  
my parents  
(in Michigan, Virginia and Washington)  
and  
Theo and Lena  
with a heart full of love  
and gratitude

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## Abstract

### “The Sound of Bombs—Translating Chinese Poetry from World War II”

examines the historical contexts and aesthetic elements of poetry by four innovative Chinese writers, who lived in Kunming, China during World War II, Mu Dan (1918-1977), Zhou Dingyi (b. 1913), Zhao Ruihong (1915-1999) and Feng Zhi (1905-1993). In so doing, the dissertation develops a methodology of translation as a practice of listening, in which translation is a key tool in understanding both the complexity of the air raid experience and the aesthetics the poets use to describe it. The dissertation also engages notions of impossibility or incommensurability in translating between Chinese and English. It examines how translating differences in sound, syntax and grammar—elements often considered “untranslatable”—offer opportunities to learn about the Chinese texts within an English-language context. Chapter 1 establishes Kunming as a wartime soundscape through close-readings/translations of Mu Dan’s poems “Chorus in Two Parts” and “Torch Parade, Kunming 1939” and Zhou Dingyi’s poem “Listening to Rain.” Chapter 2 engages the effects of air raids on subjectivity by considering how to translate the Chinese word *wo*, or “I” in Mu Dan’s poem “Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter.” Chapter 3 considers Zhao Ruihong’s narrative poem about the day of an air raid,

"Portrait of Kunming, Spring 1940" and explores how time is expressed differently in Chinese and English. It suggests how attention to sonic and grammatical features in the Chinese poem offers insights into the temporal experience of air raids. Chapter 4 offers close readings and translations of a set of poems related to Feng Zhi's 1942 collection *Sonnets*. In this chapter, translation reveals itself, not as trained on a target, but as a means to engage connections between many different texts. Finally, in the conclusion the dissertation expands to consider the work of two contemporary sound artists Christine Sun Kim and Jeffery Mansfield. Their practices complicate ideas of sound, listening and translation, and bring to the fore themes of translation as both a mode of listening and as an intersubjective and empathetic act.

Key words

Modern Chinese literature; war literature; poetry; translation studies; sound studies; disability studies

## Introduction

### On Translation and Listening

every act of listening is already a dialogue,  
even before we open our mouths to reply.

Yoko Tawada

“The Art of Being Nonsynchronous”

What does an air raid sound like? Sirens? Yes. Explosions? Almost certainly. But as written into the poetry of wartime Kunming, it also sounds like guitars and the radio, English poetry and chatting. It sounds like car horns, children crying and breathing. It sounds like silence, thinking and listening.

How does one translate these sounds? How does one convey their many meanings—cultural, emotional, sensorial and aesthetic—written in Chinese poetry, in English? To answer these questions, I engage the poems Mu Dan (穆旦 1918-1977), Zhou Dingyi (周定一 b. 1913), Zhao Ruihong (趙瑞蕪 1915-1999) and Feng Zhi (馮至 1905-1993) wrote about air raids while they were living in Kunming, a city in China’s southwestern Yunnan Province, during the War of Resistance Against the Japanese (1937-1945), as the Second World War is known in China. Indeed, rather than an obstruction, I show that translation can be a methodological approach to understanding both the complexity of

the poetry and the experiences it describes. For it is through the practice of translation that I discover insights into the poets' many sensorial, psychological, emotional, communal and aesthetic responses to aerial warfare.

A central part of this methodology is to reflect upon how translation is like listening. "Translation" comes from the Latin *translatio*, "to carry across." Attention to this act of transport asks us to consider not only the original text, but also the mechanisms that move the text across languages, as well as the changes that occur in the transfer. It is in this movement that I find similarities with listening, for in both there are points of origin and recipients, between which space opens up, movement occurs and changes arise.

In the translations that follow, the points of origin are the poems written in Kunming during the War of Resistance. I, as the translator, am their first recipient. To explore the nuances of this positioning, I overtly engage my presence as a translator. This kind of practice is generally avoided in both literary scholarship and translation, in which the writer/translator often searches to make her voice as understated as possible. I, however, have chosen to make my presence clear because it allows me to bring attention to the changes that occur as I transfer the poems from Chinese and bring them to their intended recipients, English-language readers.

This practice also allows me to dispense with a common mode in the translation of poetry in which the translator irons out the differences between the two languages in order to create a seamless new poem. By giving attention to places where the languages snag, we can best learn from the Chinese poets and the language they chose. Smoothing out the difficulties or idiosyncrasies that the Chinese poets wrote into their verse prevents us

from understanding their aesthetic choices, making what we hear less complicated, and potentially less rich.

In addition to my choice to make my presence clear, I cite the poems and other primary nonfiction sources in translation, sometimes at length. It is generally the practice in scholarly works to summarize these kinds of materials, the argument being that it is more important to hear the scholar's voice. She, after all, is the one making the arguments. While I understand this position, in this dissertation I position the Chinese texts so that they are understood to be separate from my scholarly gloss. While I am aware that the texts are shaped by my choices to include them, and by my translations of them, I include them as citations rather than summaries, so that the reader might still have the opportunity to listen between them and my annotative meditations. My inclusion of nonfiction works by the poets is also the result of my concerns about the representation of Chinese works. I have long felt that there is not enough nonfiction work being translated from Chinese into English, and yet an understanding of what China is or has been can only be accessed through various representations of experience. Without access to many different narratives from many different kinds of writers, our ability to listen to China is lessened.

Another way I mark the movement between languages is by including Chinese characters from the original poems within my translations. In this way the Chinese language becomes a catalyst that sparks insights about subjectivity (chapter 2) and time (chapter 3) during air raids, as well as how translation, as a practice, can demonstrate connections between texts (chapter 4). In addition to these themes, I include characters with the larger goal of insisting upon the intertextual nature of my translations. This



intertextuality brings our attention to the formal materiality of the Chinese poetry, and the aesthetic choices that the writers made as they rendered the Chinese language into verse. This approach, to suggest the aesthetics of the work in translation, is in fact an important intervention into the history of translation between Sinophone and English-speaking spheres, for rather than assimilating Chinese characters (or understandings of them) into English to illustrate or reinforce preconceived ideas about China or the Chinese language, translation becomes a means to explore the complexities of both the Chinese language and the poets' individual language choices.

Indeed, although I found his work late in my dissertation writing process, my intertextual practice follows Yunte Huang's line of argumentation in *Transpacific Displacement*, in both his chapter on the translation of contemporary poetry, which he argues is often rendered so as to serve preexisting ideas about China, and his observations about Maxine Hong Kingston. Of Kingston he writes, her "re-presentation of Chinese intertexts tend to smooth away the linguistic ruptures resultant from intertextual/intercultural transposition" (154). Huang sees this "smoothing away" as a common component in the rendering of literature from East Asia into English. For example, anthologies of Asian-American literature, he argues, often present texts in unbroken Standard English rather than inviting useful disruptions from the original languages. By presenting Chinese with English, however, I am asking readers to become familiar, and even comfortable, with an intertextual relationship between Chinese and English, much as they might be with a French or a German term in an English text.

This inclusion of Chinese characters within my English translations asks what we can learn from *babel* or a multiplicity of languages. It asks what is lost in monolingualism. It asks why we think we should know all the words in the first place, and what we learn when we don't. Although my translations may initially seem to include moments of babel, this practice of opening our ears to new language configurations allows us to consider the poets' personal explorations of historic events and explore the poems as aesthetic works. In other words, the Chinese characters are there, not only to engage the sounds of the words—although this cue to open up the ears and listen is certainly important—but also to press against the limits of what is known and unknown. In a sense, not knowing how to read, or hear, or say the characters is precisely the point. The questions and concerns this provokes, and the different ways that I work to answer them, are the spurs, the pricks, the sparks, that ask us to reach toward a new understanding of the poetry, of translation and of our own positions as listeners.

For indeed, I would argue that we can learn most from translation when it asks us to do the "impossible," a challenge I have taken as a guiding practice on two levels. First, in each chapter I focus on a handful of poems. Within them I pinpoint an aspect that one might consider "impossible" to translate because there is no direct equivalence between Chinese and English. For example, in chapter 1 I consider how to translate an onomatopoeic word; in chapter 2, I explore how Chinese, unlike English, does not need a subject for a sentence to be grammatical; while in chapter 3, I engage Chinese verbal particles that have no equivalent in English. Rather than considering these differences to be insurmountable, I explore how translation can spark illuminating insights.

Second, throughout my dissertation I engage the question with which I began: “How does one translate these sounds?” It is generally understood that translating sound is impossible, but rather than accept this impasse I explore what might happen if we shift the question to: “How do we listen?” In so doing, I examine deeply held assumptions about translation, and move toward new understandings of this complex, multifaceted practice.

In the remaining pages of this introduction I draw from the work of Jacques Derrida, Yoko Tawada, Walter Benjamin and Jean-Luc Nancy to develop my methodology of translation as a practice of listening. I then offer more details about the Chinese language and my use of it in English-language translations. To close I offer a description of the historical contexts in which the poems were written, biographical notes about the poets, and an overview of the chapters that follow.

### **Methodology, or how I’m listening**

As I researched literature from around the globe written about air raids during the World War II period, I came to realize that much of the air raid experience happens aurally. From the first siren that goes off hours before the planes arrive, to the second and third sirens, which indicate the approach of the planes, to the planes themselves, the bombs they drop and the final all clear, each step in this progression of violence is marked by sound. Following this insight, I began to diagram the kinds of sounds the literary texts present, focusing not on the sounds of the texts, but on the content sounds, or the sounds the texts describe.

To do this, I drew from the field of sound studies, which considers the ways in which sounds have meaning, both as sensory experiences and as a part of social discourses. I found that while scholars (Kahn, Connor) have noted the importance of sound in writings about modern warfare, there was little analysis of how sound was experienced in air raids, or even more generally in wartime. Indeed, the terms that have been established to describe soundscapes, or particular acoustic environments, describe peacetime soundscapes. There are the sounds of the city (Murray-Schaefer's work on soundscapes is about industrialization in particular), sounds of the countryside (Alain Corbin's work on the "auditory landscape" created by village bells is a wonderful example), and sounds of modernity (Karin Bijsterveld writes a fascinating study of the way our understanding of sound was transformed through technology). Yet even while sound studies as a discipline seems to be growing in volume (pun intended), there has been little written either on air raids as a sonic experience, or, for that matter, on sounds in non-European contexts. With this in mind, I turned to Mu Dan, Zhou Dingyi, Zhao Ruihong and Feng Zhi's poems and considered how they described soundscapes from wartime China.

In their poetry I found sound to revolve around the tension between the commonplace and the strange, for it is the particular terror of air raids that one's ordinary life is transformed into a battleground. This is underlined in the poems by frequent descriptions of *a-ordinary sounds*, a term I use to suggest how the ordinary sounds of everyday life have been changed by the occurrence of warfare. In pre-war circumstances, these sounds might not be registered, but in air raids, they are given particular attention, because they mark the distance between the pre-war context and the wartime situation.

The sounds are both ordinary in the sense that they remain part of the everyday lives of individuals (babies crying, dogs barking, pots rattling, radios humming), but also because they occur in the context of war (the explosion of bombs) they are eerily distorted and defamiliarized.

I also found evocations of *remembered sounds*, which I understand to include both personal and collective memories. They may refer to a mother's voice as well as to a poetic line. Literary texts and cultural references make up an important segment of this grouping. While *a-ordinary sounds* are actually occurring in the environment, *remembered sounds* are often, although not always, only present in the mind of the speaker in the poem. As with *a-ordinary sounds*, they mark an incongruity between the past and the wartime situation, creating an overlap between what is a-ordinary and remembered.

There were also, of course, the *violent sounds* of war itself. In this particular context I include air raid sirens, planes, explosions, the movement of people as they flee the bombs, as well as cries of help or fear and the sounds of a violent death. We also find the potent silences that both anticipate and follow violence.

The final grouping, which I call *sounds of resistance*, is created during wartime with the specific goal of sublimating the power of *violent sounds* and mediating the sense of distortion in *a-ordinary* and *remembered sounds*. It can include spontaneous as well as orchestrated or composed sounds, including poems or songs.

From this beginning, in which I read the poems as someone who was interested in the sounds they described (as is often done in sound studies), I expanded my focus to include my training as a literary scholar, and began to listen to the ways sounds are

conveyed through language. Here I found the subtlest meanings of the texts were not in the identification of specific sound categories, but in the ways the poets used sound to evoke their experiences. For example, I found each poet creates a tension between “content sounds,” or the sounds the poems are describing, and “word sounds,” which I define as lexical sounds, or the rhythms of language, meter and prosody.

Translators are aware of the great complexities of word sounds, which writers use to suggest relationships and genealogies. It is often through “word sounds” after all that ideas and relationships are stressed, humor is created, and tone or mood is established. I would argue that for each particular text, translators often find ingenious translation solutions. The trouble is that translation, as a practice, works to make its readers unaware of these solutions, and so readers unknowingly pass over these moments of insight—insound.

Yet in my reading, I found that by creating tensions between word sounds and content sounds, the poets were able to convey subtle insights about the air raid experience. It seemed that while content sounds might be easy enough to convey in another language, word sounds, and the tension between word sounds and content sounds, would be much more difficult. This forced me to confront the “impossibility” of translating sound.

I could give countless examples of this line of argumentation, but I’ll content myself with two. First there is Robert Frost’s famous comment, “I like to say, guardedly, that I could define poetry this way: It is that which is lost out of both prose and verse in translation. That means something in the way the words are curved and all that” (159).

Here I understand the “curved words,” which are lost, to be the sounds of language.

Second, we have Jacques Derrida, who writes, as translated by Lawrence Venuti,<sup>1</sup> that he is not concerned with “meter, rhythm, caesura, rhyme—all the classic constraints and limits that are in principle and in fact insurmountable by translation” (428).

We might pause to consider why, and in what ways, these sonic aspects are “lost” or “insurmountable.” Indeed, it seems that Derrida, by making such a claim, is missing the very opportunity that he calls for in his seminal text on translation, “Des Tours de Babel.” In it he begins a key passage with the claim that all languages describe things in different ways, or “modes.” He then continues:

It is among these modes that the translation should seek, produce or reproduce a complementarity or a “harmony.” And since to complete or complement does not amount to the summation of any worldly totality, the value of harmony suits this adjustment, and what can here be called the accord of tongues. [...] Only translation can make it emerge. (Trans. Graham 202)

I would suggest that we preemptively curtail the very harmony, the very possibility of resonance, that Derrida calls for when we state, *tout court*, that certain problems are insurmountable. As Derrida notes, translation need not work for “totality” but rather only harmony, a practice of simultaneously listening between languages. If translators are able to create this, rather than using one language to speak over another, readers are able to attune their ears to the new meanings that open up between “modes” or languages.

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<sup>1</sup> Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

Yet the only scholar to discuss the possibilities of listening, sound and translation in a way that is not dismissive is Clive Scott, a well-known English translator of Baudelaire.<sup>2</sup> Scott wants us to understand translation not as an analytical or interpretive process, but as a phenomenological experience in which we perceive the translator's perception of the source text. In his most recent work, *Translating the Perception of Text: Literary Translation and Phenomenology* (2012), Scott considers the aural aspects of translation as one level of perception in a textual experience, and he outlines three main points in what he calls "listening-to-translate." The first is to understand that listening suggests openness to the experience of language, or that it is through listening that we become part of the "weave of relationships" the text creates. Second, Scott presents the ideas of "listening the literary." By using "listening" transitively, Scott suggests that listening moves the "literary across languages," presumably by using word sounds to create a space between the source text and the target text in which new possibilities can grow. In his third point, or "translating-to-listen," he suggests that texts teach us how to listen in their own terms, by the way that they present material, visually, syntactically and sonically.

Scott's points resonate with my own translation practice, which I will detail more fully below, but I would like to reflect first on three problems I find with his assertions. First, Scott wants us to view translation as a record of experience, not interpretation. While he understands that these two cannot be wholly separated, he asks that we give our primary

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<sup>2</sup> Louis and Celia Zukofsky famously translated Catullus' poetry following its sound rather than (for the most part) its meaning. This practice is called "homophonic translation," and while writers and translators have used it in various, interesting ways, it is neither the subject of my study nor the nature of my translation practice. As will become clear, I argue that sounds have different meanings in different contexts, as such translators not only take word sounds into consideration, but also listen for how these sounds were heard.



attention to the experience of reading and let questions of meaning be secondary. To do this, he suggests that we needn't necessarily translate texts of which we don't know the source language, but rather use translation to show different possible experiences of texts that we already know. Thus freed from the imperative of transferring meaning, translation can be opened up as mode of experience.

For example, in *Literary Translation and the Experience of Reading*, also from 2012, Scott uses visual cues—illustrations, typographical shifts, collage and overwriting (he argues we should draw from avant-garde practices more freely in translation)—to show how he has experienced two English-language poems, Yeats's "Leda and the Swan" and William Ernest Henley's "Vigil." In his examples Scott uses various fonts in different sizes, as well as marginalia and drawings, as visual markers of sonic shifts. I offer as an example below an initial translation he made of Henley's poem:

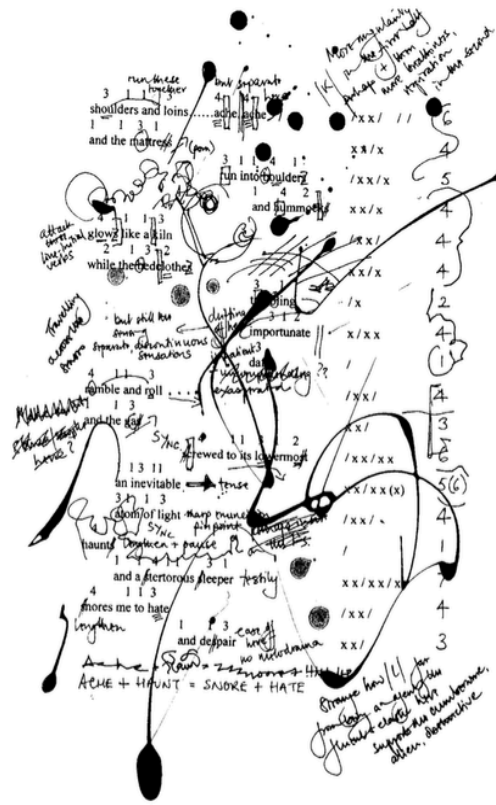


Image 1: From *Literary Translation and the Experience of Reading* (50)

Although Scott uses overwriting, notations of syllables and marginalia to offer insights into how he experienced the text aurally, as well as to show how one might express this aural experience visually, I ultimately find the work more distracting than enriching. This is primarily because I find it so visually complex that I have trouble translating it into an aural experience. In the end his experiment, while provocative, seems not entirely convincing.

Second, by working intralingually Scott elides a fundamental question about translation and listening. That is: When we are reading a work that was first written in a language we do not know, how can we know what the translator is listening to? Without access to that first language, we are not privy to the “weave of relationships” that he presents in his analysis of translation as listening, and it becomes difficult, although as

scholars such as Lawrence Venuti have shown us not impossible, to “listen the literary” or “translate-to-listen.” (Venuti argues a “foreignizing” translation might allow these effects to be felt in translated texts.)

Finally, while I understand why Scott wants to free translation from criteria of interpretation and the translation of meaning, I am hesitant to dismiss translation’s interpretive function or to create a hierarchy between interpretation and perception. As someone working primarily between French and English, Scott perhaps does not feel the need to deeply engage with the political implications of this kind of approach. It seems to me, however, that this is a rather dangerous proposition. Because I work between Chinese and English, a language combination that includes a history of translation rife with cultural biases and assumptions, I have seen how this approach can be used to obfuscate the different meanings the source text has to offer, often so that the translation can fit within the poet’s, or translator’s, aesthetic or political agenda.

I think we can ask translation to do more. I think translation can work interlingually in ways that suggests not only the translator’s experience, but also gives insights into the text’s meanings in the other language. And I propose one way to do is to listen to the original language within the translation itself, to create the harmony that Derrida speaks of in “Des Tours de Babel.”

In her essay, “The Art of Being Nonsynchronous,” Japanese-German author Yoko Tawada suggests how we might go about such a practice. The piece describes her process as she was writing a libretto for an opera whose score was drawn from recordings of the

city of Graz, Austria. For the libretto Tawada listened to a selection of over 400 recordings of city soundscapes. Here she describes what she heard:

I didn't want to just write down the images the sounds evoked in me but rather take the sounds themselves into my hand like concrete objects and then set them down on the paper. How can something we've heard be translated into language? Is an onomatopoeic expression a solution? Should I write, "crackling, scraping, tinkling"? But these onomatopoeic expressions are also culturally encoded, they aren't pure sound. When I write *shitoshito* in Japanese, only Japanese speakers can hear the sound of a gentle rain. A strong rain, on the other hand, is *zaazaa*, but this too works only in Japanese. The German verb *plätschern* (to patter) sounds similar to the Japanese *pichapicha* and is also quite similar in meaning, but such coincidences are rare.

An onomatopoeic expression automatically entails the specification of what is being described. A pattering sound cannot come from a block of wood. But when I was listening to the recordings, I sometimes couldn't tell whether a sound was coming from thunder or a sheet of metal. I wanted to represent the sound, not the person who was producing it, nor its metaphorical significance. It took me quite some time to come up with a solution: My solution was not to find a solution, but rather to enter into the crevice between sound and language and make countless little notes. This dark crevice was a treasure trove of possibilities for what language can be: Language can produce an image from a sound or juxtapose several images. It can clumsily imitate various sounds and invent new words precisely

because of its clumsiness. Language can link a sound to a color, or think up an adjective to go along with it while at the same time questioning its legitimacy. Language can compare what we hear with other things. Then the images invoked only by way of comparison begin to assert their independence. Language can offer up its own hollow interior for use as a concert hall or sing songs of its own upon the stage. And all the while it keeps secretly repeating: "I am not music, even though music is part of what I am. That music is the other sort." There are so many possibilities in the dark treasure trove between language and the audible. It is so difficult to keep the door to this chamber ajar that holding it open can be seen as an achievement in its own right. (192-3, Susan Bernofsky, translator)

Tawada is conscious of the way her language might be able to allow us to notice, to hear, to listen to, even to see, sounds in new ways. This might happen through a juxtaposition of sounds in a way that would seem unlikely visually. Or she could mix sounds and sights together provocatively. Or perhaps the text could draw our attention to silence or something extremely quiet. Whatever sound and language do, I find it revealing that Tawada begins to open the gap between sound and language by giving attention to differences between Japanese and German onomatopoeias. I do not think that this is an accident, for it seems to me that interlingual movement is a very rich way to open these "dark crevices." My work in the chapters that follow will use a similar technique. By using Chinese words within my translations I bring attention to language and sound, and explore the nooks and crannies that open up between Chinese and English.

Derrida's call in "Des Tours de Babel" to create, through translation, "a complementarity or a 'harmony'" (202) between languages stems from his reading of Walter Benjamin's seminal text "The Task of the Translator." For Benjamin the translator's task is *not* to create a text for an audience who cannot read the original. Rather Benjamin understands the task to be this: "to find in the translator's language that latent structure which can awake an echo of the original" (Hynf and Valk, trans. 303).<sup>3</sup> But what does this mean, for a translation to echo with an original? Benjamin was interested in translation's potential to integrate "the many languages into one true language" (303). On an abstract level, his goal was to attain a "true" language that could express more than each, individual language ever could. On a more concrete level, Benjamin was suggesting how to read his translations of Baudelaire, for which this famous essay served as a preface. Indeed, Benjamin is suggesting we listen not only to Baudelaire's poems and his translations, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to the way words and meanings echo between the two texts. He wants us to consider what we can learn from the reverberations that are created when the translation echoes with the original, as well as to the concordances he has created between the two linguistic systems.

In this formulation I do not read "echo" as a weaker repetition of an original, but rather as a means to draw attention to how information is conveyed through the movement of sound. For within echoes we can hear how sounds mix with other sounds, how sounds bounce off each other, and how sounds are absorbed. The Chinese word for

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<sup>3</sup> I have used this translation rather than the more common Zohn because I find it much clearer.

echo is 回聲 *huisheng*<sup>4</sup> “return sound.” In some sense, all sound is return sound, for all sounds move into space and then come back to us changed, perhaps connected with something new, perhaps showing us the shape of the terrain, always letting us hear the modulations that have occur in movement. Or, if there is no echo, we learn about what has been absorbed.

In his 2002 philosophical treatise *A l'écoute*, translated by Charlotte Mandell as *Listening*, Jean-Luc Nancy articulates a similar idea, although he refers to the echoing as “referrals.” In Mandell’s translation:

What can be the shared space of meaning and sound? Meaning [le sens] consists in a reference [renvoi]. In fact it is made of a totality of referrals: from a sign to a thing, from a state of things to a quality, from a subject to another subject or to itself, all simultaneously. Sound is also made of referral: it spreads in space, where it resounds while still resounding “in me,” as we say [...] it re-emits itself while still actually “sounding,” which is already “re-sounding” since that’s nothing else but referring back to itself. (7–8)

I appreciate Nancy’s confluence of sound and meaning for the important insight that neither rest in single, static entities, but rather both exist in movements between references and the subjects that perceive them. This allows us to appreciate that sound and meaning are dynamic and transforming, and that we, as subjects, are transformed in their perception. I suggest a similar attention for translation. In my practice, I refer the

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that I use traditional, rather than simplified, characters in this dissertation, as this was the convention at the time the poetry was written. In the bibliography I follow the conventions used by the titles.

readers of my translations back to the original. This creates a space in which we can consider the “re-sounding” between the original (the author), the translation (the translator) and the reader. Through this attention we become aware of how meaning is created—and connected, and changing—as we move between languages.

### **Sound: A New Methodology for Translating Chinese into English**

Now that I have given a general overview of the ideas behind my translation practice, I would like to offer some reflections on the particularities of translating between Chinese and English. I begin with a discussion of Chinese characters as images. Then I explain how Chinese theories of language and my consideration of the history of translation between Chinese and English have shaped my thinking about translation as a practice.

I would like to begin by addressing an aspect that including characters within my translations brings to the fore: their visuality. Readers who are not familiar with Chinese may see the characters as symbols, or ideographs, pictures of what they represent. This is certainly a plausible reading (Chinese readers also do this) although it is, naturally, a bit simplistic (Pound is always the go-to example here). I would like to pause and complicate things a bit by considering the effects of placing the Chinese characters, which nonnative and native speakers alike often read as images, into an English text. The initial effect might be to stress the visual aspect of the characters, yet this is precisely what I do not want to do. Indeed, by including characters I would like to resist a mode in the English-speaking



sphere of reading/translation that considers Chinese characters to be, first and foremost, images.

To my mind, this tradition of reading/translation informs a general sense that Chinese and English are incommensurable, which is to say they have “no common standard” on which to base translation. Now, the idea of incommensurability has been used to great critical effect in the work of Lydia Liu, for example. She teaches us that addressing it can lead us to find and question occasions when common standards are assumed. The more common, and much sloppier, usage of the idea, however, generally runs like this: because of linguistic, cultural and historical differences (no common standards), Chinese can never really be translated in English.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Chinese can be translated into English by whatever means necessary.

This supposition has supported notions such as: Chinese had no (or very little) grammar,<sup>6</sup> or it is essentially composed of nouns and images.<sup>7</sup> The most famous example of the latter is Pound, of course, and his reading of Chinese as imagistic and noun based. But we can still find these views in contemporary discussions of translation between the two languages. Take the work of Howard Goldblatt, the most well known translator of contemporary Chinese-language fiction into English. In a 2013 piece in the *Chicago*

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<sup>5</sup> And vice versa, although my attention is to the Chinese-to-English direction.

<sup>6</sup> This was a common argument of 19<sup>th</sup> century European translators, but it still informs discussions about translation today. I recently read in the bio of Yung-Shan Tsou, a contemporary Taiwan writer/artist, “Her work is characterized by the dialogue between image and language, between content and the process of writing. She has also drawn inspiration from the gulf between the German language and her mother tongue, using its more precise grammar to stretch the subtleties of Chinese.”

<sup>7</sup> This, too, has long been a common assumption that we still find today. In the interview cited below, Goldblatt is quoted as saying, “‘I’m translating a Singaporean novel in Chinese. [...] There are Brahms strains doing . . . something in the air. Slicing? Gliding? Wafting? I love doing this. In Chinese a lot of the time there’s a predicate, but no active verb. I like the process. It’s so anonymous. Nobody knows I created the word’” (Levitt).

*Reader* he tells us, "Because Chinese and English are completely distinct languages, with no history or linguistic roots in common, the work of any two translators of the same text will vary widely (Levitt)." In other words, because Chinese and English are so different, translators have a certain liberty to translate as they choose.

While I believe that translators should be allowed a great deal of creative freedom, I would argue that they must also be conscious of how their translations present texts within new discursive contexts. For, especially with this sort of *carte blanche* mentality, translators have space to transform texts into examples for whatever argument they would like to illustrate. In the case of translating between Chinese and English, translators and scholars are not always held accountable for their choices, perhaps because so few readers can critique them, perhaps because they fall into line with general ideas about what translations from Chinese are to look like, or perhaps because of a popular understanding that Chinese characters are ideographic and incommensurable.

Indeed we find this idea, that Chinese is a language in which people speak in ideograms, suggested by the *New Oxford American* dictionary entry below:

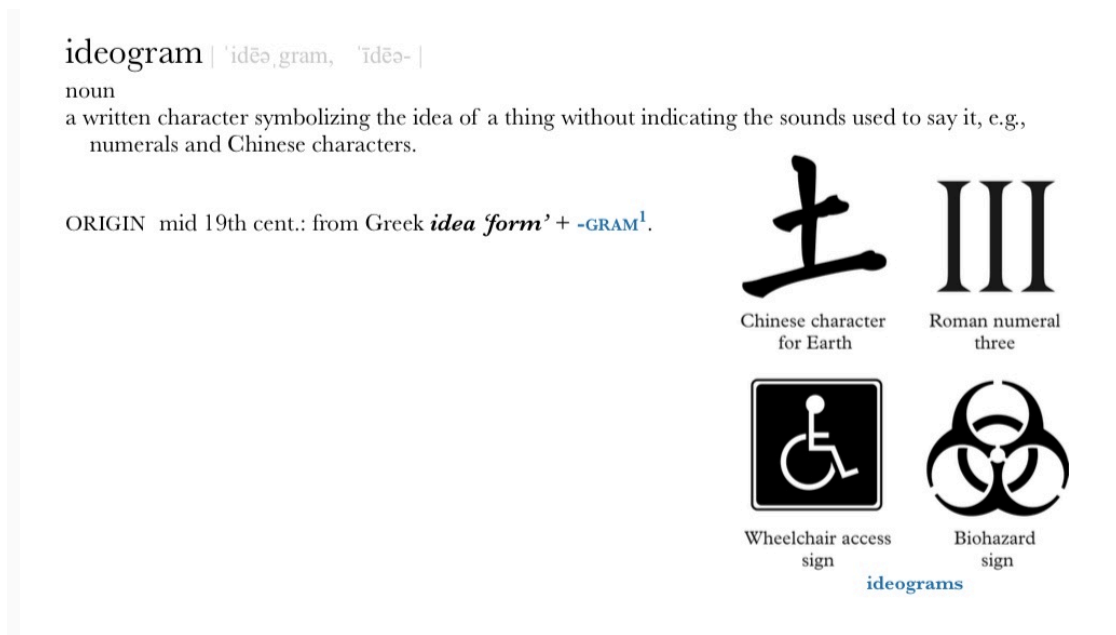


Image 2: "Ideogram" *New Oxford American Dictionary* for Mac, version 2.2.1 (177)

We see in this definition (and in the juxtaposition of the character with the ideograms) that Chinese is defined as a language of fixed images, each of which symbolizes an abstract "idea of a thing." This suggests that Chinese is made of static symbols. This makes them different from words, which conjugate, decline, or through the shifting of roots, suffixes and prefixes, change form. Imagine if I were to open my mouth and have a "wheelchair access" or "biohazard" sign come out of it.

As you might expect, this is a narrow understanding of how characters work, which bringing sound into the mix allows us to complicate. Let's look again at the dictionary definition above. It states that ideograms "symboliz[e] the idea of a thing without indicating the sounds used to say it." In fact, characters often do indicate sound, and the

definition renders itself false—at least in the Chinese context—by the very character chosen as an example: 土 *tu*. In Mandarin 土 *tu* (read “to”) means “earth.” Yet it appears in other words not for its meaning, but to indicate sound. Take the character 吐 *tu*, which means “vomit,” as an example. It combines the character for mouth 口 *kou* on the left with 土 *tu* on the right. This kind of character, which is by far the most commonly found in Chinese, is called a “phonosemantic compound.” They work like this: on the left we find the part of the character called the “radical.” It suggests the meaning of the word (in 吐 *tu* this would be 口 *kou*, which means “mouth”). The element on the right, by contrast, suggest the character’s sound. in 吐 *tu* this is 土 *tu*.

While we might be tempted to read 吐 *tu* visually with the evocative “throwing up is the mouth on the floor” or something like that, this would be to read a visual story into the character. There is nothing inherently wrong with this practice, but it often is based on a misunderstanding of how characters are formed. And this misunderstanding can lead us to arguments of incommensurability.<sup>8</sup> Although Chinese is of a very different language family from English, it still is made up of words, not symbols. And part of my practice in the chapter that follow is to underline that, if we approach Chinese characters not as images or ideographs that present semantic and imagistic meaning, but as words that contain both semantic and sonic meaning, we *cannot* conceptualize Chinese as a linguistic system that works in symbols (I open my mouth and “wheelchair access sign” comes out). This forces (invites) us to ask how it actually does work, leading us to consider the language more

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<sup>8</sup> Yunte Huang offers a history of this visual mode of reading Chinese characters in the West from the Renaissance to the present in *Transpacific Displacement: Ethnography, Translation, and Intertextual Travel in Twentieth-Century American Literature* 12-16.

holistically. What about its grammar, for example? How do the poets put words together to express ideas? Or how are characters nuanced and transformed through their combinations with other characters? If we move away from making assumptions about the visual nature of characters, and the deep incommensurability between Chinese and English, we can invite questions about the complexities of Chinese. This allows us to engage with the languages more deeply and use the differences between Chinese and English to expand our notions of what the languages can do.

Let me now complicate things even a bit more: the imagistic reading I have problematized above is based on truths. Whether Chinese characters were first formed based on semantic meaning (in which characters represents meanings) or on phonetic meaning (characters represents sounds) is a question that has been intensely debated by Chinese and Western linguists, philologists and scholars.<sup>9</sup> The traditional Chinese perspective has been that Chinese characters were semantically formed. This means that rather than developing from sound or the spoken language (as words do in phonetic systems), Chinese characters were created to represent meaning. Characters pass from thought to writing. The representation of sound, while often present, comes second. By contrast, some recent (and often Western) scholarship suggests that Chinese languages, like Western ones, were first spoken, and that the characters are representations of spoken words. In this view Chinese is a phonological language, like Western languages. It just uses symbols rather than letters as phonological markers.

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<sup>9</sup> The ideas here are discussed in Ming Dong Gu's study of "linguistic sinologism," or the ways that debates about the Chinese language are inflected by cultural politics. He argues Chinese characters are often used in broader agendas of nationalist politics or aesthetics.

I am not an expert in the formation and evolution of the Chinese language, and am not in a position to argue how Chinese came into being. My intention in bringing up this debate is not to make an argument either way, but to be aware of the way the Chinese language has been historically considered, so that I can be informed about the traditions and implications of using Chinese characters in an English-language text. As such, rather than engaging in the debate, let me state some details on how Chinese, as a written language, has been used.

Classical Chinese, as a written language, was the *lingua franca* of East Asia for around 1,000 years. When it was used in this way, it, as a written language, was distinct from the languages its users spoke. Many believe that part of the reason this was possible is because characters—either in their entirety or through the radical element on the left-hand side—reference ideas rather than sounds. As such speakers of the many different Chinese dialects, as well as Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese, could pronounce the characters in different ways, even while the general meaning of the word remained relatively stable. This practice suggests that, no matter how characters were originally formed, the visual component of the Chinese written language—including the characters that are today written in various Chinese dialects, such as Mandarin, Cantonese, etc.—remains an important element in their interpretation. And while sound may be a part of some of the characters (in some instances these sonic cues were lost in the new languages, while in some they remained), it is not a sonic/phonologically-based system, in the same way as Western alphabetic languages are.

The fact that the Chinese language is visually based in this way might seem like a disadvantage to my quest to debunk imagistic readings through a focus on sound, but I choose to see it as an opportunity. As I have shown, Chinese is not a purely sonic/phonologically-based system, nor are its characters “ideographic” in the sense they are commonly understood to be in English-speaking environments. Yet this nuance is rarely presented in translations from Chinese into English. Part of the work I am doing in this dissertation is to address this complexity, and even use it to expand the possibilities of translation. When I bring characters into my English translations, they become the elements that open the space between languages. They are a mark to suggest a place where knowledge might expand. In my discussions around the translations, I give readers the ability to both consider the visual and sonic meanings the characters suggest, as well as the relationships they have with other words within the poems. The fact that many of these meanings and relationships do not map smoothly onto English allows us to gain new ways of looking at—and hearing—air raids.

### **Wartime Kunming**

As I will show in the chapters that follow, translation is an effective means to engage the issue of air raids within the work of Mu Dan, Zhou Dingyi, Zhao Ruihong and Feng Zhi, but before I engage with their works via translation, I would like to briefly present the historical contexts in which they lived and wrote. In each chapter I offer more details about the poet and the works in consideration, here, however, I broadly sketch how

the poets arrived in wartime Kunming and the conditions of their lives there. I also offer some general biographical information, followed by chapter summaries.

On July 7, 1937, in the suburbs of Beiping (as Beijing was then called), fighting broke out between Japanese and Chinese troops. This event, which had been preceded by years of Japanese encroachment into China, came to be called the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, and it marked the official beginning of the War of Resistance. The fighting soon escalated, and nearby Qinghua University and Peking University (Beida) were soon occupied by Japanese troops. Farther away, the prestigious Nankai University, located in the northern port city of Tianjin about 100 km from Beijing, was even less fortunate. On July 29 its campus was bombed to the ground, and what remained was burned by Japanese troops (Israel 13).

Finding themselves effectively homeless, the leaders of these three top universities Mei Yiqi (Qinghua), Jiang Menglin (Beida) and Zhang Bolin (Nankai) reached an agreement. In September of that year they would form a joint university, which would be located in Changsha, on the site of a campus that Qinghua had begun constructing in 1937, fearing just this kind of invasion. This joint university was Lianda, short for Xinan Lianhe Daxue (西南聯合大學), or National Southwestern Associated University. Its creation merely confirmed what had already begun, an exodus of teachers and students away from "Occupied China," as the area Japan controlled is known, into China's interior, or "Free China."



At the time of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Mu Dan was a student at Qinghua; Feng Zhi was a professor and Zhou Dingyi was a student at Beida; and Zhao Ruihong was enrolled at Shandong University, farther to the south. Although some faculty and students of these institutions stayed behind to work with the Japanese government, most fled south and west, and some of them decided to continue their work and studies at the campus in Changsha. Our four poets were among those who made their way to Changsha for the start of Lianda's first term on November 1, 1937.

Even though Changsha was in Free China, it was still a target for air raids. Indeed Lianda was bombed on its very first day. This constant violence, combined with the fact that during the fall of 1937 the Japanese army continued its inland advance, soon made it clear that Lianda would need to move once again. In January of 1938 the decision was made to move the campus to Kunming. In his history of the school, Jonathan Israel writes, "Yunnan means 'South of the Clouds,' a picturesque indication of its remoteness. Deep in the southwest, yet connected to the outside world by the Kunming-Hanoi Railroad, that province offered the ideal combination of maximum distance from the Japanese and maximum communication with Hong Kong, Shanghai, and the West" (28).

The decision to move was made amidst national debate about the importance of wartime education. The debate was framed as a choice between being considered a coward, or even a traitor, and continuing to study to become the future leaders of China after the war's end. Mu Dan, writing under his given name of Zha Liangzhen, described the situation thus:

People see work and study as two things. So the question "Save the nation or continue studying?" became "Stay at Changsha or go to Kunming?" At that time in Changsha it was easy to find national-support work, so many students were opposed on a personal level to moving the campus. This group took their petition to the educational office, and the newspapers all attacked, arguing that university students should not flee. Many students couldn't make up their minds, but the educational office invited two famous men to come speak. One was Provincial leader Zhang Zhizhong, the other was General Chen Cheng. The General gave the students an impassioned and forceful analysis [...] of students' responsibilities. His conclusion: the university should move. After this I have to say that lots of students decided to follow the school to Yunnan. (1)

In the end over 800 students decided to continue with their education and enrolled in classes on the Kunming campus (Israel 28-29).

After the decision to move to Kunming was made, the next problem became how to get everyone there. There seemed to be two options. The first was to travel by train to Hong Kong, by boat from Hong Kong to French Indo-China, and then by train and boat to Kunming. This is the route Feng Zhi chose to travel with his wife. The second was to walk overland from Changsha. The latter was deemed feasible only for young male students (some women were enrolled at Lianda, but they travelled to Kunming via Hong Kong) and professors in good health. The journey was understood to be a good response to critics who had judged the students to be weak and cowardly. From February 20 to April 28, the group walked through three provinces (Hunan, Guizhou and Yunnan), traveling more than

1,000 miles of which more than 800 were completed on foot (Israel 31). This was the route chosen by Mu Dan and Zhao Ruihong.

After reaching Yunnan, the students travelled to Mengzi, a town to the south of Kunming, which from May to August 1938 was the home of both the College of Arts and the College of Social Sciences. Then, in early September, the Colleges moved to Kunming, which, not long after, the Imperial Japanese Army Air Force began to bomb.

Kunming was an easy target for bombers. The weather was often sunny, and until the Americans joined the war in 1941, there was no air defense. This particular set of circumstances meant that for almost three years air raids were ordinary events. Lianda and Yunnan University's neighboring campus were targets of the bombings more than once. In fact air raids were so common that classes at Lianda were arranged to accommodate their mid-day interruptions.

The celebrated essayist, Wang Zengqi, who was a student at Lianda during this period, wrote about the raids as a defining element of the school during its first years in Kunming:

When I first arrived in Kunming, at the start of the second year, 1939-1940, two out of three days there were air raid sirens. Some days there were air raids every day, and some days there were even two raids. In Kunming at that time there wasn't any air defense to speak of; whenever the Japanese wanted to come they came. Sometimes it would even be known a day ahead of time: Tomorrow 27 planes will fly over Kunming dropping bombs. You could trust the Imperial Japanese Air Force; if they said they were coming, you could plan on it!

Once the air raid siren went off, that was it. Everybody headed out of the city. We called it "running the sirens." "Run" and "sirens," together in a phrase, are a little strange when you think about it. After all, what we were running from wasn't the siren. It's not like we were running horses in the races, or running a business; that makes more sense. But that's what everyone called it, and everybody understood what it meant, and we even thought it seemed appropriate. It was also called "fleeing the sirens" or "hiding from the sirens," but none of those worked as well as "running the sirens." "Hide" was too passive; "flee" was too panicky. "Run" suggested a certain calmness beneath the anxiety. It demonstrated the most poise, and also best represented the rich, vividness of the experience. (394)

It's perhaps surprising to think about air raids as a "rich, vivid experience," but, as we'll see in the poetry, it was a complex part of the lives of people living in Kunming. On one hand it was terrifying, on another it created a sense of unification, and while not pleasurable it was its own kind of respite from daily life.

Indeed, life at Lianda seems to have been a mixture of the bitter and the sweet. In 1939, when Zhou Dingyi, Mu Dan, Zhao Ruihong and Feng Zhi settled into their new lives in Kunming, not only were air raids a common experience, but they had also left their families behind in the north. They had travelled across China from north to south and east to west, crossed enemy lines, been confronted with the great poverty of the country's inner provinces (as opposed to the relative wealth and internationalism of the coastal cities), and were living on either student government subsidies or on a professor's salary, which is to say without any money to speak of, especially after wartime inflation escalated in the

early 40s. The landscape, language, food, weather—all these everyday things—were different. And then there was the violence that came from the skies.

But Lianda was a place of intellectual and political freedom, where students and professors could continue to pursue their studies and literary work. It was also home to some of the most important literary figures of the time: Wen Yiduo, Zhu Ziqing, Shen Congwen, Bian Zhilin, Li Guangtian and Wang Zuoliang, as well as, for the first year, the British writer and critic William Empson. Professors and students alike took part in activities sponsored by literary and cultural groups, and there were public “newspaper walls” where poets could post their newest work.

As part of this Lianda community of poets Mu Dan, Zhou Dingyi, Zhao Ruihong and Feng Zhi were well read in classical Chinese poetry as well as in contemporary European writing. Zhou Dingyi was a member of the Chinese Department, while Mu Dan, Zhao Ruihong and Feng Zhi were part of the Foreign Languages Department and were also translators. (During the war Mu Dan primarily translated English poetry, Zhao Ruihong translated from French, and Feng Zhi from German.) In the chapters that follow I will develop their biographies at more length. Here, however, let me offer brief, biographical sketches.

Mu Dan is among the most highly regarded young poets of the war years. Born into a formerly affluent family, his father had been unsuccessful in his career, and Mu Dan grew up in relative poverty. Despite this, he went to one of the best high schools in the country, Nankai Secondary School in Tianjin, and in 1935 was admitted to the highly selective Qinghua University.

Despite his talents, Mu Dan wrote poetry for a relatively short time, from around 1939 to 1948, and then in 1976 just before his death. The poems he produced during the war period are rich in ideas and images. Its language and concepts are generally considered difficult, and it is often categorized as modernist (in contrast with the revolutionary verse, which was popular at the time), as it gives attention to individual psychology. I value Mu Dan's insights into the experiences of young intellectuals during the war, and consider his poetry among the richest and most moving I've ever read.

After the war Mu Dan lived abroad in South East Asia and the United States, where he did not write verse. After Liberation, he returned to China, but for a variety of political reasons did not write poetry again until shortly before his death in 1977. During this long period of poetic silence, however, Mu Dan wrote several volumes of exceptional translations, including authors as varied as Byron, Pushkin, Auden and Eliot.

Zhou Dingyi is not generally known as a poet, but as a linguistics scholar. Although he was trained in the Chinese Department, he was also a member, together with Mu Dan and Zhao Ruihong, of the Gaoyuan Society of Literary Arts student club. It was perhaps because of his ties with this organization that he composed a small handful of poems during his time at Lianda. These few poems are included, along with those of Mu Dan, Zhao Ruihong and Feng Zhi, in the volume *Southwestern Associated University Collected Modern Poems* 西南联大现代诗抄 *Xinan Lianda xiandai shi chao*. After the war, Zhou's editorial work with periodicals and encyclopedias was important to the creation of a new national language for the People's Republic of China, including simplified characters.

Zhao Ruihong is also known as a scholar rather than a poet. He finished his college work at Lianda in the Foreign Languages Department, where he focused on French and German literature. After graduation he taught first in Kunming and then in Chongqing. During the war years he translated much of Stendhal's work, including the first Chinese version of *Le rouge et le noir*, published in 1944. After liberation Zhao would travel to East Germany as a professor of comparative literature, and it was in this capacity that he held a number of university positions during his long career.

Feng Zhi was born in 1905 to an elite family in Zhuozhou, a town south of Beijing. At 12, he began his studies at the celebrated Beijing No. 4 High School, and in 1921 he enrolled as a student at Peking University. During the 1920s Feng was active with literary journals, most importantly with the *Sunken Bell* (沉鐘—the title was inspired by Gerhart Hauptman's play-in-verse, *Die Versunkene Glocke*), which he helped establish in 1925. Feng Zhi lived in Germany throughout the 1930s, where he completed a dissertation on the 18th-century German writer Novalis. After his return to China, he made his name as a translator and scholar of German literature, including Nietzsche, Schiller, Rilke and Goethe. His collection *Sonnets*, which I discuss in chapter 4, is considered one of the most important poetic works from the war period.

In chapter 1, "Sonic Spaces of Wartime Kunming in the Poetry of Mu Dan and Zhou Dingyi," I explore the complexity of Kunming as a wartime soundscape through close-readings/translations of Mu Dan's poems "Chorus in Two Parts" and "Torch Parade, Kunming 1939" and Zhou Dingyi's poem "Listening to Rain." In this chapter I

introduce the sonic landscapes of wartime Kunming as well as my motivations behind including Chinese characters.

Next, in chapter 2, “I [ ] 我: Translating the Subject in Mu Dan’s Poem ‘Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter,’” I explore the effects of air raids on subjectivity by giving attention to the space that opens up between the English word “I” and its Chinese (semi)equivalent 我 *wǒ*. I also show how the fact that the Chinese language does not always require pronouns suggests a rich potentiality that need not be lost in translation.

In chapter 3, “了, 吧, 轟炸 *Le, ba, hongzha*: Air Raids and the Sound of Time,” I follow Zhao Ruihong’s own practice of placing two or more languages together in a single text by including Chinese, English and other languages within my translation of Zhao’s poem “Portrait of Kunming, Spring 1940,” a long narrative poem about the day of an air raid. In so doing, I explore the differences between how time is expressed in English and Chinese and expand our sense of the temporal experience of an air raid.

In chapter 4, “Sonnets and 空, An Exploration of Sonnet/Sonic Space” I begin by analyzing the first poem in Feng Zhi’s collection *Sonnets*, written in the early 1940s. I then discuss the many ideas present in Feng Zhi’s writing of 空 *kong* or “space.” By presenting my translation of the first sonnet in the collection with Feng’s translation of a Rilkean sonnet, this chapter offers the furthest expansion of how to create harmony between languages through translation. In this sense the chapter brings us back, full circle, to the ideas of listening and translation I discuss in the introduction.

Finally, in the “Conclusion, or What Two Deaf Artists Taught Me about Listening (After I’d Written an Entire Dissertation on Listening),” I turn my attention away from



wartime Kunming to consider the work of two sound artists Christine Sun Kim and Jeffery Mansfield. Their practices allow me to complicate ideas of sound, listening and translation, and bring to the fore themes of intersubjectivity and empathy that are an undercurrent in the earlier chapters. I apply the insights I gain from the artists to a final translation, a short story written by Feng Zhi in Kunming called "Zoo 動物園 *Dongwu yuan*."

All the chapters revolve around the "impossibility" of translating a certain concept, whether the overreaching idea of sound or a certain term or grammatical aspect in Chinese that has no equivalent in English. They all, also, include Chinese characters within the English texts as a way to stimulate questions through the practice of translation. Chapters 1 and 2, however, differ from chapter 3 and 4, in one key way. The first two chapters discuss soundscapes of wartime Kunming in detail, and explore both its sounds and the poets' reactions to these aural stimuli. The third and fourth chapters, however, shift in focus from the sensorial experience of air raids to how sound, listening and translation can offer us insights into this period of violence, whether through an exploration of time, as in chapter 3, or, by considering, as in chapter 4, how much, beyond violence, there is to hear in poetry written during wartime. In it we return to consider the dissertation's central theme: translation need not merely be trained on a target; it can be a manifestation of resonance.

## Chapter 1

### Sonic Spaces of Wartime Kunming in the Poetry of Mu Dan and Zhou Dingyi

It is not surprising that Lu Xun (魯迅 1881-1936) was among the first intellectuals in China to note the effects of aerial bombardments on the human psyche. Arguably the most important writer of China in the 1920s and 30s, his short stories and essays form the bedrock of modern Chinese literature. We find his observations on air raids in “一覺 *Yi jue*,” or “An Awakening” from his 1926 collection of short prose pieces 野草, *Yecao*, or *Wild Grass*. It begins thus:

Like students going to school, the planes on their bombing missions fly over Peking each morning. And each time I hear their engines attack the air I feel a certain slight tension, as if I were witnessing the invasion of Death, though this heightens my consciousness of the existence of Life.

After one or two muffled explosions, the planes drone and fly slowly off. There may be some casualties, but the world seems more peaceful than usual. The tender leaves of the poplar outside the window gleam dark gold in the sunlight;

the blossom of the flowering plum is more glorious than yesterday. (Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang 143)

In this description Lu Xun does not sublimate the overwhelming and inhuman violence of air raids, nor does he react to this violence through direct calls to resistance, although his esteem for reflective resistance will become clear. Rather he listens to the planes, drawing our attention to their approach, discharge and then growing distance. Looking out his window, he realizes the air raid has made him conscious, not only of mortality, but also of the fact that the beautiful, peaceful scene before him is a kind of gift which someone, not so far away, cannot access.

While the narrator sits at his desk, gazing at the plum blossoms (a symbol both of perseverance and transience), he recalls a young man (perhaps the poet Feng Zhi himself, a story I'll explain in more length in chapter 4), who two years before had handed him a package that held a literary journal. "He said not a word," Lu Xun writes, "yet what a speaking silence, and what a rich gift that was!" In making the association between the young man's "speaking silence" and the drone of the planes, Lu Xun suggests how the planes train our ears to the meanings of sound, even if the sound is silence. If we listen to these experiences, and write about them, their many implications can be explored, and we can find ways to better understand the violent era in which we live.

In this chapter I follow Lu Xun's insight that we listen to air raids, and write about their implications, as I translate and analyze three poems, two by Mu Dan and one by Zhou Dingyi. From their poems I work to understand how they conceptualized the turbulent time and place in which they were living, and I use the poems to set the scene of both wartime

Kunming and the translation and reading practices I use in the chapters that follow. I begin with Mu Dan's (穆旦 1918-1977) rousing poem "Chorus in Two Parts, 合唱二章 *He chang er zhang*," written in February 1939.<sup>10</sup> Its buoyant call to sing China awake shows the power Mu Dan and his contemporaries felt song had, at least in the early days of the war, as a tool of resistance. I then consider his "Torch Parade, Kunming, 1939, 一九三九年火炬行列在昆明 *Yijiu sanjiu nian huojue xinglie zai Kunming*," which was published in the *Zhongyang Daily* (中央日报) on May 26, 1939. Written just a few months after "Chorus," it begins to suggest Mu Dan's uncertainties about the power of song. Rather than a lofty call for unity, as in "Chorus," Mu Dan grounds "Torch" within the streets of Kunming in order to explore the complexities of this wartime space. Reading "Torch" together with "Chorus" allows us to trace Mu Dan's development as a poet, to hear how he understood the sonic environment of Kunming, and to consider the different ways he responded to the war in his verse. I finish the chapter by turning my ears to the complexity of the air raid experience within the poem "Listening to Rain, 聽雨 *Tingyu*" by Zhou Dingyi (周定一 b. 1913), written in 1941. In my translations of "Torch" and "Listening to Rain," I include Chinese characters in order to begin to open up a space between Chinese and English. I offer this as a sort of "warm up" to the chapters that follow, in which the characters become an essential part of my analysis.

Let me now turn to Mu Dan and "Chorus." In 1939, when he wrote this poem, Mu Dan was a twenty-one-year old student in the Foreign Languages Department at Lianda. I

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<sup>10</sup> When this poem appeared in *Explorations* it was titled "Chorus 二章," with the first word in English. In *Mu Dan Collected Poems* this was changed to "合唱二章" all in Chinese.

will detail his biography more closely in chapter 2, where I explore his use of the word 我 wo or “I” in the poem “Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter;” here, however, let me briefly characterize his work. From his teen-age years, Mu Dan had shown himself to be a sensitive listener and a talented poet, but it was during his time at Lianda that he began to prove himself to be among the most important young poets of the war years (the female poet Zheng Min is another shining star). He was a master of language, which in any given poem could range from lofty existentialism to clinical description to deep emotion. This creates a poetry that is rich in nuance, intensely insightful and often quite difficult.

As we shall see in chapter 2, Mu Dan often used his poetry to explore subjectivity and how language and environment affected one’s sense of self. “Chorus in Two Parts,” however, does not explore an individual’s subjectivity; its concern is nothing less than the future of China. As the title suggests it sings a song in two parts. The first is a song of destruction, a song of China’s imminent fall. It ends with China teetering, like other ancient cultures, “Egypt, Athens, Rome,” on the edge of a chasm. But what does it mean to fall? The second part surprises us with its answer. Rich in motifs of water, breath, sound and music, it suggests that falling need not be a movement of destruction; it can be a source of power and even regeneration. In this section, Mu Dan transforms the power of falling into something that will rise again: song, and the poem ends with a call to transform the power of China’s vast landscapes into a force that will unite its people and let them sing together.

“Chorus” represents the energy of Mu Dan’s early poetry. Finished in February 1939, the year after Mu Dan concluded the 3,000 *li* march from Changsha to Kunming with his fellow students, it still sings with the spirit that carried that endeavor to its completion.

As scholars such as Chen Boliang and Carolyn FitzGerald have noted, this march introduced the young elite from China's great northern and eastern cities to the country's interior.<sup>11</sup> These parts of China, with their rivers and mountains, were new to Mu Dan, and he drew from them as a source of strength and transformation. In this way the poem describes the mood during this relatively early period in the war, when the adrenaline of resistance was still strong, and before the pressures and hardships of extended warfare had set in. Let me cite the poem here:

Chorus in Two Parts

1.

When spirits of the night pummel native souls,  
Quiet and still, the plains gaze deeply into black emptiness,  
O hasten, hurry, revolving, celestial body,  
Order flowing light to bathe your suffering heart,  
Order antiquity to scatter bit by bit beneath your rotations,  
Like a great flag fluttering, entering the universe's primeval chaos,  
See how bravery, reverence, perseverance,  
Open up Cathay's vast divinity.  
O descendants of the Yellow Emperor, Frantic!  
A devil's hand has pressed closed your chest,  
Ten thousand, thousand spirits strolling out from hazy

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<sup>11</sup> The themes we find in "Chorus" are echoed in the more measured verse of Mu Dan's 'Starting Off' and 'Walking the Roads on the Plains,' two poems that Mu Dan published together as "3000 *li* By Foot."

Steles, pacing in expectation, hoping.  
A storm, billowing waves, driving rain—hide,  
Wait for a sharp whip to cast toward deep valleys,  
Egypt, Athens, Rome, from here falling,  
O this time you on a cliff trembling  
Say no, say no, this is not a dwelling place for an ancient land,  
O stately ceremony, using fresh blood to sweep the tombs,  
Reveal a little, reveal still more, if you topple and fall...

2.

Let me sing Pamir's wasteland,  
Use the solemn sounds of its mountain summits,  
Torrents mixing together like ancient lava flows,  
Slowly, slowly, bursting forth, bubbling up strong bones,  
Like iron woven into Oriental crab apples.  
O let me sing, in a joyful mood,  
Beneath the perfectly round vault of heaven that unruly ocean  
Pushing the leaning, falling, murmuring waves,  
Like tender green tree roots reaching into muddy earth,  
Its fingers of soft light snatching up the heart of divine China.  
When I breathe, in mountain streams of mixed metals,  
Countless glimmers of dawn, dusk, shades of light,

From the scornful gaze of Kunlun, the Himalayas, Tianshan,  
Flow over desiccated plains, low-lying, damp plains,  
When the Yellow River, Yangtze, Pearl River end in a place of rest,  
So many musical sounds, elated, sullen, surging  
Follow the red, green, sky-blue water,  
Toward distant mountain valleys, forests, to dissolve in barrens.  
O warm embrace! Let me sing,  
Let me pound into your rhythmic dance,  
When people suffer, die for causes, enter sleepily into your hearts,  
Sway, sway, transform into this endless era,  
Their souls, O all your constant and unyielding love!

1

當夜神扑打古國的魂靈。  
靜靜地，原野沉視著黑空，  
O 飛奔呵，旋轉的星球，  
叫光明流洗你苦痛的心胸，  
叫遠古在你的輪下片片飛揚，  
像大旗飄進宇宙的洪荒，  
看怎樣的勇敢，虔敬，堅忍，  
辟出了華夏遼闊的神州。  
O 黃帝的子孫，瘋狂！  
一只魔手閉塞你們的胸膛，



萬萬精靈已踱出了模糊的  
碑石，在守候、渴望裡彷徨。  
一陣暴風，波濤，急雨——潛伏，  
等待強烈的一鞭投向深谷，  
埃及，雅典，羅馬，從這裡隕落，  
○這一刻你們在岩壁上抖索！  
說不，說不，這不是古國的居處，  
○莊嚴的盛典，以鮮血祭掃，  
亮些，更亮些，如果你傾倒……

2

讓我歌唱帕米爾的荒原，  
用它峰頂靜穆的聲音，  
混然的傾瀉如遠古的熔岩，  
緩緩迸涌出堅強的骨幹，  
像鋼鐵編織起亞洲的海棠。  
○讓我歌唱，以歡愉的心情，  
渾圓天穹下那野性的海洋，  
推著它傾跌的喃喃的波浪，  
像嫩綠的樹根伸進泥土裡，  
它柔光的手指抓起了神州的心房。  
當我呼吸，在山河之交鑄裡，

無數個晨曦，黃昏，彩色的光，  
從昆侖，喜馬，天山的傲視，  
流下了干燥的，卑濕的草原，  
當黃河，揚子，珠江終於憩息，  
多少歡欣，憂郁，澎湃的樂聲，  
隨著紅的，綠的，天藍色的水，  
向遠方的山谷，森林，荒漠裡消溶。  
○熱情的擁抱！讓我歌唱，  
讓我扣著你們的節奏舞蹈，  
當人們痛苦，死難，睡進你們的胸懷，  
搖曳，搖曳，化入無窮的年代，  
他們的精靈，○你們堅貞的愛！

In the first section, Mu Dan uses prosody to set up the stakes of the fall. It swirls with scattered end and internal rhyme, as well as with rolling, almost breathless, syntax. In addition, its rather grandiose vocabulary suggests a magnitude that is at once overwhelming and stirring, while its relatively long lines, most have ten or eleven syllables, have a weight that matches the poem's epic tone.

The poem's first eight lines establish China's plight within a cosmic scene, invoking the rotation of the "celestial body" (Earth) and "the universe's primeval chaos." From this cosmic chaos, we are called to "See how bravery, reverence and perseverance/ Open up

Cathay's vast divinity. / O descendants of the Yellow Emperor, Frantic!"<sup>12</sup> I would like to pause on this line, the ninth: "O descendants of the Yellow Emperor, Frantic! O 黃帝的子孫，瘋狂! O *huangdi di zisun, fengkuang!*" It is the shortest line in the poem and one of its most powerful. This, in part, has to do with the comma, two syllables from the end, which creates a caesura that emphasizes the final word: 瘋狂 *fengkuang*. What does this word mean? Madness, insanity? Frantic energy or ecstasy? In the context of the poem, in which meaning hinges upon the difference between falling-as-destruction and falling-as-power, both readings are possible, but I find the second more likely. This is underlined by the echoes of rhyme within the line. First there is the internal, powerful bell-like rhyme, which tolls with the repeated –ang:<sup>13</sup> O 皇帝的子孫，瘋狂! O *huangdi di zisun, fengkuang!* *Huang* in 皇帝 *huangdi* or "emperor," is echoed by *kuang* in 瘋狂 *fengkuang*, "madness" or "frenetic energy."<sup>14</sup> Second is the sonic echo of "di di" in the middle of the line: 皇帝的子

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<sup>12</sup> It might at first seem strange that the poem is peppered with "Os," but its first occurrence in the third line is instructive. Here it occurs in the same line with Chinese exclamation 呵 or "Ah."<sup>12</sup> This line reads: "O hasten ah, revolving celestial body O 飛奔呵，旋轉的星球 O *feiben ah, xuanzhuan di xingqiu*. Here "O" works differently than "Ah/呵," which also occurs frequently in the poem. While 呵 suggests a sort of sigh, an aspirated extension of the syllable before, "O" is most often used as an apostrophe. For example: "O descendants of the Yellow Emperor" (9<sup>th</sup> line), "O this time you on a cliff trembling" (16<sup>th</sup> line) and "O stately temple" (18<sup>th</sup> line).

Chen Boliang (陳伯良) notes in his *Biography of Mu Dan* (穆旦傳 *Mu Dan zhuan*) that the year before this poem was written, Mu Dan had taken William Empson's classes on Shakespeare and English poetry (29). In the latter he read Keats and Shelley, along with Eliot and Auden. According to Chen, however, Mu Dan was most deeply interested in the work of Whitman. Chen writes that Mu Dan had committed several of Whitman's poems to memory, including "O Captain! My Captain!" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd"(49). The musicality of all of these poets would have been part of Mu Dan's sonic landscape, and it makes sense that they find his way into his poetry. That he uses "O" for apostrophes, which were not a common feature of classical Chinese poetry, is also not a surprising adaptation. Indeed, it is an example of using two languages within a single poem, as I do below.

<sup>13</sup> Considering this piece is entitled "Chorus" a musical metaphor seems in order, and I have found the use of "pivot chords" useful. Pivot chords are common to more than one key, and they often function as a bridge when a piece moves between keys. In "Chorus" 傾倒 *qingdao*, with its multiple meanings, is our pivot chord. Sonically the –ing of *qing* is echoed with the –ang, –ong and –uang sounds that fill the second section.

<sup>14</sup> The word I've translated as "frantic" is 瘋狂 *fengkuang*. While the term is generally translated as "madness," it can also suggest something like an "unabashed defiance." Xiaobing Tang offers a insightful reading of the

孙 *huangdi di zisun*, “the descendants of the Yellow Emperor.”<sup>15</sup> This stuttering effect underlines the intensity of the line, and suggests its urgent double meaning. What is this madness? It is a frenetic energy, a defiant force that can be reined and ridden.

But the poem isn’t ready to jump on yet. After this line, it takes a step back to describe the “ten thousand spirits” that are gathering in the storm. They hide and wait for China to fall into the abyss. To China, the poem calls, “O this time you on a cliff trembling / Say no, say no, this is not a dwelling place for an ancient land.” Like in line nine above, this last line uses repetitive rhyme to underscore its meaning. “Say no, say no, this is not a dwelling place for an ancient land” 說不，說不，這不是古國的居住 *shuo bu, shuo bu, zhe bu shi guguo de juzhu*. Six of the twelve words here end with –u: 不 *bu*, “no” or “not,” appears three times. In addition there is 古國 *guguo*, “ancient country,” and 居住 *juzhu*, “dwelling place.”<sup>16</sup> This rhyme highlights the importance of this call to China, a call that is answered in the couplet that follows, the final two lines of chorus one. “O stately ceremony, using fresh blood to sweep the tombs, / Reveal a little, reveal still more, if you pour over...,” 〇庄嚴的盛典，以鮮血祭掃，/ 亮些，更亮些，如果你傾倒..... *O zhuang yan de shengdian, yi xian xue jisao, liangxie, geng liang xie, ruguo ni qingdie*. This final couplet is strange and difficult, as its last word, 傾倒 *qingdao*, has more than one meaning.

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two terms individually in *Chinese Modern*, noting that *feng* is a newer word, associated with psychological madness, while *kuang* has a longer history and suggests a kind of “explosive ecstasy” (58).

<sup>15</sup> This second *di* or “of” could also be read “de,” although in poetic language of the period it was often read “di.” I think here the second reading would be particularly effective.

<sup>16</sup> 居處 *juchu* also completes a pattern of end-rhymes that began in line 13.

It can mean to “topple and fall” or “pour out.”<sup>17</sup> Thus the line could mean, alternatively, “Reveal a little, reveal still more,<sup>18</sup> if you topple and fall...” or “Reveal a little, reveal still more, if you pour out.” By using 傾倒 *qingdao* Mu Dan has left the action of China, the “you” referred to in the line, open. Will it be forced to topple and fall? Or does it still have the ability to pour something forth, and if so, what?

The second chorus<sup>19</sup> answers this question. It is China and the poet who sings of it who will draw from China’s geographic space, and the water that flows across it, to create song, whose rising will save China from the abyss. Its redemptive chorus begins like this:

Let me sing Pamir’s wasteland,  
Use the solemn sounds of its mountain summits,  
Torrents mixing together like ancient lava flows,  
Slowly, slowly, bursting forth, bubbling up strong bones,  
Like iron woven into Oriental crab apples.

讓我歌唱帕米爾的荒原,  
用它峰頂靜穆的聲音,  
像鋼鐵編織起亞洲的海棠.混然的傾瀉如遠古的熔岩 (*yan*),  
緩緩進涌出堅強的骨幹 (*han*),  
像鋼鐵編織起亞洲的海棠 (*tang*).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> We might also note that there is rhyme in these final lines: 傾倒 *qingdao* with 祭掃 *jisao*, an expression that refers to the practice of cleaning familial gravesites and preparing offerings for ancestral spirits, which ends the line above.

<sup>18</sup> The word 亮 *liang* refers to light, and it can also mean “to shine” or “to show.”

<sup>19</sup> This part has 23 lines, slightly longer than the first.

<sup>20</sup> I include the Chinese again here, so that I can mark the sound. Generally, however, in these sections of close reading, I will only include my translation.

The chorus begins slowly, with relatively short lines, to evoke the “solemn sounds” of the Pamir Mountains, a range adjacent to the Himalayas. Its pouring water invites us to sing the origins of water’s downward course, and the tones—solemn, joyful, rhythmic—that it gathers as it traverses the landscape. In the third line we again find the word 傾 *qing*, here as part of the word 傾瀉 *qingxie*, to “pour down in torrents.” These torrents “mix like ancient lava flows, / Slowly, slowly, bursting forth, bubbling up strong bones, / Like iron woven into Oriental quince blossoms.” These five lines end in –an or –ang (岩 *yan* 幹 *gan* and 棠 *tang*), and, unbroken by caesuras, have cohesion and strength. Their regular rhythms are slow and pulsing, as they equate water with stone, and describe the land as the source for the delicate resilience of the “Oriental quince blossoms.”<sup>21</sup>

If the first section began in China’s heights, the following section enters its depths. It is also five lines and begins with a reprise of the stanza’s first line, although with an added “O” for effect. Then the lines continue the slant –an and –ang rhymes of the first section with 洋 *yang*, 浪 *lang* and 房 *fang*. But here landscape moves from the mountains to the ocean. Again we find 傾 *qing*, in the term *qingdie* 傾跌, “to push” or “propel,” the action that moves murmuring (喃喃 *nan nan*) waves deep into China’s earth.<sup>22</sup>

The lines that follow bring an uninhibited and changeful synesthesia between breath and water, and between light and sound.

When I breathe, in mountain streams of mixed metals,

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<sup>21</sup> The term “Oriental” here is unnecessary and therefore emphatic, suggesting the blossoms as a metaphor for China’s own condition. I use the term “Oriental” rather than the more contemporarily correct “Asian” to follow the usage at the time the poem was written.

<sup>22</sup> Similar images appear in Mu Dan’s “春 *Chun*” or “Spring, written in 1942.

Countless glimmers of dawn, dusk, shades of light  
From the scornful gaze of Kunlun, the Himalayas, Tianshan,  
Flow over desiccated plains, low-lying, damp plains,  
When the Yellow River, Yangtze, Pearl River end in a place of rest,  
So many musical sounds, elated, sullen, surging  
Follow the red, green, sky blue water,  
Toward distant mountain valleys, forests, to dissolve in barrens.

當我呼吸，在山河之交鑄裡，  
無數個晨曦，黃昏，彩色的光 (*guang*),  
從昆侖，喜馬，天山的傲視，  
流下了干燥的，卑濕的草原，  
當黃河，揚子，珠江終於憩息，  
多少歡欣，憂郁，澎湃的樂聲 (*sheng*),  
隨著紅的，綠的，天藍色的水，  
向遠方的山谷，森林，荒漠裡消溶 (*rong*).

The first four lines follow the breath as it travels with the light from the mountains to a “place of rest.” Then the next three extend the breath to include the “musical sounds” that travel with the water. Taken as a whole, these lines suggest that it is the melding of the breath with the landscape that creates “so many musical sounds.” These sounds are then scattered back into the landscape, a dispersal that is stressed with the slant rhyme -ong (contrasting with -ang above) in 溶 *rong* (dissolve), the final word of the section.

Here breath, light and sound come from the landscape of China, and from the poet who sings of it. He draws breath from the movement of water, as it travels through mountains, plains and low lands. But where does his song go? What does it dissolve into? The poem suggests that it turns into a rhythmic force that can encircle, envelop, all of China. The poem ends with these lines:

O warm embrace! Let me sing,  
Fasten myself to your rhythmic dances,  
When people suffer, die for causes, enter sleepily into your hearts,  
Sway, sway, transform into this endless era,  
Their souls, O your unyielding love!

To speak of a "warm embrace"<sup>23</sup> in the context of sound is to describe the movement of vibrations into internal spaces of the body; it suggests the way that rhythmic song moves within us through breath and movement. Here the "you" is second person plural, yet it also seems to be China. As such it is not the singular China of the first section, but a "you" that includes the plurality of all of China. And it is through singing that the "I" may become part of this plurality. Together China and the poet will "sway, sway transform" all those who have died in this era into new power.

In Chinese "Chorus" is 合唱 *hechang*, which means "to sing together." It captures the interconnecting power of sound and shows how it links different kinds of bodies. It brings together the souls of the dead and the bodies of the living; it breaches the

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<sup>23</sup> This notion of the "embrace" appears frequently in Mu Dan's work; I will draw attention to it in "Torch" below. It also appears in "Praise" from 1942, and in the second poem on the 3,000 li journey from Changsha to Kunming, "Walking the Wild Plains," which was written in 1940.



separation between the external and internal. It moves from the air to the earth and even connects light and music. Through sound, there is not loss, but transformation. Song builds the networks of love that can unite China.

In “Chorus” we can see—hear—that Mu Dan has invested great power in the unity of China and in the power of song. It is a clarion call addressed to China and to all who might sing for her. In “Torch Parade,” by contrast, Mu Dan does not sing of China, as a sort of mythic abstraction, but rather attempts to ground his song within the experiences of her people. At the poem’s center is a subject who is immersed in Kunming’s wartime sonic space. We witness his struggles to internalize, to “embrace” 擁抱 *yongbao*, the sounds of the streets around him.

Although “Torch” was written just a few months after “Chorus,” it represents an important shift in Mu Dan’s writing of the war experience. Gone is the call for action. Instead we have a deep uncertainty. It begins with a quatrain in which two haunting voices set the stage for the struggles to come:

Noon. An old, itinerant soldier walks down the street,  
Muttering, gasping, vomiting out curses.

A homeless man from the Northeast sits in the corner of a house,  
Alone, he sings a muffled tune, weeping.

The poem opens with voices that suggest a breakdown in sonic boundaries. Their angry, sad sounds occur, not deep in the night, but publically in the middle of the day. These initial lines underscore the kinds of sonic discordance Mu Dan confronts in the poem.

Unlike “Chorus,” which sings in harmony from mountain heights and valley lows, this poem sounds cacophonous.

In my translation I begin to tune our ears into the different inflections sounds can have by including the Chinese word 轟隆 *honglong*, an onomatopoeia for “rumbling,” within the English lines of the poem. Mu Dan uses the word 轟隆 *honglong*, which generally describes the low rumble of thunder or drums, to illustrate loud, powerful, defiant laughter. Mu Dan’s choice of the word transforms the intent of the laughter from joy or happiness to something militaristic and violent. With the tolling of 轟隆 *honglong*, laughter becomes a sonic force of anger and strength.<sup>24</sup>

Following Mu Dan, I include 轟隆 *honglong* in my translation to draw attention to the context in which he chose to harness the power and strangeness of this sound. But I also use it to stress, as Yoko Tawada reminds us in the introduction, that onomatopoeias are, in a sense, “impossible” to translate. Perhaps this is because they are inherently unstable. As sounds, they are not fixed objects but are always moving, resonating between origin and recipient. They are also only approximations, almost like adjectives that describe sonic qualities—volume, tone, cadence or rhythm—even as they evoke the nebulous relationship between the sensorium and emotions.

By keeping 轟隆 *honglong* in my translation, I wish to mark the fact that it possesses a certain semantic openness. I do not expect readers to hear it as a native speaker would. Indeed, as I will show below, it was used within the context of a larger

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<sup>24</sup> We will see—and hear—the first character in the word, 轟 *hong*, again in chapter 3, in the compound 轟炸 *hongzha*, or “bomb.”

social movement that encouraged resistance against Japanese aggression, and native speakers might no longer hear it with all the force that Mu Dan did when he chose it. My purpose, then, is not to suggest one hear it “rumble” or “roar” as it does in the Chinese poem, but rather to ask the reader to consider the following questions: “What do you hear?” “What can we learn, both about how we listen and about our assumptions of the meanings sounds convey, when we listen to a sound we don’t have a preconceived notion of?” For these are questions I will take up below, and in the chapters that follow.

Here is the poem:

“Torch Parade, Kunming, 1939”

Noon. An old, itinerant soldier walks down the street,

Muttering, blowing air, vomiting out curses.

A homeless man from the Northeast sits in the corner of a house,

Alone, singing a muffled tune, crying.

Yet here blows the breeze of May,

The breeze of May mingled with ashen dust,

The breeze of May flowing in ditches,

The breeze of May trapped in a movie theater

The breeze of May like the spread of malaria-infested mosquitoes,

Giving you warmth in the cold battle, giving you warmth in the cold battle.

Then you see that young man, walking in sunlight,

In his eyes a blank light. What are you afraid of, friend?

He hurries away, without an answer, with a black shadow  
In tight pursuit. You see, you see,  
The old man's curses!

He leans in a leather chair at the coffee shop, blowing out a film of smoke,  
Starts to say, I think a black mist is locking me up... ...  
A silk hat held lightly before red lips, smile, it's noon...  
He sees the sea, bright sea, free sea,  
In a cup of chocolate, in a weary smile, in musical cadences discussing the meaning  
Of life and suffering,  
He wants to sleep, in a cloud of fragrance.

It is noon! Let's open the paper,  
As if head lowered, sweeping distant family graves—  
Blood debt enemy planes madly bombing Chongqing our besieged troops  
All brave sacrificed refugees helping the old and the young  
The arteries of the Dabie Range flood great mountain arteries annihilate enemy blood on  
the eve of battle,  
Let us remember those who have been killed or wounded,  
Use an exclamation mark; act as sources for conversation;  
Let our singing rise, we who will not be slaves

When they press into every alley, street corner, and port,

Shouldering loads, walking beneath streetlights, cold and cheerless,  
Get up at five in the morning, empty bellies giving his tables a polish,  
Smearing our own era black with 10,000 regulated characters,  
Emaciated faces, transport munitions, put the suitcases on the train,  
Give this to your friend moving to Hong Kong—the letter we got says,  
Here you can find everything, do you want to buy cloth and Squibb brand toothpaste!  
When they soak their two legs all day in the fields, moist, dark souls,  
Buried in the ground for how many thousands of years!  
—Sprout, harvest, sprout, harvest;  
Like today, head hanging again, groping in the dark toward home,  
Hitting his wife, hearing the news that Little Brother died in the war.  
  
We sit in the movie theater, we sit in the movie theater,  
You pull open the curtain, see these few bright eyes facing forward,  
Then these few black shadows, these black shadows  
  
Thaw, melt into a nightfall,  
Dim, like a somniloquy in lethargy,  
Humming curses and tears;  
Carrying evil omens, the city sways in the dusk,  
Softly telling the motherland about so many states of mind  
Drunken, timorous, delicate.

Perhaps the next fierce wind will blow her away,

Filling the sky with ash—Who can know!

For this I see the motherland beckon us with thick, solid arms

You with Guangdong accents, Hunan accents, Jiangbei accents, Yunnan accents,  
Dongbei accents, Henan accents, Beijing accents, Shanghai accents, Fuzhou accents...

You who cast aside your homes to come, from overseas, refugees, the well trained

Wearing military clothes for the sacred call, standing bravely in bright daylight,

You who are children, youth, middle aged, elderly, women, you will

Be sacrificed in the bombing

Below, you will lose everything and will obtain everyone

Sing!

Rise from your glasses of chocolate, Rise from your recollections, Rise from your  
shackles, Rise from your deep thoughts, Rise from your hearts of half-warmed tears.

Take off your long robes, forget your magnanimity, kick away your studied  
decorum, Reveal your rough beards, miserable faces, white, weak arms

I need our warm hugs, I need your loud, hearty laughter,

I need you to burn, burn, burn, burn

To mix with the yellow dusk.

The motherland is singing, the motherland's fire is burning,

The wild force of new life is gushing from the motherland's hearty laughter,

轟隆 *honglong*, 轟隆 *honglong*, 轟隆 *honglong*, 轟隆 *honglong*!

The city wall is turned to ruins, the houses collapsed

The death of the old and weak, the young have nothing;  
The motherland is singing, facing the formidable enemy.  
Flinging loud, hearty laughter, line after line after line;  
轟隆 *honglong*, 轟隆 *honglong*, 轟隆 *honglong*, 轟隆 *honglong*!—  
(I see sunlight illuminate all the motherland's open plains,  
Warm plains, green plains, plains overflowing with flowers)  
Use thick, strong hands to build level roads,  
Use thick, strong hands to bring iron and steel from mountain peaks,  
Use thick, strong hands to pull down ancient strongholds,  
Use thick, strong hands to write our new pages,  
(From primitive forests Adam and Eve emerge,  
They have forgotten culture and savagery, life and death, light and darkness)  
Pressing into this torch procession, we emerge from wine shops,  
Our brains steeped in wine, our brains shattered,  
Leaf by leaf shaken down, a symphony in our hearts.  
I say, let's smile, take the torches gently,  
Then the thick smoke confuses your tears. A pair of bare hands  
Closes the building window,  
She feels she has passed through a dark, red corridor.  
Now you go into the house, and then run from the house onto the street,  
Still rubbing your eyes, shouting at those people---  
To wait for your whistle to return.

When I turn my head, I see the road is filled with ash, ash...

Our heads carry the night sky, the empty night a beautiful, ashen blue,  
In the emptiness, God smiles at us; let there be light: and there was light.

Our brains are shattered, leaf after leaf, replaced in our hearts.

一九三九年火炬行列在昆明

正午. 街上走著一個老游擊隊員  
喃喃著，喘著氣，吐出連串的詛咒.  
沒有家的東北人坐在屋隅裡，  
獨自唱著模糊的調子，哭了.

然而這裡吹著五月的春風，  
五月的春風夾在慧沙裡，  
五月的春風在地溝裡流，  
五月的春風關在影戲院，  
五月的春風像瘡蟲的轉播，  
在冷戰中給你熱，在冷戰中給你熱.  
於是我看見這個年輕人，在陽光下面走，  
眼裡有茫然的光. 你怕什麼,朋友？



他疾走，沒有回答，有一個黑影  
在緊緊地追隨.你看，你看，  
老人的詛咒！  
他靠在咖啡店的皮椅裡，蒙了一層煙，  
開始說，我想有個黑煙鎖住了我... ..  
於是一方絲帽輕輕扶上了紅色的嘴唇，笑，這是正午.....  
於是他看見海，明亮的海，自由的海，  
再一杯朱古力在一個疲泛的笑在談著生命的意義和苦難的話聲的節奏裡，  
他想要睡，在一陣香裡.

這是正午！讓我們打開報紙，  
像低頭祭掃遠祖的墳墓——  
血債敵機狂炸重慶我攻城部隊  
全數壯烈犧牲難民扶老携幼  
大別山脈洪大山脈殲敵血戰即將  
展開！.....  
讓我們記住死傷的人類，  
用一個驚嘆號，作為談話的資料；  
讓我們歌唱起來，不願做奴隸的人們  
當他們擠在每條小巷，街角，和碼頭，  
挑著膽子，在冷清的路燈下面走，

早五點起來，空著肚子伏在給他磨光的桌案上，  
用一萬個楷書塗抹了自己的時候，  
枯瘦的臉，搬遠軍火，把行李送上了火車，  
交給你搬到香港去的朋友——來信說，  
這兒很完全，你買不買衣料，和 Squibb 牌的牙膏！  
當他們整天的兩腿泡在田裡，隱濕的靈魂，  
幾千年埋在地下！——抽芽，割去；抽芽，割去；  
如今仍舊垂著頭，摸黑走到家裡，  
打著自己的老婆，聽到弟弟戰死的消息。  
  
我們坐在影戲院裡，我們坐在影戲院裡，  
你把幕帷拉開，看見這些明亮的眼睛向前，  
然而這些黑影，這些黑影  
  
消融，戎進了一個黃昏，  
朦朧，像昏睡裡的夢囈，  
噙著詛咒和哭累；  
帶著惡兆，城在黃昏裡搖，  
向祖國低訴著一百樣心情，  
沉醉的，顫動的嬌弱的。  
也許下一刻狂風把她吹起，  
滿天灰燼——誰能知道！

於是我看見祖國向我們招手，用她粗壯的手臂——  
你們廣東音，湖南音，江北音，雲南音，東北音，河南音，  
北京音，上海音，福州音，……  
你們拋了家來的，海外來的，逃難來的，受嚴格的訓練來的，  
為神經的呼喚而穿上軍衣的，勇敢的站在青天白日底下的，  
你們小孩子，青年人，中年人，老人，婦女，你們就要  
犧牲在炸彈  
下面的，你們就要失掉一切又得一切的人們，  
歌唱！  
從你們的朱古力杯起來，從你們的回憶裡起來，從你們的鎖鏈裡起來，從你們的沈重的思索  
裡起來，從你們半熱的哭淚的心裡起來。  
脫下你們的長衫，忘去你們高貴的風度，踢開你們學來的禮節，露出來你們粗硬的鬍鬚，苦  
難的臉，白弱的手臂  
我需要我們熱烈的擁抱，我需要你們大聲的歡笑，  
我需要你們燃起，燃起，燃起，燃起，  
向黃昏裡沖去。  
祖國在歌唱，祖國的火在燃燒，  
新生的野力涌出了祖國的微笑，  
轟隆轟隆，轟隆，轟隆!——  
城池變做了廢墟，房屋在倒塌，  
衰老的死去，年輕的一無所有；  
祖國在歌唱，對著強大的敵人，

投出大聲的歡笑，一列，一列，一列；

轟隆，轟隆，轟隆，轟隆——

(我看見陽光照遍了祖國的原野，

溫煦的原野，綠色的原野，開滿了花的原野)

用粗壯的手，開闢條條平坦的大路，

用粗壯的手，轉動所有有山峰裡的鋼鐵，

用粗壯的手，拉倒一切過去的堡壘，

用粗壯的手，寫出我們新的書頁，

(從原始的森林裡走出來亞當和夏娃，

他們忘了文明和野蠻，生和死，光和暗)

擠進這火炬的行列，我們從酒店裡走出來，

酒浸著我們的頭腦，我們的頭腦碎裂，

像片片的樹葉搖下，在心裡交響。

我說，讓我們微笑，輕鬆地拿起火炬，

然而濃煙迷出了你的淚。一雙素手

閉上了樓窗，

她覺得她是穿過了紅暗的走廊。

這時候你走到屋裡，又從屋裡跑到街上，

仍舊揉著眼，向著這些人們喊——

等你吹著口哨走回。

當我回過頭去，我看見路上滿是煙灰，煙灰……

我們的頭頂著夜空，夜空美麗而蔚藍，  
在夜空裡上帝向我們笑，要有光，就有了光，  
我們的頭腦碎裂，像片片的樹葉，在心裡交替。

In his analysis of sound spaces of Southern Song China, musicologist Joseph Lam argues that people often attempt to mark out specific “musikscapes” which exist within broader soundscapes (104) in order to create their own sense of place. These “musikscapes” offer insights into how communities “discipline their sonic environments, and how the disciplined environments, in turn, affect their music-making, listening, and negotiating activities” (105). What is so useful about this insight, in the context of Mu Dan’s poem, is that it asks us to consider how difficult, or even impossible, it must have been to “discipline” wartime sonic environments, and how disorienting they were as a result.

In the short quatrain that begins the poem, the soldier and the refugee’s voices are incomprehensible, despairing and angry. They also represent a breach of “sonic discipline,” as they voice their sadness and anger on the streets at high noon.

What is the impact of engaging with these “undisciplined,” or unexpected, inappropriate and unwelcome, sounds? The second stanza carries these questions into the poem with “the breeze of May,” which is also undisciplined. It does not bring warmth, bird songs or the scent of flowers, but dust, stagnation, pestilence and nonsensical logic. It is in this impenetrable environment that the poem’s protagonist first appears, weaving his way through the wind, trying to make sense of his own role within its unexpected terrors.

As if to save himself from the sounds and the “breeze of May” the protagonist hides in a café, feeling trapped, wishing he could escape, even sleep in a “cloud of fragrance.” But the poem won’t allow him sleep. A new stanza interrupts, “It is noon! Let’s open the paper, / Like a lowered head sweeping distant family graves<sup>25</sup>—.” By comparing the act of reading the paper with sweeping distant graves, it comes to symbolize reverence for the dead, as well as an engagement with the plight of China. It takes the young man beyond Kunming, both spatially and temporally, but unlike in “Chorus” this does not happen through abstractions of China’s landscapes, but rather by concrete descriptions of current events.

First there are the bombings of Chongqing and the Battle of Wuhan.<sup>26</sup> These epic tragedies are followed by a call to remember the dead and wounded. The news is such that “we” (the pronoun implies the reader) are compelled to action. “Let us remember those who have been killed or wounded, / Use an exclamation mark; act as sources for conversation; /Let our singing rise, we who will not be slaves.”

This last line evokes the well-known song “The March of the Volunteers,” written by Nieh Er (聶耳 1912-1935; music) and Tian Han (田漢 1898-1968; lyrics) in Shanghai in 1934. The song was featured in the 1935 leftist film 風雲兒女 *Fengyun ernü, Children of the Storm*, about young intellectuals who leave Shanghai to fight the Japanese. It was often cited as a sort of shorthand for the revolutionary songs that were popular throughout China during the war. (It also came to be the national anthem of the People’s Republic

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<sup>25</sup> Mu Dan uses the same term as we saw in “Chorus” above, 祭掃 *jisao*, or “sweeping the tombs.”

<sup>26</sup> For the Battle of Wuhan the Chinese government in Chongqing flooded the Yellow River, causing the death of at least 800,000 people and the displacement of many more.

after Liberation in 1949.) The song's message of an explosive cry of resistance—often sounded by a booming 轟隆 *honglong*—was taken up in many cultural forms, from cinema to music to woodcuts to theater to poetry, especially after the onslaught of war.<sup>27</sup> An example of this that is particularly pertinent to this study of air raids can be found in the poem "It is the Moment, My Fellow Citizens 是時候了，我的同胞! Shi shihou le, we de tongbao," written in 1937 by Guo Dehao (郭德浩, 1909-1987, the famous recitation poet later known by the pen name Gao Lan 高兰). Guo's poem is a song of resistance, written in relatively short lines, with direct address and in simple, rhythmic and rhymed language. It also offers a fascinating example of the sublimation of aerial violence into poetic declamation:

Explode! Explode! Let's become explosions!

All of you who don't want to become the slaves of a vanquished nation!

爆炸！爆炸！爆炸了吧！

一切不願作亡國奴的人們喲！

In his poem Guo transforms the "exploding" 爆炸 *baozha* of bombs from a marker of violence and devastation into a powerful call to arms. Bombing is no longer something that happens to the speaker and his fellow citizens; it becomes a power that they take over and control. This shift in agency occurs through the addition of two verbal particles, 了 *le* and 吧 *ba*, after the verb. In the phrase 爆炸了吧 *baozha le ba*, 了 *le* inflects the verb,

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<sup>27</sup> Xiaobing Tang offers a description of the force, momentum and breadth of this roar of resistance in his conclusion to *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement*, in which he discusses "The March of the Volunteers" and its part in the greater cultural movements so vividly described by Li Hua's 1935 print "Roar, China!"

suggesting a change, i.e.: “become bombs,” while 吧 *ba* adds a tone of suggestion to the verb akin to “let’s.”<sup>28</sup> Together they change the verb from “爆炸! Baozha!” “Explode!” to “爆炸了吧” “Let’s explode!” or “Let’s become explosions!”<sup>29</sup> Guo’s transformation is made with reference to “The March of the Volunteers,” and Tian Han’s lyrics, “Arise, all of you who refuse to be slaves!” “起來! 不願做奴隸的人們! *Qilai! Bu yuan zuo nuli de ren men,*” become “Let’s turn into explosions/ All of you who don’t want to become slaves in a vanquished nation!”

This kind of poetic sublimation of air raids within revolutionary verse was used by poets around China during war. We find it, for example, in the work of Hu Feng, who was based in Chongqing and Tian Jian, who was active in with the Communist Party in Yan’an. In Mu Dan’s “Torch Parade” it marks an important transformation for the young man. He is now confronting another kind of sound, songs of revolution or resistance. This compels him to consider his identity, a shift that is marked by a change from the third person singular to first person plural.<sup>30</sup> The singular “he” becomes incorporated into the plural “we.”

Indeed, the complicated nature of the multiplicity of voices present in wartime Kunming is detailed in the stanza that follows, which presents snippets of the many different ways that people have been affected by war. There are the urban refuges, those who rose early and pressed toward trains, wishing they could get back to their normal lives,

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<sup>28</sup> This is in contrast with “Chorus,” in which the “I” was able to draw directly from the natural landscape. Here joining the voices of the people of wartime China will prove to be more difficult.

<sup>29</sup> I will discuss these particles at length in chapter 3, showing how they might be included in English translations.

<sup>30</sup> Mu Dan frequently shifts between pronouns in his poetry from this period. We will see similar movements in chapter 2.



which now seem exotic (Squibb brand toothpaste!). And there are farmers, who carry on as before in the land their forefathers worked, and yet who receive the news of a brother's death.<sup>31</sup>

As if the young protagonist does not yet know what to do with the information he perceives, he does not address these stories and their implications. Instead there is a stanza break. "We" are sitting in a movie theater, or, if we translate the term literally from the Chinese, a theater for "shadow plays" 影戲 *yingxi*. I cite the quatrain, which is strange and evocative:

We sit in the movie theater, we sit in the shadow theater,  
You pull open the curtain, see these few bright eyes facing forward,  
Then these few black shadows, these black shadows

This section begins with a repetition, but rather than suggest a kind of sonic thread—as repetition did in "Chorus"—it has the effect of disjunctive stuttering, like a broken record player, or a malfunctioning film reel. And indeed something does seem wrong with this theater, for not only is it a venue for "shadow plays," it is also filled with shadows. Are they the shadows of the film? Or are they the shadows of the audience? These questions are further complicated by the fact that it is a "you," who pulls back the curtain and shifts the perspective.<sup>32</sup> Who is looking? Who is being seen? What is real? What is only shadow, only image?

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<sup>31</sup> The story of this family, and the death of the younger brother, is found also in Mu Dan's poem "From Emptiness to Fullness."

<sup>32</sup> This shift is reminiscent of Mu Dan's "Ancient Wall 古牆 *Gu qiang*" from 1937, in which we both see the wall, and the wall sees its surroundings.

We might imagine young intellectuals, like the lost young man, sitting in the movie theater. They gaze forward, waiting for the newsreels, romantic comedies, or perhaps even films that call for action. But as they sit and watch they must confront their relationship to those who have suffered in the war. They also must confront China, for it is she ("you," the motherland) that pulls back the curtain. Suddenly instead of them gazing upon her, she gazes upon them, and beneath her gaze the "we" either become "shadows," which "thaw, melt into a nightfall," and turn into the indistinct *sounds* that carry through the city, like "evil omens." Or they unite with the company of the many voices, and sing with those who have joined the fight:

You with Guangdong accents, Hunan accents, Jiangbei, Yunnan, Dongbei Accents,

Henan, Beijing, Shanghai and Fuzhou accents...

You who cast aside your homes to come, from overseas, refugees, the well trained

You who wear uniforms for the sacred call, who stand bravely in bright daylight,

You who are children, youth, middle aged, elderly, women, you will

Be sacrificed in the bombing

Below, you will lose everything and obtain everyone

Sing!

Here the lines begin with a multitude of accents, which represent both the diversity of the population who are joining the fight for China, as well as the many refugees who find themselves in the city. This is not the vast landscape of a sacred China, as in "Chorus," but the voices of the many people who come from those lands. But, just as in "Chorus" these

voices are instructed to "Sing! 歌唱 *gechang*." For indeed with his lineation Mu Dan puts 歌唱 *gechang* in contrast with the term "bomb" *zhadan* 炸彈 from two lines above:

犧牲在炸彈 (*zhadan*)

下面的，你們就要失掉一切又得一切的人們，

歌唱 (*gechang*)!

Be sacrificed in the bombing

Below, you will loose everything and will obtain everyone

Sing!

Like Guo Dehao, Mu Dan makes the connection between the bombing and the rise of song, although for Mu Dan the sacrifice is given in no uncertain terms, "You will loose everything and obtain everyone." But even these high stakes seem worthwhile. "Rise from your glasses of chocolate," the poem calls out, "Rise from your recollections, Rise from your shackles/ Rise from your deep thoughts, Rise from your hearts of half-warmed tears." Separating himself from this group the "I" cries out to the others he wishes to join: "I need our warm embrace, I need your hearty laughter, / I need you to burn, burn, burn / to rise through the dusk."

Like in "Chorus," sound has become an "embrace." It has become the conduit between networks of people engaged in a common fight. And from this embrace comes a new kind of sound: songs of resistance. The stanza that follows sings of rumbling laughter 轟隆 *honglong*, 轟隆 *honglong*, 轟隆 *honglong*, 轟隆 *honglong*, and the strength and power of the "rough hands" of a unified China. For fourteen lines, the poem sings resistance, culminating in four lines heavy in repetitive rhythm. These lines detail the

victories that can be obtained with the unity of “thick, strong hands,” except, perhaps, for the last one: “Use thick, strong hands to write our new pages.” By breaking off the rhythm here, the poem suggests that something is wrong. Can thick, strong hands write new pages? What kinds of pages will be written?

The story of Adam and Eve from the Bible follows. One may be struck by the strangeness of this abrupt shift from “strong, thick arms” to Adam and Eve’s fall from grace, but the particular mythology of this story, in which Paradise is lost because of the acquisition of knowledge, indicates the cause of the poem’s breakdown. Adam and Eve are the ultimate transgressors because of their knowledge. Having “forgotten” the binaries that controlled their previous existence, they waded into a world that is much more complicated than the Paradise they knew before. It is knowledge then—this sense of one’s own identity as distinct from God (a unifying power)—that has destroyed the rhythm of the rough hands, the unifying sonic power of song.

With this shift the “I” realizes that he is still distinct from those around him. He does not have coarse hands. Yet, there is still the hope that something can be gained from the splintering. Perhaps a symphony 交響 *jiaoxiang*<sup>33</sup> of many different voices can grow from it, as “leaf after leaf” fall from a tree? This image suggests the last hope for unity in disintegration, as people go through the motions of an air raid, as they run “in and out of buildings,” through “a dark corridor” and are called to wait for a signal for return.

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<sup>33</sup> The Chinese word for “symphony” is 交響 *jiaoxiang*. It is composed of two characters, 交 *jiao*, which means “mixing” or “intersecting” and 響 *xiang*, which means “sound.”

After the air raid, however, the “I” does not *hear* song, that force that might unify China, but rather *sees* ash—the fallout of violence. The poem again cites the Bible and the book of Genesis, this time from the very beginning: “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (*King James* 1:3). The Biblical verse is about the beginning, the creation of the world. But in this context the gift of light seems almost ironic, for the light is made of bombs and fire. If creation is to come, it will come after the fall. If China is to be born again, it must rise from shattered pieces, for it cannot come from unified song. With its inclusion of 交替 *jiaoti*, “replace” or “supersede,” the last line echoes the earlier call for a 交響 *jiaoxiang*, “symphony,” and yet is irrevocably different. For rather than coming together to create a symphony, it is as if each “leaf” were superseded by the next. Now all must be replaced, for now everything is broken. The poem ends in shattered silence. The singing of “Chorus” is nowhere to be heard.

This shattered silence recalls Lu Xun’s “speaking silence” for what a lot we can hear within it. In contrast with “Chorus,” which elaborates on the possibilities of song to save the nation from fall, “Torch” suggests that in wartime Kunming unity is both elusive and illusive, whether within an individual’s psyche, an aspect that I will explore this further in chapter 2, or among many different individuals. And indeed an important element of “Torch” is how it maps out the many kinds of sounds that were resonating through Kunming. In the contrast between the lines of free verse, the lines rumbling with 轟隆 *honglong*, or taut with repetition, we hear the tension between the word sounds that reflect how challenging it is to describe the impact of *a-ordinary sounds, remembered sounds* and even *sounds of resistance* at a time when *violent sounds* are shaping the sonic

space. The difference in the lines suggests how sounds remain “undisciplined,” unprocessed and strange, so much so that all attempts to organize them are ultimately abandoned.

In addition, in wartime, as in peacetime, we see how one’s identity is formed by negotiating many kinds of sounds. In the space of wartime Kunming, subjects had to come to terms with the ways that they and their communities were affected by violence. And they had to consider how to engage with these changes. Should they sing? Could they sing? Or could they only vomit out curses?

Now I would like to turn to Zhou Dingyi’s poem “Listening to Rain 聽雨 *Ting yu*,” and its suggestion of how one might negotiate *a-ordinary* and *remembered sounds* during the war. I conclude this chapter with his poem because its evocation of listening opens up another means to understand the complexity of Kunming’s sonic space.

Before I turn to the poem, I would like to give some attention to the term 空襲 *kongxi* or air raid, as it is an important element of my translation. It is a neologism, which appears to have come into general usage in the early 1930s, that combines the characters for “air” or “sky,” 空 *kong*, and “raid,” 襲 *xi*. (Before this time, the terms 爆炸 *baozha*, “bomb” or “explode/explosion,” and 轟擊 *hongji*, “bomb” or “attack with cannons,” were used to describe bombing attacks of ships, vehicles or buildings.) As testament to the term’s unfamiliarity, we find it featured in a 1934 column, “A Selected Explanation of New Terminology,” which ran in the Shanghai-based *Readers Weekly* (讀書週報 *Du shu zhoubao*):

## Air Raid (空襲 *kongxi*)

An “air raid” is a kind of military operation that uses airplanes flying in the sky to raid (a surprise attack) on cities. In the present war, aviation already holds an important position; bombs can be dropped from airplanes, or release poisoned gas, creating interference for enemy army encampments and the rear. This creates a disorder at the army’s core from which victory can be won. In regards to this kind of “air raid” one cannot ignore preventative measures, this is called “anti-aircraft defense.” (2)

According to this passage, both the term and experience were new to the Shanghai public in 1934. This general unfamiliarity with air raids is suggested not only by the fact that the term necessitates definition, but also because the passage puts air raids at such a distance. At this time, in Shanghai, air raids were an abstract military strategy.<sup>34</sup>

In “Listening to Rain,” however, air raids are no longer an abstraction. Indeed, Zhou Dingyi’s poem reminds us of how quickly associations with the word 空襲 *kongxi* would have been changing throughout the 1930s. If in 1934 Shanghai the neologism required explanation in a weekly newspaper, by 1937, when the Japanese were bombing large expanses of the Chinese coast and interior, this kind of abstract discussion would have no longer been needed. I include 空襲 *kongxi* in my translation to remind us of the

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<sup>34</sup> This distance is underlined by the paragraph that follows the term’s definition. It reads, “Currently, there is already talk stirring about a second world war, [in which] Japan most fears Russian and American planes coming to air raid. In an instant Tokyo or Kobe could become scorched earth, so they are practicing anti-air raid drills with great enthusiasm, to the point of recent reports that American aviation circles fear the possibility that Japanese planes could raid New York City.” The passage suggests that *Japan* might be bombed, rather than the fact that air raids were *already occurring* in the north of China.

historical specificity of Zhou's situation. For, as we will hear in Zhou's evocation of 空襲 *kongxi* on a day of rain, they are now an everyday reality.

Zhou is not generally known as a poet, but a scholar. Indeed his work in the 1950s, including the standardization of the simplified characters that came to be the official written language of the PRC (People's Republic of China), was important to the creation of a new national language. While he was a student at Lianda, Zhou was friendly with Mu Dan and Zhao Ruihong and also a member of the school's literary clubs. As a student of Chinese literature, Zhou was familiar with how poets in the Chinese tradition, and the greats come to mind: Du Fu, Su Shi, had written poems that invite us to listen to different kinds of rain: spring rain, autumn rain, fine rain, heavy rain, stormy rain. In Zhou's poem, however, the sound of rain returns to us in an unexpected movement.

Listening to Rain

I am someone who loves the rain,

Sitting alone,

The window closed, I listen

Sha, sha, sha...

It drums on roof tiles,

Desolate and cool, indifferent

But also cheerful, exuberant.

So I smoke a cigarette

And listen to distant thunder.

I think of plants in the countryside,



Also feeling slightly drunk;  
And perhaps between thatched scholars' huts  
the scent of rain drifts?  
If holding an umbrella,  
Walking where fields crisscross;  
If shouldering two buckets of rice,  
Resting beneath the eaves;  
If someone watches the sky,  
Lost in thought;  
If pushing open the door,  
Suddenly someone comes in;  
You brush off your wet hair,  
And speaking in the haze, say:  
"A spell of heavy rain is nice, eh  
We don't have to worry about 空襲 kongxi."

聽雨

我是愛雨的，  
當獨自坐著，  
閉著窗戶聽。  
沙，沙，沙... ..  
它打在瓦上的，

是淡然的淒涼，  
但又很酣暢。  
於是吸一支菸，  
聽雷聲在遠處響。  
我想四野的草木，  
也微有醉意了，  
而竹籬茅舍間，  
正飄著雨香吧？  
假若打一把傘，  
在阡陌間走；  
假若挑一擔米，  
歇在屋簷下；  
假若有一個人，  
望著天發呆；  
假若推開門，  
忽然有人來；  
你掠一下濕的頭髮，  
在煙霧裡說著話：  
“好一場大雨呵，  
這可不怕空襲。”

I love how sounds and images bounce around in this poem (re-sound in it, echo in it), like rain drops themselves, especially in its second half, when it moves through the series of

"if" clauses. But before I examine this movement, which culminates in 空襲 *kongxi*, let me ground my reading, as I did above, in a more standard analysis.

In Zhou's poem the lines are short, most are five or six syllables long. The shortest is the fourth line with its onomatopoeic, "sha sha sha," a soft sound, which rather than evoke the pitter patter of rain drops (drip, drip, drop, in Chinese 滴瀝滴瀝 *dili dili*), calls to mind a soft rain in a gentle wind. (Perhaps Tawada's *shitoshito*?) The longest line is fourth from the end, just before that transformative final couplet.

While some lines are marked with end rhyme, there is also strong internal rhyme. You can hear both, for example, in these two lines: 是淡然的淒涼／但又很酣暢, *shi danran de qiliang/dan you hen hanchang*. I translate these lines as, "Desolate and cool, indifferent/ But also cheerful, exuberant," to echo the repeated –an and –ang sounds, and stress the contrast between two very different emotive qualities.

The second half of the poem, after the question that refers explicitly to a poetic milieu 而竹籬茅舍間，／正飄著雨香吧? *er zhuli maozhe jian / zheng piaoze xiangyu ba?* "Perhaps between thatched scholars' huts/ the scent of raindrops drifts?" uses a repetitive structure, beginning every other line with 假若 *jiaruo*," "if, supposing." This structure creates a new rhythm that builds towards the end of the poem. 你掠一下濕的頭髮, *ni lue yixia shi de toufa*, 8 syllables／在煙霧裡說著話, *zai yanwu li shuozhe hua*, 7／"好一場大雨呵, *hao yichang da yu, ah*, 6／這可不怕空襲. *zhe kebupa kongxi* 6," "You brush off your wet hair, /And speaking in the haze, say: / "A spell of heavy rain is nice, eh, /We don't have to worry about 空襲." Here I made my translation a little wordier than it needs to be, to trace the building effect of syllables. I also translated the direct spoken quality of the

last two lines and the end rhyme, which we find moving not only between the English “say” and “eh” but into a slant rhyme with the Chinese *xi*, pronounced like “she.”

Through this brief analysis, I hope you can hear that the “word sounds,” the rhythm and rhyme of the language, have their own meanings. But to recall Yoko Tawada, and her “dark treasure trove between language and the audible,” how do the word sounds reverberate with references to the physical environment? How does the poem reflect culturally mediated ideas about what rain, and a poem about rain, should sound like? Zhou Dingyi creates meaning by moving between “word sounds” and “content sounds,” between “content sounds” and images, as the poem bounces from poetic references (thatched huts), to an actual sonic environment (rain on the rooftops) to expectations for the poetic treatments of rain itself (a solitary listener).

The poem begins with a declarative and a subject: 我是愛雨的 *Wo shi ai yu de*, “I am someone who loves the rain.” This is the subject/persona by whom all the sounds in the poem are perceived (including the comment from the “you” at the end). He seems to be an intellectual, rather than, say, a farmer working in the fields, as he listens to the rain from inside his home, smoking a cigarette, enjoying it as he imagines it falling between “scholars’ huts.”

From this perspective the sounds in the first half of the poem seem fairly ordinary. We can readily imagine the sound of the rain through a closed window; the rain on roofs; the inhale/exhale of breathing, emphasized by smoking; the silence of thought. We also are not surprised by the sounds outside the room. There is thunder in the distance, the sound of rain on plants.

In other words, these sonic references are speaking to both a specific environment, as well as to expectations of what an intellectual might hear/listen to in this environment. There is the sound of the rain itself, but we also hear what an intellectual would be expected to notice: a peaceful room, a mind that can hear both “indifference” and “cheerfulness” in the natural world, someone who imagines his cigarette smoke mixing with the scent of rain. In other words, in the first half of the poem, the sound of rain reverberates with cultural expectations of a scholar’s enjoyment of a peaceful, rainy day soundscape.

But then the “if” clauses begin. They take us outside the room, and although they introduce new subjects, these subjects are seen only indistinctly, as if at a distance, or again, through the gaze of an intellectual. Who is walking the crisscross of fields? Who is carrying rice? The subjects are unspecified and silent, their presence evoked only by their relationship to the rain. These brief sketches are interrupted when, “someone,” or “you,” abruptly comes in and shaking off the silence speaks “through the haze,” with a brusque and colloquial, “A spell of heavy rain is nice, eh,” followed by “We don't have to worry about 空襲 *kongxi*.”

In using this relatively new and foreign term 空襲 *kongxi*, rather than the more conversational 轟炸 *hongzha*, or “bomb,” Zhou Dingyi suggests this person interrupting might also be an intellectual, a friend perhaps. But it is not only for this elevated register that 空襲 is strange. It is also strange because it is spoken, and very distinct, after a rhythmic poem filled with hazy images. It bounces us back into the poem, and we find that its sounds and meanings have suddenly shifted. We hear the poem differently (word

sounds); we hear the rain differently (content sounds), and we understand the subject of the poem differently.

As when Lu Xun saw the world differently beneath the hum of the planes, here we listen to the poem's rain differently. In so doing, we begin to wonder about the poetic subject: What does he love about the rain? Does he love it because he can be alone—not crammed with others in an air raid shelter? Is it because he has time to think of the past, a peaceful past, poets before him, the natural world? Does the rain mark a return to his past, or to his hometown, left behind? Does the rain sound different to him now than it did before the war?

In suggesting these questions, this poem is asking us to listen to different levels of sound, from its vibrating presence, to the environment within which it occurs, to cultural expectations about what rain, and poems about rain, sound like. It asks us to consider what the concept of *a-ordinary sounds* means. It asks us to listen to the absence of planes.

The poem had begun by presenting what we expect: a peaceful soundscape—raindrops falling quietly, thunder rumbling distantly. But Zhou only created this soundscape to underline its twist at the end. With the last two lines, the poem transforms the meaning of sound of the rain completely. And what we listen for changes. We hear the rain for its meaning in Kunming during wartime, when it marks a time without worry, a time of without 空襲.

Mu Dan and Zhou Dingyi's poems bring us into communication with the many complexities of the war experience. The poets offer unique testaments about how they

listened, just as their aesthetic creations suggest ways that we might listen. I have placed their poems together to show how attention to sonic spaces can open up questions about the complexities of poetic texts. Perhaps, if we follow Lu Xun and train our ears to the space that opens as we listen from clarion calls, to cacophonous streets, to the sound of planes, to “speaking silences” to 轟隆 *honglong* and 空襲 *kongxi*, we might begin to better understand that turbulent time and place.

In the chapters that follow I continue to listen closely for how the poets expressed real-world and poetic complexity, even as I engage the differences between Chinese and English ever more intently. In chapter 2, I explore Mu Dan’s poem “Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter” for its meditation of the effects of air raids on an individual’s sense of self. In chapter 3, I consider the way time is expressed in Zhao Ruihong’s poem “Kunming, Spring 1940.” Finally, in chapter 4, I read the last poem in Feng Zhi’s collection *Sonnets* for the ways it opens up an intertextual space in which to understand the many kinds of ideas that reverberate through the poetry of the period.

## Chapter 2

I [ ] 我:

Translating the Subject in Mu Dan's Poem "Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter"

我笑，是我。  
I smile, it is I.  
I smile; it's me.  
I smile; I am I

Mu Dan 穆旦  
"Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter"

The poem in which the above Chinese line, which I have failed to translate, appears is called "防空洞裡的抒情詩 *Fangkongdong li de shuqing shi*" or "Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter." It was written by Mu Dan (穆旦, 1918-1977) in 1939, when he was a student at Southwestern Associated University, or Lianda, in Kunming, China, at a time when the Imperial Japanese Air Force was bombing the city regularly.

Mu Dan's poem suggests the effects of these raids on the 我 *wo*, usually translated as "I," "me," or "myself." In this chapter, I take this single line 我笑，是我 *wo xiao, shi wo*, which is "impossible" to translate, and use the very difficulty of translating the line to demonstrate the various meanings of the Chinese, before coming to a conclusion about how a single English translation might indicate its many meanings.



The line occurs about two thirds through the poem, after our sense of the identities of the people in it has been scrambled by cryptic shifts between pronouns, and by movement between the free verse lines that describe the air raid shelter and a sonnet that sings of a hallucinatory dream world. As we saw above, the line 我笑，是我 *wo xiao, shi wo* begins and ends with 我 *wo*, but the emphasis is not only in the repetition. We also find, perhaps especially when we try to translate it, that the line emphasizes the 我 *wo* by omitting the subject of the second clause.

The first clause is clear enough: 我笑 *wo xiao*; "I smile" or "I laugh." The second half of the line, however, isn't as clear. First, there isn't a subject. Chinese doesn't need to have one to be grammatical, so Mu Dan omits it. The sentence is complete with only the verb-object. Second, Chinese verbs don't conjugate, so 是 *shi*, "to be," doesn't offer clues about what the subject might be. This makes the exact meaning of the sentence unclear, even as it is a completely natural phrase. 是我 *shi wo* is what you would say when you answer the phone: Who is it? It's me 是我 *shi wo*.

But I'm not answering the phone; I'm trying to translate this line, and I want to know more. Should I translate it: "I am I" or "This is me" or "It's me"? Where is the emphasis? Should the line sound natural or strange? I need to know more.

As we saw in chapter 1, Mu Dan's poetry is complex, rich in nuance and large in scope. "Chorus" lifted us up to the loftiest heights of expression, while "Torch Parade, Kunming 1939" brought us into contact with the many inhabitants of Kunming's wartime streets. In my discussion of those poems, I focused upon the range of emotions and experiences Mu Dan depicts in his presentations of China and wartime Kunming, but I put

aside another important aspect of his work: his probing deconstruction of the individual subject. Critic Liang Bingjun writes that especially in his early work (of which the poems that follow are a part), we see an intense exploration of subjectivity. He adds, “the difference between Mu Dan and the earlier generation of poets, indeed the source of his modernism, is his conscious and complicated poetic experimentation with the ‘I’” (47). Similarly, poet and scholar Tang Shi writes, “We must take the ‘I’ as a point of departure for understanding Mu Dan’s poetry. This ‘I’ is a ‘shattered fragment,’ eternally hoping for its completion” (94). Xiao Ying reads “the ‘I’ in [Mu Dan’s] work to be interwoven with contradiction and conflict. [...] The comprehension and contemplation of the crisis of the subject [an asking of ‘Who am I’] is the element of Mu Dan’s poetry that created an entirely new consciousness in Chinese poetry” (87). The comments of these critics are instructive, for they suggest that the question of how to translate this line is an important one.

This chapter will revolve around Mu Dan’s 我 *wo*. In it I consider various translation possibilities. I also explore how this practice of translating allows us to hear Mu Dan’s account of the effects of air raids on subjectivity. But before I attempt to pin down 我笑, 是我 *wo xiao, shi wo*, I’d like to translate another of Mu Dan’s poems, written in 1940, called, appropriately enough, “我” or “I.”<sup>35</sup> Through it will I will consider differences between 我 *wo* and I, and explore strategies for translating the important line in “Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter.”

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<sup>35</sup> For the sake of clarity, in this chapter I will refer to the poem as “我” and my translation of this poem as “I;” both in quotes. I will leave 我 and I unpunctuated when I refer to them as objects of analysis.

Here's my translation:

I

Cut from the womb, deprived of warmth,  
A badly damaged piece is desperate for rescue;  
The self is always [pause] locked in wasted plains;

[Who?] leaves inert dreams and the rest,  
Pain, in the flow of time, with nothing to hold;  
Recurring memories can't return the self;

Cry together when [who?] happens upon an other;  
It is the mad happiness of first love, wanting to break the bars,  
Reaching out two hands, and embracing only a self

fantasized form, is deeper despair.  
The self is always [pause] locked in wasted plains,  
Hating the dreams that mother fractured forth.

我<sup>36</sup>

從子宮割裂，失去了溫暖，

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<sup>36</sup> Mu Dan's poems have been collected in various editions. I am using the 1947 edition of *Mu Dan's Collected Works (1939-1945)*, which he collated and edited himself.

是殘缺的部分渴望著救援，  
永遠是自己，鎖在荒野裡，

從靜止的夢裡離開了群體，  
痛感到時流，沒有什麼抓住，  
不斷的回憶帶不回自己，

遇見部分時候在一起哭喊，  
是春戀的狂喜，想衝出樊籬，  
伸出雙手來抱住了自己

幻想的形象，是更深的絕望。  
永遠是自己，鎖在荒野裡，  
仇恨著母親給分出了夢境。

Perhaps because of my intense desire to translate this poem well, I have come to read it as an allegory for translation. Its study of the piece, broken from the whole with which it is desperate to reconnect, makes me think of the process of translation: First, we break the poem away from the original language, searching for its help even as we leave it behind. Then there is this feeling of floating, of movement into something that is neither the new language nor the old one. There is little to hold onto. Finally we catch a glimpse of what it might hold onto, only to realize that the translation is always only itself.

But Mu Dan most likely didn't intend this kind of reading. Considered with his other poems from the period, it would be about the birth of identity. Mu Dan himself suggests this in his own translation of the poem. This is his English version, which was published, undated, in a posthumous edition of his collected works:

Myself

Split from the womb, no more in warmth,  
An incomplete part am I, yearning for help,  
Forever myself, locked in the vast field,

Separated from the body of Many, out of a still dream,  
I ache in the flow of Time, catching hold of nothing,  
Incessant recollections do not bring back me.

Meeting a part of me, we cry together,  
The mad joy of first love, breaking out of prison,  
I stretch both hands only to embrace

An image in my heart, which is deeper despair,  
Forever myself, locked in the vast field,  
Hate mother for separating me from the dream.

In many ways Mu Dan's translation is illuminating. His rendering of "the body of the Many" and his "ache in the flow of Time, catching hold of nothing," with their intentional

capitalization, underline scholar Jiayan Mi's allegorical reading of the poem, as a narrative about the crisis of an individual in a time of momentous change. He places the poem's splintered I in contrast with other Chinese poets, most notably Guo Moruo, who in his 1921 collection *The Goddesses* sang of the 我 as a new kind of modern subject—a space for creation and creativity. Guo's 我 was a powerful, passionate self that would be able to take control, not only of his individual fate, but also of the fate of the Chinese nation. Mu Dan's poem “我,” on the other hand, written twenty years later, records the implications of this “freed self.” Its subject is the “problematic modern self who is newly split from its motherhood (read as native origin, great tradition, and collective history) is always a condition of anxiety, loneliness, pain, and exile. The poem ‘I’ is the most powerful poem that illustrates the existential condition of the modern I” (250). This allegorical reading of “我” attests to Mu Dan's engagement in Chinese intellectuals' struggles to create their own histories, and their own place in a world that has become international on unequal terms.

But Mu Dan's translation brings up other important questions. What do we make, for example, of the fact that he translated “我” as “Myself” and included the pronoun I in the poem, even though the original poem did not? To me, this emphasizes the self as an object of analysis and indicates that the anguished I within the poem needs to be understood as one part, one piece, of an individual. It also suggests that this poem is not only allegorical. It is a record of a personal exploration, which comes to a climax in the strained despair created by the strong enjambment between the third and fourth stanzas.

In Mu Dan's translation:

I stretch both hands only to embrace

An image in my heart, which is deeper despair,

Or, in my translation,

Reaching out two hands, and embracing only a self

fantasized form, is deeper despair.<sup>37</sup>

This enjambment is the strongest breakage in the poem's structure, which, in the Chinese version, Mu Dan carefully created with caesuras that emphasize brokenness. But this is not to be found in his translation, only in his original poem.

In fact Mu Dan's translation might not be the best possible representation of the poem for we can't hear within it what the original makes us hear.<sup>38</sup> In the first stanza, for example, the first and third lines are marked by a central pause, which divide two modifying clauses, whose subject is not clear until the second line, "From the womb cut, Having lost warmth 從子宮割裂，失去了溫暖 *Cong zigong gelie, shiqu le wennuan/* is a shattered piece longing for rescue 是殘缺的部分渴望著救援 *shi canque de bufen kewangzhe jiuyuan.*" The third line then offers what comes to be the poem's refrain, "The self is always [pause] locked in wasted plains 永遠是自己 *yongyuan shi ziji*，鎖在荒野裡 *suo*

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<sup>37</sup> The differences between his rendering and mine are possible—again—because 是 *shi* is not preceded by a subject.

<sup>38</sup> I am not faulting Mu Dan. He would have had his own intentions in translating the poem. Nevertheless, as is often true, we might note that the strangest parts of his translation mark places of particular difficulty in the text. See the last line, for example: His subject-less "Hate mother for separating me from the dream" shows precisely how unclear it is who is doing the hating.

*zai huangye li.*" Rhyme is important not only in this refrain, but also throughout the poem. Both parts of the refrain, before and after the caesura, end with a long "e," a sound that is brought over into the first and final line of the second stanza, the second and third lines of the third stanza, and the middle line of the final stanza, which again contains the refrain. This long-e is echoed in a slant rhyme in the final word of the poem, 夢境 *mengjing*, which ends with an -ing sound.

This structure creates the sense of a pattern that is constantly broken between syntactically flowing lines and caesuras, and between the unrhymed lines and those that end in "e." This gives the poem a tension that makes the lines that end in "e" (including the refrain) seem facile. They sound too short, too hemmed in by their endings, and, in their repetition, they become singsong-like. By contrast, the lines that don't rhyme are woven into the poem like echoes, like whispered remarks or short digressions, to remind us that unity cannot be sustained. By the end, the rhyme sounds like false assurance, like a sonic reminder of a hope that cannot be.<sup>39</sup>

In my translation, I have followed this same pattern of caesura, so that we can hear the internal breakage. And I've also worked to make the contrast between the singsong and the echoes clear. This way we not only read the poem as unstable; we hear it as such.

In addition, despite his focus on the I, Mu Dan never uses the word 我 in the Chinese poem. While the title suggests its presence, it is absent from the verse itself. In

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<sup>39</sup> This is also represented in the poem semantically, as the subject moves from "longing" or "ardent hope" 渴望 *kewang* in the second line to "hopelessness" 絕望 *juewang* in the third to last line. The second character in both of these compounds is 望 *wang*, which means to see into the distance, and has the extended meaning of "hope." Here the first term is literally a compound for "thirsty hope," while the second is "cut hope" or "hope cut short."



fact, the poem doesn't include any pronouns. As I explained above, they aren't needed for a sentence to be grammatical, and so, for reasons I'll discuss below, in poetry, they often are not included. But how does one translate lines without pronouns?

More than once, as I worked through my translation of “我,” I wanted to add a pronoun. Take the first two lines of the third stanza as an example. “Cry together when [who?] happens upon an another 遇見部分時候在一起哭喊 *yujian bufen shihou zai yiqi kuhan.*” To translate directly, the line reads: “When [ ] meet the piece[s] cry together.” Since it's without a pronoun, it could read: “When you meet the pieces” or “When it meets the pieces” or, “When I meet the pieces.”

So why did I choose to use [who?]: “Cry together when [who?] happens upon an another”? Why not include pronouns, like Mu Dan did?

First I want to underline the differences both between my translation “I” and Mu Dan's poem “我” and between the pronouns I and 我. His “我” cannot be my “I,” as closely as I might want to use his poem as a model. “我” contains its own pieces, and while my “I” is created from a web of connections that starts with those pieces, it is written by I (me), not Mu Dan's 我. My “I” cannot be Mu Dan's “我.” I am not Mu Dan. And this is true, not only in our positions within time and space, or in our webs of connections, but also in the ways we hear and sound. For a person also has her own way of listening—what she hears, what her ears are attuned to, how sensitive they are, as well as the sonic memories that she has come to know. The way she talks and moves in the world. This is the case for a poet as well as for a translator, the translation as well as the poem.

As I translate, I want to think about the sound of “我” and the sound of “I,” remembering (and reminding you) that it is I who hears “我” and writes “I.” I cannot rewrite “我,” but I can write an “I” that reverberates with it, and I can explore what considering the two languages together can teach us. As I’ve written “I,” I’ve taken these sonic signals into consideration, especially the breakage of the lines. I’ve also focused on the possibilities offered by the non-existent pronouns. As you can see in my translation above, rather than choose one, I’ve decided to use brackets. To write: [who?]. I like this solution, although I argue with myself about it. I say—and it’s a good argument—that a translated poem should be just as lovely as the original. I remind myself that the greatest disservice a translator can do is to make the poem clunky, ugly. If it’s not even a poem, then how on earth is a reader to even begin to appreciate it (notwithstanding all that’s lost in meaning).

I counter myself: First, I’m not sure “[who?]” is unlovely. Second, and more importantly, I remind myself to be careful about defining poetic-ness. Sometimes, often, a poem helps us see something in a new way, or think about something in a new way, or to hear something in a new way. It is the snags that teach us, the snags that come with language play. *And*, translation is a place where this language play can come through, if I let it. So I decide for me “I” revolves around the question of “[who?].” This is what I am listening to in terms of the poem’s message and possibility.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Another choice would be to render the lines so that, syntactically, they didn’t need a subject. Something like: When meeting the piece[s], cry together / It is the mad happiness of first love, wanting to rush the fences.” I don’t think this is lovely. I also think its confusing and doesn’t suggest the poem’s question very well.

I also remind myself that Chinese writers make aesthetic choices for very specific reasons; choices that I can respect through my creative practice. Indeed because this lack of pronouns is a common complaint for those of us who translate between Chinese and English, it is often smoothed over rather than fully engaged.<sup>41</sup> Yet poets have chosen this elision for the effect we see above. They don't have to indicate a subject, so they don't. They let the possibilities open up. I.You.He.She.We.They.

Let me illustrate this with a famous poem by the 8<sup>th</sup> century poet Wang Wei (王維). The poem, whose title is almost as long as its eight lines, “酬虞部蘇員外過藍田別業不見留之作 *Chou yubu Su yuanwai guo Lantian bieye bu jian liu zhi zuo*, A response to the poem left by the Hon. Su, when he came to Lantian, but found [I] was not at home,” gives us the context. Wang Wei wrote it for his friend, Su, as a sort of *mea culpa* for being away and missing his visit. In it Wang imagines how his friend must have felt, waiting in the cold, darkening evening. The first quatrain asks: Who was there to greet you? The second answers. Here is the poem in its entirety:

A hovel leans in the valley mouth  
Tall trees gird a town left bare  
The rider returns on paths of stone  
Who met you at the mountain home?  
  
A fishing boat stuck on the icy shore

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<sup>41</sup> In prose, for the most part, it is more of an annoyance of style, although it can also raise problems of comprehension. In poetry—and this is both in classical and modern verse—this practice is very common.

Hunting fires burning in the frozen fell  
Beyond the white clouds, only  
Gibbon cries and tolling bells.

貧居依谷口

喬木帶荒村

石路枉回駕

山家誰候門

漁舟膠凍浦

獵火燒寒原

唯有白雲外

疎鐘聞夜猿

Although in general translators have been willing to add subjects, here I have chosen not to. For example, in the third line of the first stanza, I chose to use "rider" rather than follow the Chinese line, which uses "ride" as a verb. This is to avoid a gender/person-specifying pronoun. I have only included "you," which can suggest both the poem's addressee and the reader, as an object. We see in David Hinton's version of this poem, by contrast, this rendering: "I live humbly near the canyon's mouth, / an overgrown village amid stately trees. / When you came on twisted rocky paths, / who welcomed you at my mountain

gate?" This is a lovely translation, and certainly correct. As the title tells us, after all, this poem is directly addressed to Wang's friend Su.<sup>42</sup>

But even as Chinese grammar and poetic conventions allow subject pronouns to be suggested rather than directly included, I feel that the omission is done with a purpose. From time to time, in fact, Wang Wei used pronouns. His poems include 自 *zi*, which means "self," or 君 *jun*, a word that means "gentleman," or "sir," and which is often a polite form of "you." In this poem, however, by leaving out all subject pronouns, Wang Wei moves an individual perspective out of the way so that the reader can step into the position of the viewer.

As I read the second stanza, I let myself be taken into it. I lift my own gaze (perhaps you did, too?), moving from the frozen boat on the shore (the computer), to the frozen fell (the window), looking for a moment at the clouds (heavy today) until my attention moves to what I cannot see but can hear, from distant places beyond my vision, the tolling of bells and the mournful cries of those delicate-armed, melancholy tree-dwellers, the gibbons (an ambulance siren).

As a reader of poetry, I embrace this openness. If it weren't for the grammatical rules of English, I imagine our poets would make great use of it too. And rather than complain about how it's lost in translation from Chinese in English, I want to see if we might find a way to bring our attention to it. For, on a level beyond the poetic language itself, playing between including subject pronouns and omitting them allows us to consider

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<sup>42</sup> Another option would be to omit the subject syntactically, such as for the third line, "Riding stone paths for naught." But this can create a fragmented effect in English.

how syntax and structure are used to construct meaning, and how we might see nuances of meaning as we move between languages and systems of thought.

In fact, in the *Dictionary of Untranslatableables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, which was, it so happens (or perhaps, naturally), translated from French into English, we find several entries about the difficulty in translating terms related to I and the self.

At certain moments in its history, the term “self” has posed some interesting problems for translators of philosophy. In 1700 Pierre Coste, the French translator of Locke’s *Essay on Human Understanding*, proposed the innovative *soi* in order to simultaneously insist on the reflexive dimension contained in the English *self* and take his distance, following Locke himself, from the *moi* (or *ego*) introduced by Descartes and Pascal. (947)

Here, for example, a French translator uses his craft to introduce into French a term that includes a sense of reflection on one’s personal identity, which is not included, and even opposed to, the earlier French systems of thought, such as those at the heart of the work of philosophers such as Descartes and Pascal.<sup>43</sup>

I bring this up, not to dwell on this philosophical history of the “self” and its translations, but rather to point out that not only is it a difficult notion to translate in omission (in Chinese poetry, for example), but to show that even if we do translate the

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<sup>43</sup> Another example the *Dictionary of Untranslatableables* offers which demonstrates the importance of historical context for translation choices: How do we translate the German terms Freud used as he developed his vocabulary of psychoanalysis? For example, why was there the choice to translate Freud’s work *Das Ich und das Es* into English as *The Ego and the Id* rather than *The I and the It* or *The I and the Me* (both possible choices). *Is* has to do with the importance, in the English-speaking world at that time, of scientifically charged vocabulary. This choice was made differently in the French tradition, which translated it as *Le moi et le ça*, in which *le moi* signifies the ego (294).

terms, they might not mean exactly the same thing. In other words, we might consider the importance of translating terms such as I, not only in philosophy, but also in poetry.

With that in mind, let's look at I and 我 again. What differences might there be between the two pronouns? I would like to suggest that 我 marks a contingency that I does not. This is because 我 draws from religious and philosophical traditions that are different from those of the I, which comes from a Judeo-Christian/Greco-Roman world. In Buddhism and Daoism, 我 is not understood to be an individual, eternal soul created by God, for example, but rather a mark of both one individual's everyday perceptions, as well as the notion that all these perceptions of permanence or autonomy are illusions. In Confucian texts, by contrast, we often find another first person pronoun, 吾 *wu*. It suggests how one's identity is contingent upon one's relationships to others. In this contingency humanity will continue, even as the individual 我 will perish.<sup>44</sup>

We also might consider the point, suggested by Jiayan Mi above, that Mu Dan was not living in a colonizing nation, but a colonized one. It is for this socio-political reason that Chinese poets of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were deeply engaged with thinking through the relationship of the 我 to a quickly changing, incredibly violent world. Indeed, I would like to extend Mi's argument to suggest that “我” is not only a coming-into-consciousness poem, it is also as a war poem. In the 1947 edition of *Mu Dan's Collected Works*, which

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<sup>44</sup> According to the *Grand Ricci*, a definitive Franco-Chinese bilingual dictionary, the difference between the terms is marked by the fact that 我 is constructed of two swords. This demonstrates how this “I” or “me” is, in a sense, combative in its differentiation between individuals. 吾, however, is made of the character for the number five 五 above the character for mouth 口; this “five-mouths” suggests a collective “I” or “we.” While this is an interesting line of thought, we might also note that 五 could be interpreted less as a marker of meaning than as a marker of sound, as it is homophonic with 吾. Both 我 and 吾 are translated as “I” or “we,” depending on the context. In modern usage, however, 吾 is archaic, while 我 is the most common first-person pronoun.

Mu Dan arranged himself, it appears just before the poem “The Coming of Knowledge,” also written in 1940. This latter poem is a clear meditation on war, and its effects on the individual: “Take someone to the train, turn the head, turn the back, abandonment / Heartrending Loyalty, the endless division of an individual 送人上車，掉回頭來背棄了／動人的忠誠，不斷分裂的個體 *song ren shang che, diaohui tou lai bei yi le / dong ren de zhongcheng, bu duan fenlie de geti.*” I find this line instructive, because it reminds me that another aspect of Mu Dan and his 我: his biography. In the introduction I detailed how Mu Dan left the north to follow Lianda to Changsha and then Kunming. At this time, he would have had just this sort of experience of separation. His choice to go to Kunming would have included this “endless division” he writes of here.

Contemporary literary scholars don’t generally read the I of a poem as being the I of the author, even if the poem does suggest affinities between its creator and a character. The I is a literary creation, not a biographical referent. We do this to keep ourselves from reading, or misreading, poems as biographies. They are self-contained units of thought, and how they are related to the poet’s biography is not important (or at least secondary).

This approach is often in contrast with implicit expectations that translators know as much about an author—especially if the author is no longer living—as possible, so that they can make well-informed translation choices. William Gass, for example, writes about translators who work with Rilke, “Most of the translators of the Elegies and the Sonnets do their homework and offer useful notes. There are certainly many clues to the meaning of Rilke’s poems to be found in his letters” (90). This kind of biographical information is



considered useful, even essential, he suggests, when we work through a writer's more inscrutable works.

Gass's observation points to two conditions that are often hidden by the very work translators do. First, even while translators must have as complete a grasp of a text, its historical context, literary style and particular conventions, as any scholar, because this work is hidden behind the smoothness of the translation, a similar level of research and analysis is often not attributed to them. It is as if translators do their work, not with careful consideration and research, but by a magical slight of hand that brings them into touch with authorial intention. This brings us to the second point, the thorny issue of intentionality. Scholars and translators differ as to how much a translator can understand an author's intentions, or even how much they are able to reflect these intentions in her translation. To take one extreme, George Chapman, the famous English translator of Homer, claimed that he was possessed by Homer as he wrote.<sup>45</sup> Chapman's fantastical assertion points to the key fact that translators (and editors and publishers) often take pains to cover up: the translator can never fully fulfill the author's intentions, for the translation is a different text than the original. It is an uncomfortable truth that, as Christi Merrill puts it, the *soi-disant*, single-authored translation is actually "multiply possessed" (40), that is, it is informed as much by the original as by the translator's knowledge and approach to the text.

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<sup>45</sup> Christi Merrill discusses this episode in terms of identity and possession in her book *Riddles of Belonging* 39-40.

By drawing attention to the differences between my I and Mu Dan's 我, I hope to address these interrelated problems: to show both how much scholarly work is necessary in the work of literary translation, and to resist the slight of hand that would have us imagine that my text is the same as Mu Dan's. So, while below I give a sense of the nature of Mu Dan's work and language within his historical and individual contexts—this, after all, is very important—I also work to make my intentions clear.

This is why it is useful to think about who Mu Dan's 我 was, when he was writing in Kunming in 1939, even if this is not an easy task. Indeed, Chinese scholar and critic Yi Bin (易彬) begins his 2012, definitive literary biography<sup>46</sup> of Mu Dan with a kind of disclaimer: In writing biographies of famous authors, he says, one inevitably finds that "...each has his own lacuna [所沒有的東西 *suo meiyou de dongxi*]. When we compare him with other writers of his era, what Mu Dan doesn't have is extremely clear: we lack self-interpretive texts" (2). In other words, although we know the general movement of his life, Mu Dan left behind very little reflection outside of the poetry itself. There are a few letters (most that are left extant are from just before he died—older ones were burned during the Cultural Revolution), a journal begun in 1959 with records of daily events but very little personal reflection, and almost no critical essays. Faced with this challenge, Yi Bin's book is largely based on primary sources from the institutions in which Mu Dan studied and worked, memoirs by Mu Dan's family and friends, and two pieces of self-criticism that Mu Dan wrote in 1955 and 56. (Although the second is 25 pages long, and includes self-reflection

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<sup>46</sup> 穆旦評傳 *Mu Dan pingzhuan*, the title, evokes both literary criticism and biography.

on ten different periods in Mu Dan's life, Yi Bin takes its reflections on Mu Dan's life and work with an ideological grain of salt.) He also uses the few short pieces that Mu Dan wrote in the mid-to-late 70s, soon before his death.

We know the major events of Mu Dan's life. His given name was 查良鏞 Zha Liangzheng, and he was born to "a family in decline," which is to say a formerly affluent, scholar-official family whose men had held posts in the government. Mu Dan's father, however, was not successful, finding it hard to adapt to a quickly changing, post-imperial China. After his mid-30s he did not work, and instead relied upon the small inheritance that he and his brothers shared. Despite this poverty, Mu Dan went to one of the best schools in the country, Nankai Secondary School, and at 17 tested into one of the nation's best universities, Qinghua University, where he started in 1935.

It was while he was in high school that Mu Dan first began to use his pen name, 穆旦. Together the two characters mean "solemn dawn." You can see the dawn in the second character: 旦, which both represents a sun rising above the horizon and the sound *dan*. 穆 *mu* is not pictographic in a similar way—it means "solemn," "reverent" or "calm." Mu Dan put the two words together to suggest his given name: his surname: 查 can be divided into 木 *mu* on the top and 旦 *dan* on the bottom. 木 *mu* means "wood," but it would make an unusual surname, so Mu Dan chose a homophone, the more elegant 穆 *mu*, instead. Taken together 穆旦 "solemn dawn" is a poetic reference to Mu Dan's place in Chinese history, and the role of his generation at the beginning of a new era.

Indeed, Mu Dan seems to have thought deeply about his position as a young scholar in China's quickly changing world. As a student in Tianjin, he was involved with

political and literary movements that critiqued Japanese incursions, even as they looked to European and American literature for ideas about the development of a strong nation. After the war began, many of his poems are explorations about how to do this, how to develop a voice that can speak in strength against weakening assaults of violence.<sup>47</sup>

Let me now take all of this—how I hear Mu Dan’s poetry, how we might use Chinese’s omission of subject pronouns, the differences between I and 我, and Mu Dan’s biography—and return to the line with which I began, 我笑，是我。I think I am ready to translate the line.

Lyric from an Air-Raid Shelter

He faces me, chuckling; it’s actually nice and cool here;  
As I wipe off beads of sweat, brush off earth from the mountain climb,  
I see his thin body  
Tremble, in the earth, a faint gust of wind.  
He smiles, you shouldn’t let this opportunity pass you by,  
Here’s the *Shanghai Shenbao*. Ah, all this good news,  
Let’s sit down for a minute, there’s thread of light over there.  
I think of people running madly on the avenues,

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<sup>47</sup> Mu Dan joined the war effort in 1942, after he had finished at Lianda, and was a translator-soldier during the devastating Chinese Burma campaign. After Britain made a retreat from its position, Chinese troops, including Mu Dan, were moved to India to rest and recuperate. After this, they were sent back to Yunnan through remote mountain jungle. On this trek at least half died. This event is the subject of many of Mu Dan’s later war poems.

Pathetic people, threatened by death,  
Like insects swarming, pressing into our cave.

Who'd have thought farmers would scatter seeds on this earth?

I was just upstairs sleeping, someone says, I was bathing.

Do you think prices will change in the city? You live where?

Oh, oh, one of these days I'll be sure to come by; I've been so busy lately.

Quiet. It's as though they feel a shortage of oxygen.

Although beneath the earth it's safe. They look each other over:

O black faces, black bodies, black hands!

Now I hear wind in sunshine,

Brushing by each person's ear, a call blowing faintly—*shee, shee,*

From his eaves, from the pages of his book, from his blood.

The alchemist lets heavy

eyelids fall, falls unconsciously into dreams,

Ghosts streaming from hell,

Quietly taking in the burning, the flay-,

ing, Hear the breathsound call to paradise.

O Look, in the ancient forest,

The corpse turns slowly to ice!

I stand up. It's stifling in here,  
I say, it should be over by now; we can leave!  
But he pulls me over: Isn't this your friend?  
She had her wedding in a Shanghai hotel; look at this announcement!

I had forgotten a sprig of white lilacs pressed in a book;  
I had forgotten walking in parks, twirling a cane,  
Drifting beneath neon lights, hearing LOVE PARADE;  
Ai, I forgot using lavender ink, adding a slice of lemon to my tea.  
As you lower your head, you also lift it,  
Just now, before your eyes, you saw so many people. You see so many people in  
wilderness.  
You see countless people you won't see again.  
So you feel stained in black, just like all those people.

The corpse, his movements painful,  
Slowly rises to prepare the elixir,  
In a night, ancient forest black,  
"Go to Hell! Go to Hell!" a voice screams  
"Your ancient alchemy is futile.  
Die in that dream! Fall into your pain!  
Let's hear how sonorous your dead voice sounds."

Who won, he says, how many enemy planes were shot down?

I smile, [ ] is I.

When people return to their homes, and brush off grass and mud,

From the large woven nets that cover their heads,

I walk alone into a bombed-out building,

And discover myself dead there,

Stiff, on my face, smiles of joy, tears and sighs.

防空洞裡的抒情詩

他向我，笑著，這兒倒涼快，

當我擦著汗珠，彈去爬山的土，

當我看見他的瘦弱的身體

戰抖，在地下一陣隱隱的風裡。

他笑著，你不應該過這個消遣的時機，

這是上海的申報，唉這五光十色的新聞，

讓我們坐過去，那裡有一線暗黃的光。

我想起大街上瘋狂的跑著的人們，

那些殘酷的，為死亡恫嚇的人們，

像是蠻躑的昆蟲，向我們的洞裡擠。

誰知道農夫把什麼種子洒在這裡？

我正在高樓上睡覺，一個說，我在洗澡。

你想最近的市價會有變動嗎？府上是？

哦哦，改日一定拜訪，我最近很忙。

寂靜。他們像覺到了養氣的缺乏，

雖然地下是安全的。互相觀望著：

○ 黑色的臉，黑色的身子，黑色的手！

這時候我聽見大風在陽光裡

附在每個人的耳邊吹出細細的呼喚，

從他的屋簷，從他的書頁，從他的血裡。

煉丹的術士落下沉重的

眼臉，不覺墜入了夢裡，

無數個陰魂跑出了地獄，

恰恰收攝了，火燒，剝皮，

聽他號出極樂國的聲息。

○ 看，在古代的大森林裡。

那個漸漸冰冷了的殭屍！

我站起來，這裡的空氣太窒息，

我說，一切完了吧，讓我們出去！

但是他拉住我，這是不是你的好友，

她在上海的飯店結了婚，看看這啓事！



我已經忘了摘一朵潔白的丁香挾在書裡

我已經忘了在公園裡搖一隻手杖,

在霓虹燈下飄過，聽 Love Parade 散播,

當你低下頭，重又抬起,

你就看見眼前的這許多人，你看見原野上的那許多人，

你看見你再也看不見的無數的人們，

於是覺得你染上了黑色，和這些人們一樣。

那個殭屍在痛苦的動轉，

他輕輕地起來繞著爐丹，

在古代的森林漆黑的夜裡，

“毀滅，毀滅”一個聲音喊，

“你那枉然的古舊的爐丹。

死在夢裏！墜入你的苦難！

聽你極樂的嗓子多麼洪亮！”

誰勝利了，他說，打下幾架敵機？

我笑，是我。

當人們回到家裡，彈去青草和泥土，

從他們頭上所編織的大網裡，

我是獨自走上了被炸毀的樓，  
而發現我自己死在那兒  
僵硬的，滿臉上是歡笑，眼淚，和嘆息。

I will start with the title, "Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter," because it raises the question of what a "lyric" or an "emotive poem" in an air raid shelter is, or could possibly be. And I think this is something Mu Dan wants us to hear.

The term for "lyric" in Chinese is 抒情詩 *shuqing shi*. The first two characters 抒情 *shuqing* mean to "express emotion." They have been used to discuss poetry since at least the 楚辭 *Chuci* or the *Songs of Chu*, which dates to the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE. The term "lyric poetry" (抒情詩 *shuqing shi*), however, refers specifically to the European tradition. Although I have not been able to date its first usage, in *The Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Chinese Language* (*Zhongwen Da Cidian* 中文大辭典 *Zhongwen da cidian*) the term is defined by reference to the English term "lyric poetry." The entry describes the origins of the genre in Ancient Greece with songs sung to accompany the "lyre" (this word is included in English).

Reference to "lyric" in regards to English-language poetic tradition brings us to the work of contemporary scholars, including Michael Davidson, Marjorie Perloff, Yopie Prins and Virginia Jackson, who have, in various ways, complicated common assumptions that lyric poetry is an expression of the poet's subjectivity. They show us instead how lyric has been a term whose meaning has changed depending on the time and space in which it was used.

Chinese poets of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century used this term, or the Chinese translation of it, however, not because they were engaging with the English tradition, but because it was a term that could be used to differentiate modern, expressive verse from the emotive qualities of traditional Chinese verse. It is for this that I am uncomfortable translating 抒情詩 as lyric poetry, even though that is ostensibly a direct translation. As Chinese poets brought this term into their poetic tradition, they engaged its (then current in English poetry) sense of individual expression, but this does not mean that their understanding of an individual's position was entirely similar to contemporary English poets' understandings. As our exploration of the poem "我" taught us above, 我 is not necessarily parallel to I. As such "lyric poetry" and all its attendant English associations are not necessarily appropriate in discussions of 抒情詩 *shuqing shi*.

Let me instead detail how the term was used in China at the time Mu Dan was writing. Throughout the 20s and 30s Chinese writers were engaged in debates about the nature of 抒情詩 *shuqing shi*. In May 1937, poet Xu Chi (徐遲 1914-1996) published an essay in Hong Kong, entitled "The Exile of Lyricism." In this essay, which begins with a discussion of Eliot's poetic criticism,<sup>48</sup> we find reference to the nature of expression. Xu Chi asks, "Because bombs have destroyed so many people, they have destroyed lyricism 抒情 *shuqing*; as for the poetry that has not been destroyed, her responsibility is to describe the spirit of those of us who have not been destroyed. What kind of poetry should this be?"

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<sup>48</sup> We might note two things. 1. Despite beginning with reference to C. Day Lewis's book, *A Hope for Poetry*, and its analysis of Eliot, Xu Chi emphasizes that Chinese "lyricism" or "emotional expression" marks a tradition that is different from what is written in the West. 2. Day Lewis's argument about Eliot is that his poetry is emotionally disconnected in a way that the work of the "post-war" poets (meaning post World War I poets) is not. An expression of emotional connection was also important to most Chinese poets writing during World War II.

(68) “Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter” suggests Mu Dan’s ideas of what this emotional depiction could be, and in so doing answers Xu Chi’s question directly. He takes 抒情詩 *shuqing shi* into the air shelter to see what is and is not destroyed.

Indeed at this time of war many (one could perhaps even say all) Chinese poets began to use their pens for political purposes, even if they had been opposed to this kind of literary engagement before. One such poet is Bian Zhilin (卞之琳 1910-2000). A member of the symbolist school before the war, Bian’s work was highly regarded, although often described as esoteric and obscure. In 1938 he moved to the Chinese Communist Party base in Yan’an (延安), where he lived before coming to Kunming in 1939. His collection of poetry, *Letters of Consolation* (慰勞信集 *Weilao xin ji*), was published in Yan’an in 1939, and it reflects his efforts to apply his poetic talents to wartime subjects. In 1940 Mu Dan wrote a review of Bian Zhilin’s *Letters* that hinged around just this idea of “emotion” and 抒情詩 *shuqing shi*. He argued that while Bian Zhilin’s poems address the war, they do not fully engage with the emotions the era. Instead they use their “wit” to keep a distance between the poet and his subjects. Mu Dan argues that poets must draw from, and engage, their emotional experiences, rather than depict people and scenes as if they were objects before their eyes.

But as you perhaps noted in “Lyric,” and well as in “I,” emotional engagement does not mean that poetry needs to be emotionally unambiguous, or easy to understand. Rather what we can gather in reading Mu Dan’s poetry, together with his criticism of Bian, is that he’s working to establish the idea that emotionally complex poetry reflects an

emotionally complex era. We need not think only revolutionary songs, with their direct and unambiguous emotional call-to-arms, fit the bill.<sup>49</sup>

For moving his poem to a bomb shelter could be, in a sense, metaphorical, but it was also a part of the complex reality of life in Kunming. As scholar Yi Bin writes in his biography of Mu Dan:

In April 1939, Mu Dan wrote “Lyric from an Air Raid Shelter.” “Air raid shelter” is clearly not a simple symbol for a place. After war erupted, Japanese bombings caused evacuations to air raid shelters to become both an important task and an important symbol for the Chinese people. Expanding this to the landscape of Chinese letters, “air raid shelters” could be called a place of extreme importance in the literary symbolic field. They are a symbol of the war, and the war was, at that time, for the Chinese people, the most important reality they faced... (89)

Indeed, air raids were both symbolic and real. Mu Dan had lived through bombings in Beijing, Changsha, as well as in Kunming, and he understood them as a place of real and metaphorical transformation of the I.

Let me now show you how I read this transformation in his poem.

He faces me, chuckling; it’s actually nice and cool here;  
As I wipe off beads of sweat, brush off earth from the mountain climb,  
I see his thin body  
Tremble, in the earth, a faint gust of wind.

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<sup>49</sup> In other poems, such as “From Emptiness to Fullness,” for example, he more directly explores his reactions to revolutionary poetry or 革命詩 *geming shi*.

The poem starts in *medias res* with this unnamed “he,” a friend from the past, who seems determined not to think too much about reality—both in the sense of what has been lost, and what is directly before him. He would rather focus on the fantasies of news from other places. This is in contrast with the I, who cannot help but notice his friend’s “thin body /Tremble,” nor can he ignore the fact that from within the earth (as opposed to the sky) something is moving. As the I transitions into this new space, he is both observing the site before his eyes and looking “internally,” searching to understand the relationship between the external and internal worlds.

He smiles, you shouldn't let this opportunity pass you by,  
Here's the *Shanghai Shenbao*. Ah, all this good news,  
Let's sit down for a minute, there's thread of light over there.  
I think of people running madly on the avenues,  
Pathetic people, threatened by death,  
Like insects swarming, pressing into our cave.

While his friend is content to look at the newspaper—a newspaper that is distant not only in space, but in time (it must be “old news”)—the I can only think of what is actually happening around him: People, terrified by the imminent air raid, are pressing into the cave.

This pressing is affecting the I's physical space as well as his internal, emotional space. We see a transformation in this emotional space, for example, as he listens to the conversations of the people around him in the second stanza. As he tunes into their

conversations, they change from unknown, pathetic insects into individuals, farmers, shoppers, friends:

Who'd have thought farmers would scatter seeds on this earth?

I was just upstairs sleeping, someone says, I was bathing.

Do you think prices will change in the city? You live where?

Oh, oh, one of these days I'll be sure to come by; I've been so busy lately.

In the context, these ordinary conversations seem strange—*a-ordinary*. And in the middle of the stanza, everyone seems to realize this. The I notes this silence, and how the people gaze at each other.

Quiet. It's as though they feel a shortage of oxygen.

Although beneath the earth it's safe. They look each other over:

O black faces, black bodies, black hands!

Now I hear wind in sunshine,

Brushing by each person's ear, a call blowing faintly—*shee, shee,*

From his eaves, from the pages of his book, from his blood.

In looking at their "black faces, black bodies, black hands" the I again hears wind, perhaps of shadows and of loss.

This wind connects everyone to a past that has been lost, and to a future that is still unknown. This is the wind the I heard at the poem's opening, when his friend's body trembled. Now the I feels it as he considers all the people with whom he shares the shelter. As the wind shifts and grows, we have the repetition of "his"—"from his eaves, from the pages of his book, from his blood." This "he" could all be the same person—the I

looking at himself in the third-person, or it could be from all the people around him: his and his and his, each of them contributing to this poem in his own way. This is the first sense we have that the subject pronouns are not—in fact refuse to be—entirely stable.

Then Mu Dan inserts a sonnet,<sup>50</sup> or the first half of one:

The alchemist lets heavy  
eyelids fall, falls unconsciously into dreams,  
Ghosts streaming from hell,  
Quietly taking in the burning, the flaying,  
hear the breathsound of the call to paradise.  
O Look, in the ancient forest,  
The corpse turns slowly to ice!

First what we have: An alchemist, a maker of elixirs of immortality, an ancient figure in the Chinese tradition. He falls asleep, and dreams of ghosts, who come from hell (an internal space) and see the butchering of the outside world. They also hear something, a call, this “breathsound,” to paradise. But the call is also to look. Heed! The corpse slowly turning cold!

But this is a little murky. Who is this corpse? Is it the alchemist, who, despite his powers, is dying? Is it someone else? The sonnet doesn’t tell us. It breaks off here, and the I returns. This raises questions: Is the I, who had also fallen into dreaming, the alchemist?

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<sup>50</sup> I will discuss this term at more length in chapter 4. Here let me briefly state that the most common Chinese term for “sonnet” is “fourteen-lined poem.” Many Chinese poets used the form throughout the 20s, 30s and 40s.



Or is the alchemist part of the I? Or is he the many “he’s” that appeared before the sonnet began?

All of these are possible, as the poem suggests fragmentation in consciousness.<sup>51</sup>

I stand up. It’s stifling in here,

I say, it should be over by now; we can leave!

The wind, which could have brought connecting breath, oxygen, has brought ghosts instead. And these ghosts are watching a part of the I die. The I wants to get out of there.

But he pulls me over: Isn’t this your friend?

She had her wedding in a Shanghai hotel; look at this announcement!

I had forgotten a sprig of white lilacs pressed into a book;

I had forgotten walking in parks, twirling a cane,

Drifting beneath neon lights, hearing LOVE PARADE;

Ai, I forgot using lavender ink, adding a slice of lemon to my tea.

Looking at the news, recalling the memories it brings with it, the I realizes the memories of an earlier age can no longer speak to the conditions before him. The bourgeois subject of

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<sup>51</sup> Scholar Carolyn FitzGerald reads the insertion of this sonnet as Mu Dan’s critique of his teacher Feng Zhi’s (馮至 1905-1993) use of it to create a sense of unity between imagination and form (63). “By juxtaposing the incongruous setting of an air-raid shelter with an Orphic sonnet, Mu Dan succeeds in drawing attention to the yawning aesthetic divide between German mystical poetry and Chinese wartime realities of fleeing from Japanese bombs” (63). According to FitzGerald, Mu Dan was taking Feng Zhi’s class on German mysticism when he wrote this poem (62). As it regards Feng (whose work we will explore at length in chapter 4), FitzGerald writes, “the Orphic myth [is] a metaphor for the creative process involved in writing poetry” (62-3). By contrast, “Mu Dan deploys Orphic imagery to create a poetic scene that expresses the poet’s interiority” (64) and his deeply divided psyche, which does not have the power to move between levels of life and death (63). I would suggest that Mu Dan is more generally critiquing the use of pre-war style lyric poetry in the wartime context, rather than targeting Feng Zhi in particular.

these lines, with his “pure white lilacs”<sup>52</sup> and his Love Parade,<sup>53</sup> is no longer real. All of these far-fetched scenes are like snippets from a film, impersonal, spectral and strange.

Yet if we listen to the Chinese version of the poem, we find that this stanza echoes here with the earlier quatrain:

Who'd have thought farmers would scatter seeds on this earth?

I was just upstairs sleeping, someone says, I was bathing.

Do you think prices will change in the city? You live where?

Oh, oh, one of these days I'll be sure to come by; I've been so busy lately.

In the Chinese these two sections echo each other in form and content. They are both quatrains. Both begin with 里 *li*, or “inside,” and end with slant rhyme. The first quatrain ends with 忙 *mang*, “busy,” while the second ends with 檬 *meng*, part of 柠檬 *ningmeng*, or “lemon.” As for content, each creates a catalogue of sounds and images to document a respective time and space. And the second set of remembered scenes and sounds has become just as *a-ordinary* as the first.

Indeed, at first glance it might seem that the latter quatrain only explains why the I is so ill prepared for the environment in which he finds himself. If his life has been scenes filled with white lilacs and lemon slices, how can he possibly make sense of the violence around him? But the strange theatricality of the second quatrain, which is so clearly dramatized, staged and overblown, perhaps suggests more than the difficulty the I is having in understanding his position within this new world. It explains why, actually, that I

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<sup>52</sup> I read references to Dai Wangshu's “Rainy Lane,” Whitman's, “When Lilac's Last in the Door-year Bloom'd” or the first lines of *The Wasteland* here.

<sup>53</sup> From the bourgeois movie *The Love Parade* made in 1929 just before the global financial crash.

must die. The I must begin anew if he is to create verse for this environment, for the people he sees conversing before him, for they, too, have been touched by this strange wind.

As you lower your head, you also lift it,  
Just now, before your eyes, you saw so many people. You see so many people in  
wilderness.

You see countless people you won't see again.  
So you feel stained in black, just like all those people.

What is so interesting here is the switch between the you and the I. As we saw in “我,” above, Mu Dan could have left out the pronouns. Here he is purposefully putting them in. He wants the confusion not to be around who is doing this, which would have been the case if he had omitted pronouns. Rather what he wants to stress is the relationship between individuals—the he and the plural-you, the plural-you and the I, and the I and the alchemist.

I read the poem to bring emphasis not only to the I in relationship to himself, but the I in his relationships with others. How he connects to his friend and to the people around him, and even with us, the readers. For when Mu Dan writes “you” in his passage he addresses us all. The you within the I, the you within the he, the you within them, and the you within us, the readers.

This “lyric poem” within an air raid shelter, in other words, is not only about being physically inside a cave, from which ghosts, carried by the wind of the earth, come to see the violence being raged from the skies. It's also about an internal movement, in which the

ghosts of the past are brought to the surface, and expelled, to make room for a new kind creator, and new kinds of creations. For the ghosts have found that a once powerful being is powerless before this violence.

The corpse, in painful movements,  
Slowly rises to prepare the pills,  
In a night, ancient forest black,  
“Go to Hell! Go to Hell!” a voice screams  
“Your ancient alchemy is futile.  
Die in that dream! Fall into your pain!  
Let’s hear how sonorous your dead voice sounds.”

What Mu Dan strives to tell us, despite the ornateness of this this imagery, is that this death is not metaphorical. For all of its strangeness, it is real. And it has an effect, if on no one else, on him. The I, or at least a part of the I, is dead.

Who won, he says, how many enemy planes were shot down?

I smile; [ ] is I.

The poem has given me my solution. Mu Dan didn’t specify the subject, so I won’t either. I leave the subject open, so that we can imagine the many people connected to this space. In that space we find I.You.We.He.She, as we move into the poem’s last lines:

When people return to their homes, and brush off grass and mud,  
From the large woven nets that cover their heads,  
I walk alone into a bombed-out building,  
And discover myself dead there,

Stiff, on my face, smiles of joy, tears and sighs.

We remember that when the I walked into the cave, he brushed dirt off of his clothes. Now it is others that brush themselves off, who shake off the event. The I, it seems, does not. Instead he walks into a building whose insides have been turned inside out, and there finds himself, his insides spilled out. Where has he gone?

In the space that this bracket opens up we can hear the many possibilities echo:

我笑，是我。

I smile, ~~it is I~~.

I smile; ~~it's me~~.

I smile; ~~I am I~~

I smile; ~~you are I~~.

I smile; ~~she is I~~.

I smile; ~~he is I~~.

I smile: [ ] is I. These brackets are my attempt to suggest the ambiguity of the Chinese line. It leaves open a space for the Buddhist 我 that understands all of this experience to be an illusion. It includes the newer 我 of modern era, that conflicted individual separated from a sense of wholeness. It is the man leaving as a loved one boards a train. It is the individual who finds himself in the strange silence that echoes between life, as he knew it, and the possibility of an immanent death.

The Chinese poem includes all of this, but I would argue that translation has allowed me to see it more clearly, for it was the movement of bringing the poem into

English that forced me to consider what this absent pronoun might be. In this sense, the dialogue between the poems moves in both directions, with my English translation asking the Chinese poem to be more specific, and in so doing pinpointing all of the work a single omitted pronoun does, even as the Chinese poem is essential to expanding my sense of what an English phrase can do. As I have created the movement between Chinese and English, I have been vigilant not to let the English cover up the Chinese, but rather to let the differences reverberate together. This has allowed me not only to experience the languages more deeply, but also to gain, through Mu Dan's language, a better sense of the many ways that one's sense of self was assaulted during an air raid.

How might this look in other translations between Chinese and English, or even between other language combinations? Could we find places where one language omits an element that another language requires and use this difference to open up a conversation between the two languages, and between the two texts at the conversation's heart? It seems that we can.

In the next chapter, I will continue to use translation as a means to understand the effects of an air raid on an individual. In my consideration of Zhao Ruihong's poem "A Portrait of Kunming, Spring 1940," I will explore what the differences between Chinese and English grammar might be able to open up in regards to the temporal experience of an air raid.

### Chapter 3

了, 吧, 轟炸

Le, ba, hongzha:

Air Raids and the Sound of Time

Beautiful dreams broken 了! 轟炸! 轟炸!  
Enemy planes overhead 了!—

--Zhao Ruihong  
"Portrait of Kunming, Spring 1940"

Zhao Ruihong (趙瑞蕪 1915-1999), whose poem "Portrait of Kunming, Spring 1940" is at the heart of this chapter, was born in Wenzhou, a coastal city in southeastern China. As a young man, he studied at universities in Shanghai and Shandong, but when war erupted in 1937, he moved from the coast, and enrolled as a student in the Foreign Literature Department at Lianda, when it was still based in Changsha. Here he met Mu Dan, and the two became close friends. Together they walked in the student brigade from Changsha to Kunming; together they lived with other students of their department for a time in Mengzi, a peaceful Yunnan backwater, and, when the Department moved to

Kunming in the fall of 1939, the two were bunkmates in one of Lianda's student dormitories. It was from this dormitory that Zhao, newly married to Yang Yi (楊苡 b. 1919), a fellow student in the Department, and the future translator of classics such as *Wuthering Heights*, moved to set up his own little home.

In the winter of 1940, this new little home was bombed. I'll let Zhao describe the experience:<sup>54</sup>

"They've hung the red lantern! They've hung it again! ... .."

September 30, 1940, around nine am, Yang Yi and I were inside working when suddenly we heard someone shouting loudly from outside on the streets; then someone opened a door at the neighbor's and cried out, "The red lanterns have been hung. It's a trial run! The Japanese Devils are coming to bomb again!" After a little while the air raid siren started to blare *ming ming*, and the clear blue skies of Kunming vibrated. With this, we quickly gathered up some odds and ends, things to eat and drink, a few books, closed all the doors and windows, and left the house we'd rented only a little over a month before, heading toward the fields outside the Western gate, and the dikes between the fields, where the eucalyptus trees grow dense. The road was filled with people running the sirens, carrying children, or pulling them along, their arms filled with all the things that Yunnan folk use; *honghong* everything was chaotic, and everyone strained their necks, running toward whatever place they thought was safest. On the road we ran into several

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<sup>54</sup> Zhao wrote this essay "When Enemy Planes Raid" many years after the war. As I explain in the introduction, whenever possible, I will include translations of writers' accounts of the air raid experience, rather than summaries of their accounts.



professors and students from Lianda, but we didn't have the energy to talk, we only nodded at each other, smiled a bit, and then kept going. We had run the sirens in this way I'm not sure how many times; we were already somewhat used to it—experienced. But each time you would worry a little about each person's fate. And each time we would bitterly resent the Japanese pirates who were coming again from the sky to bomb our earth into oblivion, to make havoc of our people and property. Men and women, from all walks of life, old and young, we all hated the enemy, and our hearts were linked tightly together.

We walked, then ran, then walked, then ran, and as we were coming out of the city gate we heard the second siren sound, so we started to move as fast as we could away from the city toward a dike a little farther on. It was a good spot, because to the side was a dirt ditch, a little over a meter deep, and when an enemy plane came, everyone could jump in and hide. In accordance with the rules, the city had hung three red lanterns, and the last siren rang violently, sounding strongly. We ran into the long ditch, filled with all kinds of plants and watched silently. All around it was extremely quiet; the sky's blue filled us with emotion. But then from the southeast, twenty-nine enemy planes appeared, flying low, shimmering, the symbol of the flag with its blood red sun as clear as day. The rumbling started in far, and then came in closer and closer, a terrifying sound. Suddenly, we saw the enemy planes begin to dive, approaching, releasing their bombs, an uncountable amount falling, sounding like shrieking demons, sad and shrill, falling, probably,

onto the Eastern City, where a great explosion boomed, and dust, black smoke, rose high, the light of fires flooding the sky... ..

After the enemy planes had spent their bombs, they flew off to the northwest. We waited until the all clear sounded before we dared return home. It was past 1:00 in the afternoon. When we came in the gate, we found the courtyard destroyed; one face of the surrounding walls had collapsed, and the ground was filled with splinters of broken wood. Inside the house, everything was at sixes and sevens, all of the paper on the windows was torn, two thermoses, rolling on a bookshelf, were broken, and another bookshelf, piled up with empty fuel drums was turned over on the ground, with yet another shelf piled up on top of it. All our vegetables, freshly bought at the market, and which we had laid out on a sheet on the bed, were covered with gray dust... Later we heard that two bombs had dropped near Green Lake; one hadn't exploded. The other had left a deep crater. We lived near the lake, on a little lane called "Pile of Jade Dragons," so when the bomb exploded, our small home had felt the impact of its strong waves.

At this time Zhao was a young man. The ink on his college diploma was still fresh. But his work as a teacher, scholar and translator had already begun. After graduation he had taken a position at a local school, and he had begun his translations of Stendhal's works, which would include the first Chinese version of *Le rouge et le noir*, published in 1944, as well as some of Stendhal's minor works, including the novellas *Vanina Vanini* and "L'abbesse de Castro" from *The Italian Chronicles*. Unlike Mu Dan, who studied English and Russian at Lianda, Zhao was a student of French and German literature, and it was in these languages

that he would develop his career as translator and professor of foreign and comparative literature.

Zhao and Yang left Kunming in the winter of 1941. They took up teaching positions in Chongqing, where they continued their work as translators and scholars. Unlike Mu Dan, Zhao was more of a scholar than a poet, and his collection of creative work from the period, only a handful of poems, was very much in conversation with the works that he edited and translated. In fact, in his newspaper articles and translator notes from the period we find multilingual extravaganzas that show Zhao's passion for communicating his knowledge of European cultural and literary history, as well as his personal and emotional investment in his projects. He frequently appended his own verse to his scholarly projects, or added well-loved foreign lines to his own poetry.

In his epilogue to "L'abbesse de Castro," for example, we find both. Zhao fills his paragraphs with French, English and Italian titles, and lines of French and English poetry. There is, for example, an excerpt from Tennyson's "Dream of Fair Women": "Scaffolds, still sheets of Water, divers woes/ Ranges of glimmering Vaults with iron [grates]," which is cited to illustrate the quality of "gloomy melancholy." Zhao follows these lines with his own verse, introduced thus: "These translations were finished when the autumn light of 1943 was most brilliant, then they were tossed into my drawer, as if buried in a pile of fallen leaves. Today I finally have a chance to publish them, and for this, I am naturally thrilled, but I still massage that endless melancholy, ah—now is the end of 1944, no, it is Judgment Day, and I suddenly remember the poem I wrote called "New Year's Eve." The poem he then cites is filled with gothic imagery of creeping feet and dripping candles, a

reference both to the lush castles of the Romantics as well as to a patriotic poem by the important Chinese poet, and professor at Lianda, Wen Yiduo. It ends with a line by Musset, cited in French, "Les plus [désespérés] sont les chants les plus beaux." As a parenthetical poetic envoi, Zhao translates this line into Chinese, "最絕望的是最美麗的歌唱 *zui juewang de shi cui meili de gechang*; the most hopeless songs are the most beautiful."

These were the dark days of the war, and as he lived through Chongqing's dreary winter, Zhao's solace was his chosen cultural forbearers, European writers of the second-half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But this was not a new love. We find similar conversations in "Portrait of Kunming, Spring 1940," which was written four years before in Kunming. This lengthy poem, with more than 150 lines running through six stanzas, is dedicated to Mu Dan, and in many ways is a response to Mu Dan's poem "Torch Parade, Kunming 1939," which we saw in chapter 1. Written in the spring, it does not describe the devastation of his home, which had not happened yet, but rather the destruction of Mengzi, the sleepy town in which Mu Dan and Zhao had lived the year before. Nevertheless, Zhao revised the poem two years later, in 1942, in foggy Chongqing, after suffering the bombing of his own home and two more years of violent aerial attacks.<sup>55</sup>

"Portrait" is a narrative poem that recounts the events of single day in which there is an air raid. Its first stanzas are diffuse, even rambling. It's often unclear who is speaking. The effect is one of confusion, and waiting, expressed through student banter, overheard

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<sup>55</sup> Although I work with the revised version here, I include a translation of the poem as it was originally written in 1940 in the appendix.

conversations, and French, German and English verse. Finally near the end of the poem, the planes, which they've been waiting for all day, fly overhead and the bombs fall:

Beautiful dreams broken 了 *le*! 轟炸 *hongzha*! 轟炸 *hongzha*!

Enemy planes overhead 了 *le*!—

Here I choose to keep two Chinese words, 了 *le* and 轟炸 *hongzha*, as part of my translation. In placing the two languages, two systems of grammar, of writing, of sound, together, I follow Zhao's own practice. I also intend to create a new harmony between the way time is expressed in English and in Chinese, so as to expand our sense of the temporal experience of an air raid. I'll explain this more in a moment. Let me first return to the poem:

Beautiful dreams broken 了 *le*! 轟炸 *hongzha*! 轟炸 *hongzha*!

Enemy planes overhead 了 *le*!—

These lines occur in the second to last stanza of the poems, and this violence of bombs, 轟炸 *hongzha*! 轟炸 *hongzha*! causes an intense shift in the poem's prosody. Diffuse lines are replaced by the repetitive and incantatory rhythms of a poetic anthem, a call to arms, and the poem bursts forth into a song of unity and resistance, "Walk a single road 吧 *ba*!" it calls out. As Zhao writes in his memoir above, the bombs have transformed a scene of confusion into one of unified resistance. The poem ends with resolution and hope for the future, which Zhao expresses in French: "As Rousseau prophesized long ago / 'Time can lift many a veil!'/Le temps peut lever bien des voiles!"

As we saw in chapter 2 much Chinese poetry of this period is concerned with poetry's form and purpose after "expressive verse" has been bombed (轟炸 *hongzha*) to

death. "Portrait" is no different. It too contains mediations on the purpose of poetry in violent times. But it is also a narrative about waiting for an air raid, and it is in this capacity that Zhao gives much attention to waiting and the passage of time.

Although many of us are fortunate that we do not live, waiting and listening, for bombs to fall, we all know the feeling of waiting for a sound. We listen for the ding of a text message, the buzz of an alarm clock, a knock on the door, a child's wake-up cry. We wait, listening, as we go about our lives. And then, when in its suddenness the awaited object sounds, we are startled; we jump; perhaps we laugh, perhaps we sigh. Anticipation has made us jumpy.

"Portrait" gives us a sense of the experience of the intensity of this waiting, when the sound to come is 轟炸 *hongzha*, or "bomb." Before I explain why I've included it within my translation, let me offer those who do not speak Chinese a sense of the word's etymology. 轟 *hong* is the first character in the onomatopoeia 轟隆 *honglong*, which I discussed in Mu Dan's poem "Torch Parade, Kunming 1939." It is made up of three 車 *che* or "cart" characters to suggest loudness. It is often used with other characters to express onomatopoeias, loud crashes of thunder, bursts of laughter, and, of course, the sound of explosions. 炸 *zha* is a phonosemantic character. It has the radical 火 *huo*, meaning fire, on the left, as it is used in compound words that mean "explosion" and "frying." 乍 *zha*, the character on the right, is there because it represents the sound *zha*.

It is my sense, however, that etymology does not give us as full an understanding of the experience of 轟炸 *hongzha* as Zhao's poem, which suggests how listening for 轟炸 *hongzha* includes waiting for sirens and for, eventually, the explosion of bombs. In my

translation of "Portrait" I've kept 轟炸 *hongzha* in my ears. In so doing, I've come to realize that when I think of "bombing," I think of *images* of war, as I've seen in books or on the screen. These images are often black and white, sometimes in color, either silent and still or else grainy and filled with static. In other words, for me, "bomb" recalls old World War II footage, punctuated by snippets from current conflicts.

But to approach Zhao's text visually would be to be led astray, outside of the poem, both spatially and temporally. For in his poem, people weren't "bombing" as I understand it in a visual sense. In his poem individuals were *listening* for 轟炸 *hongzha*. The poem's vantage point is not from above or from a distance. It is below, waiting, listening.

As such, I have included 轟炸 *hongzha* in my translation to allow me to access a sonic experience in which sound surrounds me, rather than a visual one in which I am at a distance. For a similar effect, and in a similar attempt to create space to consider the spatial and temporal effects of air raids, I have not translated two Chinese grammatical markers: 了 *le* and 吧 *ba*, which modify verbal phrases in regards to time and experience (more on them below). In so doing, I push my translation to ask: Can the inclusion of the Chinese, and the valences of meaning between Chinese and English expressions, give us insights into the experience of air raids?

So let's return to the line and address the purpose of 了 *le*:

Beautiful dreams broken 了 *le*! 轟炸 *hongzha*! 轟炸 *hongzha*!

One of the differences between Chinese and English is the fact that Chinese verbs do not conjugate to express tenses, past, present, future, passive future perfect, what have you.

Instead Chinese uses time words (yesterday, tomorrow, in the past, in 30 minutes), often together with 了, but sometimes without, depending on the grammar of the sentence, to indicate different temporalities.

For rather than suggesting a specific temporality, 了 is there to indicate possibility, conclusion or change. Now, I do not want to write a grammar book, but in order to understand how 了 works in my translation, some definitions and examples are in order. This comes from the *Grand Ricci*, which defines 了 as:

1. A post-verbal or final particle marking [either] the completion of an action, or a new state, in the past, the present, or in a determined future. Ex. 他昨天走了 *Ta zuotian zou le*. He left yesterday. 他明天就走了 *Ta mingtian jiu zou le*. He will be gone tomorrow. 我們得走了 *Women de zou le*. We have to go. (Accessed online. Modified for clarity.)

In the first two examples you can see a time word (yesterday, tomorrow) used together with 了. This is to show that at a specific time, something will be completed. In these two examples the act of leaving will be completed. By contrast, you see in the last example how 了 suggests a change in status: 我們得走了 *Women dei zou le*. We have to go. Or we have to change from being here to leaving here.

This is another major function of 了: to express actual or possible change, as well as possibility or impossibility. Take this example: 下雨了 *Xia yu le*: it's raining (it wasn't raining before, but now it is). Or this line from the poem: 敵機飛臨頭上了 *Diji fei lantou shang le*: Enemy planes overhead 了. In these examples 了 isn't used to suggest a completion but a change in status. Enemy planes were not overhead, but now they are. This change of



status can also exist in the future, as a possibility, as with this line from the poem: “I hear there will be yet another “trial run;” it’s very possible they will come 了! “

It is for the fact that 了 does not indicate a specific temporality—as English does with the past, present or future tenses—but conclusion, change and possibility that I have included it in my translations. Can using it help us imagine time and our relationship to it in a new way?

Let’s take the line from the epigraph: “Beautiful dreams broken 了! 轟炸! 轟炸!” Here 了 is used to show that there is a change in status. The dreams have gone from being whole to broken. In English we might express this change in the present perfect tense: “Beautiful dreams have broken,” or we could render it in the past tense, “Beautiful dreams had broken,” or even in simple present or simple past tenses: “Beautiful dreams are/were broken.” In Chinese, however, we do not need to put this change in a specific temporality. What is important is not the time, but the change. What was whole has been broken.

I am fascinated by the possibility of playing with 了 in ways that bring our attention to the passage of time. It does not mark a specific temporality (past, present, future), but periods of continuation, change and completion. And I am intrigued by how this reverberates with how we experience time differently when we conceptualize it visually or sonically. In visual perception, for example, we generally understand that which is before us to exist in its present form. Although we might see traces of the passage of time upon it, or image its future form, it exists before our eyes in the present tense. With sonic phenomena, however, temporality works differently. It is an arc that begins before an object enters our visual field, and ends after that object has passed from it. Scholar of

sound Don Ihde has written, when listening to “auditory events there seems to be no way in which [to] escape the sense of a ‘coming into being’ and a ‘passing from being’ in the modulated motions of sound” (94). In other words, when conceived of sonically, events such as air raids begin long before the planes are overhead: they begin when we start to listen for it. The change is not in their presence, but in their arrival before our eyes. Air Raid 了.<sup>56</sup>

There is one more particle that I will leave in Chinese in my translation, because it too suggests a modality even as it is open temporally. This particle is 吧 *ba*, and it is most often added at the end of a sentence to soften the verb, to make it suggestive rather than imperative, much as modal verbs do in English. The difference is that neither 吧 *ba* nor the verbs conjugate, so the sentences can be read *both* like an utterance from the past, *and* like one that speaks to the present, or even the future.

Some examples are in order. 吧 *ba* can turn a statement into a gentle question, or an invitation, or a suggestion. 走吧 *Zou ba*: Let’s go. Can we go? (Not: GO!), or 别哭吧 *Bie ku ba*: Aw, no need to cry. Don’t cry, now. (Not: STOP CRYING!) 吧 *ba* can also be used to express surprise or uncertainty: 不可能吧 *Bu keneng ba*: Come on, no way! (without 吧 *ba*, this would be something more like: IMPOSSIBLE!)

In Zhao’s poem, 吧 often appears in the first sense. It is used to address the people in the poem *and* the reader with a kind of invitation or suggestion. As such 吧 both

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<sup>56</sup>As I write this, I am struck by the way English vocabulary for describing sonic phenomenon of time is limited by a visual focus: We say something “appears” or “arises,” all of which suggest a coming into view, rather than a coming into sound. As I work with the Chinese verbal particles, I realized how English is also limited in expressing temporality, which insist on events happening in either the past or present.

describes what was said during that day, and allows the poem to speak directly to the reader. Because there is no specific time mentioned, the action occurs in a temporality that can be at once past and present. Take this line from the second stanza, “Carry a walking stick, take a book, go for a walk in the country 吧。” The line is clearly referring to the moment in the poem when the students are getting ready to “run the sirens.” In this sense it occurs in the past. But it is also speaking to us in the present: “Bring your book, and come with us. Listen with us, as we wait for the planes to come.”

Let me underline the effect of this temporal openness by with a slight digression to the Wang Wei poem we saw in chapter 2: “A response to the poem left by the Hon. Su, when he came to Lantian, but found [I] was not at home.” If you think back to my translation of “A response,” do you recall a verb tense?<sup>57</sup> As it so happens (and I admit this was completely unconscious) I had translated the poem into the present tense, except for the last line of the first stanza, which I translated into the simple past:

A hovel leans in the valley mouth  
Tall trees gird a town left bare  
The rider returns on paths of stone  
Who met you at the mountain home?

貧居依谷口  
喬木帶荒村  
石路枉回駕

---

<sup>57</sup> Just as the question of pronouns has long bothered English-language translators of Chinese poetry, so has the fact that Chinese verbs do not mark time as English ones do.

The last line, actually, does not include any time marker (山家誰候門 “Mountain home who greets/greeted/will greet gate”), and in switching tenses, I unconsciously marked a shift from the opening lines, which could be interpreted as more broadly descriptive, and this last line, which is about Su, and his specific experience. If this is the case, however, it should follow that the next stanza is also in the past tense, as it answers the question. But instead of keeping the past tense, I shifted back to present, albeit through verbal particles and gerunds:

A fishing boat stuck on the icy shore  
Hunting fires burning in the frozen fell  
Beyond the white clouds, only  
Gibbon cries and tolling bells.

漁舟膠凍浦  
獵火燒寒原  
唯有白雲外  
疎鐘聞夜猿

In contrast with my rendering, the Chinese lines are complete subject-verb phrases, and as such are much less grammatically fragmented than my own. But I had translated them into fragments, unconsciously, so that I wouldn't have to choose a tense. Like the pronouns, I guess I wanted to leave things open, even if I didn't give it much thought. For if I had wanted to make the lines better reflect the subject-verb construction, I would have had to choose a tense:

A fishing boat sticks/stuck on the icy shore  
Hunting fires burn/burned in the frozen fell  
Beyond the white clouds, there are/were only  
Gibbon cries and tolling bells.

Looking over this translation, I pause, and think about how often awkward translations demonstrate an unresolved (and often unacknowledged, or even unrecognized) incommensurability, which I read as possibility, in a text. I also note that I created static images, rather than moments that float open-endedly in time. And yet the freedom from conjugation creates an opportunity—we can play, and let language provoke us to see something new about time.

I mean really—although this is pushing it, because no marker of futurity is indicated—we could have the lines read in the future: A fishing boat is/was/will be stuck on the icy shore. You can see why this is so appealing, poetically speaking. Just like Chinese's ability to leave pronouns out, and leave the possibility of many different subjects open, we find we can slide into the poem's time. The poem can be something that has happened, or is happening, or will happen.

So what to do? I think, in the end, I would translate the lines all in the present tense, as this would be the least marked, and would speak most directly to a present reader.

A hovel leans in the valley mouth  
Tall trees gird a town left bare  
The rider returns on paths of stone  
Who meets you at the mountain home?

A fishing boat stuck on the icy shore  
Hunting fires burning in the frozen fell  
Beyond the white clouds, only  
Gibbon cries and tolling bells.

This choice is especially appropriate in the second quatrain, for this is the scene that plays before our eyes and ears. But I think this is worth playing with more. How can time be expressed in a way that is neither awkward with unconjugated verbs, nor kept to a specific verb tense?

To return to the grammatical particles 了 and 吧, I include them, ultimately, because I do not want to suggest that even while Chinese grammar is so different from English grammar that it is a blank slate. I do not want to pretend the particles are not there to smooth out the poem. I want them to be there for they are part of the poem's meaning.

So, let's read the poem. Read the poem 吧 *ba*, first in its entirety, and then with my analysis.

Spring, 1940: A Portrait of Kunming

For the poet Mu Dan

Midday, ~~12:00~~, ~~12:10~~, 12:13,

Kunming, that beautiful spring city of the Yunnan plateau.

F, a classmate, tries to play a guitar imported from Vietnam

Can romantic dreams of the former capital be revived?

It cost more than 60 *bi*, was made in France, and is ornately adorned.

Play that little tune, “Aloha Oe” 吧<sup>58</sup>—

Strum new strings; listen: Music like a flowing stream,

(A maiden waves a moon-shaped fan, outside a pair of butterflies floats by

From the skein of parting a thousand tangled threads )<sup>59</sup>

Open the paper windows, sunlight amble in 吧,

You say you want to read a few lines of English poetry—humming,

W.B. Yeats’s, T.S. Eliot’s...

It can help the cranial nerves and digestion; C says

Why do you have to be so damned diligent, we just ate lunch?

I feel slightly suffocated, dizzy,

The weather’s gorgeous, isn’t it?

So, first look through today’s paper 吧:

Yesterday at 2:55 in the afternoon, enemy planes attacked Yunnan—

Green, green tassels of grain sustain heavy damage, 39 planes

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<sup>58</sup> This song, whose title translates to “Farewell My Love,” would have been familiar to its listeners, a “golden oldie,” as it were.<sup>58</sup> Written by Hawaiian Queen Lili’uokalani, and first circulated at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is nominally about two lovers parting, and it found global relevance in its reflection on memory and loss. Its lyrics suggest that what has been loved cannot be lost, but that remain ever present. To play it here would have been nostalgic, a return, perhaps the 1920s, when the song would have been at the height of its circulation, and when these young men would have been very young. This song was an important reference in many contexts. Two early examples are Jack London’s 1908 short story and a 1915 American silent film. This clip is from a 1918 Decca recording by the Hawaiian Quartet:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydzHI5pcTwM>. Later cultural icons to make use of the song include Elvis and, most recently, Lilo and Stich <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7I0h12BxOw>.

<sup>59</sup> This is a citation of the poem To the Tune “A Bouquet of Flowers” from the Song Dynasty.

Followed the Yunnan rail lines, throwing bombs blindly  
 Ah! Our kin, South Lake, eucalyptus trees,  
 Gray egrets, perching, flying,  
 Mengzi, a lovely little town, destroyed again!  
 (There's a gray-haired old man selling sweet rice soup  
 The sound of cowbells, the scent of plantains, strange feelings...)  
 Again how many living things, how many homes destroyed!  
 Today not a cloud in the sky, a gentle breeze; the sky makes us all nervous,  
 Carry a walking stick, take a book, go for a walk in the country 吧;  
 I hear there will be yet another "trial run," it's very possible they will come 了!  
 Next door on the bunk beds someone snores, someone sweetly sleeps,  
 (Zaiyu sleeps by day, dead trees cannot be carved)<sup>60</sup>  
 He's got a big beard (he snores), studies Chinese philosophy,  
 (Beneath autumn lamps, reading *A History of the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*,  
 Cruel dreams of the setting sun on an ancient road<sup>61</sup>; all fades away...);  
 Y climbs up the shaky upper bunk and sits woodenly,  
 Suddenly he pulls out a *huqin*; the tune is somber;  
 Someone runs in with news, the report:  
 They've hung the red lantern 了! People are starting to flee the city,  
 (Right! Great! I hate my first afternoon class)

---

<sup>60</sup> This line is from *The Analects of Confucius* and suggests the importance of scholarly diligence.



Still dreaming: Three thousand *li* from home,  
 Mother's letter: This year's peach blossoms are exceptionally lush,  
 But the entire city is in chaos; enemy warships cruise the sea  
 The poems of that era have been burned to ash! -----  
 Wear a red shirt, ride a black horse, walk together on new spring grass,  
 The Broken Bridge is still there, boats for picking caltrops, apricot-blossom rains;  
 (All of North China is suffering rain; flooding is imminent ....)  
 Dreaming of 59 of them, in three groups, suddenly bombing Yunnan, then heading north,  
 Pounding heart! They've passed the Red River, following the arch of the railroad line,  
 Intruding on China's brown earth, lush mountain forests ....  
 Ah! Kunming shaking 了! Kunming stands up trembling,  
 Kunming one more time with worried brows,  
 3:45 in the afternoon. Everyone is terrified,  
 Come on, we can go together 吧, don't worry,  
 Bring a poker deck, chess, a romance novel,  
 Today's really bad 了, are they really coming 了? Air raid!  
 We run two and a half *li* in one breath, sweating like crazy,  
 Irrigation ditches line the road;  
 In my heart, hope, apprehension; hide in the cypress forest 吧;  
 (Ma, I'm scared! The Japanese Devils are coming bombing again 了—ah!  
 Don't be scared, son; your Ba is still working the land—ah;

Hold tight to my collar, it's safe here, don't worry!)  
 Far, far away, a small car, a flash of purple, scatters dust,  
 (We certainly don't have the good fortune to flee in a car,  
 Lord knows—maybe we'd die faster!)  
 It's a fantastic, chaotic and riotous view:  
 Sitting on the ground, their backs against trees, a group of young people---  
 Which latitudes give rise to concern 了?  
 In which hearts can love poems sprout?  
 In what scenes can the spirit of youth flow?  
 A painter takes up his easel, slowly refining:  
 (I look at green mountains, so delightful; I imagine this is how the mountains see me<sup>62</sup>)  
 Before his eyes: wilderness, a bridge, dusk, shadows,  
 Ten *li* away clouds and mist, nearby a faint fragrance;  
 That guy, this guy, in the pine forest build a dike,  
 (Ah such beautiful earth, such good and honest, kind-hearted people!)  
 Leaning up along the green, green dikes, a few old farmers,  
 Smoke long-stemmed pipes, flocks of goats, bird calls...  
 The sky is strangely soft; all appears calm,  
 Some people say, this is a good season for 轟炸;  
 Lying on piles of hay, some watch the skies foolishly hoping ---  
 This year, life seems a gamble, perhaps you'll be killed—that space a shoal of blood;

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<sup>62</sup> This is a citation of the poem "To the Tune 'Congratulating the Bridegroom,'" also from the Song Dynasty.

(the sound of a car horn, another car, stirring up dust)

I remember tenderly the poetry meeting that night,

Her round, round face, the sound of her voice,

I love her so, *mi Beatrice!*

You laugh 了. Play a game of chess 吧,

Don't panic, the final siren hasn't sounded yet--

Deflect the red horse go ahead three 吧,

An armored car passes by, a country-selling thief!

Go ahead and attack 吧, only a crown in danger 了,

Half of the country, does the Northwest weep a common fate 了?

Yan'an is the ancient Roman Road towards Heaven,

Isn't it? You must remember...

Here, they flow into the shelter,

Hey, there are people with a gramophone playing: "The Galloping Bay"

A young woman, knitting, feels nauseous, wants to vomit,

She says she must go outside, but she's afraid the Angel of Death will extend his bloody

hand;

Pick up that letter on the ground, give it to the one named Zhang:

(Today there's more alarming news. The Qiantang River Bridge 炸了;

We're the ones who did it! Yes, in order to stop the enemy from charging south;

Again more than a hundred 炸 to death; families flee to the countryside 了....)

The thought of my hometown's Falling Dew Pond suddenly rises,

My parents thinking of me day and night ...

Here, I see many professors,

Such honorable teachers, ah, in this difficult place,

Insisting on teaching students, so many warm and sincere hearts!

Smoking pipes, heads lowered, lost in thought,

Absorbed in their books, chatting with students;

They haven't brought anything, only a notebook, lecture notes

A piece of grey cloth wrapped around a manuscript,

A few well-loved books; is there anything more precious?

Carrying a damaged leather suitcase, knowledge singing inside it;

The logic professor, face wreathed in smiles, strolls to and fro....

Il pleure dans mon coeur

Comme il pleut sur la ville,

Quelle est cette langueur

Qui pénètre mon coeur?

(I remember visiting *Yi-he Yuan* on that autumn day

A chance rain shower, maple leaves glittering brilliant red on the Western Hills...)

Was ich besitze,

seh ich wie im Weiten,

Und was verschwand,

wird mir zu Wirklichkeiten.

(I know this is a famous line from *Faust*)

Beneath a bright window, reading honored books, Qinghua's lake and pines,

Purple lilacs pressed into a collection of C. Rossetti's poems ...

(When to the sessions of silent sweet thought,

I summon up remembrance of things past)

Beautiful dreams broken 了! 轟炸! 轟炸!

Enemy planes overhead 了!—

Kunming is shaking, burning

Where is the smoke from, black as crows,

It's like souls on Judgment Day; screaming

Crying, blood and flesh mixed together—

轟炸! 炸 to death fragile lines 吧!

If they come by land, beat them back by land!

If they come by sea, beat them back by sea!

If they come by air, beat them back by air!

This is our, the Chinese people's, land!

These are our, the Chinese people's, seas!

These are our, the Chinese people's, skies!

Anger is gunpowder, infusing Kunming's sunlit skies,

Burn! Fires fill the skies—

On wild plains the people's anger boils over!

The young generation flourishes the signal flag,  
Singing a mighty and tragic song, from the top of our lungs—

We will walk a single road

Walk a single road 吧!

The sound of the all clear 了.

The clouds color, sparkle in the western sky, ardent,  
Beautiful as if the universe were hosting a joyous wedding;

Relaxed feet move slowly,

On their way to the wedding of heaven and earth,

Kunming is smiling.

Japanese imperialism must be defeated!

China must win!

The fascists must be overthrown,

All the people of the world must win!

Rousseau prophesized long ago:

“Time can lift many a veil!”—

Le temps peut lever bien des voiles!

一九四〇年：昆明一畫像

—贈詩人穆旦

中午十二點十分有三分鐘，  
昆明，雲貴高原上的春城。  
同學 F 試弄從安南買來的吉他，  
還能重溫古都往日的綺夢嗎？  
六十越幣，法國制，華美的裝演，  
彈奏一隻 Aloha Oe 小曲吧——  
撥動新弦，諦聽流泉般的樂音，  
(少女搖著團扇，樓外飛過雙蝴蝶：  
離愁正引牽絲亂，更東陌，飛絮夢夢... ..)  
打開紙糊的窗，讓陽光踱進來吧。  
你說要念幾首英國詩，哼哼調子，  
W.B. 葉慈，T.S. 艾略特的... ..  
這可助腦神經消化；同學 C 說，  
幹嗎這麼用功，剛吃過中餐？  
我覺得有點氣悶，頭昏，  
多美的天氣啊，可不是嗎？  
那麼，先翻翻今兒的報紙吧：  
昨天下午兩點五十五分鐘，敵機襲滇——  
青青的麥穗兒受了重傷，三十九架，  
沿著滇越鐵路，盲目投彈；  
啊！我們親切的南湖，憂加利樹，

樹上棲著，飛著灰白色的鷺鷥，  
蒙自，那可愛的小城憂遭殃！  
(那兒有白髮老翁和他的糖粥，  
牛鈴聲，芭蕉味，奇異的情調... ..)  
又有多少生靈，多少房屋被毀滅！  
今兒晴朗，有輕風，天藍得叫人心慌，  
帶根手杖，夾本書，到野外散步吧；  
聽說又有“預行”，很可能要來了！  
隔壁雙層床上打鼾聲，有人甜睡，  
(宰予晝寢，朽木不可調也)  
他是個大鬍子，學中國哲學的，  
(秋夜燈下，展讀《羅馬帝國興亡史》，  
做者夕陽古道的殘夢，一切都在消逝... ..);  
同學Y爬上搖晃的上層床，呆坐著，  
忽拉起胡琴，調子是淒清的；  
有人急忙地從外邊跑進來，報告：  
已掛上紅燈籠了！人們開始往外逃，  
(對，正好，我討厭下午第一堂課)  
還在做夢：三千裡外地家園，  
母親來信說：今年桃花分外豔鮮，  
可是滿城騷亂，海上常有敵艦游弋... ..  
那些抒情詩的年華已燒成灰燼！——



穿紅衫，騎青驄，結伴踏青，  
還有斷橋，采菱船，杏花春雨；  
( 整個華北苦難的雨正在滂沱... .. )  
夢著五十九架，三批，突襲滇南，再往北，  
心猛然一跳！越過紅河，弧形的是鐵路線，  
闖入棕黃色的大地，莽莽山林裡... ..  
啊，昆明震動了！昆明站起顫抖，  
昆明再一次愁眉苦臉，  
下午三點又三刻鐘。人們惶恐，  
走，一塊兒走吧，別太緊張，  
帶副撲克，象棋，一本浪漫派小說，  
今兒可糟了，真來了嗎？空襲！  
一口氣跑了兩里半，流著大汗，  
沿著公路兩邊田溝里裡走，  
懷著希望，疑懼，躲進柏樹林裡吧；  
( 媽呀，我怕！日本鬼子又來炸啦！  
孩子，別怕，爹還在地裡幹活啊，  
緊拉著媽的衣襟，這兒安全，放心！ )  
遠遠的，一輛小汽車，紫的一閃，揚起灰塵  
( 我們可沒福氣坐汽車逃命，  
說不定死得更快，天曉得！ )

這是一片離奇，混亂而繽紛的景色：  
坐在地上，背靠著樹木，年輕的一群——  
不知道什麼經緯度上長出了煩憂？  
什麼天能萌芽情詩的靈感？  
什麼境域流動著青春的氣息？  
有個畫家，撐起畫架，慢慢琢磨：  
（我見青山多嫵媚，料青山見我應如是）  
眼前是廣野，一座橋，黃昏的日影，  
十里外瀰漫著雲霧，近旁淡淡芳香；  
這一伙，那一伙，在松林下堤埂上，  
（多麼美好的土地啊，多美良的人！）  
斜偎著青青的堤埂，幾個老鄉人，  
抽著旱煙，羊群，鳥鳴... ..  
天嫩得古怪，一切顯得安靜，  
有人說，這是轟炸得好時節；  
躺在草堆上，有人望著天空痴想——  
這年頭生命像賭注，也許殺那間一灘血；  
（一陣喇叭，又一輛汽車，揚起灰塵）  
我眷戀那天晚上的詩會，  
那圓圓臉兒，那歌聲，  
我多愛她，我的 Beatrice！  
你笑了。來下盤棋吧，  
別慌，“緊急”的還未放——

偏角那只紅馬進三吧，  
鐵申車開進去吃掉那賣國的賊相！  
進攻吧，孤單的皇冠危險了，  
半壁江山，做了西北楚囚嗎？  
延安是條通向天堂的羅馬古道，  
不是嗎？這得記住... ..  
這會兒，溜進一個防空洞，  
竟有人開著話匣子：紅棕烈馬；  
織布的阿嬌感到悶熱，要嘔吐，  
她說得出去，但怕死神伸出血手；  
從地上拾起一封信，給姓張的：  
(今天又有警報，錢塘江大橋早炸了，  
是咱們自己干的！對，阻擋敵機騎南闖；  
又炸死上百人；家裡逃到鄉下... ..)  
我忽然想起故鄉的落霞潭，  
雙親日夜在想念著我... ..  
這會兒，我遇見好幾位教授，  
多可敬的老師啊，艱苦環境中，  
堅持講學著述，顆顆熱摯的心！  
抽煙斗的，低頭沈思的，  
凝神看書的，跟同學們聊天的；  
什麼也沒帶，只是筆記本，講義，

一塊灰白布裹著一部手稿，  
幾本心愛的書；還有比這些更珍貴的嗎？

提只破皮箱，智慧在裡面歡唱；  
邏輯教授笑咪咪的，踱來踱去... ..

Il pleure dans mon coeur

Comme il pleut sur la ville.

Quelle est cette langueur

Qui pénètre mon coeur?

(我記起那天秋游頤和園，  
遇上一場雨，西山楓葉紅得燦爛... ..)

Was ich besitze,

seh ich wie im Weiten,

Und was verschwand,

wird mir zu Wirklichkeiten.

(我知道這是《浮士德》裡德名句)

在明窗下讀聖賢書，水木清華，  
紫丁香花夾在一本 C。羅色蒂詩集裡... ..

(When to the sessions of silent sweet thought,

I summon up remembrance of things past)

綺夢被啐了！轟炸！轟炸！

敵機飛臨頭上了！——

昆明在顫抖，在燃燒，

不知道哪裡冒出濃煙，烏黑的，

放佛末日幽靈；叫喊聲，

哭聲，血肉模糊——

轟炸！炸死脆肉的詩句吧！

從地上來的，從地上打回去！

從海上來的，從海上打回去！

從天上來的，從天上打回去！

這是咱們中國人的土地！

這是咱們中國人的海洋！

這是咱們中國人的天空！

憤怒是火藥，沖著昆明春天的陽光，

燃燒！火焰漫天——

原野上沸騰著人們的憤怒！

年輕的一代打出戰鬥的旗號，

高唱著悲壯的歌——

咱們一道走，

一道走吧... ..

解除警報響了。

西天雲彩閃亮，熱烈，

美麗得猶如宇宙在辦新婚喜事；

輕鬆的腳步慢慢兒移動，

去赴天地間的歡宴，

昆明微笑著。

日本帝國主義必敗！

中國必勝！

法西斯一定被打到，

全世界人民必勝！

盧梭老早就預言：

“時間會揭開重重帷幕！”——

Le temps peut lever bien des voiles!

Let me start, as the poem does, with time. From the very first line, we can see an obsession with its presentation. For it is time, and the changes that mark its passage, that creates the drama of both the day and the poem. In the first line the Chinese is astounding in its specificity: “Noon, 12:10 and 3 more o’clock, 中午十二點十分又三分鐘 *zhongwu shi'er dian shi fen you san fen zhong*,” so I’ve translated it with the strikethrough in English ““Midday, ~~12:00, 12:10, 12:13~~” to give a sense of both the Chinese’s drawn-out quality and its specificity. This beginning stresses the great anticipation of waiting, a fact that brings to mind the work of Paul Saint-Amour, who has written extensively on air raids and “proleptic trauma,” or the emotional toll of waiting for something one fears to happen.

In his analyses, however, waiting is conceived of visually rather than sonically. And, being that it’s written about in European languages, it happens in a specific tense. For example, Saint-Amour’s “Bombing and the Symptom” begins with a description of what he understands to be a real-world illustration of this possibility: the uncanny “anticipation”

among the citizens of Hiroshima as they “watched waves of American bombers fly past of their way to other targets” (60). After describing the “weird expectation” in pre-nuclear Hiroshima, Saint-Amour explores the notion of “proleptic trauma,” or how a traumatic event, which is usually understood as a return from the past, might be understood to be “proleptic” or “anticipatory.”

Saint-Amour’s insights are striking, but I find his visual approach leads us to hover over air raids. We are not in the texts; we are over them, considering them visually, rather than sonically. To approach Zhao’s text this way would be to be led outside the poem, both spatially and temporally. For in his poem, people weren’t so much watching for bombing as they were *listening* for 轟炸.<sup>63</sup>

If we return to the first stanza, we find time is at standstill as we listen. There are no changes. Only waiting. In this section we don’t find 了 but lots of 吧. The students chat nervously with each other—let’s do this, why don’t you do that. These questions, with their many 吧 characters, not only set the scene but draw *the reader* into the conversation. We are listening, *with the students*, as a tension grows.

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<sup>63</sup> I would like to make a further observation about visual and sonic approaches. The body of work about air raids and a “nuclear condition” seems primarily to understand this condition visually. An example is Rey Chow’s important work *The Age of the World Target*, in which she writes, “we may say that in the age of bombing, the world has [...] been transformed into—is essentially conceived of and grasped as—a target” (31). Although Chow’s intent is to critique the visual and cultural hegemony of the West, here she reiterates the trope of visibility that makes this stance possible. If one approaches aerial warfare sonically, then one is able to move beyond the bird’s-eye view of the attacker and hear the experience from the ground. This is illustrated by Sven Linqvist’s fascinating text *A History of Bombing*, which approaches its subject with short excerpts of facts, observations and memories, arranged, “in a labyrinth with twenty-two entrances and no exit” (v) to confound narrative and time. In section 168, towards the center of the book, we find this observation, “[My father] thought the war would come marching in, just like the old days, slowly but surely. He didn’t understand that war these days would fall from the skies, without warning, in the middle of the night. I was the one who knew that, and I lay awake nights waiting for it until I fell asleep” (76).

Their chatter is trained toward the future, even as it is grounded in the precise time 12:10, 12:13. In its elegant fashion, Chinese does not make this time as occurring in the past or present: It is 12:10, 12:13. It was 12:10, 12:13. The stress is on midday, not midday when. For it was/is/will be at midday, over and over again, that the signals would sound, and it would become clear if Kunming would be the day's target.

The first signal, indicating the bombers had left the Japanese base to the south, would have gone off sometime earlier in the morning, but through the morning it wouldn't yet be clear where they were heading. But around noon, a trajectory would be established. In the meantime, we all wait. Were/are/will the planes be coming?

If we look at the poem for an answer, we find they are often marked with 了. In other words, 了 occurs at the poem's most intense moments, which are moments of change. We find it first in the second stanza, when the students first admit that an air raid might come to them: "I hear there will be yet another 'trial run,' it's very possible they will come 了." Here the 了 works to underline the stated possibility. But there is a not specific time marker. The line does not say: "Today, it's very possible...." The emphasis, the real meaning of the statement is this possibility that the planes might come.

It is not surprising that this 了 of possibility appears again in this second stanza, just after the poem describes the planes "throwing bombs blindly" over Mengzi, the small city to the south of Kunming, on the banks of South Lake, or *Nan Hu* (南湖), where Zhao and Mu Dan lived for several months. This section reflects an effort to image how this familiar place could have been changed by 轰炸. At first the language is reportorial:

So, first look through today's paper 吧:



Yesterday at 2:55 in the afternoon, enemy planes attacked Yunnan—

Green, green tassels of grain sustain heavy damage, 39 planes

Followed the Yunnan rail lines, throwing bombs blindly

The poem reports the facts. It suggests an image at a distance. But the poem cannot sustain the reportorial tone. After the image of planes “throwing bombs blindly” it breaks in with an interjection “Ah! Our kin, Nanhu.” This idea of kinship stresses the students’ intimacy with Mengzi, an intimacy that is further evoked by sounds, smells and tastes both past and present. “There’s a gray-haired old man selling sweet rice soup, [There was an old man]/ the sound of cow bells, the scent of plantains.” These details, however, do not remain in the past. They are part of the present, and they lead to questions about the students’ future: “How many more living things, how many more homes were destroyed?” They live beneath 轰炸. Will Kunming be destroyed?

The lines that follow are, in a sense, not about Mengzi, but Kunming. They are not about the past but the present, a present that the lines suggest is also, or at least could be, our present. This is underlined by the use of 吧: “Carry a walking stick, take a book, go for a walk in the country 吧.” This line describes both what the students did in Mengzi and what they *will do*, here in Kunming, if the air raid siren rings, and what we might do, too, if the planes were to come.

The lines following this suggestion become even looser, more disjointed and unquiet, as if the students (and the readers) have come unmoored in time and space.

Next door on the bunk beds someone snores, someone sleeps sweetly,

(Zaiyu sleeps by day, dead trees cannot be carved)  
He's got a big beard (he snores), studies Chinese philosophy,  
(Beneath autumn lamps, reading *A History of the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*,  
Cruel dreams of the setting sun on an ancient road; all fades away....);  
Y climbs up the shaky upper bunk and sits woodenly,  
Suddenly he pulls out a *huqin*; the tune is somber;  
Someone runs in with news, the report:  
They've hung the red lantern 了! People are starting to flee the city,  
(Right! Great! I hate my first afternoon class)  
Still dreaming: Three thousand *li* from home,  
Mother's letter: This year's peach blossoms are exceptionally lush,  
But the entire city is in chaos; enemy warships cruise the sea  
The poems of that era have been burned to ash! -----  
Wear a red shirt, ride a black horse, walk together on new spring grass,  
The Broken Bridge is still there, boats for picking caltrops, apricot-blossom rains;  
(All of North China is suffering rain; flooding is imminent ....)  
Dreaming of 59 of them, in three groups, suddenly bombing Yunnan, then heading north,  
Pounding heart! They've passed the Red River, following the arch of the railroad line,  
Intruding on China's brown earth, lush mountain forests ....  
Ah! Kunming shaking 了! Kunming stands up trembling,  
Kunming one more time with worried brows,  
3:45 in the afternoon. Everyone is terrified,

Come on, we'll go together 吧, don't worry,  
Bring a poker deck, chess, a romance novel,  
Today's really bad 了, are they really coming 了? Air raid!

This growing sense of immanence continues into the next stanza, even as the observations are spread farther afield, and come to include people of all walks of life, rushing from the city.

We run two and a half *li* in one breath, sweating like crazy,  
Irrigation ditches line the road;  
In my heart, hope, apprehension; hide in the cypress forest 吧;  
(Ma, I'm scared! The Japanese Devils are coming bombing again 了—ah!  
Don't be scared, son; your Ba is still working the land—ah;  
Hold tight to my collar, it's safe here, don't worry!)  
Far, far away, a small car, a flash of purple, scatters dust,  
(We certainly don't have the good fortune to flee in a car,  
Lord knows—maybe we'd die faster!)  
It's a fantastic, chaotic and riotous view:  
Sitting on the ground, their backs against trees, a group of young people---  
Which latitudes give rise to concern 了?  
In which hearts can love poems sprout?  
In what scenes can the spirit of youth flow?  
A painter takes up his easel, slowly refining:

(I look at green mountains, so delightful; I imagine this is how the mountains see me)

Before his eyes: wilderness, a bridge, dusk, shadows,

Ten *li* away clouds and mist, nearby a faint fragrance;

That guy, this guy, in the pine forest build a dike,

(Ah such beautiful earth, such good and honest, kind-hearted people!)

Leaning up along the green, green dikes, a few old farmers,

Smoke long-stemmed pipes, flocks of goats, bird calls...

The sky is strangely soft; all appears calm,

Some people say, this is a good season for 轟炸;

As we read this section, with its open *ahs* and *bas*, we can only listen—waiting to see where and when the sonic presence of the planes will come into being visually. I've included the sound *ah* as much as I could here, for it creates a sonic thread throughout the stanza, which ends with the observation: "Some people say, this is a good season for 轟炸." This floating *ah* creates a tension, a sonic breath that, suggests the continued absence of 轟炸. Where is it? When will it come?

Sound theorist Stephen Connor calls our expectation to be able to see the origins of a sound as "the *sound hermeneutic*—whereby sound asks *where?* and the image responds *here!* (213)."<sup>64</sup> Because, he explains, a sound can emerge from any direction, we are troubled if we cannot see the "speaking mouth" to verify the presence of a being. In

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<sup>64</sup> Connor's work is an interesting complement to Ihde's phenomenological conceptualization of sound.

this section, the overwhelming presence is not the people scattered about the landscape, but the looming absence of the planes, and the unanswerable “where?” of the 轰炸.

In stanza four we finally move into the shelter. The planes must be coming closer, and here again we find 了 connected to air raids.

(Today there’s more alarming news. The Qiantang River Bridge 炸了;

We’re the ones who did it! Yes, in order to stop the enemy from charging south;

Again more than a hundred 炸 to death; families flee to the countryside 了....)

In contrast to the lines above in which 了 marks possibility, 了 is used here to suggest both completion and change, and how these qualities reverberate into the present. Like with the example of Mengzi above, it becomes unclear with the last line, “families flee to the countryside 了,” if this event happened in the past, or if it is happening in the present, here.

This movement between space and time provokes the speaker to closely examine the environment before him—the now that presently exists (both here and far away) and which may soon be effected by loss. “My two parents think of me day and night... / Here, I see many professors.” This new focus on the scene around the speaker marks an important shift in the poem. It moves away from the awkwardly juxtaposed scenes that filled the earlier stanzas, and presents longer, sustained images, which we can trace to a specific speaker:

A piece of grey cloth wrapped around a manuscript,

A few well-loved books; is there anything more precious?

Carrying a damaged leather suitcase, knowledge singing inside it;

The logic professor, face wreathed in smiles, strolls to and fro....

These softer, more coherent lines contrast with the frantic simultaneity, the unquiet listening, of the earlier stanzas. And as a professor “wreathed in smiles, strolls to and fro,” the poem gently shifts from Chinese to French with Verlaine’s line: “Il pleure dans mon coeur” (“It rains in my heart”). Visually this shift is abrupt. The code switches entirely from Chinese characters to Roman letters. But if we read the shift sonically it is smooth. The sounds of the Chinese, especially the last half of the preceding line with its repeated “uo” sounds and final “ü” (踱來踱去 *duo lai duo qu*) prepare us for the melodious repetition of the “eu” in Verlaine’s verse. The sonic transition, then, is an almost seamless movement from the professor’s introspective pacing, to the undulations of Verlaine’s lines:

Il pleure dans mon coeur  
Comme il pleut sur la ville,  
Quelle est cette langueur  
Qui pénètre mon coeur?

In my translation:

The rain pours in my heart  
As it pours on my hearth.  
What heaviness, weariness  
Seeps into my heart?

The word sounds of this poem, with the repeated “eu” in the French, and the repeated, monosyllabic words are clearly meant to echo the content sounds the poem describes, the slow, steady sound of a day of rain. We hear that they cannot be fully separated from each other. And yet the beauty of Verlaine’s poem, which was included, appropriately enough, in his 1874 collection *Romances sans paroles*, or *Stories without words*—spoken words (*paroles*)—clearly wishes to create a *movement* between listening to the poem and listening to the rain itself—without words—for its rhythmic sadness and beauty.

Zhao includes this French poem, and the German and English ones that follow, not in translation, but in the original languages. In this way he creates a web of meanings and sounds that resound between texts and languages, and between the word sounds of the original languages and their meanings. Here are the lines that follow:

(I remember visiting *Yi-he Yuan* on that autumn day

A chance rain shower, maple leaves glittering brilliant red on the Western Hills...)

Was ich besitze,  
seh ich wie im Weiten,  
Und was vershwand,  
wird mir zu Wirklichkeiten.

(I know this is a famous line from *Faust*)

The second half of the Chinese line, 西山楓葉紅的燦爛 *xishan fengye hong de canlan*, brings us into the tone of the German, particularly the “-and” of “vershwand.” And I love that *Faust* is written in its Chinese pronunciation “浮士德 *Fu shi de*,” while the lines are

cited in German. I appreciate, too, that this line addresses the reader so directly. Indeed, maybe he does this so we won't wonder if he knows what he's doing, as his bit about Rossetti and the lilacs is followed by lines from Shakespeare:

Beneath a bright window, reading honored books, Qinghua's lake and pines,  
Purple lilacs pressed into a collection of C. Rossetti's [C. 羅色蒂 *Luo se di*] poems ...

(When to the sessions of silent sweet thought,  
I summon up remembrance of things past)

But all language play aside, this is a serious moment in the poem. Zhao is using these foreign texts to surround us with sonic meaning, to put us inside a new experience, to make us uncomfortable inside it, rather than allowing us to view it from afar. For after inviting us to join him in this new sonic space, we have these lines:

Beautiful dreams broken 了! 轟炸! 轟炸!

Enemy planes overhead 了!—

He wants the reader to be with him inside 轟炸. We are not watching from the side. We are beneath the planes. This is what his poem attempts to do, and this, too, is what my translation strives for.

And so we have returned to the epigraph. Let us hear it again. Does the first 了 mark the completion of the breakage, or a change from wholeness to brokenness? I think the poem wants us to hear both, for the stress is not *when* it happened, but that something has changed, that something has ended beneath the violent 轟炸.



It is from this change that a new call arises, one that is not unlike Guo Dehao's, which we saw in chapter 1:

轟炸! 炸 to death fragile lines 吧!

Let us take this explosion and bomb to death fragile lines. Let us walk a single road! Walk a single road 吧! In the sublimation of this violence into a power of his own that Zhao shifts the prosody and tone of the poem:

If they come by land, beat them back by land!

If they come by sea, beat them back by sea!

If they come by air, beat them back by air!

This is our, the Chinese people's, land!

These are our, the Chinese people's, seas!

These are our, the Chinese people's, skies!

These lines expressed what scholar Patricia Rae has called, in her work on proleptic elegies, "an orientation toward the future rather than the past, and a conviction that the solution to society's ills lies not in restoring a Golden Age, but in creating a brand new kind of social organization" (228). Rae is discussing English literature from between the World Wars, when much attention was given to social contexts that caused and would again cause terrific and devastating violence, and her observations of writers' engagement with a future in which loss eminent is certainly applicable here.

This new social organization is carried out in the very sounds of the poem. In this anthem, the intense sonic waiting of an air raid's "coming into being" and "passing from

being” are mediated by the repetition of song. It is an evocation of power that can be repeated ad infinitum, in the sense described by Jacques Attali in his seminal text *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, wherein he argues that the “appropriation and control” of noise “is a reflection of power, that is essentially political” (31). The poem manifests this act of control by transforming the attention of the ears from the anticipation of loss into songs that unite and resist potential future loss.

But Zhao does not end the poem with his anthem of anger. Rather he calls for our participation in resistance:

Anger is gunpowder, infusing Kunming’s sunlit skies,  
Burn! Fires fill the skies—  
On wild plains the people’s anger boils over!  
The young generation flourishes the signal flag,  
Singing a mighty and tragic song, from the top of our lungs—  
We will walk a single road  
Walk a single road 吧!

These lines recall the observation Zhao made in his autobiographical essay, cited above: “Each time we all bitterly resented the Japanese pirates who came again from the sky to bomb our earth into pits, to make havoc of our people and our property. Men and women, from all walks of life, old and young, we all hated the enemy, everyone’s hearts were

tightly linked together.”<sup>65</sup> But the 吧 also suggests the work of contemporary theorist Judith Butler, in her post 9-11 book *Precarious Lives*:

When we lose certain people, or when we are dispossessed from a place, or a community, we may simply feel that we are undergoing something temporary, that mourning will be over and some restoration of prior order will be achieved. But maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute who we are, ties or bonds that compose us. [...]

Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary solution and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility. If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the “we” is traversed by a relationality [...]. (22)

To me this “we” and this “relationality” is marked in the last line of this passage. We hear it in the 吧 that is at once a call to Zhao’s comrades, a call to his fellow citizens and a call to us. By moving through the experience of the air raid into a newly born voice of resistance,

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<sup>65</sup> This is echoed in the essay “On Air Raids,” by the famous scholar Zhu Ziqing: “The bombardments of enemy planes are terrifying; they are also detestable, but there is also something good about them. The bombing causes every Chinese person, no matter where he is, to recognize our enemy; [...] all Chinese people feel they have their own nationality, their own country” (417).

Zhao increases our understanding of intellectuals' transformation towards the anthems of a politically active China. He asks us to listen with him.<sup>66</sup>

But the poem is not over yet. Unquiet in their waiting, the people of Kunming have been united by the violence of 轟炸. It is not only that dreams have been broken. It is that something new has been created. One might find this new singing distasteful, and resist this reaction toward an anthem's sloganeering. But this would be to ignore what the sounds of the poem are teaching us. They underline the joy in what, at the time, was seen as a kind of historical imperative: the Chinese intelligentsia was ready and willing to transform its sense of the "small self" <sup>1</sup> (小我 *xiao wo*), or individual identity, into the "greater self" (大我 *da wo*) of the collective. In Zhao's poem this new manifestation of relationality is reason for a jubilant resolution. It reflected the transformation from the diffuse anxiety of the waiting to the power of resistance. Walk together 吧.

This new identity is not created by a denial of Zhao's passions or talents. As such, the final stanza suggests a reapplication of his capacities toward a greater identity.

The sound of the all clear 了.

The clouds color, sparkle in the western sky, ardent,  
Beautiful as if the universe were hosting a joyous wedding;

Relaxed feet move slowly,

On its way to the wedding of heaven and earth,

Kunming is smiling.

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<sup>66</sup> We might note that in these lines sunlight appears, but it is not the anxiety provoking sunlight of the first two stanzas. It is a radiant light infused with anger.

With the all clear there is a change. There are new possibilities, underlined by the allusions to a wedding. But what is being joined? It is the reader with the poem, the poem with the people, the people with each other. It is the birth of a new collective identity. It is all of us, who came unquietly and in haste, and who were transformed by 轟炸 into a united body of resistance. Kunming is no longer trembling. It is smiling. Neither the violence of the bombs, nor the black smoke of burning buildings can overcome this resistance and the deep peace in the belief that their unity will bring a new beginning. Walk together 吧. We have cried/are crying/will cry out: “Japanese imperialism must be defeated! / China must win! / Fascism will be overthrown! / All of the people of the world must win!” The struggle is at once personal, local and international. It occurs in the past, in the present and the future.

The last three lines of the poem underline this. Translated first in Chinese, “時間會揭開重重帷幕！*Shijian hui jiekai chongchong weimu,*” Zhao ends the poem in French “*Le temps peut lever bien des voiles!*” — “;” Time can lift many a veil!”

Time, expressed in and between many languages, can reveal many things, unseen and unheard. Now how do you hear 轟炸? How do you sense 了 and 吧? It is my hope that in this translation of Zhao’s poem you have experienced them in ways that are a little different from your experience of “bombing” and time, as you know them in English, or perhaps in another language. And I hope that you have experienced something of the temporal openness that is a gift from Chinese grammar.

In the next chapter, I will develop my sense of the space that resounds between Chinese and English, as I explore the philosophical idea of “emptiness” as it appears in Feng Zhi’s collection *Sonnets*. Although I will not dwell specifically on the air raid experience, but rather on reverberations between literature of the war period, I will again show how translation is a means to open up a space in which to listen.

## Chapter 4

### Sonnets and 空 An Exploration of Sonnet/Sonic Space

In flooding, formless water,  
a man dips down to dip up one oval pitcher,  
and this bit of water obtains one set form.  
Look, a flag rippling in autumn wind,

holding what cannot be held.  
Let distant light, distant dark night,  
the thriving and withering of a few distant plants,  
and a rushing toward endless intention,

be kept, a little, in this flag.  
空空 *kongkong*, we hear a night of wind.  
空 *kong* we see a day's grasses yellow 了, its leaves redden,

Where can we put down our thought, thinking?  
If only these poems were flags full of wind,  
holding a little of what cannot be held.

--Feng Zhi  
"Sonnet 27"

Sound opens up space by moving across it, bringing our attention to it. In writing,  
it spans the space between the writer and the reader, the shift from page to voice or mind,

from the written to the thought, or sounded, word. Sound is one side of the space that opens up between lexical and sonic meanings. It is one aspect of the relationship between words and other words, as they bump together within lines, phrases and sentences.

In the space between sound and meaning, change and connection happens, yet, we often regret that in translation the sonic aspect of words is lost. We fear that, in leaving behind word sounds, we are also leaving behind all the spaces they help create. The spaces close down. The translation is the less.

Or is it? In earlier chapters, I have shown that if we open up our translations to listening, we can use them to hear beyond English. We might hear “I” through “我,” or even understand temporality, and the experience of time in air raids, in new ways. In this practice, translation creates space by bringing our attention to listening between languages. It provides a space in which new meanings and relationships can be created.

In this chapter, I explore Feng Zhi’s (馮至 1905-1993) work from the war period, and show how listening to the spaces created within and between texts, spaces Feng himself created in translation, can offer us new possibilities for understanding the practice of translation. I begin the chapter with an analysis of “Sonnet 27,” the last poem in Feng Zhi’s collection *Sonnets*, which was written in Kunming from 1939-1941, and which I cited in the epigraph above.<sup>67</sup> In this translation I put the ideas developed in the chapter into practice. In particular, I include the word 空 *kong* which means “empty,” “hollow,” “unoccupied” or “empty space” both to signify Feng’s own nuanced exploration of the term, as well as to

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<sup>67</sup> In the appendix you will find the rest of the collection, translated in accordance with the ideas I set out in the chapter that follows.



encourage us to think of translation as a place of interconnection and resonance. Finally, to better understand the possibilities that resonate in Feng's poems, I closely read Feng's translation of Rilke's "Sonnet 1.9" in *Die Sonette an Orpheus (Sonnets to Orpheus)*.

I would like to begin to explore this idea of resonance, however, by returning to Walter Benjamin, whose text "The Task of the Translator" I discussed in the introduction. In this text, Benjamin makes clear the translator's task: It is *not* to create a text for an audience who cannot read the original. Art isn't created for an audience, he chides. As an art, rather than a tool, translation's purpose is not to recreate the meaning of the original language in the target language. (This is the work of shoddy translations, Benjamin insists.) But rather: "to find in the translator's language that latent structure which can awake an echo of the original" (Trans. Hynf and Valk 303).<sup>68</sup> Echo—that's a sonic word. Translation's task is to turn our ears to the echoes.

But what does this mean, this "awakening an echo of the original"? In the many years that I've discussed this text with other translators, inside and outside of classrooms, in large groups or chatting with a friend, this "awakening" has always seemed to me to be rather abstract, pointing toward the metaphysical, Benjamin's impulse toward a "true language," a concordance of the many.

Taking this idea from a sonic perspective, however, I'm starting to see it differently. While Benjamin might have been interested in this idea of a "true language," I think he was also being, in his brilliant way, very practical: He is telling us to listen not only to the text, but to the space around the text, to what we can learn about the text itself, and about

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<sup>68</sup> I have used this translation rather than the more common Zohn because it is much clearer.

language and even culture, from the reverberations that are created when the translation echoes with the original.

He writes: “But translation, unlike an original work, does not see itself as within the forest depths of language but rather outside it, facing it; without itself entering those depths, it calls the original inside, at that one point where, at a given moment, the echo in the translator’s language can resound to the work in the foreign language” (303). For Benjamin, this echoing, this resounding, this translating, is not a weakening of the original, but its opening up. It is the action that shows us the movement between the original text, which he envisions—en-hears—within “the forest depths of language” and the translated text on the outside.<sup>69</sup>

To echo (resound, translate) is not only, as we so often think, to repeat something only more faintly, more weakly, less distinctly. We take the myth of Echo too negatively—we don’t think about how much, if we listen, Echo can teach us in her repeating. Not only about value judgments of originality and copying, but also about how sound moves in space. Echoes are more than repetition. In their space, we can hear how sounds mix with other sounds. How sounds bounce off of objects, showing us the shape of the land. And, echoes show us, when they come back to our ears, how the sound that was originally projected has changed.

The Chinese word for echo is 回聲 *huisheng* “return sound,” and, in some sense, isn’t all sound return sound, for all sounds move into space and then come back to us in

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<sup>69</sup>Although I understand Benjamin’s point that translation can be a sort of outside engagement with language, I wonder about the inside/outside dichotomy—it would seem to me that all texts, even translations, echo within forests of language, and that to imagine a “center” is misleading. But that would be for another paper.

some form, showing us the shape of a terrain, letting us hear the modulations that occur in movement. Or, if it comes back as silence, we learn too, about what has been absorbed.

We have a lot to learn from echoes.

To speak about translation in terms of echoes, and in terms of resounding, is to think about listening. This seems an important insight in Benjamin's text—as well as in Derrida's essay "Des Tours de Babel—when they speak of "harmony" and "resonance." It is an "in-sound" that, in our ocular-centric way, we have missed. In fact, I think they weren't even fully aware of it. For what they ask us to do is to think about reading, and translating, less in terms of the visual, than in terms of the aural, through a phenomenology of listening.

In his book *Listening*, Jean-Luc Nancy meditates on what we can learn from this approach to experience: "Indeed, as we have known since Aristotle, sensing [*sentir*] (*aithesis*) is always a perception [*ressentir*], that is, a feeling-oneself-feel [*se-sentir-sentir*]" (Trans. Charlotte Mandell 8), but, he posits, we often think about this in the visual sense, in which "the subject of the target is always already given, posed in itself to its *point of view*" (21). This "givenness," however, Nancy argues, can prevent us from seeing the movement that takes place in perception, as well as the space that is traversed as a movement leaves the perceiver's body, and then comes back into it again, (to say nothing of the movement and space within the perceiver's own body and mind). By contrast, "it is perhaps in the sonorous register that this reflected structure is most obviously manifest, and in any case offers itself as open structure, spaced and spacing (resonance chamber, acoustic space, the distance of a repeat [*renvoi*]), at the same time as an intersection, mixture" (8). The

aural, in other words, and attention to listening, show us four things more clearly than attention to seeing: 1. Perception happens across space and time. 2. In this time and space change happens. 3. Sound can draw our attention to both the space in which perception happens, as well as to the change in the original sound, it's echoing back, and perhaps the mixing that happens in transfer. It also can draw attention to silence, if there is no echo. 4. It draws our attention to the limits of the space, the places where sound bounces off and returns. This includes our own bodies, which are both end points and points of echo.

In the case of words, this perception is complicated by the fact that both signified and unsignified sounds are being exchanged, but it does not essentially change the relationship. For if we shift our conception of a text to think of it as "a resonant subject," we can become attentive to the fact that it is not, as we usually think in a visual sense, the object of "an intentional line of sight," but rather is a "place of resonance," a place of "infinite tension and rebound" (22).

I find it telling that Nancy marks his suspicion of the visual with the phrase the "subject of the target." He is showing us, with that word "target," that what we are trying to pin, visually, is an "other;" as an object, "a given" fixed in place (Nancy 21). No wonder we are suspicious of this word, when used in the translation context, for it suggests one right reading, and a kind of "target reading" that does not allow for resonance. To practice translation, as a mode of listening, is to attend to what, in a text, is "always still yet to come, spaced, traversed and called by itself, *sounded* by itself" (21). Translation can be, in other words, a space for possibility, if we think of it, as Benjamin does, for its ability to

“awake[n] an echo of the original” and, in so doing, open new possibilities for the resonance of meaning.

Before I continue, I would like to discuss one point of contention: How are we to hear the echo if we are unable to access the original language? For, when this is the case, how can we know, really, what echoes we are hearing? In earlier chapters, I explored how we might include elements of the original language, so the translation contains within it, in a tangible way, “an echo of the original.” Even if we did not know how a native speaker might hear a word, we could still begin to imagine it in harmony, similar but different, from a word we did know. In some sense this is akin to Lawrence Venuti’s famous ideas of foreignization (in which a target text takes on some aspects of the source text, and is thus “foreignized”), although my intent is not to create a new power dynamic in which one language is heard over another, but rather to open a space for listening between the two languages.

In this practice, there will certainly be some aspects of the Chinese words that are not fully understood. This is precisely the point. This mode of translation asks us to recognize the limits of our knowledge, so that we can begin to broaden them. It can create a kind of productive harmony (or dissonance, depending on how one decides to train one’s ears) that brings about, as Derrida puts it, “the accord of tongues.” He writes, “The accord lets the pure language [meaning that exceeds language], and the being language of the language [language’s representation of reality] resonate, announcing it rather than presenting it” (Graham 202). It is telling that he uses the word “announce” rather than “present.” For working toward “pure language” is to search for understanding beyond the

limit of language. The accord that we find when we use two languages to stimulate this kind of search cannot be presented. It is not an object that we can see. Rather it rests in the very movement that translation creates. If we attune our ears to the resonances between languages, new understanding will announce itself, in an oral sense, in a sonic sense, always moving and shifting, just beyond our attempts to pin it down.

This lofty goal still seems possible, whether we include original languages within translations or not. For there are other means to announce the ways language echoes, and meaning changes, over space and time. Indeed, some works are written to demonstrate just this kind of resonance, and I would argue that Feng Zhi's *Sonnets* are among them. As with "Sonnet 27" in the epigraph, these poems invite us to hear beyond words, or, as he puts it, to see the wind in wind-full flags. His sonnets invite us to listen through sound and meaning to the spaces they create, to how the poems' many meanings, many allusions, many sounds echo together, always a little differently, as they come together into new meanings.

In order to begin to show the many kinds of echoes happening within "Sonnet 27," let me give it again. However, instead of repeating the translation I presented above, I include it here in a translation that I have left closer to the Chinese, in terms of vocabulary and syntax. In addition, to show the shape and sounds of the Chinese rhyme and repetition, I have kept repetition and multiple word choice in the English, and I have added Romanized pinyin, as a marker of sounds, to the Chinese.

From in a space of overflowing, formless water  
Gathering-water person gathers up one oval pitcher

This drop/point/bit of water thus obtains one set form.

Look, in the autumn wind, waving flag

It holds unholdable things.

Let distant light, distant night

and those distant plants [grass and trees] flourishing/withering,

and also there is a racing toward endless intention

all be kept a few on this flag.

We empty/in vain heard a night of wind sound

Empty/in vain see/saw [了] a day of grass yellow, leaves red

toward what place arrange our thought, thinking?

If only these few poems in a wind flag

Hold a few unholdable things.

從一片泛濫 (fanlan)無形(wuxing)的水裡 (shuili), A

取水(qushui)人取(qu)來橢圓的一瓶 (yi ping),B

這點水 (shui)就得到一個定形 (yi ge ding xing).B

看，在秋風 (feng)裡 (li) 飄揚的風旗 (qi)A

它把住 (bazhu)把不住 (babuzhu)的事體 (ti). A  
讓遠方(yuanfang)的光(guang)、遠方(yuanfang)的黑夜 (ye), C  
和些遠方(yuanfang)的草木的榮 (rong)謝 (xie), C  
還有個奔向 (xiang)無窮 (qiong)的心意 (yi), A

都保留一些在這面旗上 (shang).D/slant  
我們空空 (kongkong )聽過一夜風聲(sheng). D/slant  
空 (kong)看了一天的草黃(huang)葉紅 (hong), D/slant

向何處安排我們的思、想(xiang)? D/slant  
但願這些詩象(xiang)一面風(feng)旗 (qi), A  
把住 (bazhu)一些把不住 (babuzhu)的事體 (ti). A

As you can see and hear, I hope, in both the English and Chinese, this poem is an intricately woven meditation on using form to capture the formless. In addition to following a sonnet's conventions, it uses direct repetition, partial repetition and rhyme to create echoes that move through and beyond the poem.

For example, in the first stanza: we find "water" 水 *shui* in the first line, which takes us to 取水人 *qushui ren* "water gatherer" to 取來 *qulai* "gather up" in the second line to "this bit of water" 這點水 *zhe dian shui* in the third. There is also the rhyme of 無形 *wuxing* "formless," from the first line. 無 *wu* "without" is heard in 取水 *qushui* "gather water,"



while 形 *xing* "form" is heard in 一瓶 *yiping* "one vessel" and 一個定形 *yige dingxing* "a set form," in the second and third lines.

Feng Zhi establishes the importance of these sounds, and the ideas of the words they hold, in the first stanza. Then he moves them, with us, into the poem. At the start of the second stanza, we find the "u" of 無 *wu* and 取 *qu* in 把住 *bazhu* "holding tight" and 把不住 *babuzhu*, "unholdable," 不 *bu* being the added negation. Also in the first line of the second stanza, we find the line "It holds unholdable things," which is repeated in the last line of the poem, "Hold a few unholdable things."

In terms of end rhyme, the bright -ing of "form" 形 *xing*, "vessel" 瓶 *ping* and "set" 定 *ding* in the first stanza, and the open -i/-e/-e/-i of the second stanza, is transformed into the more substantial sounds of the slant rhymes -ang, -ong, and -eng in the third. This purposeful vowel-shifting keys us into the idea of modification in repetition, even as the poem returns to the long -e sounds -i/-i, of the last two lines, and thus ends with a sound that creates length, as these vowel endings open up into a long drawing out.

These are the word sounds of the poem, and they clearly have a place in its meaning. But they are not the only sounds in the poem. Nor are they all that we might listen to and for. For example, how does 空 *kong*,<sup>70</sup> which I left in my translation in the epigraph, work in "Sonnet 27"? Here, again, are the Chinese lines in which they occur:

我們空空(*kongkong*)聽過一夜風聲(*yi ye feng sheng*). D/slant

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<sup>70</sup>And etymology of 空: its radical, the part of the character by which its organized in dictionaries, is on the top, 穴, or "hole." It suggests a "roof" with the two slashes below indicating an opening. The lower part of the character 工 would be a sound particle, as it is read *gong*.

空 (kong) 看了一天的草黃(huang)葉紅 (ye hong), D/slant

We can see all of the sonic repetition in these lines, particularly in the words ending in -ng, but also in the homophones “night” 夜, (ye) and “leaf/leaves” 葉, (ye). There is also a perceptual parallel. In the first line we hear; in the second we see.

I would also like to suggest that Feng is using 空 in these lines to make a subtle point about form. In the first line: “We 空空 heard a night of wind sound.” In this line 空 appears twice, as a reduplicative, to intensify meaning. It appears with a similar function, although without the reduplicative, in the second line. 空 means “empty,” “vacant,” “air” or “sky,” but it also has the extended meaning of “in vain,” or “for naught.” In these lines, we might read it with this extended meaning:

We listen for naught to a night of wind sound

See for naught a day’s grasses yellow, leaves redden,

Although this reading would work (this is scholar/translator Dominic Cheung’s interpretation, for example), it would seem more in keeping with Feng Zhi’s meditation on form to understand it through its primary meaning as “empty.” In other words, I read Feng to suggest that we listen for the spaces that can’t directly be seen, spaces in which connections can be made, in which echoes can resound:

Empty, we hear a night of wind,

Empty, we see a day’s grasses yellow 了, its leaves redden,

If we listen with an emptiness, an openness, we don’t have to listen in vain to that night of wind, or look for naught upon the yellowing of the grasses. We can be filled with it. Empty, we can find a place to arrange it, or put it into the new form of our thoughts.

Indeed, as if to underline this, not only do the final words of this sentence bridge the stanza break, creating another creation of space:

空空, we hear a night of wind.

空 we see a day's grasses yellow 了, its leaves redden,

Where can we put down our thought, thinking?

The sentence also ends with a strange lexical break: "Where can we put down our thought, thinking (思 *si* , 想 *xiang*)?" The last two words "思 , 想" are generally the two-character word 思想 *sixiang* (thought, thinking). But here Feng divides the compound with a comma into two separate words 思 *si* and 想 *xiang*, both of which mean "thought."<sup>71</sup> This division brings our attention, on a lexical level, to space and form. And by bringing this opened space our attention, Feng Zhi gives an answer to the question raised by the sentence. Where do we place our thought, thinking? If we open ourselves to our experiences, look closely enough to see the spaces between words and forms, we can find an openness in which we can arrange what cannot be pinned down.

The final couplet gives another answer. This time it is a wish: "If only these poems were wind-full flags/ holding, a little, what cannot be held." We can't just have 空, the emptiness, for then we wouldn't see it. We must have the objects that it moves between. We must have the form and the words themselves, so that we can see the 空 in which they play.

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<sup>71</sup> Although they combine with different words (to give two examples: 想念 *xiangnian* means "to miss something or someone"; 思考 means "to reflect"), if we look them up in a dictionary, in both cases the one defines the other. 思 : 想 ; 想 : 思.

To include 空 within my translation is my way of evoking Feng's own goals, which scholar Michelle Yeh describes thus: "Materiality and spirituality, being and potentiality, form and content are interdependent; the latter in each pair needs the former in order to be concretized. Like a container and a banner,<sup>72</sup> which allow water and wind to be manifested, poetry renders visible that which is hidden in life" (575). Yeh succinctly describes the relationship between form and content in a visual sense. Here, however, I use my translations, and this chapter on the possibilities of translating Feng Zhi's sonnets, as an opportunity to let them do more, for as I hear it, they don't just allow the invisible to be visible, they create, or prepare for us, a space in which meaning can resound.

Indeed, Feng Zhi's poems are so rich in resonances that I would like to offer an outline—a sense of the space—of the rest of this chapter before I go further. Above I explored how 空 marks the possibility of resonate spaces in Feng Zhi's *Sonnets*, but I also find 空 to be a useful marker of the ideas and issues that are raised in moving between different cultural spheres. To this effect, I will now briefly consider how the term has been translated into English from Chinese, and address some common misconceptions that have emerged as part of this history. I then turn to Feng and his biography. Feng was a scholar of the literary traditions of both Chinese and German, and a highly regarded translator of German. As such he drew from his rich, philosophical knowledge that was deeply grounded in both German and Chinese sources. To explore the space this created, I will explain why and how he used the sonnet form, as well as why the idea of "space" is exceptionally useful in conceptualizing Feng's translations of Rilke's work. Finally, I will

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<sup>72</sup> She is referring here to "Sonnet 27."

return to 空 as a reminder of the War. While Feng chose not to write directly about the War in *Sonnets*, as part of the word for sky, 天空 *tiankong* and the word for air raid 空袭 *kongxi*, its presence is still there in 空, reverberating.

Let me begin to explore 空 by turning to a bit of hidden poetic, and translation, history. 空 is in fact a word that we have heard for at least a century in English, as it is a key idea behind Ezra Pound's poetic revolution. In *The Poetics of Emptiness: Transformations of Asian Thought in American Poetry*, in which 空 is the "emptiness" to which the title refers, scholar Jonathan Stalling demonstrates how Ernest Fenollosa developed, via his work with Japanese Tendai Buddhism, a reading of 空, or "emptiness," based on the Sanskrit word *sūnatā* to describe "the law of dependent origination" (63). Let me quote Stalling at length, for he offers many interesting insights, both into the ways that 空 (and Chinese) has been read in the West, as well as to how it can work in my reading of Feng Zhi's poems:

For Fenollosa, so-called Chinese ideograms resist positivist dreams for a one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified by constantly reminding their users of the contextual, dynamic, aggregate nature of signification, as well as the "things" signified. In contrast to both popular Western thinking and sophisticated Western philosophy, in which individual things tend to be hypostatized—that is, regarded as concrete or fixed realities—Fenollosa's Buddhism emphasizes the aggregative, dependent nature of all "things." For instance, a chair, from a commonsensical Western standpoint, will be viewed as an autonomous "thing" or

object, whereas, from Fenollosa's Buddhist standpoint, a chair might be understood to be an aggregate of its many parts (legs, seat, back), each of which can be broken into its own parts, causes, and conditions, and its color, which is merely a phenomenon that arises at the meeting point of vibrations of light and sight organs, which are themselves complex nexus of processes hypostasized as an "eye" or a "person." Neither the chair nor its color is simply "there." Fenollosa could, for instance, point to the character for chair 椅 and comment upon its aggregate of "wood" 木 that pleases 可 people 人 who sit upon it. While such "visual etymologies" are not correct, from a linguistic point of view, they offered Fenollosa a linguistic analogue for his Tendai Buddhist beliefs. In contrast to the image of a world of objects defined by their ideal, or essential forms—the kind of world that lends itself to maps, taxonomies, hierarchies, and the formulation of scientific laws—we have an image of a world that never comes to rest in any given form .... (61)

Stalling reinforces a critique of the reading of Chinese characters as ideograms in the Poundian tradition, or, to quote Pound's essay "How to Read" the idea that "The Chinese still use abbreviated pictures AS pictures, that is to say, the Chinese ideogram does not try to be the picture of a sound, or to be a written sign recalling a sound, but it is still the picture of a thing; of a thing in a given position or relocation, or of a combination of things" (Saussy 5). As I wrote in the introduction, characters can indeed be both pictures and sounds, and we lose nuances of meaning when we neglect to read them as such. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that characters are made of images, and while Fenollosa

may be, in part, at fault for Pound's rather simplistic interpretation (I, for one, would suggest Pound had his own agenda), he actually understood characters to work quite differently than Pound.

If Pound wanted to read the parts of characters AS THINGS, Fenollosa would have argued that these characters show how nothing exists except through arrangement, or interdependence. In other words, all words and things are ultimately 空, or empty, openness in which nothing is hypostatized but part of perpetually shifting parts. Thus, for all of the imperfections in Fenollosa's own readings of Japanese texts, and for all of his prejudices (he was, at least for a time, a proponent of Japanese imperialism), his "poetics of emptiness" is an argument for interdependence. Yet this particular aspect of his writing has been largely ignored.

Feng, it seems to me, was keenly aware of the possibilities of a "poetics of emptiness," or interdependence, although he never called it this. And, as a citizen of a semi-colonized nation, he was also keenly aware of the misunderstandings that moved in the space between the East and West. He knew of the confusion and prejudice, as well as of the possibility for inspiration and respect. Negotiating this space was a part of Feng Zhi's life as a scholar and poet; he spent his exploring and nuancing it. Born into an elite family in Zhuozhou, a town just to the south of Beijing in 1905, he lived and went to primary school there, until, at the age of 12, his mother took him to Beijing, where he could live with relatives and study at the renowned Beijing No. 4 High School, which had been established ten years before. It was here, in Beijing, one of the epicenters of the student cultural movements, that Feng Zhi experienced the excitement and turbulence of

the May 4th Movement in 1919. This watershed event in Chinese literary and cultural history erupted after the decision, on the part of the European and Japanese parties negotiating the Treaty of Versailles, *not* to return parts of China's Shangdong Providence to China. The territories had been taken by Germany in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and during World War I promises had been made to return them to China. But, when negotiations were made in France, after the war, the Chinese government found itself powerless, and the territories were given to Japan.

This political decision sparked a series of protests that were called the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, the key event within the broader "New Culture Movement" of the late teens and early 20s, in which many of the ideas that have shaped modern China first came into the public forum. The decision at Versailles underscored the need to modernize China so that it could have a position, equal with other nations, in the international world.

Throughout the 20s, and even more in the 1930s when the socio-political situation in China worsened from imperial encroachment to outright war, fierce debates raged, as different groups sought to argue for the best use of education, culture and literature in the transformation of both elite and poor classes into a citizenry that could, and should, maintain its own sovereignty.

In the literary field, no matter whether writers and critics thought literature should be used in the service of the proletariat and farming classes, or to express the feelings of an individual, or to transmit the values of the past, or for its own intrinsic beauty, all wanted to demonstrate that China, and the citizens of China, were legitimate members of the global world. Many felt that for this to come to pass, one of the most important



elements of reform was to shift the written language, used in education, the government and in most works of literature, from literary Chinese (a form of Chinese first developed around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and which was no longer spoken as a native language by anyone) to a written language that used spoken vernaculars—particularly one from the north, which we now know as Mandarin.

The most important call for this transformation in the literary field had come two years before the May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement, in 1917, when Feng Zhi had just begun his studies at Beijing No. 4. Hu Shi (胡適 1891-1962), a preeminent scholar and writer, published his demands for literary reform in the pages of the important *New Youth* magazine (also called *La Jeunesse* or 新青年 *Xin qingnian*). In this seminal essay, Hu urged poets to write in spoken language, and to use new forms rather than classical prosody. In addition, he suggested that poetic language must directly express experience and emotion—it should not rely on indirect literary allusions.

Hu Shi's call for literary reform sparked debates about what "new poetry" (新詩 *xin shi*) should be. Feng Zhi followed these debates closely. For this was nothing less than a total revolution in language. And at stake was the ability to participate as equals in the global world. Although each writer and critic had his or her own nuanced thinking on the subject, in broad strokes, the debates about poetry centered around content, poetic voice and form. What should the subject be? What should the intention of poetry be? Should it express individual subjectivity? Should one create a beautiful work of art? Should poetry speak to the greater Chinese population, beyond the intellectual class? The proletariat? The individual? Who should speak? What kind of tales should he tell? What scenes should

he describe? Should there be form, or should there only be free verse? If there is form, where should it be drawn from? European models? Chinese folk songs?<sup>73</sup>

In this environment, every writer had to take a stand. No one had the privilege to see himself as above the political implications of his choice. Nevertheless, many writers felt, especially in the 20s when the political situation was relatively stable, that to be apolitical in one's writing—to attend to the emotional and experiential life of the individual—was the best choice for literature. The apolitical was, in other words, their political choice.

Feng Zhi, while he was a student, both at Beijing No. 4, but also, starting in 1921 as a student at Peking University (commonly known as Beida), could be counted among this group. Further, he was among those who looked to European—as well as to Chinese—literature for ideas and inspiration. In 1923 he matriculated into the German Department at Beida, because, in his own words, “I thought I could study Chinese things on my own, but foreign things were too distant from us, and if you didn't specialize in their study they would be too hard to master” (Lu 35). As a student, and following his graduation in 1928, Feng was active with literary journals, most importantly with *Sunken Bell* (沉鐘—the title was inspired by Gerhart Hauptman's play-in-verse, *Die Versunkene Glocke*), which he helped establish in 1925. The journal's main goal was to publish modern German literature together with contemporary Chinese literature. In its pages, Feng Zhi published translations of work by Goethe, Hoffmann, Rilke and Kierkegaard among others, but he

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<sup>73</sup> Poets such as Wen Yiduo (聞一多 1899-1946) and Xu Zhimo (徐志摩 1897-1931) argued for the importance of form, although they believed that new forms should be created to replace the structures used in classical Chinese poetry. Guo Moruo (郭沫若 1892-1978) was perhaps the most well-known and successful free verse poet writing in the 1920s. His collection *The Goddesses* (*nü shen* 《女神》) was published in 1921. In his youth, Feng did not embrace form. Why, he asks, should we release ourselves from classical forms only to put ourselves into new restraints?

also published his own poems, including, in 1927 his poetry collections *Songs of Yesterday* (昨日之歌 *Zuore zhi ge*) and, in 1929, *Northern Journey and Other Poems* (北遊及其他 *Beiji ji qita*), as literary supplements to the journal.

As I wrote in chapter 1 Lu Xun praised this work, and mentions it in his essay “An Awakening,” for it is said that Feng Zhi himself presented the venerable writer with a copy, a copy which Lu Xun was to come to value highly. With these collections, Feng Zhi established his name as a young poet of talent, who wrote in a measured verse, often with a hint of form, although nothing too strict. His subjects were not generally the esoteric images of a symbolist, but rather evocative descriptions of a scene and a state of mind.

But Feng did not only want to be a poet, he also wanted to be a scholar, so in the fall of 1930, Feng Zhi left for Germany, where he lived for five years, dividing his time between Heidelberg and Berlin. During this period, Feng wrote his PhD dissertation on the 18th-century German writer Novalis (its title is *Die Analogie von Natur und Geist als Stilprinzip in Novalis' Dichtung, or The Analogy of Nature and Spirit in Novalis' Principles and Style*), and also continued to translate, working with Goethe's poetry and completing a version of Rilke's *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* or *Letters to a Young Poet*. In 1935, Feng returned to China, where he took up various academic positions, even as he focused on translations of and introductory materials for Chinese editions of works by Nietzsche and Schiller.

In 1937, with the onslaught of war, Feng Zhi and his wife joined the ranks of the millions of refugees, as they moved to the south, finally finding their way, via Hong Kong, to Kunming, where Feng took up a position at Lianda. In 1985, in his essay, “Past Events in

Kunming," Feng famously wrote that the best period of his life was when he lived in Kunming, or, to be more precise, in the mountains near it, where, because of the frequency of air raids, and the fear of destruction that they brought with them, Feng Zhi moved with his wife. He writes:

In the second half of 1939, air raid sirens came often enough, and people began to have premonitions that there would be a day when enemy planes would come to bomb Kunming. On August 20, Wu Xiangguang [a colleague] took me to see his father's forestry business, it had two empty cabins, and he said to me, if Kunming happens to be bombed, would you want to move here? I gladly responded yes.

(255)

Not long after, Feng Zhi moved, and began his habit, carried on throughout his time in Kunming, to walk twice a week to Lianda to teach. It was on one of these walks that he wrote "Sonnet 8," the first of the 27 sonnets he would compose for his collection.

Feng Zhi describes this experience in his introduction to the 1948 edition of *Sonnets*. I quote from the introduction here at length, so that we can hear Feng's voice, and in it the insights he gives to the purpose of the collection, as well as to his choice of the sonnet form:

In 1941, I lived on a mountain near Kunming. Every week I went to the city twice. As it was 15 *li* [about 4.5 miles], to go to and fro was a good walk. To be alone on the mountain path, on the dikes between the fields, one could not avoid looking, avoid thinking. It seems I saw much more than ever before, and also thought more deeply than ever before. At that time, I had long been out of the

habit of writing poems. In the ten years from 1931 until 1940, if you add them all up, I hadn't written more than ten poems—but once, on a winter afternoon, as I was watching a few silver airplanes fly in the crystal blue sky, I thought of the ancient Peng bird dream,<sup>74</sup> and following the rhythm of my footsteps, I opened my mouth and out came a rhymed poem. After I returned home, I wrote it down, and it so happened that it was a variation on the sonnet form. This was the 8<sup>th</sup> poem in the collection, and it was the first and also the least smooth, for at that point, it had been so long since I'd written poetry.

This start was by chance, but in my inner heart I came to gradually feel a responsibility: there are a few experiences, forever in my mind, and a few people from whom I endlessly absorb nutrients, and a few natural phenomena, which now give me so much inspiration: why shouldn't I give them a little lasting thanks to commemorate them? From this idea, from immortal figures in history to unnamed village children and farming women, from a distant ancient city to grass and flying insects on a mountain side, from an individual's little bit of life to the meeting of many, all of which had produced a deep affiliation with my life, I decided to write a poem. Some days I would write two or three, sometimes I would write half a poem and then get stuck, and only after a long period of time would I be able to continue and finish. This is how I wrote 27 poems. [...]

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<sup>74</sup> This is a reference to the ancient text *Zhou Gong's Book of Dream Interpretations* (周公解夢 *Zhou Gong jie meng*). According to the dictionary, "If you dream of a Peng Bird flying in the sky, your fame will travel far." The Peng Bird is a giant mythical bird, which first appeared in the classical Daoist text, the *Zhuangzi* (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE). Although its meaning has been understood differently over the millennia, in the *Zhuangzi* its great flight is mocked by a cicada and dove. This story is most often understood to represent an enlightened Daoist sage, who, free from the constraints of "little minds," is free to wander the oceans and mountains.

As it regards my choosing of the sonnet, I had never had the intention of transplanting this form in China. It was purely for my own convenience. I used this form, only because it helped me. Just as Mr. Li Guangtian says in his discussion of the collection, "because its layers rise and fall, it gradually both brings things into focus and releases them [...]." The form is just right for representing the things I wanted to represent. It never limited the activity of my mind; it only received my thoughts, and gave them a well-suited arrangement.

Feng's introduction begins by making it seem as if his sonnets fell from the sky, from the 空, but toward the end he gives some insights into how they were received, and his justifications make us realize that to write in the form was its own kind of statement. This raises the questions: What did it mean, at that time, to write in the sonnet form? Why does Feng seem so intent to deny intentionality?

There are several reasons why Chinese poets wrote in sonnets in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Below I will discuss how during wartime the form was connected with a kind of poetics of resistance, but first let me focus on the benefit of the form itself. Poets have long recognized the merits of the 14-lined form, both for the space it delimits within an individual poem, as well as for how it creates conversation, either by its relationship to other poems in a sequence, or to other sonnets with the tradition.

Writing of the origins of the sonnet form in 13<sup>th</sup> century Sicily in their book *The Art of the Sonnet*, Stephen Burt and David Mikics point to how the form works with content. "The sonnet form thrives on, and fosters, debate within the self, a thorny internal monologue. But it also reins in, and rounds off, thinking, and so makes inwardness

complete" (7). The sonnet, with its unbalanced structure between the octave and the sestet, creates a formal tension that poets can use to explore internal contradictions, or perform an "internal debate." Daniel Hartley, writing of Auden's sonnets, puts it a little more strongly. "It is the poetic form of innate contradiction; it opposes the Positive Way of the octave, where a thesis is logically developed, to the Negative Way of the sestet, in which it is undermined in some way."

Wen Yiduo coined the Chinese transliteration 商籟體 *shanglai ti*, or *shanglai form*, around 1928, but this term was soon replaced by the now more common term, 十四行詩 *shisihang shi*, "fourteen-lined poem." The latter term indicates how, in its most basic sense, the sonnet in Chinese is a poem with fourteen lines. It is freed of the rules of say, the Elizabethan sonnet or the Petrarchan sonnet, while it still generally makes use of the turn between the octave and the sestet. Scholar Lloyd Haft, in his monograph *The Chinese Sonnet: Meanings of a Form*, writes that this approach "has been very common among Chinese sonneteers: observing the overall shape of the sonnet while not strictly following all requirements of one traditional sonnet form. (In modern Western poetry, of course, the same thing is common)" (15). This is what Feng Zhi does. His sonnets highlight themes of openness in which transience and change occur, even while he suggests continuity, often by muddling the thesis/counter-argument model mentioned above. His ideas can't be separated quite so neatly.

In other words, as all great poets do, Feng Zhi takes the qualities of the sonnet form and molds them to his own needs. For example, some of Feng's sonnets have ten characters. Each character is one syllable, or ten syllables per line, an approximation of the

iambic pentameter used in English sonnets. But many also have lines of varying lengths, marking different emphasis in the lines. Short lines seem to occur in the poems where the focus is a meditation on a single moment or thought, such as in “Sonnet 5” on Venice, “Sonnet 7” on an air raid and “Sonnet 22” on a line from the Koran. In other words, although Feng keeps to the sonnet form by keeping to fourteen lines, and by keeping the lines in each poem to a relatively close number of characters or syllables, he also makes use of a variety of line endings, to give different effects as it relates to his syntax, and to indicate where he would like the stress to fall.

This looseness is possible even as Feng is still able to make use of the second benefit of using the sonnet form: the ability to connect with the traditions in which the sonnet participates. For Feng this would have meant both the European tradition, as well as the contemporary work being done in Chinese and European languages. Feng Zhi is perhaps China’s most famous sonneteer, but it was Wen Yiduo, who studied English literature in China and in the United States, and translated English-language sonnets in the early 1920s, who first brought the form into Chinese. Indeed, his translations of sonnets were part of how he worked through the creation of new forms in Chinese. In addition, many Chinese poets have written beautifully in the form, including Bian Zhilin<sup>75</sup> and Dai Wangshu—to name two of Feng’s contemporaries—as well as Zheng Min, who was a student at Lianda during the war but wrote her most stunning sonnets during the 1980s.

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<sup>75</sup> Bian Zhilin’s sonnet cycle, *Letters of Comfort*, which was published in 1940, and was written while Bian was living at the communist base in Yan’an, can be considered revolutionary, for its melding of communist themes and tone with the formal qualities of the sonnet.



For, as Feng Zhi's denial of "intention" in his introduction suggests, to write in the sonnet form, in China as with elsewhere, is to write into a tradition, a history. So when Feng Zhi states, at the end of this passage, that he did not have an "intention" in bringing sonnets into Chinese, we can understand what he means that he does not have a political intention of writing into a European tradition. He means for his sonnets to be considered merely as a poetic device, a mode of communicating meaning. Earlier in the passage, as part of the narrative of "Sonnet 8"'s creation, he suggests the sonnet form had been internalized, implicitly suggesting that it had become a Chinese form. He was not writing a sonnet on purpose. It just happened that way.

This distancing, of course, has its own kind of politics, and Feng Zhi's denial of a certain intentionality bring to our attention the fact that writing in sonnets reverberated beyond the purely literary. As much as Feng Zhi would have liked to distance himself from political readings, politics echoes through the form. One is the politics of influence. One is the politics of war. I will address the war below. Here let me take up influence.

It is often said that of all the writers that Feng Zhi translated, the one he had the closest affinity with was Rilke. Indeed, in his own writing on Rilke, Feng makes this very claim. However, in general, and unsurprisingly, Feng Zhi's relationship to Rilke, and indeed his very writing of sonnets, has been read through the lens of influence. Again I cite scholar Lloyd Haft:

Feng Zhi wrote his sonnets in 1941. In a prose statement composed afterward [the introduction cited above], he seemed at pains to play down the influence of Rilke. The first of his own *Sonnets* [sic], he said, had come to him rather casually one day

while he was walking in the countryside near Kunming; he did not even realize until he got home and wrote it down that it was a “modified sonnet.” Though he found the form suitable for his material and continued to write in it, it was not, he said, even his intention to “transplant” the Western form into China. (110)

Despite the rather implicating tone Haft uses here, he goes on to show that Feng’s sonnets vary quite a bit when compared to Rilke’s sonnets. What is interesting, however, is that Haft decides to include “Sonnet 1.9” from Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus*, as if to show (although this is never explicitly stated) that Feng Zhi learned his lineation and structuring devices from Rilke.

This lineation, which includes both marked enjambment as well as a syntax that causes sentences to flow over two or more lines, is used to different effects throughout *Sonnets*, and to suggest this to be Rilke’s “influence” seems a misstep for several reasons. First, and most importantly, it is to erase the choices that Feng made in writing, and to cast his work as derivative. To counter this we might recall the insights of Stephen Yao on European modernism: translating foreign works is a means of working through new material and new ideas, which poets often then integrate into their own working language. In other words, poets often translate in order to open a space—空—in which they can play with new ideas. If we counter Haft’s inferences by looking at Feng’s own translation of Rilke’s “Sonnet 1.9” into Chinese, we find that it is just this. It allows us to see a richness—the space—that Feng is opening up between Rilke’s work and his own.

Feng’s translation of “Sonnet 1.9” was published in 1936, as part of a selection he contributed of Rilke’s poetry to *Xinshi* 新詩, or *New Poetry*, a highly regarded journal

edited by poet and translator Dai Wangshu, which was published from 1936-1937 in Shanghai. In the publication, Feng changes the title of "Sonnet 1.9" to "Orpheus," which is left in German. It looks like this, although I have added Romanization of internal and end rhymes, which I will use in my discussion below:

Orpheus

只有誰曾在陰影內 (nei)

也奏起(qi)琴聲 (qin sheng) ,

他才能以(yi)感應 (gan ying)

傳遞 (di)無窮的讚美 (mei) 。

只有誰(shei)曾伴著死者 (sizhe)

嘗過他們的罌粟 (su) ,

那最(zui)微(wei)妙的音素 (su)

他再也不曾失落 (shi luo) 。

倒影(ying)在池(chi)沼裡 (li)

也許時時(shi shi)消融 (xiaorong) :

記(ji)住這景象 (jingxiang) 。

在陰陽(yin yang)交錯的境(jing)域 (yu)

有些聲音(sheng yin)才能 (neng)

永久而和暢 (chang) 。

I hope you can see/hear, even if you cannot read the Chinese, that there is looseness in the end rhyme, and that there is also quite a bit of internal rhyming. If you look at the German below, you can see that, as a whole, this patterning is not unlike Rilke's poem:

Nur wer die Leier schon hob  
auch unter Schatten,  
darf das endliche Lob  
ahnend erstatten.

Nur wir mit Toten vom Mohn  
aß, von dem ihren,  
wird nicht den leisesten Ton  
wieder verlieren.

Meg auch die Spiegung im Tiech  
oft uns verschwimmen:  
*Wisse das Bild.*

Erst in dem Doppelbereich  
warden die Stimmen  
ewig und mild.

Yet, where the German lines sound to me quite definitive in their ending sounds, with the –b in the first stanza and the –ld at the end of the last lines in the third and fourth stanzas,

the Chinese lines sound more open—they all end in either an –ng or a vowel sound, all of which have reverberating qualities. In addition, other than in the first stanza, in which he puts “praise” at the end of the fourth line, rather than the third, Feng Zhi follows Rilke’s word order and rhyme scheme closely. I’ve translated it here, leaving the Chinese word order and syntax more or less intact. (And not, for that reason, giving close attention to word sounds.)

Only one who has in shadows  
Played out the sound of the lyre,  
Can he then take [the] response [feeling reflected]  
To transmit endless praise.

Only one who has accompanied the dead  
Tasted their poppies,  
The subtlest of phonemes  
He cannot lose again.

Reflected in a pool  
Perhaps always dissolved  
Remember this scene.

In the border fields, when yin-yang crisscross  
There are a few sounds/voices that only then can

Last forever, mild and happy.

In addition to studying how Feng Zhi follows Rilke's word sounds, what I find fascinating is the way that Feng Zhi begins with "Orpheus"<sup>76</sup> and the foreignness of the conceit in the Chinese context, but then decides, near the end of the poem, to include Chinese expressions that allude to its own cultural history.

Let me explain: Feng's translation begins with European references. There is Orpheus, and his lyre, and his desire to bring back Eurydice, all of which are indicated in the title and the first stanza. In the second stanza, there is the strangeness of the term 音素 *yinsu*, the technical word for "phoneme." It is there, in part because of the rhyme, but also to suggest a Western linguistic approach to language and sound. Even poppy, as a flower of death, suggests a Western tradition, not a Chinese one. In China bright red flowers would not generally be placed near the dead.

The first tercet also seems slightly strange in Chinese, despite the pool, which is also a common image in classical Chinese poetry, for the way that it ends with a command: 記住這景象 *jizhu zhe jingxing*. "Remember this scene." But the final tercet brings in a Chinese worldview. First there is the translation of "Doppelbereich," or "double realm," with yin-yang (陰陽).<sup>77</sup> Then there is the classical poetic expression 和暢 *hechang*, often used to describe the wind as "peaceful and smooth."

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<sup>76</sup> It is worth noting that Chinese often includes European words in their original language—opening a space in Chinese that we don't offer as often in our English translations.

<sup>77</sup> Yin-yang is a cosmology in which feminine and masculine elements in the universe (all things can be divided into one of these two categories) are in perpetual flux. When they are in balance, things are healthy and at peace.

In translating Rilke's abstract "Doppelbereich" as yin-yang Feng extends the meaning beyond the original, even as it echoes back to the original's sense. For readers, who would realize the "foreignness" of the yin-yang cosmology within a poem about the myth of Orpheus, could consider both two modes of thought as existing together. In so doing, I would argue that the translation moves beyond Rilke's poem, which suggests music and language as redemptive, to a reading in which it is cultural mixing that is redemptive. The poem becomes a meditation on possibilities for the future of Chinese letters:

In the border fields, when yin-yang crisscross  
There are a few sounds/voices that only then can  
Last forever, mild and happy

Hasn't Chinese literature gone to its death and come back? Isn't it because it has that it can now sing in the purest phonemes? This translation seems to suggest that in Feng's view, it would be in the crisscrossing, in the dissolving pond, that voices/sounds can be created that will move the Chinese language into the future. In a sense, then, Feng's translation is nothing short of a manifesto on the future of poetry. It is a manifesto written in the space created by translation.

In sum, in his translation Feng not only tells Orpheus's story of the space that opens between death and life; he also opens up a space between different cultural spheres. He uses translation as a place where the spheres mix, and meanings expand. He shows us the possibility of translation as a "place of resonance, [with] its infinite tension and rebound" (Nancy 22). He also shows us what we can learn in listening to the echoes

between an original and a translation. Translation, then, and our expectations of it, need not be narrowed by questions such as: Did the translator get the rhyme scheme to work? Translation can do more. Feng Zhi's translation does more.

Indeed, rather than distancing himself from Rilke (as Haft suggests), it seems to me that Feng would like Rilke to be heard as part of his poetry, that Feng has opened the possibility of a new tradition that embraces multi-cultural and multi-spatial lineages. In his introduction Feng refers to his sudden inspiration, and to the ten-years of silence that came before. In so doing, Feng is recalling Rilke's own ten years of silence, which ended with the composition, not only of the *Duino Elegies*, but also of *Sonnets to Orpheus*.

This is made clear by the way Feng appends his translations of Rilke's poems in the 1936 *New Poetry* selection with the essay, "Rilke—In commemoration upon the 10th year of his death." In this short piece, which reads more as a personal essay than literary criticism, Feng alludes to Rilke's ten-year pause, and suggests why Rilke's poetry is so dear to him:

[Rilke] caused the musical to become the sculptural, the flowing to become crystalline. [...] He started to observe: He cherished purity, lovingly examined the 10,000 things in the universe. He examined rose petals, poppies, panthers, rhinoceroses, swans, the scarlet ibis and black cats; he examined prisoners, those who have been ill, grown women, flag bearers, singing girls, the insane, beggars, old women, the blind; he examined mirrors, lace, the fate of girls, childhood: he open-mindedly [虛心 *xuxin*—literally "empty-heartedly"] waited upon them, silently



listened to hear if they had sound or were silent, and shared responsibility with each person living in the indifference of fate" (295).

One of the echoes I think we should hear within Feng Zhi's own verse is Rilke's philosophy of openness to all things, his attention to the space that surrounds them, his ability to listen to echoes for the meanings that they give.

Let me quote William Gass's tremendous passage from *Reading Rilke: Reflections on the Problems of Translation* to illustrate this idea of space, of 空, which for Rilke is *Raum*:

*Raum*. If there were one word [in Rilke's work] it would be *Raum*. The space of things. The space of outer space. The space of night which comes through porous windows to feed on our faces. The mystical carpet where lovers wrestle. The womb of the mother. *Weltraum*. Not just the room in which the furniture of the world rests, but also the space of the things themselves. The space made by Being's breathing. Then *Innerweltraum*. (The German language, the German spirit, can and must compound.) Not just the space we call consciousness, but the space where we retire in order to avoid a feeling, the touch of a lover, the plea of a friend, the threat of intimacy. Distance. Darkness dotted by stars. These spaces are always palpable, as though space were smoke, or the mountains of the heart where the last hamlet of feeling may be discerned. The various distances of death. Time itself is a spaceline. For when we are dead we journey on through what we once believed was past. Cathedral spaces. The spaces made by music. *Innerweltraum*. The slopes shaped by the word in the countrysides of poetry.

Music: breathing of statues. Possibly:

stillness in pictures. Speech where speech  
ends. Time upright and poised  
upon the coastline of our passions.

Feelings for whom? You are the transformation  
of all feeling into—what? ...audible landscape.

You stranger: music. Heart's space  
that's outgrown us. Innermost us  
which it's scaled, surmounted, gone beyond

into holiest absence:

where what's within surrounds us  
the way the most skillful horizon does,  
or the other side of the air,

pure,

immense,

no longer lived in.

(37-38)

The poem Gass includes here in translation is Rilke's "To Music," written in 1918. I wish that Feng Zhi had translated it. I would have loved to have seen—and heard—what he did with it. For its themes echo within Feng Zhi's notes, as well as within his sonnets. Feng recognizes and appreciates Rilke's transformation of the music of language into the sculptures of poetry, and the way that this transformation allows landscapes of emotion to

become heard: Music (including the music of poetry) can create “audible landscapes” of feeling. (Perhaps Rilke is the hidden founder of sound studies.)

For translation is another creator of space. Rilke often articulates this as a translation of feeling or meaning into sound, or, as the space we sense open up between meaning and sound. This is slightly clearer in Stephen Mitchell’s translation:

[...]. You language where all language  
ends. You time  
standing vertically on the motion of mortal hearts.

Feelings for whom? O you the transformation  
of feelings into what?—: into audible landscape.

You stranger: music. You heart-space  
grown out of us. The deepest space *in us*,  
which, rising above us, forces its way out,—<sup>78</sup>

Rilke is describing the insights we experience when we find our feelings being voiced outside of us, what we learn when we hear the echoes of our own thoughts in an external being. He is articulating the space we hear through sound.

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<sup>78</sup>We could expand our sense of space in translation by listening between Gass’s and Mitchell’s translations. For example what do we hear between “speech” (Gass), with its aurality, and “language” (Mitchell), with its immensity, its sense of deep structures. There is also the difference between Gass’s poetic, but abstract, “Time upright and poised / upon the coastline of our passions” and Mitchell’s, “You time/ standing vertically on the motion of mortal hearts.” I can see an image more clearly in Mitchell’s, but I like to hear the inflection of Gass’s lines.

If Feng had translated this poem, we would have been able to hear how he expanded it. How his experiences echoed through it and beyond it. Indeed, perhaps the reasons I like translating Feng's work so much is the same reason that other translators like Rilke so much: Because his poetry, perhaps more explicitly than most others, invites us to create space between sound and meaning. For Feng's own work, like we saw in his translation of "Sonnet 1.9" above, suggests nuanced understanding of the differences—and the possibilities—in moving between Western and Chinese traditions. As a final meditation on space and 空, with the added element of Raum, let me develop these possibilities a little more.

In her book *Images of Absence: Death and the Language of Concealment in the Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Marielle Sutherland writes of Rilke's need of Orpheus "for he carries life into death and death into life, creating a third space, impossible in real terms but real within the imaginative life of poetic language" (269). Feng, who was familiar both with Greek mythology and with the Chinese worldview, does not see life and death in classical Greek, or Judeo-Christian terms, this "third space," and the writer's relationship to it, can be understood quite differently. One of the ways that Feng's work might open up is through an understanding of these differences.

Let me give two examples. First, we can look at Chinese literary theory, Liu Xie's (劉勰 d. ca. 523 CE) *The Literary Mind and Carving of Dragons* (completed in 502 CE). This is the most important work of literary aesthetics in classical China. In it we find an elaboration of the relationship between the poet and the world around him, which is quite different than the Greek tradition, which understands this relationship as mimesis or from a direct

intervention on the part of a God. In the Chinese tradition, by contrast, connections between the world and writing arise via patterns, and a writer's attention to patterns. Liu Xie writes:

When a writer is thinking, his spirit travels far. Therefore, when he concentrates his pondering in stillness, his thoughts will touch [what lies beyond] a thousand years; when he quietly moves his countenance, his vision will penetrate ten thousand miles. Amidst his chantings and hummings, sounds of pearls and jades issue forth; before his eyebrows and lashes, colors of wind-swept clouds unfold. Is this not brought about by the natural order of thought? (Trans. and cited by James Liu 34)

This idea of writing being brought about by "the natural order of things" pivots around the word 文 *wen*, which means both "patterns and configurations of natural phenomena, considered to be manifestations of the Tao [Dao]" and "script," or language (24). Because it is a bridge between the natural and the manmade, 文 can also suggest the possibilities of "the human mind, identified with the mind of the universe" (24). In practice, this philosophical idea is meant to suggest that writers can notice patterns and then put them into writing. In Western traditions, there is separation between the "real" of the world, and the "imaginary" of the text. In the Chinese tradition, however, this is not the case, and there would not be an "imaginative life of poetic language" in the way that Sutherland writes of it, but rather a poetic language that indicates patterns that are not, perhaps, immediately visible.

Indeed, in his essay “Couplet,” which was written in 1935 in Heidelberg, Feng suggests this very idea, as seen through *both* German philosophy and classical Chinese poetry:

Often [I] tuck a book beneath my arm and go for a walk in the mountains. But to walk with a book beneath your arm is a kind of conflict. If absorbed in a book, it’s impossible to take in the scenery. If looking from the trees in the foreground to the plains in the distance, then it’s always hard to pay attention to what [you’re] reading. Sometimes I think, I want to sit over on that stone bench with the most beautiful view, and read a bit of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, to experience nature’s beauty, and if man’s pure reason can coexist with it. But *The Critique of Pure Reason* can’t be read cover to cover while sitting on a stone bench in the mountains. So one day, on a woodland path, I read Jia Dao’s [779–843] famous couplet:

Alone, pond deep shadows

Count breaths, trees beside [my] body

I’m afraid only those who have entered the quiet solitude of a mountain wood will have felt this. At that time, I felt deeply that this couplet from a slim volume of poetry had transformed into a blade of grass and a tree; this time having a book was essential. (165)

I include this excerpt to show how Feng understood literature to be connected with his own experience and the natural world. In the tradition of Chinese 文 *wen*, it was through these lines of poetry that he was able to connect to the patterns of the world. But we can

also see here that Feng's ideas include a deep engagement with a diversity of texts—for him all of these texts were places to open up a space of insight and transformation.

We might also recall Feng's introduction to *Sonnets*, and the planes he saw in the sky. As he was walking, observing the world around him more closely than ever before, Feng saw the planes, which his mind transformed into the image of a Peng Bird. This Daoist image evokes the idea that one must be honest with oneself, and one's understanding of the greater patterns of nature, in order to rise above common perceptions of human experience. It was this insight that inspired Feng to listen to the rhythm of his footsteps, and to hear in them a new poem that expresses something more than what he heard.

And yet, as Feng also shows us, underlying this recognition of patterns is an understanding that writing can never fully express the ideas they mean to suggest. This is my second example of the differences between European and Chinese worldviews. It comes from early Chinese philosophy, and the seminal Daoist text the *Zhuangzi* (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE). In it we find sophisticated analyses of how language can only do so much. Let me cite Zhuangzi's (the title of the book refers to its author) famous parable, here in Burton Watson's translation, as an example:

The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you've gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you've gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him? (302)

What Zhuangzi suggests here is that words, while useful, are also, in a sense a trap—they become the snares that hold us back from reaching the meaning that lies beyond them.

It seems that this, too, is what Feng is pointing toward in his sonnets: an attention to the patterns of the world, that, when written into language, key us into the greater meaning that exists in the spaces between language and experience. Wai-Lim Yip suggests just as much in his assessment of Feng Zhi's work, in which he also brings together Daoism and Rilke:

Feng Zhi is a master of the art of attention to detail. Unlike some of his predecessors who cry over fire, blood, wars, brimming with anger and tears, Feng Zhi, like the earlier Rilke whom he once studied, aims at presenting ordinary things as significant existences, "things ... around us / That demand our re-discovery" (Sonnet 26). He observes ordinary people, things, and events with pure love, patiently, humbly, listening to their voices and silences and slowly discloses their destinies usually ignored by the larger world. Like the Daoist who puts all forms of being on equal footing and affirms each of the myriad things as solemn, beautiful, inter-dependent and inter-defining, Feng Zhi seeks to disclose them in moments of their epiphany, not by the tour-de-force of imagination, but by dedicated, patient attention to their emergence and their activities, to release them from their seeming irrelevance to become relevant within an aura of intimacy. (35-6)

Indeed, this "inter-dependence" and "inter-defining," this crisscrossing in the borderlands, this *Raum*, or to even return to Fenollosa, this "poetics of emptiness," are all suggested in Feng Zhi's *Sonnets*.



And all of these ideas can also be understood as part of the practice of translation. Indeed, Yip's description of Feng Zhi, could also be a description of a translator, who not only looks, but also listens: "He [or she] observes ordinary people, things, and events with pure love, patiently, humbly, listening to their voices and silences and slowly discloses their destinies usually ignored by the larger world."

It is in this mode of listening to those usually ignored by the larger world that I would like to now return, a final time, to 空, this time as a signal of war reverberating in Feng's work. War was present, was pressing, when he wrote his sonnets, and I would like to conclude my exploration of Feng Zhi's collection and the space he creates within them by returning to the question of the sonnet form and war.

I would like to suggest that in China, at that time, war resounded within the sonnet form. In 1940, the most important sonnet cycle to be written in Chinese was Bian Zhilin's *Letters of Comfort*, which was entirely concerned with the war effort. A year earlier, not only had Auden published his sonnet cycle "In Times of War," as part of *Journey to a War* (1939), but Chinese intellectuals were well aware that parts of the cycle had been written in and about China.<sup>79</sup>

Feng knew all of this. In his essay, "Work and Waiting," published in 1943, Feng Zhi cites quotes Auden's "Sonnet XVIII," as translated by Bian Zhilin, and writes of his fondness for it, because it was "written beneath a lamp at some inn in China," adding,

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<sup>79</sup> As a side note, in Bian Zhilin's 1948 introduction to his translations of Auden's sonnets, he writes, "When Auden was writing them [the sonnets], he had clearly been influenced a bit by Rilke. (This can namely be seen in the form, for example, even when he uses the sonnet form, like Rilke he doesn't strictly follow its rules), the translator also suspects that he [Auden], in matters of tone/style was slightly influenced by Chinese classical poetry" (11). The idea of influence, ever present, moves in many directions. It would be an interesting comparative study to see what it suggests in different contexts.

because “I am Chinese and for China’s fate we must in every instant, at every moment, share responsibility” (487). For Feng, with the sonnet form came an acknowledgement of the poet’s responsibility for reflecting on his contribution to the nation.

But this also raises the questions: When war is raging, why does one write? How does one continue to write? What does one write? In his essay Feng answers these questions in this way: By respecting that there is a time to wait and a time to work. Like in his essay from 1936, when he refers to the ten years of silence that separated the writing of *Duino Elegies*, in which Rilke withdrew from world events (including World War I), Feng brings our attention to Rilke’s pause for growth. In the end, Feng writes, Rilke came out transformed, with a new vision of the world and a new will to express it. “Rilke’s world seems so dear to me, precisely because bitter China needs this kind of mind ‘passing through ten years of silence, working and waiting [...]’ and so a poet passes a long period of time and finds success after hard work, this is Auden’s hope for China” (488). In bringing up Rilke and Auden, Feng indirectly addresses criticism of his writing of sonnets while bombs were dropping—as well as the ten-year pause in his writing before the publication of *Sonnets*. He desires to engage with China’s present—as Auden is doing—but he also needs to step back from the war and spend time in deep meditation, as Rilke did. The times are devastating, and Feng Zhi wants to attend to them, but he feels the best way to do so is through poetry that both moves through them, and beyond them.

In an interesting parallel to this statement, we find Auden writing a review in the *New Republic* in 1940 of C.F. MacIntyre’s collection *Ranier Maria Rilke: Fifty Selected Poems with English Translations*, which had been published that same year. In it, Auden

writes strongly of the valor, and difficulty, Rilke faced when he chose, during the First World War, not to engage:

To resist compensating for the sense of guilt that every noncombatant feels at not sharing the physical sufferings of those at the front, by indulging in an orgy of patriotic hatred all the more violent because it is ineffective; to be conscious but to refuse to understand, is a positive act that calls for courage of a high order. [...]

Now in this second and even more dreadful war, there are few writers to whom we can more profitably turn, not for comfort—he offers none—but for strength to resist the treacherous temptations that approach us disguised as righteous duties.

I cannot find this article translated into Chinese or German, and indeed, it would seem unlikely that Feng Zhi read it. Its general tone, however, was part of the greater conversations about Rilke, and the importance of his work as war loomed and then exploded, of which Feng would have been a part. For, in Feng's 1936 selection of poems, published in Dai Wangshu's *New Poetry* journal, Feng had included the very poem Auden cites here as emblematic of the "extraordinary insights of this great poet who refused to 'understand' hate and destruction." It is Rilke's poem "Ein Frauenschicksal," "A Woman's Fate." This is MacIntyre's translation:

Even as a king out hunting seized a glass,  
something to drink from—any glass, no matter—  
and someone after that in a sure place  
put the slight thing away, to guard it better:

thus destiny, which also has a thirst,  
picked up this woman, drank of her till slaked,  
and afterward some trivial fellow durst  
not put her to her use, for fear she break  
and stuck her in that careful cupboard where  
one cherishes all costly things and rare  
(for things that people fancy have some worth).

And there she stood, as strange as something loaned,  
slowly growing merely old and blind,  
and was not prized and never rare on earth.

This sonnet of Rilke's, one of his most pointedly political ones, can be joined with Auden's strong anti-war sonnets, for their meditations on the devastations brought to individual's lives. Who cannot shudder, after all, when reading Auden's sonnet "XVI," here in the version in which it was published in 1939.

XVI

Here war is simple like a monument:  
A telephone is speaking to a man;  
Flags on a map assert that troops were sent;  
A boy brings milk in bowls. There is a plan

For living men in terror of their lives,  
Who thirst at nine who were to thirst at noon,  
And can be lost and are, and miss their wives,  
And, unlike an idea, can die too soon.  
But ideas can be true although men die,  
And we can watch a thousand faces  
Made active by one lie:  
And maps can really point to places  
Where life is evil now:  
Nanking; Dachau.

As I translate Feng Zhi's *Sonnets*, Auden and Rilke's sonnets echo together. I imagine them as part of a larger sonic landscape, "O you the transformation/ of feelings into what?—: into audible landscape." Feng's work, Auden's work, Rilke's work are all part of the forest of language in which Feng Zhi's works, and my translations echo. Bringing these works together allows us to listen to different reverberations between experience and sound. We cannot hear Feng's poems—either in the original or in translation—as Feng did, or as someone who heard them during the war might have. But the beauty of literary texts is that they do not need to be fixed objects. They can reverberate between each other and within us.

In Feng's translation of Rilke's "Sonnet 1.9," his use of yin-yang makes clear that Rilke's poem is echoing through a new terrain. Feng's goal was not a "target" but a resonance. Similarly, I use 空 in my translations to show the possibilities of poetic form opening beyond the words themselves into the intertextual terrains of sound, literary traditions and experience. But I also use it to make visible (heard) what we so often, as translators, feel we need to make invisible (silent): the fact that the translations open a space between two languages. In this way, 空 asks the readers to think of translation as we do the experience of listening: not trained on a target, but as a manifestation of resonance. For in the end, approaching the reading and translation of poetry such as Feng Zhi's as an experience of listening allows us to realize just how much there is to hear. In the Conclusion I will expand this idea one step farther by meditating upon what two deaf artists mean when they ask us to listen.

## Conclusion

or

### What Two Deaf Artists Taught Me about Listening (After I'd Written an Entire Dissertation on Listening)<sup>80</sup>

From very far away, in the arts and in time, one can reply [...] with music by Wagner,  
the instant that Tristan, to Isolde's voice, cries out: *What, am I hearing light?*—

Jean-Luc Nancy

*Listening*

Artist 1: Christine Sun Kim

In August, after I had finished a draft of this dissertation, I had the opportunity to interview the artist Christine Sun Kim,<sup>81</sup> whose work revolves around questions of sound and listening. In her performance art, installation art, drawings and educational video blogs (vlogs) she considers the power, often silent to the hearing world, that sound embodies and expresses. In this work Kim often communicates with people who aren't fluent in her native American Sign Language (ASL), as such she relies upon either the written word or interpreters, and many of her insights address the relationships between sound and language. She brings to our attention to the fact that English (and other sonic

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<sup>80</sup> For Professor Tobin Siebers.

<sup>81</sup> Kim's website can be found [here](#).

language) speakers often too easily assume that language is a sonic experience, even though language and sound only overlap in certain areas.

In this conclusion I turn my attention both to Kim's art and to work by her colleague Jeffery Mansfield. Through their insights into the powers of language and sound, I broaden my ideas and practices of listening, before I return to a final piece about air raids, a translation of the short story written by Feng Zhi in Kunming, "Zoo 動物園 *Dongwu yuan*." I have chosen to conclude with these two artists' works because they allow me to become defamiliarized with language in a way that is similar to my practice of using Chinese characters in the preceding chapters. This defamiliarization challenges me to consider new ideas about what it means to have a sonic identity and forces me to complicate ideas of sound, listening and translation. In addition, their respective works bring to light important subthemes, woven throughout all of the chapters, about empathy, intersubjectivity, relationality and interdependence.

Kim's work often explores her relationships with ASL interpreters. When I asked her about this, she responded with this image and the text that follows:



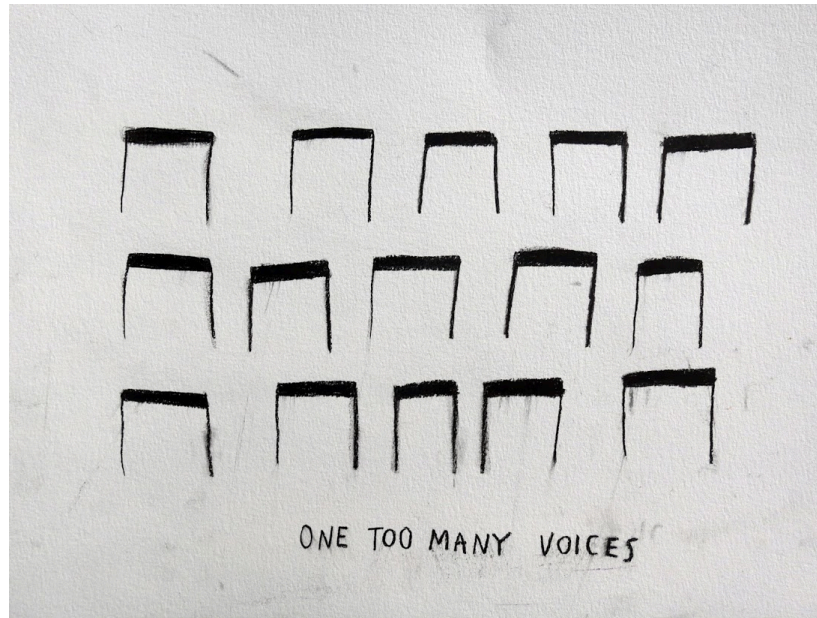


Image 3: "One Too Many Voices" (2015)

This drawing is a reference to my relationship with a number of interpreters. It seems so hard to find *the one* who represents every aspect of my voice, so it depends on the situation/setting. If it's for a lecture, I would pick the one who makes me sound super professional, if it's for a social engagement, I'd pick the one who makes my jokes hilariously funny, and so on.

I found the image intriguing, even as I wasn't sure how to read it. In looking at the many similarly legged lines, I wanted to see which voice was too many, but I wasn't able to. Finding myself at an impasse, I began to think of a quote about voices by Yoko Tawada, whose work I referenced in the introduction. I shared the quote with Kim:

Where does a voice come into being? Perhaps a vibration is first created in the vocal chords, the palate, on a person's tongue. But this is not yet a voice. Only in the listener's head is it constructed as the voice of a person. We hear selectively,

we correct, add to, and adulterate what we are hearing. Otherwise it would be impossible to understand the person speaking to us. We contribute to this process by bringing in our own knowledge, preconceptions, imagination, and repressed thoughts. Thus every act of listening is already a dialogue, even before we open our mouths to reply. (189)

Her response was totally unexpected:

This is similar to what I often call sonic identity. I try to control my sonic identity by asking filmmakers not to include voice-over in video interviews. I think people in general are so hardwired to hear a sound coming from me because they want to form my sonic identity in their head.

I hadn't thought about this: How hearing people assign a sonic identity to everyone. Even more I hadn't thought about how this compels Kim, who doesn't have the same kind of relationship with voice, language and sound, as hearing people do, to engage with the relationship between sound and identity. She must consider how to control a sonic identity that is imposed upon her by a hearing world.

Kim often engages the challenges this creates in her work, sometimes by deciding that she needn't have only one voice. For example, she can have more than one interpreter. She can use a variety of screens to show her written texts. Or, as part of a performance, she can orchestrate the audience to speak for her. Take, for example, her work "Subjective Loudness" from Sound Live Tokyo in 2013. In this performance she asked the audience to transform a list of items that reach 85 decibels (the maximum limit for sounds in Ueno Park, where the piece was performed) into a musical score. She chose

items that reached this sound limit (a dishwasher, a car wash, a band, a freight train, a ringing telephone, etc.), but the audience created the sounds. In this way, Kim articulated her sonic identity through the voices of many people. She wrote, "Since I was in full charge of the score, those voices were my voice. It was such an amazing experience to watch people willing to work together to make my voice known. They allowed me to expand my voice with their voices; it is a sign of respect for my presence (and perhaps also acceptance?)."

Because she must constantly negotiate the power dynamics of a hearing world, Kim is well aware that her voice can be presented in a way that is antithetical to her intentions. This is why, for example, she does not want to be "voiced over" in video media, why she selects interpreters with great care, and why it was so powerful for her to have her voice made present by the many participants of "Subjective Loudness." Similar issues are raised by scholars in the field of translation studies, who bring our attention to the ways that texts are chosen, rendered and heard in any given cultural space. Indeed, insights from ASL speakers about language are a rich terrain in which we might continue to expand our listening in translation studies. For example, Kim's experience with voice raises questions about what it means to have a "sonic identity." For her, hearing people seek to establish a single sonic identity for each person. How does this work more broadly with languages and texts? What assumptions do we have about a language's sonic identity? What expectations do we have about how a text translated from Chinese, or any other language, should sound? Does each text have only one identity? Can it be empowering for a writer (and the translator) to choose one translator who makes her work sound serious, another

who makes her work sound funny? Does a translation represent only one identity? Might we broaden our sense of a text's sonic identity to include the many speakers with which it engages?

Perhaps in Kim's "One Too Many Voices" the voice-too-many is the one saying, "there can only be one" or "I am the only one. "Or perhaps it is Kim saying "I am that voice too many" as she watches listeners' attention being given to the sonic identity of the interpreters? Perhaps what I should consider, as a translator, is how a sonic identity relates to a broader sense of identity? Perhaps this can help us uproot assumptions about languages and how they sound, attune readers to the interpretive nature of conversations, and complicate notions of a text's translated identity. Perhaps we can find a way to conceptualize identity in a way that is not sonic, but in regards to how its speaker is asking us to listen.

This brings me to the work of the second artist.

Artist 2: Jeffrey Mansfield

In his project "Listening Beyond Language," designer and architect Jeffery Mansfield asks a group of deaf students in the Middle East to describe a sonic event without using established signs. He did this with two goals in mind. 1.) To see how the students would describe sounds as they were experienced by them, rather than use signs that were designed by people who could hear, and 2.) To encourage speakers and listeners to experience sonic sensations through something other than an already familiar language.

One of the illustrations Mansfield uses to epitomize this experiment is a student's narration of an air raid. Mansfield writes of the student's expression:

These gestures, with their representational ambiguity and visual clarity, move beyond prepackaged meaning and crystallize something of the speaker's sensation of sound, or the speaker's perception of sound's effect on its environment. The listener can now internalize the speaker's perception of sound without hearing or feeling sound at all, but by experiencing a visual sensation of it.

The listener doesn't so much perceive words, but senses the sheer materiality of their transmission. Even if the speaker struggles to find words or clearly articulate an object, idea, or sensation, sensual information remain so clearly inscribed in the speaker's prosody, facial expression, and body language that we can still say, "I understand you." (Mansfield; the video can also be seen [here](#).)

I feel an affinity with Mansfield's objective for "representational ambiguity and visual clarity," as he asks his listeners to experience language in new ways. This is similar to my intentions in including Chinese in the translations of the preceding chapters. But I find his work even more provocative—and useful—because it undermines some of the very ideas of listening upon which my work has been based. For Mansfield listening is not about sound. This forces me to ask: Then what is it about? To answer, I find myself trying to articulate why the triangulation of sound, listening and translation has been so rich for me.

Let me return to Mansfield's text. I find the sentence: "The listener doesn't so much perceive words, but senses the sheer materiality of their transmission" interesting. I'm not entirely certain what he means by "the sheer materiality of their transmission." Is this a

reference to the physicality of the student's transmission, that the words are being communicated with the body? Does it have to do with the fact that what is being communicated has such significance that it takes on material weight? Or is it because the communication does not rely on words that the speaker is able to communicate something about transmission itself?

It seems to me that Mansfield is not as concerned with how the message is conveyed, whether it is through a spoken voice or the voice of the body, as he is with considering the act of communication. This invites us to consider how the very act of communication can be an asset in understanding the experience of something to which we have no direct access. These concerns also lie at the heart of my dissertation: How do I understand, let alone communicate through translation, an air raid, an experience which I cannot fully understand? My first response was to make my presence clear. Rather than suggesting I was an expert on interpreting that experience, I offered my dialogues with the poems, in which I showed how I listened, learned and was changed as I came up against the poems' unknowns. I showed how translation can be a means of listening. Second, I created an active relationship between Chinese and English. This way I could clearly engage the aesthetic and analytical choices the writers made. In addition, I could question expectations about knowing. The translations emerged as a sort of controlled babel in which to explore impossibilities and limitations, not as an obstacle or insufficiency, but as a point of growth.

As both my presence and Chinese characters allowed me to explore translation as a dialogic (intersubjective, relational and interdependent) relationship, I'd like to briefly

turn to the philosophical work of Martin Buber. In his 1923 book *Ich und Du*,<sup>82</sup> Buber describes two pairs of relationships. The first is the "I/It;" the second is the "I/Thou." In the "I/It" pairing, the "I" experiences or uses "It" as an object. The "I" sees, hears or touches "It," but the "It" remains separate. "I" speaks in monologue. By contrast, the "I/Thou" is understood in terms of a relationship, a connection, or "dialogically."<sup>83</sup> Although the "Thou" may be a thing (Buber uses a tree as an example), the "I" does not experience this "Thou" as an object she can classify and predict. For the "I" understands both how the thing is affected by the "I," and how the "I" is affected by the thing. This creates a dialogue.

Buber was interested in idea of the "I/Thou" for both its humanistic and spiritual dimensions. He felt that attending to these connections could bring us into fellow feeling with each other and communion with the sacred. This recalls Derrida and Benjamin's ideas that if we attend to how languages echo together, we might ultimately hear, in the connections made as words echo together, a true language in which all is in concordance. While I do not want to explore the intellectual history or spiritual nature of the work of Buber and Benjamin here, I am interested in how they wished to indicate spaces in which relationships reverberate, in which connections are made. As political theorist Darrow Schechter writes, "Both Benjamin and Buber argue that a change in our relations with others, and by extension, between ethics and politics, may [...] ensue on the basis of an illuminating experience" (162). To bring this to the sonic realm, it is through dialogue that

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<sup>82</sup> First translated as *I and Thou* by Ronald Gregor Smith in 1937 and later, in 1970, under the same title, by Walter Kaufmann.

<sup>83</sup> This is a central tenant in his 1929 essay "Dialogue."

we hear more deeply, and it is through hearing more deeply, that we become illuminated, open to transformation—*What, am I hearing light*—and further connected.

I would suggest that Mansfield's goal, in asking his students to tell stories with something other than prefabricated language, is to create this kind of dialogue in which language is a challenge to form a relationship. Through this experience we can become illuminated, learning about ourselves and our relationships with others. Similarly, lurking behind my desire to upend translation by including Chinese words in my English texts is the hope to create that kind of illuminating experience, and from it a relationship that transforms the text from an "It" to a "You." In other words, it is through my triangulations of text, translation, and reader, as well as of sound, listening and translation, that I have worked to create dialogue.

For sound, it is has to do with its vibrations, their ability to be present within us and around us. It has to do with the fact that they connect us to other entities in a way that is different from vision, which more easily remains locked in a subject/object (I/It) binary. Sound theorist and artist Brandon LaBelle illustrates this in his introduction to *Acoustic Territories* when he tells the story of a young boy on a tram, who asks his father: Where does sound come from? And then, where does it go? In response to these simple and yet unanswerable questions, the father points to his chest and then draws an arc through the air to his son's (xv). LaBelle shares this profound and lovely movement to consider the connective nature of sound, but we also find this aspect in Jean-Luc Nancy's description: "Sound is also made of referral: it spreads in space, where it resounds while still resounding 'in me,' as we say" (8). Sound, then, is something that creates connections,



physically, between two bodies, even as it is something that can create a disruption, or a movement to understand something that is coming from outside of us. It is the sonic information that we receive in our ears, but also the vibrations—the echoes—we feel throughout our bodies. And LaBelle and Nancy's observations indicate that sound doesn't need to go from mouth to ear; it can go from chest to chest, a movement suggestive of the dialogic relationship between "I" and "You."

As for listening, I use it to describe the act of attending to movement, connections and the possibility of transformation. As Mansfield's (and LaBelle's) work suggests, listening is not about the ears and the mouth, but about a willingness to take part in dialogue. It is openness to observing how meaning changes within us and around us as it moves. It is about creating a relationship between an I and a You. Certainly we listen with preconceptions and prejudices just as we see with them, but the kind of listening we might aim for is one in which we are conscious of this, and open to change.<sup>84</sup>

Finally, there is translation. It, too, is a process that brings out movement and transformations in the relationships between two bodies.<sup>85</sup> In my translations I have listened to how information is communicated, and how connections are made, as languages echo together. And I have tried to create moments in which we push our limitations, in which we come up against babel, so that new insights might transform texts from something we experience into something with which we converse.

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<sup>84</sup> I also do not mean to suggest that a similar transformation cannot happen via sight or any other sense, indeed, as Mansfield shows us listening doesn't have to be about sound. Here listening becomes a mode of communication.

<sup>85</sup> I would not like to suggest a binary between reading and translating. Reading is, of course, a kind of translation. However, it seems the presence of a translator, and the movement across languages and cultures, often emphasizes the dialogic aspects of language in ways reading a primary text might not.

Indeed, while I have found sound, listening and translation to have particular qualities that create transformative relationships, in the end—as Kim and Mansfield’s different projects give testament to—all literature, music and art all have the potential to do this. Whether from our own time and place, or from different eras and cultures, they ask us, in their own ways, to listen to the world.

Because the texts I explore in my dissertation are about war and violence, this element of conversation, of listening and learning, is particularly important to me. And, as I conclude, it strikes me that this kind of engagement is still important, not only for historical reasons, but also for contemporary ones. While I write this, on October 3, 2015, the front-page headline of *The New York Times* is this: “Airstrike Hits Hospital in Afghanistan; At Least 19 Killed.” As I edit it, in November, Paris has been targeted and air strikes are being carried out over Syria. Despite the shift from “air raid” to “air strike” (a loaded shift, I’m sure), I am (again) reminded that air raids are part of our contemporary world, and about how we must continue to reach toward understanding the effects on those who experience them.

Perhaps one of the most poignant contemporary artistic expressions of its contemporary presence is Naseer Shamma’s composition for the *oud*, “It Happened at Al-Amiriyah.” This song, about the bombing of the Al-Amiriyah shelter in 1991 during the Persian Gulf War, in which hundreds of women and children died, is a haunting aural testament to the terror of air raids. If you’d like, you can listen to this recording,<sup>86</sup> as I offer one last translated text. We may not hear the song as Naseer Shamma does, or as those

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<sup>86</sup> The web address is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqQy0O4y1hk>.

who have experienced the air raid do. Indeed, it seems that this would be impossible. But as I have shown, facing impossibility head on, engaging it, realizing the limitations that it suggests, allows us to ask new questions and invites us to engage problems in new ways. It begins to move us toward empathy.

This kind of empathetic engagement is recalled in “Zoo 動物園 *Dongwu Yuan*,” which Feng Zhi wrote in Kunming in 1944. In it Feng asks us to consider how the violence of colonial spaces returns to vibrate within the spaces of the colonizer, spaces that had been considered safe (an issue that pulses with us today). Feng makes pointed connections between aerial violence and colonialism, as well as the cause-and-effect between the violence we inflict and the violence we are subject to. All of this is made incarnate in the figure of an old man, who wants to relive his youthful escapades as a hunter in the lush southern hemisphere. The disjunction the old man feels between a former “real” world and the domesticated world of the present brings our attention to the inadequacy of language. And then the air raids begin. The world is so transformed by their violence, which unlike hunting the old man does not control, that the old man is at a loss for language. Meaning breaks down. But then rather than listen to this empty space, he reverts to the ways of his youth. With this the text ends, even as implications about the inadequacy of language and our refusal to listen to and learn from these limitations linger.

In a way, Feng Zhi’s story is not unlike Jeffrey Mansfield’s work; Feng is attempting to communicate an experience that exceeds ordinary language. And he is inviting us to dialogue with this experience, to find connections to it. As listeners, as translators, this is our final challenge.

Zoo<sup>87</sup>  
Feng Zhi

He spent the prime of his life in India, South Africa, South America, those vast, fragrant wilds. Now his hair has gone white, and he holds the railing as he walks up his four flights. Often he loses his breath. Sometimes he has to sit on a small bench beside the stairs for a few moments to catch it before he can continue on. But as soon as he starts to talk about his experiences, long since passed, in the southern regions, especially about his intemperate hunting life, which obsesses him, his eyes shoot out hot light, and in an instant he has pulled open his photo album to give folks a look.

“You see: this was killed in India, a tiger. That was when I lived on a mountain, covered all around with thick undergrowth. Nearby a tiger would often materialize and then disappear, hunting. You know, if you happened to be riding a horse through the undergrowth at dusk, and if the horse heard the sound of the tiger’s roar, it would immediately tremble. Its whole body would spasm, and it wouldn’t dare take another step. If that happened the rider was in trouble. For a while, the tiger had been too aggressive, so we thought up a plan: take a dying horse, tie it to a tree, and everyone who lived around would lie in ambush in the grass nearby. The tiger called out in the moonlight; the sick horse was so scared it long since had seemed dead. A few minutes later, the tiger appeared. It jumped toward the sick horse. All our bullets shot out together—

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<sup>87</sup> Author’s Addendum: One day the newspaper printed an article on how the zoo in a certain European city had been bombed. Many animals escaped onto the bustling boulevards. This piece of news made me think of an old man I had met ten years before in a European city. He had loved hunting. I wrote this little piece to commemorate him.

—Early the next morning, we took this picture of the dead tiger.”

He turned some more pages, “Look, this is a wild boar from Africa. That time, too, I was bivouacking in the wilderness. In the middle of the night, everyone was sleeping soundly, when suddenly in my sleeping dreams I heard my dog let out a wild bark. I picked up the lamp to take a look, but my dog, a wolf-like animal I had brought from my home village to travel the world with me, had already fallen on the blood-drenched ground. It seemed a panther had killed him with a single bite. The next day, we got everything ready. I wanted to revenge my dog, so I put up a magnificent cheetah as a battle decoy. But there was no trace of the panther. Out from the forest came a wild boar. Do you know how to hunt a boar? You must not shoot it head on, because if it gets hit dead on by a bullet, it knows death is straight ahead of him and you’re in danger of being rammed to death. The best way is to hide to the side, and shoot him in the abdomen, that way he might kill himself by running into a tree.”

“That really boosted everyone’s moral,” he closed the album. “In the wilderness hunting wild animals. There life had interest, putting our hunting rifles on our backs, shooting down a few flying birds in the forest, getting a few goshawks, capturing a few running rabbits, or leading hunting dogs along deer tracks.”

“Or there’s traveling on the Amazon of South America, with hideous crocodiles crawling up and down the water’s banks, yet in the shadiest places, right before you, without your knowing or sensing it, a *Victoria regia* opens up, its leaves big like this, its color as pure as anything, its coolness can seep into your heart. It is the most dangerous places that have this strange beauty, maybe you know, on the mountains where tigers and

panthers rule, peacocks often dance?—*Victoria regia*, peacocks, for us here it's a dream world, but there it is real.

As he spoke, people saw his faltering body could still exude robust bravery. Hunting tools hung on his four walls, as if they hadn't been fully retired from their work with the blood of animals, the poison of snakes. But outside his window was filled with the endless cars and trams of a bustling avenue, bordered on both sides by the newest kinds of shops and cafes. On sunny afternoons, the cafes set out their tables along the avenue, and every kind of man and woman would come to sit there. The complex sounds of the great city would intrude into his rooms, putting the old man's lonely quiet in stark relief. He had retired here close to ten years before. He often said: "I really wish I could be young again, and gallop off into the distant sunset." And sometimes he would open the windows, "Do you see the zoo down there, for me it brings happiness and pain. The happiness comes from the fact that all I need to do is lower my head and I can gaze onto this great park. And the countless lives inside, at the very least, still make me think of the real of my former life. The pain comes from the iron bars and wooden fences, which cause these lives to slowly distill into essence. I've lived here so long, but I rarely hear a tiger growl or lion roar. Only in the middle of the night, when my dreams return to circle around the equator and its southern regions, will I suddenly hear a roar. When I wake up, I don't know if the sound came from my dreams, or if it came from inside the zoo."

Hunters love to tell hunting stories, exaggerated and baffling. More often than not listeners hate it, but this old man always told interesting tales. He never bored. Young people liked to climb up his four flights of stairs to listen to his endlessly riveting stories.

How many suns had he spent in his hometown, but when he returned, his former home had become strange; it was the faded past of his youth in those places that he remembered.

Every morning in the early dawn he would walk around the zoo, as if he were honoring an endless homesickness. Tigers, panthers, lions, zebras, crocodiles, ... the body of each animal radiated what he already knew, each had its particular aura, but each lacked a background: the hotness of the desert, the swampiness of the jungle, wild grasslands as far as the eye could see. Especially at the first light, as the great bats would return to sleep with their gray wings hanging from dead branches, or brightly colored, poisonous snakes would coil up in the pine tree trunks, completely still, what was the difference between them and dead specimens in the exhibition halls? He would often say to himself: "These animals are imprisoned here, like the descendants of a subjugated tribe, they have become people's slaves, moved by people here, moved by people there, they have become decorations. Do they still have those kinds of calls in their blood that intend toward the wilderness, the jungles, distant freedom?"

In the zoo, what he couldn't bear were the signs hanging on the fences, on them written: "Tiger, born in India," "Zebra, born in Africa" ... These uncommunicative, dead words hid how many distant mountains and rivers! Countless distant places, countless marvels he would never see again, they were all hidden away in these few words, like an ancient painting, which only showed archetypes, and perhaps a background; each word was a symbol—but that single word contained so much real meaning!

From dead words the landscapes of those years came back. He felt each day more deeply than the next. His courage gone, he said: "I reject the dead words before my eyes and move again through those endless, life-filled wilds." But his own body wouldn't let him do it; the world outside would never again give him this kind of opportunity. As he gazed, day after day, at the caged animals that had once been wild, he grew old.

Then war exploded. On the streets a clamor of human sounds arose unlike anything heard before, and the train cars that passed daily down the tracks were also different. The young people who had often come in the afternoon to hear him tell stories grew fewer. Later they simply disappeared. But the zoo didn't change. In the tiger's pearly eyeballs, in the panther's spring, there were no strange premonitions; even the snakes and great bats were as still and silent as always.

He began to hear: such-and-such a place had had an air raid, such-and-such a town had been bombed, but his surroundings and the zoo before him were unchanged. All was in a state of war, but he felt enemy planes could never fly over his head; no bombs could fall into this peaceful zoo.

The air raids gradually increased; finally they came to the city where he lived. The siren sounded. It seemed to have nothing to do with him. But in a split second the people walking on the street were gone. His heart felt strangely bleak, the sound of planes echoed, the sound of high explosions echoed, guns sounded, the sound of bombs, the sound of falling planes, followed by the sound of machines growing distant and a period of deathly silence he had never experienced before. He opened the window for a look; a few places were covered in thick black smoke.



The places that had been bombed came nearer and nearer. One time, after an air raid, three or four floors of a neighboring building were bombed; suspended on a tree in the square was half a man's leg.

Before he'd felt it had nothing to do with him. It wasn't until these distant affairs were beside him that he began to worry for the great animals. It felt like a vast lake flooding before his eyes, every day the water rose a little higher.

Fewer visitors came to the zoo; this wasn't a good sign. Every day, early in the morning, he would go for a walk. Indeed he would go earlier and come back later. He enjoyed the peace before his eyes, and he worried about the coming winds of violence, even as he awaited their very arrival.

One day, he was gazing again at the "Indian Area," African Area" .... lost in thought looking at those dead characters. The siren sounded. Immediately after came the echo of machines. There wasn't time to go home; all he could do was hide beside a nearby earthen mound. Huge planes flew in the sky above his head. He couldn't tell which were enemy planes, which were their own. Suddenly there were the sounds—release, bomb, explosion, falling—all mixed together. Suddenly he saw a peacock fly up before him, turning he felt as if he were again on the Indian grasslands, watching an entire flock of peacocks dancing in the air. Everything before him was filled with peacock feathers, one part green, one part yellow. He lost consciousness.

In the end, he was awoken by the silence. The world had changed entirely. At sixty or seventy paces a shoal of blood hid a wild animal's dead body. One could barely make out: there a tiger's leg, there a panther's head, there a fox's tail, there part of a zebra's

neck. The most powerful, cunning animals had not been able to save their own lives. It was as if the universe were experiencing a catastrophe on the most chaotic and primeval level, which made him feel as if it couldn't possibly be real. But he went down to the edge of the lake. The iron barring was broken there, yet the crocodiles, turtles, snakes, all still kept watch in their original positions, without sound, without movement. Only a beaver had climbed out of the water onto a large pile of pure white stones to sit in the beautiful sunlight and sun his moist skin paws. The deer had already gone beyond their wooden fences, and were wandering back and forth on the sidewalks. There was also a white, meek, Italian great-eared hare, and a grayish-yellow Siamese cat, leaping across the deep blue grass. If there hadn't been those impossible shoals of blood and flesh and the ruined iron bars and wooden fences, one might think it were the seventh day of creation, peace, stillness... but beyond the zoo, thick smoke rose from rooftops, windows were aflame, ambulances sounded on the streets without cease.

He had done nothing to prepare himself for this, so as he walked 彷徨, he wasn't aware of any revelation. Without paying attention, he went out of the zoo's gate. He didn't know the great avenues had already become part of the zoo's world. On the stone tables in front of the coffee shop, monkeys of every type and color were gathered, jumping, fighting, beating up on each other. In the square, a clumsy ostrich was spinning in circles. It seemed as if it wanted to open its legs and run, but it couldn't get away. In front of a hotel, where there had always been a porter standing in an ancient ensemble, now there was a great black bear who couldn't stop playing with the hotel's revolving glass door. Two giraffes stood in the middle of the street. Stretching out their long slender necks, well

over six meters tall, they resembled a wall of ship masts. High mountain gazelle ran wild on the flat, tarred road; in the middle of the plains a raccoon dog ... there were so many four-footed animals that one could never 叫不出名稱 them all. Suddenly he turned his head to look, behind him, swaying from side to side, a Tibetan yak was lumbering along. To suddenly see such 離奇的生物 on this most modern, most affluent street, his eyes and ears went blurry, his mind 眩感了.

There would never again be women competing to be the most fashionable, the lightly dancing shoes of gentlemen. Beneath the high noon sun, he felt as if he had returned to his good years, to the vast tropical wilds he often dreamed of. The strong blood of his youth still circulated in his veins. He recalled the desert, the swamps, the jungles. The gorgeous buildings on both sides of him had returned to the primeval. He heard the wild honking of a truck go suddenly silent, and immediately after the sound of a gun. It hit an ostrich, a mountain gazelle, and that black bear in front of the hotel. As he heard it the brave hunting heart of his youth was awakened.

"I'll go back and get my gun!" His mind was set, but looking 向四下一望, 已經 couldn't see the building where he lived.

Written in Kunming, 1944

Appendix

Translation 1

Kunming: A Portrait

For Mu Dan, Writer of New Poetry

Zhao Ruihong

Version One (1940)

12:18 in the afternoon.

Feng, a friend, plays the guitar he bought from Annam

See if we can still gently trace the beautiful dreams of the ancient city in former days?

60 piastre, made in France, ornately decorated

Play that ALOHA OE little ditty

Try and pluck the broken string, quietly listen to the *zong, zong, zong* of flowing water.

(The prince waves a palace fan, a pair of butterflies flies past the window...)

Open the window, let the spring warmth and sunshine enter

He says he'd like to read a little English poetry, humming a tune

Can help digestion;

Why the hell are you so diligent, we just ate lunch, it will hurt your brain

Sit down, look at today's paper:

Yesterday at 2:34 in the afternoon, enemy planes raided Yunnan

Green, green tassels of grain sustain heavy damage, 39 planes

Followed the Yunnan lines, bombing blindly, ah, there Nanhu

Mengzi barren mountain city, again suffered disaster

(There are memories of former days, a white haired old man and sweet rice soup...)

The weather is clear and sweet, a light breeze, a charming blue sky,

We carry canes, a book under our arms, walk to the outskirts,

Hear today there is a "test run," distant sweep past a minute whirlwind

Zhang says, beneath the autumn night lamp, reading a volume of ancient history

Next door someone is snoring, (Zaiyu sleeps by day, dead trees cannot be carved)

For this I climb onto the top bunk: Cruel dreams of the setting sun on an ancient road;

Play an old, broken huqin, the tune is desolate...

Some one all smiles come in from outside, two bitter pears

Report: tense, they've already hung the red flag, people are already jumping about

Right, good timing, I hate the work for my first afternoon class.

Dreaming. Dreaming return to my home three thousand li away:

Mother wrote a letter, saying, this year the plums in the garden

Are exceptionally rich, the vines are lush, the poplars and willows sway gracefully

In addition to the plums, there often are enemy warships; harvest is still good....

The years of lyric poetry have already turned to ash, wearing bright red shirts

Riding a black horse, Qingming day, with friends going to see the scenery

There is still, ocean, caltrop boats, the Broken Bridge, delusion...

Autumn rain is falling in my hometown.

Dreaming there are already 59 planes in three rows flying in a raid over Yunnan

Heart beating. Already passed the red river, that black arced form is the rail road,

They've raided the light brown earth, thickets of mountain forests, reading the *Classic of*

*Mountain and Sea*

Ai, Kunming is throbbing, for this, Kunming stands up trembling

1:45, This mighty era! It makes people sleep lightly!

People start to run quickly, uproar, people walk, walk, walk together

Don't forget a poker deck, checkers, a romance novel,

Today is terrible, it will come, is this an air raid?

Endure a whiff of air, run two and half li, flowing hot sweat....

Following the road, following the Yunnan /Burma/Jiangsu line,

Old Huang, I heard he already boarded a truck for the Western hills,

Carrying hope, nerves, full of sweat, I walked a space of cypress trees:

Ma, I'm afraid, son, your father is still in the fields.

Hold my sleeves, don't be afraid, this is Heaven,

Far, far away, a car. A flash of purple, scattering dust...

It is also a long snake, long snake crawling on the ground, flowing unceasingly, flowing  
toward the outskirts

This is an odd scene, chaotic, scenery dappled color:

Sit down, this happy young group

People don't know in what longitudes are causes for concern.

What kind of heart sprouts love poems?

There is a painter, mounts an easel, describing the scenery

The green mountains see me so delightful; I see the mountains are also delightful

In what mud flows spring scent?

Distant places an arced line. A bridge, dusk sun's shadows

There is the earth not yet planted. At one side a brook/stream flows.

Yellow covers up red earth layer, Yunnan silt mountain river,

Ten li on, knit a patch of white clouds mist, everywhere the fragrance of open spaces

This stack, that stack, sit on the crisscrossing borders of fields

Leaning in the spaces between the ruined embankments, old farmers

Smoke pipes, in front of the great trees, cows and sheep gather together, birds call,

Tired horses, no clouds. A strangely delicate sky

People say this is a good season for air raids; it is also good weather.

Leaning on an earthen bank, a young person watches the sky wishfully thinking:

Life in this era is like gambling, in a little while perhaps we will be destroyed

Recalling fondly last night in the coffee shop: a pair of sparkling eyes

I smile, everyone come and chat, chat.

Today's "emergency" has not yet been lifted, deflect the red horse  
Go ahead three, armored car has driven past eaten up country-selling traitors.

Advance, advance, this spot, the Emperor is in danger,  
Half the country, we are the prisoners of the northwest,  
Yan'an is the Roman road to heaven, you know,  
Our mountains bombed into tight encirclements, fight!

Waiting, waiting, we slip into an air raid shelter:  
Someone turns on a phonograph, singing "The Galloping Bay," stillness  
Stuffiness causes the knitting Ah Jiao to feel light headed, she says she wants to go,  
But the first reward is death. This corner  
Is black like death, emit quiet words of longing in the form of flowing water  
Collapsed corner of an earthen slope, on it grows green grass  
Wind flows in, carrying outside warmth  
From on the earth, gather up letters, give to the one named Ma:  
Today there is another warning, bombed the bridges, farmhouses, peach flower branches  
Traitors last night at 7:00 set fire, said it was the scorched earth policy  
Own homes moved to the lower town, bandits, unafraid...  
Ah, those happy days  
Why the hell not like thick lava bitterly tempering itself, mix into terror,  
Death's thrown struggles, roll into thin air, the logic professor,  
Hunchbacked, smoking a pipe, thinks of the dream of a spring day three years ago,  
Outside Beijing, walking the twisting, rugged mountain paths



That time I sentimentally read Lamartine, Rossetti

The wind strokes the green poplars top of the wall, April azaleas in bloom  
By the side of a bright window reading books of men of virtue, burn a stick of incense

Purple lilac fragrance pressed into a book, illusions!

*Hongzha, hongzha* those weak verse, *hong zha...*

But the bombing is like pirates of old, plundering the treasures of heaven,  
Anger is like gunpowder, taking advantage of the early spring Kunming sunshine

Burning. The planes ignite people's anger

Our new generation raises the standard of fight and struggle

Singing grand, profound songs, we will walk one road, walk...

## Translation 2

### *Sonnets* Feng Zhi

#### Notes on the translations:

In these translations I have chosen to keep Feng Zhi's lineation, or the way that his sentences work across lines, rather than preserve his end rhyme. I found that when I focused on rhyme, Feng's lineation was lost, and, because of my attention to the space that is created as Feng's sentences move from line to line, I decided that lineation was more important.

I have also kept quite a bit of the repetition that Feng uses. Repetition is commonly used in Chinese for emphasis, and, while it does not always create the same effect in English, I find that, in these poems, the patterns that are created as words are repeated evoke external space.

Finally, in addition to 空 *kong*, which I have left throughout the poems, I have transliterated some sound words rather than translate them. I find these onomatopoeias even more evocative in Chinese than in English, and I hope that they will open up their own kind of sonic space.

1.

We are preparing, deeply, deeply to receive  
unthinkable miracles.  
In an endless stretch of time, suddenly  
a comet appears, fierce winds rise.

Our lives, in this instant,  
as when we were first held,  
pass over sorrows and joys, risen suddenly before our eyes,  
and hardened into towering domes.

We eulogize small insects;  
each mates once, or faces  
danger once,

and then end its miraculous life.  
All our lives we bear  
the winds' sudden lift, the comet's rise.

1.

我們準備者深深地領受  
那些意想不到的奇蹟，  
在漫長的歲月裡忽然有  
彗星的出現，狂風乍起。

我們的生命在這一瞬間  
仿佛在第一次的擁抱裡  
過去的悲歡忽然在眼前  
凝結成屹然不動的形體。

我們讚頌那些小昆蟲  
它們經過了一次交媾  
或是抵禦了一次危險，

便結束它們美妙的一生。  
我們整個的生命在承受  
狂風乍起，彗星的出現。

2.

Whatever comes loose from our bodies,  
we let return to earth.

We arrange ourselves at these times,  
like a tree in autumn, one by one,

giving leaf and faded flower  
to the autumn wind. Good tree torso  
extend into winter. We arrange our-  
selves in nature, like moths emerging,

cicadas, shedding. Shells lost in dirt;  
We give our plans to death  
not yet here. Like a musical movement,

song sounds come loose,  
free finally of music's body,  
transformed into *qing shan mo mo* .

2.

什麼能從我們身上脫落，  
我們都讓它化作塵埃：  
我們安排我們在這時代  
象秋日的樹木，一棵棵

把樹葉和些過遲的花朵  
都交給秋風，好舒開樹身  
伸入嚴冬；我們安排我們  
在自然裡，象蛻化的蟬蛾

把殘殼都丟在泥裡土裡；  
我們把我們安排給那個  
未來的死亡，象一段歌曲，

歌聲從音樂的身上脫落，  
歸終剩下了音樂的身軀  
化作一脈的青山默默。

3.

Autumn wind, you *xiaoxiao* in eucalyptus,  
are music by my ears,  
building a temple,  
letting me enter solemnly, timidly.

[You] also are a tower thrust into pure 空,  
high before me, noble.  
Like the body of a saint,  
you smooth the city and its clamor.

Ceaselessly you shed your body,  
I see only growth in wilting;  
On the paths that crisscross fields,

you take you as my guide.  
I wish you eternal life. I want step by step  
to turn into the mud beneath your roots.

3.

你秋風裡蕭蕭的玉樹—  
是一片音樂在我耳旁  
築起一座的廟堂，  
讓我小心翼翼地走入；

又是晴空的高塔  
在我的面前高高聳起，  
有如一個聖者的身體，  
升華了全城市的喧嘩。

你無時不脫你的軀殼，  
凋零裡隻看著你生長；  
在阡陌縱橫的田野上

我把你看成我的引導：  
祝你永生，我願一步步  
化身為你根下的泥土。

4.

I often think of a human being's one life,  
And then I want to pray to you even more.

You, a thicket of white edelweiss,  
you have never forgotten your name,

yet you shun all names.

You live a small life,  
never forgetting snow or grandeur,  
*momo de* [silent] living and dying.

Of all the descriptions, all the clamor  
that reaches your body, some falls away,  
and some transforms into your still silence:

This is your great pride,  
yet it is achieved in your denial.

I pray to you, for human life.

4.

我常常想到人的一生，  
便不由得要向你祈禱。  
你一叢白茸茸的小草  
不曾辜負了一個名稱

但你躲進著一切名稱，  
過一個渺小的生活，  
不辜負高貴和潔白，  
默默地成就你的死生。

一切的形容、一切喧囂  
到你身邊，有的就凋落，  
有的化成了你的靜默：

這是你偉大的驕傲  
卻在你的否定裡完成。  
我向你祈禱，為了人生。

5.

I will never forget  
the Western water city,  
It is the symbol of individual worlds,  
its form the loneliness of thousands.

One loneliness is one island.  
Islands, islands together form friendships.  
When you and I shake hands,  
we are like a bridge spanning water.

When you smile at me,  
on the opposite island  
suddenly a window opens.

Wait for night's deep still sadness,  
When shutters are closed,  
the bridges collect footprints.

5.

我永遠不會忘記  
西方的那座水城，  
牠是個人世的象徵，  
千百個寂寞的集體。

一個寂寞是一座島，  
一座座都結成朋友。  
當你向我拉一拉手，  
便象一座水上的橋；

當你向我笑一笑，  
便象是對面島上  
忽然開了一扇樓窗。

等到了夜深靜悄，  
只看見窗兒關閉，  
橋上也斂了人跡。

6.

Often I see in open plains  
a village boy, or a farmer's wife  
sobbing toward a wordless 空.  
Is it for punishment, or

a broken toy thrown away?  
For a husband's death?  
A son's illness?  
Crying without stopping for breath,

As if all of life were laid  
into a small frame. Outside its border  
there is no human life, there is no world.

They seem to come from antiquity  
So let their unending tears  
flow for a universe cut from hope.

6.

我時常看見在原野裡  
一個村童，或一個農婦  
向著無語的晴空啼哭，  
是為了一個懲罰，可是

為了一個玩具的毀棄？  
是為了丈夫的死亡，  
可是為了兒子的病創？  
啼哭得那樣沒有停息，

象整個的生命都嵌在  
一個框子裡，在框子外  
沒有人生，也沒有世界。

我覺得他們好像從古來  
就一任眼淚不住地流  
為了一個絕望的宇宙。



7.

In soft, warm sun  
we come to the city's edge,  
here two rivers  
meld into the same ocean.

The same alert  
is at our cores,  
The same fate,  
on our shoulders.

We share a god.  
He worries for us:  
Wait for danger to pass,

until the fork in the road  
has breathed us back,  
ocean water divided into river water.

7.

和暖的陽光內  
我們來到郊外，  
像不同的河水  
融成一片大海。

有同樣的警醒  
在我們的心頭，  
是同樣的運命  
在我們的肩頭。

共同有一個神  
他為我們擔心：  
等到危險過去，

那分歧的街衢  
又把我們吸回，  
海水分成河水。

8.

It is a dream of the past.  
The world before us is shattered.  
[I] want to hold the Peng bird's flying wings,  
to go chat with tranquil stars.

A 1,000-year-old dream is like an old man  
waiting for his favorite grandson—  
If today someone flew to the stars  
he wouldn't forget the world's troubles.

They often, in order to learn  
how planets orbit, how stars fall,  
hold the order of stars in the human world,

then throw themselves into the 空.  
Now the old dream has become,  
a meteorite, on a desolate mountain far from the sea.

8.

是一個舊日的夢想，  
眼前的人世太紛雜，  
想依附著鵬鳥飛翔  
去和寧靜的星辰談話。

千年的夢像個老人  
期待著最好的兒孫—  
如今有人飛向星辰，  
卻忘不了人世的紛紜。

他們常常為了學習  
怎樣運行，怎樣隕落，  
好把星秩序排在人間，

便光一般投身空際。  
如今那舊夢卻化作  
遠水荒山的隕石一片。

9.

You grew up with life, loss.  
If you went back to that fallen metropolis  
and heard dim-witted ditties in the marketplace,  
you would be like an ancient hero

he returns suddenly after 1,000 years.  
from a few grandsons, fallen and gone bad,  
[you] find no gestures of glory.  
He will unexpectedly, feel dizzy.

On the battlefield, you are like an unwithered hero,  
in another world facing the blue dome of heaven.  
Returning you become a kite cut loose:

But don't complain about this fate.  
You soar beyond them; they already cannot  
hold fast to your progress, your distance.

9.

你長年在生死的的中間生長，  
一旦你回到這墮落的城中，  
聽著這市上的愚蠢的歌唱，  
你會象是一個古代的英雄

在千百年后他忽然回來，  
從些變質的墮落的子孫  
尋不出一些盛年的姿態，  
他會出乎意外，感到眩昏。

你在戰場上，像不朽的英雄  
在另一個世界永向蒼穹，  
歸終成為一隻斷線的紙鳶：

但是這個命運你不要埋怨，  
你超越了他們，他們已不能  
維住你的向上，你的曠遠。

10.

Your name is often found among  
many other names. There is no  
difference, yet, you always,  
secretly sustained your own splendor.

And so this was all we saw:  
Venus glowing in the west at nightfall, in the east before dawn.  
You twinkle, at midnight, like all the other stars;  
there is no way to differentiate: how many young people

depend on your serene enlightenment to finally obtain  
a reasonable death. Now you have died,  
and we deeply, deeply feel, you can no longer

share in human kind's future labor—  
If this world can be raised up  
what is askew can be returned to order.

10.

你的姓名，常常排列在  
許多的名姓里边，并没有  
什么两样，但是你却永久  
暗自保持住自己的光彩；

我們只在黎明和黃昏  
認識了你是長庚，是啟明，  
到夜半你和一般的星星  
也沒有區分：多少青年人

賴你寧靜的啟示才得到  
正當的死生。如今你死了，  
我們深深感到，你已不能

參加人類的將來的工作—  
如果這個世界能夠復活，  
歪扭的事能夠重新調整。

11.

At dusk on an evening long ago  
you felt "one feeling" for a few young people.  
You knew so many disillusionments  
but that "one feeling" was never dampened.

I hold a deep thankfulness,  
as I think of you, for our era.  
It has been vandalized by ignorant men.  
The life of its one advocate

has been thrown aside, beyond the world—  
You glance back and cast brightness.  
You turn, and there is crow-black cloud cover.

You have walked to the end of your dangerous journey.  
In difficulty, only the small grasses by the side  
of the road can draw out your hopeful smile.

11.

在許多年前的一個黃昏  
你為幾個青年感到“一覺”  
你不知經驗過多少幻滅，  
但是那“一覺”卻永不消沉。

我永久懷著感謝的深情  
望著你，為了我們的時代：  
它被些愚蠢的人們毀壞，  
可是它的維護人卻一生

被摒棄在這個世界以外—  
你有幾回望出一光明，  
轉過頭來又有烏雲遮蓋。

你走完了你艱險的行程，  
艱苦中只有路旁的小草  
曾經引出你希望的微笑。

12.

In empty villages you endured hunger,  
Your thoughts turned often to the dead-filled ravines,  
yet you sang endless elegies  
for the fall of human glory.

Warriors lie injured and dead on the battlefield.  
On the horizon, falling stars vanish.  
Thousands of horses follow clouds and perish—  
Your life is their offering.

Your poverty emits light in glimpses,  
like the robes of a saint, worn and sacred.  
It is a thread, a strand in the human world,

an inexhaustible, spiritual force.  
In its light, those who govern  
reveal a pitiful form.

12.

你在荒村里忍受餓腸，  
你常常想到死填溝壑，  
你却不斷地唱着哀歌，  
為了人間莊美的淪亡：

戰場上有健兒的死傷，  
天遍有明星的落，  
萬匹馬隨着浮雲消滅……  
你一生是他們的祭享。

你的貧窮在閃爍發光  
象一件聖者的衣裳，  
就是一絲一縷在人間

也有無窮的神的力量。  
一切冠蓋在它的光前，  
只照出來可憐的形像。

13.

You grew up in an ordinary city, in an ordinary family.

You shed tears for ordinary girls.

Before a generation's heroism you were reverent,  
and your eighty years were tranquil, well spent,

like the universe, moving in silence  
without a moment, an instant of rest.

On clear days and in heavy rains,  
every place and time is full of life.

From deep, heavy illness comes new strength.

From hopeless love comes new sustenance.

You know why moths throw themselves at flames,

why only snakes that slough their skin can grow.

All things find pleasure in your line,  
"die and transform. It holds the meaning of us all

13.

你生長在平凡的市民的家庭，  
你為過許多平凡的女子流淚，  
在一代雄生的面前你也敬畏；  
你八十年的歲月-是那樣平靜，

好象宇宙在那兒寂寞地運行，  
但是不曾有一分一秒的停息，  
隨時隨處都演化出新的生機，  
不管風風雨雨或是日朗天晴。

從沉重的病中換來新的健康，  
從絕望的愛裡換來新的營養，  
你知到飛蛾為什麼投向火焰，

蛇為什麼脫去舊皮才能生長；  
萬物都在享用你的那句名言，  
它道破一切生的意義：“死和變。”

14.

Your passion sparks fires everywhere.  
You, with a bunch of yellow sunflowers,  
burn, fragrant, dense juniper,  
burn. Beneath the scorching sun,

passersby walk. They too face  
the sky and appeal to the blaze.  
But in early spring, a dried-up, silent,  
little tree, a small prison courtyard.

And in dim rooms, heads lowered,  
men peel potatoes. They  
are like hunks of ice that will not melt.

Yet between you painted a suspension bridge.  
You painted a light and pretty skiff. Did  
you want to welcome the unfortunate?

14.

你的熱情到處燃起火，  
你把一束向日的黃花，  
燃著了，濃郁的扁柏，  
燃著了，還有在烈日下——

行走的人們，他們也是  
向著高處呼呀的火焰；  
但是初春一棵枯寂的，  
小樹，一座監獄的小院，

和隱暗的房裡低著頭  
剝馬鈴薯的人：他們都  
象是永不消溶的冰塊。

這中間你卻畫了吊橋，  
畫了輕勁倩的船：你可要  
把些不幸者迎接過來？



15.

See those pairs of packhorses,  
carrying goods from far away.  
Water also carries silt  
from faraway places  
whose names we cannot say.

The wind from far-flung villages can also  
sweep up sighs and gasps:  
We have passed countless landscapes,  
we always possess them; we always leave them

Like birds flying wings in 空  
They must always command the 空,  
always knowing that there is nothing there at all.

What is our reality?  
We bring nothing from distant places  
and carry nothing with us when we go.

15.

看這一隊隊的馱馬  
馱來了遠方的貨物，  
水也會沖來一些泥沙  
從些不知名的遠處，

風從千萬裡外也會  
掠來些他鄉的嘆息：  
我們走過無數的山水，  
隨時佔有，隨時又放棄，

仿佛鳥飛翔在空中，  
它隨時都管領太空，  
隨時都感到一無所有。

什麼是我們的實在？  
我們從遠方什麼也帶不來，  
從面前又什麼也帶不走。

16.

We stand on a high mountain summit  
and become a view without edges,  
the vast and empty plain before us,  
the intertwining footpaths on the plains.

Which roads, which streams, are not connected?  
Which gust of wind, which stretch of cloud, has no echoes?  
The cities, mountains, rivers we pass  
all become our lives.

Our growth, our worry  
is a pine tree on some hillside,  
an expanse of fog in some city.

We follow the wind blowing, the water's flow  
and become footpaths intertwining on the plains,  
footprints left by travelers' lives.

16.

我們並立在高高的山巔  
化身為一望無邊的遠景，  
化成面前的廣漠的平原，  
化成平原上交錯的蹊徑。

哪條路、哪道水，沒有關連，  
哪陣風、哪片雲，沒有呼應：  
我們走過的城市、山川，  
都化成了我們的生命。

我們的生長、我們的憂愁  
是某某山坡的一棵鬆樹，  
是某某城上的一片濃霧；

我們隨著風吹，隨著水流，  
化成平原上交錯的蹊徑，  
化成蹊徑上行人的生命。

17.

You say, what you love most on this plain  
are small roads filled with life,  
the steps of countless, nameless travelers  
who travel these busy thoroughfares.

In the wild plains of our minds  
there are also small, twisting roads,  
but most who have traveled on them  
do not know where they've gone.

Lonely children, white-haired husbands and wives,  
young men and women  
friends who have died, they all

have given us the roads they have travelled on;  
we remember their steps.  
Don't let their roads become overgrown.

17.

你說，你最愛看這原野裡  
一條條充滿生命的小路，  
是多少無名行人的步履  
踏出來這些活潑的道路。

在我們心靈的原野裡  
也有一條條宛轉的小路，  
但曾經在路上走過的  
行人多半已不知去處：

寂寞的兒童、白發的夫婦，  
還有些年紀青青的男女，  
還有死去的朋友，他們都

給我們踏出來這些道路；  
我們紀念著他們的步履  
不要荒蕪了這幾條小路。

18.

We have often passed intimate nights  
in unfamiliar rooms. In the broad daylight  
what are they like? We cannot know  
so never mind the future or past. A plain

opens up outside our window.  
We hardly remember the roads we came on  
at dusk. Is it because we will come to know  
them in the morning that we will never return?

Close your eyes! Let those intimate nights  
and strange rooms weave into our hearts:  
Our lives are like the plain outside the window.

On the hazy plain we recognize  
a tree, a flash of lake light. It, as far as the eye can see,  
hides forgotten pasts, indistinct futures.

18.

我們常常度過一個親密的夜  
在一間生疏的房裡，它白晝時  
是什麼模樣，我們都無從認識，  
更不必說它的過去未來。原野

一望無邊地在我們窗外展開，  
我們只依稀地記得在黃昏時  
來的道路，便算是對它的認識，  
明天走後，我們也不再回來。

閉上眼吧！讓那些親密的夜  
和生疏的地方織在我們心裡：  
我們的生命象那窗外的原野，

我們在朦朧的原野上認出來  
一棵樹、一閃湖光；它一望無際  
藏著忘卻的過去、隱約的將來。

19.

We wave and wave again, after we say goodbye,  
our world is divided into two.  
Coldness at our sides, before our eyes, sudden vastness  
like two infants, just born.

Ah, one leaving, one birth,  
we endure the hardship of work,  
change cold into warm, fresh into cooked,  
Each weeds and plows his own earth,

to see it grow again, like the first time,  
hearts full of heartfelt thanks for the past;  
You meet someone and think suddenly of a previous life.

How many returning springs in a life, how many winters?  
We only can sense time turning,  
not each man's fated end.

19.

我們招一招手，隨著別離  
我們的世界便分成兩個，  
身邊感到冷，眼前忽然遼闊，  
象剛剛降生的兩個嬰兒。

啊，一次別離，一次降生，  
我們擔負著工作的辛苦，  
把冷的變成暖，生的變成熟，  
各自把個人的世界耘耕，

為了再見，好象初次相逢，  
懷著感謝的情懷想過去，  
象初晤面時忽然感到前生。

一生裡有幾回春幾回冬，  
我們只感受時序的輪替，  
感受不到人間規定的年齡。

20.

How many faces, how many voices  
are this clear in our dreams,  
No matter if they are strangers or loved ones:  
They my own life's schisms,

but to meld 了 many lives,  
a flower opening after melding, will it bear fruit?  
Who controls his own life,  
faced with night's water-like darkness?

Who will let his voice, his face  
travel back to only a few loved ones' dreams?  
We don't know how many have come back,

have been reflected in the remote sky 空,  
have given sailors or desert travelers  
the sustenance for a few fresh dreams.

20.

有多少面容，有多少語聲  
在我們夢裡是這般真切，  
不管是親密的還是陌生：  
是我自己的生命的分裂，

可是融合了許多的生命，  
在融合後開了花，結了果？  
誰能把自己的生命把定  
對著這茫茫如水的夜色，

誰能讓他的語聲和面容  
只在些親密的夢裡縈回？  
我們不知已經有多少回

被映在一個遼遠的天空，  
給船夫或沙漠裡的行人  
添了些新鮮的夢的養分。

21.

We are hearing violent rain in wild wind.  
Beneath in this lamplight, we are alone,  
we, in this little grass hut,  
with the tools we use.

but 1,000, 10,000 lengths of distance rise.  
Copper jars yearn for deep mountain ore.  
Pots for river clay.  
Each thing is a bird

flying in wind and rain. We hold tightly, tighter still,  
but we cannot hold ourselves still.  
Wild wind blows it all to high 空

Violent rain washes it all into mud.  
All that remains is this weak lamp glow,  
to prove how short in life we dwell.

21.

我們聽著狂風裡的暴雨，  
我們在燈光下這樣孤單，  
我們在這小小的茅屋裡  
就是和我們用具的中間

也生了千裡萬裡的距離：  
銅爐在向往深山的礦苗，  
瓷壺在向往江邊的陶泥，  
它們都象風雨中的飛鳥

各自東西。我們緊緊抱住，  
好象自身也都不能自主。  
狂風把一切都吹入高空，

暴雨把一切又淋入泥土，  
只剩下這點微弱的燈紅  
在證實我們生命的暫住。

22.

Deep night is also deep mountain,  
[I] hear heavy night rain.  
The village, more than ten li away,  
the market, more than twenty ,

do they still exist?  
Landscapes of ten years ago  
Illusions of twenty years ago  
are buried deep in the rain.

Narrowed in by four walls,  
like returning to mother's womb,  
God, in the deep night I pray,

like a man of the past  
"Give my narrow heart  
a great universe!"

22.

深夜又是深山，  
聽著夜雨沉沉。  
十裡外的山村、  
念裡外的市塵，

它們可還存在？  
十年前的山川、  
念年前的夢幻，  
都在雨裡沉埋。

四圍這樣狹窄，  
好象回到母胎；  
神，我深夜祈求

像個古代的人：  
“給我狹窄的心  
一個大的宇宙！”



23.

Steady rain for a month.  
All you have known since birth  
is sorrowful dampness.  
Until one day the rainclouds suddenly part,

and sunlight soaks the walls.

I see your mother carry you  
by the scruffs into the sunlight,  
letting your length

for the first time, soak up light and warmth

When the sun has set, she  
carries you back again. You won't

remember, but this warmth  
will fill your future yelps.

In the deep night, you will bark out light.

23.

接連落了半月的雨，  
你們自從降生以來，  
就只知道潮濕陰郁。  
一天雨雲忽然散開，

太陽光照滿了牆壁，  
我看見你們的母親  
把你們銜到陽光裡，  
讓你們用你們全身

第一次領受光和暖，  
等到太陽落後，牠又  
銜你們回去。你們沒有

記憶，但這一幕經驗  
會融入將來的吠聲，  
你們在深夜吠出光明。

24.

1,000 years ago, here  
everywhere it seems already,  
our lives were.  
Before we were born,

a song sound already  
from the changeable 空  
from green grass and green-  
black pines sang our fate.

Our worries are dense, leaden.  
How can it be that here  
we hear this song sound?

See that small flying insect.  
Between its flying wings is always,  
always new life.

24.

這裡幾千年前  
處處好像已經  
有我們的生命；  
我們未降生前

一個歌聲已經  
從變幻的天空，  
從綠草和青松  
唱我們的運命。

我們憂患重重，  
這裡怎麼竟會  
聽到這樣歌聲？

看那小的飛虫，  
在它的飛翔內  
時時都是新生。

25.

Pens and pencils on the desk;  
books on the shelf.  
All day with these silent objects,  
all we can do is think.

In words there is no song sound;  
in motion there is no dance.  
空空, we ask the flying birds  
why they flap their wings in the 空.

There is only the sleeping body,  
when the night is still, rising in rhythm,  
the 空 air in the body roams and plays,  
the salt in the blood roams and plays—  
In dreams perhaps we hear  
the sky and sea calling to us.

25.

案頭擺設著用具，  
架上陳列著書籍，  
終日在些靜物裡  
我們不住地思慮。

言語裡沒有歌聲，  
舉動裡沒有舞蹈，  
空空間窗外飛鳥  
為什麼振翼凌空。

只有睡著的身體，  
夜靜時起了韻律：  
空氣在身內遊戲，

海鹽在血裡遊戲——  
夢裡可能聽得到  
天和海向我們呼叫。

26.

Every day we walk familiar roads  
toward the place where we live,  
but this forest holds many  
paths, hidden and strange.

Hearts beat fast on new paths  
for fear being lost.  
Yet, somehow, over where the trees grow thin,  
we suddenly see where we live.

Like a new island on the horizon,  
how many things close to us  
demand to be discovered anew:

Do not feel everything is familiar.  
At death, when you touch your own hair,  
a question will arise: whose body is this?

26.

我們天天走著一條熟路  
回到我們居住的地方；  
但是在這林裡面還隱藏  
許多小路，又深邃、又生疏。

走一條生的，便有些心慌，  
怕越走越遠，走入迷途，  
但不知不覺從樹疏處  
忽然望見我們住的地方，

象座新的島嶼呈在天邊  
我們的身邊有多少事物  
向我們要求新的發現：

不要覺得一切都已熟悉，  
到死時撫摸自己的髮膚  
生了疑問：這是誰的身體？

27.

In flooding, formless water,  
a man dips down to dip up one oval pitcher,  
and this bit of water obtains one set form.

Look, a flag rippling in autumn wind,

holding what cannot be held.

Let distant light, distant dark night,  
the thriving and withering of a few distant plants,  
and a rushing toward endless intention,

be kept, a little, in this flag.

空空 kongkong, we hear a night of wind.

空 kong we see a day's grasses yellow 了, its leaves redden,

Where can we put down our thought, thinking?

If only these poems were flags full of wind,

holding a little of what cannot be held.

27.

從一片泛濫無形的水裡，  
取水人取來橢圓的一瓶，  
這點水就得到一個定形；  
看，在秋風裡飄揚的風旗，

它把住些把不住的事體，  
讓遠方的光、遠方的黑夜  
和些遠方的草木的榮謝，  
還有個奔向無窮的心意，

都保留一些在這面旗上。  
我們空空聽過一夜風聲，  
空看了一天的草黃葉紅，

向何處安排我們的思、想？

但願這些詩象一面風旗  
把住一些把不住的事體。

Author's notes:

Sonnet 3: "You jia li" tree (*Eucalyptus globulus*)

Sonnet 4: "Shu qu" grass [Cudweed or gnaphalium] in many European countries is called "edelwiess," a German word that can be translated as "precious white grass."

Sonnet 5: Venice

Sonnet 7: When the air raid sirens sound, Kunming residents hide in the outskirts of the city.

Sonnet 9: To a young friend who died in the war.

Sonnet 10: Written on March 5<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the death of Mr. Cai Yuanpei. For the last four lines of the poem, I used a letter written by Rilke to his wife during World War I (1.19.1917) discussing the meaning of the deaths of Rodin and Verhaeren. The letter goes, "If this terrifying smoke and mist (war) dissipate, they still won't be in the human world. They cannot help us in that future work of putting things in order and building up again the people of the world."

Sonnet 11: Lu Xun's collection *Wild Grass* contains the poem "One Feeling."

Sonnet 12: Du Fu

Sonnet 13: Goethe

Sonnet 14: Van Gogh

Sonnet 22: The last two lines of this poem are from lines I remember from the *Koran*.

Sonnet 23: A few newly born puppies.

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