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Language, Time, Reality: Italian Poetry in Taiwan and Its Translation as an *Open Window*

1. Assumptions and Purposes of This Article

1.1 Italian Poetry in Taiwan

Despite boasting postcolonial agendas,¹ a brief search on Google Scholar, or even in a large archive like JSTOR, immediately presents predictable evidence for this argument. Although there are a great number of studies concerning the translation of Chinese works into Western languages (mainly English), the translation of Western works into the Chinese language is a much less frequented research field. Man – in this case, the Western scholar – “always has the world before him – always only stands ‘facing opposite’.”² He is primarily interested in seeing the other, and not in how the other sees him.

Yet, since the end of the 19th century, the linguistic and cultural translation of the other has been a bilateral and reciprocal activity. The circulation of stories, knowledge and trends has played a huge role in shaping our contemporary societies on both sides and in both directions. To contribute to this research field, I therefore set a goal to study the translation of Italian poetry into Chinese, starting from the texts available in Taiwan.

Preliminary research on the subject, including scanning databases of academic papers (e.g. Airiti Library) and online bookstores (e.g. Eslite, Kingstone, *Bokelai* 博客来), confirmed the words of Professor Chen Rongbin 陳榮彬 (an NTU professor in Taipei and an expert in translation studies):

Generally speaking, only the poetic work by Dante (*The Divine Comedy*) is widely circulated in Taiwan. [...] Primo Levi, Calvino, and Pirandello are also very popular, but [...] translated poets are either really prestigious, or winners of the Nobel Prize. The poet Li Kuixian 李魁賢 (1937-) has done a lot of translations of ‘World Poetry,’ and that includes the works by some Italians.³

¹ P. Magagnin, *La traduzione cinese e le teorie traduttive*, [in:] *La traduzione del cinese*, ed. N. Pesaro, Milan 2023, pp. 1–20, p. 5.

² G. Agamben, *The Open*, Stanford 2004, p. 57.

³ From a private email exchange, which took place in June 2023.

In short, Italian poets are under-represented in Taiwan; in bookstores they are usually placed side-by-side with other European authors (mostly classics or Nobels). Many translations come from mainland China, and that is also the case of this article's case studies.

1.2 Translation as a Window on the Open

The impossibility of translating poetry has been long-discussed, yet it continues to be translated. Its translation becomes a possibility thanks to a process of “creative transposition”⁴ or “transcreation”⁵. In other words, it's possible by renouncing any exact correspondence between the source text and the target text. The result of this transcreation is a new *and* translated text, “which stands in a chiasmic relationship of simultaneous difference and inseparability with respect to the original text.”⁶

The challenging inability to translate poetry becomes even more pressing when the translation involves two “languacultures” as different as Chinese and English, or Chinese and Italian.⁷ Chinese is an isolating language. It has no articles and uses few auxiliary verbs and prepositions. The syntactic rules for sentence construction are less restrictive than those informing English or Italian sentences, and the logical connections that link the various parts of speech are often left implicit. In short, Chinese is a language that expresses only what's essential. It articulates meaning by relying less on apparent or “full” elements, and more on invisible or “empty” spaces.

This structural characteristic isn't without its philosophical counterpart. Both Confucius and Laozi aimed to transmit their principles without relying on many words, teaching “through silence” when possible.⁸ Mario Porro, discussing François Jullien's ideas, aptly points out,

The Judeo-Christian tradition arises among populations of shepherds in which the direct intervention of man, through commands and constraints, is decisive. In our tradition the word is action, even God ‘makes things come into being’ by pronouncing his ‘fiat.’ [...] The [Chinese] farmer instead believes that the result will arrive by itself, once the conditions have been triggered to let the maturation process evolve.”⁹

⁴ R. Jakobson, *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, [in:] *On Translation*, ed. R. Brower, Cambridge MA 1959, pp. 232–9, p. 238.

⁵ H. De Campos, *Novas*, Evanston 2007, p. 315.

⁶ C. Bruno, *La traduzione del testo poetico*, [in:] *La traduzione del cinese*, ed. N. Pesaro, Milan 2023, pp. 73–97, pp. 74–5. All quote translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁷ The term hereby employed, “languaculture” is a concept developed by professor Michael Agar (M. Agar, *Language Shock: Understanding The Culture Of Conversation*, New York 1994).

⁸ J. S. Wu, *Chinese Language and Chinese Thought*, “Philosophy East and West” 1969, no 19(4), pp. 423–34, p. 429.

⁹ M. Porro, *François Jullien, sul vivere*, “Doppiozero” 2021, <https://www.doppiozero.com/francois-jullien-sul-vivere> [accessed: 01.12.2024].

Thus, the Chinese language is like the Chinese “farmer,” relying on the silence of time.

The concept of time is different in Chinese culture compared to Western culture. Chinese time is perceived as reality’s diagrammatic conformations that are perpetually forming, dissolving or changing: ever-evolving situations that man is required to timely acknowledge and consider.¹⁰ Hence, according to modern Western ideology, time “evolves in a linear fashion, is teleological,” but according to the Confucian perspective,

consciousness of ‘the propensity of the times,’ like the concept of time itself, [...] does not proceed in a linear fashion. [...] It is, rather, an account of the natural unfolding of history and its internal dynamics, something not dependent upon any teleology.¹¹

The expression *shishi* 时势, translated by Wang Hui 汪晖 as the “propensity of the times,” could also be interpreted as the “potential of the situation,” as François Jullien proposes. Jullien explains that the Chinese sage does not construct an ideal form to project onto things, but grasps and adapts to the “potential of the situation.”¹² In other words, the sage adapts to the way in which situations configure themselves at any given moment. Similarly, relating this discourse on time to the discourse on language, the Chinese language does not “project onto things,” superimposing its ideal to reality. It does not ensnare reality to be expressed via severe sentence structure or binding grammatical order. Instead, it leaves empty spaces and open connections, unsaid plurals and unspecified subjects. It gives time to the moment, and speech to silence.

Thence, if the main reason for poetry’s inability to be translated is identified “in the emotional charge generated by *sound* and *images*,”¹³ when the translation involves Chinese and a Western language, *silences* and *invisible* elements must also be considered.

Professor Joseph S. Wu explores this issue by examining how classical Chinese poetry is translated into English. He compares the word-by-word translation of a Chinese poem with a comprehensible English translation, stating that the latter “has [necessarily] explained the unexpressed meanings by supplying syncategorematic words that were not in the original.” Thus, the English translation of the poem “is actually an interpretation” of the original poem.¹⁴ It’s simply one interpretation among many possibilities.

Consequentially, Wu proves that translating Chinese poetry into English paradoxically implies an expansion of the manifest signifier (i.e. an increase in the linguistic material used), and a narrowing of the signified (i.e. a contraction of the meaning

¹⁰ A. Cheng, *Histoire de la pensée chinoise*, Paris 1997, p. 66.

¹¹ H. Wang, *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, Cambridge MA 2011, pp. 69–71.

¹² F. Jullien, *From Being to Living. A Euro-Chinese Lexicon of Thought*, Los Angeles-London-New Delhi-Singapore-Washington DC-Melbourne 2020, (eBook) pos. 408; 353–368/4967.

¹³ C. Bruno, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹⁴ J. S. Wu, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

by reducing the possible interpretations compared to those elicited by the original text).

But what happens when these languages are oppositely translated? For example, when Italian poetry is translated into Chinese? Should we expect the same result, but analogous and opposite? In other words, will the signifier contract and will the signified paradoxically expand or multiply? How does the Chinese translator face this transcreative challenge? How might he render that “something beyond language” emanating from the source text, so that it might also move *beyond the translation*?¹⁵

Since the late 1970s, mainland China has opened its doors to Western translation studies and rethought its traditional translation practices, with scholars such as Xie Tianzhen 谢天振, Wu Zhijie 吴志杰, Pan Wenguo 潘文国 and Hu Gengshen 胡庚申 developing new “translation theories with Chinese characteristics.”¹⁶ The situation is different in Taiwan, where the development of translation studies as an academic discipline has shaped more recently, mainly since the beginning of the new century.¹⁷ This article, however, does not intend to investigate if (or how) these theoretical studies have influenced the examined translations. In fact, the translations examined date back to the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, it is unlikely that translation studies had already influenced their translators significantly.

The aim of this article is rather to reflect on that “something beyond language” involved in the translation process of Italian poetry into Chinese. By analysing a few Italian poems translated into Chinese, this research investigates how the gaps existing between these two different languacultures notably influence the Chinese translator’s transcreation. What happens to the “beyond-language” meaning of the original poem? Does the Chinese translation really amplify it? And should this potential amplification/multiplication of meaning be considered a positive increase, or rather a distortion?

To answer these questions, I analysed four Chinese texts: two translations of *L’infinito* (*The Infinite*) by Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837), one translation of *Non chiederci la parola* (*Don’t Ask Us for the Word*) by Eugenio Montale (1896–1981) and one translation of *Tempo e tempi* (*Time and Times*) by Montale. These poems were chosen among others because they clearly contain the topic of “time,” a key “divergence” between Chinese and Western thought.

¹⁵ “Something beyond language” is an expression by Roland Barthes (R. Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, Boston 1968, p. 9).

¹⁶ P. Magagnin, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 and 13–16.

¹⁷ The GITI (Graduate Institute of Translation and Interpretation) of NTNU was established in 1996 (<https://www.giti.ntnu.edu.tw/index.php/en/about-us/> [accessed: 01.12.2024]). In 2009, the National Science Council in Taiwan still categorised the translation studies as a sub-discipline under linguistics (Y. S. Lan et al., *Research trend and methods in Translation Studies: a comparison between Taiwanese and international publications*, “Compilation and Translation Review” 2009, no 2(2), pp. 177–191, p. 177). The NTU Graduate Program in Translation and Interpretation was founded in 2012 (<https://www.gpti.ntu.edu.tw/about/?lang=en> [accessed: 01.12.2024]).

Given that “man always only stands ‘facing opposite,’” the “man” whose gaze this research adopts and investigates is actually our so-called other, i.e. the Chinese translator. The “opposite” is ourselves (or our Western language-culture). This rare reversal of perspectives aims to enrich the panorama of translation studies by concretely implementing a postcolonial approach. Hence, by embracing the thought of François Jullien, this approach aims to transform the languacultural divergences echoed in these Chinese translations into a positive “between,”¹⁸ or a space for dialogue, mutual enrichment and chiasmic complementarity.

Giorgio Agamben’s aforementioned essay on the “Open” continues as follows:

While man always has the world before him—always only stands “facing opposite” (gegenüber) and never enters the “pure space” of the outside—the animal instead moves in the open, in a “nowhere without the no.” [...] [Yet,] only man [...] can see the open which names the unconcealedness of beings. The animal, on the contrary, never sees this open. [...] The sign of such an exclusion is that no animal or plant “has the word.”¹⁹

So, if we refer to this wealth of life’s domain as “Open,” visible only by “having the word,” yet inexpressible through the pure linguistics (i.e. “full” elements) of human language, this research on the “beyond-language” that is transmitted, transmuted, contracted or amplified through translation is likely a window on the “Open.”

2. Case Study Analysis

The article will proceed by presenting four case studies. Each case study analysis will include the following parts:

1. Source text (i.e., the Italian poem) and its English translation;
2. Chinese translation with notes;
3. Commentary on the translation.

For all the Chinese translations analysed, the following legend applies:

- **Grey highlighter** = the translating term(s) chosen by the translator importantly differs from the original to the point of altering the reader’s imagination of the object/scene; major alteration of meaning.
- **Underlined** = a part of the source text is missing, or not patently translated.
- **Element A X Element B** = Element A and B create a chiasmus.
- **Bold** = other added poetic devices (rhetorical, aesthetic, rhythmic and/or musical devices).
- *Italics* = other relevance, specified in the commentary section.

¹⁸ F. Jullien, *op. cit.*, pos. 140–157.

¹⁹ G. Agamben, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–58.

2.1 *L'infinito*, translated by Lü Tongliu²⁰

<i>L'infinito</i> (by Giacomo Leopardi)	<i>The Infinite</i> (trans. Frederick Townsend)
1 Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle, 2 e questa siepe, che da tanta parte 3 dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude. 4 Ma sedendo e mirando, interminati 5 spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani 6 silenzi, e profondissima quiete 7 io nel pensier mi fingo, ove per poco 8 il cor non si spaura. E come il vento 9 odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello 10 infinito silenzio a questa voce 11 vo comparando: e mi sovvien l'eterno, 12 e le morte stagioni, e la presente 13 e viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa 14 immensità s'annega il pensier mio: 15 e il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.	This lonely hill to me was ever dear, This hedge, which shuts from view so large a part Of the remote horizon. As I sit And gaze, absorbed, I in my thought conceive The boundless spaces that beyond it range, The silence supernatural, and rest Profound; and for a moment I am calm. And as I listen to the wind, that through These trees is murmuring, its plaintive voice I with that infinite compare; And things eternal I recall, and all The seasons dead, and this, that round me lives, And utters its complaint. Thus wandering My thought in this immensity is drowned; And sweet to me is shipwreck on this sea.

无限

1 这荒僻的山冈

Inversion of the original sentence order by anticipating the subject “这荒僻的山冈” (quest'ermo colle/this lonely hill), as in the English translation.

2 对于我总是那么亲切,

3 篱笆遮住我的目光

4 使我难以望尽遥远的地平线。

5 我安坐在山冈

„Siepe” (hedge) is translated as 篱笆 (fence). The original sentence has been rephrased. In the Chinese translation, this verse makes a parallel with the first verse.

6 从篱笆上眺望无限的空间,

7 坠落超脱尘世的寂静

“Sovrumani” (lit. “superhuman;” in the En. tr. “supernatural”) is translated as “超脱尘世” (detached from the world).

8 与无比深沉的安宁;

9 在这里,我的心几乎惶惶不安。

“Io nel pensier mi fingo” (I in my thoughts conceive) is missing in the Chinese translation. Therefore, the possibility of interpreting the poet's experience as imaginary is lost, too.

²⁰ Lü Tongliu 吕同六 (1938–2005).

- 10 倾听草木间轻风喁喁细诉,
幽微的风声衬托无限的寂静;
The sentence is rephrased and the original meaning is slightly changed: “E come il vento/odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello/infinito silenzio a questa voce/vo comparando” (And as I listen to the wind, that through/These trees is murmuring, its plaintive voice/I with that infinite compare) is translated as “倾听草木间轻风喁喁细诉, 幽微的风声衬托无限的寂静” (listening to the light breeze whispering among the vegetation, the gentle sound of the wind emphasises the infinite silence). The “I” subject is also remarkably lost.
- 11 我于是想起了永恒,
12 同那逝去的季节,
13 生气盎然的岁月,它的乐音。
“E la presente/e viva” (lit. “and the current/and alive”; in the En. tr. “and this, that round me lives”) is translated as “生气盎然的” (lively/full of life). Moreover, the ambivalence of the Italian expression “di lei” (lit. her) is necessarily lost, like in the English translation. “Di lei” is translated as “它的” (thus, “its”, i.e. the season’s). However, the Italian term “stagione” is a feminine noun. Therefore, the Italian expression “il suon di lei” (lit. “her sound”) may both indicate “this season’s sound,” or simply “her sound,” with “her” referring to an unmentioned woman to whom the poet might possibly allude.
- 14 我的思绪就这样
15 沉落在这无穷无尽的天宇;
“Immensità” (immensity) is rendered by the longer locution “无穷无尽的天宇” (endless sky).
- 16 在这无限的海洋中沉没
该是多么甜蜜。²¹
“Mare” (sea) is rendered by the longer locution “无限的海洋” (infinite ocean). The verb “è” (is) is rendered by the longer locution “该是” (should be). The “I” subject is missing.

²¹ The Chinese translations of *L’infinito* hereby analysed (sections 2.1 and 2.2) are from a selection of Leopardi’s poems edited by Lü Tongliu (G. Leopardi; T. Lü [trans.], *Wuxian – Lai’aoa’erdi Shuqingshi xuan* 无限-莱奥帕尔迪抒情诗选, Xian 1998, pp. 13–25).

Commentary on Lü Tongliu's translation of *L'infinito*

The preliminary observations provided in the marginal notes already dispel two of the aforementioned hypotheses. First, it is not true that the “signified” meaning is necessarily amplified by the Chinese translation. For example, in lines 9 and 13 of the Chinese translation, the opposite is proven true: the ambiguity of the original text is reduced to a single interpretative choice (see marginal notes for explanations). Second, it is incorrect to assume that in the Chinese translation, the “signifier” apparatus is always reduced in comparison to that employed by the source text. This point is evident in the last two lines of the Chinese text, where the translator uses two wordy locutions to render two single words (i.e. “immensity” and “sea”). Nonetheless, this translation still makes way for new reflections on the poem.

Firstly, by analysing Leopardi's poem in comparison with its Chinese translation, it is clear that the Italian language does indeed ensnare the landscape. It conceptualises reality to the point of making it liable to a double interpretation, or making it equally plausible that the scene is either real or imagined (see note on line 9 of the Chinese translation). “I in my thoughts conceive...,” says the first-person narrator (the poet). Is the hedge there, or is it imagined? Is infinity the boundless horizon extending in front of the poet's gaze, or rather a (re)imagination, an idea?²²

In the Italian text, the magnetism holding together the *discourse* on reality with the *experience* of reality is rooted in a western-languacultural and Romantic “I.” This “I” is notably less explicit in the Chinese text, turning into a slight presence, gaze or sensorial receptacle of a prismatic reality. Hence, the Chinese poem doesn't capture this reality as the product of a man's reflections (i.e. of a human language-based mind), but as a continuous, natural and tangible alternation of configurations. These configurations have always existed, independently of the poet's imagination and

²² “The Leopardian ego represents the infinity of space in his fantasy, creating it with imagination: if what he sees is the hedge, the beyond-hedge is the result of an imaginative activity that goes beyond reality, “creating” an infinity that otherwise would not exist. It is not a simple representation, [...] but ‘giving a form’ to what lacks it” (V. Panicara, *Io nel pensier mi fingo*, “Culturamoremio” 2020, <https://culturamoremio.home.blog/2020/11/21/io-nel-pensier-mi-fingo-un-infinito-che-non-ce-brevi-osservazioni-di-vittorio-panicara/> [accessed: 01.12.2024]). Leopardi himself, in his *Zibaldone*, reflects on this concept. See, for example, the following notes:

(a) Sometimes the soul might desire, and actually does desire, a view that is restricted or confined in some way, as in Romantic situations. The reason is the same, a desire for the infinite, because then, instead of sight, the imagination is at work and the fantastic takes over from the real. The soul imagines what it cannot see, whatever is hidden by that tree, that hedge, that tower, and wanders in an imaginary space and pictures things in a way that would be impossible if its view could extend in all directions, because the real would exclude the imaginary. (Z 171);

(b) Nothing in nature actually announces infinity, the existence of anything infinite. Infinity is a product of our imagination, and at the same time of our smallness and our pride. [...] Infinity is an idea, a dream, not a reality: at least we do not have any proof of its existence, not even by analogy, and all we can say is that we are an infinite way from the knowledge of or the demonstration of such existence. (Z 4177–4178). (G. Leopardi; K. Baldwin (trans.), *Zibaldone*, New York 2013).

words. The poet is merely there to grasp and verbalise them for a moment (see lines 10 and 16 of the Chinese translation and their respective marginal notes).

In the Italian text, great stress is also placed on the spatial contrasts marked by the demonstrative pronouns “questo/questa/questi/queste” *versus* “quella/quello” (only partly reproduced within the English translation). The insistent use of these pronouns reinforces the idea of a reality that can be (re)produced and/or subjugated by the human language, responding to its logical paradigms. As a result, the poem is spotted as a map by these pronouns: it is spatialised by them, in a gnoseological attempt to *comprehend* the boundlessness of the world, both in the sense of “understand” and in the sense of “embrace, include.”

The Chinese text, contrarily, is free of this scheme. The grounding force of the “I” subject disappears, and demonstrative pronouns and their spatial definition of the world are bound to the physical presence of this subject. In fact, the Chinese terms 这 (this) and 那 (that) respond to a different range of uses compared to what’s covered by these Italian demonstrative pronouns, thus resulting into a dispersion of their spatial contrasting effect. Even if the word 这 is largely used throughout the translation, it never forms a contrasting couple with 那. Alternatively, 那 is also employed in an expression such as 那么 (line 2), meaning “so, so much” (full quote: 那么亲切, “so dear” or “very dear”), which has no relation to the representation of space. As Anne Cheng explains well:

Chinese is not an inflectional language. [...] There is therefore no basic structure of the subject-predicate type which would tend to say something about something and which would implicitly pose the question of whether the proposition is true or false. [...] Hence, it is no surprise that Chinese thought has not established itself in fields such as epistemology or logic, based on the conviction that reality can be the object of a theoretical description by comparing its structures with those of human reason. The analytical approach begins with a critical distancing, constitutive of both the subject and the object. Chinese thought, however, appears totally immersed in reality: there is no reason outside the world.²³

Thus, the evaporation of the centralising, imaginative and epistemologist “I” makes this Chinese version of *L’infinito* less ambiguous in terms of interpretation, but also less exclusivist.²⁴ In other words, it’s less anchored to the experience of the Leopardian ego or the individual. The Chinese text whispers its breeze without clarifying who is listening. By silencing the “I” subject, it exalts the silence (or ineffability) of the infinite. By doing so, Lü Tongliu’s transcreation frees the reader’s gaze not from the impediment of the hedge, but from the filtering gaze of the poet himself.

²³ A. Cheng, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

²⁴ This need to convey an unambiguous text was also due to the historical context in which Lü Tongliu was translating Leopardi. At that time, many influential poets (e.g. Ai Qing 艾青, 1910–1996) declared themselves against the so-called *menglong* 朦胧 (misty) style and, more generally, against any ambiguous use of language (B. Leonesi, *La Cina, la letteratura italiana e Lü Tongliu. Un progetto di traduzione lungo una vita*, [in:] *La Cina e il Mondo. Atti dell’XI Convegno dell’AISC*, ed. P. De Troia, Rome 2010, pp. 441–450, p. 448).

2.2 *L'infinito*, translated by Wang Huanbao²⁵

[For source text and English translation, see section 2.1].

无限

- 1 我永远喜欢
Unlike Lü Tongliu, Wang Huanbao preserves the original phrase order, anticipating the predicate “sempre caro mi fu”/我永远喜欢 (to me was ever dear).
- 2 这座孤独的小山，
我坐在山上的篱笆旁，
Like Lü Tongliu, Wang Huanbao translates the term „sieve” (hedge) as 篱笆 (fence). Also missing from this translation is the idea that the hedge blocks the poet’s view. Whereas what’s noteworthy is the anaphoric and chiasmic use of the word 山 (小山X山上).
Xiàn 线 is in assonance with *piān* 翩 (line 5).
Wàng 望 is in assonance with *páng* 旁 (line 2). Moreover, another chiasmus interlaces the verses: 望远 (beginning of line 3) X 远望 (ending of line 4).
“To nel pensier mi fingo” (I in my thoughts conceive) is translated by the phrasal four-character expression 浮想联翩 ([with] thoughts thronging my mind).
- 3 望远处的地平线。
Xiàn 线 is in assonance with *piān* 翩 (line 5).
- 4 我坐着远望，
Wàng 望 is in assonance with *páng* 旁 (line 2). Moreover, another chiasmus interlaces the verses: 望远 (beginning of line 3) X 远望 (ending of line 4).
“To nel pensier mi fingo” (I in my thoughts conceive) is translated by the phrasal four-character expression 浮想联翩 ([with] thoughts thronging my mind).
- 5 浮想联翩，
“Spazi” (spaces) is translated as 宇宙 (universe, cosmos).
- 6 无穷无尽的宇宙，
“Sovrumani silenzi” (the silence supernatural) is translated by another four-character expression: 万籁俱寂, meaning “silence reigns supreme.”
- 7 万籁俱寂，
“Sovrumani silenzi” (the silence supernatural) is translated by another four-character expression: 万籁俱寂, meaning “silence reigns supreme.”
- 8 令人感到恐惧不安。
The comparison between the voice of the wind and the infinite is completely absent in this translation.
- 9 听着微风的飒飒声响，
The comparison between the voice of the wind and the infinite is completely absent in this translation.
- 10 我想起逝去的岁月
The passage “and this, that round me lives/And utters its complaint” is significantly altered. The expression “di lei” (lit. “her”) is interpreted as referring to a woman (presumably the beloved), rather than to the season. However, the translation, instead of mentioning this woman in the third person, addresses her directly. In fact, Wang Huanbao translates: 我想起逝去的岁月/和你的笑语欢颜 (I recall the seasons dead, and your joyful bearing).
- 11 和你的笑语欢颜。

²⁵ Wang Huanbao 王焕宝 (1939-).

- 12 我的思绪沉浸在无穷
无尽的宇宙之中; “Immensità” (immensity) is translated as 宇宙 (universe, cosmos). Instead of reproducing the line chiasmus of the source text (s’annega il pensiero mio/e il naufragar m’è dolce: predicate-subject/subject-predicate), the final lines are interlaced by the use of repetition (我的) and phrasal parallelism.
- 13 我的幸福融汇于这片
大海的波澜。 The meaning is significantly altered here. “E naufragar m’è dolce in questo mare” (And sweet to me is shipwreck on this sea) is translated as 我的幸福融汇于这片大海的波澜 (my happiness merges with the waves of this sea). The notion of shipwreck and its catastrophic charge completely disappears.

Commentary on Wang Huanbao’s translation of *L’infinito*

In Wang Huanbao’s translation, we read an *Infinite* that is substantially reinterpreted in a nearly Taoist way. The search for musicality (through repetitions, anaphoras, assonances and formulaic expressions) is very evident. Sometimes, it’s even detrimental to the rendering of the original sense (e.g. see verses 3–5 of the Chinese translation and respective marginal notes).

This musicality of form makes a pair with a romantic and almost carefree tone, deriving from the interpretative choices made in lines 10–11 and 13. Therefore, the poem stemming from Wang Huanbao’s transcreation seems to express a love for life, or a kind of ecstatic joy. The poet achieves this not by peering into the infinite beyond the hedge, but by feeling a part of it. Wang Huanbao’s Leopardi, holding a thoughtful but also imperturbable attitude, is reminiscent of Zhuangzi singing after his wife’s death, as death is to be conceived as simply “another change” within “the course of some heedless mingling mishmash.”²⁶

Although contemplating a “universe” (宇宙) plunged into silence (lines 6–7) might produce “restlessness” (恐惧不安, line 8), this condition does not generate any absolute sorrow. Contrarily, it is an occasion for joy and participation in reality. The apex of this climax is reached in the finale, the meaning of which differs significantly from the Italian text. As highlighted in the notes, the poet expresses a feeling of happiness and an almost holistic immersion in nature (see line 13 of the Chinese translation and respective marginal note).

To conclude, Wang Huanbao’s translation offers a less faithful rendering of the original poem, yet a fascinating interpretation of it. In fact, by relocating the poet’s melancholic pain into the infinite and natural flow of things, it interestingly transforms this pain into the joy of participation in said infinite itself.

²⁶ Zhuangzi, Zhuangzi: *The Complete Writings*. Indianapolis-Cambridge 2020, pp. 300-1.

2.3 *Non chiederci la parola*, translated by Lü Tongliu

<i>Non chiederci la parola</i> (by Eugenio Montale)	<i>Don't ask us for the word</i> (trans. J. Galassi)
1 Non chiederci la parola che squadri da ogni lato 2 l'animo nostro informe, e a lettere di fuoco 3 lo dichiari e risplenda come un croco 4 Perduto in mezzo a un polveroso prato. 5 Ah l'uomo che se ne va sicuro, 6 agli altri ed a se stesso amico, 7 e l'ombra sua non cura che la canicola 8 stampa sopra uno scalcinato muro! 9 Non domandarci la formula che mon- di possa aprirti 10 sì qualche storta sillaba e secca come un ramo. 11 Codesto solo oggi possiamo dirti, 12 ciò che non siamo, ciò che non vo- gliamo.	Don't ask us for the word to frame our shapeless spirit on all sides, and proclaim it in letters of fire to shine like a lone crocus in a dusty field. Ah, the man who walks secure, a friend to others and himself, indifferent that high summer prints his shadow on a peeling wall! Don't ask us for the phrase that can open worlds, just a few gnarled syllables, dry like a branch. This, today, is all that we can tell you: what we are not, what we do not want.

请你莫要问我们

1 请你**莫要问我们**

2 莫要让我们讲出话语

“Non chiederci la parola” is translated as 莫要问我们 (don't question us). “La parola” is mentioned later on, in the following line (话语).

The anaphoric recurrence of 莫要问我们 and 莫要让我们 interlaces lines 1 and 2 in a rhythmic way. The relative clause “che squadri” (lit. that might frame) is transformed into a separated phrase (i.e. the one reported in line 3). Therefore, the original phrase “Non chiederci la parola che squadri da ogni lato/l'animo nostro informe” (Don't ask us for the word to frame/our shapeless spirit on all sides) is broken into two: 1. 莫要让我们讲出话语; 2. 它们处处拘束我们理还乱的思绪 (1. Don't make us speak out words. 2. [Since] they would constrain our confused thoughts from every side).

- 3 它们处处**拘束**我们理**还乱**
的思绪,
- 4 诉说我们的心声
5 惟有火红的文字
- 6 有如失落在尘埃飞扬的野地
7 二朵番红花。
- 8 啊,人正自信地前进,
9 他是别人的朋友,自己的朋友,
10 他全然不顾
- 11 **炎热的阳光**把他的影子
- 12 **投在斑驳**的高墙!
- 13 请你莫要问我们
- “Squadrare” (frame) is translated as 拘束 (restrain), causing a loss of the connotative meaning related to the original term. In fact, “squadrare” comes from the Latin “exquadrare,” which meant “reduce to a square.” It suggests the idea of “shaping,” thus, the conception of language as a tool to shape reality. “Animo informe” (shapeless spirit) is actually translated as 还乱的思绪 (confused thoughts), missing the contrast between “squadrare” (giving a shape) and “informe” (being shapeless).
- The anaphoric recurrence of 有 rhythmically interlaces lines 5 and 6.
- The existential verb “risplenda” (shines) is not translated in Chinese, yet the crocus still *shines*, since Lü Tongliu has isolated it in a self-standing line, visually detached from the “dusty field”-line (line 6).
- Again, repetition (朋友) is used as a rhythmic/aesthetic expedient.
- “Canicola” (lit. heatwave, peak summer heat) is paraphrased as 炎热的阳光 (hot sunlight), thus losing the synesthetic effect of the original text, where the summer heat (physical sensation) prints a shadow on a wall (visual sensation).
- “Stampa” (prints) is translated as 投 (throw, cast, project), thus missing that very modern and technical language taste, that was also suggested by words like “squadrare” ([to] square, frame; line 1 of the Italian text) and “formula” (line 9). Moreover, the wall is hereby said to be 斑驳 (mottled) instead of “scalcinato” (shabby, worn), and also 高 (high), which is not specified in the source text.

- 14 世界将以怎样的形式向你
展现。 “Formula” is translated as 形式 (shape), thus again missing the aforementioned modern and technical taste. In fact, the Italian term “formula” is rooted in a scientific or mathematical field (similarly to the aforementioned “stampa” [prints], being clearly linked to that printing and publishing industry which had started experiencing its 20th-century booming development). This Chinese translation, thus, is less connected to the historical context in which the poem was originally written, a historical moment of great trust in science and “progress,” technical and industrial development, mechanisation of production and even human life. Whereas, in the original text, terms such as “stampa” and “formula” also carried this kind of indirect connotation.
- 15 是的,那不过是几个扭曲的
音节 Line 10 of the original poem is a noun phrase. The Chinese text, consistent with its explanatory goal, adds the verb 是 (to be), as to facilitate the understanding of the line.
- 16 有如**干枯的树枝**。 The comparison is inverted, with no great impact on the overall rendering: “secca come un ramo” (dry like a branch) is translated as 有如干枯的树枝 (like a dry branch).
- 17 今天我只能告诉你:
18 我们不是什么,
19 我们又不**企求**什么。²⁷ “Vogliamo” ([we] want), a very common and simple one-word verb, is translated as 企求 (desire, seek, attempt), a more wordy and refined equivalent.

Commentary on Lü Tongliu’s translation of *Non chiederci la parola*

As reported in the marginal notes, Lü Tongliu’s mission in translating Montale is first and foremost to explain his writing, or to make it more acceptable to his Chinese readership and — above all — to his contemporary intellectuals (see footnote 24).

The emphasis on sound through the alliteration of “s” and “t” gives the original poem an asper and pressing rhythm, which isn’t neglected by the Chinese text. In fact,

²⁷ This translation is from the *Nobel Literary Prize Winners’ Series* Montale-dedicated volume, edited by Liu Shuoliang (E. Montale; T. Lü and R. Liu [trans.], *Nobel Literary Prize Winners’ Series – Shenghuo zhi e* 生活之恶, Li Jiang 1992, pp. 22–3), however, a very same version of it firstly appeared in an earlier publication (E. Montale; T. Lü (trans.), *Mengtalai shixuan* 蒙塔莱诗选, Changsha 1989).

the Chinese translation also seeks a rhythmic and syncopated flow, mainly by resorting to repetitions and breaking the original lines into more sentences (e.g. lines 1–4).

On the contrary, the lexemes-clues of modernity (*squadri*, *stampa*, *formula*), which act as a counterpoint to the bucolic lexicon in the Italian text (*risplenda*, *croco*, *prato*, etc.) lose this type of connotation and contrastive function in their respective Chinese translations (see lines 12 and 14 of the Chinese translation and their respective marginal notes).

The division into three stanzas is maintained, but the line scansion is different. New enjambments open up new “psychological” spaces,²⁸ and often integrate what the Chinese equivalent (or the chosen translation strategy) cannot exhaustively express (see lines 6–7 of the Chinese translation, the case of the shining crocus).

Hence, the result of Lü Tongliu’s transcreation is a reflection on modernity and the human condition being no less insightful than the one offered by Montale. However, it is less metatextual, plays less on lexicon and is less rooted in precise temporal coordinates. The Montale rendered by Lü Tongliu, with his broken phrases and nearly limping pace, seems to question the possibility of a directly accessible meaning or a linear progress leading to any definitive sense. The Montalian thought rendered by Lü Tongliu seems suspended in a rather transtemporal or potential dimension, which could be regarded as the added value of this translation.

In line with Wang Hui’s thinking, Professor Tiziana Lippiello argues that “the conception of time, and in particular a revisitiation of the ancient concept of ‘propensity or potentiality of time’ (*shishi* 時勢), contributed to building a new idea of Chinese modernity, opposed to, or complementary to, the Western idea of modernity.”²⁹ Thus, Lü Tongliu’s transtemporal potentiality, contrasted with the very concrete assertiveness of Montale’s text, offers a clear example of this dual but complementary interpretation of modernity and the human condition.

Another Chinese translation of this poem available in Taiwan is penned by the writer Yang Du 楊渡 (Taichung, 1958-) and retitled *Yeqiangwei de chan quan* 野薔薇的纏蜷 (*A tangle of wild vegetation*).³⁰ Yang Du’s version, however, represents a rather free interpretation, often diverging from the source text to the point of no longer allowing a productive comparison with it. The chiasmic dialogue that Bruno sees as the mark of good translation – where diversity coexists with an inevitable reliance on the source text³¹ – is definitely compromised. Instead, other objectives take priority, such as the goal of creating a poem that is enjoyable for a Chinese-speaking reader and somewhat representative of the Nobel laureate being translated. For these reasons, although Yang Du’s text was closely analysed during a preliminary phase of this research, it was not considered useful to include among the case studies reported.

²⁸ C. Bruno, *op. cit.*, pp. 80–81.

²⁹ T. Lippiello, *Il valore del tempo nella cultura cinese classica*, [in:] *Il liuto e i libri*, ed. M. Abbiati and F. Greselin, Venice 2014, pp. 9–22, p. 13.

³⁰ E. Montale; D. Yang (trans.), *Mengdelei shixuan* 孟德雷詩選, [in:] *Nuobeier Wenxuejiang Quanjī 47* 諾貝爾文學獎全集47, ed. Y. Chen, Taipei 1982, pp. 13–14.

³¹ C. Bruno, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

2.4 Tempo e tempi, translated by Liu Ruting³²

<i>Tempo e tempi</i> (by Eugenio Montale) (From <i>Satura</i> , 1971)	<i>Time and times</i> (interim translation by myself)
1 Non c'è un unico tempo: ci sono molti nastri	There is no single time: there are many tapes
2 che paralleli slittano	which slide in parallel
3 spesso in senso contrario e raramente	often going in opposite directions and rarely
4 s'intersecano. È quando si palesa	intersecting. That's when it shows up
5 la sola verità che, disvelata,	the only truth which, revealed,
6 viene subito espunta da chi sorveglianza	is immediately expunged by those monitoring
7 i congegni e gli scambi. E si ripiomba	the devices and exchanges. And again one falls
8 poi nell'unico tempo. Ma in quell'attimo	then in the only time. But in that moment
9 solo i pochi viventi si sono riconosciuti	only the few living people recognised each other
10 per dirsi addio, non arrivederci.	to say farewell, not goodbye.

时间和光阴

1 统一的时间并不存在,

2 存在的是好多皮带,

3 它们平行地转动

4 常常是向着相反的方向

5 但很少交叉损坏。

“Tempi” (times) is translated as 光阴 ([available] time; lit. “[alternation of] light [光] and dark [阴]”).

The scansion of the verses is reorganised to guide reading and facilitate understanding.

“Nastri” (tapes) is translated as 皮带 (belts); “belts” suggests the image of a circular movement, whereas “tapes” evokes a linear sliding.

The Italian phrase occupying lines 1–4 of the source text is split, and the relative clause “che [...] slittano [...] e raramente s'intersecano” (lit. which slide in parallel and rarely intersect each other) is transformed into a new phrase (lines 3–5 of the Chinese translation). “Slittano” ([they] slide) is translated as 转动 (turn, revolve, rotate).

“S'intersecano” (intersect [each other]) is translated as 交叉损坏 (lit. intersect and damage, thus, collide), but this idea of a damaging collision is not expressed in the source text.

³² Liu Ruting 刘儒庭 (1941-).

- 6 当它现出真情 The sentence starting at line 4 and ending at line 7 of the Italian text (“È quando si palesa [...] scambi”), is completely reworded for clarification (lines 6–9 of Ch. Tr.).
- 7 那是唯一的真理，一旦表露
- 8 看守这套装置和变化的人 “Scambi” (exchanges) is translated as 变化 (changes).
- 9 立即把这真理淘汰。 “Espunta” (expunged) is translated as 淘汰 (eliminated; notice: both the characters composing this word contain the radical for “water,” i.e. 氵).
- 10 然后，它又沉入这统一的时间的洪流。 The impersonal phrase “e si ripiomba” (and again one falls) is given a subject, 它, a pronoun referring to 唯一的真理 (the only truth). “Ripiomba” (falls [again]) is translated as 沉入 (sinks into), and “unico tempo” ([the] only time) is translated as 时间的洪流 (the flow of time). Notice in both 沉入 and 洪流 the recurrence of the radical for “water.”
- 11 这时，只有少数活人觉悟， “Si sono riconosciuti” ([they] recognised each other) is translated as 觉悟 ([they] come to realise/understand [the only truth]), thus changing the meaning of this phrase.
- 12 他们说的不是再见，
13 而是永别。

Commentary on Liu Ruting’s translation of *Tempo e tempi*

The Italian title plays with the inflectional nature of the language, producing a singular-plural binomial of the word “tempo”/“tempi” (time/times). This dichotomy suggests the existence of two distinct referents, which the first lines immediately discuss: “There is no single *time*: there are many *tapes*,” etc. Time is one concept, and *times* is another. The two words are morphologically linked, yet semantically distinct.

Hence, Liu Ruting does not translate plurality, but takes a different route. He chooses two different equivalents for “time” and creates the ingenious title 时间和光阴. This includes the very common and often used term 时间 (lit. “between moments,” thus “time”), and the less frequented 光阴, referring to the “available time.” 光阴 is etymologically bound to a cyclical time, i.e. a time conceived as a perpetual alternation of light and dark. A paraphrasis of this Chinese title could thus be: “Time [as a concept] and [our life] times.” It immediately suggests a relationship between human time(s) and time as a perpetual alternation of moments (i.e. temporary configurations).

In other words, this idea contrasts the times we can name and measure with an elusive, uncontrollable time that exists beyond our ability to verbalise or manage it. The title consequently shifts the reader's focus from a purely anthropocentric and logocentric viewpoint to a broader, cosmocentric perspective. Time, in this sense, doesn't exist as an independent entity. It's something we can't truly define. The *times* we can name are merely human-made constructs, fleeting instances of awareness in the vast, continuous flow of *time*. *A carpe diem*, if you will.

Another noteworthy issue regards a series of terms purposely employed by Montale alluding to a mechanical and industrialised modernity (e.g. tapes, expunged, exchanges, respectively at lines 1, 6, 7 of the source text). This allusion tends to fade in the Chinese text, often failing to render the industrial connotation. Instead, water-radical characters are frequent, conveying a watery imagery of human times as part of a flow with sudden moments of greater awareness (see lines 9 and 10 of the Chinese translation and their respective marginal notes).

In fact, analysing the metaphorical pattern of this lyric, the Italianist scholar Luigi Blasucci notices:

Montale's youth images of the chain or wheel are [hereby] updated with the use of more modern referential fields: the moving staircase ('slide'), the typewriter or the recorder ('tapes'), the road signs ('in opposite directions'), geometry ('intersecting'), typographic art ('expunged'), the railway context ('devices and exchanges').³³

In the Chinese text, however, this metaphorical pattern of modernity doesn't stand out as clearly. There is no systematic translation of the key terms highlighted by Blasucci, nor any attempt to alternatively evoke their semantic areas. Instead, the noteworthy chosen equivalents often contain the radical for "water" (氵), e.g. 淘汰 (eliminated) for "expunged," 沉入 (sinks into) for "[again] falls," 时间的洪流 (the flow of time) for "the only time."

In spite of (and thanks to) this shift from a modern-industrial connotation of human time(s) to a watery narrative of it/them, this Chinese translation maintains an indispensable and interesting dialogue with the original text. Actually, given the nature of the Chinese language itself, radicals are crystallised in words together with their semantic legacy. Thus, regardless of any authorial intent, writing about time will always imply writing of "light" and "dark," and thus of cyclicity. For example, 时 (lines 1, 10, 11) and 旦 (line 7) both contain the radical for "sun" (日), while the word 光阴 from the Chinese title of the poem is made up of light (光) and dark (阴). Analogously, writing about mutability and transition will always bring out a "watery" background narrative.

As a result, if the Italian language can elicit certain kinds of connotations (in this case, an intentional allusion to an artificial, automated modernity), the Chinese language might actually elicit – and complementarily integrate – another kind of background narrative. For example, it may elicit human times as waves

³³ L. Blasucci, *Percorso di un tema montaliano: il tempo*, "Italianistica: Rivista di letteratura italiana" 2002, no 31(2/3), pp. 35-49, p. 48.

of a natural, water-like flow. To conclude, as much as (human) times may change, Liu Ruting's translation seems to suggest that man will always find himself immersed in this unstoppable alternation of light and dark, and irreducible (indeed *radical*) natural elements.

Another Chinese version of this poem available in Taiwan is Yang Du's translation, titled 時間與時數.³⁴ However, for reasons similar to those mentioned in relation to *Non chiederci la parola*, it was not considered useful to report on this translation.

3. Conclusions

Although this article features only four case studies, its preliminary research phase involved reading and evaluating several other texts. In addition to the aforementioned translations by Yang Du, other analysed texts included: another translation of *L'infinito* (by Fei Bai 飞白, 1929-); two translations of Salvatore Quasimodo's *Ed è subito sera* (*And suddenly it's evening*), respectively proposed by Chinese translator Lü Tongliu and Taiwanese poet Li Kuixian; and a translation of Giuseppe Ungaretti's *Sentimento del tempo* (*The Feeling of Time*), edited by translators Xu Jianuo 徐嘉娜 and Liu Guopeng 刘国鹏 for a 2018 Taiwanese publication. These texts also touch on the theme of time diversely, allowing insightful reflections in line with those discussed in this article. However, for the sake of synthesis, it was not possible to include them all.

The scope of this research could potentially expand further by focusing on other languacultural themes such as nature and natural landscape, the human body, emotions, physical sensations and more. As this article seeks to demonstrate, poetry and poetic translation are a sounding board for those languacultural divergences that scholars such as Wang Hui, Anne Cheng, François Jullien, Tiziana Lippiello and many others have concretely emancipated from the yoke of any orientalist vision. For this reason, a textual analysis of this kind, aiming more at (re)opening and exploring these divergences instead of judging their seams, can really offer a space for dialogue that is both linguistic and cultural, artistic and academic.

As previously stated in the introductory chapter, the aim of this article was to reflect on the “divergences” and “beyond-language” that come into play when translating Italian poetry into Chinese. What happens to the “beyond-language” meaning of the original poem? Can the Chinese translation somehow amplify or integrate it with its different language and culture of language? And to which extent should this transcreation be considered a positive opening – a “window on the *Open*” – rather than a distortion?

As its case studies substantially demonstrate, the languacultural divergences between Italian and Chinese (and their respective cultures of language) prove evident in all analysed translations. However, the Chinese language as a translation tool alone is not a sufficient guarantee for this space of divergence to transform into a space

³⁴ E. Montale; D. Yang (trans.), *op. cit.*, p. 164.

of positive “amplification.” Only the competence and expertise of the translators have made this “between” space productive of a true “transcreation,” or added value.

The counter-proof of this argument is represented by the translations of Montale’s poems that, although not included in this article, were mentioned in the commentary sections of chapters 2.3 and 2.4. In these cases, although the translated poems may sound understandable and enjoyable, their excessive detachment from the original text compromises their ability to share its core meaning and thus any possible dialogue around it. In short, the target text and the source text are like two friends on the phone in an area where there is little signal: the frequent disconnections no longer make their conversation possible.

On the contrary, the case studies hereby proposed are like long, deep, passionate intercontinental calls. The line is stable, only the time zone changes: our clocks – and our languages as well – *tell a different time*.

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Słowa kluczowe

translatoryka, poezja włoska, przekład na język chiński, François Julien, myśl chińska

Abstract

Language, Time, Reality: Italian Poetry in Taiwan and Its Translation as an Open Window

Italian poetry in Taiwan is under-represented. Translated poets are either prestigious names like Leopardi (1798–1837), or Nobel winners like Montale (1896–1981). But how are they translated? Inspired by Chinese thought specialists like Anne Cheng and François Jullien, this article analyses a selection of case studies, suggesting that even when translating poetry, some languacultural “divergences” importantly emerge.³⁵ These divergences represent both translation challenges, and opportunities to expand the original text’s scope.

Keywords

Translation Studies, Italian Poetry, Chinese Translation, François Jullien, Chinese Thought

³⁵ “Divergences” is the English translation of Jullien’s keyword “écarts.” (F. Jullien, *op. cit.*, pos. 84/4967).