

Translating Literary Ideology from Ancient Chinese into Modern French:

François Cheng's Francophone Poetry

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Abstract

François Cheng (1929-), elected to the Académie Française in 2002, structurally introduced the lexicological, syntactic, and semiotic form of Tang poetry to the French academia via his master dissertation entitled 'Analyse formelle de l'œuvre poétique d'un auteur des Tang: Zhang Ruoxu' (1970), later expanded to the monograph *L'écriture poétique chinoise: Suivi d'une anthologie des poèmes des Tang* (1977). He demonstrated the dialectic complexity of yin-yang and xu-shi hidden in linguistic succession, and visualized the specific connectivity of Han textual symbols in-between an intersectional cultural system of calligraphy, painting, mythology, music, and so on. From the late 1980s, François Cheng shifted his focus from academic writing to creative writing, both in French, winning the 1998 Prix Femina for his novel *Le Dit de Tianyi* (1998) and Prix Roger Caillois for his collection of essays and poems *Double chant* (2000). Much academic attention had been drawn on *Le Dit de Tianyi*, elucidating the taoist composition of female image (Yin, 2013), the connection of Cheng's fictional techniques to his aesthetic views (Zhang, 2017), the obscure merge of Chinese and western cultural elements (Silvester, 2017), the diasporic imagination of estranged homeland (Pröll, 2013), his ecocritical consciousness (Jin, 2015), and so on. Instead of his scholarly identified fiction, reminiscent of Qian Zhongshu's novel *Fortress Besieged* (1947), this academic paper focuses on his less-discussed poetry, which reveals even higher congruity of his understanding of Chinese literary classics with creative representation. It argues that, as an analyst of Tang poetry, Cheng also acts as a contemporary translator of the classical Chinese aesthetic ideology into French modern verses. His subjective creation of poetry is both transcultural and trans-temporal, ambiguously corresponding to his lingual, racial, cultural, and national belonging, and appropriating a new valid form of French literary style. This ambiguity both transcends national identification and universalizes the international flow of knowledge.

Wishing for eliminating the Eurocentric bias over Japan, Michaël Ferrier (2017) suggests replacing binary-opposite categorization, such as "East/West" and "Us/Them," with "triangulation of cultures" where "no culture can be considered the gauge of another." With reference to Ferrier's perspective, this paper regards the above-mentioned ambiguous translation of disrupted cultural context into personal poetic expression as flexible triangulation of cultures, in which redefinition of French/Chinese writers and French/Chinese literature could arouse sur-Sinophone and sur-Francophone imagination of a worldly space of literary creation and criticism. Beyond Feng Lan's (2017) recognition of François Cheng as a special representative of Chinese diasporic intellectuals who mediate between institutionalized French discourses and Chinese classical philosophy, a close reading of Cheng's poems in the paper will support an investigation of his succession and transformation of literary tradition, over a simplistic derivation of national identity in a colonial paradigm.