



The Translatability of Chinese Poetry to Portuguese and Western Languages

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A starting point in order to consider poetical translation is to take into consideration the fact that a language—beyond being a social fact (Bakhtin, 1979)—is inserted into a socio-historically situated space and time.¹ Furthermore, languages are situated in a geographic space, where this space, according to Milton Santos (1982), is an 'uneven accumulation of time'. For the translation of the Chinese language such premises and concepts would not be different. Therefore, for the non-native speaker, translator and/or reader of Chinese language to understand the situationality of Chinese poetry, it is important to consider beforehand what is the Chinese language or what Chinese language we are referring to, or better, what spacetime of Chinese language we are considering. Corroborating the range of possibilities that this discussion offers, trying to define what is Chinese language implies to the translator or reader of Chinese poetry, in particular of classical Chinese poetry, recognising a whole tradition and cultural evolution of China, as well as considering its strength and vigor as a spreading source of its own poetical, philosophical and linguistic concepts.

Therefore, be it in studies of the translation or philological studies, it is imperative to identify which Chinese language we are referring to or, even more important, in what spacetime or geographical space this language is inserted. In addition, we must keep in mind that the definition of what a language is or is not often escapes linguistic domains. As an example, we could comment on the supposition that Cantonese would only be a dialect or deviation from Mandarin due to both sharing the same ideographic writing system. So, if the ideographic writing does not necessarily carry phonetic markings as phonetic alphabets do, we cannot be induced to think that if two 'languages' share the same writing system then it is fundamental proof to assure us that they are only regional or accent variations of one language. If we share this opinion, we are innocently drawn to conjecture that the language used in the Tang Dynasty (618-906), for example, is the same as today since both have Chinese characters as a writing basis.

Following its historical evolution, the languages in China changed as much as the movement of its shifting territorial borders. Besides natural changes, common to

Artigo de Camilo Pessanha no jornal O Progresso, de 13 de Setembro de 1914, sobre a sua tradução de algumas elegias chinesas.

LITTERATURA CHINEZA

Setisfazendo uma antiga dívida para com o illustre director d'O Progresso, entrego hoje ao mesmo semanario umas poucas duzias de pequenas composições chinezas com cuja decifração tenho entretido os ocios dos ultimos seis annos de residencia em Macau—os primeiros da velhice,—tirando d'esse esforço (em boa verdade se diga) horas de um tão suave prazer espirital que delle o não esperava tamanho. Concoctei por uma minuciosa anthologia de dezasseis elegias da dynastia Han—elegias pelo accento de dorida melancolia que a todas domina, porquanto a forma, inezista e curta, é a de verdadeiros epigrammas,—seleccionadas, de entre os innumerables e vastos cacioneiros da referida epocha, por um dos mais delicados esthetas do Japão do Meio nos principios do seculo XIX, para presente de d'outrora a um amigo intimo que para longe se ausentava.

O compilador e copista d'essas deliciosas obras primas foi o ministro Jong-Feng-Kong, que ao tempo (no reinado de Chiu-King) exercera em Pekim os mais elevados cargos do estado, e de mais o de mentor do principe herdeiro. O destinatario da offerta era um pupillo do mesmo alto personagem, que a aquella occasião se iniciava na vida publica, partindo a exercer o modesto logar de sub-prefeito em qualquer burgo setentrional da mesma vizinha provincia do Kwang-Tung. Chamava-se entre os amigos Mi-Kan—e suas gestões; da delictoriação não constam o seu apellido/nome o seu nome proprio,—que era do estylo omitirem-se em lãz frivolidades. Provavelmente veio a morrer logo ao começo da carreira, no seu remoto estylo, sem tornar a ver a corte nem as Neves da aldeia natal; e assim se explica que, noventa annos volvidos (o caderno tem a data Sin-Mi, correspondente a 1811) essas poucas folhas, trazidas de tão longe como reliquia preciosa—adaptadas a album (com capa de rica madeira das Philippinas, em que havia esculpidos o nome e um breve elogio do Meo), e encerrado todo em um solido estylo de tamarindo de dupla Tampa—se fossem vendidas, pelo preço vil das duas patacas, em uma casa de peço (na Asia, como por cá se diz), alli ao Tarravim.

Na mesma dedicatória se declara que os versos são do tempo dos Min. Nenhuma informação acerca do autor ou auctores, senão que viveram n'esse periodo (1368 a 1678). Sob a direcção de um letrado chinez, foi-me, entretanto, possível identificar cada uma das composições, e averiguar-lhe o auctor,—o que, aliás, não é tarefa difficil por si sitem. São onze, ao todo, os poetas,—os quaes nomearei em notas, ao passo que v'êr dando a traducção das poesias que pertencem a cada um. Estas, decerto intencionalmente escolhidas, são tão parecidas na metrica—de um andamento calmo e dolente,—tão orientadas por uma commum philosophia—ao mesmo tempo nihilista e estoica tão homogénea no viar de uma idêntica emoção—amocosa e grave,—e tão uniformes na predilecção de imagens analogas e no vigoroso e rapido processo de se erocar,—que á sua leitura, no proprio original chinez, se acredita serem produções de um mesmo espirito e fragmentos de uma obra unica systematizada.

Traduzi litteralmente,—tanto quanto a radical differença entre o genio das duas linguas o permite. Esforcei-me por não supprir nenhuma das idéas contidas no original, por adjectiva e accessoria que fosse,—embora tendo por vezes de sacrificar a essa imposição de fidelidade os longos de ritmo e a relativa symetria da forma que eu desejava dar á traducção de cada quadra chinez, na impossibilidade de as traduzir em quadras de versos portuguezes. Menos ainda accrescentei fôse o que fosse, no intuito de reatar os erros, ou com a precepção de fazer excusissimos. Isolai a traducção de cada uma das versos, e dentro d'ella conservei, nos limites do possível, as idéas e symbolos a systema original. Isto é, da poesia chinez l'ouyng traduzida com exactidão o que era insalvável—o elemento substantivo ou symbolico—perquanto o elemento sensorial ou musical, resultando de uma technica metrica especiaissima (em que ha sabidamente aproveitados recursos prosodicos de que as linguas europæas não dispõem), é absolutamente incoercível.

Swam exigue. Se esta modesta tentativa, futil passatempo das horas tristes em longos annos de solidão, merecer ao leitor algum momentaneo interesse, será este devido, mais do que ao nenhum saber e aos hypotheticos dotes litterarios do auctor e signatario, á superior competência do profissional que no seu arrazoado definitivo collaborou,—effluentemente em parte, e com dobrado jura, portanto, ao agradecimento de todos.

Finalmente nada confiando dos recursos proprios—imperfeitas noções de simples e lidozoso auctor, adquiridas ao acaso das

horas vagas—, submetti o trabalho á censura do meu velho amigo e querido mestre sr. José Vicente Jorge, que tão distinctamente dirige em Macau os serviços do expediente sinico. O illustre sinologo não só me fez o favor de emendá-lo em alguns pontos a traducção aproximando-a mais da intenção original, mas forneceu-me ainda, espontaneamente grande copia de notas elucidativas,—as mais valiosas de entre as que acompanhavam cada composição, e sem as quaes, como o leitor verificará, por exacta que fosse a versão, a intelligencia dos textos (mesmo sob o ponto de vista puramente esthetico), ficaria deficiente.

Uma das mais flagrantemente trágicas da poesia chinez, e, com duvida, a mais difficil obstaculo á sua cabal exegese pelos occidentaes, está n'esse gosto exagerado pela allusão historica ou litteraria, que faz com que numerosas passagens, e até, poemas inteiros, tenham duplo sentido.—um superficial e directo e o outro referido ao symbolico, erudito e profuzo. Claro que, em textos d'esse genero, o traductor que não esteja aparelhado com uma vasta cultura sinologica, navega em permanente risco de sombar de encontro a invisivel, traiçoeiro caehopo. Acresce, a complicar as azas que são effeito d'esta duplidade, a propria imprecisão da linguagem, que no chinez litterario é qualidade fundamental, chegando as palavras a não ter significado proprio—tão divergentes e, até, oppostas são as accepções de cada uma,—e sendo, por seu lado, a phrase (conhecida mesmo a idéa certa representada por cada vocábulo) susceptivel, por falta de leis syntacticas que prendam á sua estrutura, de as interpretações mais contradictorias; de maneira que, frequentemente, o valor de cada um desses componentes do discurso tem de procurar-se por tentativas, e só pode ser definitivamente accerte depois de encontrado o pensamento geral, se, cotejado com este, não resultar absurdo. E, para mais, esta imprecisão é a dicção poetica aggravada pela concisa epigraphica—ou, se o leitor assim quizer, telegraphica—da mesma dicção, em que a melhor elegancia manda supprir quasi completamente as palavras designativas das relações logicas, imprimindo assim mais vivamente, é certo, na imaginação de quem lê (e essa intenção de suggestão é um dos intraduzíveis encantos da poesia chinez)—mas desacompanhadas da menor indicação de alguma dependencia,—as idéas concretas adoptadas pelo auctor como symbolos poeticos.

Todas estas obscuridades e ambiguidades levam o eminente professor da universidade de Cambridge H. Giles, antigo consel em Ningpo e auctor de um conhecido dictionario monumental, a dizer (Chinese Literature, pag. 141) que isto é a composição poetica chinez á para o traductor uma nos de casa dura:—a chinezem tem et test a hard nut to crack. Fica, pois, o leitor fazendo idéa de quão precioso me tenha sido,—n'esses inexplorados e diffamados mares que se aventurou a minha tenerrata e mal provada curiosidade, da erudição e da sentimentalidade chinezas,—e opportuno occorreu do experimentado e dedicado piloto que a fortuna me deparou.

Ainda o meu excellento amigo quis ter a benevolencia de substituir, em todo esse meninhado labor a orthographia das palavras chinez romanizadas (isto é, scriptas phoneticamente em caracteres latinos)—as quaes no original estavam conformes á pronuncia cantonesa—, traduzindo-as para pinyin—á lingua mandarinica—, em que são geralmente conhecidas pelos europæos. D'essa differença resulta que, mantendo-se-lhe a forma primitiva, por mim adoptada para exclusivo uso proprio (pois nunca pensara em dar á publicidade, pelo mesmo lado, estes annos), palavras que o leitor porventura esteja acostumado a ver se alguma de certo, especialmente entre os nomes chorographicos, lhe não serão estranhas) elle não se irrecobreciveis.

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GAMILLO PESSANHA.

ELEGIAS CHINESAS. ASCENÇÃO AO MIRADOURO DO KIANG (1.)

Este altissimo torreão abandonado foi outr'ora celebre. Aqui plantou seus estandartes, ornados de dragões, o fundador da dynastia Han. (2) Defendia-o, como inultrapassavel fozzo, a virtude do rei...Eram superfluos os circundantes canaes. Faziam-lhe guarda as proprias tribus barbaças (3). De que serviriam muralhas de pedra? Hoje, como então, a montanha esplende de regia majestade. Holam do Kiang as aguas; e odo e terra confundem as suas vozes ostentadas. Da commoção que sente, assomando no alto, quem poderia ordenar o poema? Parálisis nota, possibde nos!—de pugnares mágnas milicarias... (4)

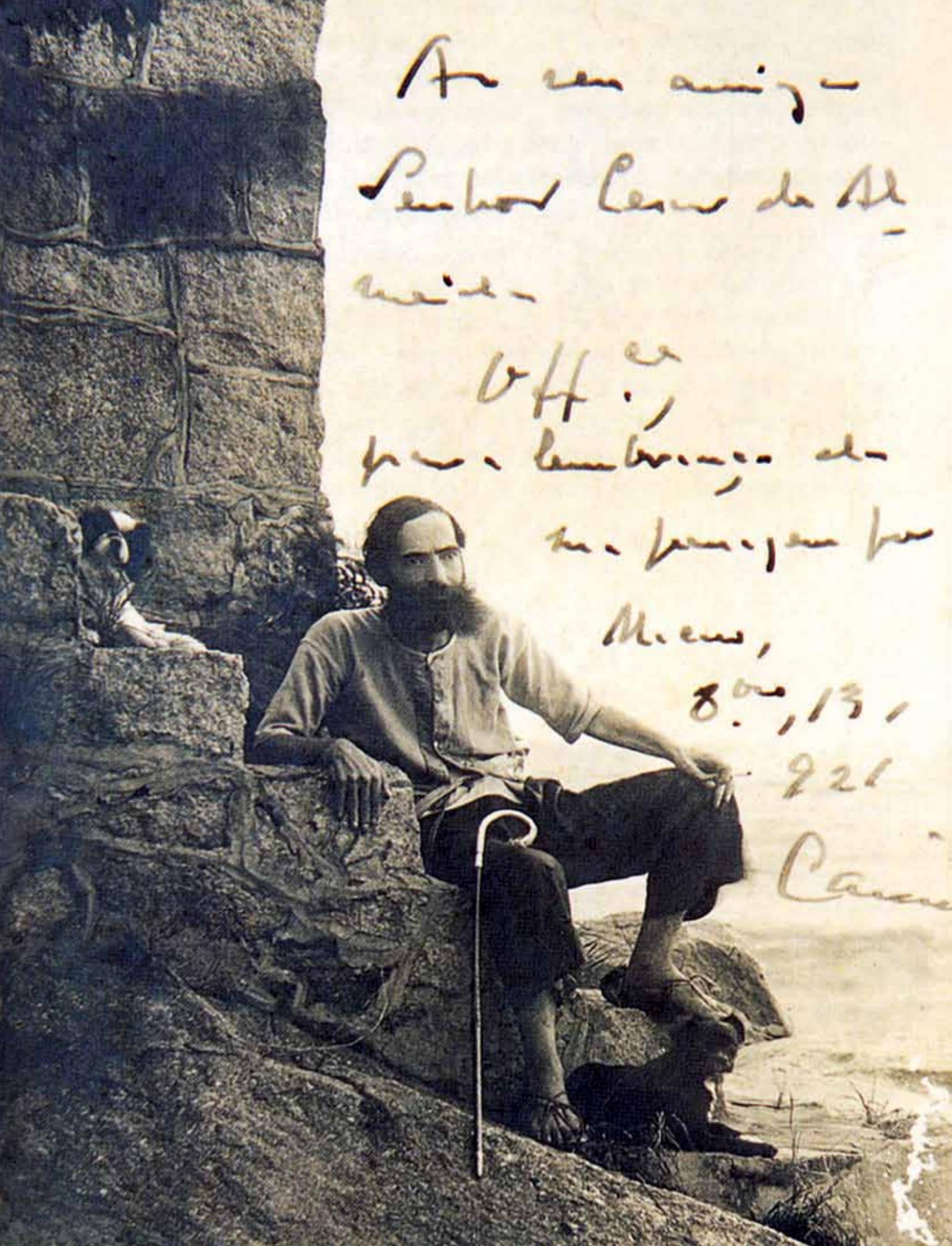
A' NOITE, NO PÊGO-DRAGÃO (5) De onde vem este perfume de flores, embalsamando a noite paradisica? Entre boças e frugas, uma cabana de oia, perto da qual um arroio marmara... Como de costume, o eremita parte ao surgir a lua. Em um corvo do wooto, um passaro, poado, ininterruptamente gorgeia.

Não lhe importa que as herbas, impregnadas do orvalho, lhe encharquem as alpercatas de junca. As suas vestes de ligeiro canhamo (6), sordece-na, enviazando, a brisa primaveril... A borda da torrente, intento fazer versos ao viço das orchideas (7). Embargam-m'o as saudades, violentas empolgando-me, do Kiang-Pei e do Kiang-nan (8) Macau, 1914.

登閣江樓 絕頂樓荒舊有名 高皇曾此駐龍旌 餘存道德感天靈 守存發與登石城 山色古今餘王氣 江流天地變秋聲 登臨授簡誰能賦 千古新亭一愴情

Notas — 1.—O auctor desta poesia e da seguinte é Wang-shan-jen (王守仁)—1472 a 1528—, também conhecido por Wang-po-an (王伯安) e por Wang-sang-ming (王陽明), e cognominado Wan-ch'ang (文成). Notarel estadista, general, philosopho e poeta nos reinados de Hung-chih (弘治), Cheng-te (正德) e Chiu-ching (嘉靖). Oita, Biog. Dic., pag. 839. 2.—高, o imperador Kau. Muitos são os imperadores que tiveram o cognome postumo Kau (alto). O poeta refere-se a Kau-ti (高帝) ou Kau-tsu (高祖), fundador da primeira dynastia Han (前漢)—206 A.C. a 25 D.C. 3.—Lit.: "Era entre as proprias barbaças Han (蠻) e I (夷)—isto é, contendo-as em respeito pelo prestigio exercido sobre ellas— (o monarcha) estava (pela integridade do solo monarca)". Desde remotissimos tempos que essas tribus inquietaram a China com as suas revoltas e incursões. 4.—新亭, Sin-Ting (o Pavilhão Novo) no Kiang-nan (江南), á margem do Yang-tz-kiang. No tempo da dynastia Chiu (晉)—265-420—, alguns letrados eminentes e ardentes patriotas costumavam alli reunir-se para chorar em commum as desditas da patria. P'ri-siu-fu (佩文韻府), vol. 24, rim 青. Esse pavilhão, pois, coet'ra o que o seu nome indicava, era já antiquissimo quando o auctor da poesia o visitou. 5.—Não nos foi possível identificar o local aqui designado pelo nome de Lung-Pan (龍潭). O dictionario de Giles dá noticia de uma cachoeira chamada Hui-lung-Pan (黑龍潭)—o Salto do dragão negro—nos arredores de Pekin. Temos também ouvido que ha outro Lung-Pan em An-Hui (安徽), perto de Yang-tz-kiang. 6.—Mais provavel nos parece, porém, que se trate de algum rapido do rio U-Kiang (烏江), ou de qualquer pequeno affluente do mesmo, no K'au-chau (貴州), onde o poeta esteve deterrado. De resto, é de supprir que no immenso e inextricavel labyrinth de curros de agua que recobre a China, muitos sitios devam existir com esse nome, tão afficçoso no gosto chinez. 7.—葛, é uma das numerosas plantas texteis cultivadas na China.—o parlysinus angustifolius segundo J. M. A. DA SILVA, e a pueraria phaseoloides ou a pueraria thumbergia, segundo os mais modernos lexicographos. Os portuguezes, no Extremo Oriente, dão o nome de nava, indistinctamente, a todos os tecidos fabricados com a fibra de qualquer planta indigena. 8.—Kiang-Pei (江北) e Kiang-Nan (江南)—as actuaes provincias do Kiang-Su (江蘇) e Chiu-Kiang (浙江), na foz do rio Yang-tz-kiang. As orchideas d'essa região são famosas pela sua effraccio opulenta. O poeta era nativo de Hsü-tsu (徐夔) na provincia de Chiu-Kiang. Ao presentir, pela aroma, a presença da flor que para Confucio symbolisava a serena altivez dos altos poros, procura retemperar no exemplo do mestre a sua precaria energia moral. Succumbit, porém, na lucta, assalado de improvizo pela nostalgia da patria distante, que o mesmo aroma vem exarcebrar.

Camilo Pessanha.



any language in the world, many times the language, the accent and the Chinese context, were altered according to social changes caused by the extinction and/or formation of new dynasties. It is always valid to remember that the language, as a social and political force, can come into play in relationships of power and hierarchy and therefore to alter a language is to create possibilities of altering the relationships of power.

One thing that in most Western countries was always a source of fascination in the evolution of the Chinese language, was the perpetuation of ideographic writing until the present day, even if by natural processes of linguistic evolution many ideograms have been modified or lost their original meaning. On what concerns Chinese writing, it is interesting to signal that the Chinese character contributes to the creation of a certain Western/European imagery of China and, consequently, to a certain mythification of the Chinese ideogram as a symbol of poetical innate expression of the Chinese language and writing.

Probably, to the reader not familiarised with the ideographic forms of writing, the characters can generate strangeness or a certain exoticism. For the poet Camilo Pessanha (Coimbra, 1867–Macao, 1926), one of the more prominent translators of Chinese poetry to the Portuguese language, the Chinese ideogram possessed an ‘art which existence we, the Europeans can barely understand for it is incompatible with our phonetic writing’ (1993, p. 14, my own translation from the Portuguese). We notice then, the possibility of fascination with the ideogram by some Western poets and translators, which would help to feed the myth of the Orient (see Machado, 1983). About the possible mythification of Chinese writing in the Western world, James Y. Liu affirms:

There is a fallacy still common in Western readers outside sinological circles, namely, that *all* Chinese characters are pictograms or ideograms. This fallacy on the part of some Western enthusiasts for Chinese poetry has had some curious results. Ernest Fenollosa ... stressed this misconception and admired Chinese characters for their alleged pictorial qualities (1999, p. 3, author emphasis)

Camilo Pessanha and his dog ‘Arminho’, 1921.

Maybe influenced by this *misconception* of the Chinese language—or, even motivated by full awareness of new possibilities in poetical creation—it is common to find in the prefaces of Chinese poetry translations to Western languages notes by translators explaining and warning about the possible visual loss caused by the absence of characters in Western languages or, even more, the need to recreate visually the poems to compensate for this loss (i.e. Pound, 1915; Campos, 2009).

Being conscious of this, we must be aware still of other peculiar characteristics of Chinese literature, mostly those present in classical Chinese poetry and the classical Chinese novel. Lin Chen 林辰 (1992, pp. 3–4 *apud* Tai, 2003), warns us that the ‘insertion of poetry within narrative language is one of the characteristics of classical Chinese fiction’. Therefore, we imagine that the gaps created by the differences and peculiarities of classic Chinese literature in relation to Western literature create hybrid spaces where the translator of the classic novel/poem has, among one of their challenges, the paradoxical task of searching in the target language for something that it does not possess; the translator, then, (re)creates not only the Chinese language but also the target language. Corroborating the peculiarity of Chinese poetry, especially classical Chinese poetry, Portugal (2013, p. 202) observes that it is notable that already in ‘the beginning of the Tang Dynasty the formal researches and linguistic studies had arrived to an elevated degree of refinement’ (my own translation from Portuguese). In addition, the classical Chinese poetry was a space with a high degree of form codification and a range of resources ‘in a language of symbolic possibilities inexistent in Western languages, [resources which] are virtually untranslatable in themselves’ (*ibid.*, p. 206). Therefore, in this case, following one of the possibilities brought up by Portugal, for the translation of classical Chinese poetry, it would be fitting for the translator to try to recreate the effect of those texts by the use of sound and semantic resources in their languages.

Pozzana and Russo (2007, pp. 9–13), debate on the supposed natural poetic of Chinese language and, considering the concepts of *Zhongguoxing* 中国性 and *Zhongwenxing* 中文性, brought forward by the Chinese poet and literary critic Yang Lian 杨炼, point out that Chinese truly does not offer anything else; nothing less to poetry than any other language. The poetic force, therefore, would not be in the particular ‘determinations of the Chinese language and culture

TRADUÇÃO

TRANSLATION

(its difference to other languages and cultures)', that is, in its *Zhongguoxing* aspect; but in its *Zhongwenxing* facet, which would be the 'process of artistic truth that comes from, and returns to, this particular cultural linguistic space'.

Moving away from the sphere of the discussion of language as poetic force and returning to the perspective of *Chinese languages*, it is necessary to illustrate another imperative point in the definition of the Chinese language in question. For that, we should compare different *spacetimes* of the Chinese language. A substantial change between the standard classic Chinese language (*shanggu hanyu* 上古汉语) and the standard modern Chinese language was clarified in the researches of the Japanese researcher Hashimoto Mantaro 橋本萬太郎. In one of his articles, one in which he united concepts of linguist geography—or geolinguistic—to linguistic typology, Hashimoto (1978) sustained the thesis that the Chinese language, until the middle of the third century, was an agglutinative and synthetic language—such as the classic and modern Japanese—but that it was in a process of evolving to its current nature, an isolating and analytical language.

This question brought forward by Hashimoto may interest philologists more than translators or readers of classical Chinese poetry. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider that the Chinese language, until the middle of the second century, was regarded as agglutinative, that probably referred to the oral language or the documental registers of the empire, since in the poetic language what we notice is an exactly opposing trend: Chinese presents itself as a language with tendencies towards the isolating and analytical. This speculation corroborates the proposition that in the classical Chinese poetry the poems were already a form of language apart from language, with its own codes and its own syntactic constructions, logical and contextual or, as mentioned in Portugal and Tan (2011, p. 21), 'the classical Chinese poem is an altered linguistic space, following well-defined principles, frequently builds an environment that is distant from the "natural" language' (my own translation, original text in Portuguese). Portugal (2013, p. 205), exploring this idea, comments 'on what concerns classical Chinese poetry, this is accentuated by the ideogrammatic writing, the visuality, the movement and the musicality intrinsic to the Chinese character' (my own translation).

In conclusion, when trying to define *Chinese language(s)* we are faced with a peculiar and intrinsic characteristic to the language and Chinese culture: the enormity of its history and its *spacetime*. For that reason, concerning studies in poetic translation, for either classical poetry or modern poetry, it does not suffice to discuss only the linguistic or typological nature of *Chinese languages*. Initially, what becomes urgent is to know that, when mentioning *Chinese language*, we are talking about a whole evolutionary group of languages, dynasties and cultures that culminated in what we today speak of as *Chinese language and culture* or, in the perspective of Yang Lian, the interplay between the *Zhongguoxing* and the *Zhongwenxing*. Therefore, more important than defining the linguistic characteristics of each Chinese language is to define the *spacetime* and the *geographical space* to which they refer or in which they are inserted, turning then the *Chinese languages* into only one *Chinese language*; but always playing upon its different facets and masks, just like an artist of the Sichuan opera, since the beginning of the Ming Dynasty, in the traditional piece of *the changing of masks*² (*bianlian* 变脸, *changing of faces*, in a literal translation).

A WESTERNISING WESTERN VIEW POINT

Is there a theory of translation that contemplates all languages from start to finish? Do distant languages deserve to have their own 'theory'? What resources of the Portuguese language can we use to (re)create the Chinese Classical poetry? The questions maybe do not contribute substantially to the debate of translation as a subject in itself, but they seem valid when they feed the question of the untranslatability or the loss and gain in poetic translation of Chinese to Portuguese. As stated before, to Pozzana and Russo the Chinese language, in its *Zhongguoxing* facet, is a language that would not offer anything different to other languages: therefore, in this matter, there would not be necessarily specific difficulties that differentiated it from other



Yang Lian.

languages in its translation. According to this line of thought, we add to the *Zhongguoxing* the function of instrumental language, meaning the group of linguistic resources and tools of Chinese in its more literal and mechanical aspect.

The space of poetic creation would be fitting for the *Zhongwenxing*—as described by Pozzana and Russo—but, furthermore, *Zhongwenxing* suggests it being the home of that which is beyond the literal and merely textual standard language. In it would reside the context, the historic, the subjective, the poet and the poetry, the connotation, the metaphor, the metonymy. Therefore, the translation of Chinese poetry in its *Zhongwenxing* facet would be beyond the palpable through the 'instrumental language', implying a transformation of the original, but without it being 'unfaithful' to 'the letter'³ or to the meaning. Corroborating our supposition of the interplay between language as *Zhongguoxing* and cultural expression as *Zhongwenxing*, Tai (2003) tells us what in poetic translation:

While lexical equivalences can be handled more easily, a mastery of cross-cultural literary signification calls for an intuitive understanding of the cultural and aesthetic codes embedded in the languages of both source and target systems, and even then there always remains a gap between understanding and expression. (p. 24)

Narrowing the question of the translatability of Chinese to the theoretical possibility of translation of poetry in the prism of some Western theorists, it is interesting to observe that, for Paz (1992), '[t]he greatest pessimism about the feasibility of translation has been concentrated on poetry' (p. 155). Octavio Paz assumes also that 'translation is very difficult—no less difficult than writing so-called original texts—but it is not impossible' (ibid., p. 156), which leads us to suppose that, possibly, the author does not agree with the untranslatability of Chinese poetry to Portuguese. Collaborating even further to our supposition his view would be, referring to those who fostered that question of untranslatability of connotative significations, in the following extract:

Woven of echoes, reflections, and the interaction of sound with meaning, poetry is a fabric of connotations and, consequently, untranslatable. I must confess that I find this idea offensive, not only because it is based on an erroneous conception of what translation is. (ibid., p. 155)

Furthermore, Paz, arguing against those who assume the untranslatability of poetry, comments that maybe what moves us is 'their inordinate attachment to verbal matters, or perhaps they have become ensnared in the trap of subjectivity' (p. 155). Therefore, poetry being first and foremost a universal experience, the poetic translatability should not be in the literal search of the meaning of words, but in the analog play of expression of context, emotion and meaning, items not just common to languages themselves, but to human beings. The vision of Paz over the issue of literal translation in poetic translation seems to complement the vision of Walter Benjamin (1923)⁴ on the poetic meaning and the literality of translation. According to Benjamin,

Fidelity in translating the individual word can almost never fully render the meaning it has in the original. For this meaning is fully realized in accord with its poetic significance for the original work not in the intended object, but rather precisely in the way the intended object is bound up with the mode of intention in a particular word. (pp. 160-161)

Therefore, to Benjamin, the translation of poetic meaning would not be attached necessarily to a list of lexical equivalents, but actually to the different *ways to convey it* in one language or another. It seems that the vision of Benjamin, as well as that of Paz, favors the proposition of poetic translatability, in whatever language it is.

We come to realise, in the perspective of those two authors, that there is an interesting discussion around the issue of the universality of poetic force, in the case of Paz, and, in the case of Benjamin, about the capturing of meaning as essence to translation of the *ways to convey it*. But it seems they still lack an approach to the problematic of preservation or loss of the poetic form in translation. To feed this discussion Berman (1999, p. 34) tells us:

Poser que le but de la traduction est la captation du sens, c'est détacher celui-ci de sa lettre, de son corps mortel, de sa gangue terrestre. C'est saisir l'universel et, laisser le particulier. La fidélité au sens s'oppose – comme chez le croyant et le philosophe – à la fidélité à la lettre. Oui, la fidélité au sens est obligatoirement une infidélité à la lettre.

Even though not referring specifically to the translation of Chinese poetry, the ideas of Berman about the

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letter and the fidelity to the letter greatly enrich the discussion. The idea around *fidélité à la lettre* maybe throws us into an issue commonly debated in the questions of translatability of Chinese to Portuguese: what would be lost considering that Chinese is a tonal language? We see that, specially in the early decades of the 20th century, there is a special preoccupation with the problem of ideograms in the translation of Chinese poetry to Portuguese and other European languages (i.e. Camilo Pessanha in *Oito Elegias Chinesas* and *China, Estudos e Traduções*), and, furthermore, there is 'a history of misunderstanding by the poets and translators, that for a long time wished to see ... [in Chinese poetry] a primacy of the pictographic image over the rhythmic sound' (Durazzo & Jatobá).⁵

Therefore, the translation of the letter, regarding the ideogramic and phonetic nature of Chinese, could possibly present itself as an impossible task or too foreignising. On the other hand, in this aspect, the translation of the letter should not be properly understood as 'literal translation', or letter by letter, since, in that perspective, the empty spaces themselves, caused by the linguistic differences between Chinese and Portuguese—in short, by the *Zhongguoxing*—would then be the foreignising elements. So, the translation of the Chinese language in the perspective of the translation of the letter appears acceptable, but, for that, possibly, excessively foreignising in the presentation of its form and not necessarily in the meaning.

But we believe that in the case of the classical Chinese poetry, the translation must be foreignising by nature, given its richness of codes, linguistic resources and specific concepts. Therefore, we suggest that a domesticating translation of Chinese poetry would bring about more losses than gains to the reader. About the domestication of translation on Chinese poetry, Magagnin (2011) says:

Dans le cas du chinois, les justifications à la pratique de la domestication reposeraient sur la conviction, chez certains traducteurs, que la langue et la culture chinoises, en raison de leur radicale "différence", puissent être plus ou moins librement manipulées afin de les adapter aux convenances de la langue et de la culture cible

What we have noticed up to this point deals more specifically with the perspective of Western authors/translators on what concerns the poetic translation and the problematic aspects of poetic Chinese translation.

To add more to the discussion, it is interesting to make a brief revision and reference on how the problems of poetic translation in Chinese have been discussed and treated on the perspective of Chinese poets and theorists. In the following topic, we present a brief revision on the panorama of translation of Chinese poetry through the view of Chinese translators and poets.

A PERSPECTIVE THROUGH CHINESE THEORISTS AND POETS

It is interesting to take into account what some Western authors think about specifically on the poetic translatability and/or the exchange of poetic translation between the West and China. An immensely rich work on this subject can be seen in *A Centennial Anthology of Sino-Occidental Poetry Translation*, organised by Hai An 海岸 (2007).

The aforementioned work gives a dimension of how the issues of poetic translation of Chinese/Western languages have been seen in China. The issue of (un) translatability is openly debated by literary critics, translation theorists and by acclaimed poets such as Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 and Lin Yutang 林语堂. For the purpose of this article, it would be impracticable to analyse all 65 essays and articles present in the Anthology organised by Hai An; for that, a first analysis (and selection) was elaborated in a fast manner, according to the bibliographic references of the texts.

Of the Western theorists listed as bibliographic references, we observe that there were some names which were constantly mentioned, such as Arthur Waley (1918, 1919, 1923, 1939, 1946), Ezra Pound (1915) and Herbert A. Giles (1901, 1923). A great portion of the texts in the Anthology are from the first decades of the 20th century, but it is interesting to notice that even in the texts and articles after 1990 no direct bibliographic reference to Berman was found; an author that, as we have revealed, offers a useful and innovative perspective on the literary tradition that is very sensitive to the issues of poetry



Xu Zhimo.

translation. The Chinese theorists commonly mentioned in the references are Yan Fu 严复, with the concept of *Xin Da Ya* 信达雅 (*xin*, 'meaning fidelity'; *da*, 'fluency'; *ya*, 'elegance'), and Xu Yuancong 许渊冲, that presented his proposal of poetic translation based on the triad issues of meaning/sound/form.

A second criteria for the choice of some of the ideas or visions of Chinese theorists presented next, was the consultation with colleagues such as the Department of Portuguese Language at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies⁶ to evaluate the repercussion that the texts might have in the Chinese academic universe. Due to the difficult reading of the texts—at times extremely theoretical, at times with flourished and old-fashioned vocabulary—only the perspective of four authors on the issues of translatability of Chinese to Western languages were chosen. Next, we can witness the point of view of four poets and/or translation critics, respectively: Mao Dun 茅盾, Dai Wangshu, Gu Zhengkun 辜正坤 and Lü Shuxiang 吕叔湘.

Initially, a vision that could contribute to our discussion is the issue of losses in Chinese poetry. Mao Dun (1922) exposes from the very start questions to the reader such as: 'Is translating foreign poetry possible?', 'Which advantages are there in translating foreign poetry?' and 'Why translating foreign poetry?'.⁷ To Mao Dun, all poetry is endowed with a 'spirit' and the translation filled with this 'spirit' is only possible in very few situations. Besides, the translatability is very much dependent on the 'nature' of the poem. Mao Dun sees the translation of a poem as a possibility of 'renovation', leaving it to the translation to introduce the 'positive aspects' of the original poem to the reader of the end language. For the author, there are no rules or theories



Dai Wangshu.



Lin Yutang.

that translators should follow, but some guiding principles, such as, for example, the importance of meaning in detriment to the form, since within possible limitations the translator might face, it would be more reasonable to lose the rhythm than to lose the content and meaning. A passage of the text that symbolises what the author believes is the degree of translatability of a poem says that the translation, even though very adequate, is only a retelling of the original poem.

But Dai Wangshu, a widely recognised Chinese poet, when talking about losses in a text dated back to 1944, comments that only bad poems lose everything after their translation, since in those there is no true poetry. Since, in real poetry, no matter to which language it is translated, its value will remain—something not even geographical distance or time will destroy. Dai Wangshu, aiming to define poetry, quality, form and content, says:

This is how poetry is: its quality does not depend on form but form the essence of its content. There is 'poetry' [real poetry, with spirit and soul] in the poem and, though elaborate and rare words are used, that is also poetry [for those are only form]. There is no 'poetry' in the poem; though rhythm and poetic syllables are well organized, they are not enough as poetry. Only the stupid consider that ugly women when well dressed become beautiful.⁸ (p. 99)

The comparison that he makes with the ugly woman is interesting, since for her there would be no salvation in the 'form', because poetry and beauty are in the essence. In this perspective, for the beautiful woman—or for the good poem—the 'form' in which it is presented is irrelevant, for the poetry in a 'poem' is in its innate poetic essence. Dai Wangshu did not comment on the technical minutia of problems in the translation of Chinese poetry, which may not contribute to our discussion; but, unquestionably, his reflection on poetic form/essence is very interesting. In closing, Dai demonstrates that he agrees with the possibility of poetic translation and comments that 'to say "you cannot translate poetry" is a habitual incoherence'.⁹

For Gu Zhengkun (1990), translation theorist, there are factors/aspects within translation: the fully translatable aspects, the untranslatable and the 'semitranslatable'. Nevertheless, even though defending that in fact untranslatable aspects exist in poetry, Gu Zhengkun says that you cannot affirm on

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the untranslatability of a poem since, paradoxically, the translatable and untranslatable aspects live within poetry at the same time. On the three factors/aspect of translation, Gu Zhengkun says:

a) the verse in line, first names, some words and expressions, structures and phrases of basic thought are totally translatable;

b) some words and expressions and the style of the work in relation to the presentation of its form are ‘semitranslatable’; however, the ‘semitranslatable’ aspects are subdivided in two: (a) those who lose more than half of their original meaning and (b) those who lose less than half of their original meaning;

c) the specific rhetoric, the symbology (referring to the cultural elements) and the melody and pronunciation are untranslatable.

Gu Zhengkun does not establish whether the adequate criteria would be to translate literally or by meaning, since he believes that a great portion of the work and choice of the translator must base itself in the culture of the end language. Therefore, it would be the translators responsibility to analyse and choose which options would offer the least losses.

Lastly, Lü Shuxiang (2002), touches the subject of form and mentions that the choice of form is an important problem to be debated in poetic translation. In the course of the article, Lü comments on many translations of Chinese poems to English in regard to the form, as to trace a panorama of what has been done about Chinese poems. The author tells us that there have been overall three options in relation to the ways in which the Chinese poems have been translated. The main options would be the metered poetry, in which Lü introduces us to Giles as one of the representatives; ‘prose’ or free verse, in which the author recognises the translation work of Arthur Waley; and ‘(re)invented poetry’, in which the author refers to Ezra Pound as the biggest exponent of this perspective.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim in these brief lines was to try and bring the reader into a reference base in order to feed the discussion on the difficulties, losses and gains of poetic translation from Chinese to Portuguese and/or other Western languages. Until very recently, we could complain about the low number of Chinese pieces translated directly to Portuguese or material that

discussed the poetic translation of Chinese language to Portuguese. However, we have been graced with translations of important Chinese pieces translated directly to Portuguese, as for example, *Antologia da Poesia Clássica Chinesa: Dinastia Tang* (2013) or *Poesia Completa de Yu Xuanji* (2011). More and more abundant are the periodicals and magazines in the Portuguese language that dedicate or give space to poetic translation of the Chinese-Portuguese pairing or for the discussion on the peculiarities of Chinese Classical poetry.

In the final consideration about the Chinese language, the goal was to provide a panorama of the Chinese language and its more latent characteristics to the reader, in order to allow reflection on the different *spacetimes* that Chinese can possess. This analysis was developed based on the fact that ‘in the same way a translation touches the original fleetingly and only at the infinitely small point of meaning, in order to follow its own path in accord with the law of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic development.’ (Walter Benjamin, p. 163, op. cit.). As the aim of this article was to make a brief presentation, it was opted not to refer to the more profound issues of linguistic nature such as the current tonalities of *putonghua* or the changes in tone of some words—or even the amount of tones—in the length of the evolution of the Chinese language.

To the reader familiarised with the poetic translation of Chinese to Western languages, in the topic *A westernizing Western view point*, maybe some strangeness was evoked by the absence of names such as Ezra Pound, Ernst Fenollosa, or even Roman Jakobson. Our proposal was exactly to bring new names to the discussion. With the same intent, *A perspective through Chinese theorists and poets* was developed. Therefore, we can verify that even without having dealt directly with names such as Pound and Fenollosa, we eventually ‘returned’ to their names due to the immense influence they have exerted in the translation of Chinese poetry and to the Chinese and Western translators.

To conclude, we imagined that such a complex and fascinating topic would not be of easy analysis, but we do not believe it to be impossible. On what concerns a language and culture as millennial history, other specific issues of translation have to be addressed. The issue itself of the loss in tonal sonority of Chinese is an issue that, contrary to the imagetic force of the character, is worthy of more specific discussion in the field of Chinese poetry translation to Portuguese. **RC**

NOTES

- 1 In this piece there will be references made to the notions of *time and space* to situate which contexts of Chinese language or poetry we are referring to. The term *spacetime*, commonly used in the exact sciences, will be applied as an equivalent to *time and space*. Therefore, in this piece, *time and space* and *spacetime* will be interchangeable.
- 2 In case the topic interests the reader, I recommend watching part of the performance of *bianlian*, from the Sichuan opera. Video available in http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMTYzNTY3NjE2.html.
- 3 About the ‘fidelity to the letter’ (*fidélité à la lettre*) refer to Berman. *La traduction et la lettre ou l’auberge du lointain*, op. cit.
- 4 Original essay published in 1923, titled *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzters*. The translation reference was translated by Steven Rendall (1997), it can be found in <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/037305ar>.
- 5 In ‘Escalando uma tradução coletiva’, of Durazzo & Jatobá, article to be published.
- 6 I thank Prof. Shang Xuejiao for the help in clearing questions on the translation of excerpts in Chinese language. I thank also Zhao Chuxin,

a dear former student, who introduced me first to the problems of Chinese poetry translation from the point of view of Chinese theorists and shared with me some of her ideas developed in her Bachelor’s thesis (*Translations of Libai in Portuguese Language*—unpublished graduation thesis).

- 7 Original questions in Chinese: ‘翻译外国诗是不是“可能”？ [...] 翻译外国诗有什么好处 [...] ‘为什么要翻译外国是?’ (p. 19).
- 8 The word 诗 (*shi*) in Chinese can be a generic term to refer to poetry. For that, it is what opted to translate it either as ‘poetry’ or ‘poem’, to express the interplay between ‘true poetry’ and ‘form’ proposed by the author. Original text: ‘诗也是如此,它的佳劣不在形式而在内容。有‘诗’的诗,诗虽以信屈聱牙的文字写来也是诗;没有‘诗’的诗,虽韵律齐整音节铿锵,仍然不是诗。只有乡愚才会把穿了彩衣的丑妇当作美人’。(p. 99).
- 9 Original text: ‘说“诗不能翻译”是一个通常的错误’。(p. 99).

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