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“Sounds, Images and Rhymes in Sikong Tu’s Poetical Art”

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When musicians, calligraphers and painters used poetical metaphors to describe effects and qualities of art works, Sikong Tu (837-908) vice-versa used sounds and images from music (mainly *qin* zither) and painting (mainly landscape) to depict stylistic qualities in Poetry. His series of twenty-four poems, which follows a theme and variations pattern, reveals a Daoist perception of Nature. Indeed, even though Tang poets were used to write poems in four or eight verses (quatrains or huitains) of five or seven characters, Sikong Tu preferred poems in six verses of eight characters or twelve verses of four characters, that is to say he reversed the structural numbers in verses/characters (four and eight) in order to show a cosmological approach (like *lüliü* musical system in twice ‘six-tones’), and to suggest the triple dimensional composition of sight-hearing and thought. Besides, the choice of rhymes echoes the structure shown in the poems studied in this paper. Moreover, the 18th poem gives rise to the feeling that poetry appears like a mirror, a dual mirror, reflecting not only the poet’s mind in regard of Nature, but also the reader’s character through the interpretation of the poem.

Introduction

How does 司空图 Sikong Tu proceed? He conceives at least three levels of poetical expression: the perception of physical world (I-description of Nature), according to the main components of perception which are (a) ‘seeing’ and (b) ‘hearing’ (pictorial and musical approaches), giving rise together to an appreciation in the sensitive world (II-feeling or emotion from sensations) ; the third level (c) consists in its interpretation in the notional world (III-thought). So, ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ create a ‘sensitive appreciation’ which is connected with a thought, in the present case, a philosophical thought. The poet plays with interlocking parts and the potentiality of Chinese language to express several meanings in only one word-character.

The series of poems is arranged in a pattern of theme with variations, and each poem shows various aspects with nuances indicated by the titles of the poems, descriptions varying from the evidence of what is visible (forms, colors and sounds) to the nearness of what is invisible (blandness, intuition, the hereafter). The theme is the Daoist way in harmony with Nature and the variations follow a cosmogonic scheme. The series of twenty-four poems is structured in two cycles of twelve poems in conformity with the *yin-yang* principle, and this to-and-fro structure moves like the twenty-hours of a day, or the twelve months of a year, or the twenty-four strings of the 瑟 *se* zither (the 25th one, the 13th one, is not used because it symbolizes the pinnacle).

Moreover, each poem is written in twelve verses or six distiches (rhythm of rhymes) like the musical 律呂 *lǜlǜ* system of twelve pipes (or bells) according to two *yin-yang* whole-tone scales (developing together what looks like the Western chromatic scale). Besides, the architecture composed by 司空圖 Sikong Tu is sophisticated since it is possible to read each poem by quatrain (that is to say: three times four-verses), and instead of five or seven characters usually written under Tang dynasty, he carried out squares {4, 4, 4, 4} (because of the number of characters in each verse) which go together with a cyclical loop as mentioned in the 17th poem with the symbolism of “圓方 circle-square”). Several connections between poems are established on the basis of relations between numbers and the *yin-yang* process.

The interlocking process within cycles seems to be the same as the ten heavenly trunks with the twelve earthy branches or between the five sounds of the pentatonic system (五聲 *wusheng*) and the seven sounds of the heptatonic one (工尺 *gongche*). It starts at the center and comes back to the primordial Unity at the end of each cycle, simple (*yin* or *yang*) or double (*yin-yang*). Rhymes are also composed according to a meaning of relating to Unity (blandness and nearness of silence) or variations (forms, colors and sounds). In the first case, inwardly, the rhyme is the same through the poem : for example, ‘*ong*’ in the 1st and 5th poems (with the same and meaningful exception of ‘*feng*’), and a systematic ‘*ang*’ in the 12th poem which is the same in the 17th with the exception of ‘*mei*’, and, of course, the last one, 24th, with a ‘*u*’ systematic rhyme (with one pronounced differently ‘*ju*’); in the second case, externally, the rhyme varies more or less through the poem : for example 3rd, 7th and 11th, then 14th, 21th and 22th poems with three different rhymes.

Thus, the three poems chosen for this conference are linked by their position relating to the number three in a interwoven binary-ternary relation (*yin-yang*) : 6 is twice 3, and 9 is three times 3 in the first cycle (of twelve); and 18 is twice 9 and three times 6 in the second one. This position is an external one, with a profusion of colors and sounds (in particular, jade and *qin* in the three poems). The description of Nature is expressive, simple as said in the 6th poem (last verse), but full of deepness as said in the 9th poem (third verse), and even subtle and out of mastery as said in the 18th poem.

Taking into account the specificities of French and English languages, I preferred a ten-foot line in French (the rhythm of the ten heavenly trunks) and an eight-foot one in English (doubling the Chinese rhythm). As a French-native, the translation is easier for me into French than into English. So, unaware of the direct correspondences between Chinese and English languages, I prefer to give a word by word translation from French, then a famous direct English translation from Chinese found in an existing publication.

Let us now have a look poem by poem¹.

¹ « 二十四诗品 *Ershisi Shipin* Twenty-four poems on poetry », 历代诗话第一册 *Lidai shihua diyi ce* Poetic Talks through the Dynasties, vol.1), 上海医学书局 *Shanghai yixue shuju* Shanghai : Commercial Press, 上海 Shanghai, 1927, 81-91.

I First poem of the selection (the 6th)

典雅 (*diǎn yǎ*) Elégance classique

玉壺買春	賞雨茆屋	<i>Yù kǔn mǎi chūn</i>	<i>shǎng yǔ mǎo wù</i>
坐中佳士	左右修竹	<i>zuò zhōng jiā shì</i>	<i>zǒu yòu xiū zhú</i>
白雲初晴	幽鳥相逐	<i>bái yún chū qíng</i>	<i>yōu miǎo xiāng zhú</i>
眠琴錄陰	上有飛瀑	<i>mián qín lù yīng</i>	<i>shàng yǒu fēi pù</i>
落花無言	人淡如菊	<i>liào huā wú yán</i>	<i>rén dàn rú jú</i>
書之歲華	其曰可讀	<i>shū zhī suì huá</i>	<i>qí yuè kě dú</i>

I-1 Translation

Gynécée de jade qui s'offre au printemps,
goûter la pluie d'un hâvre luxuriant,
Assis au centre une belle et un lettré,
des bambous taillés pour environnement ;
Nuages blancs au début d'une éclaircie,
des oiseaux isolés se pourchassant,
Sur le *qin* allongé dans l'herbe verte,
montée d'une cascade de sons voltigeants ;
Des fleurs qui, sans la moindre parole, tombent,
comme un chrysanthème, l'homme lissant,
Des écrits qui, au fil des ans, abondent,
assurés d'être lisibles aisément.

English translation (word by word) from French: Classical Elegance

Jade gynaeceum purchased for spring,
lush haven for a rain tasting,
A beauty and a scholar sit
within bounds of bamboos rising;
White clouds sign of brightening sky,
lone birds each other pursuing,
From the *gūqin* set on green grass,
a cascade of sounds up flying;
Flowers falling without a word,
Chrysanthemum, a man smoothing,
Writings which abound year by year,
sure to be of easy reading ;

I-2 Comment

Sikong Tu describes favorable conditions for writing and describes itself. In the 18th poem, he would suggest that a poet-sage writes on two levels: one, superficial or light, pleasant to read, where is expressed an happy time within Nature; the other, deep or high, rather hidden, reflecting a Daoist thought.

The 6th, Classical Elegance, is a reversal stage as an end of a small cycle (half-cycle of the first twelve poems) and a rest after a cycle of five poems (rhythm of *wu xing*, *wu sheng*, *wu se*). So this poem is 'dual', as well end and beginning, as shown by a unified rhyme, with a multiplicity of pictorial and musical images (autumn for the man and spring for the woman). Traditionally "jade" is a metaphor for a woman, spring is a metaphor of love awakening, lone birds pursuing a metaphor of love joust, and the rise of sap, then, finally, the fall without words (on the *qin*, the famous lament "湘妃怨 *Xiangfei yuan*" begins with "flowers and leaves fall here and there") because words are not able to say (not as well as music) the feeling as suggested by Sikong Tu in the 11th poem; however the man will try to put it in words (poem) by smoothing and smoothing in the course of time the selection of words. To offer a plurality of interpretations is a way to say that words are not able to contain the whole thought.

Rhymes are quite the same with a pronunciation different only for the 5th distich with 'ju'. But the pronunciation certainly was not exactly the same as now under Tang dynasty. Moreover, you may pronounce the word in order to give it the right nuance. The same in the 1st poem of the cycle where the rhyme is 'ong' and 'feng' is different but not so far from the pronunciation (may be pronounced close to 'fong'), even if there is a specific intention in order to focus on the word 風, that is to say 'wind' in the 1st poem (with a meaning explained in my book, *L'art poétique de Sikong Tu*, Editions You-Feng, 2006). In French and in English, the choice has been to set the same rhyme for all verses to give, like in Chinese, both the feeling of Unity and of multiple components in a *yin-yang* interaction.

Chrysanthemum is the symbol of a belated blossoming, a notion reinforced by the position of end of the small cycle. So, chrysanthemum is a metaphor for the poet whose writings flourish at the end of his life (that is also the end of Tang dynasty). Sikong Tu's message through his last verse is that his work is easy to read what does not deny a second level of reading. Precisely, it is the style of Daoist masters, descriptive and poetic, often metaphorical, but obscure as for the hidden message. Sikong Tu also says that Nature has a message that is not given through words (flowers).

In that way, Sikong Tu depicts happy times in a place full of pictures and sounds, all charming details. The middle quatrain echoes the couple of the first one in the combination of a pictorial distich and a musical one, intertwined by couples with, on one side, clouds and water (linked by flying sparkles of the cascade) and, on the other, birds and *qin* zither (linked by their sounds), but also with the two aspects of sight and hearing crossed with 'clouds'-'birds' and 'cascade'-'zither'. The first quatrain gives the idea of a cocoon (inward feeling), and the last one is the result of lengths of silk thread (external production). I precise here that « rising cascade » is a possible expression, not only

because of flying sparkles but also because, on *qin*, the right hand may sweep up and down the seven strings as shown with *fu* of *gunfu* in 流水 *Liushui* running.

I-3 Comparison with another translation

The series of poems has been translated directly from Chinese in good English by Tony Barnstone in *The Art of Writing : teachings of the Chinese masters* (co-edited with Chou Ping, published by Shambala, 1996). So, I suggest here is a slight exercise of comparative translation of poetry, as we (“Poetry workshop of Asia Network”²) practiced recently (June 19th, 2006³) : not about the style but about the choices of interpretations which often vary, in particular with Chinese poetry. There are two kinds of differences: one related to the ambiguities of the words themselves and the other to the interpretation of the context, for instance the cyclical *yin-yang* structure (that is to say each poem is a part of the whole) and the pictorial-musical couple (that is to say in each poem) for me; and each poem as a whole describing a specific kind of poem for Tony Barnstone. I will not undertake a detailed comparison, but give an idea of what may be deduced from our choices.

English translation by Tony Barnstone: The Classic and Elegant Style

I buy wine with a jade pot.
in my straw-roofed hut I like the rain.
Fine scholars sit at my table.
bamboo stands high to left and right.

White clouds and sun just after rain.
hidden birds chase each other.
I sleep in green shade with my lute.
over there, a flying waterfall.

Falling flowers are speechless.
like a chrysanthemum I desire nothing.
Write about the year’s flowering days.
and your poems will be read with joy.

- Concerning the ambiguities of words:

1st distich: a graphical likeness of characters offers, as homophonies do, multiple correspondences or connections; the game may be not only phonic (ambiguity between characters at hearing) but also visual (same writing except a small detail). That is probably why Tony Barnstone and me read differently the second character : ‘壺 *hu*’ for him and ‘壺 *kun*’ for me (there is just one stroke more in the second one). Both are possible. Moreover, both the two first characters may induce more interpretations : “jade” may be understood as the raw material (then connected with the pot ‘*hu*’, direct translation chosen by Tony Barnstone) or as a metaphor, either evoking the liquor of jade,

² Information about “Asia Network-IMASIE (institute of asian worlds)” may be found on the website : reseau-asie.com

³ « Comparatisme en traduction poétique », *Actes de la journée d’études de l’atelier Poésie du Réseau-Asie* (proceedings to be published).

a step in the daoist ritual (then connected with 'hu' understood as a recipient for sap, or with 'kun' understood as a passage that has a specific meaning in Daoism), or more a woman (then connected with a corridor 'kun'), which is my choice of translation, linked with the *yin* position in the cycle, the spring offer, and the overlapping between quatrains. Considering the whole cycle of poems, we may find, coherently, the second idea (daoist step and internal sap) in the 5th and 17th poems which precede, precisely, this one (6th) and the 18th where the presence of the *qin* evokes more the purity and the presence of a woman. And we may consider that, in the 4th distich, the *qin* symbolizes a woman whose song emerges from the poet's game and, vice-versa, inspires him. This seems expressed, a bit abruptly, by Barnstone's translation of the 7th verse.

4th distich : *qin* is a zither (from the point of view of organology), not a lute (even if this translation is usual since van Gulik translated it as a lute in order to give an idea of the context or spirit of the play). As for 'hu' and 'kun', between '眠 *mian*' and '眼 *yan*' there is only one small stroke which is different, absent for *mian* but present for *yan* in the upper part of the character; well, in the handwritten source, there is one stroke ambiguous crossing this upper part but is not really horizontal. Even if we both have chosen *mian*, we may say that both characters would have been possible: « see the *qin* zither in the green shadow » (obviously the *qin*, a zither, is lying). I understand the possibility of the poet himself lying as in the translation of Tony Barnstone, but I prefer to keep the ambiguity as follows: "(I see) the *qin* zither lying in the green shadow" or "I see the *qin* (lying) in the shadow". Our choices are also different for 'yin': it is directly translated as "shadow" by Tony Barnstone but interpreted by me as "grass" (because it is green and because the *qin* is lying on it). The fast cursive handwriting in Chinese calligraphy is named "grass handwriting", so such a choice contributes to clarify the double link (pictorial and musical) with the third quatrain which describes a flow of written texts : flow is musical (cascade) as well as calligraphic (grass).

- Concerning the interpretation relating to the context:

2th distich: because of the choices in the 1st distich, where I see a women in the context (following 'jade' and 'spring') and Barnstone scholars, our interpretations of '佳 *jia*' are different. I read « 佳人 *jiaren* » + « 佳人 *shiren* » then condensed because of the size of the verse in « 佳士 *jiashi* » (couple), and Barnstone read one term in two syllables « 佳士 *jiashi* » (scholars).

5th distich: because in the 11th poem, Sikong Tu explains that it is difficult to choose the right words to express deep feelings, I think he says in this poem that he smoothes and smoothes the words and the sentences in order to contain more than what is said. The meaning in China of "blandness" is "contains all colors". Barnstone sees in it "nothing" because he thinks it is enough for the poet to enjoy this instant, and it is true that it is a Daoist idea (*wuwei*), that we find in the 9th poem below. Our interpretations differ relating to 'dan', but both are possible.

II Second poem of the selection (the 9th)

綺麗 (*qǐ lí*) Beauté extraordinaire

神存富貴	始輕黃金	<i>shén cún fù guì</i>	<i>shǐ qīng huáng jīn</i>
濃盡必枯	淡者屢深	<i>nóng jìn bì kū</i>	<i>dàn zhě lǚ shēn</i>
霧餘水畔	紅杏在林	<i>wù yú shuǐ pàn</i>	<i>hóng xìng zài lín</i>
月明華屋	畫橋碧陰	<i>yuè míng huá wù</i>	<i>huà qiáo bì yīn</i>
金尊酒滿	伴客彈琴	<i>jīn zūn jiǔ mǎn</i>	<i>bàn kè tán qín</i>
取之自足	良殫美襟	<i>qǔ zhī zì zú</i>	<i>liáng dān měi jīn</i>

II-1 Translation

Et l'esprit vit dans une prospérité,
qui a commencé avec la cloche jaune,
Quand l'intensité ne peut que tarir,
l'insignifiant a maintes profondes fadeurs;
Un peu de brume qui reste au bord de l'eau,
dans les arbres des abricots rouges,
Pendant le clair de lune sur le mont Hua,
je peins un pont dans l'ombre émeraude;
Ici, rempli, un vase à vin en or,
Là, un compagnon-hôte jouant du *qin*,
Quête se suffisant à elle-même, vertus
épuisant le sentiment de beauté.

English translation (word by word) from French: Extraordinary Beauty

Mind lives in a prosperity,
which began with the yellow bell,
Intensity comes and dry up,
While blandness keeps more than one depth ;
Bits of mist stay on waterside,
Red apricots adorn the trees,
In the moonlight on Hua mountain,
I paint a bridge in green shadow ;
Here, a gold vase full of wine,
There, a fellow-guest plays *guqin*,
Self-sufficient quest, virtues are

beyond the feeling of beauty.

II-2 Comment

The 9th poem, Extraordinary beauty, in a ternary cycle with the 3rd and 6th poems, is a variation on the inexhaustible beauty of Nature. Rhymes are not easy to imitate, even if it is, like in the 6th poem, the same (*'in'*) with a nuance at the 2nd distich (*'en'*). We might discuss that question: when is it possible to imitate the rhymes from one language to another one? My opinion is that it depends on the content and on the choice of words for one image or idea. If it is possible by taking synonyms to compose adequate sonorities, this kind of slight modifications, nuances, of content, which maintains similarities of rhymes is preferable, notably in the case of significant structure; otherwise it would be better to conceive an equivalence of structure, as shown below, in the other language to avoid changing the meaning or to preserve a nice result with good meaning obtained by translation of the words. For example, for the whole of twenty-four poems, it has been possible to obtain two-third of similar structure of rhymes. In these three poems, on the contrary, only one-third is rhymed similarly, probably because external descriptions are more precise than emotional contexts.

So I replaced the rhymes, here, in French (within the second verse of each distich in English), by a game on colors, with blandness and beauty which contain all colors and sounds as a musical basis {G-C-F} equivalent to a pictorial basis {yellow-red-green} contains a palette of modes. The rhymes are : yellow (1st distich) ; blandness (2nd distich) ; red (3rd distich) ; green (4th distich) ; *qin* zither (5th distich) ; beauty (6th distich). Because of the rhyme in Chinese, we may consider that *'金 jin'* is a metaphor for “bell” at the end of the first distich (again, a raw material is used in order to arouse an evocation); the last rhyme (*'襟 jin'*) is similarly a metaphor (synecdoque) for “heart”. And in order to respect the number of feet, the 12th line begins in the translation at the end of the 11^e.

Wider relations may also be seen which establish this poem as a whole (and you certainly know that the number nine is, in China, the symbol of a whole). Thus, are gathered : the sound of the yellow bell which, from immemorial time, establishes cycles but is subject to a natural and inescapable exhaustion of the resonance (if not reactivated); the components of a landscape {mount-mists-water-bridge-trees-fruits}; and a human presence, typically of a literati Daoist, drinking wine in good company, playing *qin* zither, painting Nature and composing poems. Sages combine deepness and blandness, recommend a return to the simple reality nevertheless in plenitude, and this poem reminds undoubtedly the Seven Sages of the bamboo grove (of which 阮籍 Ruan Ji and 嵇康 Ji Kang, both musicians and Daoist philosophers).

Are gathered timelessness with recurrent recalling of the Past, the call on great ancestors, and fleeting instants vanishing like the resonance of a sound but giving the taste of a true life. Such a feeling, which echoes the previous poem (the 8th : “to exist supremely”), takes a dimension of peacefulness within beauty. It is an accomplishment of a quest which, taking its source in Nature, is both spiritual and sensitive. The philosophical approach

here is of 'tradition and modernity' cycle lived as stated at the end of the 3rd poem: "like occurring endless, [because] with ancient creating newness".

Let us go on with the comparison of choices in translation.

II-3 Comparison with another translation

English translation by Tony Barnstone: The Decorative and Pretty Style

When your spirit is wealthy
you take gold lightly.
Ink dries when too thick;
a light wash is often deeper.

Leftover mist by the water
where red apricots flower in the forest.
By my ornamented house, the bright moon
and a painted bridge in green shade.

Gold goblets are brimful of wine
as I play the zither to entertain my guests,
I feel so happy, fulfilled,
My heart is exhausted with joy.

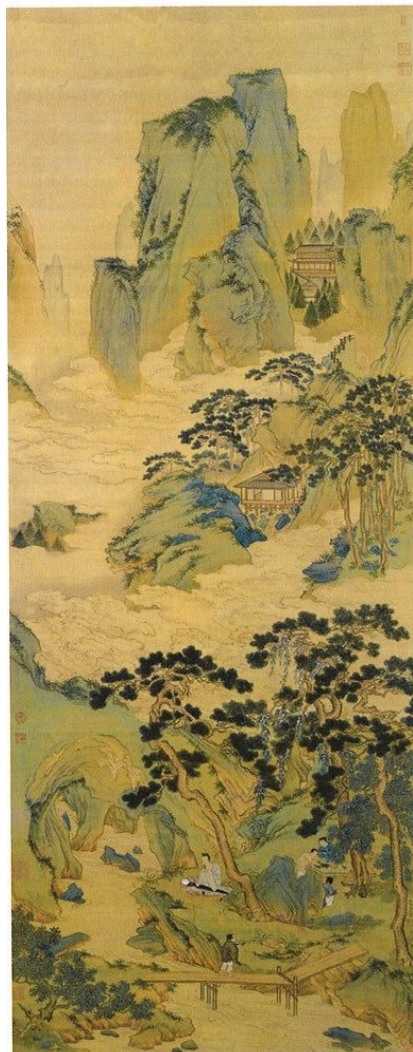
1st distich: interpretation of « 黃金 *huang jin* » as a metaphor of « 黃鐘 *huangzhong* » (yellow bell) because the yellow emperor and the regulation by the yellow bell are associated to prosperity ; and in the cycle of 24 poems, Sikong Tu evokes several times the glorious ancestors. And I have mentioned the importance put on the structure of rhymes by him. Because he has chosen to translate '金 *jin*' as 'gold', the interpretation of Barnstone differs. So, he applies the idea of dryness or dying away to calligraphy while I applies it to sound.

4th distich: '華 *hua*' in my interpretation is Hua mountain (splendid mountain) and the residence (屋 *wu*) of the poet, that is to say an interpretation of *hua wu* as Hua mountain because the description of a landscape implies the presence of a mountain, especially if the rest of components are present (water, mist, bridge, moon). « Ornamented house » in Tony Barnstone's translation is closer to the text, again by his choice of a term in two syllables (considered by me as two mono-syllables by the way of concatenation); however, for a Daoist poet, a simple pavilion or a hut is sufficient and splendour is in Nature for example, precisely, in the Hua mountain. We may say again that both translations are possible, that each one reveals the mind of the reader (I would rather focus on a splendid mountain than on a splendid house) and that Sikong Tu may have intentionally chosen such a formulation in order to let open the interpretation.

5th distich: I have the feeling that it is the guest who plays *qin* and Barnstone thinks that the poet plays for his guest. Again, both interpretations are possible. As a matter of fact, I have the feeling that the poet is painting a bridge while his guest plays music in a harmonious complementarity (pictorial-musical couple). Thus, there is also the suggested meaning of a bridge mentally established by the poet with his guest (in Daoism, a bridge

is a passage). The point of view of Barnstone is that the bridge is painted but we do not know the painter (maybe it is a painting on the wall of this ornamented house): then it is possible for him that the poet himself plays the *qin* and he deduces it is 'for' guests. The ambiguous expression is 伴客 *banke*: « companion » or « keep company ». In my opinion, because of paintings showing poetic meetings between literati friends mostly in Nature or rustic pavilions, the poet may both describe the scene in a poem representative of what Daoists enjoy much and describe the picture he is painting as a representation of this scene: a splendid mountain, the bridge and his fellow playing *guqin* in a marvellous landscape.

仇英 Qiu Ying (vers 1505-1553), may have illustrated this poem by the painting « 玉洞仙源 Grottes de jade de la source des immortels » (Musée du palais impérial, Beijing) presented next page.



III Third poem of the selection (the 18th)

實鏡 (*shí jìng*) Miroir vrai

取語甚直	計思匪深	<i>qǔ yǔ shen zhí</i>	<i>ji sī fěi shen</i>
忽逢幽人	如見道心	<i>hū féng you rén</i>	<i>rú jiàn dào xīn</i>
清澗之曲	碧松之陰	<i>qīng jiàn zhi qū</i>	<i>bì song zhi yīn</i>
一客荷樵	一客聽琴	<i>yī kè hé qiáo</i>	<i>yī kè tīng qín</i>
情性所至	妙不自尋	<i>qíng xìng sǎo zhì</i>	<i>miào bú zì xún</i>
遇之自天	泠然希音	<i>yù zhi zì tiān</i>	<i>líng rán xī yīn</i>

III-1 Translation

Adopter une parole trop directe ;
est un stratagème superficiel,
Un ermite rencontré à l'improviste,
c'est comme percevoir le cœur du Dao ;
Quant aux ondes d'un torrent limpide,
à l'ombre des pins couleur de jade,
L'un y verra du lotus et des bûches,
l'autre y entendra la cithare *qin* ;
Ce qui fait le sentiment rejoint un
mystère qui n'est pas de son propre fait,
Rencontre naturelle avec le ciel,
aussi subtile qu'un son évanescent.

English translation (word by word) from French: True mirror

To adopt very explicit words,
appears a shallow stratagem,
To meet suddenly an hermit,
allows to discern heart of Dao;
As for waves of a clear water,
in the shadow of green pines,
One would see lotus and firewood,
another would hear a *guqin*;
What makes a feeling joins in a
mystery out of mastery,
Natural meeting with Heaven,

subtle as a vanishing sound.

III-2 Comment

The 18th poem, True mirror, is the height of this binary-ternary *yin-yang* cycle by twice nine and three times six. It reveals a truth obvious but not enough recognized: poetry reveals not only the poet's mind (what he sees among what is given to him for seeing) but also the reader's mind through his interpretation of depiction of nature given to him. The subtlety of the vanishing sound sends back to the 9th poem (bell). So, I must precise that the choice of “鏡 or 鏡 *jing*” (mirror) rather than “境 *jing*” (frontier), which is more often written in books giving Sikong Tu's *Ershisi shipin*, for the title is dictated by this logical explanation (errors in writing Chinese keys are not so rare in copying). Both interpretations are possible but one opens on multiple, infinite, possibilities while the other closes the horizon with the notion of frontier or limit. There are sometimes various versions of a text as we may see in Guo Shaoyu comparisons between Chinese publications for this series of Sikong Tu⁴

The poet guess that when a musician sees pines, he thinks of the melody for *guqin* « 風入松 *Feng ru song* Wind in the pines » and hear these sounds; when a woodcutter sees pines, he would think of what to do with this wood. The same picture generates two different interpretations and separates one from the other. However, in the famous legend of Boya and Zhong Ziqi, the woodcutter understands so well the interpretation of nature given by Boya on his *guqin* that Boya understands that he shares the same feeling within Nature and they become friends: that is the double meaning of 知音 *zhiyin*. The flower, because it is a lotus, marks the spiritual link (a lotus as a reminiscence for buddhist awakening as well as a Daoist symbol).

In this way, a musician will hear sounds of a poem or of a painting by looking at them even they are silent (wind, waves, bird, and so on), while vibrations, lines or melodic chords of music may generate points, lines or colored spots in the painter's mind. In this poem, the 3rd distich is a pictorial depiction arousing, for some people, a sound shot, what is said in the 2nd verse of the following distich; the first verse of this distich, more down-to-earth allows to situate *qin* zither (which is said to be an image of the Universe) on the celestial level. The Qiu Ying's painting quoted in relation with the 9th poem is a good illustration of the context.

Analogies of meaning are substituted to rhymes (distiches: 2, 3, 4 and 6) in Western language: « heart of Dao », « jade color », « *qin* zither », « vanishing sound ». Tenue sounds of Laozi (imperceptible except for the connoisseur) are also present: they are in the resonance of the sound and (after formulation by Georges Goormaghtigh in his translation of Ji Kang's 琴賦 *Qinfu*⁵) join up with the great simplicity in an ultimate echo (sound after the sound).

⁴ 詩品集解，司空圖著，郭紹虞集解 « *Shipin jijie* » (Explications des '*Shipin*' appréciations sur la poésie), Sikong Tu, commenté par GUO Shaoyu, 人民文學出版社 *renmin wenxue chubanshe* (Editions littéraires populaires), Beijing 北京, 2005.

⁵ *L'art du qin, deux textes d'esthétique musicale chinoise*, Bruxelles: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques Vol.XXIII, 1990.

The philosophy of this poem is also the one of a plurality which does not deny Unity and, on the contrary, gives it a specific savour when it occurs between two persons, as the friendship in the sensitive world between Boya and Zhong Ziqi, or with Heaven, as indicated here at the beginning of the last distich, an instant of symbiosis and of understanding of the invisible beyond the visible, sometimes both at the same time as suggested in the 2nd distich.

This supra-natural inspiration is perceived by Boileau (1636-1711) in *L'Art poétique* (English : University of Virginia Library):

C'est en vain qu'au Parnasse un téméraire auteur Pense de l'art des vers atteindre la hauteur: S'il ne sent point du ciel l'influence secrète, Si son astre en naissant ne l'a formé poète...	Rash Author, 'tis a vain presumptuous Crime To undertake the Sacred Art of Rhyme ; If at thy Birth the Stars that rul'd thy Sence Shone not with a Poetic Influence.
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Let us go on with the comparison of choices in translation.

III-3 Comparison with another translation

English translation by Tony Barnstone: The Actual Scene Style

Use very straight speech,
without design or deep calculation.
Chancing upon a hermit
is seeing the heart of the Tao.

A clear brook zigzags
through shade of emeral pines.
One man carries firewood,
one is listening to a zither.

Go where your temperament leads.
not seeking makes it splendid.
With luck you'll stumble on
this rare and crystalline sound.

1st distich: our interpretation is here opposite. In my opinion, the poet advocate to avoid a too direct speech in order to offer several levels of interpretation without trick. On the contrary, Barnstone thinks he advocate a direct speech.

4th distich: so, Barnstone chooses here the level of reality : a man bearing firewood, another listening a zither, while I see here a potentiality : not two men but two kinds of men. On one hand, the meaning of the character '荷 *he*' is either 'bear on the back', or 'lotus', on the other, because it does not have conjugation, Chinese language offers with such ambiguities different levels of interpretation : one may see also a subtle game on '客 *ke*' (guest) as suggestive (homophony effect) for '可 *ke*' (potentiality) : one 'may' see lotus and firewood (physical aspect), another one 'may' listen *qin* zither (spirit aspect), even though 'lotus' is double because it is a plant as well as a bouddhist symbol. In this way, it is a link between the two kinds of personages, a bridge between the woodcutter and the literati poet (like the one of the legend of Boya and Zhong Ziqi and like the one of

the previous poem between the painter and the musician). Barnstone' interpretation offers the same kind of opposition-complementarity (farmer/literati) but without the link, at a level closer to the « actual scene » (title of the translation).

That is why the poetical art of Sikong Tu is of the highest degree, in the openness for multiple readings created by his judicious choice of character-words. Both interpretations are once again possible according to the level where one takes his place.

Thanks to such a comparative analysis, we may understand why poetry is of excellence in China and may be used in various occasions. It is probably a reason why one of the major mandarin examination is based on poetry (test of level of potentialities created by a literati as well as political arm by playing on hidden meanings of words or connections established by the way of sonorous and graphical ambiguities). A Chinese colleague told us during the study meeting of "Poetry workshop of Asia network" in June that she thinks the translation from Chinese towards French is not easy because it forces to choose even though the Chinese poetic text lends itself intentionally to different interpretations.

Conclusion

One purpose of poetry seems to be a mirror reflecting to each of us our own nature (as suggested by Sikong Tu in this 18th poem). So it makes good use of images with many connotations among which each person will read what fits in himself. Metaphorical way is built on such a principle, served by a language based on figuration of ideas which induces several possibilities of meaning, without deception with false semblances: the real, the visible, the suggested, the imaginary, the mythical, the unsaid coexist and are true all together.

Every description, with pictures and sounds - even insignificant, timeless and always different -, which are external aspect of things and beings, the visible one, has a spiritual depth which is the internal aspect of things and beings, the invisible one. The poetical art consists in the mastery of correspondences and in the art of saying both the most and the least. It is not possible to review it through a simple commentary. No less than a multiplicity of commentaries and translations might give an idea of innumerable potentialities from a same center. Allusions are numerous through terms relating to several meanings; moreover, there is an implicit game on ambiguities resulting from similarities of sonorities (homophony) or of handwriting (as we may see some examples in these selected poems).

Sikong Tu's poetical art raises such a mastery to excellence in a combination of 'time-space' cycles, backwards-forwards and seasons in time, ascending-descending and swirls in space, and also of these cycles in the hereafter; beyond limits or unworldliness, with the idea of a boundless universe, perceptible but immeasurable, multifaceted but undifferentiated. In this way, this work is also a book on the Daoist Way : it is a daoist meditation.