

Re-translating Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*

EDWIN K. C. LI 

Abstract Through ethnographical, historical, archival, and analytical lenses, this article explores Zheng Xiaoying's (1929–) Mandarin re-translations of *Das Lied von der Erde* as a prism that refracts critical light on intersections of translation, epistemology, interculturality, and post-/decoloniality. The article first provides a reception history of *Das Lied* in China to contextualize Zheng's re-translations, and then examines her archives to discuss the cultural dynamics of translation and musical knowledge-making in China. The article ends with a provocation from Hong Kong to reflect on the stakes of celebrating translation as a theoretical apparatus for transnational music-historical flows and decolonial goals, and to position translation in intercultural musical exchange as an arbiter of knowledges, cultures, nationhood, and politics.

Introduction

Musicology has long acknowledged that Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* [*The Song of the Earth*] (1908–09) exhibits a complex intertextuality. In the summer of 1908, Mahler received a copy of Hans Bethge's *Die chinesische Flöte: Nachdichtungen chinesischer Lyrik* [*The Chinese Flute: Adaptations of Chinese Poetry*] (1907) from Dr Theobald Pollak, one of his closest friends, and started to adapt seven of the eighty-

Email: edwinli@cuhk.edu.hk

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three Chinese poems for his *Lied*.¹ Bethge's poems, as his subtitle suggests, were not exact translations from the original Chinese, as Bethge himself did not know the language. Rather, they were adaptations (*Nachdichtungen*) of Hans Heilmann's anthology *Chinesische Lyrik* [*Chinese Poetry*] (1905), which, in turn, was based primarily on two French mistranslations of the Chinese original: the Marquis d'Hervey de Saint Denys's *Poésies de l'époque des Thang* [*Poems from the Tang Dynasty*] (1862) and Judith Gautier's *Le Livre de jade* [*The Book of Jade*] (1867).²

It is, however, little known that the task of de-coding Mahler's use of Tang poetry in *Das Lied* has been a matter of national interest in China.³ It all began with a concert in China in May 1998, where the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra featured *Das Lied* in their programme. Among the audience members was Li Lanqing, then the vice premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (PRC).⁴ One of the most powerful figures in the chief administrative authority of the PRC, Li was intrigued by the unsettled poetic origins of *Das Lied*, and penned a letter in October 1999 to the PRC's embassy in France (probably because the work originates from the French translations of Tang poetry), requesting an investigation into Mahler's work. The cultural and the political have since become ineluctably intertwined. On 8 November

¹ Hans Bethge, *Die chinesische Flöte: Nachdichtungen chinesischer Lyrik* (Insel Verlag, 1912; orig. 1907).

² Hans Heilmann, *Chinesische Lyrik vom 12. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis zur Gegenwart* (R. Piper, 1905); Marquis d'Hervey de Saint Denys, *Poésies de l'époque des Thang* (Amyot, 1862); Judith Gautier, *Le Livre de jade* (Alphonse Lemerre, 1867). For an intertextual mapping between Mahler, Hervey de Saint Denys, Gautier, and Heilmann, see Donald Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler: Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death* (Faber, 1985), p. 440. For a historicization of Gautier's mistranslation against French aesthetics, see Pauline Yu, "Your Alabaster in This Porcelain": Judith Gautier's *Le livre de jade*, *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, 122 (2007), pp. 464–82, doi:10.1632/pmla.2007.122.2.464.

³ The six movements of *Das Lied* were generally agreed to be inspired by the following Chinese poems: 1. 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde' ['The Drinking Song of Earth's Sorrow'] by Li Bai's 'Beige xing 悲歌行' ['Song of Sorrow']; 2. 'Der Einsame im Herbst' ['The Lonely One in Autumn'] by Qian Qi's 'Xiaogu qiuye chang 效古秋夜長' ['Imitating the Old-Style Poem "Long Autumn Night"']; 3. 'Von der Jugend' ['Of Youth'] by Li Bai's 'Yan Taojia tingzi 宴陶家亭子' ['Banquet at Tao's Pavilion']; 4. 'Von der Schönheit' ['Of Beauty'] by Li Bai's 'Cai lian qu 采蓮曲' ['Lotus-Collecting Song']; 5. 'Der Trunkene im Frühling' ['The Drunkard in Spring'] by Li Bai's 'Chunri zui qi yanzhi 春日醉起言志' ['Feelings while Drunk on a Spring Day']; 6. 'Der Abschied' ['Farewell'] by Meng Haoran's 'Su yeshi shanfang dai Ding Da bu zhi 宿業師山房待丁大不至' ['Staying in the Teacher's House in the Mountain and Waiting for a Friend in Vain'] and Wang Wei's 'Song bie 送別' ['Farewell']. For a critical discussion of these sources, see Fusako Hamao, 'The Sources of the Texts in Mahler's *Lied von der Erde*, 19th-Century Music, 19 (1995), pp. 83–95, doi:10.2307/746721, from which I have partly adopted the English translation of the poem titles. In this article, romanization of Chinese and Korean names follows the order Surname–First Name (e.g. Zheng Xiaoying). All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

⁴ Bi Minghui, Professor of Music at the China Conservatory of Music, stated in a 2001 article that Li Lanqing attended the May 1998 concert featuring *Das Lied*, although the names of the orchestra and the concert hall were not mentioned; 'Guanyu Male "Dadi zhi ge" Tangshi geci zhi jieshi: yanjiu de zongshu' ['Poetic Text in Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*: A Literature Review'], *Renmin yinyue*, 3 (2001), pp. 41–44 (p. 41). Zhang Suqin, in a 2023 article published in the *Guangzhou Daily*, supplied the name of the orchestra, but this piece of information could not be verified; 'Ting yishu gequ jiangshu Tangshi zhi lu' ['Listening to Art Songs, Telling the Story of Tang Poetry'], *Guangzhou Daily*, 24 July 2023 <https://gzdaily.dayoo.com/pc/html/2023-07/24/content_881_831596.htm> [accessed 13 February 2024].

that year, Wu Jianmin from the embassy provided Li with a report entitled 'On the Investigation of the Inclusion of Tang Poetry in the German Composer Mahler's Symphonies'.⁵ The result of the report was inconclusive, which then led to a series of inquiries.⁶ On 30 November, Li wrote to Wang Cizhao, the former president of the Central Conservatory of Music (CCM) in Beijing, requesting a further investigation into the topic. Wang then relayed the task to Liao Fushu, a musicologist at the CCM who is proficient in German, who in August 2000 published 'On the Problem of Two Tang Poems in *Das Lied von der Erde*' in the *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*, a major musicological journal in China.⁷ Liao's conclusion was again open; the poetic provenance of the third movement of *Das Lied* was a particular moot point.⁸ On 14 December 2000, a conference entitled 'The Interpretations of Tang Poetry in Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and an Evaluation of the Work' was jointly held by the CCM, Peking University, and the Chinese Musicians' Association (the largest musicological association in China).⁹

These politically charged discourses about *Das Lied* — curiously elevated to a matter of national import — ran parallel to efforts to re-translate it into Chinese (Mandarin) that have taken place since 1985.¹⁰ The re-translation project, spanning more than thirty years and rounds of painstaking revision, was spearheaded by Zheng Xiaoying (1929–), who was the first female conductor in China, the former head of the conducting department at the CCM, and the former chief conductor of the China National Opera (CNO).¹¹ She was also a close confidante of Li and numerous government officials at both the state and provincial levels, and since the 1980s has been one of the staunchest advocates (despite considerable opposition) of performing western music, especially operas, in Chinese — a practice known as *yangxizhongchang*

⁵ The report was titled in Chinese 'Guanyu chahe Deguo zuoqu jia Male jiaoxiangyue zhong sheji Tangshi de qingkuang'; Bi, 'Guanyu Male'.

⁶ *Male Dadi zhi ge yanjiu* [Research on Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*], ed. by Wang Cizhao and Bi Minghui (Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2002), pp. 74–75.

⁷ Liao Fushu, 'Guanyu Dadi zhi ge na liang shou Tangshi de nanti' ['On the Problem of Two Tang Poems in *Das Lied von der Erde*'], *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*, 3 (2000), pp. 16–18.

⁸ Liao questioned the definitive conclusion proposed by Qian Renkang, then Professor of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, that the third movement of *Das Lied*, 'Von der Jugend', originates from the Tang poet Li Bai's 'Yan Tao jia tingzi'. See Qian Renkang, 'Shi jie Dadi zhi ge zhong liang shou Tangshi de yan' ['Examining the Mystery of the Two Tang Poems in *Das Lied von der Erde*'], *Yinyue aihaozhe*, 8 (1999), pp. 60–61.

⁹ The Chinese conference title was 'Male Dadi zhi ge Tangshi geci jieyi ji zuopin pingjia yantao hui'.

¹⁰ 'Chinese' refers to a group of related linguistic varieties, the most widely spoken of which is Mandarin, the official language of mainland China and Taiwan. Cantonese is another major variety of Chinese, predominantly spoken in the Guangdong province of China and in Hong Kong and Macau. While Mandarin and Cantonese have different spoken forms, they share a standard written form referred to as 'Chinese', which utilizes logographs (Chinese characters) that can be understood across the different linguistic varieties. This written form is the default for formal, academic, and official usage, while spoken Cantonese, though able to be written out with Chinese characters, is primarily reserved for informal, conversational contexts and not typically used in public or formal settings.

¹¹ Two critical biographies of Zheng Xiaoying are Bai Jing, *Zheng Xiaoying zhuan: Shengming de jiaoxiang* [A Biography of Zheng Xiaoying: Symphony of Life] (Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2018); and Yang Li, *Zheng Xiaoying zhuan* [A Biography of Zheng Xiaoying] (Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2007).

(Western Operas, Chinese Singing).¹² While translating foreign musical works into vernacular languages has been a global phenomenon since at least the nineteenth century, the practice in China of translating and adapting the original for local palettes and sensibilities, as Zheng underlined, was largely motivated by Mao Zedong's advocacy of *wei renmin fuwu* (serving the people) as an artistic vision, expounded in his 1943 'Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art' for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the Second Sino-Japanese War.¹³ Art, according to Mao, was part of the revolutionary machinery to educate and unite the people — workers, peasants, and soldiers — against enemies. Mao's talks remained influential even after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, and have bolstered the broad artistic practice of *dazhonghua* (massification), a shared aspiration among generations of Chinese artists and composers to communicate with the public with easy-to-understand musical and textual languages. Zheng's support for *yangxizhongchang* has been recognized as key in the project of massification.¹⁴

Although there is no direct evidence indicating that Zheng's re-translations of *Das Lied* were mandated by an executive order, their vision was no less political. Rubbing

¹² On Zheng's friendship with Li Lanqing and other government officials in Beijing and Xiamen, see Yang, *Zheng Xiaoying zhuan*, pp. 382–86; on Zheng's discussion of *yangxizhongchang*, see her 'Daishang wo xina de geju yu dajia zuozai yiqi—you "Zitenghua" he zhongwen ban "Chahuanu" tan geju zhizuo de xiangfa' ['Beloved Operas: From *Wisteria* and the Chinese Version of *La Traviata*'], *Geju*, 5 (2012), pp. 44–48. Resistance to performing western works in Chinese has been prevalent in China. For instance, Zhang Yingxi, a China-based tenor and a student of Plácido Domingo, has expressed disapproval of such an idea; the music, he said, would misalign with the language. See Zhou Yu, 'Zhang Yingxi buju yu Zhongguo "San da nan gaoyin" duibi' ['Zhang Yingxi Wasn't Afraid of Being Compared to China's "Three Tenors"'], *Nanfang Daily*, 29 October 2013 <<http://www.people.com.cn/24hour/n/2013/1029/c25408-23358391.html>> [accessed 8 July 2024].

¹³ Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's 'Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art': A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary* (University of Michigan, Centre for Chinese Studies, 1980). On translating into vernaculars, see, for example, *Opera in Translation: Unity and Diversity*, ed. by Adriana Șerban and Kelly Kar Yue Chan (John Benjamins, 2020); *Music, Text and Translation*, ed. by Helen Julia Minors (Bloomsbury, 2013). On translating into Chinese, see Denise Gallo, 'Opera, Oratorio, Song', in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, 4 vols (Oxford University Press, 2006), iv, 1790–1900, ed. by Peter France and Kenneth Haynes, pp. 420–29. Since the 1956 premiere of the Chinese version of Giuseppe Verdi's *La traviata* in China, foreign operas and operettas — including Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot*, Gaetano Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*, Johann Strauss II's *Die Fledermaus*, Franz Lehár's *Die lustige Witwe*, and Verdi's *Rigoletto* — have been translated into Chinese and performed as such, often with altered contents, to make them linguistically, musically, and culturally accessible for mass enjoyment, enlightenment, and solidarity. See Sheila Melvin and Jingdong Cai, *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese* (Algora, 2004), p. 305. For discussions of translation of foreign musical works into Chinese, see Xue Fan, *Geju fanyi tansuo yu shijian* [Exploration and Practice of Song Translation] (Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002); Sun Huishuang, *Geju fanyi yu yanjiu* [Opera Translation and Research] (Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999).

¹⁴ Barbara Mittler, *Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China since 1949* (Harrassowitz, 1997), pp. 48–49. In addition to influencing the translation of foreign musical works into Chinese, Mao's talks also spurred the development of Chinese contemporary classical operas, a subject too vast to fully explore here. Ding Yi's (1928–98) work — his translation of foreign operas into Chinese, librettos for original Chinese contemporary classical operas, and operatic theories — provides a unique window onto this dynamic parallel. See Ding Yi, *Ding Yi wen ji* [Collected Works of Ding Yi], 5 vols (Lijiang chubanshe, 2015).

against the collective aspiration for massification and the growing wave of western musical works in translation in China was a particularly acute anxiety of misrepresentation, influence, invisibility, and recuperation palpably sensed, as we will examine, in the Chinese reception of *Das Lied*. The anxiety stemmed potentially not only from *Das Lied*'s appropriation of the accents, melodies, and meanings of Chinese languages and poetry, but also from the neo-nationalist zeitgeist and the rise of the New Left in China in the 1990s.¹⁵ While topics of modernity and enlightenment have long been problematic in China, in the 1990s Chinese intellectuals such as Zhang Yiwu, Zheng Min, and Wang Yuechuan recruited and Sinicized postmodern and postcolonial theories from the West in opposition to those who saw westernization as a necessary condition for the modernization of China.¹⁶ These intellectuals, labelled the New Left, contended that western ideas exerted various forms of colonization upon the country through disciplinary knowledges.¹⁷ With a decolonial sensibility, they sought to reclaim what had been undermined, stolen, or destroyed by western imperialism and colonialism in China since the two Opium Wars (1839–42 and 1856–60) and to re-enact a lost collective Chinese consciousness. While probing the complexity of this cultural-political advocacy would necessitate a more extensive discussion,¹⁸ it is critical to underline this Sinicized 'postcolonialism' as a theoretical underpinning of the sustained decolonial narratives, appearing on a national level, of 'national insecurities', 'humiliation', and 'self-empowerment' that may have fuelled the continued interest in understanding and re-translating — indeed, recapturing and recuperating — *Das Lied* in China.¹⁹ Re-translating the piece, as these contexts and agents suggest, was as much a personal endeavour as it was a neo-nationalist project of 'retrieval' (to employ Zheng's vocabulary) aimed at ensuring that the musical work be reproduced in a way that 'conforms to the Han language and the original poetic and musical logic' and 'is

¹⁵ See, for example, Mobo Changfan Guo, 'The Rise of Neo-Nationalism and the New Left: A Postcolonial and Postmodern Perspective', in *Nationalism, Democracy and National Integration in China*, ed. by Leong H. Liew and Shaoguang Wang (Routledge, 2004), pp. 44–62.

¹⁶ See, for example, Jianbo Zhou, *Westernization Movement and Early Thought of Modernization in China: Pragmatism and Changes in Society, 1860s–1900s* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2022). On the various expressions of musical modernity in China, see Frederick Lau, 'Chinese Music Modernities', in *The Oxford Handbook of Music in China and the Chinese Diaspora*, ed. by Jonathan P. J. Stock and Yu Hui (Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 155–76.

¹⁷ Zhang Yiwu, 'Chonggu "xiandaixing" yu Hanyu shumianyu lunzheng — yi ge jiushi niandai wenxue de xin mingti' ['Reevaluating "Modernity" and the Debate on Written Chinese: A New Proposition in 1990s Literature'], *Wenxue pinglun*, 4 (1994), pp. 107–13, 120; Zheng Min, 'Hewei "dalü xinbaoshouzhuyi"?' ['What is "Neo-Conservatism of Mainland China"?'], *Wenyi zhengming*, 5 (1995), pp. 40–48; Wang Yuechuan, 'Houxiandaizhuyi wenhua yu jiazhi fansi' ['Postmodern Culture and Reflection on Values'], *Wenyi yanjiu*, 1 (1993), pp. 44–46.

¹⁸ For instance, Ben Xu argues that the movement is self-contradictory in regard to the theoretical inconsistency between the critique of political domination embedded in many western postmodern and postcolonial theories and the understatement of China's authoritarian order; 'Postmodern-Postcolonial Criticism and Pro-Democracy Enlightenment', *Modern China*, 27 (2001), pp. 117–47, doi:10.1177/009770040102700104.

¹⁹ William A. Callahan, 'National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 29 (2004), pp. 199–218, doi:10.1177/030437540402900204.

comprehensible by audiences in China'.²⁰ Zheng's re-translations of *Das Lied* can therefore be read not only as an exemplar of musical massification, but also as a fulfilment of a post-/decolonial liability.²¹

This article examines Zheng's re-translations of *Das Lied* from ethnographical, historical, archival, and analytical approaches, and discusses and problematizes the intersections of translation, epistemology, interculturality, and post- and decoloniality, not least how translation may disorder dominant languages and unseat paradigms through which musicological knowledges are reflexively produced in western art music and, critically, establish new orders in the process. While musicology has revelled in its global turn and celebrated translation for its capacity to animate 'cultural crossings and their unpredictable play of difference',²² translation, as decolonial thinker Rolando Vázquez has argued, can be a colonial means of incorporation *as* erasure to expand modernity's epistemic territory; translation can unname the non-West to make it invisible as the primitive Other.²³ Drawing upon Walter D. Mignolo and Madina V. Tlostanova's border thinking as a decolonial methodology, Vázquez maintains that translation, as a rhetoric of modernity sponsored by coloniality, helps expose the epistemic borders where a politics of control and visibility operates.²⁴ But at the same time, the theoretical abyss between the West and the non-West embedded within Vázquez's decolonial thinking can obscure the potential for translation to reflect colonial logics even as it serves decolonial purposes, as we will learn from Zheng's project.

This article poses the following questions in reflecting broadly on diverse modes of interculturality and the decolonial stakes of translation in music-making: What epistemic dialogues and confessions have emerged from Zheng's re-translations of *Das Lied* and the surrounding network of agencies? What do Zheng's sources and re-translation processes reveal about the cultural logics and operations of music-knowledge making in China? In our enthusiasm for translation as a facilitator of intercultural exchange, how can we simultaneously theorize its decolonial agency in

²⁰ Shao Yan, 'Jingyiqiujing yiwuzhijing — Ji Male Dadi zhi ge de zhongwen yipei yu xiupei' ['Striving for Excellence, Art Knows No Boundaries: Re-translations and Emendations of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*'], *Geju*, 11 (2015), pp. 90–93 (p. 91).

²¹ A layer of complexity is, as Zheng said before the first rehearsal of the Chinese rendition of *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Zheng Xiaoying Opera Centre (22 January 2024), that it was exceedingly difficult for Zheng to secure funding from the local government, and her aspiration often fell on deaf ears, not least when liaising with those in power who had received minimal music education.

²² Brigid Cohen, 'Working on the Boundaries: Translation Studies, National Narratives, and Robert Lachmann in Jerusalem', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 65 (2012), pp. 830–33 (p. 831), doi:10.1525/jams.2012.65.3.821. For an excellent exploration of the interdisciplinarity and intermediality of music and translation, see Lucile Desblache, *Music and Translation: New Mediations in the Digital Age* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

²³ Rolando Vázquez, 'Translation as Erasure: Thoughts on Modernity's Epistemic Violence', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 24 (2011), pp. 27–44, doi:10.1111/j.1467-6443.2011.01387.x; Walter D. Mignolo and Madina V. Tlostanova, 'Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9 (2006), pp. 205–11, doi:10.1177/1368431006063333.

²⁴ Vázquez, 'Translation as Erasure', pp. 29–30.

music to construct and defend nationhood, identities, and borders, and relatedly, to build coalitions that can exercise a violence of exclusion?²⁵

Informed by my in-person interview with Zheng in January 2024 in Xiamen, China, this article is built around two main sections and ends with a provocation from Hong Kong. It begins with a reception history of *Das Lied* in China to contextualize Zheng's re-translations. It then analyses her translations, personal notes, study scores, performance scores, and the translations on which she based her work, in order to explore the cultural dynamics of translation, musical knowledge and its construction, and experiences of music-making in China, in ways that may speak to the neo-nationalist sentiments discussed earlier. In the epilogue, it takes us to Hong Kong, where the Cantonese version of *Das Lied*, produced by the late businessman Daniel Ng Yat-chiu (1937–2013) and premiered in 2004, serves as a provocative foil to Zheng's project and lays the groundwork for future discussions. This article suggests broadly, via the reception tales of *Das Lied*, that in examining global practices of music and translation, we should be mindful of the enchantment of translation as a theoretical apparatus for transnational music-historical flows and decolonial goals. Rather, we can hear translations and the resistance to them in intercultural musical exchange as arbiters of knowledges, cultures, nationhood, and politics.

Hearing *Yijing*

Given that Mahler was inspired by Bethge's paraphrase of Chinese Tang poetry in writing *Das Lied*, and that his work, as Lo Kii-ming hears, 'sounds Chinese', it is natural to wonder how far Mahler was familiar with 'Chinese music'.²⁶ Hu Haiping, while acknowledging in his 1991 dissertation that 'no documented evidence of Mahler's knowledge of Chinese music has yet emerged', made the following claims:²⁷ 1) Mahler might have heard Chinese music live at some Chinese restaurants in Hamburg in 1891–97,²⁸ 2) Johann Nepomuk Fuchs, Mahler's colleague at the Vienna Court Opera, possessed J. A. van Aalst's *Chinese Music* (1884), which Mahler might have read to learn about the history, theory, and principles of Chinese music, 3) In the summer of 1908, the year in which he was working on *Das Lied*, Mahler received cylinder recordings of Chinese music from a family friend, Paul Hammerschlag, whose

²⁵ Related questions were asked in a collaborative project on music theory and translation; see Edwin K. C. Li, Chris Stover, and Anna Yu Wang, 'Introduction: Music Theory in the Plural', *Music Theory Online*, 30 (2024), doi:10.30535/mto.30.4.6.

²⁶ Lo Kii-ming, 'Chinesische Dichtung als Textgrundlage für Mahlers "Lied von der Erde"', in *Das Gustav-Mahler-Fest Hamburg 1989: Bericht über den Internationalen Gustav-Mahler-Kongreß*, ed. by Matthias Theodor Vogt (Bärenreiter, 1991), pp. 509–28 (p. 518).

²⁷ Hu Haiping, '“Das Lied von der Erde”: The Culmination of Mahler's Artistic Life' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1991), pp. 154–56.

²⁸ Meng Ren, citing Hu's master's thesis, stated that this speculation is from Peter Rietus, who is not known to me. This information is unverifiable, given that the thesis is unpublished. See Meng Ren, 'Mahler's Concept of Chinese Art in his *Das Lied von der Erde*', *Maynooth Musicology Postgraduate Journal*, 1 (2008), pp. 154–78 (p. 156).

daughter, Elizabeth Duschnitz-Hammerschlag, told the historian Henry-Louis de La Grange about this.²⁹

To this list we can add that Mahler might have heard East Asian musics (Chinese, Japanese, and Javanese) during his visit to the Paris Exhibition in 1900, as Stephen E. Hefling surmised in 2000, and, following Peter Revers's work, that Mahler might have listened to records of Chinese music, among many other musics, in 1906 in the Phonogram Archive of the Austrian Academy of Science, which Guido Adler, Mahler's close friend, probably was in close contact with.³⁰ De La Grange suggested that in April 1908, Mahler spoke with Friedrich Hirth, a sinologist at Columbia University who published *The Ancient History of China to the End of the Ch'ou Dynasty* in January that year, about Chinese history and literature.³¹ We can also clarify Hu's claim about cylinder recordings of Chinese music that Mahler might have heard: in de La Grange's account of his conversation with Duschnitz-Hammerschlag, in the final weeks of summer 1908, Paul Hammerschlag heard from Mahler that he was interested in China and Chinese music, and Hammerschlag therefore went and bought 'phonograph cylinders of Chinese music recorded in China', which he gave Mahler as a gift.³² Paul Banks has suggested that these cylinders were probably not recorded in China but in San Francisco, and were published by Edison Records in 1902.³³ They are now publicly available in the UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive.³⁴

The grainy recordings represented a good variety of Chinese musics — songs, regional operas, comic recitations, and band music — and accordingly, they could have offered rich compositional resources to Mahler if he did listen to them, notably the ensemble of percussive sounds, with Chinese gong and wooden fish, and microtonal inflections in operatic voices and recitatives. It would be rather unfortunate to conclude, should this piece of historical evidence be authentic, that the only thing Mahler learned from these recordings was their use of pentatonicism, given that Mahler could just as well have learned that from, for example, Claude Debussy's *Prélude à*

²⁹ Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler: Chronique d'une vie*, 3 vols (Fayard, 1984), III, *Le Génie foudroyé (1907–1911)*, p. 341; de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, 4 vols (Oxford University Press, 2008), IV, *A New Life Cut Short (1907–1911)*, p. 211.

³⁰ Stephen E. Hefling, *Mahler: 'Das Lied von der Erde' ('The Song of the Earth')* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 144–45; Peter Revers, 'Aspekte der Ostasienrezeption in Gustav Mahlers *Das Lied von der Erde*', in *Musik als Text*, ed. by Tobias Pleburch and Hermann Danuser (Bärenreiter, 1998), pp. 376–83; Revers, 'Das Lied von der Erde', in *Mahler Handbuch*, ed. by Bernd Sponheuer and Wolfram Steinbeck (J. B. Metzler, 2010), pp. 343–61. For the repertoires played at the Exhibition, see Judith Gautier's six-volume *Les musiques bizarres à l'Exposition de 1900* (Librairie Ollendorff, 1900).

³¹ De La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, IV, pp. 161–62. In the book, Hirth mentioned some musically related topics at various places in broad strokes, such as the connection of the invention of 'certain flutes' and the system of weights and measures (pp. 22–23), how the sound of the drum served as a military signal (p. 165), and how Confucius was so impressed by a piece of music played in the court of the Duke King that he did not consume meat for three months (p. 243).

³² De La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, IV, p. 211.

³³ Paul Banks, 'Mahler in China (1907)', 26 February 2024 <<http://pwb101.me.uk/mahler-in-china-1907-2/>> [accessed 26 February 2024].

³⁴ UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive, 'Edison Chinese Cylinders' <<https://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/history-chinese.php>> [accessed 28 February 2023].

l'après-midi d'un faune (1894) or *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902), or from reading various theoretical discussions on pentatonicism that were already available before 1908.³⁵

Yet Hu sees the pentatonicism in *Das Lied* — perhaps the most salient trait of Mahler's orientalism — as the most credible piece of material evidence demonstrating that Mahler had some knowledge of Chinese music.³⁶ As he writes,

no matter how uncertain we are about the actual resources of Chinese music Mahler might have consulted, the constant appearance of pentatonic materials in *Das Lied* unequivocally supports the assumption that Mahler knew Chinese music well enough to incorporate its materials into his own composition.³⁷

Indeed, most music-analytical efforts to understand *Das Lied* are aimed primarily at demonstrating how Mahler translated the essence of the poems into music through the means of pentatonicism, thus extracting from the poems an oriental flavour. In 1949, Hans Tischler claimed that the melodic material of the entire *Lied* is 'based on the pentatonic scale', which 'unites the whole' and 'evokes the impression of a Chinese background[,] though there is no real attempt at imitating Far-Eastern music'.³⁸ Some fifty years later, Hefling, more assertive than Tischler, saw pentatonic scales as 'the most frequent modes of pitch organisation in Eastern music', and associated the pentatonicism of the first movement of *Das Lied*, 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde', with an exotic — both Chinese and Japanese — impression.³⁹ Hefling identifies two kinds of pentatonic scales in the movement: the 'Chinese' anhemitonic pentatonic scales (five-note scales which do not contain semitones) and the 'Japanese' hemitonic pentatonic scales (five-note scales which contain semitones).⁴⁰ Hefling also locates an appearance

³⁵ See Antoine Dechevrens, 'Etude sur le système musical chinois', *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*, 2 (1900–01), pp. 526–47. While van Aalst did mention variations (notably, changed tones, or *pien*) beyond pentatonicism in his *Chinese Music*, which Hu believes Mahler read, he wrote that 'the present Chinese theoretically admit seven sounds in the scale, but practically they only use five, and that as well in ritual music as in popular tunes'; *Chinese Music* (The Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1884), p. 16. According to de La Grange, in November 1906, Mahler, after reading the score, put Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* on the *Spielplan* for the 1907–08 season of the Vienna Court Opera, before its upcoming premiere in Frankfurt on 19 April 1907; *Gustav Mahler*, III, *Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion (1904–1907)*, pp. 393 n. 407, 485, and 641. De La Grange notes that Mahler first heard *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* on 1 December 1907 in Vienna, when Richard Strauss conducted it with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra; *Gustav Mahler*, III, p. 787 n. 348. On Debussy's pentatonicism, see Jeremy Day-O'Connell, 'Debussy, Pentatonicism, and the Tonal Tradition', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 31 (2009), pp. 225–61, doi:10.1525/mts.2009.31.2.225.

³⁶ On *Das Lied*'s orientalism, see Francesca Draughon, 'The Orientalist Reflection: Temporality, Reality, and Illusion in Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*', in *Germany and the Imagined East*, ed. by Lee M. Roberts (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), pp. 159–73; Francesca Draughon, 'Mahler and the Music of *Fin-de-Siècle* Identity' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2002), pp. 157–209.

³⁷ Hu, '"Das Lied von der Erde"', p. 156.

³⁸ Hans Tischler, 'Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde"', *The Music Review*, 10 (1949), pp. 111–14 (p. 112).

³⁹ Hefling, *Mahler*, pp. 84 and 86.

⁴⁰ Hefling believes that Mahler might have read Otto Abraham and Erich Moritz von Hornbostel's 'Studien über das Tonsystem und die Musik der Japaner', *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*, 4 (1902–03), pp. 302–60, where the Japanese semitonic pentatonic scale form *hirajoshi* is discussed.

of the subset of the *hirajoshi* scale, 4-Z29. These pentatonic scales, Hefling argues, constitute the structural bedrock for the ‘basic motives’ in the movement. This is most prominently manifest in the refrain ‘Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod’, which rises a semitone (G–Ab–A) at each of its three appearances and is melodically constructed from the *hirajoshi* scale (C–D–Eb–G–Ab). Hefling argues for a twofold effect of these pentatonic procedures: first, these scales provide motivic coherence for the movement; second, pentatonicism diffuses the teleological feeling generated by functional harmony and counterpoint without displacing them, giving the music ‘a decidedly exotic touch’.⁴¹

While Hefling’s analysis is grounded in a questionable assumption of pentatonicism as an expanded modality governing *Das Lied*, Donald Mitchell went so far as to claim that Mahler’s ‘orientalism’ not only resides in the music and the text, but also precedes them. Mahler’s pentatonicism, in Mitchell’s metonymic manoeuvre, is an outward expression of his spirit, which is, as Mitchell writes, ‘authentically Chinese’ and lies ‘beneath the layers of varnish and alien languages’.⁴² Bethge’s texts merely ‘activated’ and ‘released’ Mahler’s Chinese sensibility, which ‘was already there’.⁴³ As Mitchell explains:

As Mahler himself moved into his final years, his personal philosophy moved nearer to a position that, at least in the West, we should recognize as sharing common ground with an identifiable ‘oriental’ approach to matters of life and death [...]. It cannot, of course, have happened only as a result of his enchanting Bethge’s *Chinesische Flöte*. That may have seemed to be a happy and fruitful accident, but I am convinced that the ‘discovery’ of Bethge was merely the means of releasing a world — a whole world of feeling — that was *already in existence* at the deepest levels of Mahler’s psyche, awaiting the Word [*sic*], in a literal sense, that would lend the work-to-be its unique shape and identity.⁴⁴

Mitchell’s statements should not be misunderstood as flights of imagination. Unlike Tischler and Hefling, who undergird their claims with melody, motives, and modality, Mitchell grounds ‘the deepest levels of Mahler’s psyche’ and his ‘authentically Chinese spirit’ in the composer’s use of heterophony. Heterophony, as Mitchell points out, was part of the current thinking in Vienna in the early twentieth century, as evidenced by the publication of Guido Adler’s ‘Über Heterophonie’ in — not coincidentally — 1908.⁴⁵ Indeed, heterophonic thinking was widely discussed from the mid-nineteenth century onwards by musicologists such as Antoine Dechevrens, Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, Carl Stumpf, and Otto Abraham, in both western and non-western

⁴¹ Hefling, *Mahler*, p. 86. Other music analysts, such as Josef Venantius von Wöss (*Gustav Mahler, Das Lied von der Erde: Thematische Analyse* (Universal Edition, 1912)), Uwe Baur (‘Pentatonische Melodie Bildung in Gustav Mahlers *Das Lied von der Erde*’, *Musicologica Austriaca*, 2 (1979), pp. 141–50), and Philip T. Barford (‘Mahler: A Thematic Archetype’, *The Music Review*, 21 (1960), pp. 297–316) have made similar comments.

⁴² Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler*, p. 441.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 448–49. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 125–27; Guido Adler, ‘Über Heterophonie’, *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek Peters*, 15 (1908), pp. 17–27.

musics.⁴⁶ Mitchell takes full advantage of this piece of cultural-material evidence to justify his claims about Mahler's orientalism — and, without much explanation, his 'Chinese spirit' — in his music. In particular, Mitchell describes at length his hearing of heterophony in 'Der Abschied', the finale of *Das Lied*, especially in the textural development beginning from the violin melody in bar 172, reproduced in [Example 1\(a\)](#).⁴⁷ The melody assumes its principal significance when it is made vocal — 'Ich sehe mich' — in bar 198. The first violins play a countermelody to the principal melody, creating a two-part texture. The music arrives at the climax in bar 213, shown in [Example 1\(b\)](#), and ushers in a three-part texture, with the horns and cellos asserting linear-melodic independence yet bearing traces of the principal melody. This 'simultaneous combination of differing forms of the same melody', or what Theodor W. Adorno has called 'blurred unison' [*unscharfes unisono*] ('identical voices diverge slightly through rhythm'), is the Chinese psyche to which Mitchell refers in his statements.⁴⁸

Tischler's, Hefling's, and Mitchell's attempts to associate a certain music-compositional technique or theory with a culture deserves to be called into question. Tse Chun Yan, for instance, has shown that not only is pentatonicism in Chinese musics a historically specific concept, but that Chinese musics have long adopted other scalar systems, such as the heptatonic scale and *kuyin*, a hemitonic, non-pentatonic scale commonly used in Guangdong province in southeast China that consists of, in equal temperament, a slightly raised $\hat{4}$ and a slightly flattened $\hat{7}$, in addition to $\hat{1}$, $\hat{2}$, $\hat{5}$, and sometimes $\hat{6}$.⁴⁹ As far as heterophony is concerned, Robert T. Mok pointed out in his discussion of melodic extemporization in Chinese instrumental ensembles, nineteen years before Mitchell's publication, that what constitutes heterophony cannot be purely defined through musical elements but comes about through musicking processes.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ For Mitchell's translation of Adler's 'Über Heterophonie', where these authors are discussed, see Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler*, pp. 624–34. Carl Stumpf's 1901 study was believed to be the first to revive Plato's idea of 'heterophony' in music; see Stumpf, 'Tonsystem und Musik der Siamesen', *Beiträge zur Akustik und Musikwissenschaft*, 3 (1901), pp. 69–138. On Stumpf's discussion of Adler, Helmholtz, and von Hornbostel and their views of heterophony, see Stumpf, *Die Anfänge der Musik* (Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1911), pp. 95–99, and its English translation, *The Origins of Music*, ed. and trans. by David Trippett (Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 139–44.

⁴⁷ Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler*, pp. 388–93.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 39 and 62. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 150. Another example of 'heterophony' in *Das Lied* can be found in the finale, bars 235–53, between the flutes, the alto voice, and the cellos. Mitchell also points out in passing that bars 332–44 in 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde' 'offer a texture that is compiled by almost exclusively heterophonic means'; *Gustav Mahler*, p. 451.

⁴⁹ See Tse Chun Yan Victor, 'From Chromaticism to Pentatonism: Emergence of Ideology and Practice in *Qin* Music of the Ming and Qing Dynasties' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2009), pp. 9–10.

⁵⁰ Robert T. Mok, 'Heterophony in Chinese Folk Music', *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, 18 (1966), pp. 14–23, doi:10.2307/834636. On heterophony in Chinese music (in particular, the silk and bamboo ensemble tradition), see, for example, Alan R. Thrasher, 'The Melodic Structure of *Jiangnan Sizhu*', *Ethnomusicology*, 29 (1985), pp. 237–63, doi:10.2307/852140; John Lawrence Witzleben, 'Silk and Bamboo' *Music in Shanghai: The Jiangnan Sizhu Instrumental Ensemble Tradition* (Kent State University Press, 1995), pp. 104–17. On a cross-cultural theorization of heterophony, see Žanna Pärtas, 'Theoretical Approaches to Heterophony', *Res Musica*, 8 (2016), pp. 44–72.

Example 1(a). Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, 'Der Abschied', bars 172–82.

At least part of this controversy was not entirely unknown to writers in China in the 1990s. Mitchell's 1985 monograph was cited in an article on the spiritual meaning of Mahler's music which appeared in Chinese in the *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music* in 1993, and writers in China engaged with both German and English sources on *Das Lied* from the early twentieth century.⁵¹ Indeed, following a series of academic articles published in the 1980s that were predominantly focused on the poetic origins of *Das Lied*, Chinese scholarly literature on its aesthetic value and historical import proliferated in the 1990s and early 2000s.⁵² This phenomenon was paralleled by the resurgence in the 1980s in studies on Tang poetry and its historical context, aesthetics, literary significance, and political value,⁵³ after a significant lull during the Cultural

⁵¹ Li Xiujun, 'Male yinyue zuopin zhong de jingshen neihan' ['The Spiritual Meaning in Mahler's Musical Works'], *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*, 3 (1993), pp. 53–58 (p. 58), doi:10.16504/j.cnki.cn11-1183/j.1993.03.014; Yan Baoyu, 'Male "Dadi zhi ge" dewen geci hanyi yiji yu yuan Tangshi de bijiao' ['Comparison between German Translation of Tang Poems and Original Literature of *Das Lied von der Erde*'], *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*, 3 (2000), pp. 19–27, doi:10.16504/j.cnki.cn11-1183/j.2000.03.004; Huang Yuan, 'Male de Dadi zhi ge yu Zhongguo Tangshi' ['Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and Chinese Poetry in the Tang Dynasty'], *Journal of the Academy of Arts*, 17 (1999), pp. 26–32 (p. 29).

⁵² To my knowledge, one of the earliest scholarly commentaries on *Das Lied* in China was written by Chen Hong, a music professor at Nanjing University. It was published in Shanghai in the political journal *Zazhi* in 1944; Chen expressed appreciation of Mahler's music to some extent, but dismissed his mistranslations and the absence of Chinese elements; Chen, 'Chenshi zhi ge' ['*Das Lied von der Erde*'], *Zazhi*, 13 (1944), pp. 73–76. For a survey of research on *Das Lied* in China since 1980, see Yan Sun, 'Sanshi nian lai guonei dui Male Dadi zhi ge yanjiu de zhuyao fangxiang' ['Main Directions of Research on Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* in China over the Past Thirty Years'], *Sichuan Xiju*, 2 (2014), pp. 152–55.

⁵³ On Tang poetry research in China in the 1980s, see Chen Yunji, 'Shiji nian lai guonei Tangshi yanjiu zongshu' ['An Overview of Tang Poetry Research in China in the Past Decade'], *Zhongguoshexue*, 5 (1993), pp. 148–56.

Example 1(b). Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, 'Der Abschied', bars 213–24.

Revolution (1969–79), the sociopolitical movement launched by Mao that aimed at eradicating perceived bourgeois and capitalist influences in the country — including academic research on Tang poetry — in order to preserve communism and traditional Chinese values.⁵⁴ More importantly, as mentioned, interpreting *Das Lied* evolved into a national endeavour from the 1990s after the high-ranking government official Li Lanqing expressed a keen interest in translational matters pertaining to it.

A scholarly exchange in a state-sponsored Chinese article published in 1999 neatly captures the polarized sentiments in the academic community towards *Das Lied* at the turn of the twenty-first century. In the article, the music critic Huang Yuan expressed his dissatisfaction with *Das Lied*'s explicit orientalism:

Mahler's *Das Lied* is a work written in the early twentieth century by a European using several distorted Chinese Tang poems and the Orient as its inspiration. As it was written in an era in which East and West were still pretty much isolated from each other, it is difficult to locate the authentic oriental aura in this kind of oriental music as understood by westerners. It might be a stretch to claim that there is no despair, solitude, or trepidation in Chinese poetry, but at the very least, in the poetry of Li Bai, Meng Haoran, Wang Wei and the like, these morbid states never appear. While Chinese literati often wrote poetic texts that portray how one drowns one's sorrows, these texts express the disappointment, indignation, and resistance generated by the frustration of one's ambition, especially the ambition to serve one's own country. It is hard to find fear of death and extreme loneliness in Chinese people. Therefore in the sixth movement of *Das Lied*, it is really difficult to see any alignment between the musical atmosphere, and Meng's and Wang's 'The woodcutters are almost home, | The birds in the mist are roosting' and 'You say you have achieved nothing, | And want to live alone by the Southern mountain.' This is why I do not have any familial affection towards *Das Lied*.⁵⁵

He let his irritation show in his next remarks:

In fact, Mahler himself did not write *Das Lied* because he was fond of the Orient or because he learned any sort of truth from Chinese culture to express his will. Rather, he,

⁵⁴ On the politics of Tang poetry in twentieth-century China, see, for example, Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 31–81, 261–84, and 421–40. On the politics of artistic creation and musical cultures during the Cultural Revolution, see *Listening to China's Cultural Revolution: Music, Politics, and Cultural Continuities*, ed. by Paul Clark, Laikwan Pang, and Tsan-Huang Tsai (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Barbara Mittler, *A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2013); Lei X. Ouyang, *Music as Mao's Weapon: Remembering the Cultural Revolution* (University of Illinois Press, 2022).

⁵⁵ '马勒的'大地之歌'是一个欧洲人在本世纪初叶凭借几首走了样的中国唐诗而写的,以东方为题材的作品,在东西方尚处于隔绝的时代,这种按照西方人的理解所写的东方音乐中,实难找到东方原有的氛围。很难说中国诗词中完全没有这种绝望、孤独、恐慌的心态,但至少李白、孟浩然、王维等人的诗词中应该说未见有这种病态。中国文人们不乏有借酒浇愁的诗句,但似乎还是属于壮志难酬,报国无门而产生的失意、悲愤与抗争。对死亡的恐惧和不能自拔的孤独,在中国人的心态中似乎也不多见。因而在该作的第六乐章,孟浩然、王维的'樵人归欲尽,烟鸟栖初定',以及'君言不得意,归卧南山睡'的诗句中,实在难以找到与其音乐氛围相一致的地方。这也就是为什么我对'大地之歌'一直缺乏亲情的缘故。'; Huang, 'Male de Dadi zhi ge yu Zhongguo Tangshi', p. 29. The poems in the quotation are cited and translated in Sun Shih-Ni (Sidney), 'Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*: An Intellectual Journey across Cultures and beyond Life and Death' (unpublished Master of Music dissertation, Florida State University, 2009), pp. 80–81.

as a composer who was born in *fin-de-siècle* Europe and was a musical pioneer, wrote *Das Lied* out of the need to break loose from the tether of European classical culture and to find a new musical language, a new way of expression. It just so happened that Mahler came across several Tang poems, and this has put Li Bai and his devotees in a difficult position. *Das Lied* is Mahler's personal work. It expresses a western sentiment with western text. Fundamentally it has nothing to do with China. If *Das Lied* had not been crowned with the names of 'poet-sages' from China, then it would not have generated problems that confused me. Unfortunately, I am not intelligent enough. It took years for me to understand this: *Das Lied* should be understood as a purely European work, and we should leave behind our complex about China and forget about the heyday of the Han and Tang dynasties. We will then have no trouble understanding *Das Lied*, and everything will be at peace.⁵⁶

Huang's statement is well known in Chinese scholarly communities, but has never been translated into other languages. My English translation may have qualified Huang's snidely sentimental writing and even, to some extent, muffled his voice. His expressions, such as 'zoule yang de' ['distorted'], 'Zhongguo qingjie' ['China complex'], and 'xiangan wushi' ['at peace'], and his demonstratively excessive humility ('I am not intelligent enough'), are cultural-linguistic signs of cultural protectionism. Between the lines, Huang accuses Mahler of cultural appropriation; he proposes sparing the composer if we paper over his alleged Chineseness and understand *Das Lied* 'as a purely European work'.

What added complexity to the reception of *Das Lied* in China is that there exists simultaneously a staunch opposing, redemptive voice. At the end of Huang's article, the editor of the journal incorporated a response from Guo Jianying, the youngest son of Guo Moruo, an eminent Chinese literary scholar and vice premier of the PRC from 1949 to 1954 (succeeded by Li Lanqing much later, in 1993).⁵⁷ In response to Huang's claim that '*Das Lied* should be understood as a purely European work, and we should leave behind our complex about China and forget about the heyday of the Han and Tang dynasties', Guo writes that:

Mahler's intention was not to set music to Li Bai's and others' poems, but to develop their *yijing*. He was composing a mostly western vocal symphony. It was not Mahler's intention to be faithful to the original Tang poems or to introduce oriental culture to a western audience. [...] But problems arise when you claim that Mahler departed from the essence of Tang poetry, revile translations, and attack Mahler's pseudo-Chinese music. I believe it is erroneous to generalize the complex and diverse Chinese cultures with 'the heyday of the Han and Tang dynasties'. Furthermore, if we were to be shackled

⁵⁶ '其实马勒本人亦并非因为多么钟爱东方, 或从中国文化中悟到什么真谛而借此尽抒其志。实在是因为开一代音乐先河、独领风骚的马勒生于世纪之交, 欧洲日新月异之际, 他有必要超越欧洲古典文化的羁绊, 找出一种新的音乐语言、新的表达方式以述其情。正好这时, 有几首唐诗碰到了他的手上, 却难为了李白, 也难为了李白的爱好者们。' '大地之歌' 本来就是一部马勒一个人的作品。叙的是洋情, 唱的亦是洋文, 其情其景其实原本就与中国无涉。如果该作不冠以几个中国诗圣的名字, 本也不会出现曾令笔者困惑的问题。憾之, 笔者本非大器加之更是晚成, 直至很久才悟明这个道理: 即, '大地之歌' 应作为纯粹欧洲的作品去理解, 抛开中国情结, 忘记汉唐盛世, 则该作品一目了然, 大家也相安无事。'; Huang, 'Male de Dadi zhi ge yu Zhongguo Tangshi', p. 29.

⁵⁷ The response was dated 15 July 1996, so it is highly likely that Guo had been given a draft of Huang's article before it was published.

by ‘our complex about China’, then we might start to limit our understanding of Chinese cultures.⁵⁸

Guo then quotes examples of Chinese writers — from the poet Li He in the Tang dynasty to the novelist Cao Xueqin in the Qing dynasty — to demonstrate that ‘Chinese culture’ is more diverse than as caricatured by Huang. Guo contended, in words that can hardly be read today without a grin, that the main goal of Huang’s article was ‘not to assist Chinese audiences in understanding and absorbing *Das Lied*, but to demonize the work as a vacuous, desperate, morbid, dark, and crossbred monster’.⁵⁹

Once we make allowances for the vehement tone of Guo’s denunciation, a notable feature of his attack on Huang is his use of the word *yijing*, a concept critical to the discussion of *Das Lied* in China. In Guo’s view, *yijing* mediates between the translation and the pentatonic representation in *Das Lied*: Mahler’s work, for Guo, is not merely a translation of the Chinese texts themselves, but also a translation of the *yijing* of the Chinese poetry into music. *Yijing*, which arguably originates from Tang Chinese aesthetics and resonates with the cosmological view found in Daoism, has been translated into English in multiple ways: ‘vision’, ‘essence’, ‘imagery’, ‘artistic conception’, ‘idea’, and so forth.⁶⁰ None of these, unfortunately, captures its implication of ‘the transcendence of material and finite objects, phenomena, and events, and penetration into infinite space–time’.⁶¹ The complexity of the philosophical foundation of the concept lies in its affective experience of freedom (*daquan*) untrammelled by physical laws. This affective experience is an intuition (*zhijue*) or mystic realization (*miaowu*) of a freedom with all worldly things, and this intuition or realization eradicates dichotomies of subject and object, self and other, and internal and external.⁶² *Yijing*, in other words, is an immanent (*neizai*) state of mind (*jingjie*) that manifests itself in a transcendent affect of freedom. *Yijing*, now commonly used in Chinese communities, is a mysterious aesthetic quality in art that cannot be pinned down and carried across from one subject to another, but is intuited or felt.⁶³

⁵⁸ ‘马勒本意不在为李白等诗“语曲”，他是取其大意，或意境，加以完全的发挥，在创作一部主要是西洋成份的声乐交响曲。忠实于唐诗原作，或者把东方的文化介绍给西方的音乐听众，这从来就不是马勒要做的事情 [...] 但是你在提出你的观点的同时，在悖离唐诗精髓方面大做文章，咒骂译文，咒骂马勒仿中国风格的音乐，这是出问题的地方。我想，复杂全面的中国文化，是不好以‘汉唐盛世’四字以蔽之的。如果进而再受到‘中国情结’的束缚，那就很可能自己开始局限误解中国文化了。’; *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵⁹ ‘帮助中国听众理解，吸收‘大地之歌’非你本意。你感兴趣的是将之描绘成为一个空洞、绝望、病态、黑暗的杂种怪物。’; *ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁰ See Pauline Yu, *The Reading of Imagery in the Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁶¹ Li Changshu, *Yijing de zhexue jichu: cong Wangbi dao Huineng di meixue kaocha* [*The Philosophic Basis of ‘Yijing’: An Aesthetic Investigation from Wangbi to Huineng*] (Social Sciences Academic Press, 2008), pp. 2–3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶³ On *yijing*, its philosophical underpinnings, and its translatability, see Zhou Hongmin, “‘Yijing neng fou fanyi’ haishi shixue guannian wenti — ye da Chen Daliang boshi” [“Can *Yijing* Be Translated” or Is It a Problem of Poetic Vision — and a Response to Dr Chen Daliang’], *Contemporary Foreign Languages Studies*, 14 (2014), pp. 25–29; Gong Guangming, ‘Yijing fanyilun’ [‘A Theory of *Yijing* Translation’], *Journal of Southern Yangtze University (Humanities & Social Sciences)*, 2 (2003), pp. 69–73, 99; Lai Xianzhong, *Yijing meixue yu quanshi xue* [*Aesthetics of ‘Yijing’ and Hermeneutics*] (National Museum of History, 2003).

Yijing, long regarded as an ‘integral element of Chinese aesthetic consciousness’, has been a widely employed concept in the Chinese discourse on *Das Lied*, coinciding with the systemization of *yijing* studies in China since the 1980s.⁶⁴ For instance, in line with Huang’s position, Yan Baoyu, a specialist in German literature and music, claims that ‘Bethge’s adaptations are mediocre and lack *yijing*; they taste like a glass of water [...]. The seven poems [...] do not reflect the originals’ meaning [*neihan*]; they are “misconstruals” [*wudu*] of the originals.’⁶⁵ Yan argues that Mahler did not embody any Chineseness, but expressed a ‘*fin-de-siècle* sentiment’ — desperation, hopelessness, and decadence — which ‘naturally’ [*ziran de*] resonates with Chinese Tang poetry. In a thesis on *Das Lied*, Pei Chencheng, echoing Yan, writes that:

the aesthetic value of Bethge’s translation is not high. Although Mahler spared no pains to embody a Chinese *yijing*, there exists a gulf between the socio-historical milieu and personal experience that contribute to the Tang poetry, and Mahler’s music. Mahler, after all, did not express the meaning of Chinese poetry.⁶⁶

Yet while Guo attempted to salvage Mahler’s reputation from the bitter attacks by Huang and others, his response to Huang was as much an attack on Huang’s position as it was a critique of *Das Lied*. Isn’t *Das Lied* an attempt to ‘generalize the complex and diverse Chinese cultures’ via its pentatonicism? Can one see, hear, and feel in Mahler’s work the multifarious Chinese cultures diverging from the same *yijing*? If ‘it was not Mahler’s intent to be faithful to the original Tang poems’, then how did he ‘develop their *yijing*’? Even if we forget our ‘complex about China’, how should we understand *Das Lied* if it is ‘pseudo-Chinese music’? In Guo’s view, Huang, as a Chinese person, is expected to acknowledge cultural diversities within the plural ‘Chinese cultures’, while Mahler, as a westerner, can be absolved of guilt in the name of ‘lack of research’ and ‘cultural differences’.⁶⁷

Let us pause here. A word is spoken in the original poem, is misunderstood by translators, is blurred again by the translation from French to German, and is misheard by Mahler, who adds to it sounds that refer back to some Chinese sounds or musics that he, too, only hears in mis-spoken forms. What seems to hold a fascination for writers in

⁶⁴ Xia Zhaoyan, *Yijing gaishuo: Zhongguo wenyi meixue fanchou yanjiu* [On ‘Yijing’: A Study of Chinese Literary Aesthetics] (Beijing: Guangbo xueyuan chubanshe, 2003), p. 4. For a historical overview of *yijing* studies, see Xiao Ying, ‘Yi yu jinghun: Yijing lun de bainian yanbian yu fansi’ [‘Yi and Jinghun: A Hundred Years of Evolution and Reflection on the Theory of Yijing’], *Wenhuiyanjiu*, 11 (2015), pp. 5–17.

⁶⁵ ‘贝特格译诗的德文文字平庸，缺乏意境，品味起来像一杯白开水。[...] 所以这七首名义上是翻译的中国唐诗，实际上它们没有反映出原诗的内涵甚至还有“误读”。’; Yan Baoyu, ‘Shi “shijimo qingxu” haishi Tangshi yijing? Tan Male “Dadi zhi ge” de yinyue neihan’ [“Fin de Siècle Sentiment” or Yijing of Tang Poetry? On the Musical Meaning of Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde*], *Yinyue yanjiu*, 2 (2000), pp. 17–23 (p. 20); see also Yan, ‘Male “Dadi zhi ge” dewen geci hanyi yiji yu yuan Tangshi de bijiao’, pp. 19–27.

⁶⁶ ‘贝特格的这本唐诗译本的艺术价值并不高，马勒在这部作品中虽然极力表现中国风的意境，但是由于社会背景、历史渊源、个人经历的极大区别，马勒始终也没有表现出中国古典诗词的内涵。’; Pei Chencheng, ‘Shengyue jiaoxiangqu “Dadi zhi ge” zhi tanjiu’ [A Study of *Das Lied von der Erde*] (unpublished master’s dissertation, Shaanxi Normal University, 2010), p. 39.

⁶⁷ Huang, ‘Male de Dadi zhi ge yu Zhongguo Tangshi’, p. 32.

China throughout this game of almost-literal Chinese whispers is the concept of *yijing*.⁶⁸ But why is *yijing* the organizing principle, if not the analytical goal? Why has the reliance on *yijing* not been questioned by any writers? While Huang provided no explanation whatsoever as to why he could not hear correlations between the *yijing* expressed by the music and the text in ‘Der Abschied’, Guo left the reader equally confused when he claimed that Mahler *merely* developed the *yijing* of the poetry in his music, without referring to any musical examples. While I concur with Guo that Huang made sweeping generalizations about Chinese cultures as if they were a monolithic entity, the two were in fact talking past each other.

But they probably wished to talk past each other. For what constitutes the *yijing* of the music and the poetry in *Das Lied* and what the *yijing* should sound like are, according to the Daoist philosophical foundation of the concept, symbolic sounds. Understood in relation to the Daoist concept of the Way (*dao*) from which everything is generated and to which everything returns, *yijing* cannot be apprehended by one’s hearing. It is, as philosopher Park So Jeong has put it, a ‘symbolic tone generated from within’.⁶⁹ *Yijing*, construed as such, is musically indeterminate. In this sense, both the coupling and the de-coupling of Mahler’s knowledge of Chinese music, or even his inherent Chinese sensibility and his ability to translate *yijing* into music, become purely authoritative assertions. *Yijing*’s musical indeterminacy is a convenient epistemic property that sustains fantastical claims about musical listening made in the interests of a distinct scholarly, personal, and political agenda. In the academic ‘telephone game’, *yijing*’s transformative magic can overcome any signal loss, but at the same time, it leads the argument to a dead end.

Translating *Yijing*

While *yijing* has had broad applications in discourses beyond *Das Lied*, it generated particular problems for Zheng as an artist, who took the lead in re-translating Mahler’s piece into Chinese. In an interview with the *Beijing Morning Post* of 25 July 2017, Zheng stated that one of the challenges of re-translating *Das Lied* was to ‘retrieve’ (*zhaohui*) the literary bond between Mahler’s *yijing* and the Tang poetry.⁷⁰ In my score-study sessions with her, Zheng expressed without prevarication that she was translating the *yijing* of Mahler’s music and the Tang poetry into one that, she hoped, would resonate more meaningfully with the public.⁷¹ In this section, I take an insider’s peek at Zheng’s sources and translational processes to create a substantive synthesis of her project and the layered cultural, political, and philosophical contexts in which her work

⁶⁸ The phrase ‘Chinese whispers’ carries sinophobic undertones rooted in an association between the Chinese language and incomprehensibility. The game is known as the ‘telephone game’ in the US.

⁶⁹ ‘從內裡傳出來的作為意象之音’. Park So Jeong, ‘Laozi “yīnshēngxiānghé” he “dayīnxishēng” bianxi’ [‘Yīnshēngxiānghé and Dayīnxishēng in the Laozi’], *International Chinese Studies in Korea*, 11 (2009), pp. 233–52 (p. 247).

⁷⁰ Li Cheng, ‘88 sui Zheng Xiaoying “zhongweiyangyong” hua Male’ [‘Eighty-Eight-Year-Old Zheng Xiaoying Discusses “Zhongweiyangyong” and Mahler’], *Beijing Morning Post*, 26 July 2017 <<http://www.chinawriter.com.cn/n1/2017/0725/c404005-29426481.html>> [accessed 20 April 2023].

⁷¹ Personal communication with Zheng, 23 January 2024.

was immersed. We will see how Zheng's re-translations, echoing the neo-nationalistic ethos, were essentially concerned with establishing epistemic differences, where *yijing* served as an exclusive paradigm and contributed to building a nationwide capacity to refute western aesthetic frameworks. Before we get ahead of ourselves, an understanding of Zheng's re-translations of *Das Lied* necessitates some knowledge firstly of her involvement in translating western musical works, especially operas, into Chinese, which directly inspired her *Lied* undertaking, and secondly of her sources, or, as I see it, excavated archives for the project.

According to Zheng, *yangxizhongchang* (Western Operas, Chinese Singing) dates back to the Chinese premiere of Verdi's *La traviata* on 24 December 1956, under the baton of Li Guoquan at the Tianqiao Theatre in Beijing by the Zhongyang shiyan geju yuan (China National Experimental Opera, the predecessor to today's China National Opera).⁷² Directed by Gu Fung, the opera was translated, with the title *Chahuanu*, by Miao Lin and Liu Shirong, who consulted the Russian and English translations of the original Italian and collaborated on setting their translation to music.⁷³ In a brief note dated 18 January 1957 in *Renmin yinyue*, a flagship musicological journal in China, Liu, going against the grain of the contemporaneous global ideological conflict, explained that *Chahuanu* had two purposes: on the one hand, it aimed to emulate European classical operas, and on the other, it served as a showcase of the artistic standards and training implemented by Valeria Dementieva, a soprano from the Soviet Union who had been sent to China to be the artistic director of the production.⁷⁴ In an

⁷² On 11 February 1907, a Chinese student organization in Tokyo, 'Chunliu she' ['Spring Willow Society'], performed *La traviata* as a stage play in Mandarin at a fundraising event. For a historical examination of the performance, see Zhong Xinzhi and Cai Zhuqing, 'Bainian huigu: Chunliu she "Chahuanu" xinkao' ['A Centennial Retrospective: Revisiting Spring Willow Society's "The Lady of the Camellias"'], *Taipei Theatre Journal*, 8 (2008), pp. 257–81. For a broader history of early stage plays in China and Japan, see Huang Aihua, *Zhongguo zaoqi huaju yu riben* [Early Chinese Stage Plays and Japan] (Yuelu shu she, 2001). On a recent performance of *Chahuanu* at the Zheng Xiaoying Opera Centre and a discussion of *yangxizhongchang*, see Kong Lingwei, "'Chahuanu" yangxizhongchang Rongcheng zaiyan: Yunshang zhibo xian reyì' ['Chinese-Language *La Traviata* Presented in Fuzhou, Followed by Online Discussion'], *Geju*, 11 (2022), pp. 64–71.

⁷³ The translation of the title, *Chahuanu*, was derived from Lin Shu (under the pseudonym Leng Hongsheng) and Wang Shouchang's 1899 translation (entitled *Bali chahuanu yishi*) of Alexandre Dumas fils's novel *La Dame aux camélias* (1848). For a discussion of the date and versions of Lin and Wang's translation, see Ceng Xianhui, 'Lin yi "Bali chahuanu yishi kao"' ['A Study of Lin's Translation of *The Lady of the Camellias in Paris*'], *Fujian shifan daxue xuebao (zhixue shehui kexue ban)*, 3 (1991), pp. 78–84; A. Ying, 'Guanyu "Bali chahuanu yishi"' ['On "The Lady of the Camellias"'], *Shijie wenxue*, 10 (1961), pp. 112–16. As Zheng recalled, the Chinese translation was not without errors. For instance, in Act II, Scene 1, Giorgio Germont (Alfredo's father) approaches Violetta and asks her to end her relationship with Alfredo for the sake of his family. Violetta says, 'I'm a lady, sir, and this is my house. Please excuse me if I leave you, more for your sake than mine.' The Chinese translation nevertheless read: 'Please leave.' Personal communication with Zheng, 23 January 2024.

⁷⁴ Liu Shirong, 'Zhongyang shiyan geju yuan shangyan "Chahuanu"' ['Central National Experimental Opera House Stages "The Lady of the Camellias"'], *Renmin yinyue*, 1 (1957), p. 37. The first expert from the Soviet Union who visited China (to help train the choir at the Central Conservatory of Music in preparation for their participation in the Fifth World Youth Festival in Warsaw) was Lenny Dumashev in 1955; Zheng studied conducting at the Central Conservatory of Music with him; see Sun Zhaorun, 'Sulian zhuanjia Jiming Caiwa shengyue jiaoxue fangfalun jian shenfen kao' ['A Study on the Vocal Pedagogy and Identity of Soviet Expert Valeria Dementieva'], *Geju*, 9 (2022), pp. 58–69.

interview with the *Beijing Daily* of 16 July 2019, Li Guangxi, who played the character of Amang (Alfredo Germont) in the 1956 production, fondly reminisced that after the premiere, the entire artistic community was elated:

At that time, we all said that opera was the ‘heavy industry’ of theatre, and it was unimaginable to stage grand western operas. [...] There were many Chinese operas, but only one western opera, and when workers from the art industry in various places heard about it, they all came! It took four days to travel from Guangzhou to Beijing, and a week from Xinjiang to Beijing. [...] Our art is meant to serve the workers, peasants, soldiers, and ordinary people. If we sang in Italian at that time, the ordinary people would not understand what we were singing about.⁷⁵

As the first western opera introduced into China, *Chahuanu* enjoyed phenomenal success until the Cultural Revolution. After a decade of cultural tumult, Zheng then carried the spirit of *Chahuanu* forwards in her translating of western operas into Chinese. In 1978, she was appointed chief conductor of the CNO and resumed rehearsals for a production of *Chahuanu*. Then, in 1979, she was notified that as part of a Franco-Chinese cultural exchange agreement, experts from France would be sent to the CNO to coach the rehearsals for the Chinese rendition of Georges Bizet’s *Carmen*.⁷⁶ In the following year, Zheng collaborated with the translator Sun Huishuang in translating Bizet’s opera and setting it to music.⁷⁷ Their efforts were further bolstered in 1981 when they joined forces with French director René Terrasson, conductor Jean Périson, soprano Jacqueline Brumaire, and a team of seven or eight French experts specializing in costume design, choreography, and lighting. The Chinese translation, Zheng recalled, underwent six good rounds of edits.⁷⁸ The Chinese *Carmen* was premiered at the Tianqiao Theatre in Beijing in 1982.

Not only did the experience of working on *Chahuanu* and the Chinese *Carmen* boost Zheng’s confidence and lay a firm foundation for her translation and text-setting techniques, but they also reinforced her belief in the value of performing western works in Chinese for audiences in China. It was these experiences, Zheng maintained, that prepared her, as someone who did not know German, to take on the formidable task of

⁷⁵ ‘那时候我们都说，歌剧是戏剧中的‘重工业’，要排外国大歌剧更是不能想象。[...] 那时候中国戏多，外国戏就这一个，很多地方上的文艺工作者听说了也都来看！当时从广州到北京得走4天，新疆到北京要一个星期，但他们都来。[...] 我们的文艺要为工农兵、老百姓服务，如果在当时唱意大利文，老百姓也不知道你在唱什么。’; Jiang Zhenyu, ‘Jiuxun Li Guangxi: Wo buxiang likai wutai’ [‘Li Guangxi in his Nineties: I Don’t Want to Leave the Stage’], *Beijing Daily*, 16 July 2019 <<https://www.chinanews.com.cn/yl/2019/07-16/8895968.shtml>> [accessed 12 December 2023].

⁷⁶ Zheng Xiaoying, ‘Zheng Xiaoying: Kamen yu wo’ [‘Zheng Xiaoying: *Carmen* and I’], *Yingyue zhiyin*, 27 January 2024 <<https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/OmjDkcMXUIpsj0-EGifXNQ>> [accessed 12 February 2024].

⁷⁷ As Zheng recalled: ‘During the summer of 1955, Sun participated in a conducting class that I organized for high-school students. Later, while studying French at a foreign language institute, he even organized a student choir. By this time, he was a teacher at the Beijing Language Institute. He was a rare talent in French translation and had a great passion for music. So I recommended Sun to the China National Opera to undertake the translation work for *Carmen*’; *ibid.* On the techniques and processes of translating *Carmen*, see Sun, *Geju fanyi yu yanjiu*, pp. 1–71.

⁷⁸ Zheng, ‘Zheng Xiaoying: Kamen yu wo’.

re-translating *Das Lied* and setting it to music. However, Zheng was not the first person in China to do so: Zhang Yi, from the translation-cum-text-setting department of the CNO, provided a Chinese translation and text-setting, based on an English translation of the original German, for a Chinese premiere on 4 July 1985 conducted by the Australian conductor and violinist Leonard Bertram Dommert with the China National Opera Symphony Orchestra (CNOSO), featuring tenor Ma Honghai and alto Wang Huiying.⁷⁹ While preparing rehearsals for this premiere, which was based on Zhang's translation, Zheng began her own re-translation, which she titled *Chenshi zhi ge* (*Song of the Mundane World*).⁸⁰

On 3–4 March 1990, Zheng conducted the work with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, collaborating with tenor Liu Weiwei and alto Liu Shan from the CNO. At that time, although Zheng had obtained musicologist Liao Fushu's Chinese translation of the original German, she could only use a revised version of Zhang's text-setting, because Liao's translation had not been set to music. From 1990 to 2013, Zheng consulted Zhang's text-setting and Liao's translation, and worked with musicologists and performers to refine the translation and set it to Mahler's music, a practice known as *xupei*. On 7 June 2013, she led the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra in a performance of an emended version of *Chenshi*, with tenor Zhu Yidong and alto Yang Guang at the Xiamen Hong Tai Concert Hall; this translation, dated 8 June 2013, was published in the CD booklet of the recording of *Chenshi* released by Dragon's Music, a Hong Kong record label, in 2015.⁸¹ On 18 July 2017, tenor Wang Feng and alto Yang Guang performed with the China National Centre for the Performing Arts Orchestra in Beijing under Zheng's baton, and the end of her meticulously documented performance history of *Chenshi* was marked on her miniature orchestral score.⁸²

Zheng worked with a variety of materials when re-translating *Das Lied*. For her rehearsals in 1985 and the Shanghai concert in March 1990, she relied on a German miniature orchestral score (MS), likely printed in China.⁸³ Zheng employed an enlarged

⁷⁹ The exact year of Zhang's translation and the source of the English translation have yet to be identified. In the same concerts (4–5 July 1985), Dommert also performed solo in He Zhanhao and Chen Gang's *Butterfly Lovers' Violin Concerto* (1959) with the CNOSO. See Zheng Xiaoying, "Zhongweiyangyong" — "Yangweizhongyong" ['Western Cultures, Chinese Use'], booklet of *Zheng Xiao-ying Classics & Introduction to Symphony* (2 CDs) (Dragon's Music, 2015), p. 10.

⁸⁰ In our conversation, Zheng indicated her preference for the translation *Chenshi zhi ge* ['Song of the Mundane World'] over *Dadi zhi ge* ['Song of the Earth']. Yet *Dadi zhi ge* was consistently used as the title for her orchestral scores, piano reduction, and the translations by Zhang Yi and Liao Fushu. The title *Chenshi zhi ge* only appears in Zheng's published translation accompanying her 2015 CD recording of *Chenshi*, released by Dragon's Music.

⁸¹ The two CDs are the only extant complete recording of *Chenshi*.

⁸² Zheng, MS, p. iv; all abbreviations of the sources are explained in the main text. In the same concert, tenor Sun Li performed the Chinese rendition of Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*; Zheng's programme notes, 'Ode to Friends 2017/18', in her private collection. Zheng also noted in MS a performance of *Das Lied* with the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra on 11 March 2005 (with tenor Wang Feng and alto Liang Ning) in the original German. Zheng confessed to me that Liang was not accustomed to performing in Mandarin, and she respected her decision to perform in German. For a less detailed account of the performance history of *Chenshi*, see Zheng, "Zhongweiyangyong" — "Yangweizhongyong", p. 10.

⁸³ Philharmonia miniature score, no. 217, of *Das Lied von der Erde: Symphonie für eine Tenor- und eine Alt- (oder Bariton-)Stimme und Orchester*, Gustav Mahler *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Erwin Ratz

version of MS after March 1990, which I label ES (enlarged orchestral score); this incorporated select translations from MS, but also introduced several new ones.⁸⁴ ES was not entirely identical to Zheng's published translation, dated 8 June 2013, accompanying her CD (which I label TCD), although she claimed that she had used it for the concert held a day before. A piano reduction (PR) was also used for rehearsals for the same concert, but discrepancies between PR and ES abound.⁸⁵

As far as Zheng's re-translations are concerned, Zhang Yi's Chinese translation and text-setting from an unknown English source (ZY) and Liao Fushu's Chinese translation from the original German (LFS), on which TCD was based, were two major sources of reference.⁸⁶ Two additional documents Zheng possessed include her undated study notes on ZY (SNZY) and her revision of ZY and LFS on another hard copy of ZY (R-ZYLFS), dated February 2013. SNZY contained her analyses of poetic form, musical commentary in broad strokes, notes on bar numbers and pentatonic occurrences, and paragraph-long exegeses of the music's poetic meaning. The latter was a revision of the translations.⁸⁷ That said, certain revisions made their way into ES and TCD.⁸⁸ Materials in R-ZYLFS, accordingly, were selectively adapted into ES and

(Universal Edition, 1962), ix. Zheng took note of the Shanghai concert in MS, p. 3. The score was likely printed in China, as indicated by the Chinese description on the last page of the score: '内部交流 A9/128/大地之歌 (德9-4/A128)/A' ['internal communication A9/128/Song of the Earth (German 9-4/A128/A)']. The publishing company and the year of publication of this presumed Chinese edition of the German score are unknown.

⁸⁴ For instance, in bars 28–32 in MS, there are three translations; each Chinese character matches a German syllable (syllable-matching was one of Zheng's principles of translation and text-setting in *Chenshi*). In the corresponding location in ES, however, only the first translation from MS, which underlies the German text, is retained.

⁸⁵ The piano reduction is *Das Lied von der Erde: Eine Symphonie für eine Tenor- und eine Alt- (oder Bariton-)Stimme und Orchester (nach Hans Bethges 'Die chinesische Flöte' von Gustav Mahler). Klavierauszug mit Text nach der Partitur, bearbeitet von Jos. V. v. Wöss* (Universal Edition, 1911). Bars 392–93 of the finale is an example of one of the discrepancies: while 'seine Stimme war umflort' ['his voice was veiled'] was translated as 'shifen tongku de huida 十分痛苦地回答' ['answered in agony'] in PR (p. 88), it was translated as 'shifen tongku de ta huida 十分痛苦的他回答' ['he answered in agony'] in ES (p. 129). In the former, Zheng broke the syllabic structure by tying the third and fourth Fs, aligning them with the monosyllabic 'tong 痛' ['pain'] rather than the disyllabic 'Stimme' ['voice']; in the latter, each Chinese character aligns with one German syllable. TCD (and accordingly, the performance) adheres to the former.

⁸⁶ LFS, in the form of a handwritten manuscript, was passed on to Zheng in 1990 by Liao's family following his passing.

⁸⁷ It may appear that R-ZYLFS was a medium for Zheng to ruminate on certain sentences in some detail, considering that the document was dated February 2013, and multiple line-by-line translations had already been attempted in MS and ES. For instance, in the penultimate line of the fifth movement, 'Chunzui 春醉' ['Drunkenness of Spring'], Zheng added 'you 又' ['again'] in R-ZYLFS between 'Chuntian 春天' ['spring'] and 'yu 与' ['and'], although this revision could not be found in MS, ES, PR, or TCD.

⁸⁸ An example can be found in the finale, 'Gaobie 告别' ['Farewell'], where the original lines in the third stanza in ZY read: 'Bei yiwang de xingfu he tongnian | gudu de maotouying qixi zai shu shang 被遗忘的幸福和童年/孤独的猫头鹰栖息在树上' ['Forgotten happiness and childhood | the solitary owl perches in the tree'], which was adapted verbatim in MS. In R-ZYLFS, 'tongnian 童年' ['childhood'] was crossed out and changed to 'qingchun 青春' ['youth'], and the second line was revised as 'na gudu de xiaoniao qixi zai shushao 那孤独的小鸟栖息在树梢' ['That solitary little bird perches on the treetop']. This revision appeared in both ES and TCD.

TABLE 1(A)
ZHENG'S WORKING SCORES FOR *CHENSHI*

Date	Source title	Abbreviation
c. July 1985–March 1990	Miniature orchestral score	MS
c. March 1990–July 2017	Enlarged orchestral score	ES
February–June 2013	Piano reduction	PR

TABLE 1(B)
ZHENG'S WORKING TRANSLATIONS FOR *CHENSHI*

Date	Source title	Abbreviation
c. 1985	Zhang Yi's Chinese translation and text-setting from an unknown English source (2 pages; double-sided)	ZY
1990	Liao Fushu's Chinese translation from the original German (11 pages; single-sided)	LFS
February 2013	Zheng's revision of Zhang's and Liao's translations on ZY (2 pages; double sided)	R-ZYLFS
Completed 8 June 2013; published 2015	Zheng's published translation in a CD booklet (4 pages)	TCD
Undated	Zheng's study notes on ZY (2 pages in a folio)	SNZY

TCD, and some of them represented Zheng's personal thoughts that were not found in other practical uses in rehearsals and performances. Table 1(a) and (b) summarizes the scores and translations with which Zheng worked for the various performances of *Chenshi*.

The discursive thickness of Zheng's sources invites a reading and hearing of her archives — stored in the cabinets directly behind her work desk — not only as history, but also, to use Ann Laura Stoler's words, as 'active, generative substances *with* histories'.⁸⁹ The archives' generativity is amplified by the difficulty in generalizing their characteristics and Zheng's non-commitment to the papers. At many instances during our conversation, she unsettled the archival conceit by expressing her openness to potential changes, recounting on-the-spot adaptations during rehearsals and performances, regretting misremembrances, and performing such unwritten phenomena as voices and modes of listening. The following observations therefore flutter between the archival grain and my sense of its post-/decolonial pulse, the ethnographic history, and the broader cultural, historical, and epistemic agencies at play.⁹⁰ In particular,

⁸⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Thinking through Colonial Ontologies* (Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 1. Italics mine.

⁹⁰ On music, archives, and (post)colonialism, see Philip Burnett, Erin Johnson-Williams, and Yvonne Liao, 'Introduction: Music, Empire, Colonialism: Sounding the Archives', *Postcolonial Studies*, 26 (2023), pp. 345–59, doi:10.1080/13688790.2023.2243070.

I will examine how *yijing* served as an aesthetic and epistemic framework for Zheng's re-translations, and more broadly, what the rhetorical modes and layered temporalities of these lived sources can tell us about the cultural operations of translation, musical knowledge and knowledge-making, and musicking experiences in China.⁹¹

Before we look at an example, namely Zheng's re-translation and text-setting of the refrain 'Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod' in 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde', we will first consider Mahler's orchestration of the first appearance of this refrain, as shown in [Example 2](#). Mahler's decision to put a slur over the G to D in the first refrain (bars 81–86) was probably informed both by the syllabic articulation and by the syntactic construction (the third refrain, in bars 385–93, was not slurred): he assigned a pitch to each syllable and slurred the main clause, 'Dunkel ist das Leben'. The elliptical clause 'ist der Tod' is not slurred and is marked 'rit'. Naturally, the second 'ist' is metrically accented when it is performed as the beginning of a new phrase; it is also given more weight as the music slows down, and has a different colour, harmonized against a dominant-seventh chord in G minor (with a $b6-5$ suspension). Mahler also assigned the same Bb to the 'ist' in both clauses to mark the parallelism. The slur thus functions as a musical inflection of the linguistic comma, coordinated with the orchestration. The horn player, for example, will breathe together with the tenor after 'Leben'.

Shao Yan, a musicologist and Zheng's former colleague at her Opera Centre, documented a discussion of this refrain between Zheng, alto Yang Guang, and tenor Zhu Yidong during rehearsals in May 2013, a month before the June concert in Xiamen.⁹² The re-translation and its emendation are reproduced in [Example 3](#). At first glance, they are similar to Mahler's original: each character is assigned a pitch, and the slurring remains unchanged. However, the comma placement in the re-translation and the emendation brings about a tension between the linguistic syntax and the musical-phrasal articulation. While Mahler's original slur is retained, the linguistic syntax is modified. The comma is important here. Unlike the comma in German, the Chinese comma functions to demarcate both clauses and sentences, control logical flow, and signal a breathing space. In written Chinese, the comma can be repeated almost indefinitely until an idea, however defined, is completely expressed. In both the re-translation and the emendation, the comma is placed after four characters, after the G. What comes before the comma is a sentence in the re-translation, and a clause in

⁹¹ On the relationship between the structure of archives and the production of knowledge, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Nicholas Mathew, 'Interesting Haydn: On Attention's Materials', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 71 (2018), pp. 655–701, doi:10.1525/jams.2018.71.3.655.

⁹² Shao, 'Jingyiqiujing yiwuzhijing', p. 92. SNZY contains a paragraph-long commentary on this movement, where Zheng mistakenly believed that this refrain was Mahler's own addition. While this refrain did not appear in d'Hervy de Saint Denys's 'La chanson di chagrin' in *Poésies de l'époque des Thang* (pp. 70–71) or Heilmann's 'Das Lied vom Kummer' in *Chinesische Lyrik* (pp. 54–55), it did appear in Bethge's 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde' in *Die chinesische Flöte* (pp. 21–22), but with four instead of three refrains.

Example 2. Mahler, 'Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod', in 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde', *Das Lied von der Erde*, bars 81–90.

81



8

Mandarin romanization:

1. 人 生 如 梦 , 转 眼 就 死 亡 。
ren - sheng ru meng zhuan - yan jiu si - wang

Mandarin romanization:

2. 黑 暗 伴 随 , 人 生 和 死 亡 。
hei - an ban - sui ren - sheng he si - wang

German text:

Dun - kel ist das Le - ben, ist der Tod.

Example 3. Zheng’s (1) Chinese re-translation and (2) emendation of the re-translation of Mahler’s ‘Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod’ in ‘Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde’ (bars 81–89) in May 2013.

TABLE 2
LAYERS OF TRANSLATIONS OF LI BAI’S ‘BEIGE XING’ (‘SONG OF SORROW’)¹

Li Bai’s ‘Beige xing’ (‘Song of Sorrow’)	悲來乎，悲來乎。(bei lai hu, bei lai hu)	How sorrowful, how sorrowful.
Mahler’s <i>Das Lied</i>	Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod.	Dark is life, is death.
Zheng’s re-translation	人生如梦，转眼就死亡。(rensheng ru meng, zhuanyan jiu siwang)	Life is like a dream; one dies in a twinkling of an eye.
Emendation of the re-translation	黑暗伴随，人生和死亡。(heian bansui, rensheng he siwang)	Darkness goes along with life and death.


¹ According to Shao Yan’s discussion of the rehearsals in May 2013; ‘Jingyiqujing yiwuzhijing’, pp. 90–93.

the emendation during the rehearsal; the former reads ‘rensheng ru meng 人生如梦’ [‘life is like a dream’], and the latter ‘heian bansui 黑暗伴随’ [‘darkness goes along’]. The linguistic pause thus rubs against the musical slur, creating some doubt as to where the performer should breathe. Yet these re-translations provide a music-theoretical re-interpretation of this phrase. According to these re-translations, the first four bars — a descending arpeggio of a G-minor triad — align with the first sentence or clause of the respective translations. There thus exists a superposition of music–text relations: the arpeggio corresponds to the first clause, while the slur creates a musical phrase that spans the first six notes.

Not only do the re-translation and the emendation re-fashion Mahler’s phraseology, but they also alter the textual meaning in *Das Lied*. As shown in Table 2, while Mahler’s text reads ‘Dark is life, is death’, the re-translation is ‘Life is like a dream; one dies in a twinkling of an eye’.⁹³ One might wonder whether the re-translation is inspired by the original poetry; in Li Bai’s ‘Beige xing’ [‘Song of Sorrow’], ‘How sorrowful, how sorrowful’ is far from Mahler’s translation and the re-translation. The emendation might be a corrective to the re-translation. The topics of darkness, life, and death return, but rather than *being* life and death as written in Mahler’s text, in the emendation darkness

⁹³ In Tan Dun’s opera *Marco Polo* (1995), Mahler appears as a female character and sings the beginning of ‘Der Trunkene im Frühling’ (the fifth movement of *Das Lied*) in a Chinese re-translation. The first line of this re-translation, incidentally, is identical to the first part of this translation of the refrain in the first movement (‘rensheng ru meng’). See Christian Utz, *Neue Musik und Interkulturalität: Von John Cage bis Tan Dun* (Steiner, 2002), p. 465.

81



Mandarin romanization: sheng - ming yi pian hei - an si - wang yi - yang

English translation: Life is a field of dark - ness, like death.

German text: Dun - kel ist das Le - ben, ist der Tod.

Example 4. Zheng's re-translation of Mahler's 'Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod' in 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde' (bars 81–89) in ES, PR, and TCD. Transcription of Zheng's recording with the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra (Dragon's Music, 2015), beginning at 1:35.

goes along with life and death. Shao reported an anecdote behind the process of re-translation and emendation: after Yang claimed that a direct translation from German into Chinese 'cannot be sung with aesthetic feeling', Zheng re-translated the original into 'Life is like a dream; one dies in a twinkling of an eye'.⁹⁴ The emendation was then made on the spot according to the music's direction and tenor Wang Feng's vocal habits.

Zheng settled on the following translation, recorded in ES and possibly informed by LFS, for the June 2013 concert: 'shengming yipian heian, siwang yiyang 生命一片黑暗,死亡一样' ['Life is a field of darkness, like death'], as reproduced in [Example 4](#). The decision marks an abrupt but significant change. Unlike the drafts prepared a month prior to the concert, the adopted re-translation closely aligns with Mahler's original in terms of its textual meaning and features a six-plus-four phrasal structure. This new version, though in line with Mahler's slur in the first two refrains, modifies the penultimate dotted minim, adding an extra quaver to accommodate the last two characters. Not only does this version introduce a musical intervention into Mahler's composition through the added musical note, but it also contradicts Zheng's own music analysis. As evidenced by her orchestral markings in both MS and ES, she believed that the refrain exhibits a four-plus-four-plus-one structure, indicated by red vertical lines delineating the subphrases in all the refrains (which also explains why the first clause in [Example 3](#) comprises four characters).⁹⁵

The re-translation that was ultimately adopted departed in three main respects from the material Zheng was working with: from Mahler's music, her own phrasal segmentation, and the original Tang poetry.⁹⁶ In retrospect, the alterations made in May 2013 were experimental. For it was through the process of trial and error, listening, performing, and feeling the language (as Yang articulated) that a collectively intuited *yijing* within the creative team, despite the difficulty of pinning it down or outlining a definitive contour, could potentially be staged as part of a resonant design for Chinese

⁹⁴ Shao, 'Jingyiqiujing yiwuzhijing', p. 92.

⁹⁵ Personal communication with Zheng, 24 January 2024; Zheng, MS and ES, both pp. 12–13, 22, and 37–38.

⁹⁶ Zheng acknowledged, however, that the Tang poetry played a critical role in her re-translations, and she went so far as to hand-copy the original poetry in full on the first two pages of MS and ES, and included them in TCD.

audiences.⁹⁷ As a collective subjectivity, *yijing* took precedence over everything else as a guiding aesthetic framework to justify any quirks in the re-translation process and every change of decision. All other considerations — translational accuracy, phrasing, and so on — while crucial, were a concerted means to an end. Providing *Chenshi* with an interpretive paradigm, *yijing* could thus effectively iron out the ostensible contradictions, inconsistencies, and disharmonies between Mahler's music and text, the original Tang poetry, and Zheng's re-translations, and could grant the creators an epistemic immunity from potential critiques. In this way, *yijing* promotes solidarity by enacting a mechanism of control, in that any potential dissidents would be denied entry into the epistemic sovereignty.

To consider further how Zheng's approach to re-translation realized her vision of retrieving the literary bond between Mahler's *yijing* and the Tang poetry, we may take a closer look at ZY and LFS, both of which Zheng used to inform her re-translations. ZY, it will be remembered, is a translation of an unknown English source, while LFS directly translates Mahler's original German into Chinese. Generally speaking, Zheng leaned towards the liberal ZY rather than the literal LFS as the foundation of her work (Example 4 being an exception). For instance, in the finale, Mahler's 'Ich wandle auf und nieder mit meiner Laute' ['I wander up and down with my lute'] is more or less literally translated into Chinese in LFS. ZY, on the other hand, paints a vividly different, richly textured, picture. It specifies that 'I' is 'sorrow', Sinicizes Mahler's characteristic use of mandolin that precedes the text by detailing that 'I' embraces a *pipa* (a generic Chinese lute), and expands the entire imaginary space into infinity by placing 'I' in 'everywhere' [*dao chu*]. Rather than limn a to-and-fro movement, ZY evokes a quixotic yearning for someone by enacting a dynamic and coherently Chinese soundscape mapped onto a surreal spatiality through speech and instrument. In re-constructing the scene [*jing*] and re-curating the affective experience [*yi*] on stage, Zheng attempted to liberate the conditions under which *yijing* can be intuited or felt despite the impossibility of dictating what it is. Indeed, as the Chinese philosopher and aesthetician Zong Baihua has theorized, *yijing* is the transcendence of 'a projected crystallization of affect and scene' ['qing yu jing de jiejingpin'] from one's heart and mind.⁹⁸ Zheng, in re-creating the *jing* and *yi* on stage for her audiences, removed those in Mahler and provided a new basis — in a way, a new *art* — for potentialities of transcendence and crystallization to take place in their hearts and minds. In embracing ZY and discarding LFS in this and many other instances, Zheng saw a shared vision between herself and ZY in reshaping the order for the ineffable as a mode of translation.

A good example of this process of removal and re-enactment is shown in the first movement. 'Dein Keller birgt die Fülle des goldenen Weins!' ['Your cellar contains the abundance of golden wine'] was first translated literally in MS (informed by LFS), but

⁹⁷ Shao, 'Jingyiqiujiang yiwuzhijing', pp. 92–93.

⁹⁸ Zong Baihua, 'Zhongguo yishu yijing zhi dansheng (zengding gao)' ['The Birth of *Yijing* in Chinese Art'], in *Zong Baihua quanji*, 4 vols (Anhui Education Publishing House, 1994), II, pp. 356–74 (p. 358).

was then translated in ES as 'zai ni de xuejiao li na jinhuang de meijiu ru haiyang 在你的血窖里那金黄的美酒如海洋' ['in the cellar of your bloodstream, that golden wine is like an ocean']. ZY's translation was radical: 'zai ni de xueguan li jinhuang de qiongliang zai liutang 在你的血管里金黄的琼浆在流淌' ['the golden nectar flows within your blood vessels']. ZY was eventually selected, published, and performed. Zheng gave a surprisingly simple response to my naive consternation at so drastic a departure from the original: the re-translation, she said, was more 'dynamic' [*shengdong*], and the audiences could therefore comprehend the *yijing* better. A direct correlation between the characteristic of the scene and *yijing* was made, but the conversation moved elsewhere as we shared a knowing grin, as if touching on a sore point. Hanging in the air was a tacit agreement not to undermine the indeterminacy of *yijing* but to celebrate the remoulding of the entire sensorium — the scent, the sound, the affect, the visuals — that the re-translation enabled as a new foundation for cultural solidarity in the decolonial pursuit of retrieval.⁹⁹

With its overarching aesthetic and epistemic framework of *yijing*, Zheng emphasized that *Chenshi* embodies a specific mode of interculturality, reversing the historical dynamics of *zhongweiyangyong* (Chinese Cultures, Western Use) to *yangweizhongyong* (Western Cultures, Chinese Use), the latter being a widely chanted slogan in 1950s Maoist propaganda.¹⁰⁰ The Chinese verb *yong*, meaning to use, carries the historical connotation of governance.¹⁰¹ To use Homi K. Bhabha's idea, in disrupting the language and music in *Das Lied* and providing it with a new interpretive paradigm, the 'denied knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority — its rules of recognition'.¹⁰² Zheng's self-alleged re-translation of *yijing* — her attempts to mark it as an interpretive sovereignty, circulate it as a design, generate new potentialities of affect through removing the old and setting up the new, and expand the audiences' sensory experiences — registered precisely such novel terms of recognition. Amid the archives' discursiveness, the post-/decolonial pulse which I sensed is therefore concerned not only with the lack of faithfulness to Mahler's text and music and to the original poetry per se, but also with the political potential of the legitimization and installation of an exclusive epistemic space that energized and authorized the re-translations and interpretations. *Chenshi*, in this way, emerged as a re-conquered epistemic protectorate.

⁹⁹ For the justification procedures of translations, not least regarding target texts that deviate significantly from the literal meaning of source texts, see for example Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies — and Beyond*, rev. edn (John Benjamins, 2012), pp. 31–34.

¹⁰⁰ See Utz, *Neue Musik und Interkulturalität*, p. 214. For a critical discussion of Mao's idea of *yangweizhongyong* in historical contexts, see Zhu Jidong, 'Mao Zedong jianchi "guweijinyong" "yangweizhongyong" de jiben sixiang ji qi shidai yiyi' ['Mao Zedong's Fundamental Ideas of "guweijinyong" and "yangweizhongyong" and their Epochal Significance'], *Mao Zedong Thought Study*, 37 (2020), pp. 15–23.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, 'Enriching the State' by Xunzi, a Chinese philosopher in the Warring States period: 'As for the way that a person of *ren* governs (*yong*) the state, he will cultivate his intentions and thoughts, correct his person and conduct, achieve an exalted and lofty character, make himself loyal and trustworthy, and align himself with good form and proper order.' Translation modified from Xunzi, *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, trans. by Eric L. Hutton (Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 96.

¹⁰² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994), p. 114.

Emily Apter describes this epistemic territory as a performative sovereignty of translation, a musical-linguistic agitation that marks epistemic borders in ‘translation zones’.¹⁰³ This agitation, Richa Nagar elaborates, ‘narrates people, stories, events, and dreams through collectively owned journeys not in a hope to reach perfection, but in a hope to disorder the dominant languages and paradigms through which we often encounter knowledges and knowledge makers’.¹⁰⁴ The ‘we’ that Nagar pens here is of course situational; in our case, the re-translations of German into Chinese signal an imaginary space of sinophone solidarity rooted in China. This hunger for translation, Nagar notes, arises from an unjust linguistic-epistemic landscape of exclusion, which paradoxically aspires to connect, in the form of control, those who suffer within it. Zheng articulated the reversal of this paradox through her re-translations: ‘We [the Chinese people] must shed the hubris and pretence of understanding *Das Lied* [...] and reunite through a Chinese understanding of it.’¹⁰⁵ For Zheng, re-translating *Das Lied* was an enterprise that aimed to de-naturalize a long-standing western-driven paradigm of solidarity in China deriving from an uncritical reverence of and a feigned fascination for western musical works. Audiences and critics in China, Zheng elaborated, enjoyed *Das Lied* not despite but *because of* their unfamiliarity with it, because at that time enthusiastic admiration of western culture put them on the right side of history, as signifying their commitment to Chinese modernization. Her project re-invigorated the aspiration of the New Left in the 1990s by capitalizing on translation as a tool of gathering, community-building, and cohering/co-hearing. Echoing Maoist ideology, Zheng, a party member herself, also acknowledged that her effort was in line with the party’s strategies of cultural reform and the values of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the previous decade, where three principles of ‘staying close’ were upheld: staying close to practicality, to life, and to the people.¹⁰⁶ It is through re-translating western works into Chinese that the people can displace the western ideologies they have adopted — and, as Zheng underlined, their own resulting hubris — to appreciate these works from a China-centred perspective. More crucially, her project sought to build a nationwide cultural, political, and epistemic capacity to refuse and refute values, ideas, frameworks, and institutions imposed from outside, and to enact a resonating order within China that enables the potential shaping of a domestic and global politics of control and authority in music and knowledge-making. Rather than animate cultural crossings, re-translations as such serve to construct and defend nationhood, identities, and borders.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Richa Nagar, *Hungry Translations: Relearning the World through Radical Vulnerability* (University of Illinois Press, 2019), p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Personal communication with Zheng, 24 January 2024.

¹⁰⁶ Zheng, ‘Daishang wo xinai de geju’, p. 44; ‘Exegesis: Why It Is Necessary to Take the Three Approaches as an Important Policy for Cultural Reform and Development’, The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China (18 November 2011) <http://big5.www.gov.cn/gate/big5/www.gov.cn/jrzq/2011-11/18/content_1997133.htm> [accessed 28 February 2023]. ‘Three principles of staying close’ is my translation of the original Chinese.

¹⁰⁷ Emily Apter, ‘Translation at the Checkpoint’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50 (2014), pp. 56–74, doi:10.1080/17449855.2013.850235.

Epilogue

For Mandarin-speaking audiences, listening to *Chenshi* can be a transfixingly joyful experience: every single word can be comprehended clearly despite the text-setting challenges presented by Mandarin.¹⁰⁸ Surely this was no easy task for a tonal language where pitch changes semantics; pairing the four tones in Mandarin with a predetermined melody was a challenge strategically overcome. Shao explained how laborious the process of ensuring that every melodic tone matches the speech tone was:

The original not only needs to be translated correctly, beautifully, and in harmony with the music, but the language also needs to flow naturally. The demarcation of phrases, breath marks, the coordination of tone stress and melody, the four tones [in Mandarin] and melodic direction, and so forth — all this requires strenuous efforts by the conductor and musicians, who, during rehearsals, repeatedly negotiated, exchanged views, fine-tuned the re-translation word by word according to the original. Only by doing so can the re-translation be brought to a state of perfection.¹⁰⁹

As one hears *Chenshi* unfold, its comprehensibility can be easily taken for granted as part of Zheng's thirty-year-long project. But it should not be. I wish to end this article with a provocative turn to the Cantonese *Lied* produced in Hong Kong by the late entrepreneur and Mahler aficionado Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, which sheds another cultural light on the prism of *Chenshi* for future refractions, and to underline, in contrastive terms, the issue of comprehensibility and the epistemic complexities among post-/decolonial responses to a western musical work within a nation. The choice of language for Ng's *Lied* is critical: Cantonese, now primarily spoken in Hong Kong, Macau, and other regions in southeastern China, is often claimed to be one of the languages closer to the Middle Chinese spoken during the Tang dynasty, while Mandarin emerged much later, in the Ming dynasty (although both are often conveniently categorized as 'Chinese').¹¹⁰ Therefore, while to the best of my knowledge there is no direct evidence that the Cantonese *Lied* was intended to address Vice Premier Li's concerns, a neo-nationalistic sentiment did shine through in its explicit choice of language, and, as we will see, its orientation towards the original Tang poetry. A Cantonese *Lied* is, as it were, more authentically Tang; it stages an aesthetic conceit to allow the Chinese masses to hear how Tang poetry should have sounded in a much-revered western musical work.

¹⁰⁸ Zheng, 'Daishang wo xinai de geju', p. 47.

¹⁰⁹ '原作不仅要被译得正确、优美、配合音乐时，还需要字词通顺；在分句与气口、重音与旋律的配搭、四声与旋律走向等，都需要指挥及演唱者在长期的案头工作和现场排练中，反覆切磋、推敲、对原译逐字修正，才能使之日趋完善。'; Shao, 'Jingyiqiujing yiwuzhijing', p. 91. Shao provided an example from the fourth movement, 'Von der Schönheit', of correcting tone-melody mismatches (*daozi*) during rehearsals.

¹¹⁰ That Cantonese is a language closer to Middle Chinese has been moot. See for example Siu-Pong Cheng and Sze-Wing Tang, 'Languagehood of Cantonese: A Renewed Front in an Old Debate', *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 4 (2014), pp. 389–98, doi:10.4236/ojml.2014.43032; specifically on Tang poetry, see Richard VanNess Simmons, 'The Language of Táng Poetry as Entryway into the Spoken Language of the Táng: A Preliminary Exploration', *Tang Studies*, 41 (2023), pp. 121–63, doi:10.1353/tan.2023.a911976.

Ng produced a Cantonese chamber ensemble version of *Das Lied*, which was premiered in 2004 in collaboration with Glen Cortese at the British Library in London with the Chamber Orchestra Anglia under the baton of Sharon Andrea Choa.¹¹¹ In 2007, the Singapore Symphony Orchestra recorded the Cantonese *Lied* based on Ng's work with the conductor Shui Lan, mezzo-soprano Liang Ning, and tenor Warren Mok; Universal Edition published Ng's score a year later.¹¹² The work was later performed in Hong Kong in 2016 at the Asia Society Hong Kong Centre with Philharmonia APA conducted by Choa, with Liang and tenor Justin Lavender.¹¹³

Ng's Cantonese setting of Tang poetry in *Das Lied* was aimed at preserving the textual integrity of the Tang poetry. Ng made minor alterations to the poetry and expanded it when necessary, primarily for musical reasons. For instance, in the case of the refrain 'Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod', which we examined in Zheng's re-translations, Ng preserves the cry 'bei loi fu 悲來乎' ['how sorrowful', in Cantonese] from Li Bai's 'Beige xing' ['Song of Sorrow'] (see Table 2). It is repeated three times, instead of twice as in the poem, to match nine Chinese characters with the nine musical pitches of the refrain. Ng's work was more an endeavour in text-setting than in translation; indeed, it could be heard as a resistance against translation.¹¹⁴

Yet Ng's *Lied* is virtually incomprehensible to native Cantonese speakers. To be sure, compared to the four tones in Mandarin, Cantonese has a more complex system of nine tones, which makes text-setting considerably more challenging than for a Mandarin text. But no effort whatsoever seems to have been made to meet this challenge. The vocal entry (bars 16–18) in the first movement of Ng's *Lied*, reproduced in Example 5, will suffice to elucidate this point: it recalls Li Bai's poem verbatim, 'zyujan jau zau 主人有酒' ['the master has wine']. In theory, the first two characters, *zyujan* 主人, are optimally comprehensible when the melody falls, instead of rises, in accordance with the speech tones. *Janjau* 人有 should be mapped onto an ascending minor third, perfect fourth, perfect fifth, minor sixth, minor seventh, or perfect octave, while *jauzau* 有酒 would best match an ascending major second or major third.¹¹⁵ None of this is followed, and these tone–melody mismatches persist through the rest of the work as an audible red thread. Zheng's *Chenshi* and Ng's Cantonese *Lied* therefore sit at the

¹¹¹ 'IDP 10 Years On', IDP News Issue No. 24, International Dunhuang Project (2004) <<https://idp.bl.uk/newsletters/autumn-2004/>> [accessed 7 August 2023].

¹¹² I thank Claudia Patsch from Universal Edition for clarifying the year of publication of Ng's Cantonese *Lied* (email communication, 11 July 2024).

¹¹³ 'Mahler's Das Lied Revisited — in Chinese', Asia Society Hong Kong (2016) <<https://asiasociety.org/hong-kong/events/mahler-s-das-lied-revisited-chinese>> [accessed 26 February 2024]. A video of the performance can be found in 'Mahler's Das Lied Revisited (Complete)', Asia Society Hong Kong (9 August 2016) <<https://asiasociety.org/video/mahler-s-das-lied-revisited-complete>> [accessed 26 February 2024].

¹¹⁴ An exception is Ng's translation of Mahler's end line 'ewig' ['eternal'] into 'jatcoeng' ['long day'] in 'Der Abschied'. For Cantonese speakers, 'jatcoeng' does convey the *yijing* of the eternal. This is also one of the precious moments in Ng's *Lied* where the speech tones and the melody align.

¹¹⁵ Kai-Young Chan has provided tables on intelligible intervals for Cantonese tone successions based on perception tests conducted in 2020–21; 'From Constraints to Creativity: Musical Inventions through Cantonese Contours in Hong Kong Contemporary Music', *Principles of Music Composing*, 21 (2021), pp. 41–59.

16

主 人 有 酒

Cantones romanization: zyu jan jau zau

German text: Schon winkt der Wein

Example 5. Daniel Ng Yat-chiu's Cantonese *Das Lied von der Erde*, bars 16–18.

opposite ends of a spectrum: the former is impressively comprehensible, the latter frustratingly unintelligible.

What does this alien soundscape do? For Cantonese speakers, the work displaces Mahler's music; it is a violence against music. While Zheng's Mandarin re-translations install a new epistemic paradigm through *yijing*, the Cantonese *Lied* makes audible the incongruence between the temporality, logic, and language of a Chinese culture and western art music. The latter reveals that the operation of translating Mahler's *Lied* not only renders 'invisible' but also *inaudible* 'everything that does not fit in the "parameters of legibility" of its epistemic territory'.¹¹⁶ The Cantonese *Lied* reveals an ugly musical truth, one that exposes *Das Lied*'s erasure through translation, buried underneath the music's epistemic territory as a romantic, border-crossing reality. Ng's *Lied*, in liberating the Chinese poetry from the German translation that 'captures and transforms people, cultures, and meanings into what is legible and controllable for those in power', shows that the authentically Chinese, the *untranslated*, is in fact incomprehensible in Mahler's music.¹¹⁷

This alienation speaks differently to non-Cantonese speakers. For those who do not speak the language, Ng's *Lied* is a sound object to be misheard as authentically Chinese. As Frankie Perry has commented, Ng 'fosters a productive alienation of Germanophone or Germanophile listeners', and to this we can add, of all non-Cantonese-speaking listeners, 'for whom the text will (more than likely) no longer be comprehensible'.¹¹⁸ His work, Perry continues, demonstrates 'an interest in a very specific type of "authenticity", wherein allegiance lies not so much with the source score and the authority of the composer, but with the cultural archaeology of a work'.¹¹⁹ Unlike Zheng's *Chenshi*, which celebrates *yijing* as a guiding epistemic principle, Ng's *Lied* presents an alien soundscape to listeners — both native and non-Cantonese speakers — an audible unknowability where the struggle to understand licenses a new way of listening and knowing.

I shall set aside the discussion on Ng's *Lied*, an intriguing artistic and political statement indeed, for future conversations, but I wish to conclude this article by

¹¹⁶ Vázquez, 'Translation as Erasure', p. 28.

¹¹⁷ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Blackwell, 2005), p. 144; cited in Vázquez, 'Translation as Erasure', p. 30.

¹¹⁸ Frankie Perry, 'Lieder Reimagined: Arrangements and Adaptations of Romantic Song in the Twenty-First Century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2021), p. 268.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

reflecting on the ramifications of what we have discussed from a broader point of view. In western art music, the epistemic asymmetry between translation and original not only stems from the well-worn original–translation dichotomy, but also from the very difference that the translation promises.¹²⁰ As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has reminded us, the colonial model of epistemic production is characterized by deviation from the ideal, produced by the colonizer or the elite.¹²¹ Once differences are registered, they can be signalled, evaluated, compared (or rendered incomparable), judged, marked, and figured as the Other. Against the context of western art music, translation, as a difference-making apparatus par excellence, often operates in an epistemic regime conditioned by a colonial structure of comparativism, where the original accedes itself to the position of the knowledge producer, while the translation, not least in a non-western language, is relegated as the unmarked receiver.¹²²

When the original lies outside of the music–text fabric, the governance of the epistemic regime can be displaced. An illustrative example is the well-documented efforts in China since the 1990s to Sinicize Puccini's *Turandot*, which features a mythical story of a Chinese princess and which has been widely criticized as orientalist.¹²³ Several renditions, some radical, have been made to ensure, as a postcolonial critique, that the opera could be performed with a Chinese artistic understanding. We have seen how Zheng and Ng realized the same aspiration with different strategies: rather than simply localize the original, Zheng proposed a musical economy deploying a common linguistic and philosophical currency to sponsor her re-translations, enacting an exclusive epistemic sovereignty to discipline domestic, and potentially global, music-knowledge making. On the other hand, Ng, through resisting translation, celebrated incomprehensibility to demonstrate how western coloniality of language and knowledge must be heard to be believed. For Ng, any re-translation of *Das Lied*, be it Chinese, Russian, or Czech, would be inauthentic.¹²⁴ Despite strategic differences, the efforts share a common goal with the New Left in the 1990s: to enlighten people in China about their national interest and identity, liberate them from their self-imposed perception of being a colonized populace, and unite them within a post-/decolonial consciousness against colonial forces. The lessons drawn from the tales of Zheng and Ng are valuable: if translation serves as a decolonial praxis, Zheng and Ng have laid bare

¹²⁰ See, for example, Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 69–82.

¹²¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson (University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

¹²² See Haun Saussy, *Are We Comparing Yet? On Standards, Justice, and Incomparability* (Bielefeld University Press, 2019), especially pp. 19–27. On a sustained critique of difference in music studies, see *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, ed. by Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹²³ Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai, 'Turandot in China: Rejected, Reinterpreted, Reclaimed', *The Opera Quarterly*, 26 (2010), pp. 486–92, doi:10.1093/oq/kbq029.

¹²⁴ Listen to, for example, *Das Lied von der Erde* (sung in Russian), Rimma Baranova, Mikhail Dovenman, Leningrad Philharmonic, cond. by Kurt Sanderling (Venezia, 1958); *Das Lied von der Erde* (sung in Czech), Marta Krásová, Beno Blachut, Prague National Theatre Orchestra, cond. by Karel Šejna (Český rozhlas, 1960).

its discursive capacity to enact systems of power, exclusion, and control, and its ability, through music, to resist in its absence.¹²⁵ Their works invite us to recognize music as a critical site where interactions with colonial legacies — ethnography, music-making, analysis, translation, performance, listening, and much more — can challenge us to be critical of logics of coloniality in decolonial efforts and the stakes of building a decolonial coalition, in theory and in practice, against ‘the West’ without tending to the forms and temporalities of domination, marginalization, and reaction across postcolonial consciousnesses.¹²⁶

Reception stories surrounding *Das Lied* in China do not end here. In 2002, the Hong Kong Dance Company produced a modern dance rendition of *Das Lied* choreographed by Chiang Ching and performed with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra Chamber Ensemble conducted by Kerstin Nerbe. The production featured the Chinese poet Zheng Chouyu's Mandarin re-translation of *Das Lied*, which gave a colloquial spin to the German original, and was sung by mezzo-soprano Ulrika Tenstam and tenor Warren Mok.¹²⁷ In 2004, the Chinese composer Ye Xiaogang completed his piece *The Song of the Earth*, using the poems that inspired the composition of *Das Lied*. More interpretations can be expected. *Das Lied* has become a chimera too layered, too polysemic, its chronotopes too heavy. Discursive translations cluster thickly around *Das Lied*, and their political overtones ring loud in the ecosystem. This should not strike us as surprising once we appreciate the fact that *Das Lied* in China is as much an issue of cultural translation as it is of nation-building.¹²⁸ These tales remind us that we should be wary of reading translation merely as a quixotically intercultural tool of modernization and progress, or as a theoretical apparatus for transnational music-historical flows and decolonization.¹²⁹ As listeners, we can hear translations and the resistance to them in interlingual and intermusical transactions, and in the intercultural reciprocity of meaning-value and its denial, as arbiters of knowledges, cultures, nationhood, and politics.

¹²⁵ On translation as a decolonial praxis in music studies, see Michael Iyanaga, ‘On the Decolonial Otherwise of Translation: Alexander J. Ellis, Mário de Andrade, and the Contingency of Form’, *Ethnomusicology*, 68 (2024), pp. 173–94, doi:10.5406/21567417.68.2.03.

¹²⁶ See Shzr Ee Tan, ‘Whose Decolonisation? Checking for Intersectionality, Lane-Policing and Academic Privilege from a Transnational (Chinese) Vantage Point’, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 30 (2021), pp. 140–62.

¹²⁷ Zheng Chouyu's text can be found in Jiang Qing, ‘Wuzhe Jiangqing tan wudao shigeju “Dadi zhi ge”: Tangshi yiyun yu Male jingshen shijie’ [‘Dancer Jiang Qing Discusses the Dance Drama “Song of the Earth”: The Essence of Tang Poetry and Mahler's Spiritual World’], *Pengpai xinwen* (14 October 2017) <https://m.thepaper.cn/kuaibao_detail.jsp?contid=1824178&from=kuaibao> [accessed 25 February 2024]. I thank Chan Hing-yan for bringing this to my attention.

¹²⁸ See Dagmar Schäfer, ‘Translation History, Knowledge and Nation Building in China’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Culture*, ed. by Sue-Ann Harding and Ovidi Carbonell Cortés (Routledge, 2018), pp. 134–53.

¹²⁹ See Rey Chow, ‘Translator, Traitor; Translator, Mourner (Or, Dreaming of Intercultural Equivalence)’, in *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Language as a Postcolonial Experience* (Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 61–77; Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity — China, 1900–1937* (Stanford University Press, 1995).