



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Translating the Cryptic "East": Perceptions of Chinese Classical Poetry in Twentieth Century Russia

Yulia DREYZIS

Moscow State University / Russian Academy of Sciences, Russia
xiaoyouliya@gmail.com

This paper presents an analysis of the interaction between classical Chinese poetry and its Russian translation during the long 20th century through the manifold ways in which translational representations participate in relentless reinterpretation, rethinking, and re-signification. This historical instantiation of the eternal tension between "domesticating" and "foreignising" translations allows a closer look at the strategies exploited by the majority of their Russian creators. Poet-translators of the Belle Époque set the tone for producing "readable" translations oriented towards the regnant literary and cultural norms of their target audience. Presenting a part of the significant avant-garde trend of reinterpreting the cryptic "East", their taste for using Chinese imagery and poetic principles as a manifestation of cultural transfer was reinforced by translations of Chinese literature by Russian Sinologists published most actively during the 1940s–1960s. Their task was formulated as a cultural objective of producing a familiarised, "fluent" text based upon "the translator's invisibility". Their versions were addressed to a reader who acted within the framework of the national/cultural tradition, and who was forced to reckon with this tradition. Then the pendulum swung the other way, producing highly de-familiarised translations of traditional Chinese poetry by contemporary Russian poets within a more nuanced approach that still awaits interpretation.

本文通過對不同翻譯策略的考察，探析 20 世紀中國古典詩詞與其俄文譯本的互動關係。文章基於“歸化”與“異化”兩種翻譯理念之間的內在張力，探討俄文譯者在長期的翻譯實踐中如何解讀原文並定位其譯文。19 世紀末至 20 世紀初，美好年代的詩人譯者更傾向於順應本土文化和文學傳統，追求譯文的流暢性和“可讀性”。他們在翻譯中移植了華夏詩學原則和異域文化意象，成為揭開東方神秘面紗的先鋒派。1940–1960 年間的俄羅斯漢學家再接再厲，致力於創作與本土文化傳統相兼容、自然流暢且無明顯翻譯痕跡的譯本。然而，到 20 世紀末，俄羅斯詩人中開始出現一種完全不同的翻譯風格。他們譯介中國古典詩詞時採用較為疏離且脫離傳統的手法。這種新型翻譯風格對於拓展解讀視角的價值仍有待進一步探討。

Keywords: Chinese Poetry, Russian Sinology, Translatability, Translation Strategies

關鍵詞： 中文詩詞，俄羅斯漢學，可譯性，翻譯策略

Introduction¹

Through an analysis of the interaction between Chinese poetry and its translation into Russian, this paper explores the functioning of poetic text, the cognitive framework of its perception, and the principles whereby an alien-language tradition is assimilated.

The reception of Chinese poetry in European literature at the beginning of the 20th century is closely connected with the fate of the *Le Livre de Jade* (The Book of Jade) collection, published in 1867. It was reprinted at least five times and repeatedly translated into different European languages (Liu 2013, 42). Although opposing opinions were expressed about the quality of these translations, there can be no doubt of the book's enormous influence on the perception of Chinese verse in the West.

The author of the translations was Judith Gautier (1845–1917), the daughter of Théophile Gautier (1811–1872). The 1867 edition of the collection contained 71 poems. In the new edition of 1902, Gautier added several dozen works, Chinese characters for the poets' names, and a subtitle with an explicit indication that all verses were translations made by Judith Gautier herself. Only two-thirds of the works of the expanded version can be identified as belonging to Chinese poets (Yu 2007, 220). Presumably, her Chinese instructor, Ding Dunling 丁敦齡, did not speak French very well (Liu 2013, 42), and his interaction with Gautier was based on significant incomprehension and misunderstanding. Many of the names look unrecognisable and it remains unclear how regular the transcription system was. Errors in Judith's workbooks could also serve as a source of incorrect attribution of texts (for example, in one case the persona of the poem is declared to be its author).

Gautier's handling of the information available to her also demonstrates a departure from the originals. She replaces almost all the names with those of her own invention. Gautier excludes almost all personal and place names, replacing them with generic names. As a rule, she does not translate the whole poem, but selects only the first few lines, sometimes changing the order. These modifications are intended to make the anthology a more complete work. Gautier also works in the opposite direction – she includes the interpretation of images and allusions in the text itself, eliminating the need for annotations, but increasing the length. She changes the impersonal narrative common in Chinese poetry, personifying the text and saturating it with personal pronouns. Some believe that the verses attributed to the vague figures of contemporary Chinese poets were written by Gautier herself (Yu 2007, 221) and constitute a colossal mystification that has had such a significant impact on constructing the image of Chinese poetry in the West.

One of the most mysterious translations is a poem attributed to the grand figure of Chinese poetry Li Bai 李白 (701–762/763), *Le Pavillon de Porcelaine* (The Porcelain Pavilion):

¹ This research was made possible due to the generous support of the Russian Science Foundation and was carried out in the Institute of Linguistics RAS (Project No. 19-18-00429).

Au milieu du petit lac artificiel, s'élève un pavillon de porcelaine verte et blanche; on y arrive par un pont de jade, qui se voûte comme le dos d'un tigre.

Dans ce pavillon, quelques amis, vêtus de robes claires, boivent ensemble des tasses de vin tiède.

Ils causent gaiement, ou tracent des vers, en repoussant leurs chapeaux en arrière, en relevant un peu leurs manches,

Et, dans le lac, où le petit pont, renversé, semble un croissant de jade, quelques amis, vêtus de robes claires, boivent, la tête en bas dans un pavillon de porcelaine.

In the middle of a small artificial lake rises a green and white porcelain pavilion; we arrive there by a bridge of jade, which is vaulted like the back of a tiger.

In this pavilion, some friends, dressed in light robes, drink cups of warm wine together.

They chat cheerfully, or write verse, pushing their hats back, raising their sleeves a little,

And in the lake, where the small bridge, turned upside down, seems a crescent of jade, some friends, dressed in light robes, drink, upside down in a porcelain pavilion

(Gautier 1867, 113–114)

Gautier's text was considered a mystification, until in 1995, Fusako Hamao found the work of Li Bai 李白 *Yan Tao jia tingzi* 宴陶家亭子 (Feasting in the Tao Family Pavilion), that looks like a very likely prototype (Hamao 1995, 83–94):

曲巷幽人宅	[in] the winding alley [to] the hermit dwelling
高門大士家	[through] the high gate [to] the great man's house
池開照膽鏡	the pond is opened [like] a mirror reflecting the gallbladder
林吐破顏花	the grove releases flowers making one blur in a smile
綠水藏春日	green waters hide the spring sun
青軒秘晚霞	dark green parapets conceal the evening clouds
若聞弦管妙	if [you] would hear the charms of strings and trumpets
金穀不能誇	it would be impossible to praise the Golden Valley

(Quan Tang shi 1706, juan 179)

Gautier apparently misinterpreted the family name of Tao in the title (which may also mean “ceramics / pottery”), turning it into “porcelain”. Perhaps this was facilitated by the construction of a real porcelain pavilion during the World Exhibition in Paris in 1867 (Hamao 1995, 94). Gautier rewrites the poem, reducing it to four lines. Few of the details of the original text by Li Bai survive – Gautier retains only the green colour of the water, lending it to the pavilion and the jade bridge, while the pond turns into an “artificial lake”. The description of the reservoir is also changed: in the original, the purity of the waters is emphasised in the traditional description of a magic mirror that helps to see literally

through a person. Gautier creates a picture of the lake reflecting the impeccable purity of the feasting friends (while the composition serves as a formal analogue of what is being described).

This is the focus of Gautier's poem, while Li Bai's original contains only a subtle hint at the poets' feasting scene. Gautier incorporates the interpretation of a commentator who writes about the "Golden Valley" as a place where in the third century AD an extravagant feast was arranged – music played, wine was drunk, and verses were composed in the form of a poetry competition (Rubins 2002, 155).

In 1918, *Le Pavillon de Porcelaine* inspired a famous Russian poet, Nikolay Gumilev (Николай Степанович Гумилёв, 1886–1921), to create a cycle of poems under the same name. Gumilev's book is an independent work: preserving the theme, plot, and general mood of the original, he replaces rhythmic prose with regular verse, eliminates the breakdown into thematic subsections, and makes his own selection of poems.

In Russia, China was often viewed within the framework of the classical *chinoiserie* tradition. Poets of the early 20th century set the tone for this kind of interaction through their fascination with China as the exotic Other exemplified by Gumilev (Gamsa 2017, 563).

The title poem faithfully reproduces the text of *The Book of Jade*:

Среди искусственного озера	Sredi iskusstvennogo ozera
Поднялся павильон фарфоровый.	Podnyalsya pavil'on farforovyy.
Тигриною спиною выгнутый,	Tigrinoyu spinoyu vygnuty,
Мост яшмовый к нему ведет.	Most yashmovyy k nemu vedet.
И в этом павильоне несколько	I v etom pavil'one neskol'ko
Друзей, одетых в платья светлые,	Druzey, odetykh v plat'ya svetlyye,
Из чаш, расписанных драконами,	Iz chash, raspisannykh drakonami,
Пьют подогретое вино.	P'yut podogretoye vino.
То разговаривают весело,	To razgovarivayut veselo,
А то стихи свои записывают,	A to stikhi svoi zapisyvayut,
Заламывая шляпы желтые,	Zalamyvaya shlyapy zheltyye,
Засучивая рукава.	Zasuchivaya rukava.
И ясно видно в чистом озере —	I yasno vidno v chistom ozere —
Мост вогнутый, как месяц яшмовый,	Most vognuty, kak mesyats yashmovyy,
И несколько друзей за чашами,	I neskol'ko druzey za chashami,
Повернутых вниз головой.	Povernutykh vniz golovoy. ²

(Gumilev 1918, 9)

² Latin transcription will be provided alongside the Cyrillic original for all the Russian-language poems mentioned in the paper. English translation follows.

At heart of artificial lake arose
 A porcelain folly – lone pavilion’s form.
 And arching, like a springing tiger’s spine,
 To it a bridge of jasper reached.
 And there in this pavilion idly sat
 A group of friends, who were quite brightly dressed,
 And drinking from their dragon-painted bowls
 Some mulled and spicy-scented wine.
 And they were happily engaged in chat
 And then they fell to writing down their poems
 With jaunty cocking of their yellow hats
 And elbows’ jut from rolled up sleeves.
 In lake’s clean waters clearly could be seen
 A concave bridge, just like a jasper moon,
 And then some friends behind their china bowls,
 Turned upside down in mirrored glaze.³

The choice of *Le Pavillon de Porcelaine* to play the part of the title poem in Gumilev’s book is not accidental. Both Gautier and Gumilev were greatly influenced by the cult of artificiality and the idea of imitating nature in art, characteristic of the French Parnassus school. Since these two aspects are also typical of Chinese poetics (Owen 1985, 40–42), both authors found the latter close to their aesthetic attitudes. They used the Chinese imagery to embody a poetics of clarity (Chu 2019, 156–172). The image of the “porcelain pavilion” becomes an analogue of the image of the ivory tower – the world of aesthetic pleasures, protected from the encroachments of reality.

The parallels between the aesthetic paradigms of Gumilev and Gautier become apparent precisely in the light of their interaction with the Chinese poetic tradition. Chinese poetry attracted both authors with its emotional restraint, its attitude to the poetic text as an artifact, but not a duplicate of reality, and its rich metapoetic content (Rubins 2002, 161).

The lack of accuracy in the indication of the sources reflects the perception of like-minded friendship, common in China – the idea that the presence of a company of fellow poets serves as an important catalyst in the creative process. Thus, the poem becomes a kind of collective property. Implementing the Chinese practice of exchanging verse between friends, Gumilev freely borrowed from Gautier, creating a poem that at the same time seeks to be original.

Gumilev’s stylised Chinese verses presented a part of the significant avant-garde trend of reinterpreting the cryptic “East”. This tradition of using Chinese imagery and poetic principles was further reinforced by the many translations of traditional and contemporary Chinese literature by Russian Sinologists

³ Translation by Rupert Moreton, as reproduced on *Nikolay Gumilyov Electronic Collected Works* website (Gumilev 1997).

who published most actively during the 1940s–1960s (Gumilev’s wife Anna Akhmatova (Анна Андреевна Ахматова, 1889–1966), for example, made a translation of Qu Yuan’s *Li Sao* 離騷 in 1954) (Akhmatova 1957: 149–161). Now we will explore how poetic translation from Chinese functioned in this period, before some significant changes transformed the Russian poetic scene in the 1970s.

Translating through the prism of the familiar

Social order was inscribed within the translation of classical Chinese poetry. A translation was addressed to a reader who acted within the framework of the national/cultural tradition. The task posed to the translators of classical Chinese poetic texts was not poetic; it was instead a cultural one, which obviously did not involve resorting to a method of linguistic thinking unknown to the reader. The translation, based on deliberate lack of self-sufficiency and possible incomprehensibility of the “meaning” for the addressee, implied the presence of additional explication, or comments of various kinds. The Russian-Soviet tradition of translation developed a model of cultural and historical commentary, almost divorced from the principles of poetics.

The task of the translator was presented in formulae such as “introducing into Russian culture”, “introducing the Russian reader” to something. This prioritised “conveying the meaning of the original” in the target language. Indeed, classical translations from Chinese made in the 20th century represent a simplification in relation to the original text, due to both the restrictions imposed by the syllabotonic versification and conventional syntax, and to a wrongful correlation with Russian romanticist poetry, misuse of folklore components, etc.

Translations of Chinese classical poetry first appeared in Russia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. Mostly they were made from other European languages. Exemplary of such translations are the anthology *China and Japan in Their Poetry* (Китай и Япония в их поэзии, 1896),⁴ and the selection *From Modern Chinese Poets*, published in the well-known magazine *Bulletin of Foreign Literature* (founded in 1891).⁵ This included poems by Li Bai, Bai Juyi (Пе-Клю-И), and La Ksu-feng (unidentifiable) translated by A. Dobrokhotov.

The first collection which presented to the Russian reading public a vast selection of Chinese poetry was the 1914 *The Flute of China* (Свирель Китая) (Egoriev and Markov 1914). Little is known about Egoriev except for his untimely death by suicide on the 5th of May 1914. Markov was born in Latvia and later married the artist Varvara Bubnova (Варвара Дмитриевна Бубнова, 1886–1983). Upon his death Bubnova moved to Japan, where she taught European painting and studied traditional Japanese art. She eventually became famous and wrote an autobiography. This autobiography has preserved the information about the translator Markov (Voldemārs Matvejs, 1877–1914).⁶

⁴ *Kitay i Yaponiya v ikh poezii* (China and Japan in their Poetry). 1896. Translated by O. Miller. St. Petersburg: Tipografiya Ya.I. Libermana.

⁵ “Iz sovremennykh kitayskikh poetov” (From Modern Chinese Poets). 1910. *Vestnik inostrannoy literatury*, no. 2: 251–252.

⁶ Detailed information about Markov can be found in Howard, Jeremy et al. *Vladimir Markov and Russian Primitivism: A Charter for the*

The translations in *The Flute of China* were based on French and German translations; they rely on the strategy of “conveying the meaning of the original”. The introductory part to the anthology also contains the first sketch of the system of Chinese versification rendered in Russian. Here is an example of a very famous poem by Li Bai entitled *Yu jie yuan* 玉階怨 (Complaints on the Jade Steps)⁷ translated in *The Flute of China*. The original reads as follows:

玉階生白露
夜久侵羅襪
卻下水晶簾
玲瓏望秋月

white dew blooms [on] jade stairs
the night deepens dampening silk stockings
let down the crystal curtains
exquisite watching the autumn moon

(*Quan Tang shi* 1706, *juan* 164.11)

The translation is of far greater length incorporating explanations into the text of the poem:

Из белого, прозрачного нефрита	Iz belogo, prozrachnogo nefrita
Подымается лестница,	Podymayetsya lestnitsa,
Обрызганная росой...	Obryzgannaya rosoy...
И в ней светится полная луна...	I v ney svetitsya polnaya luna...
Все ступени мерцают лунным светом.	Vse stupeni mertsayut lunnym svetom.
Царица в длинных одеждах	Tsaritsa v dlinnykh odezhdakh
Поднимается по ступеням,	Podnimayetsya po stupenyam,
И роса, переливаясь,	I rosa, perelivayas',
Мочит края благородных покровов.	Mochit kraya blagorodnykh pokrovov.
Она идет к павильону,	Ona idet k pavil'onu,
Где лунные лучи	Gde lunnyye luchi
Прядут свою ткань.	Pryadut svoyu tkan'.
Ослепленная,	Oслеplennaya,
останавливается она на пороге.	ostanavlivayetsya ona na poroge.
Ее рука тихонько	Yeye ruka tikhon'ko
спускает жемчужный занавес,	spuskayet zhemchuzhnyy znaves,
И ниспадают чудные камни,	I nispadayut chudnyye kamen'ya,

Avant-Garde. 2015. Burlington: Ashgate.

⁷ In the English-speaking world, the first to render this poem (using a word-for-word translation by Ernest Fenollosa) was Ezra Pound, providing it also with a translation of a traditional Chinese commentary.

Журча, как водопад,	Zhurcha, kak vodopad,
Пронизанный лучами солнца.	Pronizannyi luchami solntsa.
И внимает царица журчанью,	I vnimayet tsaritsa zhurchan'yu,
И с грустью смотрит на лунный свет,	I s grust'yu smotrit na lunnyy svet,
На осенний лунный свет,	Na osenniy lunnyy svet,
Льющийся сквозь жемчуг.	L'yushchiysya skvoz' zhemchug.
...И долго с грустью	...I dolgo s grust'yu
смотрит на лунный свет.	smotrit na lunnyy svet.

From white, transparent jade
 The stairs rise
 Splattered with dew...
 And the full moon shines in it...
 All steps flicker in the moonlight.
 Queen in long clothes
 Climbing the stairs
 And the dew overflowing
 Wets the edges of noble garment.
 She goes to the pavilion
 Where the moon rays
 Spin their cloth.
 Blinded, she stops at the threshold.
 Her hand quietly lowers the pearl curtain
 And wonderful stones fall
 Gurgling like a waterfall
 Penetrated by the rays of the sun.
 And the queen hears the murmur
 And looks sadly at the moonlight,
 To the autumn moonlight
 Flowing through the pearls.
 ...And for a long time with sadness she looks at the moonlight.

The problems of translating classical Chinese poetry into Russian were later touched upon in the works of such scholars as Olga Fishman (1917–1986), Mikhail Basmanov (1918–2006), Evgeniy Serebryakov (1928–2013), Igor Lisevich (1932–2000), Kirina Golygina (1935–2009), Sergey Troptsev (1940–), Pya Smirnov (1948–), and Marina Kravtsova (1953–). Golygina's work *Studying Chinese Classical Literature in Russia* (Golygina, Sorokin 2004) is of particular interest, as she reviews the research of a representative number of Russian scholars from translational and cultural aspects. However, those works did not systematically consider Chinese poetry translations in the context of the scholarship on Soviet translation practices (or general translation theory).

Still, this is a field in which significant work has been done – the growing interest in the practice, theory, and history of literary translation in Soviet Russia is evidenced by a number of conferences and publications (see Witt 2017, for an overview). Much of the scholarship historicises the tension between “literalist” and “artistic” translation strategies that forms the core of the historical narrative. From the late 1940s, one can observe the gradual construction of the “Soviet school of translation” as a conceptual framework that dominates the field of poetry translation (Witt 2017, 38). Contemporary scholars define its main trend as strongly domesticating. As Andrei Azov puts it – “translation that violates the poetics of the original wins in this epoch” (Azov 2013, 172). One of the main proponents of the new trend, Ivan Kashkin (Иван Александрович Кашкин, 1899–1963), condemned factual accuracy, which sometimes only obscured the ideological and artistic meaning of the work (Witt 2017, 45).

The “Kashkin school” became practically synonymous with the “Soviet school” in general. There was a consistent shift of the entire discourse on translation towards prescriptivity and a corresponding set of value judgements which is palpable in Russian translation studies up to this day. All the conceptual strongpoints once used by Kashkin in polemics with his opponents contributed to the displacement of the category of “alienness” and made it impossible to conceptualise this category in non-judgmental terms.

While early Soviet publications developed by poets and scholars such as Nikolai Gumilev emphasised the need to preserve the rhythmic and compositional structure of the original, at the same time finding a distinctly Russian poetic rendition for the foreign verse, later translation paths moved in another direction. Another aspect outlined by Gumilev, Briusov, and others included a hierarchical and analytical approach to translation, or “the system of priorities and hierarchy of values” (Khotimsky 2018, 226). A continuation of this tradition in the field of Chinese poetic translation is presented by a rare example of a scholar who truly introduced Russian society to Chinese poetry – Vasily Alekseev (Василий Михайлович Алексеев, 1881–1951). In 1916 he released an enormous volume *Chinese Poems about the Poet. Stanzas by Sikong Tu* (Китайская поэма о поэте. Стансы Сыкун Ту) (Alekseev 1916),⁸ containing research on and translation of 24 eight-line poems by Sikong Tu 司空圖 (837–908), a poet of the Tang era, who created a kind of obscure poetology, depicting, as Alekseev believed, the 24 distinct phases of inspiration of a Chinese poet.

In Alekseev’s book, we find many pages of research, a line-by-line translation of each poem with a detailed commentary, and paraphrases reproducing the favoured Chinese way of explaining the meaning: saying the same thing that is already said in verse, but in other words just as poetic as the ones chosen by the original. *Poems about the Poet* was highly popular among Russian writers, including Gumilev’s circle. Alekseev translated a lot of poetry and prose, and he had many students, a large number of whom were active translators (Smirnov 2003).⁹

⁸ Reprinted as Alekseyev, Vasily. 2008. *Kitayskaya poema o poete. Stansy Sykun Tu*. Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura.

⁹ One of the most famous names is that of Nikolay Nevsky (Николай Александрович Невский, 1892–1938), first a Sinologist, then a scholar of Japanese studies, Tangutologist, and folklorist. Incidentally, his first independent work was a translation of Li Bai’s poems with detailed comments (never officially printed). Another of Alekseev’s students was Julian Shchutsky (Юлиан Константинович Щуцкий, 1897–1938), a brilliant translator of the *Yi jing* 易经 (Book of Changes). His friend at the university, Boris Vasiliev (Борис Александрович Васильев, 1899–1938), was also a man with a taste for poetic translation. His texts were assembled in the 1935 collection *East* (Восток); later, when the vast majority of its authors were arrested, the collection was seized from libraries, so Vasiliev was

All the students of Alekseev translated poetry. For example, Alexey Shtukin (Алексей Александрович Штукин, 1904–1963), mentored by Alekseev, translated into Russian the verses of the *Book of Songs*.¹⁰ But Chinese poetry was opened to a broad Russian readership by a small collection, *Anthology of Chinese Lyrics of the Seventh-Nineteenth Centuries* (Антология китайской лирики VII–XIX веков) published in 1923, which was edited by Julian Shchutsky (Shchutskiy 1923).¹¹ Alekseev wrote an introductory essay and brief remarks on the chapters. This book was unusually popular; the readers liked the translations immediately and remembered them for a long time. There was something in them that was consonant with the traditions of the Silver Age¹² of Russian poetry that had not yet died, and at the same time there was some unusualness or exoticism. One of the amusing testimonies of the unprecedented popularity of Shchutsky's translations is a parody of a text by Wang Ji 王績 (590–644) which appeared immediately after the translation.

Some significant “Chinese” works were produced under the direct influence of Shchutsky. In the mid-1920s, he joined the anthroposophists, who were already persecuted in the USSR. He fell in love with an active anthroposophist, Elizabeth Dmitrieva-Vasileva (Елизавета Ивановна Дмитриева-Васильева, 1887–1928, pen name Cherubina de Gabriac, Черубина де Габриак), a famous Silver Age poet. Soon she was sent to exile in Tashkent. Shchutsky went to visit his beloved. She lived in a tiny adobe house, through which a pear tree sprouted. There she composed the poetic cycle *The House under the Pear Tree* (Домик под грушевым деревом, 1927). It is difficult to say to what extent Shchutsky, an outstanding poet himself, participated in the creation of these poems. As Mark Gamsa points out, the Chinese mask was probably “an attempt to achieve distance by alienation from the suffering self”, or maybe “intended to circumvent censorship and let the poetry reach readers in the guise of translation” (Gamsa 2017, 565). However, creating a distinctly Chinese text in this case presented a part of a larger trend, aiming at the destruction of exoticisation *and* the familiarisation of the exotic.

Vasily Alekseev translated Chinese poetry with this idea in mind. He embodied a resistance to Marshak's fear of “some kind of struggle” materialising in the image of a swamp that “draws the translator into a foreign language, sucks him into its turns, almost into its own circle of images” (cited in Witt 2017, 41).

practically unknown as a translator for many years. What rather sets him aside is the fact that he participated in the persecution of his teacher Alekseev; that, however, did not save him from execution. Nevsky and Shchutsky also fell victims to Stalinist terror.

¹⁰ He escaped execution, but not arrest, and ended up in a camp, where he continued to translate from memory; thanks to the efforts of Alekseev, the camp was replaced by exile. His oeuvre is the only complete translation of the *Book of Songs* into Russian (Shtukin 1957).

¹¹ Reprinted as *Dal'neye ekho. Antologiya kitayskoy liriki VII–XIX vv.* (Distant Echo: Anthology of Chinese Lyrics of the Seventh–Nineteenth Centuries). 2000. St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoye vostokovedeniye.

¹² “Silver Age” is a term traditionally applied by Russian philologists to the last decade of the 19th century and first two decades of the 20th century. It was an exceptionally creative period in the history of Russian poetry, on par with the Golden Age a century earlier. The term “Silver Age” was first suggested by philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, but it only became customary to refer thus to this era in literature in the 1960s. In the Western world other terms, including *Fin de siècle* and *Belle Époque*, are somewhat more widely used. The Silver Age was dominated by the artistic movements of Russian Symbolism, Acmeism, and Russian Futurism. The period ended after the Russian Civil War. Gumilev's execution in 1921, as well as the appearance of the highly influential Pasternak collection in 1922, marked the end of the era.

Mikhail Gasparov once noted that Russian poet Nikolay Gnedich (Николай Иванович Гнедич, 1784–1833) translated the *Iliad* not into “general cultural” Russian, but into a language specially designed only for transposing this one work (Gasparov 1988, 62). One cannot speak or write in this language. It was invented so that we would feel the truly divine, alien origin of the great poem. Alekseev did roughly the same, re-inventing his Sikong Tu. The most insightful contemporaries appreciated his translations precisely because of this value. It was said that he discovered the “Chinese Khlebnikov” – for contemporaries nothing in Russian poetry could be compared in its bizarreness to Khlebnikov.¹³

Alekseev achieved estranging and modernist effects through his commitment to literality. Looking at his approach today, mirroring the gains and losses of contemporary translating practice, one tends to perceive it as both more faithful to the original and more productive for the poetic renewal of the target language (in this case, Russian). By contrast, the practice of producing “smooth” and “readable” translations creates inaccuracies and deviates from the spirit of Chinese poetry through its drive for readability and consequent elimination of ambiguities. There was a significant debate in the early Soviet Union between “literalist” and “artistic” approaches to translation, a debate that by the 1930s had essentially been resolved in favor of the increasing centralisation of the translation field, including more emphasis on professional translation (see Zemskova 2013; Baer 2016). The ideological pressure resulted not only in control over the choice of works for translation but also in the “ideologization of norms” (Witt 2013), which influenced translation style and editing practices. From now on, translations into Russian were supposed to read as if they were a literary text written in Russian.

In the case of Chinese poetry this trend is associated with the name of the poet Sergey Bobrov (Сергей Павлович Бобров, 1889–1971). In his youth he was a member of the *Centrifuge* (Центрифуга) community, before joining the Futurists; then he took up translation, did mathematical work (he was a mathematician by training), and wrote extensively on the theory of poetry. In 1916, Bobrov read Alekseev’s book; he was absolutely fascinated by the translations from Sikong Tu. He tried to translate from these translations using them as word-for-word rendering, and tried to write “fantasies”, as he called them, on Chinese themes. In 1932 he sent a very timid letter to Alekseev, expressing admiration for his Sikong Tu, and asked the scholar to evaluate his own experiments. Alekseev, not spoiled by the attention of his colleagues, reacted to Bobrov’s attempts kindly, encouraging him to continue to master Chinese imagery.¹⁴ Their correspondence lasted more than one year – Bobrov spent eight years in exile (1934–1942). He returned to a completely changed translation environment: views on translation had changed dramatically.

All the ideas of *World Literature* (Всемирная литература) had been rejected, and the so-called “Soviet realist translation” prevailed. *World Literature* was a publishing house under the People’s Commissariat for Education, organised in 1919 on the initiative and with the close participation of

¹³ Viktor Khlebnikov, better known by the pen name Velimir Khlebnikov (Велимир Хлебников, 1885–1922), was a Russian poet and playwright, a central part of the Russian Futurist movement, but his work and influence stretch far beyond it.

¹⁴ Alekseev’s letters have been preserved in the personal archive of Bobrov, as noted in the introduction to the publication of his own poetic adaptation of Sikong Tu (Bobrov 1969, 161): “It seems to me that your imitations, and especially fantasies, would be good to print. After all, this is a whole new stream in Russian poetry” (from a letter dated June 5, 1932). Calling Bobrov’s poems “imitations”, Alekseev nevertheless wrote: “I have never heard anything like this in terms of the power of perception and the successful characterisation of the main moments” (from the same letter).

Maxim Gorky.¹⁵ Gorky recruited many of the greatest figures of Russian culture to work in the publishing house. The consortium that edited the translations included Alexander Blok, and the Chinese department was headed by Alekseev. The publishing house existed until 1924. Translators from *World Literature*, scholars, and experts in various cultural traditions had sought to make the reader feel the difference between Arabic, English, French, Spanish, Chinese, and other poetry. Now the main thing was to make the translation understandable to the general reader. Bobrov was quickly imbued with these new trends.

He was eager to create from Chinese poetry, to which he was committed, texts that would be understandable to the proletariat. He wrote an extremely superficial article as a preface to his translations, trying to explain the essence of Chinese poetry (published in *International Literature* [Интернациональная литература] in 1940). And then he did not hesitate to write a long letter to Alekseev (Smirnov 2009, 50–52), saying in plain words that Alekseev was out of date, inadequately understood translation matters, and was poorly versed in Chinese poetry. But with all this, he condescendingly called on the scholar to participate in the book of Chinese translations conceived by him on new, “progressive” foundations.

After the war, when the “great friendship” with China began, translations streamed out in full flow. In 1957, the four-volume edition *Classical Chinese Poetry* (Классическая китайская поэзия) was published. More than 90% of the translators were ghostwriters without any knowledge of the subject – thousands of the most complicated lines needed to be translated almost instantly, as the four volumes came out in one year, the editor-in-chief Nikolai Fedorenko (Николай Трофимович Федоренко, 1912–2000) being essentially a diplomat, not a scholar.¹⁶

Another student of Alekseev, Lev Eidlin (Лев Залманович Эйдлин, 1910–1985), eventually became the major translator of Chinese poetry. Even the Chinese admired his ability to read and understand classical verse. He, like Vasiliev, often made hardly justified grammaticalisations of the translations by introducing pronouns. Eidlin continued to work until the mid-1980s. But the scene gradually became dominated by non-Sinologists, exemplified by Alexander Gitovich (Александр Ильич ГИТОВИЧ, 1909–1966). He had been sent as a correspondent to wartime Korea, where he was impressed not so much by the war as by the nature of the country. Then, somehow, he switched to China – perhaps this was due to the fact that Akhmatova, who was his neighbour, began to translate Chinese authors, and he followed.

For their time, these translations were comparable in degree of fame and influence on people who were interested in China to Samuil Marshak's (Самуил Яковлевич Маршак, 1887–1964) classic translations from Shakespeare. They are comparable also in their approach to the original material.

¹⁵ *World Literature* was supplemented by other outlets for translated material such as, in the case of Asian literature, the journal *Vostok* (The East). The literature published tended to be canonical; in fact, *Vostok*, which published literary works from all over Asia, essentially took texts only from a given language's classical tradition (Clark 2018, 141).

¹⁶ Simultaneously the readers became acquainted with the works of Leonid Cherkassky (Леонид Евсеевич Черкасский, 1925–2003), who left for Israel in the early 1990s, and St. Petersburg scholar Lev Menshikov (Лев Николаевич МЕНШИКОВ, 1926–2005). Cherkassky translated the Chinese poet Cao Zhi and was also almost the only one who translated poets of the 20th century. Another very significant figure in the translation is Boris Vakhtin (Борис Борисович Вахтин, 1930–1981). A talented playwright, prose writer, and professional Sinologist, he published two collections of Chinese folk songs translated by him.

These translations were explanatory. Sinologist Boris Pankratov (Борис Иванович Панкратов, 1892–1979), a former Russian intelligence officer in China, worked with Gitovich.

Turning to the strategy of “conveying the meaning of the original”, a socially and historically oriented interpretive approach, we will now once more examine Li Bai’s *Complaints on the Jade Steps* as translated by the next generations of Sinologists after the first rendering in *The Flute of China*. Consider Shchutsky’s version:

Я стою... У яшмовых ступеней	Ya stoyu... U yashmovykh stupeney
Иней появляется осенний.	Iney poavyayetsya osenniy.
Ночь длинна-длинна...Уже росой	Noch' dlinna-dlinna...Uzhe rosoy
Увлажнен чулок мой кружевной.	Uvlazhnen chulok moy kruzhevnoy.
Я к себе вернулась и печально	Ya k sebe vernulas' i pechal'no
Опустила занавес хрустальный,	Oпустila zanaves khrustal'nyy,
Но за ним я вижу: так ясна	No za nim ya vizhu: tak yasna
Дальняя осенняя луна!	Dal'nyaya osennyaya luna!

(Shchutskiy 1923, 91)

I stand... at the jasper steps
 Frost appears in autumn.
 The night is long-long ... Already with dew
 My lace stocking is moistened.
 I returned to my place and sadly
 lowered the crystal curtain,
 But behind it I see: so clear is
 The distant autumn moon!

Although the number of significant words he has added to the Chinese original is very small, Shchutsky deprives Li Bai’s text of its strict lapidarity, and deduces the meaning “out of the words”, depriving the poem of its mysterious charm and the allure of reticence. From the very first words “I stand...” the translation acquires grammatical categories, and with the introduction of “sadly” it is endowed with a categorical semantic; in other words, it loses some of the distinct merits of the original. Finally, the translator radically violates the form of the five-word line with a caesura after the second character; the paired rhyme equally lacks correspondence to the original; moreover, it is positioned not at the ends of the lines, but the ends of their pre-caesura and post-caesura parts.

Soon Alekseev himself proposed his own version of the translation:

Яшмовый помост рождает белые росы...	Yashmovyy pomost rozhdayet belyye rosy...
Ночь длинна: овладели чулочком из флера.	Noch' dlinna: ovladeli chulochkom iz flera.
Уйду, опущу водно-хрустальный занавес:	Uydu, opushchu vodno-khrustal'nyy zanaves:
В прозрачном узоре взгляну на месяц осенний.	V prozrachnom uzore vzglyanu na mesyats osenniy.

(Alekseev 1925, 87)

The jasper platform gives birth to white dew...
 The night is long: the fleur stocking has been invaded.
 [I] will leave, lower the water-crystal curtain:
 In a transparent pattern look at the autumn moon.

Having sacrificed the only formal feature of a Chinese poem (its rhyme), Alekseev retains all the other features of the original. Each line of five Russian words for him is a semantic unity, clearly divided in strict accordance with the Chinese norm into two words before caesura and three after it. The first two lines convey the lyrical ambiguity that the Chinese connoisseur admired. Actually, it is also present in the two final lines, where all three verbs (leave, lower, look) are deprived of the subject as predicates, and therefore of grammatical person.

The translator carefully selects Russian correspondences to Chinese words: including “invade” (or, rather, “take possession”, *ovladet*) for the verb *qin* 侵, the variant, perhaps not “aggressive” enough, but incomparably closer to the original than the languid, straightforward “moistened” in Shchutsky. The composite epithet “water-crystal” is also very characteristic of Alekseev’s translation manner, although, unfortunately, no Russian equivalent has been found for the neighboring 玲瓏 *ling-long* – both a sound and a visual image at the same time.

More than thirty years after Shchutsky and Alekseev, Gitovich also translated the same poem by Li Bai; the interlinear translations for him were made by Pankratov:

Ступени из яшмы	Stupeni iz yashmy
Давно от росы холодны.	Davno ot rosy kholodny.
Как влажен чулок мой!	Kak vlazhen chulok moy!
Как осени ночи длинны!	Kak oseni nochi dlinny!
Вернувшись домой,	Vernuvshis' domoy,
опускаю я полог хрустальный	opuskayu ya polog khrustal'nyy
И вижу – сквозь полог –	I vizhu – skvoz' polog –
сияние бледной луны.	siyaniye blednoy luny.

(Gitovich 1956, 116)

Jasper steps
 Long cold from the dew.

How wet my stocking is!
How long are the nights of autumn!

Returning home,
I lower the crystal canopy

And I see – through the canopy –
the glow of the pale moon.

These translations were made for different purposes: from purely scholarly to artistic and educational; there are mistakes in these translations – both the misunderstood original and the conspicuous awkwardness of the Russian language, but they have one thing in common: the desire to clarify all grammatical and semantic connections. Thus, they entered into an obvious contradiction with the Chinese poetic norm: among Chinese connoisseurs, this poem is glorified, first of all, by the vague lack of clarity, the lack of manifestation of the meaning that only dawns behind the words. They present a classic example of Soviet-era translations, “which are ironically divergent from the original” (Mikushevich 2015, 168).

Translations by Eidlin, Gitovich, and many others try to convey the meaning of the Chinese verse in the language of Russian romanticist poetry of the 19th century¹⁷ with its metaphors, personification, historicism, etc. This approach seems ambiguous. As Eidlin has formulated, “Chinese poets appear before our reader dressed in Russian clothes” (Eidlin 1972, 193). The texts had to resemble the original work, yet convey the idea of the “poetic” in the context of the receiving culture (Khotimsky 2018, 233). Gitovich remarked: “It is necessary that the translation becomes part of Russian poetry, and it does not matter to the reader whether the poet knew the language or worked with an interlinear crib” (Gitovich 1969, 379).

Even if we accept the controversial strategy of archaizing the translation language of any classical text, the question still arises: how does the 8th century in China correlate with the 19th century in Russia?

Translating through the experimental prism

The language of the original played a subordinate role in relation to the target language for the larger part of the 20th century in Russia. The maxim of the translator of classical poetry was reduced to

¹⁷ Early Russian Romanticism is associated with the writers Konstantin Batyushkov, Vasily Zhukovsky, and Nikolay Karamzin. However, the principal exponent of Romanticism in Russia is Alexander Pushkin. Other Russian Romantic poets include Mikhail Lermontov, Fyodor Tyutchev, Yevgeny Baratynsky, Anton Delvig, and Wilhelm Küchelbecker. The subjectivist “freedom” in their approach to reality determines many features of the style of romantic poetry: the predominance of expressiveness over figurativeness, lyricism, “evaluativeness” of descriptive means. Romanticist epithets, for example, are mostly devoid of material-objective meaning (they have almost completely lost it) and carry an emotional-evaluative function. This “poetics of recognition” turned into the poetics of the template is exploited in Romanticist stylisations.

“extracting the meaning of the original”. One was expected to translate into existing, archaising, poetic tradition, so that the poem would be read “with ease” by an unprepared reader.

At the same time, the structure of contemporary Russian verse not only provides new opportunities for poetic translation from unrelated languages, but also allows one to find points of convergence in the language of contemporary Russian and classical Chinese poetry. Avant-garde verse tolerates heteromorphic constructions, expansion of the understanding of rhyme, including internal rhyme, and all types of isomorphisms.

On the other hand, the text and language of the original awaken in the translator the desire to transform his/her own language. This strategy of transforming one’s own language when interacting with someone else’s can be especially significant when translating from unrelated languages. In this case, the idea of the potential convergence of languages and of translation as an expression of this convergence can be realised.

In other words, instead of expounding the so-called meaning of the Chinese text in Russian (which is obviously impossible in isolation from the Chinese language), it is necessary to follow the path of developing potentiality in Russian and “turning Russian into Chinese”. Or in a more paradoxical formulation: language is translated into language. Thus, the reproach to the translator – *people don’t speak Russian like this* – can be rephrased: *they potentially do speak Russian like this, they already speak Russian like this*.

Both difficulties and perspectives arise from that gap, as noted by Jakobson – the translator is most hindered not by the absence of any form or category present in the original language, but rather by the presence of “superfluous” forms and categories. In the case of Russian–Chinese language interaction, this becomes most obvious. Adjusting to the case system, or to the inevitable choice of verbal forms, leads to a narrowing of the semantic expansion. This narrowing produces insufficient intratextual plasticity and word mobility – for languages differ mainly in what *cannot be* expressed, not in their expressibles (Jakobson 1959, 233–239).

Indeed, the language of the original poses unavoidable questions: do we actually need unequivocal part-of-speech markers, capital letters, punctuation, etc.? Similar questions arose before contemporary poetry with its evolution. Looking back at this evolution, a modern translator’s strategy focuses not on a national poetic convention, but on the intra-poetic convention existing here and now, developing it through the interference of a genetically unrelated language.

When comparing Chinese and Russian poetic texts, we see an opposition arising in accordance with the criterion of concentration. Classical Chinese poetry in this sense serves as an example of an extreme concentration of the text. Firstly, Chinese as a character language implies a much larger semantic volume in fewer words/morphemes. Secondly, Classical Chinese in general, and the poetic language of the “Golden Age” of Chinese poetry in particular, suggests a greater semantic concentration compared to modern Chinese.

The strategy of Chinese classical poetry is aimed at refusing narratives, refusing to abuse details, and increasing the semantic volume of each word. The principle of saving words as the fundamental difference between lyric poetry and narrative reveals an orientation towards the reader, capable of

complex interpretations, especially in the case of a poet-cum-reader. Such an attitude makes us look for all possible ways to reduce the number of words and increase their semantic volume in the Russian language.

Alekseev put forward the requirement of “scholarly accuracy” of the translation, which implies special attention to the number and principles of word selection (Alekseev 1978, 516). Interestingly, this requirement echoes the paradoxical demand for literalism put forward by Walter Benjamin (Benjamin 2000, 15–23). On the one hand, the “scholarly accurate” translation, according to Alekseev, implies that not a single word is missed in the original that would have affected the translation in one way or another. Ideally, the original should correspond as closely as possible to the word-for-word translation, as far as it is achievable in relation to the Chinese text.

On the other hand, Alekseev proposed a formal principle of correspondence between the characters of the original and the words in translation. It is necessary to keep the same number of characters: five or seven characters in a line of traditional Chinese verse should correspond to the number of words in a Russian poetic line, not counting function words. Despite the fact that such a structure is difficult to achieve in Russian verse/language, much more “verbose” than Chinese, strict adherence to this principle opens up the possibility of expanding the semantic volume of the word and building the text in the mode of potentiality (or potential convergence).

The ideas of Alekseev were realised only in the translation practice of post-Soviet Russia. But the stage was set by exploring China as site of poetic imagination and experiment.

If we move away from the strict focus on translations of Chinese poetry to experimenting with the “Chinese text”, we must inevitably emphasise the preparatory work carried out by Russian conceptualist poetry (1970s–1980s). A pivotal role is played by idea of the “East” as a symbol, image, and metaphor. During the Cold War and its aftermath, the “West” perceived the USSR (and Russia) as a part of the same Orientalist myth through which the “East” was seen by Nikolay Panitkov (Николай Панитков, 1952–), and Dmitry Alexandrovich Prigov (Дмитрий Александрович Пригов, 1940–2007) (e. g. in the performance art work *This is - Chinese, Это - китайское*, 1997). China has occupied a special place in the construction of the “Eastern” space due to certain political and cultural reasons – starting from its unique role in the system of Soviet international relations and propaganda and further to the active involvement of the many Soviet publishing houses and cultural and academic institutions. China, where it was practically impossible for a Soviet citizen to travel (in contrast to the theoretically and in some cases even practically accessible West), which was officially or openly hostile or briefly mentioned without any comment in the official media, nevertheless was abundantly represented by the historical and the cultural.

China’s manifestation in the mind of the Soviet intellectual was twofold: as the Maoist PRC and as the great ancient, mysterious, and highly spiritual Chinese tradition. Of course, the Western popularity of the “Eastern”, especially in its pop-cultural derivation, played its part, too. It began with the texts of J. D. Salinger (1919–2010) and the beat generation and became the leading trend in the hippy movement, rapidly commercialising as early as the 1970s. The influence of the Western counterculture and pop culture on shaping the image of the “East” for the consciousness of the late Soviet people is difficult to exaggerate. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the world “opened up” and

China suddenly turned out to be an economic superpower, the cultural image of the country and its tradition has not changed.

We see it as a source of inspiration and influence, for example, in the concept of “Schizochina” (an imagined space for the author’s phantasms) as developed by Andrey Monastyrskiy (Андрей Монастырский, 1949–), Igor Kholin (Игорь Холин, 1920–1999), Viktor Pivovarov (Виктор Пивоваров, 1937–), and other conceptualists (e. g. in group exhibitions *Schizochina: Hallucination in Power*, 1990, and *Chinese Lesson*, 1998).¹⁸ Later on “Chinese text” features in Faina Grimberg’s (Фаина Гримберг, 1951–) fantasies of traditional China (*In Memory of My Brother*, Памяти брата; *Mei Lanfang*, Мэй Ланьфан, 2017), involving the symbols of imperial Chinese decadence: silk, jade, erotic imagery, and allusions to Chinese theatre, in a highly stylised form that emphasises above all the fact that female roles were performed by male actors.

In the poetry of Maxim Amelin (Максим Амелин, 1970–), traditional imagery becomes intertwined with images of contemporary China (*On the Badaling Section of the Great Wall of China*, На Бадалинском участке Великой китайской стены, 2015). Maria Galina (Мария Галина, 1958–) attempts to use both for a kind of a mythological reconstruction of the initial image in *“Here You and I Stand on the Yangtze River...”* (Вот мы с тобой стоим на реке Янцзы..., 2012). Andrey Sen-Senkov (Андрей Сен-Сеньков, 1968–) further explores the possibilities of the imaginary “Chinese” space in his long sequence *Chamber Gossip on Eunuchs in China* (Камерные сплетни о евнухах в Китае, 2015) that blends fantasy and reality as in the pseudo-histories of Milrad Pavić.

Such a stylised perception of China combines with a phonetic and visual assimilation of the Chinese tradition in Russian poetry – manifested in new translation practices. Poets seek consonance between Chinese and Russian words, and emphasise the character of Chinese writing, which correlates with the graphic appearance of the verse. The most vivid example is Natalia Azarova (Наталия Азарова, 1956–) and several of her projects including the long poem *Red Cranes on a Grey Background* (Красные краны на сером, 2014), although “Chinese” experiments can also be observed in Genady Aigi (Геннадий Айги, 1934–2006), Tatiana Grauz (Татьяна Грауз, 1964–), and others.

In the Du Fu translation project Azarova tries to retransmit the syntactic and semantic ambiguity of traditional Chinese verse into the Russian text. Azarova uses nominative series to locate the words next to each other in an associative rather than a syntactic connection, and masters what Charles Olson called “composition by field” (the movement across the entire surface of the page) (Olson, 1950). In Chinese poetry the possibility of a joint reading of words that are adjacent vertically has been part of a long-standing tradition. Azarova also uses repetition (reduplication) as a deepening exponentiation of the meaning. This concentration with a plurality of meanings (rather than rhyme or division into separate lines) is a sign of poetic language – be it traditional or contemporary.

¹⁸ Prigov was one of the leaders of the conceptual art school started in the 1960s, viewing performance as a form of art. Russian conceptualism was a very broad movement; although relationships among conceptualist artists sometimes reached the level of rejection and enmity, they all tried to overcome the boundaries between different types of art and were interested in the “mechanics” of language.

The vertical interaction of language signs creates the possibility of non-linear movement along the text, which, as in the poem *Yue ye yi shedi* 月夜憶舍弟 (On a Moonlit Night Thinking of My Brothers) by Du Fu, can underlie the philosophical reading of the poem:

戍鼓斷人行	<i>движение людей</i> <i>прервут барабаны войны</i>
邊秋一雁聲	<i>осени на границе</i> <i>кричит одинокий гусь</i>
露從今夜白	<i>вижу что здесь</i> <i>ночи пока светлы</i>
月是故鄉明	<i>на родине в детстве</i> <i>луна сияла всюду</i>
有弟皆分散	<i>разбросаны братья</i> <i>разлукой за много вёрст</i>
無家問死生	<i>никого не спросить</i> <i>они живы ли умерли ли</i>
寄書長不達	<i>письма послать</i> <i>им не дойти далеко</i>
況乃未休兵	<i>к тому же войны</i> <i>непрерывно движение вокруг</i>

(Azarova 2021, 74)

<i>dvizhen'ye lyudey</i>	movement of people
<i>prervut barabany voyny</i>	interrupting war drums
<i>oseni na granitse</i>	autumn's border
<i>krichit odinokiy gus'</i>	lonely goose screams
<i>vizhu chto zdes'</i>	see that here
<i>nochi poka svetly</i>	nights still bright
<i>na rodine v detstve</i>	at home in childhood
<i>luna siyala vovsyu</i>	moon shone with might and main
<i>razbrosany brat'ya</i>	brothers scattered
<i>razlukoy za mnogo vorst</i>	many miles apart
<i>nikogo ne sprositi'</i>	no one to ask
<i>oni zhivy li umerli li</i>	are they alive are dead
<i>pis'ma poslat'</i>	sending letters
<i>im ne doyti daleko</i>	they won't get far
<i>k tomu zhe voyný</i>	besides war is
<i>neprreryvno dvizhen'ye vokrug</i>	continuously moving around

The central position of the first and last lines (the third character, the first after the caesura) is occupied by *duan* 斷 ('interrupt') and *wei xiu* 未休 ('continuously'), located, respectively, one under the other; the end and beginning of the poem not only form a circular composition, but the graphics become an expression of the dialectic of discontinuity and continuity characteristic of Du Fu's poetics.

Contemporary Russian translators do not dwell solely on the imagery of the tradition but rather demonstrate a "formalist" interest in its language mechanics and thus come closer to the foundations of traditional Chinese poetics.¹⁹

In contemporary translations Alekseev's quantitative principle plays an important role not only in relation to the number of words in a line, but also in relation to the amount of the text in general.

In such a criterion as the length of the poem, the difference between Western and Eastern poetry is especially noticeable. In its most general form, this can be formulated as follows: in the Western tradition, the length of the poem is determined by the genre, and not by the visual appearance; in Chinese poetry, the length of a verse is correlated with the way it is written and the ability to simultaneously encompass it with the eye (even on a scroll). If you cut a Chinese poem into several pages of printed text, it will destroy the very substance of the verse. Traditional Western poetry, by contrast, for almost its entire history remains indifferent to the visibility of the whole text as an expressive medium, despite individual visual experiences (figured poems, futuristic poetry, etc.).

Due to the dictate of visuality in the culture of the 21st century, this criterion in traditional Chinese poetry seems surprisingly relevant to contemporary verse. In present day Russian poetry, the location of the text on the page, its configuration and quantitative principle as a whole is not only an important expressive means, but also a means of creating rhythm and, more broadly, meaning formation. In this regard, it seems necessary to introduce the concept of graphic text design. The important principles of graphic design of a contemporary poetic text, reflected in the translation, may be the following: the text should be located on one page, devoid of punctuation marks or containing them just minimally, the number of words and their length and location should form a certain graphic rhythm and configuration of the text. In addition, the vertical interaction of characters creates the possibility of a non-linear reading of the text, which can underlie the philosophical reading of the text.

Graphic design and quantitative indicators most reflect the concentration on the maximum integrity of the text; in translation, when trying to convey the integrity of the text and graphic design, the problem of capital letters arises. It is well known that the tradition of capital letters is not a universal. On the other hand, the concept of a "capital" (large) mark (large character) seems absurd for the Chinese language. In Russian translations of the 20th century, capital letters strengthened the linearity (sequence) of reading, and dictated more unambiguous intertextual links.

Present day poetry, which adopted writing without capital letters at the beginning of the 21st century as a relative intra-poetic norm (which also stems, regardless of Chinese poetry, from the concentration

¹⁹However, the echoes of Vladimir Mayakovsky's "step construction" in Azarova's handling of the Chinese caesura in her Du Fu translations point to the fact that this interest in the visual aspect of the poetic text – what Joseph Frank called modernist "spatial form" (Frank 1945) – is something already present in early 20th-century Russian modernism, and a resource that the more contemporary generation draws on.

on the integrity of the text), allows one to correlate the encoding in the Cyrillic alphabet with the Chinese character encoding. The rejection of capital letters is absolute, including in proper names and titles.

The strategy of text integrity also dictates the treatment of punctuation marks. Already in the second half of the 20th century, Russian poetry progressively refuses punctuation, especially commas and periods, considering the graphic solution of dividing lines to be more expressive and sufficient (Sidorova and Lipgart 2019). Thus, the traditional punctuation marks adopted in Russian become an obstacle to the creation of flexibility and multi-parameter syntactic and in-text links, including vertical ones, and seem redundant, except for question marks and exclamations. The intonation-graphic division of the text in the translation uses caesura (line-break): in a seven-word line, a caesura is used according to the formula $4 + 3$, and in a five-word line $2 + 3$.

The rhythm of the Chinese verse is formed by a number of isomorphisms, in particular homophones, and translation from tone to tone or movement of tones. The search for a similar structure leads to the translator's marked attention to the movement of vowels within the line, the vertical ratio of vowels and the assonance structure of the verse. On the other hand, the Chinese language has an amazing possibility of morphophonetic repetitions, fully realised in the poetic text. A reiteration-driven structure of tone-homophone-character overlapping is projected into an assonance-anagram complex. Anagrammatic construction of contemporary Russian verse to some extent is able to correlate with the isomorphism of Chinese characters.

If we accept the statement of Jakobson that paronomasia (a rhetorical device similar to a pun) reigns over poetic art, then “only creative transposition is possible... or interlingual transposition – from one language into another, or finally, intersemiotic transposition – from one system of signs into another” (Jakobson 1959, 238).

The search for the convergence of the principle of ideographic repetitions and the principle of sound-letter repetitions (anagrammatic, paronomastic, isosyllabic) in translation is both an interlanguage and an intersemiotic creative transposition. In this case, the aim is not to search for paired or modelling matches.

The struggle of poetry with codified syntax, which began in the 20th century, also opens up a number of new possibilities for translation (Bonch-Osmolovskaya 2010; Fateeva 2021). The syntactic connections of words in a contemporary poem are freer and more multidimensional. As the syntactic flexibility of the word and its plasticity increases, the number of possible valences increases, which represents more opportunities to correspond to a predominantly analytic language such as Chinese. Enantiosemy (semantically opposed interpretations), in particular, ceases to be perceived as a play on words and conveys the complex subjective structure of the Chinese text. The efforts of the translator are aimed at shifting the traditional parts of speech, increasing the plasticity of syntactic functions.

New translations thus explore the possibilities of developing a kind of character thinking in Russian. For poetry, a very important role is played by the fact that the character system is a potentially open one, and the development of character thinking implies the ability not to think of language as a kind of system that requires overcoming. Chinese poetry never turns into a uniquely symbolic plane: it is

always factual, or more precisely, figurative and factual, which, however, does not contradict conceptualisation, and more often than not, it is deliberately ambiguous. In traditional Chinese poetry, unlike European poetry, the images are not so literary (narrative), they are textures, elements, spatial relationships. The subject is already reconstructed on the basis of these spatial relationships, in the matter of the text.

One should continue to think about the translatability of the linguistic structure even when it seems untranslatable – a translator of classical poetry between unrelated languages must inevitably accept this thesis of Benjamin; from this position, the main task of the translator's commentary is not to analyse the so-called “translation difficulties,” but to support the idea of translatability as productive.

Benjamin, in his paradoxical article quoted above, characterises the hallmark of poor translations as inaccurate rendering of irrelevant content (according to Benjamin, this happens as long as the translation is trying to serve the reader). It seems that translation failures primarily stem from the problem of addressing or orientation towards the general reader. Indeed, most often the translation is more directed than the original text; a poetry translator, as a rule, thinks about which specific audience his translation is intended for.

At opposite ends of this observation's chronological span, both Alekseev and Azarova, in their pursuit of literalism and their attempt at maximum fidelity to the poetic principles of the original, productively “estranged” the Russian language itself, revealing new poetic potentialities in the host/target language through this engagement with a foreign poetic tradition.

Each epoch rethinks the classics in its own way, depending on the possibilities and development of poetic technique and metalanguage reflection. The idea of translation as a continuation of the life of the original work is also productive: such a position provides important texts with translatability in different historical epochs, which excludes the deliberate archaisation of the text and presupposes finding the convergence of the original language, as perceived in the 21st century, and the target language – in our case the contemporary Russian language and the classical Chinese. At the same time, a translation, unlike the original, cannot live long; ideally, every generation of translators supports the life of the original, so that the original “grows” and evolves in incessant translation.

Bibliography

- Azarova, Natalia. 2021. *Du Fu. Proyekt Natalii Azarovoy* (Du Fu. Natalia Azarova's Project). Moscow: Ob'yedinennoye gumanitarnoye izdatel'stvo.
- Azov, Andrei. 2013. *Poverzhennyye bukvalisty: iz istorii khudozhestvennogo perevoda v SSSR 1920–1960 gg* (The Defeated Literalists: From the History of Literary Translation in the USSR, 1920s–1960s). Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Vysshei shkoly ekonomiki.

- Alekseev, Vasily. 1916. *Kitayskaya poema o poete. Stansy Sykun Tu (837–908)* (Chinese Poem about the Poet. Stanzas by Sikong Tu (837–908)). Petrograd: Fototipiya i tipografiya A.F. Dresslera.
- Alekseev, Vasily. 1925. “Li Bo. Iz chetverostishiy. Per. s kit.” (Li Bai. From the Quatrains. Trs. from Chin.). *Vostok*, vol. 5: 87–102.
- Alekseev, Vasily. 1978. *Kitayskaya literatura. Izbrannyye trudy* (Chinese Literature. Selected Works). Moscow: Nauka. Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury.
- Baer, Brian James. 2016. “From International to Foreign: Packaging Translated Literature in Soviet Russia”. *The Slavic and East European Journal*, no. 60(1): 49–67.
- Benjamin, Walter. 2000. “The Task of the Translator.” In *The Translation Studies Reader*, edited by Lawrence Venuti, 15–23. London: Routledge.
- Bobrov, Sergey. “Poema o poete’ Sykun Tu v poeticheskom perelozhenii s kommentariyem. Vstupitel’noye slovo N. I. Konrada” (Sikong Tu’s “Poem about the Poet” in Poetic Transcript [with commentary]. Opening Remarks by N. I. Conrad). *Narody Azii I Afriki*, 1–3: 161–176.
- Bonch-Osmolovskaya, Tatiana. 2010. *The Formal Literary Experiments in Contemporary Russian Poetry in the Context of European Literature Techné*. PhD Thesis, The University of New South Wales, Sydney.
- Chu, Jinyi. 2019. *Patterns of the World: Chinese Fashion and Cosmopolitan Ideas in Late Imperial Russia*. PhD Dissertation, Stanford University. Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures.
- Clark, Katerina. 2018. “Translation and Transnationalism. Non-European Writers and Soviet Power in the 1920s and 1930s”. In *Translation in Russian Contexts: Culture, Politics, Identity*. London: Routledge: 139–158.
- Egoriev, Vyacheslav, and Markov, Vladimir. 1914. *Svirel’ Kitaya* (The Flute of China). St. Petersburg: O-vo khudozhnikov “Soyuz molodezhi.”
- Eidlin, Lev. 1972. “Kitayskaya klassicheskaya poeziya” (Chinese Classical Poetry). In *Klassicheskaya poeziya Indii, Kitaya, Korei, Vyetnama, Yaponii* (Classical Poetry of India, China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan). Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 193–203.
- Fateeva, Natalia. 2021. *Kreativnyy potentsial yazyka sovremennoy russkoy poezii* (The Creative Potential of the Language of Contemporary Russian Poetry). *Neuere Lyrik. Interkulturelle und interdisziplinäre Studien*. Book 10 (Russian Edition). Berlin: Peter Lang.
- Frank, Joseph. 1945. “Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Two Parts.” *The Sewanee Review*, no. 53 (2): 221–40.
- Gamsa, Mark. 2017. “Refractions of China in Russia, and of Russia in China: Ideas and Things”. *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, no. 5 (2017): 549–584.
- Gasparov, Mikhail. 1988. “Bryusov i bukvalizm” (Brusov and Literalism). In *Poetika perevoda* (Poetics of Translation), 29–62. Moscow: Raduga.
- Gautier, Judith. 1867. *Le livre de jade*. Paris: A. Lemerre.
- Gitovich, Alexander. 1956. “Toska u yashmovykh stupenei” (Jade Steps Remorse). In *Kitayskaya klassicheskaya poeziya* (Classical Chinese Poetry). Moscow: Goslitizdat: 116.

- Gitovich, Aleksandr. 1969. "Mysli i zametki ob iskusstve poeticheskogo perevoda" (Thoughts and Notes on the Art of Poetic Translation). In *Masterstvo Perevoda* (The Craft of Translation), Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel': 364–385.
- Golygina, Kirina, and Sorokin, Vladislav. 2004. *Izucheniyе kitayskoy literatury v Rossii* (The Study of Chinese Literature in Russia). Moscow: Eastern Literature.
- Gumilev, Nikolai. 1918. *Farforovyy pavil'on* (The Porcelain Pavilion). Petrograd: Hyperborey.
- Gumilev, Nikolai. 1997. "Farforovyy pavil'on" (The Porcelain Pavilion). Translated by Rupert Moreton. Nikolay Gumilev Electronic Collected Works website. Accessed November 15, 2019. <https://gumilev.ru/languages/890/>.
- Hamao, Fusako. 1995. "The Sources of the Texts in Mahler's 'Lied von der Erde'". *19th-Century Music*, no. 19 (1): 83–94.
- Jacobson, Roman. 1959. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation". In *On Translation*, edited by Arthur Reuben Brower, 233–239. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Khotimsky, Maria. 2018. "'The Tenth Muse': Reconceptualizing Poetry Translation in the Soviet Era". In *Translation in Russian Contexts: Culture, Politics, Identity*. London: Routledge: 220–239.
- "Lisao." Translated by Anna Akhmatova. In *Antologiya kitayskoy poezii* (Anthology of Chinese poetry), v. 1. 1957. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoy literatury: 149–161.
- Liu Zhixia 劉志俠. 2013. "Ding Dunling de Faguo sui yue" 丁敦齡的法國歲月 (Ding Dunling's Life in France). *Shucheng* 書城, 9. Accessed November 15, 2019. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_a3eb87400102v8gx.html.
- Mikushevich, Vladimir. 2015. "Perevodit' poeziiu mozhet tol'ko poet: Razvogor s Vladimirom Mikushevichem" (Only a Poet Can Translate Poetry: Conversation with Vladimir Mikushevich). *Prosodiia*, 2: 164–177.
- Olson, Charles. 1950. "Projective Verse." *Poetry New York*, no.3. Accessed January 24, 2023. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69406/projective-verse>.
- Owen, Stephen. 1985. *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Rubins, Maria. 2002. "Dialogues across Cultures: Adaptations of Chinese Verse by Judith Gautier and Nikolai Gumilev." *Comparative Literature*, no. 54(2): 145–164.
- Shchutskiy, Yulian. 1923. *Antologiya kitayskoy liriki (VII–XIX vv.)* (Anthology of Chinese Lyrics of the Seventh–Nineteenth Centuries). Moscow, Petrograd: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo.
- Shtukin, Aleksey. 1957. *Shitszin. Izbrannyye pesni* (Shi jing: Selected Songs). Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura.
- Sidorova, Marina, and Lipgart, Andrey. 2019. "Language System and Linguistic Creativity in Modern Russian Poetry: Syntax". In *Parallel Processes in the Language of Modern and Contemporary Russian and Chinese Poetry*. Moscow: Institute of Linguistics, RAS: 114–149.
- Smirnov, Ilya. 2003. "V. M. Alekseyev – perevodchik kitayskoy poezii" (V. M. Alekseev – Translator of Chinese Poetry). In *Postoyanstvo puti. Izbrannyye tanskiye stikhotvoreniya v perevodakh*

- V. M. Alekseyeva (Permanence of the Path. Selected Tang Poems Translated by V. M. Alekseev). St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoye Vostokovedeniye: 5-23.
- Smirnov, Ilya. 2009. "Kitayskaya poeziya v perevode, ili Razmolvka uchenogo s poetom" (Chinese Poetry in Translation, or a Quarrel between a Scholar and a Poet). *Voprosy Literaturnykh Nauchnykh Ispytaniy*, 2: 27-68.
- Witt, Susanna. 2013. "Arts of Accommodation: The First All-Union Conference of Translators, Moscow, 1936, and the Ideologization of Norms." In *The Art of Accommodation: Literary Translation in Russia*. Oxford: Peter Lang: 141-184.
- Witt, Susanna. 2017. "'Sovetskaya shkola perevoda' - k probleme istorii kontsepta" ("Soviet School of Translation" - On the Problem of the History of the Concept). *ACTA SLAVICA ESTONICA IX. Translation Strategies and State Control*. Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 36 - 51.
- Yu, Pauline. 2007. "Travels of a Culture: Chinese Poetry and the European Imagination." In *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, no. 151(2): 218-232.
- Zemskova, Elena. 2013. "Translators in the Soviet Writers Union: Pasternak's Translations from Georgian Poets and Literary Process of the Mid-1930s." In *The Art of Accommodation: Literary Translation in Russia*. Oxford: Peter Lang: 185-211.