

LICHTUNG AND LU ZHAI: NINE WAYS OF LOOKING AT TRANS-CIVILIZATIONAL IMAGINATIONS OF WANG WEI¹

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*Abstract: This essay explores a range of questions related to trans-civilizational translations or trans-civilizational imaginations in translational activities and thus broadens the field of translation studies to include considerations of its philosophical, historical, cross-cultural, postcolonial implications. Underlining this study is the concern with problems arising from a Western universalism overriding a cosmopolitan vision of the world that occur in translating works from a non-Western civilization such as the Chinese. The investigation, informed by theories of literature, translation, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, and philosophy, focuses on a specific case: how “Lu Zhai,” a four-line poem by China’s Tang poet Wang Wei, is variously translated and what problematic assumptions lie behind them. This essay questions the limitations of a Western spirit of universality, whether subtly or explicitly manifested. It concludes with a speculative comparison of “Lu Zhai” with Heidegger’s metaphor *Lichtung*, as an example of an affinity between the Western and Chinese civilizations, affirming the Derridean humor that the Babelian confusion of many tongues may have a divine purpose.*

TRANSLATION STUDIES in the postcolonial era, which is more than the studies of translation, raise questions about cosmopolitanism and universalism. Insofar as translation integrates differences, it should be a cosmopolitan, not a universal, vision that guides a translator. However, when he crosses over to another language, another civilization and time-space, the translator could be equipped with a certain kind of knowledge and imagination that do not quite correspond to the other; the process and product of translation thus leave traces of a perception and psychology about the other which have ethical and political implications. Sometimes, the desired correspondence with the other that defines translation is not even there. Problematic translations are more common, more pronounced in inter-civilizational or trans-civilizational translations than in intra-civilizational translations. Translations between such languages as English, French, German, Spanish, for example, are intra-civilizational in that these languages not only belong to the Western Christian civilization but also share Latin as their common linguistic roots, whereas translations between any one of these languages and a language such as the Chinese are inter- or trans-civilizational.

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Historically, Western imaginations of the Chinese civilization are often colored by either a misty aura of knowledge or a less than genuine affinity, although, occasionally, there are also cases where there is the astonishing matching of intentions or a perfect meeting of minds, testifying that correspondences in the trans-civilizational context are indeed possible.

This essay studies how “Lu Zhai,” a four-line Chan (or Zen) poem by China’s Tang dynasty poet Wang Wei, is variously translated and what patterns of trans-civilizational imagination emerge from these versions. My inquiry is enabled and facilitated by a not insignificant event. In 1987, Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz published a compact book titled *19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* (hereafter referred to as *19 Ways*) in which thirteen English versions of “Lu Zhai,” two French versions and one Spanish translation are assembled in conjunction with three arrangements (the Chinese text, a phonetic transliteration and a character-by-character translation) of the original poem. Weinberger provides succinct commentaries for all the translations and is clearly the dominant voice and perspective of the book. Paz’s voice is confined to reflections on his own translational process. The Spanish translation, No. 15, is Paz’s own work and is followed by both Paz’s commentary and that of Weinberger. Towards the end of the book, Paz also provides a “Further Comments” on his translations of Wang Wei. The book, in fact, contains three of Paz’s versions of the poem. The range of translations gathered is sufficient proof that “Lu Zhai” is clearly well favored by Western translators; the editors also admit that a parallel exploration of German, Italian or Portuguese could have yielded more findings.

Based on the valuable work of Weinberger and Paz and starting from Wang Wei and the Chinese context, this essay explores issues related to trans-civilizational imaginations in nine different ways. For this purpose, only selected translations by Weinberger and Paz, are included for discussion. Of all the translators featured in *19 Ways*, Paz seems to have the most intense fascination with Wang Wei’s poem, which is evident in his several versions, in his reflections included in the comments and, indeed, in his life-time devotion to translating Chinese poetry. Paz’s translations receive more attention here as they are linked to Paz’s intentions in his several interconnected roles as a translator, translation theorist, poet, critic of Western modernity, and an inter-civilizational visionary.

This essay asks several questions. By what assumptions and with what intentions are the translations made? What vital forces in Wang Wei’s poem have been enabled by Paz and other translators to continue into the modern Western culture? How does the “Pound instinct” consciously or unconsciously inform the translations by Paz and others? In Paz, how is his vision of presence related to trans-civilizational translations and to intra-civilizational translations? Finally, what intentions in the ancient Chinese poem resonate with modern Western intentions, resulting in a mysterious correspondence between the West and Wang Wei? Guided by such questions, this essay examines the translations of Paz’s and others’ *trans-civilizationally*, in connection with

Chan/Zen practices in Wang Wei and in Chinese culture and history, as well as *intra-civilizationally*, in conjunction with Benjamin, Pound, Baudelaire, Heidegger and the Western quest for presence. The essay thus appears as several enunciations rather than one argument. However, underlying these notes is the attentiveness to the West-East poetic correspondence in general and the mysterious correspondence between *Lichtung* and “Lu Zhai” in particular. *Lichtung*, from Heidegger, is cited as a metaphorical sign for the Western effort to redefine and recover Being or presence, whereas “Lu Zhai,” title of Wang Wei’s poem, is a metaphor for the complex intentions involved in Chan/Zen poetry in the Chinese history and culture.

I. Wang Wei and the Chinese Context

Here is the original Chinese text of Wang Wei’s “Lu Zhai (鹿柴),” with each line followed by a character-by-character “translation” which, of course, is not yet proper translation but nonetheless offers a “raw” sense of the poem.

空山不見人 empty hills not see man
 但聞人語響 yet hear man talking echo
 返景入深林 returning light enter deep forest
 復照青苔上 again shine green moss on/above

Wang Wei (c. 700-761) was a Tang dynasty poet, painter, calligrapher, musician, Chan/Zen² Buddhist and a *literati* scholar-official. His poetry, including “Lu Zhai,” has accordingly been appreciated and studied as the nexus of his aesthetic, religious and social practices in Chinese painting, calligraphy, music, Zen Buddhism and the feudal officialdom. “Lu Zhai” is part of a sequence of twenty “landscape painting poems” (*shanshui shi*) Wang Wei has created; the sequence uses, for subjects and settings, different locations of his retreat estate in the Wangchuan Valley of today’s Shaanxi Province. “Lu Zhai,” the title of the poem, is a place name in the Wangchuan Valley, consistent with the rest of the poems in the sequence. Wang Wei once copied these poems in his own calligraphic style on a long scroll and matched them with paintings. The scroll, called “The Wangchuan Flow,” has unfortunately been lost.

While expressing his appreciation of the poem’s “universality, impersonality, absence of time, absence of subject”, Paz points out that Wang Wei was a “fervent Buddhist” and this poem as “Buddhist nature poetry” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 31). It is now sufficient to perceive Wang Wei simply as a Buddhist rather than the Zen Buddhist he was and the inadequacy in Paz’s perception is evident in his translation

² The word Chan historically preceded the word Zen. Zen, a term well accepted in English, is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word Chan which in turn is derived from Pali *jhānam*, from Sanskrit *dhyānam*, (meditation). The Sanskrit root *dhyā-*, *dhī-* means “to see, observe.” For consistency, the word Zen will be used in the rest of the essay.

strategies which will be discussed later. Weinberger seems to have sensed this as a problem, for, in his commentary on Paz's commentary, he purposely includes a key sentence, suggesting the light "almost becoming the sudden illumination, *satori*, of Zen Buddhism" (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 32). This mention of Zen Buddhism in connection with Wang Wei, the only one in *19 Ways*, is arguably the most crucial information.

To say that Wang Wei is a Zen Buddhist is to point to the Chinese cultural context in which Wang Wei's poem is embedded, for Zen Buddhism is the hybridization of a special branch of Buddhism and Chinese intellectual traditions such as Confucianism and Taoism. Moreover, the hybridization was made possible partly by the class of *shidaifu* who embraced and promoted Zen practices. *Sidaifu* can be translated as *literati* for short or as "the cultured scholar-official." In the long feudal history of China, many of the most accomplished literary men and artists also held positions in the feudal officialdom. According to Lu Zhiwei, "The crux of the strange relationship between official and literary life lies in the nature of our old civil examinations. Success or failure was entirely based on literary achievement" (Lu, 1982, 122). Perceiving the connection between the development of Zen Buddhism and the *literati* culture enables a deeper appreciation of the Chinese civilization in which arts, Zen practices and politics are intertwined. It is thus not redundant to say that Wang Wei, too, was both a devoted Zen Buddhist and a member of the *shidaifu* who embraced Zen Buddhist practices. Yang Xianyi and Gladys, in their translation of Wang Wei, choose to emphasize this aspect of the poet: "A great painter and an accomplished musician, Wang, for many, represents the classical ideal of the cultured scholar-official" (Yangs, 2005, 7). Many of the *literati* scholar-officials found Zen appealing, since this form of Buddhism somehow met their psychological need for a proper balance between their worldly ambitions and their otherworldly aspirations (入世和出世 *rushi* and *chushi*). One of the fundamental texts in Zen Buddhism is *Vimalakīrti Sutra* which records the words of wisdom of Vimalakīrti who is both a layman householder and a model bodhisattva. Vimalakīrti, in short, is an example of how Buddhism can inform the worldly daily life.

The active participation of the *literati* in Zen practices elevated the social status of Zen in China, making this hybridized form of Buddhism possible. The principle of *Sunyata*, for example, is a syncretism between the Taoist "emptiness" and the Buddhist "emptiness." Although adopting a series of negations may appear to be a sign of nihilism, *Sunyata* in fact functions, says Suzuki, as a means of "grasping the central fact of life, which can never be brought to the dissecting table of the intellect" (Suzuki, 1967, 51). What is emptied is the dualistic mode of thinking (or binary oppositions) that sustains the Western rationalist tradition. *Sunyata* also implicitly points to the becoming of the self and of the world, thus unsettling many concepts in Western modernity. An apt Western analogy for this idea is, precisely, the need of clearing up space for a true experience as implied in Heidegger's *Lichtung*. In other

words, *Sunyata* may be aptly called an *active* nothingness as it is meant to affirm the presencing of life which has been obscured. In this sense, “empty,” being the first word of “Lu Zhai,” is a key word with philosophical resonances. Later generations honored the three great Tang poets—Li Bai (or Li Po), Du Fu, Wang Wei—with three fitting titles: “the Poetic God,” “the Poetic Saint,” and “the Poetic Buddha” respectively. More revealing evidence of Wang Wei’s inseparable connection with Zen Buddhism is found in his names. Wang is his family name, Wei is his given name, and Mo-Jie is his courtesy name. His given name and courtesy name put together become Wei-Mo-Jie (维摩诘), three words forming the Chinese spelling for Vimalakīrti. Wang Wei’s own life was quietly modeled after Vimalakīrti who is both a layman householder and a model bodhisattva.

As this brief account of Wang Wei suggests, the intentions in “Lu Zhai” shows dimensions of the Chinese language and culture as a *whole*, rather than just the personal intentions of Wang Wei.

II. In Correspondence With the Zen Spirit of “Lu Zhai”

Empty mountains:

No one to be seen.
 Yet—hear—
 human sounds and echoes.
 Returning sunlight
 enters the dark woods;
 Again shining
 on the green moss, above. (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 42)

This superior translation by Gary Snyder enables English readers a true experience of the Zen poem that is Wang Wei’s original. To say that the poem is Zen is to say that it is also Chinese, poetically and culturally. The Zen spirit is so well blended into the Chinese poetic tradition that it is virtually impossible to separate the two. As is characteristic of Chinese nature poetry, the physical world is precisely observed and described. Yet this very Chinese poetic feature happens also to be the basic requirement for a Zen experience: the arrival of an epiphany or satori must rest on the experience of a concrete fact of life, on connecting the seemingly mundane or trivial details to the Tao (truth of the world). Wang Wei’s poem also aptly illustrates the Zen experience that satori happens silently, in the reticence and impersonality of the implied speaker. To use another Chinese idiom: this silence is but a thunderous silence. The thunderous power of the silence in “Lu Zhai” is the internal light of the narrator who observes. The Western term “narrative point of view” may prove to be too technical to be sufficient here - since the narrator/observer for a Zen poem like this must, almost literally, have the true Dharma eye and the mind of Nirvana. In the context of Chinese Zen, this “self” is the aesthetic merging of the self with the objective world, manifesting itself as an “I-It” unity that is the Buddha nature (佛性, *foxing*). This *foxing* rejects the subject-object

duality on which the rational intellect depends. “Go directly to your Buddha nature without the dependency on words,” says the basic tenet of Zen. This is the key point of Wang Wei’s poem. Any underestimation of this point diminishes the Zen nature or the Chinese nature of this and other Zen poetry. The path towards satori or, rather, to *kai-wu*, the opening of *wu* is shown in a linked chain of key signifiers which Snyder skillfully and accurately represents: the empty mountains, human sounds and echoes, dark woods, returning light (at sunset), green moss. “Dark woods,” although not a literal equivalence, conveys precisely the original “deep forest,” thus demonstrating the bi-lingual and bi-cultural abilities of Snyder.

In lines 1-2, the narrator observes that in the empty mountains human voices and echoes are heard. These sounds and echoes make the mountains seem even emptier. The first Chinese word in the poem *kong*, empty, connotes Sunyata which, in Zen Buddhism, is the means of disentangling oneself from unsatisfactoriness. Sunyata is central to Zen Buddhism (see Suzuki, 1964, 48-57). To realize the Buddha nature that potentially exists in everyone, dualistic thinking, clichés and customary doctrines should be emptied. This emptying is the preparation needed for a fresh perception that will break through the stale, thus realizing satori. Emptying is the opening needed for the light, for an understanding of the becoming of the world which is the Tao. *Kai-wu*, the Chinese phrase for a moment of satori, literally suggests that *opening* should precede enlightenment. The significance of “empty” is multi-layered. The word introduces the meditative reticence of the poem. It merges the physical with the metaphysical, and embeds Zen in the worldly. Read in the Chinese social context of Wang Wei’s time, “empty” also implies how Wang Wei might have desired to counteract the corrupted social and political reality in feudal China, to free himself from the “dirty waves,” so to speak, and to stay in the “clear streams.” Poetically, this “emptying” creates room for imagination and for attaining the point of view that has been obscured or forgotten.

Lines 1-2 and lines 3-4 form two inter-linked parts. The emptiness, enhanced by the human sounds and echoes far off, is followed by the Zen narrator’s observation of how the apparition of a ray of evening light slips through the deep forest (or “dark woods” as in Snyder’s English) to illuminate the otherwise hidden moss. Satori is realized in the most ordinary situation. “Returning,” the first word in line 3, is as indispensable as the word “empty.” It paints the scene of the setting sun: light from the setting sun is returning light because it has been here before, in the morning, hence the cycle of the day now being completed in the twilight. In that sense, “returning” signifies the cyclical motion of the universe. Returning is the motion of Tao. The moss that bears the dim light, a simple but central fact of life, is evidence.

Weinberger praises Snyder’s translation this way: “Every word of Wang has been translated, and nothing added, yet the translation exists as an America poem.” Weinberger’s high assessment is not based on the often misused principle of a translator’s “fidelity” to the original. Rather, he understands, rightly so, “that translation is more than a leap from

dictionary to dictionary; it is a reimagining of the poem” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 43). Snyder is as creative as he is well informed of the spirit of the original: he adopts the imperative “hear” which “is particularly beautiful” and he gives both “sounds and echoes” to capture 人语响 *ren yu xiang*, making it more precise. To use Weinberger’s words, Snyder’s version is that rare occasion when the translator holds a “perfect correspondence” with the original. In Snyder’s version, the added last word, “above,” is a surprise. Why is the returning light shining both *on* and *above* the green moss? The Chinese word 上 or *shang*, a *post-position* rather than a *pre-position* (as it is a functional word placed after the object), can indeed mean both “on” and “above.” The last line, 复照青苔上, can thus be read in two ways: again shining *on* the green moss; or, again shining [in the place] *above* the green moss. It is perhaps out of his appreciation of the poetic value of ambivalence that Snyder has decided to keep both “on” and “above” in the same line.

Weinberger, however, does not point out one more aspect of Snyder’s very creative translation: his treatment of the sound system of Wang Wei. While Snyder seems to take liberty in breaking up one line in the original into two, he, in fact, ingenuously reproduces the internal rhythm of the original. Even though each Chinese character is monosyllabic, characters are combined into various semantic and rhythmic units. In “Lu Zhai,” the internal rhythm of each line consists of a 2-word unit followed by a 3-word unit, as: xx—xxx. Snyder, in this version, succeeds in making English readers “see” and “hear” the Chinese original.

III. Reimagining Wang Wei With Less Than Zen

19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei features superior translations such as Snyder’s and also includes a fair portion of problematic translations. In most cases, the problem is not the translator’s lack of technical skills but the failure in establishing a true correspondence. Since in “Lu Zhai,” the spirit of Wang Wei is necessarily the spirit of Zen which is profoundly Chinese and East Asian, the success or failure in holding a true correspondence with this spirit is thus the success or failure in trans-civilizational imaginations. To put it differently, a Western translator, in order to cross into the Chinese civilization, cannot have the mind of just the Western world but must have a cosmopolitan vision of the *whole* world with its diverse range of differences. The failure to correspond to Zen can be seen in a given translator’s inability to represent the narrator as the medium of Zen who, with the Dharma eye and the Nirvana mind, aesthetically merges the physical with the metaphysical and finds the *satori* in the most ordinary details of life. Soame Jenyns is among those translators not knowing how to perceive the narrator other than a casual traveler in the mountains. Here is his 1944 version:

An empty hill, and no one in sight
 But I hear the echo of voices
 The slanting sun at evening penetrates the deep woods

And shines reflected on the blue lichens (12).

In addition to the awkward and perplexing phrase “shines reflected,” the dullness of this version comes from the absence of such Zen elements as Sunyata or return or the satori finally resting in the moss. The “slanting sun” or the “lichens” (which Weinberger finds particularly ugly in the plural) are not mere idiosyncratic choices of words but betray Jenyns’ failure to appreciate the Chinese and Zen aesthetic of making “precise observation of the physical world.” As Weinberger so well puts it, “Jenyns and other translators come from a tradition where the notion of verifying a poetic image would be silly, where the word ‘poetic’ itself is synonymous with ‘dreamy.’” Weinberger provides additional biographical information: in 1944, Jenyns was “Assistant Keeper of the Department of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum” who, “so far removed from the poem’s experience,” was “scribbling through the Blitz” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 13). Similar to Jenyns who breaks the impersonality of the poem by adding the “I,” G. W. Robinson, in his 1973 version, renders the first two lines as: “Hills empty, no one to be seen/We hear only voices echoed—” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 28). Once again, Weinberger critiques with a pithy comment: “Robinson not only creates a narrator, he makes it a group, as though it were a family outing. With that one word, *we*, he effectively scuttles the mood of the poem” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 29). Diminishing the Zen experience in Wang Wei’s poem does not seem to be the privilege of non-Chinese translators. A case in point is the 1972 translation provided by Wai-lim Yip who is a critic who has written on the importance of Chinese poetics to modern American poetry.

Empty mountain: no man is seen,
But voices of men are heard.
Sun’s reflection reaches into the woods
And shines upon the green moss. (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 26)

The phrase, “reaches into,” strangely anthropomorphizes the light; the evening light is reduced to only “Sun’s reflection.” The idea of cycle, represented by “returning light” and the light shining “again,” vanishes. These missing links disconnect Yip’s version from the Zen spirit, making one wonder if Yip is fully aware of the Zen connotations of the poem. An astonishing case of making Wang Wei less than Wang Wei and less than Zen is the 1958 version co-translated by Chang Yin-nan and Lewis C. Wamsley:

Through the deep wood, the slanting sunlight
Casts motley patterns on the jade-green mosses.
No glimpse of man in this lonely mountains.
Yet faint voices drift on the air. (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 16)

It is troubling to see that the two parts of the poem are unnecessarily reversed, that the mountain becomes “lonely” (a Western perception that empty must be equal to lonely), that the voices are imagined to be “faint

. . . drift on the air,” that the sunlight “casts motley patterns” on mosses that “jade-green.” The translators seem so comfortable with the original that they made an attempt to “improve” it. The voice of Weinberger now has a stern warning: “Such cases are not uncommon, and are the product of a translator’s unspoken contempt for the foreign poet. It never occurs to Chang and Walmsley that Wang could have written the equivalent of *casts motley patterns on the jade-green mosses had he wanted*. He didn’t”(17). It is quite obvious that Chang and Wamsley’s version completely misses who the narrator is or the specific Zen manner in which he observes and reflects. Then there are cases such as the 1970 translation made by Kenneth Rexroth, which require a more careful critique:

Deep in the mountain wilderness
Where nobody ever comes
Only once in a great while
Something like the sound of a far off voice.
The low rays of the sun
Slip through the dark forest,
And gleam again on the shadowy moss. (22)

A beautiful poem this is, showing Rexroth’s poetic skills which are evident, for example, in “the low rays of the sun” sensually slip “through the dark forest.” But Rexroth re-imagines Wang Wei in such a way that Wang’s form and content are largely ignored. Note how far removed is his “mountain wilderness” from Wang Wei’s Zen phrase “empty mountains,” how he changes the simple “human sounds and echoes” into three lines of his own invention (lines 2-4), and how he ignores the cycle of the day indicated by Wang Wei’s “returning light.” There is no Zen in this translation. The poem is more in the line of Robert Frost than bearing much resemblance to Wang Wei. Although Rexroth’s poem is beautiful on its own and requires more subtle analysis, is it possible that he, too, might have harbored “a spoken contempt” for the Chinese original?

IV. Octavio Paz’s Versions and Diversions

The questions raised about certain problematic translations prepare us for a more complex assessment of Octavio Paz. Assessing Paz is more difficult because he has an unparalleled seriousness about translating Wang Wei and ancient Chinese poetry and that his life-time devotion is motivated by a philosophical vision about modernity inclusive of other civilizations. *19 Ways* in fact contains three of Paz Spanish versions.

Version 1
[Presented as Translation No. 15]

No se ve gente en este monte.
Solo se oyen, lejos, voces.
Por los ramajes la luz rompe,

Tendida entre la yerba brilla verde.
 No people are seen on this mountain.
 Only voices, far off, are heard.
 Light breaks through the branches.
 Spread among the grass it shines green. (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 30)

Version 2

[Included in Weinberger's comments on Paz, reprinted
 from Paz's 1978 edition of *Versiones y Diversiones*]

No se ve gente en este monte.
 Solo se oyen, lejos, voces.
 La luz poniente rompe entre las ramas.
 En la yerba tendida brilla verde.
 No people are seen on this mountain.
 Only voices, far off, are heard.
 Western light breaks through the branches.
 Spread over the grass it shines green. (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 33)

Version 3

[Included in Paz's "Further Comments"]

No se ve gente en este monte,
 solo se oyen, lejos, voces.
 Bosque profundo. Luz poniente:
 Alumbra el musgo y, verde, asciende.
 No people are seen on this mountain,
 only voices, far off, are heard.
 Deep forest. Western light:
 it illuminates the moss and, green, rises. (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 49)

In the 2000 edition of *Versiones y Diversiones*, Paz deleted the first two versions and approved only the third version (*Versiones* 534). Yet, his decision to juxtapose all three in *19 Ways* reveals an intention to show the process of his untiring effort to appropriate a language of otherness. Viewing the three as a process, we note the following features of Paz's versions:

First, what is remarkable about the three versions is the created rhythm, reminiscent of the original but also distinctly Spanish. Paz's rhythm, embedded in the Spanish cadence, with a passion of what Stendhal called *espagnolism* bursting forth. Either in "la luz rompe /Tendida entre la yerba brilla verde" ("Spread among the grass it shines green") or in "Luz poniente: /Alumbra el musgo y, verde, asciende" ("it illuminates the moss and, green, rises"), light brings forth a feeling that is sensual, erotic, fire-like. Here, we raise *the first question* about Paz's translations: Is this passion of *espagnolism*—felt in the rhythm—an apt translation of the Zen reticence of the original?

Secondly, Paz, in all three versions, drops the word "empty" (in contrast to Snyder's version). Perhaps Paz has added "lejos" (far off) to suggest the emptiness intended in the original but that is not the same as preserving the word. Thus, *the second question*: Does Paz's strategy,

involving both omission and addition, preserve the concept of Sunyata in the original?

Thirdly, in his third and definitive version, Paz, with a few minor changes made in punctuation marks, clarifies that the poem is made up of two parts; Paz does not seem to pay too much attention to the first part but gives a great deal of emphasis to the second part, to what he describes as “the clearing in the forest illuminated by the silent ray of light” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 50). In the second and third versions, Paz adopts “Luz poniente” or “Western light” as the translation for *fanjing* 返景 or “returning light (or, more literally, shadow)” in the original. In his second (1978) edition of *Versiones* (reprinted in *19 Ways*) Paz explains that he has adopted “Western light” because in his reading of some Mahayana texts, he has noted the frequent occurrences of “the Western Paradise—the place of the setting sun” which is also “the domain of the Amida Buddha” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 31). Amida Buddha, also Amidabha, means “the infinite light.” Paz says that he remembered that Wang Wei had been “a fervent Buddhist” (31) and he thus found it fitting to render “returning light” into “luz poniente” (“Western light”). In this context, we ask *the third question*: By adopting “luz poniente” or “Western light” as the translation for “returning light,” is Paz specifying what Wang Wei does not? Or is this evidence that Paz does not know that “returning light” is part of Zen experience intended by Wang Wei?

Fourthly, in the third version, Paz adds “asciende” (rises) as the last word of the poem, which is a big surprise. Thus, *the fourth question* may be asked: Is this addition appropriate? Snyder’s version has also added the word “above.” But Snyder’s surprise is reasonable because the word 上 can mean both “on” and “above,” whereas Paz’s “asciende” is a verb.

The four questions can be summarized in brief: (1) Is the passion of *espanolism* fit for the Zen reticence? (2) Is the idea of Sunyata preserved or left out? (3) Is “luz poniente” apt? (4) Is “asciende” an apt addition? To these questions, a general response and critique can be made first. Although Octavio Paz, to his credit, makes efforts to inquire into Wang Wei’s Buddhist background, he does not seem to know that Zen Buddhism is, at least culturally, not quite the same as Buddhism in general. Paz has the poet’s acumen to take note of the “impersonality” and “absence of time, absence of subjectivity” but he does not see that the poetic expression of “Lu Zhai” is in accord with the wordless teaching of Zen. A clear evidence of Paz’s miss is his omission of the word “empty” and related concept of Sunyata. All the twenty words in Wang Wei emphasize emptiness and silence. The poem is a deliberate retreat from anything explicitly doctrinarian. “Western light”—light from the Western Paradise—might be implied but saying it explicitly seems to intrude into the deliberate silence. However, Paz, as poet, translator and critic, has more complex intentions in offering his Spanish versions; his thinking, not his exclusively, might give his translational creativity some justification. The four questions will be taken up later in other appropriate contexts.

V. Benjamin and Paz: Differences in the Theory of Translation

Paz is a great poet, but in the theory of translation, he can be compared to a better authority on the subject: Walter Benjamin. Benjamin and Paz share the basic idea that translation is a creative practice but Benjamin has a more profound sense of the importance of the foreign and of the interplay of differences in translation. The gist of Benjamin's theory, as found in "The Task of the Translator," is that a translation is the *afterlife* of the original. This after life is another life, a product of creative transformation, yet this other life must be *vitally* connected with what Benjamin provocatively calls the "translatability of the original." Benjamin's theory defines translation as a specific form of art. This art is first of all concerned with an original which is preferably a linguistic work of art itself and from which a translation, another work of art, is produced. The original has a dignified "physical and spiritual existence which is not meant for "the imparting of information" (Benjamin, 1969, 69). Only a bad translation seeks to "transmit anything but information" (69) or "undertakes to serve the reader" (70).

The *essence* of the original is its "translatability" embodied by its specific signifying modes: "the translatability of the linguistic creations ought to be considered even if men should prove to be unable to translate them" (Benjamin, 1969, 70). What is immediately striking about this statement is the implication that such translatability may be felt, in the practices of most translators, as untranslatable. Yet, as "God" is the witness, the translatability is there, whether or not the original is translated at all. Thus, being able to meet this challenge is the only reward for the good translator. Translation is an inter-language art. A good translation should be connected to the "translatability of the original" as such through discovering what Benjamin calls "the central reciprocal relationship between languages" or "the kinship of languages" (Benjamin, 1969, 72). This "reciprocal relationship" or "kinship" is realized through "a transformation and a renewal of something living" (73). To translate is therefore to *re-vitalize* the original. Regarding the idealized goal in translation, Benjamin's theory takes on a philosophical overtone, as in this statement: "all suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the *intention* underlying each language as a whole—an *intention*, however, which no single language can attain by itself, but which is realized only by the totality of their intentions supplementing each other: pure language" (Benjamin, 1969, 74, emphasis added).

There may be intentions in the broader or narrower sense. In the narrower sense, an intention is an "intended effect" (Benjamin, 1969, 76). Achieving the kinship or reciprocity of two languages is dependent, first, upon finding the "intention" embedded in each language and, second, on how the intentions of the interacting languages *supplement* each other. When this happens, a "pure language" of suprahistorical significance is achieved *in* and *as* translation. In Benjamin's context, the kinship of languages is also synonymous with what he calls a "greater language," a new language that integrates languages. Thus, a good translation is a newly gained language in which the somewhat different

intentions of the original and of the target language supplement each other. Paraphrasing Benjamin further and speaking figuratively, I suggest that the two intentions lean towards each other, thrust and counter-thrust, constituting of *an arch of supplementing intentions*.

To illustrate this insight with Paz's translations as our example, this ideal arch should match the intentions and traditions Wang Wei and Paz each represent, both Chinese and Spanish, both Chinese Zen and the Western presence (to use Paz's wording), the otherwise unrelated now related, in a form of what Paz calls "simultaneity."

One reason why Benjamin is frequently referenced in postcolonial studies and contemporary translation studies is that it in effect defines translation not just as an inter-lingual mode but also as a trans-national, trans-civilizational and supra-historical mode. Benjamin's invocation of "pure language" or "greater language" as an ideal has anticipated such postmodern and postcolonial ideas as hybridity, liminal space, and heterodoxy in postcolonial theory. It is this Benjaminian vision of translation that has inspired Homi Bhabha to envision how newness could be born into the world through cultural translation and to speak of co-present "times" in the now as *pre-sencing*. Benjamin dispels the popular myth that fidelity and freedom are to be perceived as two opposed tendencies because, he argues, there could be no true fidelity without the translator's freedom to create. Indeed, fidelity in the translation of individual words—known as word-for-word translation, literalism or mechanical translation—can never truly reproduce translatability of the original. Benjamin conditionally qualifies the translator's creativity when he emphasize: "The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image, and tone converge. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language" (Benjamin, 1969, 81).

Octavio Paz shares the conviction that translation is creative. He argues that translation is fundamental to any human creativity that involves language, for "[t]he idea of language contains that of translation" ("Presence and the Present," 1969, 152). A child asking his mother to explain the meaning of a word, suggests Paz, is asking her to translate ("Translation," 1992, 152). Similarly, "a painter is one who translates words into plastic images; the critic is a poet who translates the lines and colors into words. The artist is the universal translator. That translation, of course, is a transmutation. It consists, as is well known, of the interpretation of non-linguistic signs by means of linguistic signs—or the reverse. But each one of these translations is really another work and not so much a copy as a metaphor of the original" ("Presence and the Present," 1969, 48). To Paz, then, translation and literature are governed by the same laws of creative transformation. Paz also cautions that poets are not always good translators, especially when they use "the foreign poem as a point of departure towards their own." A good

translator “*moves away from the [foreign] poem only to follow it more closely*” (“Translation,” 1992, 158, emphasis added). A sound evaluation of Paz’s translation of Wang Wei must begin by concurring with Paz and Benjamin that because a translation is a creative transformation, it should not be judged by how identical it is with the original but by how analogous it is. Therefore, “*luz poniende*” (Western light) cannot be rejected as a possible translation for *fanjing* (returning light). Indeed, deletion or addition is on some occasions a necessary translation strategy. However, even though the translator has a right to creative freedom, he must use that freedom not only to travel but also to return. A good translator travels in order to return. In Paz’s own words, a translator moves away from the foreign poem “only to follow it more closely.” It can be added that the only justification for the translator’s creative transformation is that he follows the original more closely.

Juxtaposing Paz with Benjamin, we also find that Benjamin includes a careful description of the original (in terms of its translatability) and of the kinship of languages as the ideal goal. On this point, however, Paz shows ambivalence. Paz holds that translation is a creative transformation when he discusses translation within the same tongue (in intra-lingual translation) as an analogy for translation from one tongue to another (in inter-lingual translation). However, that is only an analogy. Jacques Derrida makes a more differentiation in another context: “a translation in the proper sense” should be distinguished from “a translation in the figurative sense” (Derrida, 1992, 226). His point is that treating inter-lingual translation and intra-lingual transformation the same would diminish the respect for the other tongue in which the original is embedded. Wang Wei’s composition of “Lu Zhai,” for example, might be called intra-lingual translation because he skillfully transforms his love for Chinese painting, music and Zen practices into that poem. In that, he answers to Paz’s description of a “universal translator.” But, a translator in the strict sense of the word, the inter-lingual translator, is a cosmopolitanist, not a universalist. Paz’s affinity with Wang Wei in this kind of translation makes them both poets but Paz’s inter-lingual translation of the poem is a separate issue; his translations of Wang must be evaluated in terms of whether he can successfully establish a true correspondence with the poem which is from a foreign culture, language and history.

Concerning the differences in translation, Paz appears to be ambivalent. On the one hand, Paz points out how “translation overcomes the difference between one language and another, [while] it also reveals them more fully” (“Translation,” 1992, 154). He is also aware that cultural and linguistic differences indicate different perspectives. “A plurality of languages and societies: each language is a view of the world, each civilization is a world,” writes Paz. “The sun praised in an Aztec poem is not the sun of the Egyptian hymn, although both spoke of the same star” (“Translation,” 1994, 153). However, unlike Benjamin who sees the “foreignness” discovered in translation as an asset and upholds the kinship of different languages as the idealized goal, Paz has an anxiety about the foreignness and differences: “Translation had once

served to reveal the preponderance of similarities over differences; from this time forward translation would serve to illustrate the irreconcilability of differences, whether these stem from the foreignness of the savage or of our neighbor" ("Translation" 153). "Irreconcilability of differences" has an undesirable connotation. But is not it the task and joy of translation to make differences reconcilable, mutually supplementing, reciprocal and realize the kinship, the arch?

To Paz, translation is the way to end confusion by recovering a certain "universality of the spirit." Only the "[u]niversality of the spirit was the response to the confusion of Babel: many languages, one substance" ("Translation" 152), and to illustrate this point, he adds, with a bias unconsciously revealed, "It was through the plurality of religions that Pascal became convinced of the truth of Christianity" (152).

Further inquiry shows that Paz's claim for a "universality of spirit" is centered in the West. The world, according to Paz, is divided between the Western civilization and the non-Western civilizations. China—with its history, culture and poetry—is the obvious civilizational other. According to Paz, translational activities within the languages of Western world (or intra-civilizational translations, to use the term of this essay) and those between the Western world and other civilizations (or trans-civilizational translations) should be perceived as two kinds of convergences, the former a matter of stylistic emulations within the Western conscience and the latter a matter of appropriating something foreign and assimilating it for the nurturing of the Western conscience. In "Translation: Literature and Letters," Paz states: "It would be sensible to consider Western literature as an integral whole in which the central protagonists are not national traditions—English, French, Portuguese, German poetry—but styles and trends. No trend, no style [within Western literature] has ever been national, not even the so-called artistic nationalism." However, Paz also acknowledges that Western literature is the result of "convergences of the various traditions" which include "the presence of the Arabic tradition in Provençal poetry, or the presence of haiku, and the Chinese tradition in modern poetry"; these "presences" are not Western but have, through translation, been assimilated into Western literature ("Translation," 1992, 160).

Not all Westerners center their vision of the world in the West. Not all Western translators will feel troubled by the "confusion" of tongues in the Babel. Derrida, in contrast to Paz, gives a rather different reading of the myth of the Babel. Voltaire, says Derrida, once humorously explained that although the word "Babel" signifies "confusion" in *Genesis*, the prefix "*Ba* signifies father in the Oriental tongues, and *Bel* signifies God." Thus, "Babel means not only confusion in the double sense of the word [confusion of tongues and confusion of the architects about the interrupted structure], but also...the name of God as the name of father" (Derrida, 1992, 219). As soon as we pronounce "Babel," Derrida suggests, "we sense the impossibility of deciding this name belongs, properly and simply, to *one* tongue" (226). This name, which is God's name, "should be translated as confusion to be understood, hence to let it be understood that it is difficult to translate and so to understand"

(227). Translation, thus experienced, does not recover someone's lost rational transparency or uni-vocality. In translation, the Babelian confusion has a "divine" purpose since the confusion, through foreign tongues, has God's plan behind it. Indeed, God the "father" is manifested in the foreign tongue or, specifically, "oriental tongues." It is this God, a God for all religions and civilizations, who has released translation to the world as the law and duty.

VI. The Pound Tradition and the Pound Instinct

As suggested earlier, the suprahistorical kinship of languages can be visualized as *an arch of supplementing intentions*. Without translation, these intentions would remain isolated, foreign to each other, just as each half of the arch on its own is frail. In a poor translation when a translator's intention is not reciprocated by the intention of the original, there is no arch either. The arch is formed in a good translation, in a good cross-cultural correspondence.

Fidelity is in fact an imprecise principle for translation, for it is often invoked to defend mechanical translation, to justify uncreative, awkward identicalness between two languages. Benjamin's theory critiques "fidelity" without creative freedom. He accordingly keeps the signification of *supplementing intentions* open-ended so that we can interpret it to mean that the translator's intention, demonstrated through his use of language, can even *realize* the intention of the original that has never been realized before. Theoretically, Wang Wei would gain "another life" in the poetic Spanish of Paz as long as he is still recognizably Wang Wei, not someone else. The questions raised earlier about Paz's versions remain to be answered. For example, can we determine if the passion of *espagnolism* intended by Paz's translation is a supplementation to Wang Wei's Zen reticence? Does it reveal Wang Wei's intention in a way that has been revealed before? The questions are not easy to answer because when we explore the intentions in Paz's translation (half of the possible arch), we will find that Paz's intentions are not completely personal but related to a web of intentions and traditions that include Pound. The complex legacies of the Pound tradition bequeath what might be called a "Pound instinct" which has become part of the Western collective unconscious.

Pound, to Paz and many others, is a symbolic figure for introducing Chinese poetry into Western literature. Pound, too, takes a West-centered position in approaching the inter-civilizational translation of Chinese poetry. In "Further Comments" included in *19 Ways*, Paz states that Pound was "[t]he first to attempt to make English poems out of Chinese originals . . . All of us since who have translated Chinese and Japanese poetry are not only his followers but his debtors" ("Further Comments," 1987, 46). Take note of how Paz puts it: "*make* English poems out of Chinese originals." Pound's way of *making* English poems out of Chinese originals has positive and negative implications. Positively, Pound has made the Chinese language and poetry an integral part of modern poetic consciousness in the West. Pound's own poetic

talents play an important role in his success. But to suggest that his creativity in this respect amounts to his “invention” of Chinese poetry is arrogant as slights the value of the Chinese originals and denies the correspondence required in translation.

It was the same arrogance, a “positional superiority” as Edward Said aptly characterizes it, which has arbitrarily created a Western preference for ancient China over modern China. This is evident in a moment involving Fenollosa and Pound. In Fenollosa’s little book *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, edited by Pound and regarded by Pound as his Bible for Chinese poetry, Fenollosa confidently makes this claim: “Several centuries ago China lost much of her creative self, and of her insight into the causes of her own life; but her original spirit still lives, grows, interprets, transferred to Japan in all its original freshness” (Fenollosa/Pound, 1968, 6). Sam Hamill, an accomplished translator of Asian poetry, poignantly informs: “Fenollosa knew little Japanese and almost no Chinese. His informants were two Japanese professors, Mori and Ariga, neither of whom was fluent in classical Chinese, and thus Li Po became known in the West by his Japanese name, Rihaku” (Hamill, 1999, 81). Yet Fenollosa was accoladed by Pound as the ultimate genius, which is quite revealing of Pound’s own instinct towards Chinese poetry. Pound recommended Fenollosa in a similarly orientalist comment: “In his search through unknown art Fenollosa, coming upon unknown motives and principles unrecognized in the West, was already led into many modes of thought since fruitful in ‘new’ Western painting and poetry...To him the exotic was always a means of fructification” (Fenollosa/Pound, 1968, 3). “Exotic,” “unknown art” are revealing indeed of Pound’s instinct. This is the instinct that the Chinese originals are somehow unknown or unknowable that seems to entitle Pound and others to “invent” them.

The value of the Pound tradition is that his poetic acumen allowed him to appreciate the visual dynamism of a Chinese character (or “ideogram”) as akin to poetry, which has further inspired him to make imagist poems through translations based on the sometimes clear and sometimes vague understanding of the Chinese originals. In his many successful cases, Pound’s intentions are indeed reciprocated by the intentions of the Chinese language and poetry. But in the unsuccessful cases, he seems to be “translating”—inventing, that is—all too freely from his own mind, without sufficient respect for the originals which, in his words, are “unknown” and “exotic” anyway. It is this attitude towards the Chinese civilization, the Pound instinct, which has a negative impact on those who uncritically follow the Pound tradition.

Pound’s knowledge of the Chinese language and poetry is limited in two aspects. First, he does not seem to hear the music in the Chinese language. While he speaks of *melopoeia* (the music), *phanopoeia* (the image) and *logopoeia* (the spirit of poetry dancing in the words) as the three indispensable elements of poetry, he often abandons, in his translation of Chinese poetry (e.g., in “The River Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”), any effort to re-create the music of the original and focuses only on *phanopoeia* and *logopoeia*. Secondly, Pound does not seem to

be fully aware that the visual dimensions of Chinese characters are only a fraction of the total intentions of the Chinese language and, therefore, an “ideogram” is not always an isolated semantic entity but is often combined with other characters to form a semantic unit. The first line in Confucius’s *Analects* says: “子曰：‘學而時習之，不亦樂乎？’” which means: “The Master said: ‘Is it not indeed a pleasure to acquire knowledge and constantly to exercise oneself therein?’” (William Edward Soothill’s translation, 1995). Pound, inflexibly following Fenollosa’s theory and basing his reading of 時習 as isolated ideograms, produced this grotesque mistranslation: “He said: *Study with the season’s winging past*, is not this pleasant?” (Pound’s translation of *Analects*, emphasis added). No translator with pride would like to be remembered by such an absurd rendition. Pound indeed has “invented” a structure in this case but instead of being an arch it is but a precarious Leaning Tower, not supported and not to be supported by the original. In several translations of Wang Wei that we looked at earlier, particularly the versions by Chang Yin-nan and Lewis C. Walmsley and by Kenneth Rexroth, there is this troubling Pound instinct.

While Paz, like many others, inherits from Pound the positive legacies, his West-centered universalism still allies him with the Pound instinct in subtle and explicit ways. Pound began a course of renewing and redefining the Western “poetic conscience” by borrowing from a cultural and linguistic other. He started the trans-civilizational imaginations of the Chinese poetry and transformed modern Anglo-American poetry. Pound’s translations of Chinese poetry, says Paz, “allow us to glimpse another civilization, and one quite distant from Western Greco-Roman tradition... With that small volume of translations [*Cathay*] Pound, to a great extent, began modern poetry in English. Yet, at the same time, he also began something unique: the modern tradition of classical Chinese poetry in the poetic conscience of the West” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 46). Pound’s example has inspired Paz himself to devote much of his career to an untiring absorption of ancient Chinese civilization and, perhaps, to shy away from contemporary China. According to Roberto Cantu, “Ancient China, on the other hand, turned into a constant source of literary allusions in Paz’s critical essays, and an inspiration to translate poems and essays of Chinese masters between 1957 and 1996, hence over a span of four decades” (Cantu, 2007, 2).

In translation practices, Paz admires Pound for being able to create poetic verbal units in English. He emulates Pound but overcomes some of his weaknesses. Paz sees the inadequacy, if not absence, of *melopoeia* in Pound’s translation of Chinese poetry to be a problem: “Pound did not attempt to find metrical equivalents or rhymes: taking off from the image-ideograms of the originals, he wrote English poems in free verse” (Weinberger, 1987, 46). Because of this criticism of Pound, Paz, in his Spanish versions of “Lu Zhai,” achieves a certain success in recreating the original’s sound of music. Paz also shows an interest in parallelisms in Chinese poetry, unlike Pound who does not give “it the attention it deserves” (“Further Comments,” 1987, 47). Such parallelism, says Paz

admiringly, is “the nucleus of the best Chinese poets and philosophers: the *yin* and the *yang*. The unity that splits into duality to reunite and to divide again. I would add that parallelism links, however slightly, our own indigenous Mexican poetry with that of China” (Weinberger, 1987, 47).

The music of the Chinese poetry is the hardest to translate into any Indo-European language. Yet, from the Benjaminian perspective, this seeming untranslatability is precisely the translatability of the original “even if men should prove to be unable to translate them.” Paz is also one of the few capable of demonstrating this translatability of the Chinese originals. His versions, evidence of a beautifully recreated *melopoeia*, are fruits of his meticulous work. Regarding the third line of his final version, Paz says that he first tried “*traspasa el bosque el sol poniente*” (The Western sun crosses through the forest) but found it “too energetic, too active” to match the original. “Next I decided to omit the verb, as Spanish allowed the ellipsis. The two syntactical blocks (*bosque profundo/luz poniente*; deep forest/western light) preserved the impersonality of the original and at the same time alluded to the silent ray of light crossing through the overgrowth” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 49). Whether Paz is aware of it or not, the omission of verbs is not uncommon in Chinese poetic lines. This final decision about the third line at least corresponds to an intention in the Chinese poetry. But, in its negative moment, the Pound instinct willfully slights the original to willfully keep it exotic in a willful “invention.” Since an instinct sometimes acts as part of the collective unconscious in the West, it can be troubling without necessarily troubling its owner. Isn’t there the Pound instinct in Paz’s translation of Wang Wei, even if it is just a trace?

VI. Presence as Translation: Baudelaire and Paz

Paz’s interest in trans-civilizational translations is part of his vision of “presence.” In “Presence and the Present,” Paz elucidates how this presence is analogously also a matter of translation. In the pre-modern world, Paz argues, the meaning of the present was once linked to the past that was “the presumptive repository of the eternal” (“Presence and the Present,” 1969, 52). With the introduction of modernity, however, our sense of the present is filled with anxiety because the past is no longer the repository of eternal meanings and is thus disconnected from the present. This sense of modernity or the present, suggests Paz, finds a key symbol in Baudelaire whose sense of aesthetic modernity began with the many modern paintings he reviewed. The Baudelairean present, according to Paz, is a sense of the present vaguely connected to the past but linked to a hope for the future. This present (this modernity), fraught with anxiety and contradictions, bizarre and pluralized, is ironically in need of *presence* or, to use Heideggerian terms, needs to be reconnected to Being. From the Baudelairean present have evolved notions of plurality and simultaneity. A pluralized present means: “the eternal is nothing but a plural, and there are many kinds of beauty as there are

racess, epochs, and civilizations” (“Present and the Presence,” 1969, 52). A simultaneous present means: different temporalities become ‘spatialized’ and juxtaposed; the concept of simultaneity is a manifest style in modern paintings and literature, particularly in futurist paintings. Paz, however, disagrees with Anglo-American critics who claim that the discovery of simultaneity be attributed to Pound and Eliot (see *Poetry and Modernity*, 1989, 71-72). Paz argues that the Baudelairean modernity, with its hope placed in change, progress and the future, has been proven to be a failure by the end of the twentieth century. “Progress” has taken humanity to multiple crises and greater anxiety that we now stand at a juncture at which we find the future to be anything but the promised land. Therefore, Paz suggests that this Baudelairean modernity/present be re-visioned.

In *Poetry and Modernity*, Paz, with a visionary passion, proposes: “For the ancients the past was the golden age, the natural Eden that we lost one day; for the moderns, the future was the chosen place, the promised land. But it is the present that has always been the time of poets and lovers, Epicureans and certain mystics. The instant is the time of pleasure but also the time of death, the time of the senses and that of the revelation of the beyond. I believe that the new star—that which has yet to appear on the historical horizon but which has already been foretold in many indirect ways—will be the star of the present, the star of *now*” (1989, 75). This presence, poetically achievable, is a poetics of the present. As Roberto Cantu argues, Paz’s “idea of *the consecration of the instant* . . . can be interpreted as a reading experience [in which] the poem is the mediating text where past, present, and future achieve their consecration in the reader’s *conscience of self*” (Cantu, 2007, 8). This is as much a view of art as it is a view of life. Senually Hellenic it “naturally involves the body, but it need not and should be confused with the mechanical and promiscuous hedonism of the modern Western societies. *The present is a fruit in which life and death are combined*” (*Poetry and Modernity*, 1989, 75, emphasis added). As a remedy for the inadequacy, if not lack, of Western modernity, Paz proposes that re-visioned *presence* be a simultaneous experience of multiple times and cultural others. Because his new vision requires the traveling across times and civilizational boundaries, it is fundamentally a concept of translation. Paz thus argues that ancient Chinese poetry and other crystallizations of the Chinese civilization not only must be brought in to be an integral part of the plural and simultaneous presence, they are also a crucial origin of the very idea of simultaneity. Several modern thinkers in the West, Paz points out, have discovered that idea from the East. Sergei Eisenstein, the great theoretician of montage, “discovered the predecessors of simultaneity in the arts of the East, particularly in Japanese theater and the Chinese ideogram” (*Poetry and Modernity*, 1989, 69). Carl Jung discovered that “*I Ching* is dependent on the simultaneous presence of various chains of causes” (*Poetry and Modernity*, 1989, 69). Pound, as Paz acknowledges, also linked his own simultaneous method with “his reading of Ernest Fenollosa and his translations of Chinese poetry” (*Poetry and Modernity*, 1989, 71).

Paz must have had a hundred good reasons for his elation in discovering Wang Wei's "Lu Zhai" in which a ray light illuminates the green moss. One reason, I speculate, is that the poem, through Paz translation, can illustrate the pluralized and simultaneous vision of presence. His three versions of Wang Wei, if read in juxtaposition, reveal the simultaneous existence of life and death. In the first version, the light that penetrates through the branches intimates a sensual and erotic undertone: "Por los ramajes la luz rompe./Tendida entre la yerba brilla verde." But in his third version, the sunlight at sunset, translated deliberately as "luz poniente" ("Western light"), can suggest the nearness of death or the co-presence of death and birth, for the Western paradise, the domain of Amida Buddha, is the place where devoted Buddhists go when they die or, rather, to be re-born. "I consulted one of [Wang Wei's] biographies and discovered that his devotion for Amida was such that he had written a hymn in which he speaks of his desire to be reborn in the Western Paradise—the place of setting sun . . ." (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 31). In this light, a rewarding way is to read the sensuality of the first version and the implied presence of death in the third version next to each other, in a manner of simultaneity.

Returning now to question (1): Is the passion of *espagnolism* in Paz's recreated rhythm fit for the Zen reticence of Wang Wei's poem? Or, to ask it in a Benjaminian manner: Is this intention (passion of *espagnolism*) part of the intention inherent in Wang Wei's Zen reticence but has not been and could not have been realized before? That's a good possibility. Wang Wei's style of Zen reticence is meant for an experience, through satori, of a cosmic consciousness of "no life and no death," the eternally constant which is analogous to the simultaneity of erotic love and death. His reticence is not devoid of passion but is an expression of passion with restraints. Wang Wei's passionate belief in "no life and no death" is illustrated by anecdotes of his fearlessness facing his own death—he calmly wrote to his friends announcing that his own death was near. In "Lu Zhai," the feeling that life is inclusive of death is also implicitly expressed as the "returning light" shining on the green moss. Paz's re-imagination of "Lu Zhai" can be justified this way: the implicit in Wang Wei and the explicit in Paz, the subdued and more energetic, the enthusiastic and the reticent, do lean towards each other, with similar, but not the very same, intentions.

VII. *Lichtung* and "Lu Zhai": a Secret Correspondence

The appeal of "Lu Zhai" to Western translators and readers cannot be empirically explained. But it can be surmised that this ancient poem from another civilization might well answer a need or awaken a desire in the Western mind. In this segment, in the eighth way of looking at trans-civilizational imaginations of Wang Wei, we leave ready-made translations aside to imagine another arch of matching intentions, in a "translation" that should and could be made.

I am referring to Heidegger's *Lichtung*, a metaphor in German, which could be cited as an apt match to realize the translatability of "Lu

Zhai.” The secret correspondence between *Lichtung* and “Lu Zhai” can also be viewed as a meta-translation, namely, something that propels other translations: the striking similarities between the metaphors from two different times and two different civilizations could well be the secret cause that has led some translators, perhaps Paz or Snyder, to Wang Wei’s poem, for, after all, according to Heidegger’s philosophizing, *Lichtung*—the idea of light through opening—has been in the collective unconscious of the Western thoughts from the beginning. At work then is a phenomenon of cross-cultural psychology. One becomes interested in something foreign because the foreign, in an uncanny manner, answers to a need within one’s unconscious that began a long time ago. So the “foreign” is not that foreign after all. That, indeed, is the Freudian uncanny that has been enhanced and made useful in cultural studies, as in the writings by Julia Kristeva or Michel de Certeau. It, too, can be made useful in the now flourishing field of translation studies. The interest in the foreign other manifests itself variously. Sometimes, someone detects an exotic aura in the other, there begins a desire which could either evaporate into thin air or it could persist, get the foreign feeling so entangled in the crises of the self and brew all kinds of sentiments such as resentfulness, anger, or intense hatred. That kind of interest in the foreign does not result in a real translation. But a true correspondence between the self and other is the essence of translation.

As it has been discussed earlier, Wang Wei’s Zen spirit resides in both parts of the poem. In the first part (lines 1-2), the mind of “I” is emptied of the man-centered thinking and becomes something like the mountain filled with sounds and echoes. This Sunyata is the prerequisite and preparation for the sensual and spiritual satori quietly but intensely immersed in the ray of returning light in a forest clearing. As a Western metaphor with Western connotations, Heidegger’s *Lichtung* corresponds, mysteriously but indisputably, to both parts of the Chinese metaphor in “Lu Zhai.” In “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” Heidegger suggests that the German word *Lichtung* combines two meanings: (1) an opening or a clearing, especially a clearing in the forest and (2) light. The suffix *tung* comes from older German words such as *Waldung* (foresting) or *Feldung* (fielding). The prefix *licht* means light in the sense of being free and open but it could also be read as light (as Heidegger insists) as brightness. As Heidegger continues his interplay of these two meanings, his explanation of *Lichtung* reads as if it were meant as an explication or paraphrasing of Wang Wei’s poem, as in this excerpt:

Still, it is possible that a factual relation between the two exists. Light can stream into the clearing, into its openness, and let brightness play with darkness in it. But light never first creates openness. Rather, light presupposes openness. However, the clearing, the opening, is not only free for brightness and darkness, but also resonance and echo, for sounding and diminishing of sound. The clearing is the open for everything that is present and absent. (“The End of Philosophy,” 1969, 65)

Heidegger's *Lichtung* is meant as a serious critique of Western metaphysics. *Lichtung* suggests a concrete "thereness" that defies the binary opposition of essence and phenomenon. "The phenomenon itself, in the present case the opening," says Heidegger, "sets us the task of learning from it while questioning it, that is, of letting it say something to us" (1969, 66). The opening is a specific opportunity for meditation on a concrete presencing. But "[a]ll philosophical thinking which explicitly or implicitly follows the call to 'thing in itself'" ironically "knows nothing of the opening" (66). Why? Because the Platonic metaphysical tradition has been following a path towards "truth" through dialectical idealism, a path that has deviated from *aletheia*. *Aletheia*, the Greek word for "truth," means "unconcealment" in its etymological origin and in pre-Socratic thinking. By introducing the German word *Lichtung* Heidegger wants to awaken the re-cognition of *aletheia* as "unconcealment." The light in the forest clearing, *Lichtung*, is the unconcealment of presence, allowing the light of *aletheia* to be seen. The Platonic tradition has made "truth" a matter of abstracting a value through dialectical movement and systematic coherence. That tradition, Heidegger says playfully, is the '*lethe*' of *aletheia*, the forgetting of Being.

With *Lichtung* in mind, we return to Paz's translations of "Lu Zhai," to question (2): Is the idea of Sunyata preserved by Paz? In all fairness, Paz's deletion of Wang Wei's first word "empty" from his versions is not the most thoughtful move. He has in effect de-emphasized something that deserves all the emphasis. The "empty" reminds us of the basic irony of "Lu Zhai" that the sense of otherworldliness is not an escape into nature but a specific *literati* Zen expression of the poet's disdainfulness towards the political turmoil of the time. In the word "empty" is the tension between Wang Wei's this-worldly ambitions and his other-worldly aspirations are paradoxically co-present. With "emptiness" Wang Wei's poem achieves the stillness and openness required to re-cognize the green moss in the apparition of light. "Emptiness" in "Lu Zhai," like the "opening" or "clearing" in *Lichtung*, is the prelude for the coming forth of light. Similarly, Heidegger's *Lichtung* is no metaphor for pastoral idleness but figures his serious contestation against the kind of Western thinking that culminates in the crisis of modernity. The seriousness in the intention of "Lu Zhai" matches the serious intention of *Lichtung* even though the histories and cultures they respectfully symbolize are very different. It is this matching in seriousness that makes the metaphorical correspondence between Wang Wei and Heidegger—in their opening, clearing, emptying for the light of *aletheia*—seem so natural. This suprahistorical kinship of languages, this arch, is the Benjaminian dream for translation.

IX. The Divine Purpose in the Babelian Confusion

The conclusion can begin with a response to question (4) about Paz's versions. Question (4): Is Paz's addition of "asciende" as the last word

of his translation appropriate? Both a positive response and a negative comment can be included here. A positive interpretation: the addition of “asciende” as the last word can be explained to indicate that Paz sees, in Wang Wei’s light in the forest clearing, the spirit of regained presence. By adding “asciende” Paz takes liberty with the original so that he can express a passion consistent with Paz’s recreated rhythm and music of the poem, a passion meant to reciprocate the affirmative spirit of Wang Wei’s poem.

However, a problem about this addition cannot be ruled out. At the very end of *19 Ways*, Eliot Weinberger, Paz’s co-editor, adds a “Postscript” in which he relates what seems to be comic story. After the commentaries of the book had been published in the Mexican magazine *Vuelta*, the editors received a furious letter charging Weinberger with a “crime against Chinese poetry.” It turned out that a certain philologist, Professor Peter A. Boodberg, had written an 1 ½ page essay, “Philology in Translation-Land,” which “is devoted to excoriating, in idiosyncratic language, all other translators and scholars of Wang Wei for failing to realize that the last word of the poem, *shang* (which now means *above, on [top of], top*) had an alternate meaning in the Tang dynasty: *to rise*” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 51). To set the record straight, the Chinese word *shang*, 上, can be used as a verb and therefore to mean: *to rise* or *to go up*, just as it can also be used as a preposition (or post-position) to mean: *above, on, on top of* and so on. This was the case in the Tang dynasty as it is the case today. But the word *shang*, in the last line of Wang Wei’s poem, *cannot* be both a verb and a preposition and therefore it cannot mean *on, above* and *to rise* at the same time. In the Chinese language, determining the part of speech of a certain word is subject to the specific semantic context. So Professor Boodberg should know that his philological study of *shang* only proves the obvious and that a discourse and grammatical analysis should determine if *shang* is a preposition or a verb in that line. The word, in that context, simply cannot be both a verb and a preposition (post-position). In other words, in Wang Wei’s last line, *shang* does not and cannot mean “to rise,” not in the Tang dynasty, not now.

Unfortunately, Weinberger seems to agree with Boodberg and he praises Paz’s addition of “asciende” for exactly the wrong reason. He says: “This usage [*shang* as a verb] apparently dropped out of the language centuries ago. But for those who doubt the accuracy translated by poets rather than scholars, it should be noted that Octavio Paz, in his latest version of the poem, intuitively divined this forgotten meaning and translated the word as *asciende*” (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 51). Weinberger could have double-checked with a real Chinese linguist before he printed his comment. Weinberger’s “Postscript” also includes the version translated and sent by Professor Boodberg which translates *shang* as “going up.” But it is not certain if Weinberger has included that poem entirely for the purpose of comedy. The inadequacy of Boodberg’s translation is such that Weinberger felt obliged to comment: “To me this sounds like Gerard Manley Hopkins on LSD, and I am grateful to the furious professor for sending me in search of this, the strangest of many

Wei's" (Weinberger and Paz, 1987, 51). It is Weinberger's "Postscript" that unintentionally proves the need for a negative evaluation of Paz's addition of "asciende." Because that word is not justified either in the ancient intention of Wang Wei's "Lu Zhai" or in contemporary Chinese usage, it has to be seen as an "invention" reminiscent of the troubling Pound instinct.

Voltaire once wrote on the tower of Babel as a myth, which Derrida cites for his theory of translation. A small part of Voltaire's article seems pertinent to our discussion that I would like to quote it as our conclusion. Voltaire says, with his witticism: "But it is incontestable that Babel means confusion, either because the architects were confounded after having raised up their work up to eighty-one thousand Jewish feet, or because the tongues were then confounded; and it is obviously from that time on that the Germans no longer understand the Chinese; for it is clear, according to the scholar Bochart, that Chinese is originally the same tongue as High German" (quoted by Derrida, 1992, 219). This half-joking remark deserves a half-joking comment: Voltaire and Bochart are right. See how foreign the Chinese has become to the Western world. Therefore, God indeed has a plan, through translation.

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