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JIǍ DÂO’S RHYTHM, OR,
HOW TO TRANSLATE THE TONES OF MEDIEVAL CHINESE§

THOMAS J. MAZANECK

ABSTRACT Since the early twentieth century, translators and critics of classical Chinese poetry have tended to focus on imagery and suggestion, balking at rhythm. It is commonly assumed that modern English and classical Chinese are too different, phonemically, for any of the aural qualities of one to translate into the other. My essay aims to overcome these differences through a series of experimental translations of poems by Jiǎ Dào 賈島 (779–834). I begin with a discussion of linguist/translator Henri Meschonnic’s definition of rhythm as “the organization of movement in speech,” a concept which includes a poem’s performance and audience, its effect on its community and language at particular points in time. For a master craftsman of tonal patterning and parallelism like Jiǎ Dào, this means it is necessary to establish a method for translating medieval Chinese tonal prosody. Drawing on the theory that the medieval Chinese tonal binary of “level” 平 and “deflected” 仄 tones emerged out of the Sanskrit syllabic binary of light (laghu) and heavy (guru) syllables, I translate each level tone into a stressed long vowel and each deflected tone into a stressed short vowel in English. This creates a real yet subtle shift in the rhythm of the translation, carrying over some of Jiǎ Dào’s force on language in time. Thus, in translating Jiǎ Dào’s rhythm, I aim to translate his illocutionary power: not just what his poems say, but what they do.

KEYWORDS Classical Chinese, Jiǎ Dào, Translation, Tonal Prosody, Rhythm

§ I would like to thank Lucas Klein, Monica Zikpi, Zeb Raft, Eleanor Goodman, and the Journal of Oriental Studies’s anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on this essay. The method of translation proposed here was originally developed, in a far less mature form, for my 2011 M.A. thesis at the University of Colorado, “To Know the Tone: Analyses and Experimental Translations of Li Duān’s Poetic Experiments.” The support of my advisor, Paul Kroll, was fundamental to the shaping and completion of that project. I’m also grateful to Cameron Moore Rodriguez for introducing me to the works of Henri Meschonnic many years ago.

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Chinese has tones. English doesn't. Their poetries reflect this difference. Classical Chinese meter is tonal, English is stress-based. They are distinct languages with distinct rhythms. Thus it follows that, on the level of sound, one cannot be represented by the other. It's a fool's errand to try to carry over anything from Chinese to English aside from semantic meaning. So, for the last one hundred years, we have made of Chinese poetry a monument to imagery, filling our books with glosses and footnotes, jotting down allusions and historical contexts, all in search of the precise shape of the image, to the neglect of the shaping force of the melody. To put it in Poundian terms, it's been all phonopoeia, no melopoeia.1

This imbalance, the stressing of sense over sound, comes from one of two assumptions: 1) that classical Chinese poetry is not interested in rhythm, or 2) that the rhythms of classical Chinese are so alien to Western languages that they cannot be translated. The first assumption reaches its apotheosis in the myth of the pictogram—a misunderstanding of the Chinese script as directly representing concepts, not words. Much ink has been spilled over this problem, and the pictogram theory has been proven to be simply wrong.2 The second assumption, that classical Chinese rhythm is untranslatable into English, is more popular among those in the know. Medieval Chinese, like its modern successors, is a tonal language, and bases its prosody on patterns of tonal classes. Modern English, on the other hand, is not tonal, and its poetry uses stress-based meters. Because the two languages are so different at the level of the phoneme, rhythm is one of those things that must be sacrificed in the act of translation. Both philologists (with their prosey glosses) and popular translators (with their new, invented rhythms) agree on this.

But what if they’re wrong? What if we could translate tones into English? Perhaps we could gain new insights into both medieval Chinese literary history and the possibilities of late American poetics. Overlooked Táng3 poets may come alive to us as we experience their rhythms for the first time. English poetry could reshape itself as we tuned in to new aspects of the language: if Ezra Pound revolutionized modern American literature through a misunderstanding of classical Chinese, a better understanding could result in boundless possibilities. Rhythm, which reaches our bodies more than our intellect, could shape us in new ways.

This essay takes the first few steps toward the understanding of rhythm through a series of experimental translations of poems by Jiă Dăo (賈島, 779–814), a master craftsman of tonal patterning and parallelism. In what follows, I draw on Henri Meschonnic's search for a rhythmic approach to translation to outline the basics of tonal parallelism. This will help us understand Jiă Dăo, the most important and influential Chinese poet during the ninth and tenth centuries. In order to do justice to his illocutionary power, I propose a new method of translation, drawing on a few long-neglected experiments from the sixteenth century. When we read these first few experimental translations, with their subtle rhythmic patterning, I hope that we can begin to feel what Jiă Dăo is doing to language and to history.

Rhythm In Translation

Rhythm is hard to pin down. Repetition is at the heart of it, most theorists agree. Beyond that, opinions diverge. To Elizabeth Ermarth, rhythm is nearly perfect repetition, "parataxis on the horizontal and in motion: a repetitive element that doesn’t ‘forward’ anything, one that is always exact but never identical." Against the idea of "history," her postmodern, rhythmic time becomes an alternative to the modern, linear conception of time that was dominant in the west from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. But rhythm, as it is commonly understood, is not the repetition itself but the result of what takes place in the intervals.4 To Henri Lefebvre, rhythm is "not just any repetition" but necessarily repetition with a difference, with marks and accents appearing at regular intervals. In this way, "only a non-

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2 For a succinct debunking of the pictogram theory, also known as the "ideographic myth," see John DeFrancis, Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1984), pp. 133–49. Many have blamed Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa for popularizing and perpetuating this myth in the west (e.g., George Kennedy, "Fenollosa, Pound, and the Chinese Character," in Selected Works of George A. Kennedy, ed. Tien-yi Li [New Haven: Far Eastern Publications, 1965], pp. 443–62), and there is some truth to these assertions. But recent scholarship has shown that Fenollosa and Pound had divergent aims. Fenollosa did indeed know something about the sounds of Middle Chinese, as attested by his notes on poetic rhymes, a section that Pound excised from the published edition of The Chinese Written Character as a Medium of Poetry. Ezra Pound, for what it’s worth, generally used the term "ideogram," not "ideograph," in his own essays on Chinese characters, and was more concerned with finding precedent for his own poetics of juxtaposition than with presenting an accurate portrayal of Middle Chinese. For an overview of Fenollosa’s and Pound’s theories, especially their points of divergence, see Haun Saussy, "Fenollosa Compounded: A Discrimination," in The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: A Critical Edition, ed. Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 1–40.

3 Because the purpose of this essay is to emphasize the importance of tonal prosody and attempt to find a way of representing it in English, I include tonal diacritics in my transcriptions of Chinese words (e.g., Táng, not Tang, for 唐). While this is not standard practice for the Journal of Oriental Studies, it is for linguistics, and, moreover, it serves as a reminder of the importance of tones to the Chinese language.


mechanical movement can have rhythm." But Lefebvre barely ventures into rhythm in art, focusing instead on the rhythms of everyday life.

So what is it in poetry? Rhythm is borrowed from music (as is so much poetic vocabulary) and shoehorned into a new category. A loose fit. Feet, some would say. Poetic rhythm is meter, the arrangement of sounds into patterns based on a simple dichotomy (stressed vs. unstressed, heavy vs. light), built out of the unit of the metrical foot—the iamb, spondee, anapest, etc. This is a half-truth. Meter is a way in to rhythm, but it is not the thing itself. Rhythm is something that takes place in the body as language and the subject move together. It is the "thinking-feeling qualities of movement." Rhythm is flow. In this way, meter is the byproduct of an analysis of rhythm. To use another musical metaphor: meter is the score, rhythm the symphony.

To explain this better, I turn to Henri Meschonnic (1932–2009), French linguist and translator of the Hebrew Bible, best known for his 800-page opus Critique du rythme. Writing in the era of Derrida, Foucault, Cixous et al., he took a sharp turn from some of his more famous contemporaries to articulate a theory of language which stressed the unity of the sign. To him, so-called "structural" (and "post-structural") linguistic theory, from Saussure on down, made a grave mistake in splitting the signifier from the signified. This binary, he argues, is the result of separating language from life: with structuralism, we study a representation of language, not language itself. The latter, he says again and again, is intimately tied up with the lived bodily experience of individuals and communities.

What we need, then, is to start from life, from movement, from the idea of an interconnected system. This will lead us to a poetic understanding of language. "Poetries," writes Meschonnic, "starts when system [as opposed to structure] is applied to speech, to enunciation... integrating both the subject and its history." Structure is static, synchronic, and results in a dead-on-arrival theory of language. System is dynamic, historicist, and produces a


7 Ibid., p. 57–66, encompasses his entire discussion of music.


theory of language that moves and breathes, one that is not atomized into lifeless components. Another key word Meschonnic uses to describe the fundamental integrity of interrelated concepts is "continuum" (continuité)—a set of things which flow inseparably together—as opposed to "continuity" (continuité)—the endless repetition of a thing with no change. Seen from the perspective of the subject, the continuum is what Brian Massumi would call "a continuous rhythm of seamlessly linked accelerations and decelerations, increases and decreases in intensity, starts and stops." It is integration, not analysis. In the context of literature (for Meschonnic, this means the Hebrew Bible), we need to think through the implications of a "body-in-language continuum." So it behooves us to remember that language is created and used by *humans*—corporate creatures who live and die, sometimes alone and sometimes together, always in history. As such, language is changing, is living, is rhythmic.

This reconceptualization of language has enormous consequences for translation. The old dichotomy of style and substance, of form and meaning, which has characterized translation theory for centuries, collapses in on itself. "More than what a text says, it is what a text does that must be translated; more than the meaning, its power, its effect." A poem (in the broadest sense of the term) does not convey messages, it shapes its audience's subjectivity, even, potentially, creating a sense of intersubjectivity. And it does this through rhythm. Rhythm, here, is "the organization of movement in speech," not a binary alteration of same and different. The emphasis, once again, is on the continuum, on unity instead of disunity.

11 Eleni Ikoniadou notes a similar tension in the different definitions given to "rhythm" throughout its long history, a tension between "the measured movement of time" and the "formless form" which undercuts such concepts of stable regularity (Ikoniadou, *The Rhythmic Event*, p. 11–12; see Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme*, p. 184). Lefebvre attempts to turn this tension into a positive, claiming that "rhythm reunites quantitative aspects and elements, which mark time and distinguish moments in it—and qualitative aspects and elements, which link them together, found the unities and result from them" (*Rhythmanalysis*, pp. 8–9).


14 In Meschonnic's idea that the flow of a poem shapes the subjectivity of its audience, he approaches psychiatrist Daniel Stern's influential concept of "vitality affect contours." By this, Stern refers to the way "basic processes of life, such as breathing, getting hungry," etc., create affective patterns associated with them which transfer across different senses (the "rushing" accompanying anger, joy, floods of light, hits of cocaine). These, in turn, form the most basic stuff of our perception of the world, and it is through such patterns, argues Stern, that infants achieve a sense of self-identity (The *Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (London: Karnac Books, 1985), pp. 51–60). Later, he would assert that vitality affect also formed the basis of "implicit relational knowing" (Stern, *Forms of Vitality* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], p. 111). Stern's views have had important implications for the philosophy of music (e.g., Mark L. Johnson, "Embodied Musical Meaning," *Theory and Practice* 22/23: 95–102 [1997–98]) and aesthetics more generally (e.g., Massumi, *Semblance and Event*). Most recently, neurobiological experiments have begun to confirm and expand many of Stern's hypotheses (see Massimo Ammaniti and Pierfrancesco Ferrari, "Vitality Affects in Daniel Stern's Thinking—A Psychological and Neurobiological Perspective," *Infant Mental Health Journal* 34:5: 367–375 [2013]).

The translator is tasked with listening to this rhythm and conveying something of its power in a new language—which leads to an emphasis on experimental translation, to prevent the poem from crystallizing into dead language. “Because it is not a language system that we have to translate, but what a poem does to its language, we must invent discourse equivalences in the target language: prosody for prosody, metaphor for metaphor, pun for pun, rhythm for rhythm.” As translators, we must use every resource within our grasp to convey the illocutionary power of individual poets and the communities surrounding them. If a translator presents a monolithic portrait of “classical Chinese poetry” (or any other tradition of poetry), she has failed. The translator, instead, must re-create an individual poem or poet’s unique force, historical effect, and the way it shaped the literary culture of its time.

In Meschonnic’s view, to which 1 adhere here, the goal of literary translation is not to recapture the meaning or even the form of an original. To do so implies an eternal striving for something irrevocably lost. Rather, the goal of literary translation is to bring the force of a text into a new language, what it does rather than what it says. This may sound similar in some ways to Eugene Nida’s theory of “dynamic equivalence,” but the resemblances are superficial. Nida, like St. Jerome and Anthony Pym, posits a split between meaning and word, then chooses to emphasize one over the other. To Meschonnic, the two are inseparable, and their unity must be preserved. It is for this reason that the translator must reach for creative solutions in the search for “discourse equivalences.” In this way, with the sign undivided, a poem’s shaping power can come to bear on a new linguistic community. For me, that means taking on Jiă Dăo, the most important poet in China during the ninth and tenth centuries. And to do that, we must try to translate the most alien, yet most integral, aspect of medieval Chinese poetry: its tones.\footnote{16}

\footnote{16} One may object that the purpose of Meschonnic’s project is precisely to avoid an equation between meter (for Chinese, tonal prosody) and rhythm. However, even in his most anti-metrical passages, he recognizes the fundamental role that prosody, intonation, and other kinds of extralinguistic signifiers associated with meter play in the construction of rhythm. See Critique du rythme, pp. 266–277. “Je définis le rythme dans le langage comme l’organisation des marques par lesquelles les signifiants, linguistiques et extralinguistiques (dans le cas de la communication orale surtout) produisent une sémantique spécifique, distincte du sens lexical, et que j’appelle la signifiance… les signifiants sont autant syntaxiques que prosodiques. Le « sens » n’est plus dans les mots, lexicalement. Dans son acceptation restreinte, le rythme est l’accentuel, distinct de la prosodie. Dans son acceptation large, celle que j’implique ici le plus souvent, le rythme englobe la prosodie. Et, en parlant, l’intonation. Organisant ensemble la signifiante et la signification du discours, le rythme est l’organisation même du sens dans le discours” (emphasis mine).


\footnote{18} Meschonnic, Ethics and Politics of Translating, p. 39.

\footnote{19} One may object that the purpose of Meschonnic’s project is precisely to avoid an equation between meter (for Chinese, tonal prosody) and rhythm. However, even in his most anti-metrical passages, he recognizes the fundamental role that prosody, intonation, and other kinds of extralinguistic signifiers associated with meter play in the construction of rhythm. See Critique du rythme, pp. 266–277. “Je définis le rythme dans le langage comme l’organisation des marques par lesquelles les signifiants, linguistiques et extralinguistiques (dans le cas de la communication orale surtout) produisent une sémantique spécifique, distincte du sens lexical, et que j’appelle la signifiance… les signifiants sont autant syntaxiques que prosodiques. Le « sens » n’est plus dans les mots, lexicalement. Dans son acceptation restreinte, le rythme est l’accentuel, distinct de la prosodie. Dans son acceptation large, celle que j’implique ici le plus souvent, le rythme englobe la prosodie. Et, en parlant, l’intonation. Organisant ensemble la signifiante et la signification du discours, le rythme est l’organisation même du sens dans le discours” (emphasis mine).


of an eight-line poem. To this end, all the characters of a couplet’s second line should be the inverse of the first. There are a large number of guides and treatises from the medieval period (and beyond) dealing with the technical details of parallelism, even though very little of this has been translated into English or used by Western scholars. To get a sense of what this involved, let us analyze one of Jiā Dào’s couplets from the point of view of three broad modes of parallelism: semantic, grammatical, and tonal. As we shall see, Jiā Dào is at pains to employ them all. Here is the opening of the quatrain “Inscribed on Revenue Manager Dù’s Pavilion”:

题杜司户亭子:

 semantic

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<td>[part]</td>
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<td>[object]</td>
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<tr>
<td>divan</td>
<td>head pillow</td>
<td>is stream</td>
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 grammatical

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<td>[adjectival noun]</td>
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<td>[verb]</td>
<td>[adjectival noun]</td>
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<td>[place in nature]</td>
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<td>[object in nature]</td>
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<th>池</th>
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<td>[part]</td>
<td>[place in nature]</td>
<td>[object]</td>
<td>[location]</td>
<td>[object]</td>
<td>[object in nature]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well</td>
<td>bottom</td>
<td>spring reaches</td>
<td>bamboo beneath</td>
<td>pool pond</td>
<td></td>
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27 The most comprehensive of these medieval guides is the “Twenty-nine Types of Parallelism” 二十九種對偶 collected in the Bunkyo hifuron, for which see Wēn jīng mì fŭlùn [Bunkyo hifuron] huìjiào huìkăo: fù Wénbĭ yănxīn chāo 文鏡秘府論彙校彙考: 附文筆眼心抄 (Beijing: Zhōnghuá shùjū, 2006), vol. 2, pp. 678–848.

To translate all of this into English is no mean feat, and the kinds of matches attempted will vary according to just which aspects of the poem one wishes to highlight. On every level, both lines of this couplet follow the pattern 2-2-2-1. This is most clear on the tonal level, where we find two level tones, then two deflected tones, then two level tones, then a deflected tone in the first line, followed by the inverse of this in the second line. This knowledge of the tonal pattern also helps us detect a further patterning on the grammatical level: both lines follow the sequence [adjectival noun]-[subject]+verb-[adjectival noun]-[object]. The tones were integral to the poem not just for their artistry, but also as an aid to interpretation.

Often, Jiă Dăo and his followers would go a step beyond the usual practice and compose entire poems out of these tonally parallel couplets. Many others who weren’t directly associated with him would do the same when trying to imitate the “Jiă Dăo structure” 賈島格, an approach extremely influential from the Late Táng through the Northern Song. The first character of a tonally parallel couplet would be more flexible than the rest (in many poems, the only non-parallel portions are these initial graphs, the rest balancing perfectly), but a strict adherence to parallelism in every position demonstrated an even greater technical mastery. And the lengths to which Jiă Dăo and others went to achieve this sort of technical perfection became one of the major tropes of poetry criticism in the late Táng period.

This brief foray into Chinese prosody helps us see why English translators of Táng poetry have generally shied away from tonal variation. First, they have no direct equivalent for it in their language, and therefore no way of directly reproducing it (unlike the relatively easy with which, say, line breaks can be matched). Second, because the four tones of MC are quite different from those of MSM, knowledge of the tones can only come through the reconstructions of historical phonologists, of which many literary scholars in the West are suspicious.

We must go beyond individual words and their semantic meaning: we have to dig in to their rhythm. The study of Chinese literature is more than Signology.

Jiă Dăo’s Rhythm, or, How to Translate the Tones of Medieval Chinese

Rhythm was central to the craft of Jiă Dăo, perhaps the most influential poet of the ninth and tenth centuries. During the 150 years surrounding the collapse of the Táng dynasty, he was the most well-known and admired poet in China, eclipsing even such luminaries as Dù Fù 杜甫, Lĭ Bái 李白, Bái Jūyì 白居易, and Lĭ Shāngyĭn 李商隱. Early twentieth century critic Wén Yīduó 閔一多 went so far as to call this time period “the Jiă Dăo era” 賈島時代 of Chinese poetry. If we ignore his rhythm, then we ignore his legacy, which will botch all our literary histories.

Jiă Dăo was born in Fànyáng 范陽 (just southwest of modern Bĕijīng) in 779 and became a Buddhist monk at the age of 15, taking the dharma name Wúbĕn 無本. Judging from contemporaries’ remarks, his early poems were brash and daring, but few of these have survived. Sometime in his early thirties, he traveled first to Luóyáng 洛陽 and then to the capital, Chāngān 長安, in an attempt to attract the attention of grand literatus Hán Yŭ 韓愈. It was evidently during this period that he began to obsess over crafting perfectly wrought parallel couplets. A well-known anecdote relates how he bumped into Hán Yŭ on the streets of Luóyáng because he was so absorbed in composing a poem, deciding whether to use the verb “push” 拆 or “knock” 掃, that he did not notice Hán Yŭ’s procession. Many similar legends have been told about his admirers. Whether or not any of these stories are true is beside the point. They demonstrate what Jiă Dăo represented to the literary tradition: that poetry was a craft requiring labor and concentration.

While in Chāngān, Jiă Dăo left the ranks of the Buddhist clergy and sat for the civil service examination—only to fail. He spent many years in the capital region exchanging poems with the greatest writers of the day: his two most frequent correspondents were Yáo Hé 葉脩 and his cousin, the monk Wūkĕ 無可. Many of the poems composed during this period refer offhandedly to his poverty. Though almost certainly a rhetorical move given him by the discursive norms of the literary tradition, stories soon began to accumulate around these references. His poverty became reified. When combined with the intensity with which he play rhythm, which is rooted in meter, in favor of image and allusion. But at the same time, we must exercise what T. S. Eliot called the “auditory imagination,” that is, “the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word.”

This anecdote first appears in the Shūjì jiăo 聊齋裡 of Hé Guāngyuán 何光遠 (mid 10th century) and was retold and reprinted in many subsequent sources. The poem at the center of the story was included in the Yóuxuān 又玄集 and thus is translated below (Appendix, poem 3).

30 This is not to say that features such as rhyme and regular meter are absent from contemporary poetry in English; only that they are often hidden beneath the surface. Rhyme, for instance, tends now to be internal or slant.
composed poetry, the archetype of the kūyín 苦吟 ("bitter chanting") aesthetic was born.34 Jiă Dăo was transformed into the starving artist par excellence. Finally, at the age of 59, he was appointed to a post in Changjiang 長江 (in modern Sichuan province). He died six years later, on August 31, 843, while serving as the Adjutant Director of Granaries 司倉參軍 in Pùzhōu 普州 (also in modern Sichuan).35

As alluded to earlier, Jiă Dăo quickly became the most important poet of the late Táng and Five Dynasties period. The large number of anecdotes, tributes, and imitations of his work which sprouted up after his death attest to this fact. He is the most frequently-cited poet in the surviving "poetry standards" (shīgē 诗格)—instruction manuals for writing a good poem—from this era. The Late Táng poet Lĭ Dòng 李洞 (d. 897?) went so far as to compile one of these manuals entirely from Jiă Dăo's couplets.36 In the Northern Sòng (960–1127), the "Late Táng style" 唐後體 was, for better or worse, practically synonymous with Jiă Dăo and his imitators.37 There are more poems invoking him in this time period than any other poet: twenty-two which mourn him, nearly forty which mention him in their titles, and countless more which directly quote from him.38 Some allude to a sort of tourist attraction called "Jiă Dăo's Poetry-Intoning Terrace" 賈島吟詩台. Another, by the poet-monk Qiji 贉己 (864–937?), implies that Jiă's former residence was also a site of pilgrimage, one so popular that it was reconstructed multiple times after being burned to the ground.

34 kūyín is an expansive concept centered around the idea of making sacrifices for the sake of crafting good verbal art. Other translations for the term could be "suffering for poetry" or "painstaking composition." For a more in-depth look at the concept, see Owen, "Spending Time On Poetry: The Poetics of Taking Pains," in Recasting the Dragon, pp. 157–178. On the way its meaning changed from the ninth to the tenth centuries, see Li Dīngguăng 李定廣, Tángmò Wŭdài luànshì wénxué yánjiū 唐末五代亂世文學研究 (Beijing: Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxué chūbānshè, 2006), pp. 88–109.

35 This account of his life generally follows the copious annotations in Fù Xiāncōng 傅璇琮, ed., Táng cìzì zhuàn jiàojiān 唐才子傳校箋, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhōngguó shìzàng chūbānshè, 1989), 334–336.


38 See also, Zhōu Yùkăi, "Jiă Dăo gé shīgé" and Lĭ Guì 李貴, "Jiă Dăo gé shīgé yăo suòng xuànlèi yú yìngjiăo yìng" 賈島詩句圖序論與影響 (Shànghăi: Fùdàn dàxué chūbānshè, 2012), pp. 68–71. Although I would, contra Lĭ Guì, stress that Jiă Dăo became the best representative of a new school of hard work and painstaking craftsmanship was one of the main factors bringing together poets from various parts of the land, just like the river fowl of the poem's final line. That is to say, throughout the collapse and fracturing of the Táng empire in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, Jiă Dăo was among the most important literary touchstones, one of the factors holding together a culture rapidly spinning out of control.39


Method of Translation

So Jiă Dăo must be recovered. But we are still faced with the enormous challenge of conveying something of his verbal craftsmanship in translation. As mentioned above, Jiă Dăo's art occurs at the level of the couplet, in which two lines are set in parallel to each other on the semantic, grammatical, and tonal levels. Scholars who have dealt with parallelism in the past have taken on the first two levels, but few regard the third as even possible. How are we to do any different?

We start with a theory about the origins of tonal classification. Chén Yíngqué 陳英恪 once proposed a hypothesis (later developed by Victor Mair and Tzu-lin Mei) that the classification of medieval tonal readings into the categories of píng 等 and deflected (zè 侧) originated in the fifth century in response to Sanskrit linguistic theory, brought into China via Buddhism. Specifically, Sanskrit meter was based on a division between "light" (laghu) and "heavy" (kăyūn). 40 We shall follow the first of these two levels, but few regard the third as even possible. How are we to do any different?

40 QTS 838.9443.
(guru) syllables, and this system needed to be understood to properly chant Buddhist gāthās and other ritual texts. In response, Chinese Buddhist poets developed their own prosody based on a binary division of syllables that were roughly analogous: laghu and ping were both “prolongable” while guru and zè were “unprolongable.” That is, the former class of syllables could be extended without fundamentally changing their sound, while the second class could not. Thus, Chinese tonal prosody is, at heart, a form of quantitative verse.

Quantitative prosody is native to the classical Greek and Latin traditions of poetry, in which lines are analyzed in terms of “long” and “short” syllables, which roughly correspond to vowel length in the syllable. There is, in fact, a genealogical relationship here to Sanskrit meter: Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit meters all logically originate in the shared poetic tradition of proto-Indo-European. As a form of quantitative prosody, therefore, classical Chinese's tonal prosody is not so alien as it first appears. While it may not be a sister metrical tradition, it is at least a second cousin by adoption.

English, like Greek and Sanskrit, has syllables of varying length. Although we have rarely conceptualized our language in such a way, it is possible. In the sixteenth century, some of the greatest poets of the language, including Edmund Spenser (1552–1599) and Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586), tried their hand at quantitative verse. Richard Stanyhurst (1547–1618) went so far as to translate the first four books of Virgil's Aeneid using a quantitative meter. Although these experiments were mocked ruthlessly by Thomas Nashe and have generally been regarded as failures in the eyes of literary historians, they have gone so far as to translate the first four books of Virgil's Aeneid using a quantitative meter. Although these experiments were mocked ruthlessly by Thomas Nashe and have generally been regarded as failures in the eyes of literary historians, they have generally been regarded as failures in the eyes of literary historians, their very existence testifies to the potential of thinking along these lines. So, taking a cue from Stanyhurst et al, I propose to translate Jiă Dăo's poetry into a form of quantitative meter.

Of course, because English poetry as it is practiced today mainly adheres to a stressed-based meter, a purely quantitative translation would be unfeasible. Therefore, I combine the two. First, following Arthur Waley and many others, I match the number of stressed syllables in English to the number of syllables in the Chinese source. A line of five characters in Chinese will translate into an English line with five beats. Second—and this is my innovation—the vowel length of each stressed syllable will be determined by the tone of its corresponding Chinese character. Each level (ping) tone will correspond to a long vowel, and each deflected (zè) tone will correspond to a short vowel. What constitutes a long vs. a short vowel will be defined in the strictest scientific manner, as defined by phonologists: “short” vowels are those which occupy just one mora in the syllable nucleus, such as the i in “hid” (IPA: /i/); “long vowels” are those which occupy two morae in the syllable nucleus, a category that includes both long vowels proper, such as the ee in “heed” (IPA: /iː/), and diphthongs, such as the i in “hide” (IPA: /aɪ/). The dialect of English I translate into is my own, General American.

After figuring out how to translate, we must resolve the question of what to translate. The earliest catalogues tell us that Jiă Dăo's poetry circulated in a variety of formats, as befits a poet who became as popular as he did. The New Tăng History 新唐書, compiled in the middle of the eleventh century, lists both a ten-fascicle collection called Chángjiàng Jìă Dăo's Rhythm, or, How to Translate the Tones of Medieval Chinese


**Jiă Dăo’s Rhythm, or, How to Translate the Tones of Medieval Chinese**

To see what this looks like in action, let us examine one poem in detail. What follows is the first of Jiă Dăo’s poems in *Yòuxuán ji* (Collection of further mystery), edited by Wéi Zhuāng 華莊 (see the Appendix for all five translations). In all of these poems, we find perfect conformity to the rules of tonal parallelism outlined above: the tones of line 1 of a couplet are perfectly mirrored in line 2, with the occasional exception of the first character of a line. Without recourse to an unconventional translation strategy, there would be no hint of the impact Jiă Dăo had on medieval literary culture.

The translation very closely follows the source text. For each level tone, we find a stressed long vowel in English. For each deflected tone, a stressed short vowel in English. The technique fails in only two places: the second stress of line 3 (“repeatedly”), where we find a long vowel instead of a short one, and the final stress of line 4 (“again”), where the word must be read in a forced, mid-Atlantic accent (a-), to achieve the long vowel, instead of a Midwestern accent. Otherwise, the pattern of long vs. short stressed vowels matches up perfectly.

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**An Example**

To see what this looks like in action, let us examine one poem in detail. What follows is the first of Jiă Dăo’s poems in *Yòuxuán ji*, a parting poem given to a Vietnamese monk who had visited the Táng capital. I provide here my translation, the tonal pattern of the source text, and the source text. For the purpose of this analysis, the stressed syllables of the translation are marked with either a breve (’) for a short vowel or a macron (¯) for a long vowel. As we will see, my quantitative-verse rendering gives a rhythmic shape to the English that would be lacking in a more conventional translation.

**“Seeing off Dharma Master Weijian of Annan”**

**Jiă Dao 賈島**

You deliver sūtras inside spring vistas X O O X X 講經春色裏
As flowers flit encircle the royal lounge. O X X O O 花繞御座旁
Repeteddly you’ve crossed the Sēa of Tŏnkin, O X X O X 南海幾印渡
And now look to retire to your old hills again. O X X O O 舊山臨老師
Incense is blown out by the touch of the wind; X O O X X 與風香損印
A stone drum dōns a robe of rain. ’54 O X O O O 雲雨篳衣生
The sky and rivers are that way as well: O X X O O 空水既如故
Wŏrd’s been rare from yōu, coming and going. O X O O O 往來消息稀

The translation very closely follows the source text. For each level tone, we find a stressed long vowel in English, and for each deflected tone, a stressed short vowel in English. The technique fails in only two places: the second stress of line 3 ("repeatedly"), where we find a long vowel instead of a short one, and the final stress of line 4 ("again"), where the word must be read in a forced, mid-Atlantic accent (a-), to achieve the long vowel, instead of a Midwestern accent. Otherwise, the pattern of long vs. short stressed vowels matches up per-

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**53** Tángrén xuăn Tángshī xīnbiān (zēngdìng běn) 唐人選唐詩新編 (增訂本), ed. Fu Xuàncéng 蘇振科 et al (Běijīng: Zhōngguó shūdà, 2004) [hereafter TRXTS]. 877; TRXTS 5526638–6639; Li Jiāyán 李嘉言, ed., Jiă Dăo jiăozhù 賈島集校注 (Taipei: Lĭrén shūjú, 2002), 4.130–131; Qí Wénbāng’s version of the poem. Other reliable early collections give a different couplet here:

As the tide churns barbarian grasises fall. O O O X X 落雁驚驚落
In the wet months spotty are the island’s pines. X X X O O 落島斑斑

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**49** Scholars have exerted a great deal of effort tracing the lineages of various editions of Jiă Dăo’s works, most notably Qí Wénbāng 齊文榜, “Chángjiāng jiă bānbên yuānzhǐ kăoshù” (長江集校箋考述), Wénbāng’s 文榜, 1994, no. 1: 10–38 (1999). I will not rehearse their arguments here. For a convenient chart summarizing Qí Wénbāng’s proposal, see p. 28 of his article.

**50** This breaks down into 409 poems, at least 29 have also been attributed to other poets of the era, calling into doubt their authenticity. From the very beginning, there were different Jiă Dăos to translate.

**51** The same, of course, can be said of many medieval poets. One of the problems of working from sources produced in a manuscript culture is their tendency to move (both in terms of attribution and in terms of the text itself). A parallel example can be found in Xù Hăn 陸翰 (788?–858), for whom 85 of his poems are attributed to 23 other Táng poets, 56 of which are also attributed to Dù Mù 杜牧 (803–852). See Luó Shíjìn 羅時進, “Jiă Làngxiān cítáng jí 賈朗賢集箋” (Taipei: Lĭrén shūjú, 1992). Information on editions of Jiă Dăo’s poetry comes from the notes in Fù Xuáncóng, Táng cáizĭ zhuàn jiàojiān 中晚唐才人傳箋 (Běijīng: Zhōnghuá shūjú, 1992), 4.159–160. To avoid confusion, I transliterate proper names and technical terms without tonal diacritics in these translations.

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**54** My translation follows the *Yòuxuán ji*’s version of the poem. Other reliable early collections give a different couplet here:

As the tide churns barbarian grasises fall. O O O X X 落雁驚驚落
In the wet months spotty are the island’s pines. X X X O O 落島斑斑

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**55** Tángrén xuăn Tángshī xīnbiān (zēngdìng běn) 唐人選唐詩新編 (增訂本), ed. Fu Xuàncéng 蘇振科 et al (Běijīng: Zhōngguó shūdà, 2004) [hereafter TRXTS]. 877; TRXTS 5526638–6639; Li Jiāyán 李嘉言, ed., Jiă Dăo jiăozhù 賈島集校注 (Taipei: Lĭrén shūjú, 2002), 4.130–131; Qí Wénbāng’s version of the poem. Other reliable early collections give a different couplet here:

As the tide churns barbarian grasises fall. O O O X X 落雁驚驚落
In the wet months spotty are the island’s pines. X X X O O 落島斑斑
fectly with the level and deflected tones of the Chinese. In this way, we start to get a feel for the rhythm in Jiă Dăo’s poem. Its sound-shape moves in us.

Moreover, the translation attempts a very loose imitation of the rhyme scheme of the source text (which rhymes on the even lines): in the translation, each rhyme line ends with a long vowel plus the nasal –n final. A slant rhyme, to be sure, and one which has very different linguistic properties than the original’s high front unrounded vowels, but there is at least an attempt to create resonances at the end of each couplet.\footnote{A different experiment in translating might attempt to reproduce the vowel qualities of the original Middle Chinese into English as well. However, since I’m hoping to stay relatively close to the text’s semantic meaning, and since previous experiments of this nature (called homophonetic translations) have resulted in significant departures from the source text, I have not opted to go this route. For an example of one of the more aesthetically satisfying homophonetic translations out there, see Celia and Louis Zukofsky, Convert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Moreover, since my goal is to bring a sense of the rhythmic effect of Jiă Dăo’s poetry into English, homophonetic translation would be a red herring. One of the founding principles of modern linguistics is the arbitrary nature of the sign (see Ferdinand de Saussure, \textit{Course in General Linguistics}, trans. Wade Baskin, ed. Pierre Mieusel and Haun Saussy [New York: Columbia University Press, 2011], pp. 67–70), a principle which extends even to most onomatopoeia and sound symbolism. That is, the nature of a given phoneme’s associated meaning only works within a certain language, even if it appears universal to speakers of that language. For example, the consonant cluster gl is strongly associated with vision in English (glitter, glisten, glow, gleam, ogle) but only in English. Examples that appear more universal (e.g., the use of high fronted vowels to indicate smallness in many languages) have many prominent exceptions (“big” in English contradicts the previous example). For more on sound symbolism, see the essays collected in \textit{Sound Symbolism}, ed. Leanne Hinton et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), especially the typology on pp. 1–6.}

Also, the line length of the English stays within a very narrow range of syllables (9–12) in an attempt to show the regularity of Chinese line length (5 syllables). The cumulative effect of these efforts is the presentation of the poem as a well-structured whole.

Furthermore, I’ve made sure to include none of the strain that characterizes most metrical translations (and much metrical poetry at that): no strange inversions for the sake of prosody, no faux archaisms. The idiom should be that of natural speech in American English, albeit with a few uncommon phrases (“royal lounge,” “Sea of Tonkin”). And, to please the Sinological audience, the translation remains almost entirely literal on the semantic level. It is only in the third couplet that we begin to stray: “blown out” in line 5 would be more precisely rendered as “snuffed out” (the idea of something pressing down on the lit incense stick to extinguish it), and in line 6, the stone drum actually “grows a robe” from the sheet of “soaking rain” covering it. Nevertheless, the semantic and grammatical parallelisms of this couplet are apparent in the translation, so it strays from the source’s semantic meaning within acceptable limits. In general, we have a new poem which reads pretty naturally. It is, therefore, possible to translate the tones of Chinese prosody into an English quantitative verse that is both fluid and literal.

While I will not pretend that my modest experiments have done anything so grand as recreate the power and appeal of Jiă Dăo’s poetry in a new language some twelve centuries later, I believe they are pointers in the right direction. The first step toward translating the rhythm of a poem (in Meschonnic’s expanded sense) is to look beyond the form/content dichotomy and understand the poem on its own terms: what sort of effect it had in its own culture and why. For Jiă Dăo, this means a close attention to the craft he put into his couplets, couplets which demonstrate an aesthetic of parallelism integrating prosody, grammar, and semantic meaning. The best way to highlight the rhythmic force of this parallelism, especially on the metrical level, is to use an experimental form of English quantitative verse. In this way, our experience of Jiă Dăo’s poetry undergoes a subtle (but real) shift, and we can begin to feel something analogous to what his readers felt in the ninth and tenth centuries. The gap between medieval Chinese and modern English, between Jiă Dăo and Anglophone readers, may be impassible, but it is not sound-proof. With the right tools, like a tenuous phonological reconstruction and a resurrected quantitative prosody, we can hear the Tâng poet once more. Listen. He calls to you.

Appendix I:

Jiă Dăo’s Poems in \textit{Yòuxuán jí} {《遠安南普賢法師》}

1. “Seeing off Dharma Master Weijian of Annan”\footnote{TRXTS 817; QTS 572.6638–6639; Lǐjiāyán 4.37; Lǐjiànkūn 4.130–131; Qí Wénbāng 4.159–160.}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
You deliver sūtras & inside spring vīstas \\
As flowvrs flī & encircle the rōyal lōunge. \\
Repēatedly & you’ve crōssed the Sēa of Tōnkīn, \\
And now lōok to rētire to your ōld hīlls agāin. \\
Incense is blōwn ōut & by the tōuch of the wīnd; \\
A stōne drūm dōns a rōbe of rāin. \\
The skȳ and rĭvers & are thăt wāy as wĕll: \\
Wŏrd’s been rāre & from yōu cŏming and gōing.
\end{tabular}
\end{center}
2. “Inscribed on Revenue Manager Du’s Pavilion” 57《題杜司戶亭子》

Your lōunge heăd’s pillow is
a stōne in strēam’s cĕnter;  O O X X O X
床頭枕是溪中石。

The spring in your wells deep réaches
the pŏnd under the bâmbûos.  X X O X X O
井底泉通竹下池。

Păst midnighť and still no sLEEP
for mé, your trănsient guĕst,  X X O X X O X
宿客未眠過後半。

Who listenş alone as the râins
in the hîlls come down, arrîve.  X O O X X O X
獨聞山雨到來時。

3. “Inscribed on Li Ning’s Secluded Dwelling” 58《題李凝幽居》

A lēisurely life with fĕw nēighbors hĕre:  O O X O X
閒居少鄰並。

A grăssy păth ĭnto this ōvergrown tŏwn.  X X X O O
草徑入荒村。

Bĭrds pĕrch on the trēes Ĭnside the pŏnd;  X X O X X O
鳥宿池中樹。

A clēric strīkes on the mōon-lĭt dōor.  O O X X O X
僧敲月下門。

I make ōut the wîlds’ fŏrm when crŏssing a brĭdge,  O O X X O
過橋分野色。

And mŏve the fŏot of nĭmbus with a shĭft of stōnes.  O X X O O
移石動雲根。

Quit for a sĕcond then retŭrn ĕre again,  X X O X X O
暫去還來此。

A seclūded mēeting căn’t go băck on my wŏrd.  O O X X O
幽期不負言。

4. “Weeping over Śramana Boyan” 59《哭柏岩和尚》

Mōss cŏvers the rŏck cōuch anēw:  O X X O O
苔覆石床新。

Mŷ teacher remāined through sĕveral sprĭngs.  O O O X O
吾師佔幾春。

In your pŏrtrait remāin shades of your religiŏus prăctice,  X O O X X
寫留行遺影。

To the flămes retŭrned your bŏdy sēated in dhyāna.  O X X O O
焚卻坐禪身。

Your tŏmple hăll bārred by snōwy fĭrs,  X X O X X
塔院關松雪。

Your rŏom’s gâte lŏcked with dŭsty crăcks.  O O O X O
房門鎖塵。

Myself I lōathe this pāir of trickling sŏbs
in the hills sŏmě where I liy.  X O O X O
自嫌雙淚下。

Don’t beyōnđ one who understandş the vŏid.  X X X O O
不是解空人。

5. “Weeping over Meng Jiao” 60《哭孟郊》

Your bŏdy has dīed your nāme remāins stĭll,  O X O O X
身死聲名在。

To be păssed dōwn a million gĕnerātions.  O O X O O
多應萬古傳。

To your wĭdowed wīfe hâs nō sŏn to hĕr;  X X X O O
寡妻無子息。

To your wŏrk that was tăken with trēes and fōuntains.  X X X O O
破宅帶林泉。

Your wĕ#:pulchre’s nĕxt to a mōuntain-clīmbing păth,  X X O X X
塚近登山道。

Your pŏetry bôarded an ōcean-wŏrthy bōat.  O O X X O
詩隨過海船。

After bēing mŏurned by your gŏd friĕnds,  X O O X X
故人相吊後。

The slōping sŭn descĕnds from the cŏld skȳ.  O X X O O
斜日下寒天。

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57 TRXTS 817; QTS 574.6688; Li Jiāyán 10.122–123; Li Jiānkūn 10.419; Qí Wénbāng 10.516–517. In QTS, the title is given as “Lodging at a Country Home Pavilion” (one variant says “Lodging at Minister of Works Du’s Eastern Pavilion,” another “Inscribed on Revenue Manager Du’s Pavilion”), a variant of “Inscribed on Revenue Manager Du’s Pavilion,” another “Inscribed on Revenue Manager Du’s Pavilion,” and “Inscribed on Revenue Manager Du’s Pavilion.”


59 TRXTS 818; QTS 572.6630; Li Jiāyán 3.21; Li Jiānkūn 3.76–78; Qí Wénbāng 3.89–91. Several editions give “Meditation master” instead of “Śramana” 禪師.

60 TRXTS 818; QTS 572.6632; Li Jiāyán 3.31; Li Jiānkūn 3.91–92; Qí Wénbāng 3.107–109.
論文摘要 自二十世紀初，古代漢語的翻譯家和評論家皆以意象和暗示為主，回避節奏。就音位而言，人們通常認為現代英語和古代漢語的差距較大，並不能引出中文的音感。為了克服這些分歧，本文章用試驗性的方法將賈島的詩歌翻譯成英文。首先探討語言學家、翻譯家梅肖尼克（Henri Meschonnic）的節奏理論，重點強調節奏是「語言中移動的組織」。這個概念包括詩歌的演唱和聽眾，以及其對社群和語言的影響。如要翻譯賈島這種平仄對偶的巨匠的作品，必須建立翻譯中古漢語韻律的方法。借鑑陳寅恪的假設，即中國的平仄區分是受梵詩格律輕重（laghu—guru）區分的影響而創立，我把平聲字翻譯成英語重讀音節的長元音，仄聲字則翻譯成輕讀音節的短元音。翻譯的節奏經歷了一個微妙的變化，並帶着賈島對語言歷史的影響力。於是，本文有望在翻譯賈島的節奏時，能翻譯他言外之力，不僅表達他詩歌所說的，也展示出他詩歌所做的。

關鍵詞 古代漢語 賈島 翻譯 詩歌 音調韻律 平仄

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