

Same Difference:

Xi Chuan's *Notes on the Mosquito* and the Translation of Poetry, Prose Poetry, & Prose

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As Jade Green as Bok Choy

there is a crowd of commoners as purple as red cabbage—the line epitomizes something of my translation of the selected poems of contemporary Chinese poet Xi Chuan 西川 (b. 1963, penname of Liu Jun 刘军), which we titled *Notes on the Mosquito* (New Directions, 2012).¹ The line comes from my version of “The Distance” 远方, a poem dedicated to Anna Akhmatova, and like her writing on someone else’s draft, where “a word which is not mine / Occasionally shows through” (D. M. Thomas’s translation), Xi Chuan is often in dialogue with other currents of world poetry.² As he wrote them, though, these purple commoners are perhaps paradigmatically Chinese, which is to say their description speaks to Chinese conceptions of reality in colloquially Chinese idioms: 有一群百姓像白菜一样翠绿.

Neither the grammar nor the vocabulary of the line is particularly complex or obscure in its language of composition:

有	<i>yǒu</i>	there is / are
一群	<i>yìqún</i>	a group of / crowd of
百姓	<i>bǎixìng</i>	“hundred surnames”
像	<i>xiàng</i>	like / as
白菜	<i>báicài</i>	bok choy
一样	<i>yíyàng</i>	same as
翠绿	<i>cùilǜ</i>	jade green.

“There is a group of ‘hundred surnames’ as jade green as bok choy.” Nor is the cultural knowledge very advanced: “hundred surnames” is a very old (as in, millennia old) expression still in use that refers, as almost all students of Chinese learn in their first semesters, to common people, the families who do not constitute the nobility;

¹ Xi Chuan, *Notes on the Mosquito*, 60–61.

² Akhmatova, *Selected Poems*, 101.

additionally, it helps to know that bok choy (whose English comes from the Cantonese pronunciation) means “white cabbage.” This explains the poetry of the line: “there is a crowd of non-nobles as jade green as white cabbage.”

The line deals with the essences of Chinese, but with a twist. Whereas the Chinese aesthetic is often presented as metonymic and literal, the poetry of Xi Chuan’s line operates by revealing the fiction in the Chinese language’s conceptualization: white cabbage is not white (that it is modified by the quintessentially Chinese “jade green” twists the twist with even more torque).³ At other moments in my translation I have left the Chinese allusion for the educated reader to follow or the interested reader to look up, such as in *Eagle’s Words* 鹰的话语:

32. An enthusiast of the *Analects of Confucius* refutes another enthusiast of the *Analects of Confucius* to a bloody pulp.

33. Du Fu has received too much exaltation, so no other Du Fu could ever win anything.

32. 一个熟读《论语》的人把另一个熟读《论语》的人驳得体无完肤。

33. 杜甫得到了太多的赞誉，所以另一个杜甫肯定一无所获。⁴

In this instance, though, I sacrificed the insinuation about Chinese in particular to imply that all languages may contain such falsehoods and misnomers: *as purple as red cabbage*, because, of course, red cabbage is not red. And to reproduce the *poïesis* of Xi Chuan’s alliteration, such as with the chiasmus of /b/ and /x/ (IPA [ç]) and the repeated /c/ (IPA [tʂʰ]) in *yǒu yìqún bǎixìng xiàng báicài yíyàng cuìlǜ*, I preceded it with, *there is a crowd of commoners*.

The Clothes Make the Man

Perhaps nothing has been called “untranslatable” as much as poetry—indeed, according to one Frosty pronouncement, the untranslatable defines the poetic.⁵ The smartest person to fall for such fallacious idiocy as that “poetry by definition is untranslatable” was

³ See Chow, “On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” which draws from Saussy, *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic*. For the argument that Chinese poetry is to be “taken as strictly true,” see Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*.

⁴ Xi Chuan, *Notes on the Mosquito*, 180–181.

⁵ But see Robinson, *Poetry & Translation*, esp. 23–47, on whether the famed statement even appears in Robert Frost’s written record.

probably Roman Jakobson: “Phonemic similarity is sensed as semantic relationship,” Jakobson wrote, therefore, “Only creative transposition is possible.”⁶ Of course, elsewhere, transposition is itself understood as one of several potential methodologies for the translator, rather than an alternative to translation, and through such methodologies, translation of poetry, impossibly, takes place all the time.⁷

Only in poetry translation is perfection prerequisite for the possible. But is translating poetry fundamentally different from translating prose? Esteemed translator Burton Raffel argues that, no two languages having the same phonology, structures, vocabulary, literary history, or prosody, “re-creation and approximation, rather than any struggle for a ‘literal’ and ‘exact’ reproduction,” is essential to poetry translation, but “prose is a different matter”: “proper translation of prose style is absolutely essential to proper translation of prose, and close attention to prose syntax is absolutely essential to proper translation of prose style.”⁸ The distinction of genre in translation takes on a sharp significance in translating a writer such as Xi Chuan, as *Notes on the Mosquito* includes poetry, prose poetry, and expository prose, requiring that I both stretch and calibrate my translation practice as appropriate not only to the genre in question, but to match the writer’s style in its development over time. Contrary to Raffel, I believe that matching the style of the source text is as important in poetry (and prose poetry) as it is in prose; while “re-creation and approximation” are at times important strategies, what has been called “trans-creation” as an overall approach is not what I wanted to follow in these translations. As I wrote in the introduction to the volume, “I am motivated by a belief that the reader not only wants to know but can know both what Xi Chuan says and how he says it, both his images and his style, both his allusions and his elusiveness.”⁹

From clothing to writing, style has been comprehensively associated with the individual; *wén rú qí rén* 文如其人, as we say in Chinese, a phrase that has been traced to poet Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037 – 1101): the writing makes the man. And as I also wrote in my introduction, Xi Chuan’s stylistic changes relate to events in his personal life, around which his changing aesthetics pivoted. He emerged in the eighties with an idealistic

⁶ Jakobson, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” 266.

⁷ See Vinay and Darbelnet, *Comparative Stylistics of French and English*, esp. pp. 36 and 94–99.

⁸ Raffel, *The Art of Translating Prose*, 10. See also Raffel, *The Art of Translating Poetry*.

⁹ Klein, “Translator’s Introduction,” xiii.

interest in lyricism and *poésie pure*, but after three years in which he wrote very little, by the mid-nineties he changed direction to write expansive prose poems that could interrogate their own poetics (1989 was a traumatic year not only because of the Tiananmen Square massacre, but also because of the death of two of his closest poet friends). The translation of style, then—particularly for someone who also writes outside of her or his translations—presents a kind of Zen of translation. As Eliot Weinberger has written, “A translation is based on the dissolution of the self. A bad translation is the insistent voice of the translator.”¹⁰ If I re-create and approximate, am I not insisting on my own voice? I’ll detail here one example of what I had to do to translate his early lyricism, and then another example looking at his later prose poetry; I’ll then look at questions of style with respect to translating his prose essay that concludes the volume.

Xi Chuan’s first poems were published right after his graduation from Beijing University as an English major in 1985. He wrote “Echo” 回声 in 1986, publishing a revision in 1992. In its final version, and as I translated it for *Notes on the Mosquito*, it reads:

一个人，犹如一座城市 是一片回声	a person, like a city, is the ring of an echo
砖石垒叠而起如层层海浪推远 雾色在清晨和黄昏都很凝重	piled masonry rises like the surge of wave on wave the color of fog solemn at dawn and dusk
那些高耸着的钢铁栅栏围护四方 谁曾在其中放牧牛羊？	towering steel railings enclose the perimeter who has put cattle and sheep to pasture within them?
在木叶相合的地方 男女相遇	where leaves meld man and woman meet
在寂寞侵入石头的地方 世界唯回声永存	where solitude invades stone only the echo is eternal
这蔚蓝色的柱石上 一层一层织满铜丝般的藤蔓	on this sky-blue pillar is woven story on story of copper-like lichen

¹⁰ Weinberger, “3 Notes on Poetry,” 60. See also Johnson, “Notes on ‘Notes on Translation.’”

在幽暗的房间里	inside a dank room music
女人采回的果实中有音乐声回旋	swirls through the fruit the women have plucked
我坐在一群老鼠之中	I sit among mice
感受到大雪静静地飘落	and feel the quiet drift of a snowstorm
城上的积雪和高风	piles of snow and high winds over the city
把一些人就此埋没——	bury people here and now—
灵魂化为	their spirits change into
子夜峡谷中披衣的守望者	cloaked watchmen in the canyon of midnight
而这里，一片回声	but here, a city built by
搭起的城市，我们把脚	an echo, we dig our feet
埋进冰凉的水泥和沙子	into the ice-cold mud and sand
转身咳出血痰，重操旧业	turn around, cough up blood, and take up our old trade ¹¹

I read the conclusion about “taking up our old trade” as referring to Xi Chuan’s return to poetry after his 1989 – ’92 fallow period, and the reexamination of his earlier assumptions about poetry it preceded. Whether the poem is the record of its own “echo,” however, Xi Chuan is not the only one to have published two versions of it; I pre-published a translation in an issue of *Two Lines: World Writing in Translation*.¹² The differences between the two versions amount to my lines being looser in the earlier publication, my sense of the requirements of contemporary American poetry not as condensed, and so I have “a monumental fog-color at dawn and at dusk” and “storey on storey of lichen like copper wire.” The *Two Lines* editors wanted to be sure readers didn’t confuse the floors of the building on which the lichen was growing with narrative tales, so we added an *e* to *story* (I suppose *New Directions* has more trust in readers?), but perhaps the more interesting detail is that, for the consonance of the line in English, I changed *téngwàn* 藤蔓, “vine,” to *lichen*. Similarly to the transfer between bok choy and red cabbage, I altered the image for the sake of sound and sense in the target language, in

¹¹ Xi Chuan, *Notes on the Mosquito*, 38–39.

¹² See Wimmer and Yang, eds., *Some Kind of Beautiful Signal*, 28–31.

service of a broader level of accuracy (the book version presents the metaphorical figure and ground more clearly; the vine / lichen is like copper wire, not the other way around).

In translating lyric poetry, where the source text's reshaping into something communicable with the category as historically constructed in the target language requires such swapping of details as vine for lichen or bok choy with red cabbage, what Raffle calls "re-creation and approximation" is indeed often necessary. In prose poetry, however, similar gestures threaten to efface the defining characteristics of the work in question.

In 1997 Xi Chuan took a six-month trip to India that not only opened his eyes to other cultures, but to other possibilities of cultural expression, as well. I believe this trip also marks Xi Chuan's interest in his own culture's past; seeing India's history would have encouraged him to review and revive China's history (*Eagle's Words*, whose lines about Confucius and Du Fu I quoted above, was begun on that trip). Since then, ancient China has played an even greater role in his poetry, as witness *Thirty Historical Reflections* 鉴史三十章, a series—by now numbering more than thirty—of poem-essays (or what he calls poessays, *shīwén* 诗文) reading and retelling anecdotes from China's long history. In "That Person Writing" 一个写字的人, he digs into China's written past to come up with an examination of its writing process:

Eighty wooden slips, like a line of old men linked by fate. The seal script writing interposed in the slips is difficult to discern, but what it conveys about heaven, the state, war, and the thoughts of the sages remains unchanged. The work of the brush of this anonymous writer looks like the brushwork of Sima Qian or Sima Xiangru. Only at a remove of two thousand years can the customary greatness of his era be perceived! From afar he may yet have glimpsed Sima Xiangru or Sima Qian. He dips his brush in ink, working stroke upon stroke, permitting himself not one false word; writing the aphorisms of Zengzi, delighting in his thoughts. He's nearly convinced that the thoughts he transcribes will be of great use to humanity. These thoughts he protects, these thoughts he transmits. Wittingly or not certain words are altered, wittingly or not he retains his own breath within the views of another. From a humble stenographer, he unwittingly transforms into a minor author beside a great author, like an ant tethering thought's kite against the wind. Sunlight spilling onto the writing desk, he sneezes. On the street shoe sellers call out to him: "You—you're the guy who deals in thought!" He writes on wooden slips, in a time before the invention of paper or movable type, and so what he

writes is the “one” book (each book so written must be the “one” book). But later, a dead man takes his book underground. The thought that evolved from this book, the thoughts that were transformed from this book, would ultimately reshape the world, but this “one” book, through the slow stretch of time, was no more to be found. And now, even if it were to be brought back to light, those thoughts transformed from it, the thought adopted by the world, could never be corrected. Like a forgery re-entering the site of civilization. And that person writing, it’s as if he had never been born. He is a speck of dust on the earth, disseminating civilization in its limited way.

八十根木简，像一群小老头命运相连。木简上介乎篆隶之间的文字难以辨识，但它们所表达的有关天下、国家、战争与圣贤的思想丝毫未变。那个匿名的书写者，他运笔的方式，当与司马迁、司马相如运笔的方式大略相同。时代风尚须经两千年间隔才能觉察其伟大！他甚至有可能远远瞥见过司马迁或司马相如。他用毛笔蘸着墨汁，一笔一划地工作，不允许出现一个错字；在书写到曾子的格言时，他的心情多么愉快。他似乎坚信他所抄写的思想一定会在人间派上大用。他保护了这些思想，传递了这些思想。他有意或无意地改变了某些字句，他有意或无意地在他人的见解中保留下自己的气息。他从一个谦卑的抄写者，无意间变成了那高深作者身旁一位小小的作者，像一只蚂蚁，拉住一只逆风而起的思想的风筝。阳光洒在书案上，他打了个喷嚏。街头贩履者朝他吆喝：“您呐，您是和思想打交道的人！”他写字在木简上，那时纸张和印刷术尚未发明，所以他写下的是“唯一”的书（每一部如此写下的都是“唯一”的书）。但是后来，一个死人居然把这部书带入地下。从这部书演化而成的思想，从这部书变走了样的思想，最终改造了世界，而这部“唯一”的书，却在如此漫长的时间里渺不可寻。现在，即使它重见天日，它也不可能去纠正那源于它却走了样的、已然被世界所采纳的思想。它像一部伪书重返文明的现场。而那个写字的人，仿佛从未出生。他是大地上的一粒尘土，曾经在有限的范围内传播过文明。¹³

As should not be too hard to figure out, this piece resonates very strongly with me as translator. Like the unnamed transcriber of the aphorisms of Zengzi 曾子 (505 – 436 BCE), I am convinced that Xi Chuan’s writing, which I transmit and protect, will be of great value to humanity. And just as Xi Chuan infuses his own style in his recording of the episode, wittingly or not, I retain my own breath within my translations.

¹³ Xi Chuan, *Notes on the Mosquito*, 212–213.

But while such retention may be what transforms me, like an ant tethering thought's kite against the wind, from an "anonymous translator" or "humble stenographer" into "a minor author beside a great author," my intent in translating this poem is to transmit, as Raffel advises for the translation of prose, Xi Chuan's style—requiring, as Raffel says, close attention to Xi Chuan's syntax. In *The Art of Translating Prose*, Raffel outlines his process of "syntactic tracking," where he counts sentence and clause length, and the number of punctuation marks across languages, to arrive at an evaluation of the quality of the translation. I have done something similar with Xi Chuan's poessays: I have treated his sentences as sentences and clauses as clauses, retaining, to the extent possible, his periods, commas, exclamation points, and semicolons:

Eighty wooden slips,
八十根木简，
like a line of old men linked by fate.
像一群小老头命运相连。

The seal script writing interposed in the slips is difficult to discern,
木简上介乎篆隶之间的文字难以辨识，
but what it conveys about heaven, the state, war, and the thoughts of the
sages remains unchanged.

但它们所表达的有关天下、国家、战争与圣贤的思想丝毫未变。¹⁴

And so on. Though I agree with Weinberger that "a translation shouldn't be, though it always is, judged on a line-by-line basis" (because effects "that cannot be reproduced in the corresponding line can usually be picked up elsewhere, and should be"), I have tried to give my prose poem translations a line-by-line level of formal equivalence.¹⁵

The reproduction of Xi Chuan's style as opposed to approximation and re-creation is even evident in the line with which I began this essay; in my own writing, I try to avoid generalized locutions such as "it is" and "there are," but because Xi Chuan wrote *yǒu* 有, and I am a minor author beside a great author, I translated it as "there is." In straight-up prose, however, even where Raffel says syntax is a more important

¹⁴ Written Chinese distinguishes between < 、 > and < , >, the "enumeration comma" and the standard comma.

¹⁵ Weinberger, "3 Notes on Poetry," 59.

consideration than it would be in poetry, I find that a looser correspondence often yields the better translation. In other words, the ways poetry in many languages has been opened up and transformed by translation (prose poetry itself is a good example of this) has allowed for poetry to be more directly translatable, whereas with prose proper, the particular contextual demands each language places on the writing often require that the translator do more conscious and conspicuous tweaking to make the exposition come off with an equivalent level of intelligence and gravitas.¹⁶

As a counter example to my citations of my poetry translations, then, here is a section from my translation of Xi Chuan's "The Tradition This Instant" 传统在此时此刻, an essay Chuan that serves as the Author's Afterword to *Notes on the Mosquito*:

As everyone knows, China today is an enormous oxymoron. Originally a linguistic term, an oxymoron is a statement comprised of two or more words that seemingly contradict each other, such as "vexed smile" or "living dead" (in Chinese we say "walking corpse"). Today we find oxymoron everywhere: for instance, Chinese "hip-hop" commercials, or "Red Tourism," which is both nostalgically Communist and at the same time consumerist; or the phrase "Party-member capitalist" (well, are you are a capitalist, or a Communist engaged in the struggle to overthrow capitalism?); or how about "Socialist Market Economy," which is as oxymoronic as a "Capitalist Planned Economy" would be, if it existed; or "diverse unity," coined by Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong to define the cultural and political notion of a multi-ethnic China (a unified diversity that must be quite different from a diversity that couldn't care less about unity).¹⁷

Compare this against an earlier draft and Xi Chuan's Chinese:

As I've written elsewhere, China today is a great big oxymoron. Originally a linguistic term, an oxymoron is a statement comprised of two or more words that proscribe each other, such as "vexed smile" or "living dead" (in Chinese we say "walking corpse"). I borrow this term for the field of society in an attempt to find whichever social resources might be usable in the growth of our language. No need to look too far afield, since just by observing what's around us, we find oxymoron everywhere: for instance the "hip-hop commercials" we see on TV—hip-hop is a street-art form that originated in African-American communities, always containing an element of opposition, but our TV stations blithely adopt it

¹⁶ This is not to say that prose style has not been influenced by translation; on the contrary, intellectual writing in mainland China has been partially created by German and Russian expository styles. The relative inaudibility of these styles in English, though, necessitates different translation tactics into English.

¹⁷ Xi Chuan, *Notes on the Mosquito*, 249–250.

in service of commercialism; or “Red Tourism”—which is both nostalgically Communist and at the same time consumerist; or “Party-member Capitalist”—well which is it, are you are a Capitalist, or a Communist engaged in the struggle to overthrow Capitalism? (since we know you’re not Friedrich Engels, or even living in Engels’s historical moment) or “Socialist Market Economy”—as oxymoronic as a “Capitalist Planned Economy,” but of course there is no “Capitalist Planned Economy,” whereas the “Socialist Market Economy” has already become reality; or “diverse unity” (coined by Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong [1910 – 2005] to define the cultural and political notion of a multi-ethnic China)—this unified diversity must be quite different from a diversity that couldn’t care less about unity.

我在别处已经谈到，当下中国是一个巨大的矛盾修辞。矛盾修辞本来是一个语言学概念，意指由意义相反的两个词所构成的陈述，它们之间相互限定，如“行尸走肉”（复合矛盾修辞），如“苦恼人的笑”之类。我把这一概念借用到社会生活领域，并希图找到我们语言的生长所可能利用的社会生活资源。不用往远处看，只需观察一下身边的事物，我们就会发现矛盾修辞比比皆是：比如咱们广播里的“说唱广告”——说唱是街头的、源于黑人的、具有反抗色彩的艺术形式，广播电台却高高兴兴地拿它来为商业服务；比如“红色旅游”——又是红色的又是消费的；比如“党员资本家”——你究竟是个资本家呢还是个要打倒资本主义的共产主义者（你又不是恩格斯并处在恩格斯的时代环境）？比如“社会主义市场经济”——与“资本主义计划经济”是同样的修辞结构，但当然没有“资本主义计划经济”这么个东西而“社会主义市场经济”居然就成为了现实；比如“多元一体”（费孝通用以定位多民族中国文化、政治形态的概念）——这一体的多元肯定不同于不在乎一体性的多元。¹⁸

This earlier draft is much closer to the Chinese, as I translated it the way I translate poetry, attempting a reproduction of both the details and the style (with attention to diction, pacing, and punctuation). Nothing wrong with it *per se*, but it is not only too academic for a general audience, it comes off as wordy and clumsy, as well, certainly what Juliane House would call an “overt translation.”¹⁹ As a demonstration of Skopos Theory, however, different translations serve different purposes, and my editor and I

¹⁸ Xi Chuan, “Chuantong Zai Cishi Cike,” 22–23.

¹⁹ See House, *Translation Quality Assessment*, 66; cited in Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies*, 93.

agreed that Xi Chuan's humor would work better with a number of revisions.²⁰ The published version of this passage is a third shorter.

I would be very reluctant, if not completely and dogmatically unwilling, to make so many cuts when translating poetry, but then again poetry has prized precision and concise language for longer, especially in Chinese.²¹ This attests to the difference of the relationship between form and content in poetry from that in prose: in poetry, we understand that “FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT,” in Robert Creeley and Charles Olson's famously phrase, whereas in prose we expect the content to appear to us with much less mediation.²² This is not to deny that the syntax of prose is in fact its own mediation, but only that we as readers seem to have less patience for and awareness of how it mediates. While certain fixes of cultural referent are necessary and accepted in poetry translation, the expectation seems to be that to fix style in prose is to make it more clear, more understandable, more direct, even at the leveling of individual style. In poetry, individual style—the style of the first poet, that is, not the translator's own style—comes to matter at least as much as it does in prose.

Placing the translation of prose next to that of poetry also affords us another look at Jakobson's association of “semantic relationships” with “syntactic and morphological categories” in prose, rather than as he discusses them in regards to poetry. Does it matter, for instance, that in prose I can edit “but of course there is no ‘Capitalist Planned Economy,’ whereas the ‘Socialist Market Economy’ has already become reality” to, simply, “if it existed,” or “As I've written elsewhere” to “As everyone knows”? If I would not stray this far from direct translation in poetry, it is a sign that phonemic similarity in poetry is not sensed as semantic relationship, as Jakobson puts it, but rather that semantic relationships are sensed as phonemic similarity. Not that you didn't know it already, but translation of poetry turns out to be possible, after all.

To See a Mountain as a Mountain

Innumerable other factors come into play in translating both poetry and prose, of course,

²⁰ See Vermeer, “Skopos and Commission in Translational Action.”

²¹ Although, see Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics*, 126–127, scrutinizing “compactness” as a poetic virtue.

²² Olson, “Projective Verse,” 240.

most of which boil down to sensitivities to the relationship between the text and its source and target language contexts. I have written elsewhere of how I translated the line from “Written at Thirty” 写在三十岁, which other translators give as “every cricket in the world grew with me” 全世界的蟋蟀和我一起成长, as “with working crickets of all countries I grew up”—to honor Xi Chuan’s attempt to “write through” his upbringing amidst the Maoist rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution (1966 – 1976).²³ Changes such as this, like the changes from jade green bok choy to purple red cabbage, or of vine to lichen or even “As I’ve written elsewhere” to “As everyone knows,” require, at a certain level, an uncharacteristic confidence on the part of the translator vis-à-vis the source text. As Lucien Stryk has said,

I’ve never thought of a translator as someone who should be an apologist, always worried, hat in hand, about the degree of faithfulness to the original. But as someone who when working intensely can spark those magical moments, when in fact he is the equal of the person he is translating—he must be that equal in order to render those poems properly.²⁴

And yet such moments of unapologetic confidence and asserted equality to are in themselves acts of the greatest subservience, which is the subservience of the translator to the style and message and form and content of what is being translated.

Stryk would have known, though, that such confident subservience defines the Zen of translation. In translation, as in the best poems, as in Zen, all is one, and one is none. *Yígè yìsī* 一个意思, we say in Chinese: same difference. Or, as Xi Chuan writes at the beginning of “South Xinjiang Notes” 南疆笔记, overlooking the land monks and merchants passed through on the Silk Road between India and China, bringing Buddhism into China on its way to becoming Zen:

Zero or infinity—same difference, like to be or not to be—same difference, like to speak or not to speak—same difference. Detail gets omitted in the mountains. Facing mountains, like facing Nothingness or the Way—sorry, I’m being too direct.

²³ See my article “On Xi Chuan and Translating ‘Written at Thirty,’” as well as Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 500. For my translation of the poem in question, see *Notes on the Mosquito*, 46–47; for the translation by George O’Connell and Diana Shi, see “At 30.”

²⁴ Stryk, “An Interview by Kent Johnson,” 47.

零或者无穷，一个意思，如同存在或者不存在，一个意思，如同说话或者不说话，一个意思。细节被省略了，在群山之中。面向群山，如同面向虚无或者大道，——抱歉，我说得太直接了。²⁵

The writing makes the man, translation of style is based on the dissolution of the self, and still involves re-creation and approximation. Bok choy is red cabbage. Same difference.

²⁵ Xi Chuan, *Notes on the Mosquito*, 124–125.

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