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German Literary and Philosophical Influences on the Chinese Poetry of Feng Zhi: The Sonnets

Influences littéraires et philosophiques allemandes sur la poésie chinoise de Feng Zhi (1905-1993) : les sonnets

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German Literary and Philosophical Influences on the Chinese Poetry of Feng Zhi: The Sonnets

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This work is for you.

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INTRODUCTION

The research conducted in this work focuses on the intertextuality between German philosophical and literary works and the poetic creativity of modern Chinese writer and translator Feng Zhi 冯至 (1905-1993), original name Feng Chengzhi 冯承植, from Zhuo 涿, modern Hebei Province.

The study explores the transtextual relation between Feng Zhi's mature lyrical production, notably *Shisihang ji* 十四行集, hereafter *The Sonnets*, and select texts of Novalis and Rilke. The purpose of this critical study is to analyse and appreciate the extent to which transtextual elements travel between the primary literature, Feng Zhi's own doctoral dissertation defended at Heidelberg in 1935 and his later sonnets. In fact, the innovative contribution of the research to the current state of scholarship is the critical demonstration of how Feng Zhi's thesis played a vital role in the development of his poetic voice. The poet's thesis represents one of the most influential primary sources that ultimately also contributed to the making of his post-Romantic lyrical production that additionally gives new insights into the transtextual relationship between the German sources and the Chinese poet's modern examples of writing.

The texts analysed in this study will attempt to demonstrate how given transcultural cues in Feng Zhi's poetry define the writer's apparent poetic tendency as a post-Romantic, Aesthetic and metaphysical lyricist from the one hand, whereas other closer investigations and pieces of transtextual evidence frame his work among the first examples of Chinese modernist literature. In fact, it is one of the aims of this study to also elucidate the post-Romantic and pre-Modernist approach in the lyricism of the sonnets of Feng Zhi, and to show the poet's tendency towards an enigmatic and existentialist attitude that addresses the close and mutual relationship between the individual and the surrounding community as well as a pre-Modernist idea of self-completion achieved through the full aesthetic realisation of the individual and of his position within a systematic community.

To this end, particular consideration will be given to the transcultural convergence of philosophical and ontological traits pertaining to studies on metaphysics and aesthetics and existentialism, which emerged from significant European intellectual debates and criticism on literary works of Romanticism and Symbolism. In fact, as it will be demonstrated, being Feng Zhi inspired by the mystic poetry of Novalis, the philosophy of idealism and existence of Karl Jaspers as well as by the poetry of aesthetical experiences of Rainer Maria Rilke, the Chinese lyrical voice taken here into exam expresses a peculiar sense of modern awareness: a modern awareness of independence, tenacity and self-reflection that is also in line with the ideals of the new national spirit that characterised the modern Chinese literary arena during the first half of the twentieth century.

The critical appreciation of *The Sonnets* and their thematic allegories put forward in this study will demonstrate Feng Zhi's poetic shift from Romanticism to pre-Modernism as being mainly triggered by the cult of Rilke in Germany and Europe during the poet's visit in the West. To exacerbate the radical change in Feng Zhi's poetic orientation were also the existentialist theory of Karl Jaspers and the question of communication in the new individualistic and alienated world animated by modernity in China.

Essential to the critical outcome of the research is the analysis from a comparative perspective of connections among various kinds of literature, philosophical works and cultural traditions in a global way: connections between past and present, across different academic disciplines and modes of intellectual inquiry. The texts, both German and Chinese, are analysed so as to seek a comprehensive understanding of how rhetorical and aesthetic elements of these given texts shape social values and beliefs that are relevant to Feng Zhi's sonnets.

Questions related to the historical gaps between the European texts and authors analysed in this work must be clarified right from the beginning in order to comprehend how elements pertaining to various historical stages simultaneously appear in Feng Zhi's work. In fact, all German texts taken into close examination in this study are regarded as cultural expressions whose reception and intertextual convergence go beyond linguistic, social and historical boundaries. Such an approach

is fundamental to clarify some issues that may arise if one considers the historical gaps and relative features of the time between authors, such as Novalis, a philosopher of the early German Romantic Movement who lived during the second half of the eighteenth century; Goethe, an intellectual and man of letters of the *Sturm und Drang* and Weimar Classicism who lived between the second half of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century; Reiner Maria Rilke, symbolist and modernist Austrian-Bohemian poet who lived between the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century; and finally Karl Jaspers, a philosopher contemporary with Feng Zhi. Therefore, the proposed study seeks to bridge geographical and temporal distances between languages and periods of time in order to look at juxtapositions between two literatures that are far away, yet so close.

Finally, this study proposes a new English translation of Feng Zhi's twenty-seven sonnets, which make up the collection of sonnets bearing the homonymous title, *The Sonnets* (see appendix). Forming these and the poet's own German doctoral thesis on the poetry of Novalis the primary sources for hermeneutical interpretation as well as transtextual and transcultural investigation, a new and revised English translation was essential to the conduction and realisation of this study as well as achievement of the expected research results.

I. Introduction to the Modern Chinese Literary Arena

As for many writers of his time, it was almost common practice, if not inevitable, for young intellectuals like Feng Zhi to be exposed, sooner or later in their upbringing, to Western culture and literature. Numerous young students of the early twentieth century were still taught according to the traditional Chinese system, where pre-modern writings were seriously taken as the main corpus for literary education and general upbringing. Nonetheless, what affected the shaping of young Feng Zhi were not only the pieces taken from the classical Chinese literary corpus but also the reading of Western lyrical texts, and more precisely, the major works of the German poetic and philosophical canon.

Feng Zhi's was not an isolated case, in fact, numerous Chinese poets engaged with Western literature that soon became the model in terms of literary form and language. Feng Zhi's first encounter with German literature was seemingly made possible through the reading of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (*Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers*, 1774), translated into Chinese by Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) and published in April 1922 by the Shanghai Taidong Bookstore [上海泰东图书] with the title *Shaonian Weite zhi fannao* 少年维特之烦恼. This second and complete translation of Goethe's work was strikingly successful among the intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement.

Goethe was the German poet who chiefly triggered the creativity of Feng Zhi since the beginning of the early and mature poetic production. As Feng Zhi writes, during the war period in China of the early 1940s, lessons at the provisional university of Kunming were held in the evening and early morning in order to avoid the air bombardments from the enemy. Inside his back, the poet mainly carried two things: a fruit from the market and some books borrowed from the school library. Among the most important books was *Goethes Sämtliche Werke* [The Complete Works of Goethe, 1905] edited by

Eduard von der Hellen in commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the publication of Goethe's works in 1806. These books, Feng Zhi says, could be brought from Shanghai, as these were easy to carry and not lost during the war. As the Chinese writer adds, he mainly read Goethe because of personal preference.¹

Goethe's epistolary novel immediately gained particular resonance and was read by a large audience, giving rise to a Werther Movement in China during the 1920s and 1930s, similarly to that of Germany 150 years before. This phenomenon was so notable in the China of the twentieth century that is currently even often referred to in Chinese as Wertherism (*Weite zhuyi* 維特注意).² Young Chinese intellectuals were spurred on and so stirred by the iconoclastic spirit of the New Culture Movement to the point that they even found their ignited protest against the traditional feudal system and its moral values being materialised in the image of Werther. In the preface to his Chinese translation of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Guo Moruo even mentioned "emotionalism" as the first resonance with the German work: "A world without love is a magic lantern, able instantly to project a variety of pictures against a white screen or give birth to a universe of feeling from the mids of death and destruction."³

Chinese intellectuals discovered a form of individualism, an innovative form of freedom of feelings from all chains and their traditional love for nature as pantheism mirrored in the figure of Werther. The pivotal concept of the movement was in fact "to instate the individual as the organizing principle of society, which also reshaped Chinese literature on a formal level."⁴ A new generation of a few young Chinese intellectuals belonging to a small urban elite in the large cities, just like in Europe,

¹ Feng Zhi, "Lun Gede, de huigu, ming yu buchong" 《伦歌德》的回顾，明与补充 ["Clarification and Supplement to the Review of the Essay on Goethe"] in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 4.

² See Joanne M. Cho and Douglas T. McGetchin (eds.), *Gendered Encounters between Germany and Asia: Transnational Perspectives since 1800*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 155.

³ Guo Moruo's Preface to *Shaonian Weite zhi fannao* quoted by Cho and McGetchin, *Gendered Encounters between Germany and Asia*, p. 155.

⁴ Cho and McGetchin, *Gendered Encounters between Germany and Asia*, p. 155.

could see their own image and representation within Werther's melancholy and world-weariness [Weltschmerzen]. This sense of charisma can be easily explained when considering the temporal vacuum between the old tradition and the new world: Werther did embody fatalism, melancholy, resignation, sentimentalism and world-weariness.

What notably interests the reader for a more holistic understanding and appreciation of the variegated literary period and trends that are taken into account in this work is the 'westernising' phenomenon of conscious imitation and integration of Western literature and philosophy in modern China.

It is important to define here that this new trend of modernisation, and consequent "Westernisation", did not result merely from the effect of aesthetics, but rather from the conscious imitation and integration of Western literature by modern Chinese intellectuals. Remarkable examples of this phenomenon are the writings of the first half of the twentieth century, when the modern Chinese literary arena was predominantly characterised by works that vividly witnessed the signs of modernisation and 'Westernisation' in China. Young and dynamic Chinese poets who lived under the influence of the May Fourth Movement or the 'New Culture Movement' or *Xin wenhua yundong* 新文化运动 also historically animated by Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), as it was termed following the definition of the socio-cultural reform campaign by the editor of *New Tide* magazine in December 1919, became increasingly inspired by Western lyricism.^{5 6}

This new form of literature responded mainly to the poets' demand for challenge and poetic freedom from the chains that characterised the rigid versification forms of the Chinese literary tradition. Moreover, it also advocated a new literature written in the vernacular language about the people, with the latter's

⁵ See Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement. Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, Taipei, Rainbow Bridge Books, 1960, p. 194.

⁶ See Jacqueline Estran, *Poésie et liberté dans la Chine républicaine: la revue Xinyue (1928-1933)*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010, p. 10.

contemporary concerns taking centre stage instead of the ‘conventional themes and stock imagery’ of the classical poetic tradition.⁷

“Modernisation” is a process in which Chinese writers and intellectuals of the beginning of the twentieth century have played an active role. Indeed, they contributed to its construction at a time much earlier than Feng Zhi’s appearance in the literary arena. This was due to the demand for a steady national and economic development as well as for an effective national security and a stronger defensive system, which Chinese intellectuals of different generations began to see as necessary so to make China exist. Because of this common response, many intellectuals manifested their eager need to learn from the experience of modernisation in the West.

Modernism and modernity are seemingly connected as a society ultimately industrialises itself through a series of new institutions that regulate modern life. What chiefly causes and intensifies the sense of anxiety and the state of alienation that generally typify the writings of the modernist genre is “modernity’s extreme dynamism”⁸. Modernism appears, hence, as the critical expression of those new sensations brought about by modern life experiences. The two distinctive, yet complementing, seminal works that address the question of modernity and modernism in China are *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* by Leo Ou-fan Lee and *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial Shanghai, 1917-1937* by Shu-mei Shih. In general, scholars tend to agree that modernity in China pertains to the individual’s acceptance of modern Western ideologies and individualism, thus entailing a new state of mind and self-awareness, rather than to the social condition of China as a modernised society. Conventionally, modernism in China with its experimental characteristics has been regarded as one of the striking trends of the Republican literature being

⁷ Michelle Yeh, ‘Modern Poetry’ in Victor H. Mair (ed.), *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2001, p. 453.

⁸ Giddens suggests that twentieth-century modernity differs from all previous modernities given “modernity’s extreme dynamism”. See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991, p. 15.

separate from realism and romanticism.⁹ There was, in fact, a group of intellectuals often referred to as members of the New Sensation School (Xin ganjuepai 新感觉派)¹⁰ who wrote some of the earliest examples of modernist Chinese literature between 1920 and 1930.¹¹ During this decade, the expression of the urban experience in China was mainly expressed by Shanghai writers, such as Mu Shiying 穆时英 (1912-40)¹², Liu Na'ou 刘呐鸥 (1905-39) and Shi Zhecun 施蛰存 (1905-2003), editor of the journal *Les Contemporains* (现代 *Xiandai*), which published translations from foreign literature and the works of Shi Zhecun's trusted persons, such as Mu Shiying and Dai Wangshu.

It is necessary to note, however, that other scholars also tend to regard modernism as a historical genre, which found its best expression through the experiences of China's post-Mao era, or the New Era (Xin shiqi 新时期, 1979-89). These writers practised a form of poetic and narrative innovation, as in the case of the early post-Mao 'misty poetry' (*menglong shi* 朦胧诗) and 'search-for-roots' fiction (*xungen xiaoshuo* 寻根小说) or as the 'avant-garde fiction'. Subjectivity for these modernist writers is not only to be reconstructed but also transcended as they embrace modernist values or are threatened with the 'deconstruction' of a post-modern world.¹³

Whether Chinese modernism is to be considered as a literary genre or historical trend of the Republican or post-Mao era, Feng Zhi's 'pre-Modernist' approach refers

⁹ Lee confines this phenomenon within the literary scene of Shanghai.

¹⁰ The New Sensation School of Shanghai was the Chinese equivalent of the homonymous Japanese literary circle (*Shinkankakuha*) headed by Riichi Yokomitsu, which also aimed at promoting a new style and medium to express new impressions.

¹¹ Sean Macdonald, "'Modernism' in Modern Chinese Literature: The 'Third Type of Person' as a Figure of Autonomy", *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature - Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, Vol. 29, No 2-3, 2002, pp. 292-325, p. 292.

¹² Mu Shiying became famous for his modernist short story and literary style. The 'deconstruction' threat of modernity is what instills in the lyrical persona the sensation of a fragmented and almost inhuman life in a large and modern city like Shanghai.

¹³ See Xudong Zhang, *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms: Cultural Fever, Avant-garde Fiction, and the New Chinese Cinema*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1997, p. 6.

rather to the intensity and extent to which his literary production was influenced by Western modernist writings. In fact, Feng Zhi's lyrical production distinguishes itself from other Chinese Modernist writings of the Republican era that mainly developed as a response to the literary writings of Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell and of other American imagists during the 1920s and 1930s as well as from the later modernist writings of the New Era. The term 'pre-Modernist' adopted in this study does not necessarily refer to the temporal advancement or anticipation of the generally accepted Modernist tendency but rather to a philosophical differentiation in terms of intensity and influence from the English and American 'modernist' sources. The 'pre-Modernist' term becomes even more meaningful and gains relevance when comparing Feng Zhi's 'modernist' voice with that of other young Chinese modernist poets of the Republican period, such as Dai Wangshu, Bian Zhilin or even Wen Yiduo. The poets of the Republican era largely attempted to re-examine the meaning of literature basing the foundation of their new poetry on the spirit of the personal creative freedom of the May Fourth Movement. By doing so, they questioned the tradition and expressed the need for its re-evaluation taking foreign forms of expression as their new models. The poetry written during the period from 1920 and 1940 was, thus, very original and experimental in its linguistic, syntactic and structural forms. The lyrical production of Feng Zhi examined in this work combines elements of Novalis's and Rilke's poetry and depicts a new world characterised by authentic inspiration where the lyrical persona gains new aesthetic experiences, a re-evaluation of the *self* in relation to the surrounding world and community. The personal approach and intertextuality with the German Romantic and existentialist writings make Feng Zhi's literary figure rather autonomous in the general literary scene of modern China in these twenty years.¹⁴

¹⁴ The concept of autonomy in the modern Chinese literary and artistic context is also supported by contemporary literary research. This specific approach is not further developed in this study. Su Wen 蘇汶 exploited the expression 'third type of person' [第三种人] to identify an autonomous group of intellectuals who could not be classified as 'liberals', hence, headed by Hu Qiuyuan nor as the left-wing writers headed by Lu Xun. Although, this autonomous 'type' of intellectuals preferred to be loyal to their art, Lu Xun openly and heavily criticised them in his article "Lun disanzhong ren" 论第三种人 ["On the Third Type of Person"] as deserters who are led by their self-deception and escapism. For additional investigation, see Su Wen's writing *Wenyi ziyou lunbian jibian* 文艺自由论辩集 [Anthology on the Debate of Literary and Artistic Freedom, 1933].

When it comes to the importation of not only ideologies but also of new techniques, military strategies and arms, and the “effort to graft Western technology onto Chinese institutions”¹⁵, the key elements and inevitable social phenomena that animated this period of modernisation in China are mainly represented by the establishment of the Self-Strengthening Movement or *Ziqiang yundong* 自强运动 (1861-1894). Other instances that matter in this regard were a series of political reforms known as the ‘Hundred Days of Reform’ (1898) and an animated revolution, the Xinhai Revolution 辛亥革命 (1911-1912) which finally gave institutional form to the imagined Chinese nation-state.

With the overthrow of the feudal Qing state and increasing gravity of the national crisis that faced the fledgling nation-state that was China during the first half of the twentieth century, the realisation of the project of nationalisation in all its aspects was urgent. The career path for positions within the civil service also underwent a radical change and modern Chinese intellectuals turned towards Western knowledge and were formed as professors, teachers, writers, publishers and journalists.

The New Culture Movement was a social movement led by modern Chinese literati and intellectuals, and as the literary revolution played a fundamental role in the shaping of the same movement, literature and its involvement of a new form of language to be nationalised became closely connected with politics and soon employed to spread the modern national spirit.

Modern Chinese intellectuals particularly focused their attention on the more practical function of literature, which addressed the question of how to best represent the modern awareness, change the national spirit and create a modern national culture expressed through a new form of language. Poetry, in fact, underwent two important long-lasting changes during the early days of the Literary Revolution

¹⁵ Daniel C. Palm, “Learning the “Superior Techniques of the Barbarians”: China Self-Strengthening Movement” in Chau Donovan C. and Kane Thomas M. (eds.), *China and International Security History, Strategy, and 21st –Century Policy*, Denver and Oxford, Praeger, 2014, pp. 39-57, p. 40.

(1917-22). First of all, Hu Shi and other intellectuals, some of which were under Japanese influence, began to use the word *shi* 诗, which originally indicated one particular genre of poetry, to refer to poetry as a whole. The second change regarded the formal aspect of the new poetry that followed Western examples in punctuation and distribution of lines. The new poems were now printed on page line by line and not in the continuous prose form, as it was the custom during the previous centuries. The first place where these new *shi*-poems were printed was the magazine *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian* 新青年), where Hu Shi had published his manifesto in 1917.¹⁶ It was mainly Hu Shi's essay of 1918 entitled "A Constructive Theory of Literary Revolution" that contributed to the merging of the vernacular components in the *New Youth* circle. What Hu Shi had in mind by promoting a national language movement was also the establishment of a "new national literature in the national language."¹⁷ Hu Shi's drive to experiment predominantly stemmed from his belief in John Dewey's experimentalism. This form of experimentation of the use of vernacular in various genres of literature is vividly manifested in his call and encouragement to his fellow Chinese to "produce literary work in the national language"¹⁸. This initiative was then also taken seriously by other essayists who contributed in the divulgation of the literary revolution principles in the magazine *New Youth*, such as Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896-1950) and Zhou Zuoren. On this regard, Fu Sinian's essay "How to Write in the Vernacular" (*Zenyang zuo baihuawen* 怎样做白话文), first published in February 1919 on the magazine *Xinchao* 新潮 (New Tide) clearly manifests his literary vision to adopt *baihua* as means of a national language. In this essay, the writer pinpoints the two fundamental elements a poet must always bear in mind when writing prose or verses in the vernacular: firstly, to stick to the everyday speech, and to do so it was paramount that poets did listen to how people spoke before integrating this into their writing; secondly, to borrow and directly use a "Europeanised national language" in terms of form, grammar, morphology, syntax, structure and figures of speech. This according to Fu Sinian

¹⁶ See Michael Hocks (ed.), *The Flowering of Modern Chinese Poetry: An Anthology of Verse from the Republican Period*, Montreal and London, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016, p. 8.

¹⁷ Zhou Gang, *Placing the Modern Chinese Vernacular in Transnational Literature*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 42.

¹⁸ Zhou, *Placing the Modern Chinese Vernacular in Transnational Literature*, p. 42.

would make the Chinese national language more elegant, philosophical and beautiful to the extent that it could be equated with other European languages.¹⁹ On this regard, it is important to note that what is demonstrated in this work is how Feng Zhi also contributed to the establishment of this new national language through his twenty-seven sonnets by employing a light yet precise language that is not far from every day speech but that can still convey deep philosophical cues.

Zhou Zuoren, on the other hand, in his essay “Literature of Humanity” (*Rende wenxue* 人的文学), focused on the ‘instrumental’ function of the new national language, advocated, hence, as literary instrument. What Zhou Zuoren argued in his essay was that writers should first and foremost think of a literature that belongs to humanity that is far from being an “inhumane literature”. In other words, Zhou Zuoren openly denounced certain forms of literature as not embodying the key elements of humanity and morality.²⁰

During the earlier phase of the modernisation period, exponents of literature wished to have an ideological impact on society. As a consequence, according to the optimistic view of Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929), the literary revolution was the vehicle of the young urban elite desirous of individual emancipation and democracy. The new literature, for instance, that was created on the basis of Ibsenism brought forward by Hu Shi did eventually also give rise to a form of marriage independence and social sense of duty within the young urban elite. On the other hand, the new free verse of Guo Moruo appealed for patriotism, spiritual freedom and vitality. Moreover, among those Chinese intellectuals who had German formation, Zong Baihua 宗白华 (1897-1986), Chen Quan 陈铨 (1903-1969) and Feng Zhi encouraged a new energetic life and national spirit.

¹⁹ See Zhou, *Placing the Modern Chinese Vernacular in Transnational Literature*, p. 43.

²⁰ See Zhou, *Placing the Modern Chinese Vernacular in Transnational Literature*, p. 43.

The demand for a literary revolution was mainly promoted by journals as *Xinqingnian* 新青年 *La Jeunesse* (New Youth) and *Xinchao* 新潮 (New Tide), both based at Peking University. Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942), Qian Xuantong 钱玄同 (1887-1939), Liu Bannong 刘半农 (1891-1934), Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896-1950) and others debated how to improve literature through their essays and discussions with Lin Shu 林纾 (1852-1924) in 1917. Among these, Qian Xuantong was the one taking the lead in supporting the use of a written language suitable and worth being called “a national language” 以国语为之. The emphasis put by Hu Shi in his essay “Towards a Constructive Theory of Literary Revolution” (建设的文学革命论) was also on literature written in the modern vernacular to be considered as literature in the national language.

As soon as Hu Shi and other members joined the Association for the Study of the National Language and the Society for the Implementation of National Language Unity, Fu Sinian proposed the two paths of spoken language and a Europeanised national language as means for elevating the literature in *baihua*. At this stage, the national language movement and the literary revolution converged: the language spoken around Beijing became the basis for the new standard spoken vernacular and the language to be used by the new literature from the May Fourth Movement onwards.²¹

The enterprise of the remaking of the national literature mainly existed since 1920 up to 1940 when various Chinese writers of different epochs and literary currents made different artistic attempts. Among the literary societies between 1910 and 1920, the *Wenxue Yanjiuhui* 文学研究会 or Literary Research Association, also known as the ‘realist’ or ‘art-for-life’s sake’ school, founded by Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰 (1896-1981), better known later as Mao Dun 茅盾, and others, functioned under the stark shadow of the Russian Realistic literature with the ambition of unveiling the problems of social reality. Other dynamic literary associations were the Creation

²¹ See Mei Chia-Ling, “Voice and the Quest for Modernity in Chinese Culture” in Carlos Rojas, Andrea Bachner (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literatures*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 149- 171, p. 164.

Society or *Chuangzao she* 創造社 under the influence of European and Japanese Romanticism with the representation of emotions and inner conflicts of the soul; the Crescent Moon Society or *Xinyue she* 新月社 founded by Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897-1931) in 1923²² inspired by English-language poetry and pioneering a new versification of the New Poem; and the Sunken Bell Society or *Chen zhong she* 沉钟社 established in 1925 with a bias towards modern German literature and the translation of German literary works.

Among the contributors in these literary associations, especially the *Xinyue*, the dominant literary form within the establishing of the new literature was poetry. As Prof. Estran clarifies, only Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902–1988) “represented the novel”.²³ The “spirit” of the journal was generally represented by Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897-1931), a poet who revenged his love and intent to live according to his passions and who played a vital role with his poetry in the intellectual arena of the early 1920.²⁴

In this context, it is worth noting however, that the influence of Western poetry in China was predominantly based on the aesthetic experience that varied from poet to poet and who ultimately could not negate his identity or either neglect his sense of belonging to traditional Chinese poetic aesthetics. The poetic arena of these intense twenty years was animated by intellectuals who followed different lyrical forms, such as English, French, German and American models. In fact, some modern Chinese lyricists and translators chiefly and intentionally picked Western poems for their close resemblance or implicit affinity of images, emotions and themes, which were also recurrent in the long Chinese tradition. For instance, the poetic themes of the early and mature writings of Feng Zhi, such as that of ‘self-completion in loneliness’, clearly manifest how the Chinese poet succeeded in merging the essence of German literature with traits and themes also recurrent in classical Chinese tradition.

²² See Estran, *Poésie et liberté dans la Chine républicaine*, p. 1.

²³ Estran, p. 10.

²⁴ Estran, p. 11.

Following the spirit of the New Culture Movement, some Chinese poets dedicated their literary activity to the development of new forms and verses that could best fit the poetry in *baihua*, the vernacular language; whereas other lyricists imitated and introduced poetic forms typical of the Western tradition. To the latter's end, Feng Zhi, eminent Chinese scholar of German literature and philosophy, is commonly regarded as the most famous modern sonnet composer of China.²⁵ His intellectual and literary creativity was even praised in 1935 by Lu Xun, who defined Feng Zhi as “中国最为杰出的抒情诗人” (China's most remarkable lyric poet).²⁶

Feng Zhi's poetic attempt was also possible thanks to the experimentation of the new form of language that was much in use among the urban elites and intellectual circles of the period. The concept of “modern” and the use of the new acclaimed national language contribute to the definition of the variegated literary arena that mainly characterised the first half of the twentieth century. The innovative use of *shi* as form of poetry, far from the stylistic forms of *wenyanwen*, clearly allowed modern lyricists to write in a freer and more fluid form.

One of the most striking characteristics of the new literary theories and new poetry, also clearly visible in Feng Zhi's sonnets, is the use of multi-syllabic words typical of *baihua*: most words in Feng Zhi's work consist of two syllables, whereas most words in classical Chinese are monosyllabic. The sonnets discussed in this study also implicitly reveal how the rhyming scheme of this new poetry in *baihua* necessitates new poetic forms able to contain the new sets of rhymes and line lengths that distinguish the syllabic count of sentences of the ‘plain language’. As Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967) argued following his translation work from languages, such as ancient Greek and modern Japanese, one simply “cannot write [*in baihua*] in a fixed form, and therefore must write free verse.”²⁷ Zhou Zuoren's translations were given in free verse and mainly expressed the meaning conveyed in the original poems. The translation of Feng Zhi's twenty-seven sonnets in this study are similarly

²⁵ While primarily remembered as a prominent poet and translator of German works into Chinese, Feng Zhi also wrote a novel, essays and a lyrical narrative.

²⁶ Preface in *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 (Compendium of Modern Chinese literature), Vol. 2, Shanghai, Liangyou, 1935.

²⁷ Hocks, *The Flowering of Modern Chinese Poetry*, p. 9.

translated in free English verse without any futile attempt to render or falsify the prosodic qualities of the original works in *baihua*.

The modern attempt to write a new form poetry that also and often rendered in *baihua* the meaning of English or French works even accepted some extreme cases where foreign-looking sentences with foreign diction and syntax structure were used. Because of the evolution and adaptation of *baihua* to modernity, Feng Zhi claims the Chinese language to be extremely mixed. In a particular instance the poet even admits to feel the Chinese language as being drifting away from him and has the sensation of writing in a foreign language when choosing the right words for his verses in Chinese (现在中国的文字可以说是混杂到万分-有时我个人感到我的中国文是那样地同我疏远, 在选择字句的时候仿佛是在写外国文一般).²⁸ Because of this change in the language, Feng Zhi reaches the conclusion at a certain point of seeing himself literary “poor” as no text can now truly enjoy its full richness (我觉得我是非常地贫穷, 就因为没有丰富的文字).²⁹ Guo Moruo, Dai Wangsu, Bian Zhilin and others even made use of foreign terms in their poems, as in the title of his poem “A Demon’s Serenade” (1931) that clearly adopted foreign terms as “serenade”.³⁰

Moreover, the government and ministry for education gradually introduced in the 1920s written vernacular and spoken Mandarin at all levels in the education system. Maybe also beyond Hu Shi’s expectations, the vernacular language was, thus, elevated to the status of a “standard national language” of the newly established Republic.³¹ The new lyrical forms of the 1920s, also in use by poet-translators of the Crescent Moon Society, were also referred to as “national forms” given their more regulated form and musical effect. As Michel Hocks adds on this matter, there is a general and accepted idea that national cultural identity in poetry during the

²⁸ Feng Zhi’s letter to Hui Xiu and Xiang He, dated 17 November 1931 in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 12, p. 137.

²⁹ Feng Zhi’s letter to Hui Xiu and Xiang He, dated 17 November 1931 in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 12, p. 137.

³⁰ See Hocks, *The Flowering of Modern Chinese Poetry*, p. 10.

³¹ Yu Gao, *The Birth of the Twentieth-Century Chinese Literature: Revolutions in Language, History and Culture*, trans. in English by Li Guicang, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 51.

twentieth century could be only achieved by “writing in bound forms or by trying to emulate the classical tradition”.³²

On the other hand, Feng Zhi’s original stance towards the use of language in poetry is revealed in the preface to his second edition of the sonnets where he stresses that a poem should not require any external explanations. In his own words, Feng Zhi regarded poetry, as one would contemplate a figurative form of art, such as a painting or a sculpture, hence, without needing any further and external cues for the interpretation of the artefact. Therefore, poetry seemingly finds its interpretation solely in its being. This writing manner also reflects Goethe’s approach to objective phenomena and their relation with personal experiences, a concept that Feng Zhi will eventually fuse with Rilke’s concept of aesthetic experiences.

³² Hocks, *The Flowering of Modern Chinese Poetry*, p. 10.

II. Introduction to Intertextual Relationship between German Writing and Chinese Writing

After the political and cultural shock represented by the brutal imposition of Western colonialism through what became notoriously known as the Opium Wars (1839-42 and 1856-60), Chinese officials often wrote accounts of their travels in Europe and the United States with wonder and admiration for the achievements and technical functioning of the West. The West was still often represented as an exotic destination by the most open-minded intellectuals of China being granted their trip abroad. One of the most influential travellers and translator that brought much information about Europe to the Chinese audience was undoubtedly Wang Tao 王韜 (1828-1897), who sought exile in Hong Kong in order to escape execution. From there he could see the growth of the British colony and travel to Europe. Wang Tao was finally recognised as an expert in foreign affairs and could finally settle in Shanghai.

Wang Tao had met many Westerners and soon saw the need to understand Western culture thoroughly in order to maintain good relationships. Hence, he began working on writing European histories with the intention of informing China of the historical background of the European powers and facilitating a better relation. While in Hong Kong, Wang had also worked for James Legge helping him with the Classics. When Legge returned to Scotland in 1867, Wang joined him. His travel across the ocean, Africa, Italy, France and the crossing of the English Channel to Britain is related in his *Manyou sui lu tu ji* 漫游随录图记 (Jottings of My Roamings 1890).³³

Upon his return to Hong Kong, Wang began working again on the Classics and current affairs related to Western matters. In 1871, Wang collected some information from Western newspapers in English and other Western materials, analysed the results and wrote *Pufa zhanji* 普法战记 (A Record of the Franco-Prussian War, 1871). This work presented the battle between France and Prussia and the development of the European countries. The book also explained how Prussia, even

³³ Thanks to Legge's network, Wang Tao was able to gain experience in Europe that other Chinese travellers could hardly attain, including giving a speech at the University of Oxford and meeting with a number of British intellectuals of the time.

though not as strong as France, was able to defeat the French army and upset the balance of power in Europe.³⁴ Wang Tao hoped his Chinese readers could understand the current situation in Europe and learn from Prussia's victory. He concluded that the main reason why France lost and Prussia won the battle was because the right people were chosen for the right job, hence, implying that the success of a nation depended from its people. Although Prussia was smaller in size compared to France, because of the appointment of the right leaders and the unity of its people, the nation could be modernised and defeat its enemy.

Wang Tao's book was one of the sparks that pushed China to start looking at Prussia since the victory of the Prussian Kingdom during the Franco-Prussian war of 1871.

Another influential text that seemingly had the similar impact among Chinese intellectuals and literati was the book written in Chinese by German missionary and sinologist Ernst Faber (1839-1899), *Die Schulen Deutschlands (The Schools of Germany, 1873)* elaborating the principles of the German education. Faber's stated intention was that to disseminate the basic ideas of the best German pedagogical works among the Chinese. In his book, Faber also discussed about themes related to the knowledge and Christian faith, the classical traditional erudition of the Chinese, Western theology and the study of classics, philosophy, linguistics, pedagogy as well as the advantages in the use of machines, the development of trade, war science and the scientific methods for healing.³⁵

Through these two books in China, politicians, intellectuals and literati could learn about German politics, armed forces, pedagogy and industry. In 1876, the governor of Zhili Province, Li Hongzhang (1823-1901), dispatched seven young men to Germany to study military and technics. In 1901, the governor of Hunan Hubei Province, Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) made explicit request to learn from the

³⁴ See Wai Tsui, "A Study of Wang Tao's (1828-1897) *Manyou suilu and Fusang youji* with Reference to Late Qing Chinese Foreign Travels", Doctoral Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, March 2010, p. 284.

³⁵ See Lixin Sun, *Das Chinabild der Deutschen Protestantischen Missionare des 19. Jahrhunderts. Eine Fallstudie zum Problem interkultureller Begegnung und Wahrnehmung*, Marburg, Tectum Verlag, 2002, p.113.

German education system and the cooperation between China and Germany became even stronger after the fall of the last Chinese empire: on the international chessboard, German turned out to be one of the firmest and most industrialised economies in Europe, especially after the unification (1871) – a strong and successful model for neighbouring or far-off countries that were in their process of development and change. This paved the base upon which a series of Sino-German ties and cooperation took place in the 1920s and 1930s.

During the 1920s, on the contrary of the Soviet Union, Germany did not show any political interest in China, and even Chiang Kai-shek identified the German unification (Deutsche Einigung, 1871) as a positive phenomenon from which China could also learn. In the international development phase, China saw Germany as a “primary force”³⁶. German officers were soon recruited to train the nationalist forces leading to the victorious campaigns against the Chinese warlords in 1929.

The need for a more efficient and reliable alliance in military and industrial policy was particularly felt when the Japanese troops invaded the Manchurian region in 1931 (the Mukden Incident) giving rise to the need for a speedy industrialisation of the country.

The Nazi seizure of power in 1933 strengthened the Sino-German cooperation as the new Defence economy began to require more military raw material directly from China.³⁷ The same year, the German military general Hans von Seeckt arrived in Shanghai proposing an outlined and detailed programme for the industrialisation and practice of new military tactics in China. Kuomintang official Kong Xiangxi visited Germany together with other KMT officials and was received directly by Adolf Hitler in 1937. The same year, the second Sino-Japanese conflict broke out putting an end to the so-far strong cooperation between China and Germany as Hitler finally chose Japan to China as military ally against the Soviet Union.

³⁶ Sun Yat-sen, *The International Development of China*, Taipei, China Cultural Service, 1953, p. 283.

³⁷ See William Kirby, *Germany and Republican China*, Stanford University Press, 1984, p. 106.

The Sino-German cooperation of the 1930s was the most fruitful plan of Sun Yat-sen 孙中山 (1866-1925) to modernise and industrialise China as both countries managed to cooperate fairly without any seemingly imperialist hidden plans. This is exactly the period when Feng Zhi travelled and studied in Germany: 1930-35.

This interest in establishing sound connections with modern Western powers was also felt in Japan, especially, during the Meiji Restoration started in 1868. During this period, the regime literally applied Yukichi Fukuzawa's thought to be separated from Asia and deal with "civilised nations of the West" instead:

"Our nation [Japan] does not have the time to wait for the enlightenment of neighbouring nations in order to prosper together in Asia. Actually, we must free ourselves from their [China, Korea] ranks and advance and retreat together with the civilised Western nations. Furthermore, we must not give special treatment to China or Korea as neighbouring nations but follow the ways in which Westerners dispose of such nations. [...] Some argue that principles must be given primacy and that the army is secondary. But such an argument is no more than the logic of a few Confucian students or the senility of a few old men."³⁸

Because of its fast development and its leading position in terms of techniques, pedagogy, medicine and military strength, Japan showed particular interest towards Germany. Along with other forms of professional knowledge, such as in the case of international law and jurisprudence, Japan also absorbed the German notion of culture. Furthermore, the German language was also introduced into many collegial courses and numerous German books were also imported directly from Germany. Many students reading for their degrees in engineering or health sciences were given German lessons as part of their university career in order to read and study on German books, follow lectures expressively delivered by German professors in visit in Japan and, eventually, be sent to Germany for further research and specialisation.³⁹ The German philosophical, literary, political and economical thoughts became inevitably well known and rather popular among the intellectual

³⁸ Yukichi Fukuzawa, "The Basis of the Expansion of the Armament," vol. 10 of the Complete Works of Yukichi Fukuzawa, p. 242 in Lee Yong-ju, *The Path from a Theory of Civilization to Escape of Asia: Yukichi Fukuzawa's Perception of Asia and the 'Mission to Civilize'*, Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2003, pp. 123-152, p. 126.

³⁹ See Henri von Hoof, "A Contribution to the History of Medical Translation in Japan" in Henry Fischbach (ed.), *Translation and Medicine*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamin's Publishing, 1998, pp. 29-36, p. 35.

class in Japan during the Meiji period. Writers, such as Haga Ya-ichi, brought back to Japan German philology, considered at that time a scientific discipline developed by scholars like August Boeckh during the nineteenth century, stressing the connection between national language and national literature.⁴⁰

Because of Japan's geographical vicinity and accessibility from China, it became common practice and almost a must for many acclaimed Chinese intellectuals and university students of the period to relocate and pursue their studies on Western technology and medicine in Japan rather than in Europe or in the United States. Significant and influential Chinese characters of the first half of the twentieth century, such as Lu Xun, the forerunner of modern Chinese literature, and his brother Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967); Guo Moruo; Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石, 1887-1975); Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan 孙中山, 1866-1925), studied in Japan, where students could also be exposed to numerous Western political, sociological, economical, philosophical and literary works in English, French, German or in Japanese and be able to bring the acquired knowledge back to China. Chinese intellectuals learnt about English, American, German, French and Russian works during their studies in Japanese universities.

Japan represented the most industrialised, modernised and 'westernised' nation in East Asia and it became rather convenient for many students from China or South-east Asia to relocate to Japan for study and research. Nevertheless, during the 1920s and 1930s an increasing number of Chinese students began to receive different forms of scholarship and were able to move and further their study by pursuing higher degrees very renowned universities in Germany, France, England and the United States. This represented an incredible opportunity for many of these young intellectuals who could finally gain first-hand experience of theories they had been studying for long or just by being surrounded by very influential literati and intellectuals of the time.

⁴⁰ German philology was assimilated by scholars like Haga as to research on nativist etymology of words, syntax and sound of pre-modern Japanese before the adoption of Chinese script. Haga scientifically combined nativism and German philology See Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 337.

The young intellectuals who had temporarily moved to Europe and the United States began their prolific work of research and soon began to write essays under the direct influence of the modern literary movements of the time. Nonetheless, also those Chinese intellectuals with a Japanese educational background, and especially those who proudly belonged to the generation of the New Cultural Movement, such as Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Guo Moruo and Tian Han 田汉 (1898-1968), also exerted a significant influence in China and even contributed in the transmission of German culture for the Chinese readership. Such was the German literary and philosophical reception among intellectual circles in Japan that Lu Xun, for instance, accepted the modern concept of self-consciousness of Nietzsche as well as his ideas of continuous nature of metamorphosis. The number of essays Lu Xun wrote after returning to China witnesses the Chinese writer's attention for Nietzsche's work and philosophy.⁴¹ When Lu Xun wrote *Kuangren riji* 狂人日记 (*The Madman's Diary*) in 1918, he also translated the first three parts of Zarathustra's introductory discourse of Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spoke Zarathustra) in *wenyan*.⁴²

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, when Guo Moruo translated Goethe's *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers*, he also brought the Werther-fever to China and his translations of poems of Goethe, Heinrich Heine and other German poets exerted significant influence on the susceptible mind of young Chinese readers like Feng Zhi.⁴³

The famous literary letter collection *The Three-leaf Collection* (*San ye ji* 三叶集), jointly published with Tian Han and Zong Baihua in 1920 shows the enthusiasm

⁴¹ See Cao Juren 曹聚仁, *Lu Xun ping zhuan* 鲁迅评传 (A Critical Biography of Lu Xun), Hong Kong, Sanyu Shudian, 1967, pp. 50-56.

⁴² Much can be said about intertextual occurrences between Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Lu Xun's *The Madman's Diary*. See Wong Yoon Wah, "The Influence of Western Literature on China's First Modern Story" in Wong Yoon Wah, *Essays on Chinese Literature: A Comparative Approach*, Kent Ridge (Singapore), Singapore University Press, 1988, pp. 52-66.

⁴³ See Marián Gálík, "Feng Zhi and His Goethean Sonnet" in Masayuki Akiyama and Yiu-nam Leung (eds.), *Crosscurrents in the Literatures of Asia and the West. Essays in Honor of A. Owen Aldridge*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1997, pp. 123-34, p. 127.

and the understanding of the Chinese intellectuals of the May Fourth period for German literature. The letters give a detailed analysis of the works and ideas of the German poet. Guo Moruo's poems in vernacular deal with Walt Whitman's concept of pantheism, ideals of freedom and revolution that were also supported by Zong Baihua.

Zong Baihua felt so much anointed by Guo Moruo's passion for German literature that he even decided to study in Germany himself. He researched Schiller's poetry, even if wrote very little about it.⁴⁴

Tian Han, on the other hand, soon became a drama theorist, showing all his enthusiasm for German drama in *The Three-leaf Collection*. Eventually, he later used all his knowledge of German drama theory becoming one of the chief founders and theorists of modern drama in China.

During the 1940s, right after the publication of the *Sonnets*, Feng Zhi dedicated his time to the study of Goethe publishing two new detailed fundamental writings: *Explaining Goethe* in the 1940s and *About Goethe* in the 1980s. From his essays, it is possible to perceive Feng Zhi's concern about the nation and his time as he discussed the poverty of the people, the corruption of the regime and the way forward for the nation. It is evident that Fang Zhi's attention to the current issues mainly derived from the use of the intellectual elite that became even more visible in the media and cultural activities. Moreover, both personal freedom and the intellectual's position in society began to change with the growing and fast developing communist ideology: the individual was now made part of the State and attention to current matters had to be set aside as intellectuals began to look at reality from a different angle.

Scholars, such as Chen Yinke 陈寅恪 (1890-1969), fought for their ideal of an independent spirit and free thought during a very difficult historical situation. He would accept corporal pain rather than giving up his intellectual freedom of

⁴⁴ See Lin Tonghua 林同华, *Zong Baihua quanji* 宗白华全集 [Complete Works of Zong Baihua], Vol. 2, Hefei, 1994, p. 39.

expression. As Liu Jiandong remarks, this was even more visible during the chaotic year 1967 as if he had a possibility.⁴⁵

Another very intriguing form of intertextual relations at a metalevel was the introduction of the German autobiographical genre of Goethe. In fact, Goethe's autobiographical work *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit* (*From my Life: Poetry and Truth*; 1811–1833) was translated into Chinese during the 1930s and circulated in two versions: the first copy appeared as fragment in 1930 from Shanghai's Shijie shuju 世界书局 (World Publishing House), translated by Zhang Jingsheng 张竞生 (1888-1970) of Peking University. Seven years later there appeared the complete translation by Liu Simu 刘思暮 (1904-1985) in two volumes, published in Shanghai by the Shenghuo shuju 生活书局 (Life Publishing House). This is a period when the first radical modern Chinese autobiographies were being experimented with. Two major exponents of this genre are Guo Moruo, who wrote his first autobiography *Moruo zizhuan* 莫若自传 (*The Autobiography of Guo Moruo*, 1928-1945) and Hu Shi, who wrote *Sishi zishu* 四十自述 in 1933. Following Goethe's example, the new conceptual and aesthetic radical autobiographies were told from a threefold perspective: scientific, historical and artistic.

In Goethe's autobiography, for instance, the life of the author is recorded from a scientist's point view, thus, analysing each day on scientific terms following the laws of metamorphosis in nature. The historian's point of view comes into place when a historical account of the period in which the author lived is documented. Finally, the author of the book was free to choose the accounts of his own life, especially those that he deemed particularly relevant.

The movement of Chinese intellectuals who studied at German universities mostly occurred between 1920 and 1930. In fact, in 1924 there were almost one thousand Chinese students in Berlin as German higher education and training was advanced and well known in the world during the second half of the nineteenth century. Thanks to the close cooperation between the German government and the

⁴⁵ See Lu Jiandong 陆键东, *Chen Yinke de zuihou ershi nian* 陈寅恪的最后 20 年, Beijing, 1995, p. 477.

Chinese National Party, a substantial number of outstanding Chinese students were offered financial assistance and through sponsorship by regional Chinese governments in order to study in Germany. Feng Zhi won financial support from the Hebei Province Ministry of Education in order to study and obtain his doctoral degree in Germany.⁴⁶

To keep up with this initiative, the German government also promoted German culture in China in order to strengthen the cooperation between the two nations: various colleges and universities were established in Chinese cities, such as in Qingdao, in Shandong Province, and Shanghai. What made this move even more possible was the monetary inflation that hit Germany between 1919 and 1924 causing the sudden drop of German currency and the consequent decrease in costs for studies in Germany for Chinese students.

Modern German theories on aesthetics had a great impact on the Chinese shaping of an autochthonous formulation of aestheticism and on modern Chinese literature as whole. In fact, already at the beginning of the 20th century, Liang Qichao and Wang Guowei 王国维 (1877-1927), both with Japanese education background, along with Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940), an outstanding scholar of German studies and interpreter of Chinese culture and thought, behaved as active participants in the introduction to China of the aesthetic thoughts of Western intellectuals, such as that of Kant and Schopenhauer. Their aim was that to revive the current ideas on classical Chinese aesthetics in order to give them a ‘modern’ interpretation and contextualisation.

Relevant to this period was Cai Yuanpei’s theory of “Aesthetic Education Replacing Religion” – a faith reconstruction project in modern Chinese cultural context, which had witnessed the downfall of Confucianism and lack of religious spirit. Key elements of this theory were secularity, transcendence, individualism and collectiveness. Convinced of the weakness of the Chinese school system, Cai Yuanpei travelled to Germany in 1907 to study philosophy, aesthetics and

⁴⁶ See Ying Cai, *Der deutsche Beitrag zur Modernisierung der chinesischen Dichtung: Feng Zhis Die Sonette*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang GmbH, 2013, pp. 32-33.

psychology. During his stay in Berlin and Leipzig, he wrote textbooks for the teaching of morality in secondary schools, wrote a book on the history of Chinese ethics, and translated several German books into Chinese. In 1911, he returned to China and was appointed Minister of Education by the Republican Government, a position he left in 1912 to protest against the regime of Yuan Shikai. He then returned to Germany to resume his studies and visited France in 1913 and learnt French. In France he began his work for Franco-Chinese education, including the creation in 1916 of the Franco-Chinese Society of Education of which he was the president. This association allowed more than two thousand Chinese students to visit and study in France.⁴⁷ Cai Yuanpei became an acclaimed education reformist within the intellectual elite and was made rector of Peking University from 1916 to 1926. During these ten years, his work at the head of the university contributed to the making of the first institution of higher learning. Moreover, he founded and became the president of the *Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan* 中央研究院 or Academia Sinica, the highest national research institute. Being a pioneer in the modern Chinese intellectual circle, Cai Yuanpei sought to modernise education in China after his experience in Germany and extensive reading of Kant's work. The objective behind his mission was that to substitute religion with aesthetic education – having served as the first Minister of Education soon after the founding of the Republic of China in 1912, he succeeded in putting forward his education credo of civil virtue, utilitarianism and worldview.

During the 1920s, when Cai Yuanpei was rector of Peking University, Wang Guowei was considered together with Chen Yinke, Zhao Yuanren and Liang Qichao, one of the “Great Four Masters” of Qinghua University.⁴⁸ Even with an education acquired in Japan, Wang Guowei's theories on the application of aesthetics and literary criticism was inspired by German idealism and influenced by the traditions

⁴⁷ Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) - Le Fonds chinois - Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, <https://www.bm-lyon.fr/nos-blogs/le-fonds-chinois/documents-et-ressources/ressources-359/presentation-de-l-institut-franco-chinois-de-lyon-1921-1946/l-histoire-de-l-ifcl-1921-1946/article/cai-yuanpei-1868-1940?lang=fr>. Accessed 14 November 2017.

⁴⁸ See Chung-Ying Cheng and Nicholas Bunnin (eds.), *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, Malden, Blackwell Publishers, 2002, p. 18.

of Chinese art.⁴⁹ The philosophy of Kant, Schiller, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche played an important role in the conception of his theories and redefinition of Chinese literature. According to Wang Guowei, although art was instrumentally useless, it was definitely “worthy and significant in terms of enlightenment.”⁵⁰ This could obviously be explained by the fact that art ultimately represented a form of expression of philosophical, aesthetic, spiritual and ethical values. Therefore, Wang Guowei’s theory is very much in line with Schopenhauer’s notion of the “Idea as the object of knowledge or the origin of art.”⁵¹

Thanks to Schopenhauer’s principle of sufficient reason and Kant’s distinction between theoretical and practical reason, Wang Guowei concluded that *li* (principle) could mean both casual and intellectual reason (*liyou* and *lixing*). Moreover, as an object of knowledge, *li* contains both metaphysical and ethical values. There is no such division in ancient Chinese thought. Wang Guowei also concluded that the Chinese interpretation of fate (*ming*) was to be connected with the Western notion of fatalism, although he did not fully accept the implied connotation of free will and determinism.

Finally, Wang Guowei’s desire was to promote German idealism, stressing its ethical account of life ethics and aesthetic reference of art. Moreover, in 1908, Wang Guowei published the first 21 pieces of his *Renjian cihua* 人间词话 (*Remarks on Ci Poetry in the World*, 1908-10) initially advancing his “theory of realm” according to which an effective poem should combine descriptions of both the scenery and emotions. In this work, Wang mainly analysed classical Chinese poems under the influence of Kant, Schiller and Schopenhauer employing new philosophical and modern aesthetical concepts, such as that of nature, ideals, presence and absence of the self, beauty and transcendence. By doing so, Wang established a bridge between traditional Chinese aesthetics and modern Western aesthetics. As soon as the Chinese Revolution of 1911 broke out, Wang fled to Japan and lived there for five years. In

⁴⁹ See Cheng and Bunnin (eds.), *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, p. 39.

⁵⁰ Keping Wang, “Wang Guowei: Philosophy of Aesthetic Criticism”, in: Chung-Ying Cheng and Nicholas Bunnin, *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, Malden, Blackwell Publishers, 2002, pp. 37-56, p. 39.

⁵¹ Keping Wang, “Wang Guowei”, p. 39.

January 1913 he finally completed his writing on pre-modern opera, entitled *Song-Yuan xiqu shi* 宋元戏曲史 (History of Opera in the Song and Yuan Dynasties).

Nonetheless, as also generally accepted, it was Zong Baihua and Zhu Guangqian who theorised modern Chinese aesthetics. In fact, in 1930, Zhu Guangqian travelled to England and France and studied the philosophy and aesthetics of Kant and Nietzsche. He then explained in detail the traits of Western psychological aesthetics in his works on the psychology of literature, art and tragedy, homophonously entitled *Wenyi xinlixue* 文艺心理学 [The Psychology of Art, 1931] and *Beiju xinlixue* 悲剧心理学 [The Psychology of Tragedy, 1933].

According to the study and research conducted by these Chinese intellectuals, aesthetics and poetry, intended as a form of art, had to be closely related. In fact, when Wang Guowei, Zong Baihua, Zhu Guangqian along with others, analysed traditional Chinese art from the perspective of German aesthetics and introduced a modern Chinese concept of aesthetics, their attempt was often made possible thanks to the new researches on classical poetry. In other words, classical Chinese poems were analysed and re-evaluated through German-Chinese comparative approaches.

Among the first promising signs of the beginning of Western Romantic infiltration in China was the foundation of the literary association Creation Society in July 1921 by a group of young intellectuals studying in Japan. Its major members included Guo Moruo, Yu Dafu 郁达夫 (1896-1945) and Tian Han. In autumn 1921, the society issued one of the first series of literature in *baihua*, including Guo Moruo's famous poem *Nüshen* 女神 [The Goddesses] and Yu Dafu's novel *Chenlun* 沉淪 [Sinking]. The society followed the romantic tradition and claimed to believe in the motto "art for art's sake": art was to be considered as valuable art. The works being proposed, some in forms of Chinese translations of Western works, aimed at social transformation, contributing to the shift from 'literary revolution' to 'revolutionary literature'. The society eventually also supported leftist writers in their critique of the Crescent Moon Society whose members were deeply engaged with English romantic poetry.

Through the publications in *Creation Quarterly*, the members of the society expressed their common “inner demands” that stemmed from a mixture of nineteenth-century German Romantic discourse, aestheticism, Expressionism and even Futurism.⁵² Guo Moruo’s introductory essay to the inaugural issue of *Creation Quarterly* on his translation of Goethe’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* clearly manifested the society’s explicit gaze at the European literary and philosophical repertoire. While translating Goethe’s work, Guo Moruo began to feel admiration for the German poet, the romantic movement of Sturm und Drang, German emotionalism, pantheism and veneration of nature.

This generation of Chinese intellectuals showed a particular inclination towards German philosophical ideas of thinkers like Schopenhauer. In his critical work, *Cong Shubenhua dao Nicai* 从叔本华到尼采 [From Schonpenhauer to Nietzsche, 1946], Chen Quan wrote that Schopenhauer’s thought, unlike Nietzsche’s, was not meant for grown-ups but rather for a new generation of sad and enthusiastic youngsters like him.⁵³ Moreover, while Nietzsche’s philosophy belonged to adults, Schopenhauer’s pessimism clearly belonged to the younger generation. Very easily, the literary and philosophical ideas were compared to the age of men, hence, also based on the logic of progress and evolutionism. Because of their desire and striving for a new form of cultural modernity, those Chinese intellectuals belonging to the same generation of Feng Zhi and Chen Quan identified themselves with modern literature and philosophy and did not hesitate to express their innovative, optimistic and deep values.

As young Chinese intellectuals began to challenge tradition and finally turned towards the Western, new aesthetic forms of literary expressions were eventually deemed indispensable. Among Western literary practices, the “sonnet” was considered as one of the strictest poetic forms of poetry to be imitated in China. In fact, as previously mentioned, some Chinese poets sought to revive Chinese

⁵² See Kirk A. Denton and Michael Hockx, *Literary Societies of Republican China*, Plymouth Lexington Books, 2008, p. 108.

⁵³ Chen Quan 陈铨, *Cong Shubenhua dao Nicai* 从叔本华到尼采 (From Schonpenhauer to Nietzsche), Shanghai, Shanghai Dadong Publishing House, 1946, pp. 53-54.

versification through the introduction and experimentation of now literary genres and poetic forms; one of these was the sonnet.

In the introduction to the volume of essays *Compendium of New Chinese Literature* published in 1935 and edited by Yu Dafu, Zhu Ziqing (1898-1948) divided the Chinese New Poetry into three major schools: the “School of Free Verse”, the “School of New Versification” and the “School of Symbolism”.⁵⁴ The School of New Versification represented by Hu Shi and Guo Moruo was established towards the end of the 1910s and the beginning of the 1920s and refused the restrictions and limitations imposed by the classical language and versification calling for the freedom of form. The School of New Versification and the School of Symbolism led by Wen Yiduo 闻一多 (1899-1946) and Li Jinfa 李金发 (1900-1976) respectively were established around the mid-1920s. Whereas the School of Wen Yiduo made use of English and American Romantic poems to represent emotions by focusing on the external beauty of the form, the School represented by Li Jinfa referred to the French Symbolist poetry to represent the inner beauty of indirect suggestions and symbolic images. The Chinese sonnet resulted after the quest for new versifications brought forth by the School of New Versification.

Poets of the Crescent Moon Society, like Wen Yiduo, advocated the introduction of Western lyricism as well as the sonnet form. Excellent examples of this new Chinese poetic attempt in the sonnet form were made by Bian Zhilin 卞之琳 (1910-2000), Liang Zongdai 梁宗岱 (1903-1983) and ultimately by Feng Zhi. With regards to imagery, the Chinese sonnets followed the Western tradition of Symbolism and Imagism. Therefore, at the time when Feng Zhi composed his twenty-seven sonnets, the lyric form of the sonnet and foreign imagery were already harmoniously blended with the modern poetic language and traditional imagery.

The Western poetic form of the sonnet was also acclaimed by modern Chinese writers because of certain similarities with the versification of the Chinese *lǜshi* 律诗 poems. This coincidence was very important for Feng Zhi as he was seemingly still

⁵⁴ See Cai, *Der deutsche Beitrag zur Modernisierung der chinesischen Dichtung*, p. 46.

under the influence of the aesthetics characterising the Tang and Song poems. The lyric form the *lüshi* poems was regarded by Wen Yiduo as the highest form of Chinese poetic culture.

The *lüshi* poem is a lyric form with a strict versification pattern that was long regarded as a touchstone for the poetic art that flourished during the Tang dynasty. It essentially consists of eight lines each counting five or seven syllables with rigid tonal schemes. As Hu Shi also wrote in his diary in 1915: “The sonnet is the *lüshi* poem of the English language.”⁵⁵ Wen Yiduo tested the lyric form of the sonnet in 1922 and remarked some parallels with the Tang *lüshi* poems. Later in the 1930s Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋 (1903-1987), who had already studied at Harvard and become one of the key founders and leading theoretical voices of the Crescent Moon Society, also commented on the affinities found between the Western sonnet and the Chinese *lüshi*. As he already affirmed in his *Pianjian ji* 偏见集 [Collection of Prejudices, 1934] in the 1930s, “there is no art that does not contain restrictions. Emotions should be restricted according to the conditions of aesthetic beauty [...] when it comes to Chinese poetry, *lüshi* most resembles the sonnet form” (没有艺术而不含有限制的。情感是必须要有合乎美感的条件的限制，方有形式之可能。中国诗里，律诗最象十四行体)⁵⁶.

Wen Yiduo translated and published some parts of *Sonnets from the Portuguese* of Elizabeth Browning in the journal *Xinyue*. Afterwards, Xu Zhimo wrote a long article on Wen’s translation pinpointing some salient elements, such as that relating to the artist’s sense of solitude. As Prof. Estran writes, this sense of solitude does not arouse from the artist’s own stance before the world but rather from the his impossibility to adapt to the norms of society, find delight within ordinary life, which Xu could interpret also within the couple and family sphere.⁵⁷ Even Xu Zhimo ended up comparing the European sonnet form to the Chinese *lüshi*. As Estran adds,

⁵⁵ Diary entry of 22/12/1914 in Cao Boyan 曹伯言 (ed.), *Hushi Riji Quanjian* 胡适日记全篇 (The Complete Diary of Hu Shi), Vol. 1, Hefei, Anhui Jiaoyu Publishing House, 2001, p. 571.

⁵⁶ Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋, *Pianjian Ji* 偏见集 (Collection of Prejudices), Shanghai, Shanghai Shudian, 1988, p. 269.

⁵⁷ See Estran, *Poésie et liberté dans la Chine républicaine*, p. 195.

Xu Zhimo stressed the importance of the sonnet's influence and evolution as he wished to encourage his peers to also use it so that it may become a national form.⁵⁸

The versification rhythm in Feng Zhi's sonnets clearly abandons the traditional rules and the tonal patterns typical of the pre-modern *pingze* 平仄, adopting instead the Western metrical foot. According to some recent studies, Feng Zhi looked at the philological research and practical experience of Wen Yiduo when he composed the sonnets.⁵⁹ Even if he had not strictly followed Wen Yiduo's poetic prescriptions in the formal making of the sonnets, it still appears evident that Feng Zhi could no longer apply the conventional and rigid *pingze* rules to his modern composition, especially, when considering he was writing in an entirely new spoken and written language.

In the first of the series of letters entitled *Letters to a Young Poet*, which Feng Zhi translated in 1931, Rilke wrote: "Go into yourself.... Then come close to nature". Three years later, when Feng Zhi wrote his dissertation on Novalis, he summarised his views on nature by claiming that "the way to nature is nothing more than the way towards one's own interiority." Feng Zhi appears to have analysed Novalis's view of nature through Rilke's language and perspective. Feng Zhi's approach to this theme proves the modern Chinese poet's belief that both Novalis and Rilke rediscovered their own deep interiority through nature. For instance, when it comes to the relationship between man and nature, according to Novalis, nature represents the object of knowledge and exchange for mankind; and with regards to his representation of the godliness, nature shows subjectivity and freedom. Rilke, on the other hand, emphasises the independent and free motifs of nature. For Rilke, all natural things are for themselves and characterise themselves for their own dignity. As Ying Cai adds to this point, Novalis sees man and nature living in a peaceful relationship, whereas Rilke believes these do not live in harmony.⁶⁰

Moreover, with regards to the relationship between nature and God, Novalis stresses the godly authority of Christianity. He believes that the godliness lies

⁵⁸ See Estran, *Poésie et liberté dans la Chine républicaine*, p.196.

⁵⁹ See Ying Cai, *Der deutsche Beitrag*, p. 75.

⁶⁰ See Ying Cai, *Der deutsche Beitrag*, p. 100.

beyond nature and man, but it can manifest itself through nature. In contrast to this belief lies Rilke's idea of pantheism and of existence. Godliness represents for Rilke the depiction space of transcendence and of eternal values. This striking view is the modern element that Feng Zhi sees in Rilke. In fact, Feng Zhi recognises 'modernity' in Rilke's view of nature as well as in his general view of life, which dramatically differed from the ideals of Romanticism. Feng Zhi gradually ended up to accept Rilke's poetic style also because of his dissatisfaction with the exaggerated lyrical hues of Romanticism and also because of the provoking criticism on the Romantic style brought forward by a number of Chinese writers of the 1920s and 1930s.

Towards 1944, Feng Zhi postulated a different appreciation commenting on the historical position of Romantic literature in the West and in China. As the writer puts it, the achievements of European Romantic poets cannot be compared to those of Shakespeare, Goethe or Tolstoj. The majority of these, in fact, wished to resist society and had no patience: They wanted to express emotions and could not control themselves. They longed for the infinity and rejected reality. They overlooked the prerequisites and the moral of some modern writers (他们多半为了反抗社会而不屑忍耐, 为了崇尚情感而不肯沉潜, 为了无限制的追求而否认现实; 其实, 他们所忽略的, 恰恰是现代一个文学修养者所应有的条件或道德). As Feng Zhi claims, the spirit of these poets could become immortal like that of Lord Byron and Heine, and their meaning could last forever; however, their works in modern Europe lose the honour and glory they could enjoy in the past as their content and contours can hardly meet the deeply felt requests of modern man (像摆伦, 像海涅, 他们的精神尽可以不朽, 他们的意义也将要永在。但他们的作品在现代的欧洲早已失去它们在前世纪所享受的尊荣, 就是因为他们的内容与外形很难满足现代人的深切的要求).⁶¹

According to Feng Zhi, a political reform in China became necessary after almost fifty years of revolution. The spirit of Western Romanticism 'happened' to meet the demands of Chinese writers in a time when emotions had to be liberated (中

⁶¹ Yaocheng Han 韩耀成, *Feng Zhi QuANJI* 冯至全集 [The Complete Works of Feng Zhi], Vol. 5, Shijiazhuang, Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999, p. 315.

国四五十年来是一个革命的时代，政治需要改革，情感需要解放，而西洋浪漫主义的精神正巧适合了中国这个时代的要求), Feng Zhi compares the poets of the Romantic circle to a tempest or a wave, which only bring excitement to the universe and show neither eternal efforts nor patience (那些浪漫派的诗人只不过是一阵风雨，一翻波浪，给宇宙一种激动，却显示不出另一方面的永恒的努力与耐力).⁶²

From Rilke's concept of art, Feng Zhi finally accepted a new perspective of nature: "Since I read Rilke's works, I became humble with plants and proud of man [...] At the same time, Rilke makes me 'see' the plants neither haughtily nor submissively, bear the wind and snow, enjoy the sunlight, its spring flowers blooming, its autumn fruits; and it is neither an exaggeration nor a shame if when the root is firm the branches flourish... this is our good example (自从读了 Rilke 的书，使我对于植物谦逊，对于人类骄傲了 [...] 同时 Rilke 使我看植物不亢不卑，忍受风雪，享受日光，春天开它的花，秋天结它的果，本固枝荣，既无所夸张，也无所愧而..... 那真是我们的好榜样)." ⁶³

Feng Zhi asks his readers not to deride him if the writer decides to restore his original name into Feng Chengzhi as an act of toughening his own body, spirit and recunstruing his own temple (所以我也好好锻炼我的身体，我的精神，重新建筑我的庙堂). ⁶⁴ Feng Zhi also admits here to have learnt about loneliness and endurance from the poetry of Rilke, the essays of Nietzsche and the paintings of Van Gogh. In another letter addressed to Hui Xiu (慧修) and Xiang He (翔鹤), dated 25 July 1931, Feng Zhi writes to have been emotionally moved by the sudden death of Friedrich Gundolf (1880-1931), a German-Jewish poet and respectful academic of the Weimar Republic.

⁶² Yaocheng Han, *Feng Zhi Quanjì*, p. 317.

⁶³ Feng Zhi's letter to a friend dated 10th April 1931 in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanjì*, Vol. 12, p. 121.

⁶⁴ Feng Zhi's letter to a friend dated 10th April 1931 in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanjì*, Vol. 12, p. 121.

In this period, Feng Zhi decided to shortly move to study in Berlin where he could read more on Goethe. What mostly inspired Feng Zhi during his first months of his stay in Germany were Nietzsche's essays, Rilke's poems, Van Gogh's paintings and the unexpected death of Gundolf (到德国已经是十个月, 结算结算这十个月的收获, 只是几首 Rilke 的“诗”, 几段尼采的“文”, 几幅 Van Gogh 的“画”, 最后是 Gundolf 的“死”).⁶⁵ Feng Zhi remained very enthusiastic about Gundolf's passionate teaching on the poetry of Rilke and history of Germany. His regret not to be able to listen to his lessons about German literature (现在这些想望都随着他的死亡消散了) because of the young academic's death led him to take classes at university in Berlin.

It is notable that a number of modern Chinese poets, Feng Zhi included, had similar paths of lyrical evolution. They first attempted to imitate European Romanticism but then turned towards modernism to find the form of expression that best represented their sentiments towards their self and the collectiveness. This is precisely the literary ambivalence and shift that this work seeks to highlight in Feng Zhi's poetic production.

⁶⁵ Feng Zhi's letter to Hui Xiu and Xiang He, dated 25 July 1931 in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanjì*, Vol. 12, p. 122.

III. Introduction to the Chinese Romantic period

Before analysing the post-Romantic and pre-Modernist poetry of Feng Zhi, it is necessary at this stage to also shed some light on the intellectual trend that characterised the earlier short, yet intense period of Chinese literature, which modern and contemporary criticism evaluates and defines as “Romantic”.

One of the first milestones in the promotion of the Romantic ideology among the Chinese intellectual circle was the founding of the Creation Society. The first issue of the journal was edited by Guo Moruo and finalised by Yu Dafu. Most of the literary works, translations and essays were realised by the core members of the Society. There was no formal manifesto that accompanied the founding of the association if not the very meaningful title bore by the Society itself. In fact, Guo Moruo’s hymn “Chuangzaozhe” 创造者 [The Creator] proclaimed the arrival of the Society and of its journal, the *Chuangzao jikan* 创造季刊 [*Creation Quarterly*] in the modern Chinese context with a “new cosmic imagination”⁶⁶. As the poet announced in his poem, the idea of ‘creation’ is analogically associated with the birth of a baby with a loud cry. What followed was one of the most striking poem compositions of this kind: Guo Moruo’s publication of *Nüshen*, poems praising liberty, democracy, re-generation of the self and the “rebirth” of a nation.

As sinologist Wolfgang Kubin also claims in his essays, with *Nüshen*, a corpus of 62 poems composed in Japan between 1918 and 1921, Guo Moruo succeeded in giving voice to what the “Sturm und Drang” period did in German literature.⁶⁷ The Chinese poet attempts to depict a new order after the world has been put in utter confusion. The old world must be destroyed for a ‘new world’ to emerge. In fact, the goddesses, preceding the poet, create a new sun (*xin taiyang* 新太阳). As leader of the masses, the poet, as the self-proclaimed hero, means to recreate the sun. The destruction annihilates the others and the self. This is what will guarantee the rebirth

⁶⁶ Denton and Hockx, *Literary Societies of Republican China*, p. 107.

⁶⁷ Wolfgang Kubin, “Creator! Destroyer! — On the Self-Image of the Chinese Poet”, *Modern Chinese Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1996, pp. 247-259, p. 253.

of the world, a concept that is also brought forward by the image of the phoenix that emerges from the ashes.

Guo Moruo has transfigured the German sublime as a modern aesthetic ideal creating a new form of poetry for the time and a new poetic Chinese hero in response to modernity. Through the defiance of the phoenix in “Fenghuang niepan” [Nirvana of the phoenix], the poet exalts destruction rather than sublime – unleashing “all that is dark and obscure in the modern figuration of the sublime”⁶⁸.

Whereas Guo Moruo’s *Niushen* can also be read as an intertext of Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855), the concept of rebirth and reshaping emerges in one of Feng Zhi’s sonnets as clear transtextual confluence from Goethe’s notion of “stirb und werde” [die and become].

The approach to secularisation was a typical phenomenon in the characterisation of Chinese modern age. Guo Moruo’s idea of being a ‘creator’ was explicitly conveyed in his preface to the opening issue of *Creation Quarterly* in July 1921. Paraphrasing what Guo Moruo wrote in images of the Romantic sublime, the creator would evoke the power of the erupting volcano and the impetuous powers of the Universe (seemingly recalling the concept of “Sturm” and “Drang”) to create a new and bright world. Some critics regard this bold statement as the manifesto of the Society or even as the manifesto of Chinese Romanticism.

Of relevance in this context is also Zong Baihua’s self-proclamation as divine in 1923 when he wrote the poem “Xinyang” 信仰 [I believe]: Wo ye shi shen! 我也是神 [I too am God!]. Following the teaching of German pantheism, man, as depicted in these modern Chinese poems, becomes the new God in order to accomplish what the old God could not do. It is also interesting to note that Shiu Palm Almborg gave a slightly different, version of the Chinese world *shen* 神:

⁶⁸ Yi Zheng, “The Figuration of a Sublime Origin: Guo Moruo’s Qu Yuan”, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2004, pp. 153-198, p. 153.

“When the red sun is born/ The flower of faith blooms in my heart: I believe All is divine! I believe I am also divine.”⁶⁹

In line with the spirit of the German Romantic movement, Guo Moruo also speaks of a yearning for death and disillusionment, especially at the end of a dream, and, as also W. Kubin claims, of the night as a “symbol of true democracy”.⁷⁰

Moreover, the political poems expressing the aspirations of German youth, such as those of Georg Herwegh (1817-1875), became subject of study among modern Chinese intellectuals with a German formation background or inclination towards the young German revolutionary spirit in lyricism. In fact, in *The Goddesses*, Guo Moruo describes the worker as a benefactor for the masses: “gongren! Wode enren! 工人! 我的恩人! [Workers! My benefactors!].

Guo Moruo’s sense of patriotism and power of imagination were fired since a very young age. When he was still a boy, Guo was very much struck by the story of a Chinese worker-student’s maltreatment overseas – this tragic story instilled an early sense of patriotism in the young student’s heart. Moreover, the poet retells his very vivid memory of a magazine he used to read at school, *Qimeng huabao* 启蒙画报 [The Illustrated Student], which contained illustrations on the bibliographies of striking historical personalities, such as Napoleon and Bismarck – they both immediately triggered the young boy’s imagination and soon became his childhood idols. From his early biographical account on his childhood, *Wode tongnian* 我的童年 (1892-1909) [My Childhood], it is possible to read that he was not merely impressed by the figure of Bismarck, but that he was also particularly struck when reading of Napoleon’s and Josephine’s love story and divorce.

Moreover, among his first contacts with Western literature was the reading of Rider Haggard’s novel *She: A History of Adventure* (1889) translated into classical Chinese by Lin Shu. The heroine of Haggard’s novel was called Ayesha who

⁶⁹ Lloyd Haft, *A Selective Guide to Chinese Literature: 1900-1949*, vol. 3, *The Poem*, Leiden, Brill, 1989, p. 288.

⁷⁰ Kubin, “Creator! Destroyer!”, p. 256.

appeared as sublime in Lin Shu's translation. In his writing, Guo confessed he would dream of dying for a woman like Ayesha. Young Chinese poets became interested in Western love novels, as these appeared to the eyes of the young Chinese students as more lively, audacious, sentimental and less orthodox than the Chinese novels.

When he arrived in Japan in January 1914, his first encounter with Tagore's poetry made him more keen to read and learn more about Western poetry. At the Japanese university, Guo Moruo could learn other foreign languages and was exposed to the works of Goethe, Heine and Schiller. He regarded Goethe as a pillar of German civilisation and greatest exponent of German literature to the extent of being equated to the importance that Confucius has for the Chinese.

In Japan, he could become an ambitious poet, as he felt free from the fetters of classical Chinese poetry. As he wrote in his autobiography, it was Whitman who made him keen to write poems. By reading Whitman, the Chinese poet continues, he could finally see and voice his personal thoughts and the nation's suffering. It was then possible for him to have his first poetry collection, *Nüshen*, written. Guo Moruo was also particularly influenced by Whitman's concept of pantheism. According to him, Whitman believed that everything on earth is a self-reflection of God, thus, equally divine – the divine could be found everywhere.

The Chinese Romantics stressed inspiration, emotion and imagination. In their poetic criticism, they expressed the need for freedom in poetic form. German poets, such as Goethe and Heinrich Heine, became their references for their own lyrical production. As Shen Congwen claimed in his essay “Lun Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo chuanguo” 论中国现代小说创作 [On the Creation of Modern Chinese Fiction] in 1931, the Chinese Romantics belonging to the Creation Society characterised themselves for their exaggerated, heroic and fearless momentum, paving a new way for Chinese literature.⁷¹ Such a concept of ‘impetuous’ destruction and crude heroism are in line with the demands of the time: the youthful reshaping of the Chinese poetic composition and of the feelings of a new emerging bourgeoisie.

⁷¹ Congwen Shen 沈从文, “Lun Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo chuanguo” 论中国现代小说创作 [On the Creation of Modern Chinese Fiction], *Wenxue yuekan* 2, no. 4, 1931, p. 4.

In fact, the spirit of the May Fourth that shaped the beginning of the modern Chinese cultural tradition, as Yi Zheng suggests, can be described as a spirit of destruction as well as of creation⁷² - a youthful hope for regeneration.

A very intriguing aspect of the May Fourth Literature and especially of some writings that particularly stick out for their Romantic touch is the critical divergence of one literary stream into two poles: the conventional 'romantic' and 'realistic' extremes. If these can be regarded as chronologically and ontologically distinctive in the European literary arena, the same cannot certainly be said for the modern literary Chinese context, where the two occasionally combine together with 'complementary' features. If one takes Yu Dafu's most well-known story, *Chenlun* 沉沦 [Sinking, 1921] as an example of representative work of the Romanticism that characterised good part of the May Fourth period literature, the reader will immediately react as if dealing with a piece of realist fiction. The truth is that the story directly manifests the profound psychology of the subject through the mind of a single, modern and alienated character. For one moment, Chinese fiction abandons the traditional canon of social and ethical interaction in order to explore the internal conflicts [innerer Zwiespalt] and fissures within the characters' psychological dimension. The novelty for the Chinese reader lies in the 'real' emotional turmoil undergone by the character. It is evident that the whole story unfolds from the personal experiences of the character. Through the story, the protagonist is found citing poems by Romantics, like Wordsworth and Heine, and classical Tang and Qing poems.

Although it is possible to identify themes, such as that of solitude, that belong to both the Chinese and Western literary tradition, the new writings of the May Fourth period depict a different nature of the malaise. In fact, when one looks at classical Chinese poetry, the theme of solitude is generally associated to that of separation or parting from friends and family or from the native lands for far-away travels. However, as also further experimented in Feng Zhi's early and mature writings, the new sense of loneliness conveyed in particular Chinese modern writings rather stems from an external source: the Western Romantic conscientious will and pursuit of solitude.

⁷² Zheng, "The Figuration of a Sublime Origin", p. 160.

This new sense of solitude and image of solitary artist indicates, how Frank Kermode claims in his essay *The Artist in Isolation*, the “evolution of assumptions relating to the image of poetry.”⁷³ The author, as also Frank Kermode suggests, to look at for a fully developed view of this image is Thomas Mann whose early stories *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*, 1912) and *Tonio Kröger* (1903) represent a systematic exposition of isolation, or as Kermode calls it, the “cult of isolated joy”.⁷⁴

The Chinese characters in Yu Dafu’s *Chenlun* reveal the same sense of separation of those in the Western texts, who reject the mundane world seeking solitude for its sublimity and for “bringing self closer to the divine”.⁷⁵ Moreover, as Kirk Denton also clarifies, the Chinese protagonists characterise themselves for their nostalgic gaze to their point of origin, as if they wish to return to it. This stands in contrast with Heine or Zarathustra’s contempt for society. The protagonists of *Sinking* try to imitate the lives of those depicted in Western texts and escapes from society, just like the story of Zarathustra who abandoned the world for a retreat on top of a mountain in solitude. However, the sense of loneliness is too much to bear for the Chinese character who finally begins to reconsider his intense condition of solitude and feels nostalgic about China – his homeland.

The contrast between iconoclasm and nationalism becomes very recurrent in many of the writings of the May Fourth period. However, despite being romantic and individualistic, the May Fourth generation was always sure about the relationship and special attention to pay to both the self and the mind when it comes to nationalism and iconoclasm. Soon after the founding of New Youth (*Xin qingnian* 新青年), Chen Duxiu’s article “Aiguo xin yu zijue xin” 爱国心与自觉心 [The Patriotic Mind and the Self-conscious Mind, 1915] immediately shed light on the May Fourth discourse over the matter of the mind. According to Chen Duxiu’s essay, the self-conscious mind, which is not concerned about the social and political world,

⁷³ Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image*, London & New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Kermode, *Romantic Image*, p. 7.

⁷⁵ Kirk A. Denton, “The Distant Shore: Nationalism in Yu Dafu's "Sinking"”, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 14, 1992, pp. 107-123, p. 116.

can discern the truth amidst all ideological doctrines. Moreover, the novelty lies also in the original independence of the mind from all social or moral impositions.

Among the most striking ironic and paradoxical assessments on the subject of the self and individualism is Hu Shi's controversial view of individualism. In fact, in one of his famous essays discussing the theories of Ibsenism, "Yibushengzhuyi" 易卜生主义 (Ibsenism, 1918), Chen Duxiu showed a very firm position in favour of egoism, whereas in another essay, "Fei gerenzhuyi de xin shenghuo" 非个人主义的新生活 [The Anti-individualist New Life, 1920], he expressed his views of anti-individualism. This position, which can be understood as part of a historical progression and later shift to Marxism, clearly expresses the tension of the May Fourth Movement on topics that were highly animated by Western Romantic ideals of individualism, creativity, imagination and genius. This is also visible in Guo Moruo's change from extreme pantheism and egoism to Marxism. As also Kirk Denton maintains, Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo share the "unresolved tension between Romantic egoism and traditional holism".⁷⁶ However, the results and ways how the two Creationists deal with this conflict is rather distinctive: Guo Moruo merges the two extremes into one an "utopian idealism", whereas Yu Dafu's fiction mirrors the troubled self torn by the two incompatible poles.

Another very interesting exponent of the new literature of the May Fourth period under direct influence of Western Romanticism was Xu Xu 徐訏 (1908-1980), whose early travel writings clearly mark a decisive ingredient of lyrical exoticism. With reference to the German Romantic's attraction and fascination for the exotic and the Orient, Prof. Dorothy Figueira writes: "they travel further from home than the ordinary seeker for Self and Truth".⁷⁷ The act of travelling, both spatially and metaphysically, as it will be further also elucidated with reference to Feng Zhi's poetry, informs of Xu Xu's literary journey. Thanks to a recent rediscovery of Xu Xu's fiction by Chinese literary historians and to Yan Jiayan's critique on the romantic hues of the author's literary production, Xu Xu has been regarded as the

⁷⁶ Denton, "The Distant Shore", p. 120.

⁷⁷ Frederik H. Green, "The Making of a Chinese Romantic: Cosmopolitan Nationalism and Lyrical Exoticism in Xu Xu's Early Travel Writings", *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol. 23, No.2, 2011, pp. 64-99, p. 64.

main representative of Chinese post-Romanticism (Hou langmanzhuyi 后浪漫主义)⁷⁸. Because of his concern for romance and evoking images of exoticism in his stories, Xu Xu has been ever since labeled as a ‘late romantic’, ‘neoromantic’ or ‘post-romantic’ writer.⁷⁹

According to Michael Löwy, Romanticism is generally conceived as the result to an aesthetic response to modernity following the Industrial Revolution; or using Ernst Fischer’s words in his work *The Necessity of Art*, Romanticism is a “movement of protest – of passionate and contradictory protest against the bourgeois capitalist world, the world of the “lost illusions””⁸⁰. In his very bold essay “The Making of a Chinese Romantic: Cosmopolitan Nationalism and Lyrical Exoticism in Xu Xu’s Early Travel Writings”, Frederik H. Green re-evaluates Xu Xu’s labeling as ‘post-romantic’, seeking to demonstrate how Xu’s works show an independent Chinese romanticism trend that did not merely originate from the West, but “rather motivated by parallel concerns and characterised by similar themes as those in the West.”⁸¹

The Romantic generation is very variegated, as each and every writer became an interpreter of Western ideals in his own ways and terms. Leo Ou-fan Lee wrote a seminal work on the Romantic tendency of modern Chinese literature, though giving a circumscribed picture of the literary arena limited to a few examples, Feng Zhi excluded. Lee’s book engages the literary period of the Romantic generation from a historian’s perspective and delineates the social changes that prepared for the emerge of the two sentimentalists, Lin Shu and Su Manshu 苏曼殊 (1884–1918), who responded to romantic poetry with great enthusiasm. Through his translations, Li Shu introduced the sensualism of *La Dame aux Camélias* and other novels. Lee also presented the two “protagonists”, Yu Dafu and Xu Zhimo, another gentleman poet

⁷⁸ Yan Jiayan 严家炎, “Zhongguo xiandai ge liupai xiaoshuo xuan” 中国现代各流派小说选 [Anthology of China’s Modern Schools of Fiction], Beijing, Beijing daxue, 1986, p. 309.

⁷⁹ The label ‘neoromantic’ [新浪漫] was given by Geng Chuanming when analysing Xu’s romantic aesthetics.

⁸⁰ Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2001, p. 12.

⁸¹ Green, “The Making of a Chinese Romantic”, p. 67.

imbued with English Romanticism. The third part of Lee's book deals with the so-called 'romantic left' of China: Guo Moruo, Jiang Guangci and Xiao Jun. What is relevant to this study is how Leo Ou-fan Lee regards the Chinese Romantic generation as alienated, weakened by politics or frustrated because of love and sex. As the book also suggests, the Chinese Romantic, just like Byron, is tragically driven to death by his own passion, and if he does not die tragically, his only destiny is to suffer because of political humiliation.

Literary critics also dedicated entire essays on the reception of English Romanticism in China. For instance, Xing Pengju wrote a critical study on the poetry and personality of William Blake in the journal of the *Xinyue*. What clearly emerges from Xing Pengju's state is the author's attention for the poetic view and approach to the poetic creation of the English Romantic.⁸²

Having said that, in light of his versatility, historical context and the discernible traits of his new aesthetic and intellectual tendency that aims at reconciling, and at the same time overcoming, the Romantic and Realistic movements, the proposed study seeks to re-evaluate Feng Zhi's position within the literary criticism and regard him as a post-Romantic and pre-Modernist writer.

⁸² See Estran, *Poésie et liberté dans la Chine républicaine*, p. 195.

IV. Feng Zhi: A poet between Romanticism and Modernism

Feng Zhi's fame in the West as well as in China is mainly due to his collection of twenty-seven sonnets, written in 1941 during his stay in the mountainous area of Kunming and first published in 1942 by the "Guilin Tomorrow Society" (Guilin Mingri She 桂林明日社). Feng Zhi was never a prolific writer and his poems mostly appeared in literary journals except of a few slender booklets of poetry. Nonetheless, the prominence and literary exquisiteness of his sonnet collection make up for his rather confined poetic production.

His father, Feng Wenshu 冯文瀾, scholar and director in the salt industry in Tianjin, was away from home most of the time and Feng spent the springtime of his life alone and in close relationship with his mother, who 'tragically' died of tuberculosis when the boy was still nine years old. The unexpected and early loss of the mother left the young boy with an upsetting trauma that influenced his early poetic lyricism and ignited an unbearable feeling of loneliness that subtly pervaded the core of his early writings as well as his mature philosophical concept of interpersonal attachment and relationship.

It is as middle school student, thus earlier than his enrolment at the German Department of Peking University, where he embarked on the intensive study and analysis of German philosophical and literary works between 1923 and 1927, that Feng Zhi experienced his first and decisive encounter with Western literary writings and, more specifically, with German literature, thought and history. Through the teachings of his Chinese literature mentor at school in Beijing, the young student broadened his knowledge on Classical Chinese poetry and learnt about European literary and cultural movements. Of great importance for the young poet's upbringing and literature sensitivity were the poems *Tang shi sanbai shou* 唐诗三百首 [Three Hundred Tang Dynasty Poems] and the anthology of essays written in Classical Chinese *Guwen Guanzhi* 古文观止 (compiled and edited by Wu Chucai and Wu Diaohou of the Qing dynasty), which he learnt from his father at home at age of seven.

During the years of education at the Fourth Middle School of Beijing (1917-1923), Feng Zhi gave vent to his feelings by expressing his ideas in verse.⁸³

When it comes to Feng Zhi's life and lyricism, it is possible to identify at least three distinct stages in his poetic development and refinement: the sentimental period, mixed with traditional Chinese sensitivity and German Romantic ideals and *Leitmotifs* (1923-30); the experimental period (1930-46), marked by Feng Zhi's experience and study in Germany and characterised by the elaboration of a new poetic expression that is imbued with post-Romantic and modernist traits; and a post-war period (1946-93) marked by Feng's participation in the new People Republic's literary arena.

The first sentimental period corresponds to the poet's experimental phase of a new form of lyricism that harmoniously combined the knowledge of elements pertaining to the Chinese classical tradition with other components recently introduced from Western literature, and more particularly from the German Romantic philosophical and literary canon. This poetic approach is what best characterises Feng Zhi's early writings until his new experiences within the German literary and philosophical context.

Together with other young Chinese intellectuals, Feng Zhi co-founded two literary associations while he was still an undergraduate student, namely the *Qiancao she* 浅草社 or Shallow Grass Society that through the journal *Shallow Grass Quarterly* contributed to the dissemination of modern Chinese literary writings between March 1923 and February 1925; and *Chenzhong she* 沉钟社 or Sunken Bell Society. The latter was established in 1925 and was reminiscent of the poetic fairy-tale drama *Die versunkene Glocke* [The Sunken Bell, 1896] by the German naturalist author and Nobel Prize winner Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946). The motifs of the German romantic fairy drama, embodied in the title of this influential Chinese literary association, are mirrored in the poetic themes that vitalised the articles published in the issues of its quarterly journal.

⁸³ Feng Zhi called his school "Viertes Städtisches Gymnasium" in his Lebenslauf (*Curriculum Vitae*) section of his doctoral dissertation defended at Heidelberg in 1935.

There are indications that Feng Zhi began a prolific period of poetic activity at the age of fifteen in 1920, thus, much before his enrolment and reading at Peking University. According to various sources, Feng appears to have written more than a thousand poems that, as Cheung also points out, are all unpublished and only limited to private circulation among friends.⁸⁴ The author published at least three of these undisclosed and mysterious poems in the *Creation Quarterly* in 1929: “Mailman”, “Inquiring” and “Thus I sing”.

The restless journey into the ‘mysterious’ unknown conveyed in these early writings has often been a recurrent theme in poet’s works, specifically those stirred and influenced by the Romantic sensitivity in Europe and subsequently in East Asia, who then embarked on a philosophical quest for self-completion and search for sublimity. It is remarkable how the young poet succeeded in expressing his spiritual and emotional state through the use of imagery and motifs also readily associated with those of the European Romantic movement.

The lyrical ‘I’ is set on a journey towards infinity, a realm depicted by the Romantics as an unconceivable emptiness that stirs the heart of men. The solitude of the lyrical ‘I’ enables him to catch a glimpse of ‘infinity’ and experience the essence of the sublime. As Edmund Burke theorised, “another source of the sublime, is infinity [that] has the tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest effect of the sublime.”⁸⁵

The lyricism of Feng Zhi’s early poem collection, *Zuori zhi ge* 昨日之歌 [Songs of Yesterday, 1927] and of the lyrical narrative *Beiyong ji qita* 北游集其他 [Northern Journey and Others, 1929] published in the *Sunken Bell Quarterly*, predominantly centres on the poetic subject’s experience of his engulfing melancholic state of solitude and on the portrayal of an adapting lyric strength and igniting will power that enable the poet to overcome loneliness. Feng Zhi’s romanticised concept of loneliness finds its roots in his early years as a child and

⁸⁴ See Dominic Cheung, *Feng Chih*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1979, p. 54.

⁸⁵ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Mineola: Dover Publications, 2008, p. 53.

adolescent. Notably, as he spent most of his childhood time alone, the lines of “Zuihou zhige” 最后之歌 [The Last Song], last poem collected in his *Songs of Yesterday*, are epitome of an emotional turmoil aggravated by his state of loneliness.

The poetic motif of solitude and isolation that distinguished and permeated Feng Zhi's lyricism was particularly intensified during the time when the young scholar finished his studies on German philosophy and literature at Peking University in 1927 and provisionally moved to the northern city of Harbin. Short but significant extracts from his heart-stirring experience and laments over his profound state of loneliness fill the last verses of his long poetic narrative work *Northern Journey and Others*, which poetically instils a romanticised need for attention and fondness

Although he was exposed to German literature and to Rilke's writings from a very young age, it was during his time of study at Heidelberg that Feng Zhi fully grasped and recognised Rilke's modern concept of philosophical engagement with a self-reflexive subjectivity, thus, marking the beginning of his second poetic stage. A new metaphysical approach and redefinition of concepts, such as that of solitude versus collectiveness or spatial and temporal infinity characterise his mature lyrical works of the 1940s. These works provide a more complex and telling picture of the poet's deep philosophical introspection and an analysis of the state of subjective solitude that poetically recall Novalis's notion of self-annihilation and Goethe's art of relinquishing or renouncement (*Entsagung*). Feng Zhi's experience in Germany was also particularly significant during times of contrast between the Chinese poet's background and the German customs, such as that of Christianity. In a letter to Dr. Bauer, for instance, Feng Zhi confesses to be very respectful of ancient Chinese philosophers while still admiring the great Germans who are good at overcoming difficulties. On a rather enigmatic note the Chinese poet regards himself as “the son of the old and of declining Chinese generation (我始终把自己看做是古老，衰落的中国的上一代的儿子)”.⁸⁶ The poet confesses to experience in Germany an intensifying and acute crisis like a disease in his body on a quiet Christmas night.

⁸⁶ Feng Zhi's letter to Dr. Bauer, dated 31 December 1931, in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanjì*, Vol. 12, p. 153.

During this phase and years of postgraduate formation in Germany, between 1930 and 1935, Feng Zhi particularly engaged with the philosophy of Goethe, Rilke and Novalis, whose literary works, as he emphasised during the ceremony of the InterNationales Kunstpreis in 1987, significantly contributed to the redefinition of his emotional stance. His enthusiasm for Rilke's poetry was triggered by the German poet's ballad *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph Rilke* (The Tale of Love and Death of Cornet Christopher Rilke, 1899). However, he then came across the *Neue Gedichte* (New Poems), *Duineser Elegien* (Duino Elegies), *Die Sonette an Orpheus* (The Sonnets to Orpheus), Rilke's only novel *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* [The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge] and his letters once he was in Germany. Three of Rilke's works exerted great influence upon sensitivity and lyrical production: the *New Poems*, the *Duino Elegies* and *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*. Rilke's slim booklet *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* (*Letters to a Young Poet*) immediately stimulated Feng Zhi's senses and creativity to the extent that he began its translation in 1931, thus, almost immediately after his encounter with the masterpiece. It becomes evident that this lyrical stage of his life was predominately marked by the influence and his 'pathological' fascination for Rilke. It is worth noting that in a letter addressed to Hui Xiu and Xiang He, Feng Zhi confessed that translating Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* was dictated by his own destiny and he could not neglect it as much as he could not refuse to live (为我以为这件事是我的运命, 我不能不翻译它, 正如我不能不生活一样).⁸⁷

The day after he completed his Chinese translation of Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, Feng Zhi wrote to his friend Dr. Bauer⁸⁸ that the more familiar one gets with Rilke, the more things one can obtain from him (对里尔克越熟悉, 从他那儿得到的东西也就越多). According to Feng Zhi, Rilke's world is so rich and vast as if there were no other world beside his. Feng Zhi confesses that this is the world he for ever wishes to study and live in. The world, according to Feng Zhi, needs a pure

⁸⁷ Feng Zhi's letter to Hui Xiu and Xiang He, dated 25 July 1931 in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 12, p. 122.

⁸⁸ Willy Bauer soon became a friend of Feng Zhi during his study at Heidelberg. Invited by Feng Zhi during the Resistance War against the Japanese aggression, Dr. Bauer lectured on German studies at the Shanghai Tongji University.

poet (纯洁的诗人) like Rilke whose purity is not influenced by customs and tradition.⁸⁹ Feng Zhi also criticises China's current youth life as being blind and without a guide: "The majority of modern Chinese people are so far distant from human nature that they are now unable to comprehend the fate of reality (现代中国人绝大多数离人的本性太远了, 以致无法认清现实的命运).⁹⁰ Feng Zhi sees the young Chinese generation as being trapped in a series of mistakes and utter confusion. His responsibility, Feng Zhi claims, is to translate Rilke's works so that this confused generation can be inspired by Rilke's advice and be saved by avoiding mistakes and disorder (青年们现在正陷于错误和混乱之中, 我的责任是翻译一些里尔克的作品, 好让他们通过里尔克的提示和道路得到启发, 拯救自己, 以避免错误和混乱).⁹¹

Moreover, in a letter from Berlin dated 9 December 1931, Feng Zhi recounts about the extent to which he had to read in German literature during his stay in Germany. For instance, he tells his friends Hui Xiu and Xiang He how "cute" (很可爱的) he found Kleist, Hölderlin and Novalis: Kleist committed suicide in his thirties, Hölderlin lost his sanity in his twenties and Novalis died in his thirties (这三人都是很可爱的. K 于三十岁左右自杀, H 于二十岁左右发狂, N 于十岁左右病丧).⁹² For Feng Zhi, the stubborn (倔强) Kleist, the exquisite Hölderlin (高尚) and the graceful (优美) Novalis represent three different aspects of spiritual life. Finally, while at the University of Heidelberg, he successfully defended his doctoral dissertation in German on the poetry of Novalis, entitled "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist als Stilprinzip in Novalis' Dichtung" [The Analogy of Nature and Spirit as a Style Principle in the Poetry of Novalis] under the supervision of Prof. Ewald Boucke.

⁸⁹ Feng Zhi's letter to Dr. Bauer, dated 10 September 1931, in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 12, p. 146.

⁹⁰ Feng Zhi's letter to Dr. Bauer, dated 10 September 1931, in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 12, p. 147.

⁹¹ Feng Zhi's letter to Dr. Bauer, dated 10 September 1931, in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 12, p. 147.

⁹² Feng Zhi's letter to Hui Xiu and Xiang He, dated 9 December 1931 in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 12, p. 131.

Given the fundamental matrix in his poetic writing of transtextuality on Gérard Genette's terms, that is the "manifest or secret" relation of one text with another, Feng Zhi's meticulous reading and understanding of German eighteenth and nineteenth-century lyrical and philosophical works, especially those of Novalis, Rilke and Jaspers, make available a new and valuable key with which to read, perceive and finally interpret the poetry of the main works belonging to his second poetic phase: the *Sonnets*.

Among the central themes and leitmotifs of Feng Zhi's *Sonnets* that vividly show the occurred shift and evolution in the Chinese poet's lyricism from Romanticism (typical of his early writings) to pre-Modernism are the theme of imagination, the relationship between loneliness and collectiveness, the contrast between permanence and mutability, the themes of night and death as well as literary traces of the Orphic myth.

Imagination in Feng Zhi's poetry is holistically conceived as a powerful means to achieve infinity, overcome and typify loneliness and its counterpart collectiveness, perceive mutability over permanence. The perception of infinity, which moves the sensitive poet, is discerned as a state of boundlessness that is perceived on spatial and temporal terms. In fact, as the various sonnets demonstrate, the lyrical self often gains a new aesthetic experience of both temporal and spatial infinity through a personal interaction with nature: once dissolved into nature, the self can transcend reality, overcome the earth-bound condition of the living world and attain perpetuity. This supernatural post-Romantic approach to reality already gives hints of a pre-Modernist element: reality is perceived as the acting force of the consciousness of the lyrical subject identified as an individual being capable of experiencing the sublime through aesthetical experiences. A further characterisation of this approach to the theme of spatial and temporal infinity is made possible through a new theorised philosophy of the relationship between the human being and time on a transcendental level of human existence. Characterising element of human existence and its relationship with space and time is its 'transcendence'. The human being does not stand idle in front of the phenomena that he observes; on the other hand, he attempts to rise higher and receive a holistic understanding of them. On a similar note, Martin Heidegger, in opposition to what was rejected by Edmund

Husserl (1859-1938), founder of the school of phenomenology, had also argued that man is more than a rational being and that human existence is all about transcendence: “the human being is something that goes beyond itself”.⁹³ Feng Zhi’s verses, however, convey a perception of time that can be understood in terms of temporal anticipation where the Chinese lyrical voice echoes elements in time that seem to be affected by a given predestination.

Moreover, with regards to the theme of space and time and their imaginative perception in the sonnets of Feng Zhi, transtextual links can be established between the works and philosophical elaborations of Novalis, his doctoral dissertation on the poetry of Novalis and his own lyrical production. In fact, according to Feng Zhi, the writings and poetry of Novalis resemble a world where all boundaries are blurred, all ends are connected and all opposites are reconciled. As Feng Zhi continues, enthusiastic about his first love to Mathilden, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, an almost fictional Middle High German lyric poet, says: “all distances are so close to me, and the rich landscape is to me just like inner phantasy.”⁹⁴ Feng Zhi’s interpretation and further exemplification of the problem of reality is realised through a pre-modernist approach, which centres on the sensorial perceptions gained by the poetic self through aesthetic experiences, and an adaptation of former ontological deductions typical of the Romantic age.

The implied concept of distance that one finds in the early writings and sonnets of the modern Chinese poet can be identified as the transcendental span that is required to reach the other side of reality and of the earthly world. It serves to connect the depicted natural scenes, created both in the mind of the perceiving subject and in the lines of the sonnets, with the interiority of the artist – the ultimate connection that is longed to be established between the divided realms of the universe: the self and the proper outside world. Well-defined and tangible natural objects, such as mountains, water, plains and pathways figuratively embody the inner unquenchable spiritual striving of the artist (*Sehnsucht*). Moreover, the motive of

⁹³ Graham Harman, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing*, Chicago and La Salle, Open Court, 2007, p.48.

⁹⁴ “Jene Fernen sind mir so nah, und die reiche Landschaft ist mir wie eine innere Phantasie” - Tscheng-Dsche Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist als Stilprinzip in Novalis’ Dichtung, Doctoral Dissertation, Heidelberg University, 1935, p. 6.

temporal and spatial infinity, epitomised by the condition of far-away distance that the poet and all humanity is bound to experience in life, shall be also conveyed by the continuous and nostalgic gaze into the past. In fact, the author makes reference and commemorates some illustrious figures of the past in at least four of his sonnets and through his literary creativity confers them immortal spiritual fate and evanescence in the earthly world.

The second and most recurrent theme is that of loneliness and its projection into collectiveness. A state of solitude that does not merely refer to the common sense of loneliness aroused by the state of being 'alone', but rather a sense that encompasses a wider and more holistic dimension perceived by the 'self' when this establishes contact with the outer world. It is important to clarify that the theme of solitude is also what characterises the Romantic approach taken in Feng Zhi's early writings. On the other hand, when it comes to the mature lyrical composition, the theme of loneliness and its relation with collectiveness is what vividly relates Feng Zhi's poetry with Rilke's thought. In Feng Zhi's sonnets, the incapacity of the solitary self to merge completely and permanently into one holistic group and become part of it is depicted through various images, such as that of bridges, boats, arms and tree roots. Furthermore, Feng Zhi could have taken a further exemplifying note of 'solitary union' from Rilke's writings and teachings and applied it onto his own sonnets: the mystified form of 'union' of at least two people in most of Feng Zhi's sonnets is found as the narrator in many of the sonnets. Nonetheless, if one had to take Rilke's philosophical perspective again as point of reference and demystifying reading key, a further and more subtle meaning of Feng Zhi's "we" would not be limiting the semantic Chinese reading of *women* 我们 to a completed union of two bodies merging into one new being. Instead, as it also transpires from some of the sonnets, notably the Venetian sonnet (sonnet 5), the Chinese plural personal pronoun *women* would, in actual fact, refer to the 'union' of two 'solitary beings' that share the same destiny.

The third most prominent theme is change and its counterpart of mutability. In fact, as it will be noted, the natural world portrayed in the sonnets undergoes continuous change and renewal. The trees are depicted as seasonally shedding their

bark while the cicada breaks free from its larva shell when moulting and the snake sloughs off its old skin. A common theme that is also in line with Rilke's and Nietzsche's poetry sees metamorphosis, continuous change and the overcome of all weaknesses allow the completion of life. The poet's experimentation of metaphysical change finds its root both in the Chinese classical tradition, and more precisely in the lyrical writings of the Tang and Song dynasties, as well as in his poetical response to modernity. If modernity by definition and exemplification entails a conscious and delineated rupture with the past followed by a rediscovery of new themes and ideas that are relevant to the current era, Feng Zhi succeeds in such a quest. In fact, he does not limit himself to a mere exploitation of new trends and emulation of foreign forms and styles, but he succeeds in merging his modernist attempt for change with some enriching aspects pertaining to the classical tradition, especially when these exalt or recall universal needs or the core desires of mankind.

When it comes to the theme of the night, Feng Zhi suggests a transcendental process occurring at night, the symbol of the dusk of life, which enables the earthly human body to make no difference among the other luminous bodies of the sky. The idea of reaching the zenith of the night in order to transmute and become one with nature conveyed in Feng Zhi's sonnets shall be regarded as the completion of an everlasting cycle. The arrival of the night is a ritual, which introduces the arrival of death. According to Novalis's poetry, death was also the romanticisation and idealisation of life, which makes man closer to the godliness, thus to infinity. The arrival of the night, thus the coming of death, serves as a prelude to the beginning of a new existence in a higher realm. In fact, according to what transpires from Feng Zhi's poetry, life should relentlessly overcome all weakness and ultimately strive for completion and infinity.

Last but not least, the conceptualised idea of infinity is moreover evoked by the Orphic motif that runs through the sonnets. The Orphic poet succeeds in establishing a relationship between the self and the surrounding environment. Analogous to Rilke's transcendental experience, Feng Zhi also felt and ultimately understood the aesthetic experience of the tree's existence during a very mystic and metaphysical moment of interaction with nature. The Orphic myth shall enable the inner self of the

lyrical subject to remain in complete harmony with nature and sensor the invisible movement of the plants.

With further regards to Rilke's influence into Feng Zhi's poetry, the German novel *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge* must have also lent the Chinese poet the notion of memories, knowledge and feelings about things and animals before even attempting to put pen on paper:

To write a single line of verse one must see many cities, people, things, one must know animals, one must feel birds flying and know the movements flowers make as they open up in the morning. One must be able to think back to roads in unfamiliar regions, unexpected encounters, and partings which one saw coming long before; one must be able to think back to those days in one's childhood that are still unexplained [...], to those days in peaceful and secluded rooms, and to those mornings by the sea, to the sea anywhere, to seas, to nights of travel that swept along high above, flying with the stars; and it's still not enough, even when one's allowed to think of everything one can.⁹⁵

As demonstrated in the following chapters, all of these preconceptions and preconditions set by Rilke appear with frequent transtextual occurrence in Feng Zhi's sonnets. For instance, with reference to feeling of birds flying and the movement of flowers or plants, sonnet 25 foreshadows the lyrical self's awareness of birds flapping their wings outside the window⁹⁶, whereas sonnet 4 deals with the poet's close relationship and understanding of the edelweiss. Moreover, recurrent images of secluded houses (sonnet 21 and 26) and rooms (sonnet 18) or even the wish to fly up and interact with the stars (sonnet 8) fill the mood of sonnets.

⁹⁵ Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. by William Needham of *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* https://archive.org/stream/TheNotebooksOfMalteLauridsBrigge/TheNotebooksOfMalteLauridsBrigge_djvu.txt . Accessed 15 October 2016.

⁹⁶ The lyrical voice of sonnet 25 confesses to be asking in vain why the birds outside the window flap their wings with amusement. The answer to this question can be seemingly be found in the first Elegy of R. M. Rilke where one reads that "vielleicht daß die Vögel die erweiterte Luft fühlen mit innigerm Flug" [maybe the birds feel the expansion of air with their intimate flight]. This allusion would also prove the lyrical self's constant recall for emptiness and spatial infinity.

Rilke's indications to memories related to nights of love (sonnet 18) also re-emerge in Feng Zhi's sonnets, where the nights are never the same and each every one of them brings new aesthetical experiences to the lyrical subjects: "One must have memories of many nights of love--no two nights the same."

Moreover, as Rilke also maintains in his novel:

It's only when they [the memories] become blood within us, become our nameless looks and signs that are no longer distinguishable from ourselves—not until then does it happen that, in a very rare moment, the first word of a verse rises in their midst and goes forth from among them.⁹⁷

Sonnet 20 evokes voices and faces that are vivid in the lyrical I's dreams becoming "a gash in my life", whereas sonnet 25 contemplates those mysterious rhythms that awake at night while the human body is asleep and the "salt plays within out blood".

All these various elements from different historical and literary sources are what represent the chief active factors in the making and refinement of Feng Zhi's poetry over time and space. As this study attempts to convey, Feng Zhi underwent a rather personalised formation path for which it becomes rather complex to simply label the Chinese poet in question though common stigma and presumptions. Nevertheless, what the author of this study seeks to elucidate through the English translation of the *Sonnets* and transtextual evidence of literary and philosophical influence between the German sources and the Chinese lyrical production is the extent to which Feng Zhi can be regarded as a post-Romantic writer with pre-Modernist experimentations.

⁹⁷ Rainer, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*.

V. The English Translation of Feng Zhi's Sonnets

When it comes to translating of Chinese poetry or prose into English, as Ivor A. Richards claimed in one of his best-known accounts, “we have here indeed what may very probably be the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos.”⁹⁸ After almost two thousand years of translation theories, this challenge has not yet been resolved. There is then a notion spread from the time of German Romanticism onwards that assert the concept of “untranslatability”, regarded by Andrew Chesterman as the “memes” of translation.⁹⁹

As also suggested by A. Chesterman, following the etymology of the word ‘translate’, this work seeks to “carry across”¹⁰⁰ the meanings held inside the Chinese words in semantic and communicative translation given the major semantic structure differences of modern Chinese from the English language. The author of this work is aware that as Medieval English philosopher Roger Bacon once argued when referring to Greek and Hebrew scriptures, it is practically “impossible that the peculiar quality of one language should be preserved in another”.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, the proposed translation of Feng Zhi's sonnets does not merely reflect the author's knowledge of the source and target languages for the ‘foreign’ rendering of the Chinese poems, but also a thorough knowledge and critical appreciation of the subject of the text. The proposed translation, in fact, does not only focus on the Chinese original composed by Feng Zhi in the 1940s, but it also and simultaneously takes into close consideration those German texts and sources that the modern Chinese poet came across, extensively studied, translated into Chinese and which ultimately do present evident traces of transtextual confluences.

⁹⁸ Ivor A. Richards, “Toward a Theory of Translating” in: Arthur F. Wright (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Thought*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1953, pp. 247-262, p. 250.

⁹⁹ See Andrew Chesterman, *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 1997, p. 19.

¹⁰⁰ Chesterman, *Memes of Translation*, p. 20.

¹⁰¹ Roger, Bacon, *Opus Majus*, Vol. 1-2, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928, p. 75.

Linguist Roman Jakobson argued that prose could be translated, whereas poetic texts are by their refined definition and purpose technically untranslatable, as complete equivalence cannot be achieved, thus, requiring “creative transposition”¹⁰². This argument of poetic untranslatability was also sustained by Italian poet Dante Alighieri who saw poetic translation as impossible: “may everyone know that nothing harmonized according to the rules of poetry can be translated from its language into another without destroying all its sweetness and harmony.”¹⁰³ Such a statement is considerably sustained by the argument that two different languages are two different entities altogether. These might have similarities or common traits but the whole cultural background and expression of a people identified with a given language is certainly exclusive and not replicable, being this connected to one particular culture and people. Therefore, given that two languages are far from being identical, what can be rendered in translation from a text in one language into another tongue can only be approximative. Even though it is not feasible to convey the exact holistic meaning and artistic beauty of the Chinese sonnets into another language, the purpose of the new proposed translation of Feng Zhi’s sonnets from Chinese into English humbly seeks to give an effective and, at the same time, satisfactory and pleasurable rendition to English language readers.

The concern of departing from the original Chinese verses by rendering into another language has affected the mood and tone of translators of all ages and cultures. Nonetheless, as also contemporary Chinese poet Han Dong 韩东 (1961–) claimed during an interview by his English translator, if these “new poems”, that is the final result from the making of a new poem altogether when translating into a different tongue, “shine in another language, then why worry if they have departed from the original?”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, London and New York, Routledge, 2016, p. 61.

¹⁰³ [E però sappia ciascuno che nulla cosa per legame musaico armonizzata si può della sua loquela in altra transmutare senza rompere tutta sua dolcezza ed armonia] Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, quoted by Jacob S. D. Blakesley, *Modern Italian Poets: Translators of the Impossible*, Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 2014, p. 35.

¹⁰⁴ Xujun Eberlein, “Is There a Good Way to Translate Chinese Poetry?”, 20 May 2016, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/good-way-translate-chinese-poetry/#!>. Accessed 10 October 2017.

While the proposed English translation in this work seeks to remain as faithful as possible to the original sonnets in Chinese, it is of paramount importance to bear in mind that some elements pertaining to the Chinese prosody in *baihua*, such as the meters and the exquisite rhyming scheme cannot simply be replicated in English mainly due to the discordant syllable system that differentiates the two languages. Among the most salient technical challenges encountered during the translation process of the sonnets features the aching awareness raised by the translator's impotence of maintaining the same or imitating a close rhyming scheme as that employed by the modern Chinese lyricist. In fact, the various rhyming schemes adopted by Feng Zhi in his sonnets make the final aural effect of the poems rather hard, if not impossible, to be finally imitated into another language.

The sole technical feature that was of fundamental importance and that was also maintained in the English translation is the sonnet form. Feng Zhi appears to have experimented and adopted the sonnet form in his poetic composition from Rilke. As the poems that make the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, all of Feng Zhi's poems that belong to the sonnet collection are composed of two quatrains and two tercets, thus, following at the same time the Petrarchan sonnet structure 4433. The sonnet tradition in Germany was not as fixed and established as that in Italian or English literature. Furthermore, when considering the lyrical formal standards of the German sonnet advanced by August Wilhelm Schlegel, one will immediately notice that Rilke did not even abide by those traditional rules. Rilke's and Feng Zhi's rhyme schemes vary from sonnet to sonnet.

Even though it is possible to individuate common traits among the various sonnet forms in the West, it is worth noticing though that the rhyme scheme of the European sonnet varied from literature to literature. For example, the common Petrarchan sonnet uses a pattern of hendecasyllables and follows the abab abab or abba abba order in the octave and the cdc dcd or cde cde or cde dce in the sestet. The English or Shakespearian sonnet is predominantly written using the iambic pentameter where each line has ten syllables divided into five pairs (iamb) and follows the order abab cdcd efef gg. Rilke's sonnets, just like Feng Zhi's sonnets, present all different rhyming schemes and syllabic patterns. Some of Rilke's sonnet,

for instance, follow the order abab cdcd or abba cddc in the octave and eef ggf or efg efg or even efg gfe in the sestet and make use of enjambments to characterise the verse structure.

Although it is not possible to reproduce the innovative rhyme scheme adopted by Feng Zhi in *The Sonnets*, it would be interesting to also note how the modern Chinese lyricist ordered his rhymes and what syllabic patterns he used in the sonnets:

- Sonnet 1: abab cbc b dac dac
 10 9 10 9 / 10 10 10 10 / 9 9 9 / 10 10 9
- Sonnet 2: abba acca dad ada
 10 9 10 9 / 10 10 10 10 / 10 10 10 / 10 10 9
- Sonnet 3: abba cddc ebb eaa
 9 9 9 9 / 9 9 9 9 / 9 9 9 / 9 9 9
- Sonnet 4: abba acca bcc baa
 9 9 9 9 / 9 8 8 9 / 9 9 9 / 8 9 9
- Sonnet 5: abba cddc cbb caa
 7 7 8 8 / 8 8 8 8 / 7 7 8 / 7 7 7
- Sonnet 6: abba acca ddd dee
 9 9 9 9 / 9 8 9 9 / 9 9 9 / 10 9 9
- Sonnet 7: abab cdcd ecf faa
 6 6 6 6 / 6 6 6 6 / 7 7 7 / 7 6 6
- Sonnet 8: abab cdcd efg efg
 8 8 8 9 / 8 8 8 9 / 8 8 9 / 8 8 9
- Sonnet 9: abab cdcd bbe ebe
 11 11 11 11 / 10 10 10 10 / 11 10 11 / 11 11 11

- Sonnet 10: abba cddc eed ffd
 9 10 10 10 / 9 10 10 10 / 10 10 10 / 10 10 10
- Sonnet 11: abba cddc dcd cee
 10 10 10 10 / 10 10 10 10 / 10 10 10 / 10 10 10
- Sonnet 12: abba acca aad ada
 9 9 9 9 / 8 8 9 9 / 9 9 9 / 9 9 9
- Sonnet 13: abba acca dde ded
 12 12 12 12 / 12 12 12 12 / 12 12 12 / 12 12 12
- Sonnet 14: abab cdcd eef ggf
 9 9 8 9 / 9 9 9 8 / 9 9 10 / 8 9 10
- Sonnet 15: abab cdcd eef ggf
 8 8 9 8 / 8 8 9 9 / 8 8 9 / 8 10 9
- Sonnet 16: abab abab cdd cbb
 10 10 10 10 / 10 10 9 9 / 10 10 10 / 10 10 10
- Sonnet 17: abab abab bab bab
 10 10 10 10 / 9 9 9 9 / 10 10 10 / 10 10 10
- Sonnet 18: abba cbbc aba cbc
 12 12 12 12 / 12 12 12 11 / 11 12 12 / 12 12 12
- Sonnet 19: abba cddc cdc cee
 10 10 11 10 / 9 10 11 10 / 10 10 11 / 10 10 11
- Sonnet 20: abab cdcd eff eaa
 10 10 10 10 / 10 10 10 10 / 10 10 10 / 10 10 10

- Sonnet 21: abab acac dde ded
 10 10 10 10 / 10 10 10 10 / 10 10 10 / 10 10 10
- Sonnet 22: abba caac cc deed
 6 6 6 6 / 6 6 6 6 / 6 6 6 / 6 6 6
- Sonnet 23: abab acac daa dee
 8 8 8 8 / 8 8 8 8 / 8 9 7 / 8 8 9
- Sonnet 24: abba bccb cdc cdc
 6 6 6 6 / 6 6 6 6 / 6 6 6 / 6 6 6
- Sonnet 25: aaaa bccb aaa acc
 7 7 7 7 / 7 7 7 7 / 7 7 7 / 7 8 8
- Sonnet 26: abba baab cac dad
 10 9 10 10 / 10 9 9 10 / 10 10 9 / 10 10 10
- Sonnet 27: abba acca dbb daa
 10 10 10 10 / 10 10 10 10 / 10 10 10 / 10 10 10

Feng Zhi did not attempt to give a wide range of rhyme sounds in his sonnets. On the other hand, the modern Chinese poet exploited the “relative undifferentiation” on rhyme sounds in Chinese “by making patterned use of the recurrences.”¹⁰⁵

Although the first edition of the poem collection published in 1942 in Guilin did not include a preface or introductory lines to the sonnets, it would be valuable to gain a better understanding of the poetic context by also including some short notes on what Feng Zhi felt when he personally wrote the introductory preface to his second edition in 1948.

¹⁰⁵ Lloyd Haft, “Some Rhythmic Structures in Feng Zhi’s Sonnets”, *Modern Chinese Literature*, Vol. 9, N. 2, 1996, pp. 297-326, p. 308.

In 1941, Feng Zhi used to live on the mountains that surround the city of Kunming and he used to walk at least twice a week a distance of 15 *li* in order to reach the city and the place where he taught. In order to avoid the air raids of the enemy, the poet used to live in a hut in Yangjiashan (杨家山), located in the northwestern suburb of Kunming and surrounded by lush pine forests [茂盛的松林].¹⁰⁶ These “very good walks” (很好的散步) as the author himself defined them, turned out to be crucial for the birth of the sonnets. In fact, as Feng Zhi notes, when a man is found on a mountain path, it is almost inevitable not to start wondering about the past and the many days that belong to it. Back then, he had not been poetically productive for a long time: barely ten poems in all from 1930 till 1940; when all of a sudden, during a winter afternoon, he gazed upon a silver airplane from distance soaring high in the crystal-blue sky that reminded him of the mythical bird *peng* (鹏鸟) that the ancient people used to dream of. He took the advantage of that spontaneous rhythm without wasting any time and suddenly made up a rhyming poem. As soon as he returned home, he took a paper and wrote what happened to be distinguished as the rough copy of sonnet. That was the first jot of the eighth poem of the collection. And as Feng Zhi writes, it was also the earliest and the most premature form of all the sonnets, as he had not written poems for a long time.

Although the beginning was random and quite unplanned, Feng Zhi confesses to have started feeling a increasing sentiment inside his heart, an unusual request: the life and objects of some people worked in his mind restoring new things thanks to their nutritious lymph. The poet confessed that these are what brought revelation and finally enlightened him best. In a very intriguing rhetorical

¹⁰⁶ Feng Zhi, “Lun Gede, de huigu, ming yu buchong” 《伦歌德》的回顾，明与补充 [“Clarification and Supplement to the Review of the Essay on Goethe”] in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 4.

question, in fact, the author asks himself why he does not then leave behind something that could express his sense of gratitude towards them.

Always bearing this call in his mind, everything that is being sung in the poems is then deeply related: from the immortal historical characters to the nameless village peasant girls, from the far away and eternal cities to the flying insects and small blades of grass found on hillsides, from the small parts of individual lives to the common experience that unite many people. Feng Zhi wrote about this in every poem. Sometimes, he managed to write up to two or even three poems in one day. Other times, on the other hand, he would not be able to write even half a poem and finish it only after a long time. This is how he accomplished to write a total of twenty-seven poems. As soon as the poems were finished, a serious illness hit him in autumn leaving him shattered and exhausted. Only after gradually recuperating from the illness he could finally take out the twenty-seven poems and re-arrange them and finally recopy them. After such epochal quest, as he writes, his spirit felt light again when looking upon the satisfying result that finally met his initial request.

As for the choice to adopt the sonnet form, Feng Zhi stresses that his choice was purely dictated by personal convenience and not by an intention to transplant this poetic form in China. As he writes, he used this poetic form only because it helped him [我用这形式, 只因为这形式帮助了我].¹⁰⁷ Just as Li Guangtian 李广田 wrote in his essay *Shisihang ji* (*The Sonnet*), due to its characteristics of having layers upon layers that rise and fall regularly, that gradually focus and then

¹⁰⁷ Preface to the sonnet collection in Han Yaocheng 韩耀成, *Feng Zhi Quanjì* 冯至全集 *Complete Works of Feng Zhi*, Vol. 1, Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999, p. 214.

disconnect as well as because of its tangled yet so neat form and its beautiful sound patterns that come and go, the sonnet never restricts the poet's hyperactive thought, but, as Feng Zhi highlights, it rather grants his thought a suitable and appropriate arrangement [它不曾限制了我活动的思想，而是把我的思想接过来，给一个适当的安排]¹⁰⁸.

As Feng Zhi recounts, seven years after having written the sonnets, the sky of Beijing and Kunming were of the same blue colour and still often filled with some silver planes. However, this image could not remind the poet of the same ancient mystical roc of the past, but rather of silver planes that brought suffering on earth. Nonetheless, after the sight of some new born puppies, the poet still felt compelled to write a sentence: "You shall bark light in the dark night" [你们在深夜吠出光明]¹⁰⁹.

In the mess of an utterly confused and unreal society, Feng Zhi confesses the urge to declare these urgent words of prayer: "Give my narrow heart a vast universe" [给我狭窄的心一个大的宇宙]¹¹⁰.

The first edition of the sonnets of 1942 in Guilin does not include a preface or postscripts, as Feng Zhi truly believed that a poem should first be an engraving or a painting and therefore not need further explanations. Nonetheless, in the second edition of the collection, the author felt the necessity to add these explanatory notes.

¹⁰⁸ Han, *Feng Zhi QuANJI*, Vol.1, p. 214.

¹⁰⁹ Han, *Feng Zhi QuANJI*, Vol.1, p. 215.

¹¹⁰ Han, *Feng Zhi QuANJI*, Vol.1, p. 215.

CHAPTER ONE

FENG ZHI'S DOCTORAL DISSERTATION:

THE ANALOGY OF NATURE AND SPIRIT AS A STYLE PRINCIPLE IN THE POETRY OF NOVALIS

Feng Zhi discussed his Doctor of Philosophy dissertation in History of the German Literature on the poetry of Novalis within the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Heidelberg in 1935. Feng Zhi's work, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist als Stilprinzip in Novalis' Dichtung", entirely written in German, was supervised by Prof. Dr. Ewald August Boucke, who collaborated as professor of German and Scandinavian literature from 1921 till 1937.¹¹¹

The work examines the mystic way of thinking; the magical idealism; the poetic style and various natural elements related to the poetry of Novalis. The analysis of Feng Zhi's doctoral dissertation gains pivotal importance when construing the poetry of the modern Chinese poet during the war period. In fact, as this study seeks to demonstrate, it is possible to establish various transtextual relationships between Feng Zhi's own doctoral research and his mature writings, notably the sonnet collection of the 1940s. Modern and contemporary criticism agree

¹¹¹ Dagmar Düll, *Heidelberger Gelehrtenlexikon 1803-1932*, Berlin and Heidelberg, Springer Verlag, 1986, p. 27.

on the fact that Feng Zhi, being a scholar of German Studies with acclaimed fame and lecturing experience at various Chinese universities, was directly influenced by German literary and philosophical works. Many sinologists world-wide have successfully sought to give a critical interpretation of these so-called influences through literary comparisons between Feng Zhi's poetry and a few German works, notably those of Novalis and Rilke. Nevertheless, as this study attempts to demonstrate, relevant transtextual elements between the modern Chinese writings and the German sources, mainly those related to Romanticism, passed through the poet's own critical interpretation. This personal construal understanding and experimentation finds its visible roots down to his own training 'notebook' – his doctoral dissertation. For the re-evaluation of the modern Chinese writer's works and post-Romantic stance in poetry, Feng Zhi's doctoral dissertation is being treated in this study as one of the most salient primary sources.

1.1 A mystic way of thinking

The opening line of Feng Zhi's work claims the position of Novalis within a literary and philosophical movement, and more precisely within the Early German Romantic circle. Moreover, as also Feng Zhi clarifies, in the figure of Novalis meet the poetry and the philosophy of Early German Romanticism; these merge together and give birth to one being.

Novalis strived to sing about the world seen also by a wider perspective, that is the scientific view. As he wrote to A. W. Schlegel on 24 February 1798 from Fribourg: "the sciences must all be made poetic and truly and solely about this final lyrical process I wish to discuss with you".¹¹²

In the history of poetry, Novalis is placed together with other mystic poets whose thoughts, senses and will combine together. He succeeds in this personification and merging of thought, feeling and will. Novalis feels to have a call to reorganise the whole world from scratch and take all sciences back to their last and smallest unit, to evoke the golden age and nail down a new religion: a new religion with the power of his poetical soul and mind. All his works are poetically conceived and brought together.

In his work, Feng Zhi attempted to research how 'subject' and 'object', inner and outer world, spirit and nature converged in the lyrical works of Novalis and how his poetical style was consequently affected. Novalis's poetical style rests upon his philosophy of nature from which he then derived his lyrical style principles.

Novalis's writings and poetry resemble a world where all boundaries are blurred, all ends are connected and all opposites are reconciled. What really struck him about nature was "das große Zugleich", thus, the simultaneous occurrence of

¹¹² "[...] die Wissenschaften müssen alle poetisiert werden - von dieser realen, wissenschaftlichen Poesie hoff ich recht viel mit Ihnen zu reden." - Letter to A. W. Schlegel (IV, 229 in Novalis's German Complete Works) in Feng Tscheng-Dsche, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist als Stilprinzip in Novalis' Dichtung", Doctoral Dissertation, Heidelberg University, 1935, p. 5.

natural phenomena in the world: what is foreign is known at the same time, and what is far is simultaneously close.

All boundaries and limits disappear in space leaving no distinction between far away and close, high and low, finitude and infinity. Enthusiastic about his first love to Mathilden, Heinrich von Ofterdingen says: “all distances are so close to me, and the rich landscape is to me just like inner phantasy” [Jene Fernen sind mir so nah, und die reiche Landschaft ist mir wie eine innere Phantasie].¹¹³

In fairy-tales, earth and sky meet together in “süße Musik” [sweet music]. The infinite behaves like finitude and these stand in continuous change. The continuous mutation does not only refer to space but also to time: the past and future, the beginning and the end, duration and instantaneity. It is worth noticing that these elements and complementary characteristics of change of opposing forces also animate the poetic spirit of Feng Zhi’s sonnets. In his sonnets, for instance, Feng Zhi makes constant reference to the passing of time in terms of finitude and infinity. Through metaphysical imagination, the self is then capable to overcome both conditions of time and space, being far and simultaneously far: “Our lives are like that open plain outside the window” (sonnet 18). Feng Zhi’s dilemma concerns the motion of the self within a boundless space-time dimension: “Who can lead his own life in such an ocean-like boundless night?” (sonnet 20).

Time and space behave relatively: they are one body like subject and object. Space is permanent time while time is flowing space [Raum ist beharrliche Zeit – Zeit ist fließender Raum].¹¹⁴ Novalis feels every human connection as a relative condition.

Novalis, like other philosophers, such as Heraclitus, the Apostle Paul, Laozi or medieval mystics, thinks in forms of circles and prefers employing sentence structures in chain forms to express his thought. In his book *Denkformen*, Hans

¹¹³ Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 6.

¹¹⁴ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 7.

Leisegang represented a clear characteristic of this thought forms, defining them as the “inwardly consistent sum of the rules of thought which result from an analysis of the writings of an individual and which appears likewise in other writers as the same structure”.¹¹⁵

Through the consideration of the life process in nature, such as the seeds’ life cycle in the plant world, the mystic poet gains his fundamental idea, which he then applies to humanity and to the whole cosmos. The terms used in mystical logic are living fundamental forms taken from the life cycle of things. Terms that are otherwise always in opposition, such as day and night, light and darkness, spirit and body are here linked and built inside of a ring. The day is linked with the night and the night is connected with the day again. All extreme ends are connected in an eternal cycle. It is this same kind of natural cycle that constantly echoes in Feng Zhi’s sonnets. The modern Chinese writer uses images pertaining to the natural world to also convey this principle. He then also hints the same concept of rebirth to emphasise the infinite cycle of nature. The Goethean sonnet (sonnet 13) ends with a very enigmatic sentence, clearly taken from Goethe’s poetic repertoire: “Die and become” [Stirb und werde].

From the seed comes an organism, which will bring new seeds. From this one, life comes in again. From this perspective, the mystic poet affirms that life is the beginning of death and that death is the beginning of life – both become one. In the sonnets of Feng Zhi, for instance, through the image of the moulting cicada or moths that leave their shell in the mud (sonnet 2), the Chinese poet seemingly attempts to convey a similar awareness. What strikes the reader is the concluding note of the same sonnet: “A singing voice fallen from the body of music, the sole remaining body that changes into a chain of voiceless mountains.” The idea conveyed is vividly manifested in the image of silent mountains that take shape one after the other as to foreshadow the infinite cycle of life: life after death and death the beginning of life again.

¹¹⁵ Hans Leisegang, *Denkform*, 1928 in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 8.

According to Feng Zhi, Novalis's production is free from a characteristic: the Romantic irony. As Feng Zhi rewords it, in his kindred spirit, Novalis remained a pure lyricist and simultaneously a pure mystic who harmonises everything.

According to Novalis, the whole world is a large organism that constantly flows and moves. What binds, also undoes at the same time; what mixes together, also separates at the same time; what ties things, also splits at the same time. Equality, similarity and affinity are the main colours of all things within the large organism.

This reminds us, for instance, of a few lines of the poem of "Astralis"¹¹⁶ in the second part of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*:

"Eins in Allem und Alles in Einen
Gottes Bild auf Kräutern und Steinen,
Gottes Geist in Menschen und Tieren,
Dies muß man sich zu Gemüte führen.
Keine Ordnung mehr nach Raum und Zeit
Hier Zukunft in der Vergangenheit."¹¹⁷

"One in All and All in One
The image of God on greenery and stones,
The spirit of God in men and animals,
This is what one should take to heart.
No more order to space and time
Here future of the past."

¹¹⁶ In this poem, the poet inaugurates the passage from the "Erwartung" (Expectation) of part I to the "Erfüllung" (Fulfillment) of part II in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.

¹¹⁷ Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in Feng, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist", p. 9.

1.2 Way to the inner self and Idealism

In one part of the *Fragmente* and in the novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (*The Novices at Sais*, 1802) is manifested the central theme of nature. Access to nature is nothing other than the way to the self. For Novalis, nature is not the objective side that is seen through material eyes and that can be described, but it rather represents transcendence.

Among the Romantics, Tieck and E.T.A. Hoffmann had demonised the concept of nature and given it a gruesome violence. Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis still live in their ideal world while the Heidelberg poets discover and recognise phenomenal nature again. Contrary to Goethe, who gains his ideas from reality, Novalis conceives his ideas from a higher level. He writes:

“The world must be romanticised. In this way one discovers once more its original sense. To romanticise is nothing other than a qualitative potentiation [Potenzierung]. Through this operation, the lower self is identified with a better ‘self’. Just as we, ourselves, are such a qualitative potentiation. This operation is still completely unknown. Since I give a higher sense to the commonplace, a secret insight to the everyday, the worthiness of the unknown to the known, an infinite appearance to finitude, in this way I romanticise it.”¹¹⁸

The true and high world is like the veiled image of the Goddess of Sais. In order to unveil this image, there is a need for a long pilgrimage. Man is the Messiah of nature: he has to save nature.

Where is real nature? Who can save nature? Novalis gives his reader some hints in the very famous couplet: “Someone arrived there — who lifted the veil of the goddess, at Sais. — But what did he see? He saw — wonder of wonders — himself.”

According to Feng Zhi, in these lines is found the unlocking key to understand the mysticism of Novalis. It is worth noticing at this stage that Feng Zhi also implied that the way to nature is a mere representation of the way to the self. If it is not nature being reflected into man’s life it is then humanity that is reflected upon the wonders of nature. In sonnet 16, for instance, the lyrical voice declares that “our

¹¹⁸ Novalis, *Schriften*, II, 545 in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 10.

growth, our worries are a pine tree on some hillside, or a veil¹¹⁹ of thick fog over a city". Furthermore, in sonnet 18, the poetic subject urges his companion to "let that this intimate night and unknown place weave inside our chests: Our lives are like that open plain outside the window: We recognise in the misty open plain a tree, a reflection of a lake, and as far as the eye can see hide the forgotten past, the vague future."

As all opposites are relative and one is found in the other, so the boundary of the outer world is found in the inner world. The meaning of the outer world can only be found in the inner world.

With regards to the relationship between inner and outer world, Novalis teaches this in the middle part of *Blüthenstaub* (*Pollen*, 1798) as follows:

"To retreat within ourselves means to withdraw from the outer world. Among the spirits this earthly life, analogically is an inner observation, a withdrawing into oneself, an immanent effecting. So this earthly life arises from an incipient reflection, a primeval withdrawing or containment, germinating in oneself, that is as free as our reflection. Conversely, the spiritual life arises in this world from a breakthrough of each original reflection. [...]"¹²⁰

Moreover, in one of the *Fragmente* the following points are elucidated:

1. Life on earth is for the spirits (not ghosts, but those who have overcome death and are the best ones among us as they have already reached the spiritual kingdom in their lifetime) an inner contemplation.
2. There is a division between the earthly and spiritual life on earth.

¹¹⁹ The same veil that covers the disguised or hidden real face of nature is symbolically represented by a thick veil of fog that covers the city. The mysterious face covered by the veil of the goddess mirrors the self of the pilgrim.

¹²⁰ "In sich zurückgehen, bedeutet bei uns, von der Außenwelt abstrahieren. Bei den Geistern heißt analogisch, das irdische Leben eine innere Betrachtung, ein in sich Hineingehen, ein immanentes Wirken. So entspringt das irdische Leben aus einer ursprünglichen Reflexion, einem primitiven Hineingehen, Sammeln in sich selbst, das so frei ist, als unsere Reflexion. Umgekehrt entspringt das geistige Leben in dieser Welt aus einem Durchbrechen jener primitiven Reflexion." Novalis, *Blüthenstaub* (*Pollen*), *Fragmente* 44 in Feng, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist", p. 11.

3. When we retreat within ourselves, we can find the primeval shape again.

Thanks to this awareness, Novalis could see the way the leads within the inner self.

From his science books, it is possible to know that Novalis attempted to create an inner world that was exactly like the outer world. The inner world should then also correspond to the outer world till the smallest part.

From *Pollen*: “We dream of a journey through the universe. But is the universe then not in us? We do not know the depths of our spirit. The secret path goes inwards. Eternity with its worlds, the past and the future, is in us or nowhere.”

In this secret inner self that he experienced deeply and ecstatically, Novalis finds the great union between the outer and the inner world. As Feng Zhi claims, Novalis feels like a foreigner in the world and longs for the afterworld or the inner world. In this land of the afterworld or of the inner world, which he calls “homeland” [Heimat], he considers, looking back, the world that is foreign to him.¹²¹

This is how he treats life and death and nature. The world is coloured mystically, nature is romanticised and potentiated to a greater organism.

As Feng Zhi theorises, Novalis feels to be called into a mission for the construction of the world – a mission that fulfils the magical Idealism. Magic idealist Novalis seeks to create a moral meaning [Moralorgan] and to moralise nature.

Magic is the art to live the outer world secretly, to which also man’s body belongs. The magic of Novalis differs from any other kind of magic that is based on occultism, because this [Novalis’s] animates nature and generates magnificence and inexplicability, whereas the other aims to see the dark and sinister powers in nature in order to unravel human mysteries. The magician determinates and orders nature while the occultist is subject to dark powers.

¹²¹ See Paul J. Cremers, *Der magische Idealismus als dichterisches Formproblem in den Werken Hardenbergs*, Doctoral Dissertation, Bonn University, 1921.

In other words, the cycle of nature and spirit is: to consider nature from the inside out and obtain it from the inside, to romanticise the dedication [Zugeeignete] through the moral organ, to look for a great design and scheme for the world and finally to moralise it by projecting this onto nature through magical will.

Throughout this natural process, the spirit represents the active component and operative power.

The spirit is the artist, who projects and accomplishes; whereas nature represents the substance and material, which is used by the artist for the work of art. The spirit yearns and operates, whereas nature leads and serves. The spirit creates, whereas nature witnesses. As Feng Zhi concludes, the union of nature and spirit is the grounding idea of Novalis and of the Romantic philosophy.

“Nature is an Æolian Harp, a musical instrument, whose tones are the re-echo to higher strings within us.”¹²²

“What is Nature? – An encyclopaedic, systematic index or plan of our Spirit. Why will we content ourselves with the mere catalogue of our treasures? Let us contemplate them ourselves, and in all ways elaborate and use them.”¹²³

The spirit of Novalis is, as Feng Zhi demonstrated with these quotes, so deep woven within nature that the union is perceivable everywhere: nature serves as a trope, symbol and allegory for his poetic style.

¹²² Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon* in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 14.

¹²³ Novalis, *Fragmente und Studien 1797-1798* in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 14.

1.3 Origin and Being of Novalis's style

In order to gain a general overview of Novalis's poetic style, Feng Zhi makes three fundamental distinctions: the canonisation of his fairy-tales, his language theory and his mystic way of thinking. Feng Zhi concludes by defining Novalis's style as being primarily based upon the animation of nature, language descriptiveness and analogy. Novalis's greatest task is that to create a romanticised world, thus, a "wonderworld" [Wunderwelt]. For Novalis, as Feng Zhi determines, the poet's activity can be regarded as that of a 'fortune-teller' and priest, a doctor and lawmaker. The poet is omniscient: he understands nature better than any other scientific mind. He is a microcosm, a real world in miniature. He is able to get the known from the unknown, make possible what is impossible, use his power upon the world of plants, animals and stones and finally he is also able to bring nature into eternal movement and into man-like activities. His word is like that of a wizard; his world is his own instrument, which he can play in various ways. He is actually a wizard, a great magician.

As Feng Zhi remarks, in many parts of *The Novices at Sais* and in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis praises poetry above everything. Poetry is the only means by which the "wonderful" [das Wunderbare] can be shown and wounds be healed. The poetry to which Novalis refers is neither perceived by the mind nor subdued by "economy".

Feng Zhi considers Novalis's work *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as a great fairy-tale. It begins with a dream that introduces the coming atmosphere of the novel, a kind of secret world. The soul of the poet flows through the whole novel. Although it is called 'novel', it is actually a fairy-tale in the Romantic sense. As Novalis wrote¹²⁴ to Friedrich Schlegel about *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*: "The Novel should gradually evolve into a fairy-tale."¹²⁵

Novalis compares fairy-tales with dreams and Feng Zhi makes reference to other Romantic authors who also ascribed great importance to the idea of dream,

¹²⁴ A letter dated 5th April 1800 – What Novalis meant by this statement is the dominance of the fairy-tale conditions that should increase throughout the novel.

¹²⁵ Feng, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist", p. 15.

such as Tieck's fair-tales, E.T.A. Hoffmann's stories, Arnim's novel and Brentano's novels. Feng Zhi also emphasised Novalis's idea that in fairy-tales everything should ultimately be represented as wonderful. In fairy-tales, the poet makes animals, plants and stones speak as he wishes. Everything should be animated; that is the poet's ultimate call in life.

The poet also sought to lend naivety and simplicity of language to his fairy-tales. The boundary between natural and artistic poetry is thus disappears. With regards to the characteristic Romantic style of fairy-tales, E. Boucke (Feng Zhi's own doctoral supervisor) writes in his essay about the prose style:

"It is often difficult for these Romantics to discern where the deliberate illusion finishes and their own style begins, or whether this artificially renewed manner of speaking has not become of a second nature. Also Novalis sings the tone of the old art of fairy-tale in wonderful purity, and at the same time proclaims the message of his magical idealism in these tender tones. [...]"¹²⁶

Imagery plays a very important role in fairy-tales. However, it is not the case in Romantic poetry and language 'decoration', as it is with writers of the Baroque. Romantic poets renew the language as the mystics of the Middle Ages who created everything from inner experience and had ability: Nature carries the image of man like man carries the image of God. At the same time, the language carries the image of the spirit of man and of nature. Using Feng Zhi's words, the language is the daughter conceived from the union of nature and spirit.

Novalis has long researched on language theory. According to Novalis, man does not speak on his own: the whole universe speaks through him. Therefore, everything is 'information' [Mitteilung] being passed on. The human language is a poetic creation and the linguistic signs are being generated *a priori* from the human nature. The power of the language stems from its imagery.

Feng Zhi also gives an account of Novalis's interpretation of metaphors as power of the analogy. According to Feng Zhi, the analogy is primarily the main tool of the mystical thinker. The synthesis of the inner and outer world, the internalisation

¹²⁶ Hofstaetter-Panzer, *Grundzüge der Deutschkunde* in Feng, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist", p. 16.

of the external and the embodiment of the spiritual, which are all harmonising mystical world-views, would be hardly imaginable without the use of analogies. The art of making analogies of all phenomena belongs to the nature of the mystic. However, it must also be noted that Novalis was born in a time when analogies were preferred.

It is not only in philosophical speculation, but also in the field of natural philosophy that the analogy is often used. All the sciences of that time were based on the idea of natural unity and of the all-round rule. Nature is being looked upon as a great organisation in which everything is either the same or related or similar. The analogy of all natural phenomena, the analogy between man and the world in particular, is the firm foundation upon which the nature-philosophers of that time built their own world. For instance, if one reads the “Fragmente aus dem Nachlasse eines jungen Physikers” (Fragments of a young physicist) of J. W. Ritter, it is possible to get the impression that the whole book was merely based upon comparisons.

As Feng Zhi comments, in *Christenheit oder Europa*¹²⁷ [Christendom or Europe, 1799], Novalis makes some remarks on how to deal with history:

“With regards to history, I would encourage you to research in your didactic context on similar dates and to learn how to use the magic wand of the analogy.”¹²⁸

The world is scarcely left with something that is not touched by Novalis with this magic wand. The sciences are analogous. A type of science can only be represented by another. All ideas are related. With regards to ideas, elements, concepts and instincts, Novalis finds their crossing analogies.

To sum up, according to what Feng Zhi analysed in his work, the inspiration of nature, the imagery in language and the power of nature and spirit to create analogies, which build and support Novalis’s own style, are deep rooted in his magic

¹²⁷ The original dissertation of Feng Zhi reports the title of Novalis’s essay as “Christheit und Europa”. However, the author of this study retains that it must have been a typo or some kind of oversight from Feng Zhi’s side, as the original title of Novalis’s essay in German is *Christenheit oder Europa*.

¹²⁸ Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 20.

idealism. In his style one must absolutely note what Novalis emphasised: “The world is a universal trope of the spirit, a symbolic image of therefrom.”¹²⁹

Feng Zhi also claims that symbol is therefore distinguished from metaphor, which denotes a comparison and expresses a function.

The world is a universal trope of the spirit that is represented through symbols. Feng Zhi gives a detailed explanation and account of these symbols through singular groups.

¹²⁹ Novalis, *Schriften* in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 21.

1.4 The singular groups

Feng Zhi examined Novalis's stylistic means in singular groups. In an introductory note, the Chinese writer claims to separate in blocks what Novalis carefully bound together. Feng Zhi, however, finds the excuse and apology for doing so for the sake of "keeping an eye" on Novalis's personality and on the world as a whole.

Feng Zhi claims that Novalis's world is an organism and in his poetic style nothing is affected.

1.4.1 Light – Colour

As he wrote in a letter to Friedrich Schlegel in winter 1797, Novalis dealt with a study on light. For the German poet, light is symbol of the real sobriety and agent of purity. God, freedom and immortality interact in spiritual physics (metaphysics), like the sun, light and warmth on earth. Beauty and morality are almost like light and warmth in the spiritual world. Light is the universal mechanism and vehicle of the community of the universe. In fact, in the flame of light, all natural powers are in action, while the ray of light is the stroking fiddle bow.

The poet should be familiar with the sharp spirits of light. In this moves the spirit of the poet, as it is responsible for the inspiration of nature. The *Hymnen an die Nacht* begin with a hymn to the light that moves, separates and binds the universe with its colours, rays and waves. The whole world breathes the power of light. This light-creating power is what Novalis requests from all poets and people. What shines, flows and everything that brings to life corresponds to Novalis's spirit, which sets everything in eternal movement and leads to infinitude. For this reason, light is for Novalis analogous with the human mind and spirit in every detail.

It is not only the eyes, but also the words that proclaim a new life that are like sparks of a divine spirit. After that Heinrich heard the wise Sylvester speak from the nature of conscience, he tells him: "with what joy fills me the light that comes from your words". The usual light-metaphors: for instance, the future that shines with rays

of hope or the holy beloved in wonderful glance are not be particularly mentioned as they do not go beyond the conventional and are very common to show us the peculiarity of Novalis's poetic style. Only in the *Hymnen an die Nacht*, Novalis calls upon his beloved light, though with a different meaning. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that in one of Feng Zhi's sonnets, the meaning of light, as the greatest creation power of nature, appears as the ray of future hope (sonnet 23): "But this first time experience will blend into your future sounds of bark, and you will bring light again in the nights."

Moreover, the spirit of virtue, that is the morality, which the magic idealist must carry within himself, is called by Sylvester "the all-stirring, all-invigorating light". Only through this spirit, everything is received from heaven to earth and "the unknown path of infinite natural history is radiated till the transfiguration.

In Novalis's fairy-tale world, one can also encounter sparking flowers and fruits. The landscape of Sais lies in complete illumination. In Klingsohr's fairy-tale the city and the plain are bright. "The world lies blooming around the bright hill". It must be noted here that Feng Zhi's sonnets do make clear reference to light. In sonnet 11, Feng Zhi eulogises the figure of Lu Xun and associates the image of light with hope, especially when referring to the hope that Lu Xun should or must have brought to his generation: "You have often hoped for a ray of light, but as you turn your head, you find a covering dark cloud." In sonnet 12, Feng Zhi addresses the poetic genie of Du Fu where he associates the imagery of light with divine power. In fact, by putting the Tang dynasty poet in a higher poetical position, the lyrical voice of Feng Zhi's sonnet states: "All crowns before his light only become reflections of pathetic images". In sonnet 21, Feng Zhi stretches the concept of light as analogy to life and its fugacity: "Only this feeble light remains to confirm our ephemeral life". In sonnet 23, the lyrical subject is found in front of a few new-born puppies. The idea of light here is much more profound than in any other sonnet: the simple and more direct image of light, which the puppies are exposed to thanks to the care of their mother, also implies a higher concept of hope. In fact, the rays of sunlight shall be maintained within the inner self of each puppy and shall be released under a different shape, that of sound, in times of despair or absence: "You cannot remember, but this first time experience will blend into your future sounds of bark, and you will bring

light again in the nights”. A further positive idea of light, especially when associated with the sun and warmth, is conveyed in sonnet 7, where the people gather together in the outskirts of the city “under a pleasant sunshine”. Finally, Feng Zhi’s reference to light also implies ‘speed’. For this reason, the author of this study has chosen to translate ‘light’ 光 as ‘blaze’ in sonnet 8, rendering so the idea of immediacy and rapidity: “They set on earth the order of stars, and like a blaze they rush into space” [好把星秩序排在人间，便光一般投身空际].

Another element that is linked with light and which interested the Early Romantics like Novalis is colour. Even though the idea of colour belongs to the field of physics, it did exert great influence in the poetic tone of Romantic writings: the construction of a Romantic world and foundation of their world-view. The element of feeling is an inner light that shines in beautiful and crafty colours. Once Novalis asked the question whether life also shines in colours since this is like the light.

Novalis feels to be called to mix all colours in his poetry according to his ideas. According to the German poet, nothing is more poetic than all transitions and heterogeneous mixtures. Colour represents a transition von absolute movement to absolute quietude and from quality to quantity. Colour is poetic. As Feng Zhi remarks, in Novalis’s works the colours are mixed according to his will. For instance, when one looks at Heinrich’s dream and Klingsohr’s fairy-tale, the reader cannot not notice the visual “symphony” given by light and colour.

Feng Zhi also compares the German Romantics’ preference for certain colours: Tieck and Brentano preferred the colour red, E.T.A. Hoffmann grey and Novalis blue. Blue is the colour of air, mist, currents, mountain and ‘distance’. Blue is the colour that makes all things visible and that awakes a sense of nostalgia [Sehnsucht] for far distance. Heaven shows man infinite spaces in dark blue. The rivers are milky blue and the flame is light blue. It is so possible to image Novalis’s world in blue or in all its nuances and different shades.

1.4.2. Fire

Apart from light, it is also possible to find fire and water as very frequent metaphors in Novalis's poetry. As Feng Zhi defines, these two elements, which Novalis calls 'primary sources of energy' [Hauptkraftquellen], are very representative in the German Romantic's poetry as these both possess equal creative powers in nature. In Novalis's works, it is not the destructive fire that always burns, but rather is it a flame that animates everything and does good to everyone.

Fire possesses magical powers: fire can unite the separated particles and also separate what is already bound together. In Romantic poetry, fire is usually associated with love.

The process to consume itself and regenerate reminds the reader of the ancient Egyptian phoenix, which plunges into the fire and re-emerges upwards in a renewed and younger shape. The same process also reminds of Goethe's "Stirb und Werde". With this in mind, it is possible to understand the death by burning of the mother that Novalis recounts in Klingsohr's fairy-tale. This passage is of utmost importance for the understanding of the Goethean sonnet of Feng Zhi. In fact, the enigmatic lines and reference to Goethe's "Stirb und Werde" are clearly explained in his re-elaboration of the Romantic poetry and of the imagery of fire. In fact, in sonnet 13, the lyrical voice praises Goethe's work and deep wisdom by affirming that his works can at least reveal the true and hidden secret of life that can be encapsulated within the phrase "die and become": "A heavy illness changes into a burst of health, love despair changes into nourishment, You know why the moth fluttered into the flame, why the snake shed its skin to grow; all living creatures benefit from your words, revealing the true sense of life: "die and become" [Stirb und werde - 死和变].

Love, which represents the only way to the highest world, can be equated with fire for the simple reason that it refines, sublimates and exalts man. As Feng Zhi also clarifies, Heinrich von Ofterdingen calls Mathilden the guardian as his holy fire. According to Novalis, the true and real fire is that which refines and exalts beings. As Feng Zhi also comments, Novalis has looked for this kind of fire with animals, love and great deal of care for the highest place.

1.4.3. The Liquids: water, sea, rivers and sources

With a very interesting theory, Feng Zhi concludes that Novalis ascribed a similar meaning to water to that of the ancient Greeks. Nevertheless, in earthly water Novalis recognises a higher meaning and function. The ancient sages attempted to find the origin of things within this ‘higher water’.

Novalis often thought of himself as a river and considered himself as liquid. In one of his *Fragmente*, Novalis stated: “there is no doubt about the fact that our body is a shaped river”.¹³⁰ The external sense’s property of being fluid is for Novalis the first step towards a higher world. When the body is transformed into fluid, the inner sense also awakes.

Everything flows and runs like water towards the central point where the “blaue Blume” is found. The essence of Novalis’s poetry is found in the nostalgia for this world. This world is found in the far-away distance. However, only the river and not the mountains can lead us to this far distance, the beautiful place.

Love is for Novalis the melting process of two people in a higher form of Being [Dasein]. The first kiss melts the beloved ones into infinity. As Heinrich says to Mathilde, love is a mysterious together-flowing of our most secret and peculiar being. This new idea of unity sheds light on the use of ‘we’ 我们 in Feng Zhi’s sonnets. In fact, the lyrical subject often undergoes the changes of the cosmos in unity with another being that is not mentioned. The reader, however, can sense the presence of another being that is in perfect syntony with the lyrical subject: a mirrored split image of the self that is encountered within another being. The plural personal pronoun used in Feng Zhi’s sonnets can be interpreted from different perspectives. One of these is the complete acceptance of Novalis’s notion of togetherness and endless flowing towards infinity.

¹³⁰ Novalis, *Fragmente* in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 32.

The sea, seen as water in infinite mass, appears to Novalis as formless, inhospitable, unknown and without paths. Because of its inscrutableness, the sea instils a sense of ancient secretiveness and wonder.

The source where the rivers and all currents come from symbolises the origin of human freedom.

1.4.4. Sky (also Heaven), star, sun, moon

Novalis believed and emphasised his nostalgia for the appearance of heaven also in his writings, such as in his essay *Christendom or Europe*. Heaven, in fact, for Novalis gives access to a higher world, a complete life that does no longer belong to the time of the modern Chinese writer. On the one hand, heaven represents our spirit, on the other hand, heaven represents God. Nevertheless, contrary to Christian belief, Heaven is not the place where God dwells. It is rather a higher creation of the productive heart, as the heart appears at the same time as the religious organ. Every look on the inside is for Novalis nothing other than a heavenly journey.

Novalis's nostalgia for this heaven and the hope for his return are revealed very often in his writings.

If Heaven and the sky are compared to the spirit and God, the stars are symbol of God and spirit.

Feng Zhi does not define Novalis as a common astrologer who attributes the causes of earthly phenomena to the position and appearance of the stars. He rather saw the stars as parables or allegories to his higher world; and not only as an allegory, but also as indispensable part of it. With the implications from the arbitrary name of planets and constellations Novalis sees the elevation of casualty as fundamental: the arbitrary of fate. Novalis is no astrologer or astronomer, who, for instance, notices the influence of a comet on humanity. He calls astronomy the metaphysics of nature, the basis of all physical sciences. Living astronomy stems

from the nostalgia for the old heaven. The appearance of one of these old heavens, namely the golden ages, is symbolised by the visit of stars [“Besuch der Gestirne”]. As Novalis writes:

“Then once again shall the stars pay visits to the earth, who fell foul of them during those ancient dark ages; then shall the sun lay down her sceptre and become once again a star among other stars, and all the species of the earth re-unite after a long period of separation.”¹³¹

It is essential to notice here that Feng Zhi understood and fully agreed with Novalis’s teaching about the visit of stars as representation of the golden ages. The first sonnet of the collection, in fact, opens with the lyrical subjects predisposition and readiness to receive this wondrous moment – the coming of a comet: “We prepare ourselves to deeply receive those unexpected wonders, amidst endless years suddenly appears a comet and a rushing wind swiftly blowing”.

Feng Zhi also highlights the importance given by Novalis to stars as representations of spiritual maturity that is radiated from the eyes.¹³² At this point, the star is identical to light that is also understood as human mind (or intellect). It is no coincidence that Feng Zhi attributed Cai Yuanpei’s spiritual level and maturity to that of a star in sonnet 10.

As Feng Zhi remarks, for novalis the sun is like a god in eternal independence, whereas the plants turn around it. The sun is in astronomy what God is in metaphysics.

With regards to the moon, Feng Zhi summarises the importance and occurrence of the image of the moon on Romantic literature. According to Feng Zhi, the moon has earned its popularity among the Romantics because of its secret power to transform all reality into fantasy and because of its influence upon the spiritual life. In Novalis’s works, the moon appears over the landscape to make the world more fantastic and wonderful.

¹³¹ Novalis, *The Novices at Sais* in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 40.

¹³² Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 41.

As Feng Zhi concludes, the moon accompanies the nostalgic man and takes him into dream-like and wonderful lands. Novalis appears to be more familiar to the moon than to the sun. In fact, the sun is merely used as a metaphor in his works, whereas the moon is necessary for his spiritual landscape.

1.4.5. Air, wind and clouds

The elevation from lower to higher places is an essential part of Novalis's poetry. Air and the aether come into place not as part of the mass, as in the case of fire, light and water, but these do still have a similar meaning according to Novalis. Novalis evokes a very peculiar image where humans live from aether just like plants live from earth and man fertilises the earth, so do the plants by "fertilising" the air.

Man is very intimately connected with air, as also with other elements as light, fire and water, which man cannot do without. Like blood, air is another good organ for mankind.

In *Hymn to the Night*, Novalis writes: "To balsam and Aether, it changes my blood!".¹³³ These similar words also appear in the poems of German post-Romantics, such as Hofmannsthal in his lyrical drama *Ariadne*: "Balsam and Aether flow for the deadly blood in bloodstreams".¹³⁴ It is interesting to note that Feng Zhi also makes a similar reference in sonnet 25, where both air and blood play a similar role as in Novalis's and Hofmannsthal's lines: "The air is filled with amusement, the sea salt plays within our blood".

As Feng Zhi also claims in his dissertation, the air in Novalis's world is pure and blue and it exerts great influence upon man's natural disposition. In the clear and warm air of South Germany, Heinrich gives up his shyness.

¹³³ Novalis, *Hymnen and die Nacht* [*Hymns to the Night*] in Feng, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist", p. 43.

¹³⁴ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Ariadne auf Naxos* [*Ariadne on Naxos*] in Feng, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist", p.44.

Wind is nothing other than air movement. It is poetical and musical and means a lot to the “solitary, nostalgic heart”. The wind rushes from beloved regions and dissolves its silent sorrow with its thousand dark, melancholic tones into a deep melodious sigh that comes from the whole of nature.¹³⁵ It is here that another trace of transtextual confluence from Novalis’s text into Feng Zhi’s own poetry occurs. In sonnet 15, Feng Zhi gives a similar description of wind that rushes and carries the breaths of far distant regions: “From some unknown distant places, the wind, from countless miles away can take the breaths of many far-away lands”.

The wind, just like the moon, appears to soften the world by giving it a dream-like appearance.

1.4.6. Night and twilight

Novalis’s hymns stem as fruit of the poet’s deepest and most mystic experiences following Sophie’s death. The poet’s decision to die, from what it can be noticed in his diary, the nostalgia for the afterworld and for the eternal reunion with his beloved and dead Sophie led to the creation of the *Hymns to the Night*. Novalis jumps and sinks into this night as if it were a deep felt being. The inner powers, the intoxication of the self and the premonition of deep pleasures are awoken. Time and space dissolve into this sacred moment.

The night brings man with the fulfilment of his wishes. In it, man can see the ‘mother’ who is ready to show everything. The night represents the realm of the dead. This was what the German poet longed for mostly during the time that followed Sophie’s death – a wish to reunite with his beloved one in the realm of the dead.

The night is also imbued with fear. As Feng Zhi notes, Novalis’s epithet of night changes constantly from “gruesome”, “fearsome”, “deep” to “cold” night.

¹³⁵ This part is literally being paraphrased from Feng Zhi’s own reworded quote of Novalis’s text taken from *The Novices at Sais*, in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 44.

On the other hand, twilight achieves a completely different tone in Novalis's poetry not only because it establishes the conditions for dream-like mood for the creation of the fairy-tale world, but also because it represents a poetic transition: the transition from night to day and from day to night. Nevertheless, the German Romantic further differentiates the evening twilight for the morning twilight, the latter being a more joyful hour full of expectations, whereas the other one foreshadows a rather nostalgic hour.

The far-away mountains are coloured in fair tones, whereas the evening brings "sweet sadness" over the landscape. Novalis's nostalgia is for far distant mountains, people and events.

1.4.7. Plant world

From Novalis's *Fragmente*, it is possible to discern how the poet placed man, animals and plants into one whole family group.

The Romantics indicate a clear interest and passion for flowers. They are amazed by their beauty and attribute to them profound meanings because of their purity and perfection. According to Feng Zhi, flowers are both a revelation from nature and a symbol of the human spirit. Without flowers, the Romantic world would definitely look different. Flowers are for Novalis a symbol and allegory, or indispensable parts of the landscape.

Novalis's notion and creation of the "Blaue Blume" became symbol of the whole Romantic movement. The promising magical flower and the dream flower merge together for Novalis as a wonderful flower of poetry, love. As in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the "blaue Blume" represents love, proto-femininity and solution to the earthliness. Some very recurrent flowers in Novalis's works are the roses, which also according to the German poet symbolises love. Mathilden, in fact, compares herself to a rose.

People who interact with flowers speak to them, collect them and also decorate with them in dreams. Human beauty is often compared to flowers. The novice's "complexion shone like the lily".¹³⁶

Novalis shows love for all creatures, more particularly for plants. If the tree symbolises growth and is noble, the bloom is poetical. The development of an artist is compared to the growth of the noblest plant, which must be protected with great care from the gloom severity of the northern skies. The poets, according to Novalis, should lower themselves and sink into the plant world: they will awake the secret life of the woods and the spirits concealed within the trunks.

It is this kind of nobleness that Feng Zhi seeks to evoke in the sonnet he devoted to the edelweiss (sonnet 4). It is interesting to note that the German word for 'edelweiss' is made up of 'edel' for noble and 'weiss' for white. It could not be a mere coincidence out of all plants and flowers of the natural real that Feng Zhi chose this specific defenceless and delicate white flower as lyrical object of his poem. The delicateness of the flower, which calls the care instructed by Novalis for all poets, is emphasised by the short life span of the plant, which Feng Zhi decided to poetise: "Live a short life, and devoted to what is noble and pure".

The close relationship and sinking into the vegetation taught by German Romantic Novalis is exemplified in the prayer that the Chinese lyrical voice utters for the little flower: "At times, when I think of men's life, I cannot resist praying to you. You, bunch of white luxuriant grass, your name have never let down." With a decisive and nostalgic note, Feng Zhi concludes his sonnet by praying and blessing long life to the edelweiss: "To you I pray, so that you may live." Feng Zhi's lyrical voice in sonnet 4 can be defined as a recall to the Romantic stance essential for the so-called "romanticisation of the world" [die Romantisierung der Welt].

¹³⁶ Novalis, *The Novices at Sais* in Feng, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist", p. 52.

1.4.8. Animal world

One of the calls for the Romantic poets was to overcome the difference set between man, animals and plants. The striving of the Romantic poets and nature philosophers was exactly that of abolishing that borderline that separates the three.

The love for animals stems from the Romantic view of the world that saw the three elements as great and as a whole organism. Every creature, be this an animal, man, plant or stone, belongs to the same organism. On this base, Novalis sets the foundations of his fair-tale world where the union of all creatures is in constant development. The animals in the fairy-tales understand man and speak with him in deep trust.

Feng Zhi notices that in his poetry, Novalis makes a distinction between the poet's current time and the old golden ages. In fact, according to Novalis, animals used to talk to man in the old age, whereas today, if outside the fairy-tales, animals are not all friendly and lovely as plants are. Man believes with fear in sagas of dragons and other fearsome animals. Many animals are driven by their hunger fury, whereas tamed animals get closer to man.

From the animal world stems the representation of wings as expression of nostalgia. Poets are free spirits whose present spreads up in all spontaneous wings. The birds depicted in Feng Zhi's poems are always in flight and connected with the idea of distance and freedom: if the lyrical voice is found within a house, the latter makes frequent reference to the fluttering insects or flying birds "outside the window" and over the plain before infinity.

1.4.9. The human being

"What is the human being? A perfect trope of the spirit. All true communication has thus symbolic character – and so are not caresses true communication?"¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Novalis, *Fragmente* in Feng, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist", p. 58.

From Novalis's *Fragmente*, what transpires is that nature, mankind and world are ordered and placed under the spirit. They actually serve the spirit as it trope.

The human being is a part of nature. He is not only equated with animals and plants, but he can also become stone. In himself, man possesses the mind of stones, plants and animals and strives to be a supernatural being. According to Novalis, man is made up of body and spirit. He belongs to nature thanks to his body that reconnects nature and spirit. The body is more than a representation of the spirit. It is a part of nature.

Novalis spiritualises and divinises the human body and attributes it a high meaning as all other things of nature.

To summarise, Feng Zhi's work examined Novalis's poetical world and sought to discern to which extent the German mystic poet transformed spirit in nature and nature in spirit. In his writings, Novalis did not pay much attention to reality. He rather stayed indoor and experienced all kinds of sciences. As Feng Zhi defines him, Novalis is a poet who plays with seriousness. As he means, whoever is called for the representation of the world plays. Man becomes master of infinite games. God and nature should also play. Time goes by playfully.

Novalis's poetry is purified from all risky analogies. He sees everything in nature with his own eyes and nuances everything with his own favourite colours. He collects whatever corresponds to his being and reorders it accordingly in order to build higher forms and to ennoble mankind. For this reason he worships the all-animating light and fire, befriends water and plants and studies the architectonics of nature on mountains, in gorges and holes. The landscape is for him bright and the air blue. The fire is no longer a destroyer, but a connector; death is no longer an annihilator, but rather a re-unifying power.

Novalis's poetry is acclaimed by his friends and by the post-Romantics as the purest and deepest revelation of the Romantic spirit. Its meaning and interpretation

change from time to time. Nevertheless, it is a poetry that always evokes purity, nostalgia and beauty.

CHAPTER TWO

IMAGINATION: SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL INFINITY

The poetical sensitivity of the modern Chinese lyricist Feng Zhi is particularly manifested through the use of philosophical imagery and the experimentation of new poetic forms that can transmit inner perceptions and metaphysical motives. In fact, following the spirit of the early German Romantic movement, Feng Zhi emphasised emotions and the newly attained perceptions as a source of aesthetic experiences. The result of these experiences is subsequently moderated by a feeling of reverential respect that is mixed with awe and wonder when the poetical persona is confronted with the sublime of the natural realm.

Feng Zhi does not limit himself to a mere imitation of themes and motives that were recurrent during the Romantic period in Europe, instead, the Chinese poet combines his new aesthetic experience with elements that are also typical of the Chinese tradition and classical literature. One of the recurring motives that Feng ingeniously succeeds to convey throughout his sonnets is the theme of infinity.

The perception of infinity, which moves the sensitive poet, is discerned as a state of boundlessness that affects both time and space. The lyrical self of the poems gains a new aesthetic experience of temporal and spatial infinity through a personal interaction with nature. Once the lyrical voice dissolves into nature, it can transcend

reality, overcome the earth-bound condition of the living world and embrace spatial and temporal perpetuity. This supernatural post-Romantic and modernist approach to reality can also be perceived as the acting force of the consciousness of the poet identified as an individual being capable of experiencing the sublime through aesthetical experiences.

The hypothesis whether any transtextual relation between Feng Zhi's lyrical production and Heidegger's philosophical conclusions exist and can be proved is not relevant to the end of this study. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that Heidegger did also theorise in his most acclaimed book, *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*, 1927), a philosophy where time is said to only belong to human beings, or better to the 'human existence'.¹³⁸

In line with this thought, the objects that recur in Feng Zhi's sonnets are not affected by time. Only living and moving beings show the signs of age, whereas other living natural elements, such as trees, flowers and plants, are eulogised for their perpetual state of eternity despite their so-much acclaimed life cycle, which is still governed by the incumbent presence and aging power of time. In fact, according to Heidegger, only 'human beings' are temporal.

It seems that Feng Zhi followed the Kantian tradition enclosed in the philosophical writing *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781). In fact, as one can read from Kant's book, still considered as one of the most influential philosophical works, philosophy cannot really assert the state and nature of things, as

¹³⁸ The German word employed by the philosopher to express this notion is *Dasein*, a term that is not commonly translated into English but that can be broadly understood as 'being-there'. It is important to note here that the definition of the word *Dasein* given by Heidegger does not reflect the actual meaning of the term today. In fact, the modern definition of the word denotes a notion of existence that can be extended to anything. Such restriction in the definition of the term could be explained by the assertion of Heidegger that only human beings are affected by time as these can manifest and experience their 'presence' [*Anwesenheit*]: "Beings are grasped in their being as "presence"; that is to say, they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time, the *present*."

See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. in English by Joan Stambaugh, New York, State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 24.

only human beings can enjoy a glimpse of the world in their limited human way. Kant suggests that human beings cannot really have a true understanding of things that are found beyond the arrangements of human existence. As Feng Zhi concludes in his last tercet of sonnet 19, man is limited to his short earth-bound span of age and can only perceive the course of time:

“We only sense the course of time,
And not the limited time of human age.”¹³⁹

Feng Zhi remains faithful to this Kantian tradition in Western thought, as he is unable to tell us anything about the causal relationship between the moth and its fluttering movements towards the flames or between the snake and its moulted skin. In fact, in his eulogy to Goethe in sonnet 13, Feng Zhi praises the wisdom of the German poet by also claiming that all living beings in the world benefit from his truthful words full of wisdom that unveil the disguised sense of life:

“All living creatures benefit from your words,
Revealing the true sense of life: “die and become”.¹⁴⁰

Feng Zhi’s sonnets, as well as the Kantian tradition, focus on the human experience of temporality, on the discovery and rediscovery of things encountered in the world of man:

“So many things are close to us
That yearn to be rediscovered.”¹⁴¹

Kant’s apparent influence on the perception of time and being on the poetry of Feng Zhi can also just be exemplified by the transcendental quality of human life and time as it is experienced by the lyrical voice of the Chinese verses. Feng Zhi uses the metaphor of familiar and unknown paths along the plains and among the trees in thick forests as elusive goal – when reaching his goal, the forest clears up and the lyrical voice finds illumination or understanding. This illumination is seen as a glimpse of one’s own dwelling place between the trees after the way was lost:

¹³⁹ Concluding tercet of sonnet 19.

¹⁴⁰ Concluding tercet of sonnet 13.

¹⁴¹ Closing lines of the first tercet in sonnet 26.

“Only unwittingly through the trees
We suddenly glimpse our home,”¹⁴²

The relationship between human existence and time can be completed with a second problematic element: space. In Feng Zhi’s verses, there is never any conflict between space and time. Nevertheless, space needs to be defined in terms of how it is found in the environment. It is common understanding that time changes space, as in the events unfolded in history do change the environment in which man lives. Space is, therefore, defined as man encounters it. Everything in nature has its own place and its own meaning. It is within this found space that Feng Zhi’s lyrical self attempts to move and merge into far-other-reaching dimensions.

In line with Kant’s teaching on the notion of existence, Feng Zhi seems to be elaborating a new arena of spatial and temporal dimensions. Kant defines all that comes prior to experience as *a priori*. According to Kant, since one does not discover space and time through life experiences, both space and time are regarded as *a priori*. For many philosophers, anything humans know before life experience can be regarded as *a priori*.¹⁴³ Similar to this assertion of space and time, the narrator of the sonnets shows “knowledge”, on Kant’s terms, of things that occurred much before experience could ever occur:

“Here, myriads of years ago
Everywhere, it seems
Our lives already existed;”¹⁴⁴

The demystification of space and time does not only shed lights upon past experiences but also on the knowledge and being of future phenomena:

“A mountain village ten miles away,

¹⁴² Concluding lines of the second quatrain in sonnet 26.

¹⁴³ Contrary to this notion, Heidegger’s theorisation of phenomenology assumes that *a priori* does not refer to what humans ‘know’ before experiences occurs, but rather what it “is” before experiences: “the subjective of being-in-the-world, which has nothing to do with a determinate character restricted beforehand to a worldless subject. See Harmann, *Heidegger Explained*, p.107.

¹⁴⁴ Opening lines of the first quatrain in sonnet 24.

A market place twenty miles away,
Do they still exist?
Mountains and rivers of ten years ago,
Illusions of twenty years ago,”¹⁴⁵

One can also find traces of this consideration in the concept of existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, especially when he coins the most famous catchphrase in modern philosophy: “existence before essence”.¹⁴⁶ According to existentialists, the word “existence” refers to the actual human reality of experience. On the other hand, the word “essence” refers to all the qualities one deems to be essential to man, such as the human nature. In simple words, there cannot be man if there is not a prior element of human nature. The existence of man, in fact, as Feng Zhi puts it in sonnet 24, was destined or “chanted” according to some plans and wills that no one will ever be able to know long time before the beginning:

“Before we were born
A singing voice already
From the changing sky,
From the green grass, the pine trees
Chanted our destiny.”¹⁴⁷

Thus, in line with what theorised Sartre, human existence precedes essence.

Pivotal feature of human existence and its relationship with space and time is ‘transcendence’. The human being does not stand idle in front of the phenomena that he observes; on the other hand, he attempts to rise higher and receive a holistic understanding of them. One main characteristic of transcendence, as it can be perceived from Feng Zhi’s poetic voice, is freedom. It seems that Feng Zhi’s depicted world has man as a being capable of moving and escaping from the world to some extent. It is only through distance that it is possible to establish the detachment to and from things. As Feng Zhi writes in sonnet 9, the soul of a soldier transcends through space and time reaching the skies and becoming free:

¹⁴⁵ Lines from the first octave in sonnet 22.

¹⁴⁶ See James L. Christian, *Philosophy: An Introduction to the Art of Wondering*, Boston, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2006, p.246.

¹⁴⁷ Closing lines of the octave in sonnet 24.

“But, of this fate you cannot complain,
You have surpassed them, and they cannot
Hold your flight, your infinity.”¹⁴⁸

Moreover, one does also find the impact brought by new global technology in Feng Zhi’s sonnets when it comes to distance. In fact, while feelings of nostalgia and sadness engulf the lyrical subject in sonnet 8 when thinking of the past and the remote times when man dreamt of reaching the sky and the stars, that same distance that man always saw as infinite and unreachable is broken by the advent of global technology:

“An ancient dream, like an old man
Awaiting the best descendants...
Today, men fly towards the stars,
Yet, can not forget this confused world.”¹⁴⁹

In sonnet 12, a eulogy to the Tang dynasty poet Du Fu, Feng Zhi praises the lyrical activity of the so-much admired poet despite the hardship of poverty and life. Feng Zhi laments the death of heroic warriors and uses the metaphor of stars falling, or sinking in while disappearing, on the horizon:

“Heroic warriors die on battlefields,
On the horizon is the fall of the stars,”¹⁵⁰

The spirit of heroic warriors dying on their courageous mission in the battlefield transcends human existence, space and time while vanishing on the horizon, the remote line where time and space merge together.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Concluding tercet in sonnet 9.

¹⁴⁹ Second quatrain in sonnet 8.

¹⁵⁰ Opening line of the second quatrain in sonnet 12.

¹⁵¹ Although not relevant to the purpose of this study, worth noticing is Heidegger’s similar neologism of *Ent-fernung* for temporal and spatial distance. The latter, contrary to the already existing non-hyphenated word *Entfernung* (‘distance’ or range), was coined by the German philosopher in his work *Being and Time*. The translation of the German term offered by Macquarrie and Robinson, ‘de-severance’, appears to be the closest to the original meaning conveyed in German by Heidegger. In fact, what Heidegger attempts to convey through this neologism is the perception of that distance which is experienced between man and a far-away object as well as its dissolving state of farness.

It is possible to claim that things around man are ‘far yet so close’. This is also the perception of distance evoked in some of Feng Zhi’s sonnets: the idea of farness, especially when yearning and glimpsing one’s dwelling place, hence a familiar object that is emotionally attached to spirit of the self, suddenly becomes close. It is also essential to notice that the place at a given distance is not only brought closer to man’s spirit and remembrance, but it also acquires a certain nearness by featuring into the being’s awareness. Moreover, once a specific object is found at a given distance, it also obtains a sensorial perception of orientation or alignment. In fact, the moment when the lyrical persona of Feng Zhi’s sonnet 26 loses his way and is overwhelmed by agitation and fear, the familiar place (我们住的地方 *wome zhude difang*) is glimpsed among the trees and is seen as “a new island appearing on the horizon”.¹⁵² The idea of spotting a new island on the horizon can be regarded as the result of directional orientation, especially when the focus is directed on this object at a distance. The poet almost uses nautical jargon in order to emphasise the directionality of the object glimpsed, appearing like a new island.

Temporal ‘anticipation’ is another characteristic of time for the poetic voice of Feng Zhi: present and past merge into one temporal line of unfolding events that seem to be in close relationship. A vivid example of this can be seen in the opening sonnet of the collection:

“Our existence, at this last moment,
Resembles the very first embrace”¹⁵³

Decisively stronger than this is the anticipation of unexpected wonders that occur along never-ending years and take the shape of a comet:

“We prepare ourselves to deeply receive
Those unexpected wonders,

Heidegger stresses the direct and indirect distance that is found between the human existence and anything surrounding him.

¹⁵² Opening line of sestet in sonnet 26.

¹⁵³ Opening lines of the second quatrain in sonnet 1.

Amidst endless years suddenly appears
A comet and a rushing wind swiftly blowing.”¹⁵⁴

Unexpected events are somehow authentic anticipations of past experiences. It is not up to man to discern how and when these unexpected wonders occur; however, it is possible to understand their anticipating nature that unfolds over space and time. The successive unfolding of past experiences and the authentic way in which human existence interacts with the past takes the form of recurrence. In other words, human existence happens and historicises by gaining instances of existence that repeat themselves over time. In his sonnets, Feng Zhi offers his reader both versions of temporal kinds: sonnet 8 makes an explicit reference to the awaiting of future generations and descendants who can meet the persona’s expectations. In fact, Feng Zhi uses the verb 期待 *qidai* to express the concept ‘awaiting’:

“An ancient dream, like an old man
Awaiting the best descendants...”¹⁵⁵

One can also find in Feng Zhi’s verses a similar idea of fear to that of Aristotle. The Greek philosopher theorised fear as an ontological problem and rooted its fundamental source in the very nature of ‘aesthetic fear’. In fact, fear originates “from the belief that we are threatened, a belief that we cannot hold while imagining fictional perils.”¹⁵⁶

What results fearsome in its fearsome character in Feng Zhi’s sonnets is the level of despair and disorientation that increases as one loses his way and does not walk on paths that have already been beaten:

“Walking on a new one brings agitation,
Fear increases as we go farther, as we lose our way,”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ First quatrain of sonnet 1.

¹⁵⁵ Opening lines of the second quatrain in sonnet 8.

¹⁵⁶ Dana LaCourse Munteanu, *Tragic Pathos: Pity and Fear in Greek Philosophy and Tragedy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.16.

¹⁵⁷ Opening lines of the second quatrain in sonnet 26.

The key element to the understanding of transcendence and its space-time dimension being projected back and forth within the surrounding environment of the lyrical persona is the word metaphysics. The notion of metaphysics in this context keeps a constant and faithful connotation with its Greek origin. In fact, we should be looking at the ‘physics’ part of the term, which in Greek means ‘nature’ [φύσις - *physis*]. A very broad and literal translation of the term ‘metaphysics’ would hence be ‘after-nature’, where ‘after’ also denotes the concept of ‘beyond’, thus, implying the idea of transpassing nature or the natural boundaries. This notion becomes particularly crucial to the understanding and appreciation of Feng Zhi’s later lyrical production and, more predominantly, the *Sonnets*.

2.1 Space and Time through the Romantic Imagination

Many poets across centuries and nations worldwide have directly or indirectly dealt with the notion of space and time in poetry. Some even went farther by theorising metaphysical attempts that merge the two elements into one whole spatial and temporal dimension and synaesthesia. The characteristic features of the European Romantic ideology and typical escapist yearning for transcendence from spatiality and temporality may exemplify some of the references to space and time found in Feng Zhi's works, notably the *Sonnets*.

Before examining the application and theorisation of spatial and temporal elements in Feng Zhi's works and the sonnets, it is necessary to shed some light on the perception of space and time and their transcendental experimentation through the use of imagination in the poetry of some European Romantic lyricists. A second and more pertinent study will then analyse the transcendental concept of imagination in the works that most exerted direct influence on the sensitivity and lyrical production of Feng Zhi: the poetry of the Romantic Novalis, the *Sturm und Drang* and Weimar Classicism's exponent Goethe, and the writings of Rilke.

When it comes to the British context, for instance, it is possible to find some of the earliest assertions on the perception of space and time relevant to the development and transtextual analysis of this study. In fact, British barrister and writer Thomas Jefferson Hogg (1792-1862) wrote of his friend Shelley that the poet had no idea of time and space: "No human being, no poet was ever less punctual, he had no perception, no notion of time", and added that this was to be expected since "a divine nature lies not in time but in eternity".¹⁵⁸ British Romantic poet John Keats wrote in a letter to his brother Tom that there is "no such thing as time and space".¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Shelley* in Humbert Wolfe (ed.), *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley as comprised in The Life of Shelley by Thomas Jefferson Hogg, The Recollections of Shelley and Byron by Edward John Trelawny, Memoirs of Shelley by Thomas Love Peacock* Vol. 2, London, J. M. Dent, 1933, p.73.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Gittings (ed.), *John Keats Selected Letters*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 95.

In fact, one of the central claims brought forward by Jerome McGann in his work *The Romantic Ideology*, Romanticism is summarised as an ideological construct through which historicity is rejected and replaced by a myth that evokes an aesthetic transcendence of time.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, McGann's readings of Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode* and *Tintern Abbey* focus on the poetical manner in which the Romantic poet makes history disappear: "The poet annihilates its history, biographical and socio-historical alike, and replaces these particulars with a record of pure consciousness."¹⁶¹ This stance is typical of the European Romanticism: the poet goes beyond the boundaries of the realm of immediate experience and that, as particularly seen in one of Feng Zhi's sonnets, poetry may enable a form of liberation from the historical constraints of space and time, thus transcending "the conflicts and transience of this time and that place".¹⁶²

It is worth noting that the Romantics could conceive time and history as obstacles to the complete vision of the cosmic unity and harmony they longed to attain through poetry. To this claim, however, one other element redeems the impermanent and evanescent from decay: the temporality and power of the lyrical creation – the poem. In his work *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley claims that "poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them, or in language or in form, sends them forth among mankind, bearing sweet news of kindred joy to those with whom their sisters abide - abide, because there is no portal of expression from the caverns of the spirit which they inhabit into the universe of things."¹⁶³ Poetry, so to speak, redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.

The Romantic notion of transcendence and freedom from the real world of space and time is certainly a legacy of German Romanticism, which Feng Zhi

¹⁶⁰ See Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. 133.

¹⁶¹ McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 90.

¹⁶² McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 70.

¹⁶³ Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neil (eds.) *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, Oxford World's Classics Series, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 698.

researched on giving an authoritative contribution through his doctoral thesis, as well as characteristic feature of the Victorian definition of the Romantic poet. In fact, C. H. Herford wrote in his work *The Age of Wordsworth* of the Romantic as the ‘transcendent’ and the ‘lyrical’ that in “apparently detaching us from the real world [...] seems to restore us to the reality at a higher point – to emancipate us from the ‘prison of the actual; by giving us spiritual rights in a universe of the mind, exempt from the limitations of matter, and time, and space’”.¹⁶⁴

This understanding was very much in line with the perception gained by the reading of Wordsworth’s work *The Excursion*, a poem that offered spiritual comfort through its direction towards impersonality, death and infinity transcending the personal perceptions of space and time. The poem summarises the fatality and change of human time and as Eugene L. Stelzig claimed, “mutability is not only a recurrent complex of feeling but also a normative element”¹⁶⁵ in Wordsworth’s poetry, and although the grey-haired Wanderer utters a dramatic monologue on change, it also implies a harmonised tragic regret with the acceptance of the inevitable:

"So fails, so languishes, grows dim, and dies,"
The grey-haired Wanderer pensively exclaimed,
"All that this world is proud of. From their spheres
The stars of human glory are cast down;
Perish the roses and the flowers of kings,
Princes, and emperors, and the crowns and palms
Of all the mighty, withered and consumed!
[...]"¹⁶⁶

In his essay ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality’, Paul De Man argues for the rediscovery of allegory in Romanticism, as it is through a form of allegory, which has time as central element, that an ‘authentic temporal destiny’ is ultimately revealed. De Man’s reading of Wordsworth’s work ‘A slumber did my spirit seal’ unveils the poem as an

¹⁶⁴ Herford, *The Age of Wordsworth*, London, George Bell, 1897, as cited in Mark Kipperman, “Absorbing a Revolution: Shelley Becomes a Romantic, 1889-1903”, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 47. 2 (September 1992), pp. 187-211, p. 205.

¹⁶⁵ Eugene L. Stelzig, “Mutability, Ageing and Permanence in Wordsworth’s Later Poetry”, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 19. 4 (1974), pp. 623-644, p. 628.

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Hutchinson (ed.) *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 976-88.

expression of poetic temporality that brings irony to the stance of wisdom so that the poem appears to be “written from the point of view of a unified self that fully recognises a past condition as one of error and stands in a present that, however, painful, sees things as they actually are”.¹⁶⁷

Critics, such as Abrams and Wasserman, considered Coleridge as the great synthesiser taking his strategy as the authentic pattern of Romantic imagery. Through his lyrical work, Coleridge did consider timelessness as a characteristic of the creative mind. Moreover, K. M. Wheeler has also claimed that Coleridge’s notion of a symbol clearly conveys the poet’s belief in the importance of the “freedom from particular time or space in imaginative discourse”.¹⁶⁸

Another very intriguing instance of time-space transcendence through the use of imagination can be found in Coleridge’s poem *The Heolian Harp*. It is very interesting to notice how the temporal element of noon, as Wheeler also points out, is evoked at the midpoint of the poem, thus suggesting that the poem may be evolving along an established route that is marked by space and time:

And thus, my love! As on the midway slope
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
Whilst through my half-closed eyelids I behold
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
And tranquil muse upon tranquility [...]¹⁶⁹

The construction of the poem and positioning of temporal elements along the scene adds a typified dimension to the poem creating a form of contrast between time and space.

Furthermore, Shelley’s lyrical composition and treatment of temporality in *Adonais* may also be regarded as an example of a similar creative tension between transcendence and reliance. Very similar to Feng Zhi’s sonnet, Shelley’s imagination

¹⁶⁷ Paul De Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality” in *Blindness and Insight*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. 197.

¹⁶⁸ Kathleen M. Wheeler, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge’s Poetry*, London, Heinemann, 1981, p. 53.

¹⁶⁹ Ernest H. Coleridge (ed.), *Coleridge: Poetical Works*, Oxford, Oxford University press, 1969, pp. 34-8.

in his poem attempts to mutate historical circumstances into a mythology according to which Adonais achieves a state of being that appears to transcend his earth-bound condition of temporality. Shelley depicts a principle of permanence and metaphysical state that goes beyond the real world:

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.¹⁷⁰

Shelley's concept of 'eternity' depends on the overcoming of a temporal dynamic, yet the elegy seems to dramatise the impossibility of man to evade time:

And thou, sad Hour, selected from all years
To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure compeers,
And teach me thine own sorrow, say: with me
Died Adonais; till the Future dares
Forget the past, his fate and fame shall be
An echo and light unto eternity!¹⁷¹

According to Mark Sandy, the 'sad Hour' does not only refer to Adonais's death but it also implies the 'historical recognition' that affects the poet's reputation. Sandy suggests that *Adonais* stresses how Shelley's depiction of a poet's desire to escape from the world and reach the transhistorical realm merges with his acknowledgement of man's need to be remembered and recognised.¹⁷²

In his essay 'Timelessness and Romanticism', Georges Poulet argued on the Romantics' apprehension of the state of timelessness as perceived in their own world and the way in which they attempted to bring 'eternity' into time in their poetry. In Poulet's terms, the poetry of the Romantics was not only centred around an ideal world or an abstract experience, but they rather aimed at expressing "their own concrete experiences, their own immediate realities, and to reflect in their poetry not the fixed splendour of God's eternity but their own personal confused apprehension,

¹⁷⁰ Coleridge, *Coleridge: Poetical Works*, pp. 460-4.

¹⁷¹ Leader and O'Neil, *Percy Bysshe Shelley*, pp. 4-9.

¹⁷² See Mark Sandy, "Stormy Visions: Shelley's Re-Invention of Myth, Memory and Identity in *Adonais*", *Keats-Shelley Review* 14, 2000, pp. 84-94, pp. 85-6.

in the here and now”. In fact, as Poulet adds, the Romantics aimed at describing the immense variety of district temporal experiences which they could feel and observe in themselves.”¹⁷³

With regards to the theme of space and time and the imaginative perception in their sonnets of Feng Zhi, it is possible to establish transtextual links with the works and philosophical elaborations of Novalis. In his doctoral thesis on the poetry of Novalis, in fact, among the themes that Feng Zhi analysed is the demystifying perception of nature, the close and indispensable relationship between the inner self and the outer world, and the revealing essence of space and time.

According to Feng Zhi, the writings and poetry of Novalis resemble a world where all boundaries are blurred, all ends are connected and all opposites are reconciled. What really the German poet about nature was *das große Zugleich* [‘the great simultaneity’], thus, the simultaneous occurrence of natural phenomena in the world: what is foreign is known at the same time, and what is far is simultaneously close.¹⁷⁴

According to Feng Zhi, all boundaries and limits disappear in space leaving no distinction between far away and close, high and low, finite and infinite. As Feng Zhi continues, enthusiastic about his first love to Mathilden, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, an almost fictional Middle High German lyric poet, says: “all distances are so close to me, and the rich landscape is to me just like inner phantasy.”¹⁷⁵

In his dissertation, Feng Zhi also attempts to give an explanation of Novalis’s concept of space-time relationship. In fact, for the Chinese poet, “time and space appear simultaneously and behave relatively: they are one being like subject and object. Space is permanent time while time is flowing space.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Georges Poulet, “Timelessness and Romanticism” in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 15.1, 1954, pp.3-22, p.7.

¹⁷⁴ See Tscheng-Dsche Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist als Stilprinzip in Novalis’ Dichtung”, Doctoral Dissertation, Heidelberg University, 1935, p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ “Jene Fernen sind mir so nah, und die reiche Landschaft ist mir wie eine innere Phantasie” in Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, 1935, p. 6.

¹⁷⁶ Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p.7.

From his dissertation, it is also possible to understand that the modern Chinese writer also attempts to give a re-dimensional structure of space having based on the concept that Novalis gives about nature and the veil of Sais. In fact, according to Feng Zhi, in Novalis's work *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (*The Novice of Sais*), written in 1798 but published by Friedrich Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck in 1802, is contained the main revealing theme of nature and its fundamental relation to man: "Access to nature is nothing else than the way to the self."¹⁷⁷

As Feng Zhi arguments, for Novalis, nature is not objective, nor is it what can be researched by scientists or described and seen from the eyes of poets like Goethe, but it is transcendental.

Nature is not only what can be perceived as such in scientific terms but a being-in-the-word. This represents the same being that interacts and interchanges with the self, and produces possibilities for personal aesthetic experiences within a reality that is glimpsed and perceived by the lyrical subject.

Feng Zhi's interpretation and further exemplification of the problem of reality is realised through a pre-modernist approach, which centres on the sensorial perceptions gained by the poetic self through aesthetic experiences, and an adaptation of former ontological deductions typical of the Romantic age. Feng Zhi's post-Romantic stance seems to coincide with the same theorisations on the theme of reality and nature of Novalis as discussed in his dissertation. In fact, the Chinese writer contrasts Goethe's ideas of reality with those of Novalis, who through his very well-known assertion arguments on the total 'romanticisation' of the world:

"The world must be romanticised. In this way one discovers once more its original sense. To romanticise is nothing other than a qualitative potentiation [*Potenzierung*]. Through this operation, the lower self is identified with a better 'self'. Just as we, ourselves are such a qualitative potentiation. This operation is still completely unknown. Since I give to the commonplace a higher sense, to the everyday a secret

¹⁷⁷ Feng, "Die Analogie von Natur und Geist", p.9.

insight, to the known the worthiness of the unknown, to the finite an infinite appearance, in this way I romanticise it.”¹⁷⁸

As Feng Zhi also explains, the “unknown, mystic, infinite world is the quintessence of nature, for which Novalis much longs [*Sehnsucht*]”¹⁷⁹ It is interesting to note that this is exactly what he tries to convey through his sonnets, that nature, in its quintessence and sublime manifestation is perceived by the lyrical self through images of the unknown, mysticism, and ultimately in the infinite.

Feng Zhi’s mysticism and longing for infinity through the sublime quality of nature vividly transpire in sonnet 3, which the poet dedicates to the eucalyptus tree. Through an apostrophe addressed to the tree, the poet commemorates the holiness of nature by also declaring to be guided by the magnificence of the plant. In the tercet of the sonnet, the lyrical subject wishes the tree to be “eternal” and expresses his desire to dissolve in the soil under its roots and exist forever:

“You are my guide:
May you be eternal, as I wish to gradually
Decay for the soil under your roots.”

Essential to the demystification of the poem is the philosophical exemplification of nature proposed by Novalis, who through his *Sehnsucht* and admiration for nature as whole unveils the “operation” that enables the identification of the lower self with a “better self”.

Feng Zhi’s elaboration of the concept of infinity is also represented in the absence of public clamour. Unspoken or silent beings can also manifest their infinite quality, hence, their sublime. In sonnet 10, for instance, Feng Zhi eulogises the intellectual achievements of Chinese writer and pedagogist Cai Yuanpei. Feng Zhi claims that his friend Cai Yuanpei might not have been recognised by the masses for his attainments and that because of this, his name might be confused or just collected with other names that did not make any striking difference to the acclaimed world.

¹⁷⁸ Translated from Novalis’s *Fragmente* “Die Welt muss romantisch werden” [the world must become romantic] (Chapter 24), offered by Projekt Gutenberg-DE, <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/fragmente-6618/24> . Accessed 10 February 2017.

¹⁷⁹ Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 10.

However, what Feng Zhi attempts to convey through his short lines is that a sensitive poet like him could still catch the decisive glimpse of sublime in his nature that even equals him with the morning star and the Vesper. In fact, Feng Zhi argues that Cai Yuanpei's fame might have 'always' been maintained secret or simply unvoiced. Nonetheless, his romanticised sublime still pervades and is particularly visible as the sun rises and sets:

“[...] you forever
Maintained secret your splendour.
We can see you only at dawn and dusk:
The morning star and the Vesper,
[...]”¹⁸⁰

Moreover, the poem advances the first stage of elaboration of another point that characterised the romantic ideology as brought forward by Schlegel and further rationalized by Novalis: the completion of the 'self' expressed through clarity and the image of 'light' as a medium of return into oneself. The light and its manifestation in space have two central connotative meanings for the Romantic poetry, and both seem to also apply for the appreciation of Feng Zhi's lyrical production.

The first denotation regards the concrete description of the movement of light within the medium of reflection. This is what might have led Novalis to the formulation of one of the most acclaimed fragments of his studies: the potentiation of the romanticisation of the world. It is the same proclaimed notion of medium [*Medialität*] of the absolute combined with unity that he theorised in mathematical terms: reflection is a never-ending process that enables the true 'self-penetration' of the spirit in nature, in other words, the movement of that spirit that pervades nature as if it were found completely at the other side. Through this process, one can assume the possibility of seeing into nature where more of himself can be unveiled. In opposition to Fichte's system, which mainly refers to nature as the 'self', Novalis's theorisation of nature becomes the basis of inner revelation. This creates the philosophical ground upon which the famous line of the novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* is based: "Someone arrived there — who lifted the veil of the Goddess at Sais.

¹⁸⁰ Lines from the octave in sonnet 10.

— But what did he see? He saw — the wonder of wonders — himself.”¹⁸¹ The self-projection is intended by Novalis in terms of self-penetration, as the own image is reflected upon nature and then mirrored back into the self.

Schlegel had also used the image of light concerning the medium of the absolute of nature in order to express himself with complete clarity: “The idea of the ‘I’... is to be regarded... as the inner light of all ideas. All ideas are only the refracted colour images of this inner light. In every idea the ‘I’ is the hidden light.”¹⁸²

The experimentation of Novalis’s notion of ‘self-penetration’ can be seen in a few of Feng Zhi’s poems, beginning with sonnet 17. In this particular sonnet, the paths of the plains that Feng Zhi makes frequent reference to become a reflection of the inner ‘self’. The numerous intertwined paths of the plains are those in front of which the self mirrors his own nature. There is a certain emotional attachment to these paths that is particularly stressed by the word ‘love’ (最爱 *zui ai*) and staring (看 *kan*) to imply a specific and possibly unconscious orientation towards the focal point of reflection:

“You say, in the open plains you love to stare
Are strips of paths full of life,
Steps of countless passers without a name
Who set foot on these lively roads.
In the open plains of our soul
Are also countless winding paths”¹⁸³

A further representation of this self-reflection is clearly depicted in sonnet 18. The lyrical subject, finding himself with a companion inside of an unknown room, contemplates the far-stretching plain outside the window and suddenly invites his lover to close her eyes and imagine upon the countryside outside. This romantic act of imagination is what serves the lyrical self to transcend and find their self-

¹⁸¹ “*Einem gelang es – er hob den Schleier der Göttin zu Sais – Aber was sah er? Er sah – Wunder des Wunders – sich selbst.*” Translated from Novalis’s *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, but quoted from Feng, “Die Analogie von Natur und Geist”, p. 10.

¹⁸² Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926*, Cambridge (Mass.) and London, Harvard University Press, 1996, p.133.

¹⁸³ Lines of the octave in sonnet 17.

penetrating reflection in nature. This transcendental and luminous reflection is then mirrored inside their lives:

“Close your eyes! Let that this intimate night
And unknown place weave inside our chests:
Our lives are like that open plain outside the window”¹⁸⁴

Intimacy is what differs the night from any other parts of the day and what will contribute to the completion of transcendence.

The second exemplification of the notion of the luminous ray regards light as a phenomenon that regulates time and that brings into relation all sorts of spheres, which make the poem a place of transition – a Romantic space in which human existence and consciousness are revealed into something larger and sublime. An experimentation of this notion features in sonnet 23 which Feng Zhi possibly composed after being inspired by the birth of a few puppies.

“Sunlight has shone over the walls,
I saw your mother
Holding and taking you to the sunlight,
So letting your whole bodies
Feel the warmth of light for the first time,
The sun has set, she’s taken you back.
You cannot remember,
But this first time experience
Will blend into your future sounds of bark,
And you will bring light again in the nights.”¹⁸⁵

A first reading of the poem arises questions about the nature of the light that will blend into the future sounds of the puppies’ bark. However, taking Novalis’s concept of self-penetration and Schlegel’s assertion of light into account enables a more analytical interpretation of the poem. The image of the puppies could serve as a metaphor of the first aesthetic experience of sunlight. Light is said to sink into the body of the puppies in the form of warmth and then be re-projected into the form of sound into space “bringing light again in the nights”.

¹⁸⁴ First tercet in sonnet 18.

¹⁸⁵ Lines of the second quatrain and sestet in sonnet 23.

Feng Zhi's poetry attempts to touch and connect all areas of experience, somehow fulfilling Schlegel's claim that "Romantic poesy is a universal and progressive poetry", hence, giving its poetry a sense of wholeness. This sense of totality is also particularly perceived when dealing with temporal dimensions. Feng Zhi's deep knowledge of Novalis's poetry affected his lyrical thinking to the extent of producing an experimental type of poetry that not only shadowed the teaching of the German writer but also contributed, to a certain extent, to amplify the mystification of Romantic writings. Undoubtedly inspired by Novalis's composition *Hymnen an die Nacht*, some of Feng's sonnets also play around the turn of daylight and mystification of the night. The reader is often transported from the familiar and awareness into the unknown of the night world.

Time transition between day and night occurs and the voice of the poem is what conventionally leads the temporal shift. Light is what predominantly permits the distinction between day and night in the poems and what leads the lyrical subject to undergo aesthetic experiences of the unfathomable world.

2.2 Transcendence through imagination: The other side of Reality

One of the most remarkable literary accomplishments in Feng Zhi's poetry, and especially in the sonnets, is the prevailing use of imagination as a means to surpass the known world of man and reality.

The distinctive use of Feng Zhi's romantic literary imagination enables the poet to experiment lyrical devices that also ingeniously fit in the patterns of modernist aesthetic thought. For the selection and elaboration of themes as well as the highly philosophical stance that the poet takes towards nature and the sublime, Feng Zhi can easily be referred to as a post-Romantic author. However, Feng Zhi's lyrical production also gives space to a more subtle ideological position and skilful experimentation of modern themes, such as the aesthetic experience gained by interpersonal relationships and the constant attempt of the lyrical self to reconcile with the outside world. Such philosophical and literary stance marks the poetic production of the Chinese author as a promising example of some of the earliest experimentations in Chinese literature of modernist composition.

The use of imagination as a literary device finds its deep roots not only in Chinese tradition but also in Western philosophy and culture.

In fact, the idea of 'imagination, despite being seen as an aberrant function of the mind that is subservient to the powers of reason and order, was already associated with the power and value of art since the time of Aristotle. Subsequently, the idealised notion of human imagination was even placed over the power of reason as the most sublime form of human expression by the Romantic poets in Europe during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century.

The British Romantic poet Percy Shelley was one of the first thinkers to put down a brief yet decisive theorisation and fundamental notion of the power of imagination. In Shelley's terms, "reason is to imagination as the instrument is to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance." The English poet described the core essence of literature as a creative endeavour and as the most basic expression of imagination.

In Romantic literature and philosophy, the sphere and power of imagination is said to embrace a whole universe that can be broadly divided into two major realms: that which is close to the self, the ‘subject’, and that which can be identified as the imagined dimension of things that exists within the range of experiences and thoughts of the self. According to the Romantics, this division is evenly found within the mind of the self. For idealist philosophers, such as J. G. Fichte, the self and its sphere represent the subject and its object, which he calls the ‘ego’ (*Ich*) and the ‘non-ego’ (*Nicht-Ich*). According to Romantic poets and artists, the subjective world is ultimately divided into “the creator and the world that he or she creates.”¹⁸⁶

The implied concept of distance that one finds in the early writings and sonnets of the modern Chinese poet can be identified as the transcendental span that is required to reach the other side of reality and of the earthly world. It serves to connect the depicted natural scenes, created both in the mind of the perceiving subject and in the lines of the sonnets, with the interiority of the artist – the ultimate connection that is longed to be established between the divided realms of the universe: the self and the proper outside world. Well-defined and tangible natural objects, such as mountains, water, plains and pathways figuratively embody the inner unquenchable spiritual striving of the artist (*Sehnsucht*).

In line with the poetry of the first generation of German or English Romantics, Feng Zhi seemingly found imaginative inspiration in the natural world: the period of poetic silence finally elapsed during his stay in Kunming. The German pre-Romantic poet Novalis as well as Friedrich Schlegel had elaborated a refined approach and idea of the natural realm that enabled them to establish an idealist Fichtean freedom of the subject united with Spinozistic holism. What became particularly appealing to the Romantics was Fichte’s notion of the confrontation of the limited ego with the striving force of the non-ego. This inner conflict for creative freedom is what led many poets to the experience and unquenchable need for transcendence. In fact, as Schlegel and Novalis theorised, the ultimate self is found in a finite and limited form that constantly makes it strive for a state of freedom that is impossible to attain. The

¹⁸⁶ Brad Prager, *Aesthetic Vision and German Romanticism: Writing Images*, Rochester, Camden House, 2007, p. 1.

absolute self is infinite, hence, unachievable. Indeed, if such a state of absoluteness and infinity were to be reached, then it would no longer be the 'ideal' or 'infinite'. The sensitive poet is driven towards this unconceivable state of infinity – a sense of longing (*sehnen*) that generates feeling.

In Fichtean terms of moral idealism, the finite self's search for its infinite counterpart becomes an aesthetical ideal in which the lyricist attempts to recognise a glimpse of the infinite in some finite forms. To this point, the gap between the ego and the non-ego is filled with an aesthetic transcendence through art. Fichte's concept inspired the Romantics and particularly Schlegel and Novalis, the latter being credited with the creation of a philosophy of poetry centred on Fichte's writings.

Among the most significant features that resulted from the adaptation of idealist thought and the incorporation of Romantic elements in the poetry of Novalis, and then consequently in the writings of Feng Zhi, is the new inner division produced when the self of the lyrical subject meets the outside world. The new systematised distinctions brought forward by the Romantics can be seen as the fruit of a new reception of idealist thought. Similar to this rhetoric is found Hölderlin's theorisation of unity and division, which separates self-consciousness from 'being' (*Sein*). Self-consciousness represents the ego or the conscious 'I' that is able to make decisions and is essentially separated from the world; and as Hölderlin claims, one must not also confuse 'being' with 'identity'.

It is also worth noticing that what the Romantics define as the inner representation viewed through the mind's eye is, as idealist writers contended, an illusion: a personal and subjective imaginative vision of the outside world that is perceived by the mind of the subject. The individual glimpse of the outside world, or the universe as a whole, is systematically represented through the perceiving eyes of the lyrical subject and becomes the comforting medium of the idealist writer. From a Romantic point of view, in fact, what is generally seen as perception or mere vision in common jargon reveals much more than the eye can meet. Visual perception became a key interest for early Romantic thinkers as Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel. Their philosophical effects seem to have been deeply permeated into the aesthetic

principles of Feng Zhi, whose idealist production appears to be comparable to the perception of poetic imagery theorised by early German idealist philosophers such as Fichte.

The imaginative activity of the poet and the aesthetic perception received from the outside world gains precious relevance for the lyrical subject. The state of sadness, almost translated into physical pain, which pervades the lines of Feng Zhi's poems, for instance, seems to be alleviated by the power of imagination. His earthbound condition of sorrows, which belongs to the mortal world and marked by transience, longs to unite with the vastness of the plain, reaching nature, joy and immortality.

Similarly to creativity, imagination is significantly and traditionally defined in opposition to rationality. This claim might be particularly applicable when considering the strong antagonism and contrast with the reason, reality and truth that characterised the era signed by the Enlightenment thought and movement. As Roger Scruton claims in his entry on 'Imagination' in *A Companion to Aesthetics*, "imagination does not aim at truth, as belief aims at truth".¹⁸⁷ Very similar to this assertion is also Dabney Townsend's argumentation in *An Introduction to Aesthetics*, who sheds light on the claim that traditional ideas commonly associate imagination with fantasy and phantasm:

"To call something imaginary was a way of saying that it was illusionary and thus not real at all. Fantasy was thought of as a kind of mental disease. At best, it was a waste of time and misleading – daydreaming about what could never be. At worst it was a confusion, a turning from real ideas to fantastic combinations such as monsters [...] imagination was regarded as eccentric and unreliable because it was not controlled by reason, observation, or mathematically calculable forms."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Roger Scruton, "Imagination" in Cooper David (ed.), *A Companion to Aesthetics*, pp. 212-217, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2001, p. 215.

¹⁸⁸ Dabney Townsend, *An Introduction to Aesthetics*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997, p. 92.

In light of what has been traditionally nailed in terms of fantasy and imagination, it is vital to unravel any sort of misconception and give imagination a more positive and dignifying role.

When it comes to literature, one must always bear in mind that imagination is a powerful force of creativity and serves as a vital medium to comprehend literary writings in the most suitable and successful way. Literature, by representing a form of expressive communication, for instance, provides insight into how the lyrical subject, and more broadly the writer, feels. The reader's care and attention to the text, which yields the rewards of understanding, can be compared to the care and attention one normally practises when imaging how people feel in more holistic terms. As German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote in *The Critique of Judgement*, "Poetry... expands the mind by giving freedom to the imagination... It invigorates the mind".¹⁸⁹

Scruton explains that imagination involves the ability to experience mental images and engage in creative thought.¹⁹⁰

The imaginative activity of engaging in creative thought is not limited to the production of literature, but it can also be expanded to the activity of 'imagining' while reading. The power to imaginatively create literature takes its fundamental cues from life. Scruton adds that a strong creative imagination allows the reader to think more widely and creatively. It allows the reader to suspend their belief and disbelief, while their thoughts are able to roam over a wide range of possibilities. Scruton also claims that when we use our imagination, we are having thoughts that are not beliefs about the actual world, but suppositions about a possible world. He adds that the content of a belief can be projected in a thought that is not necessarily a belief, this happens in inference and imagination.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. in English by Meredith James Creed, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1952, pp. 191-192.

¹⁹⁰ See Scruton, "Imagination", p. 212.

¹⁹¹ See Scruton, "Imagination", p. 214.

The idea and practice of Feng Zhi of catching the moment and immortalising the instance with immediacy in his verses is not only a trend found in Chinese literature, but also a thought, which in Western philosophy finds one of his most convincing and reliable starting points in the philosophy of Kant. Bode claims that “immediacy is necessarily identified with the material of sense, considered without reference to the concepts of the understanding.”¹⁹² The immediacy caught in Feng Zhi’s verses leads the lyrical subject to transcendence. In fact, in line with Kant’s concept of immediacy, the “higher standpoint” is not that of objective idealism, but rather a matter of functionalism.

What clearly emerges from Feng Zhi’s lyrical production, and more specifically from the lines of the sonnets, is the poet’s attempt to convey his aesthetic and sensorial experience gained when interacting with the outside world. The elements that enabled the poet to experiment a modernist and innovative poetry based on aesthetic experiences and sensorial perceptions are various. The imagery employed, such as that of mountain peaks, water and nightfalls, does not link the modernist writings with the Chinese classical tradition, but it rather serves as experimental tool, which the lyricist makes use of in order to convey new forms of expression. The German scholar succeeds in this epochal attempt not only to investigate innovative ideological cues but also to implement new introspective approaches from the West.

The teachings of Rilke, Novalis and Goethe become vital for the achievement of this new poetical and philosophical experimentation. Every sonnet of the collection tackles a theme which could be close to the poet’s heart but that ultimately marks the level and the extent of the exposure and influence of the German literary world.

In line with the German literary and philosophical teachings of Novalis, whose poetry and intellectual activity is characterised by the use imagination and transcendence, the writings of Feng Zhi also convey the shift of the existence and

¹⁹² B. H. Bode, “The Concept of Immediacy”, *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Vol. 9, No. 6 (Mar. 14, 1912), pp. 141-149, p. 142, <https://archive.org/details/jstor-2012764>. Accessed 9 June 2016.

experience of the known 'self' beyond the ordinary or matter-bound level. This metaphysical movement enables the poetic self to embark on a transcendental journey that is accomplished through self-consciousness and imagination.

As Sinologist Dominic Cheung writes in his work, *Feng Chih*, the combined acts of looking and thinking are "crucial to the discovery of new things."¹⁹³ Assertions of this kind evidently require further considerations when analysing the introspective nature and philosophical acquisitions of Feng Zhi. In fact, we are required to postulate a process through which the lyricist captures sense impressions, which primordially represent the sum total of immediate aesthetic experiences that are grained metaphysically. The work of imagination, in point of fact, generates immediate symbols that are not mere preconditions of all experiences. On the contrary, they denote phenomena that are closely connected with spatial and temporal dimensions produced in the consciousness and spirit of the poetic self.

The philosophical construction of immediate sensorial attainments and their aesthetic outcomes find their ultimate manifestation in the psyche of the lyrical self and become poetic expressions. The emotional and spiritual turmoil of the self, especially when this is left to contend with the elements of the outside world, finds relief in the discovery of a new reality that alleviates the soreness and fret of the world.

The transcendental process brings new aesthetic revelations about the sublime found in eternity and redeeming infinity, both in spatial and temporal terms, achieved through the work of imagination. This process is vivified through imagery and sensorial cues in the poetic elaborations of Feng Zhi: the verses normally begin with the signs of ache and frailty affecting the human conditions, or in some cases creation as whole. The subsequent verses deal with the action of man or nature towards the demystification of the incumbent soreness. Remedy is normally found towards the end of the sonnet, where the state of transience fades away and turns into metaphysical perpetuity, where the restraints of space and time no longer affect the state of the self. It is at this stage that the lyrical self, often together with a

¹⁹³ Dominic Cheung, *Feng Chih*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1979, p. 51.

companion, is freed from the material world that bounds him to his human flesh and succeeds to transcend his spirit inside the natural realm.

The spatial distance conveyed in Feng Zhi's sonnets represents a way how the poet could express and evoke the other side of the terrestrial world; that is the other world. Spatial and temporal infinity allows the poetic voice to transcend reality and reach the ethereal and ultra-terrestrial realm. In the sonnet 16, the poet evokes the traditional theme of the glance into the far distance:

“We stand upon the high mountain peak
Merging into the infinite distance,
Blending into the vastness of the plain before us,
Dissolving in the entangled paths of the fields.”¹⁹⁴

The poet, finding himself on the top of a mountain, contemplates the vastness and the infinity over the landscape before him. He contemplates on the intertwined paths that pave the landscape and imagines his body and spirit to dissolve, becoming one with the unlimited spacious plain before him stretching out towards infinity. The inner world of the poet meets the vastness of the outside world and attempts to become one with it. The poet's thoughts, sorrows and existence become integral part of the whole. He imagines and sees his life transcend reality and partake in the vast universe.

Nature seems to invite the poet to unite with her by following the blast of wind or the water streams springing from the mountain, and finally dissolve in the “entangled paths of the fields” and mingle with the “life of those who cross them”:

“We are led by the rushing wind, the streams,
Dissolving in the entangled paths of the fields,
And in the life of those who cross them.”¹⁹⁵

In describing the landscape before his eyes, Feng Zhi maintains the purity of the natural scenery in the fullness of its quietude, grandeur and sublimity. The condition of isolation that the reader perceives when imagining the vastness of the landscape

¹⁹⁴ Opening quatrain of sonnet 16

¹⁹⁵ Ending tercet of sonnet 16

also recalls the classical Chinese imagery of solitude embodied, for instance, by natural elements, such as the “empty mountain” or “white clouds”, in Wang Wei’s poems. Following the principles of Buddhist universal emptiness, however, Wang’s “empty mountain” represents the poet’s place of escape where he finds refuge from all “illusory things of the phenomenal world”¹⁹⁶. Although Wang Wei never made any theological references in his poems, he was a devoted Mahayana Buddhist adherent and followed a Zen master. In his works, Wang conveyed Taoist and Buddhist notions and gave his poems deep and metaphysical symbolic meanings. Wang uses the image of the empty mountain to evoke the poet’s state of isolation, whereas Feng educes the condition of solitude through the image of intertwined paths on the plain or through the concept of the woven roots of a tree that finds self-completion in its solitude. Through his lines, Feng Zhi suggests that solitary, yet completed, subjectivity permits man to experience the vastness of the cosmos as well as of his inner self. It is by means of this aesthetic experience that man succeeds to overcome his limited condition and his finitude, thus, attaining infinity.

The aesthetic experience of self-completion leads the poet to a firmer realisation of his inner self and how this relates to a new other world. Imagination and self-realisation empower an increasing sense of longing for infinity, which is attained and quenched through a metaphysical experience that goes beyond the normal and physical level. The state of spiritual and physical transcendence through imagination releases the poet’s spirit and self from the burden of the ordinary realm and ultimately enables the poet’s inner world to merge into the greatness of the cosmos and meet the sublime representation of a new outer world, the Elysian side of reality.

As Novalis wrote, complete life is only found by the representation of heaven and the world is a mere embodiment of the incompleteness of life on earth. Moreover, the world denotes the sphere of the incomplete union between spirit and nature.¹⁹⁷ In line with what Novalis theorised, Feng Zhi’s lyrical voice attempts to

¹⁹⁶ Tony Barnstone, Willis Barnstone and Xu Haixin, *Laughing Lost in the Mountains: Poems of Wang Wei*, Hanover and New Hampshire, UP of New England, 1991, p. XV.

¹⁹⁷ See Gerhard Schulz (ed.), *Novalis Werke*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 2001, p. 431.

find self-completion through the power of imagination and transcendental union with nature.

The verses of sonnet 3 convey the attempt of the lyrical subject to establish contact with nature and receive ever-lasting endurance and permanence:

You, eternally shed your bark,
Wither and manifest your maturity;
In the intertwined paths of the countryside
You are my guide:
May you be eternal, I wish to gradually
Decay for the soil under your roots.¹⁹⁸

The ever-lasting property of nature is epitomised by the biological activity of the tree to shed its bark. In fact, the poem's voice calls upon the tree that is said to shed its bark eternally, thus, implying the permanence and ever-lasting life of nature. The permanent quality of the tree is counterbalanced by the continuous change of mutation of its image. As the tree sheds its bark, it also manifests its maturity. Feng calls upon the tree and contemplates on the immortal nature of it. The earth-bound and perishing condition of man is stressed by the poet's strive to decay under the tree's roots and serve as nourishment. Death appears in these lines as the only vehicle to achieve permanence and completely merge with the immortal nature of the tree. The poet, in fact, addresses the tree as his eternal guide, as his way to reach the other side of reality. Death and decomposition represent the same aging change the tree undergoes to achieve maturity. The poet's body decays, mutates and finally turns into nourishment for the tree roots.

This act of complete union is what Novalis referred to as complete and transcendental "Vereinigung des Geistes und der Natur."¹⁹⁹ Moreover, in his *Fragmente*, Novalis explained about chemical processes that affect the natural elements and also defined that when man's physical life (*körperliches Leben*) burns,

¹⁹⁸ Sestet of sonnet 3.

¹⁹⁹ Schulz, *Novalis Werke*, p. 431.

so does his spiritual life (*geistes Leben*) through combustion. In Novalis's words, death would be a change of capacity.²⁰⁰

In the lines of sonnet 8, Feng Zhi expresses the poetic subject's longing for infinity and desire to soar high in the far away distance of the sky:

“It is a dream of ancient times,
The world of today utterly confused,
I wish to hold onto a roc and fly high
And talk with the peaceful stars.”²⁰¹

In this first quatrain, the poet creates a contrast between the distant ancient dream to fly and the confused, scattered and disordered world of men. The English term adopted to translate the Chinese word *peng* (鹏鸟) refers to a mythological bird of gigantic dimensions that could fly high and cover great distance. In line with the classical tradition, the roc, evoked by Feng Zhi, was a mythic bird that could soar the skies in absolute freedom. In fact, the opening chapter of the Taoist book of *Zhuangzi* describes the grandeur of the mythic *peng* as a bird mutated from a kind of fish of the North Sea named *kun* (鲲), whose back stretched for thousands of *li* and that could reach a flying altitude of 90,000 *li*.²⁰²

The mythological creature becomes for the lyrical voice a means to transcend the confused world he lives in and reach the far-attaining space, perhaps a higher state of physical, mental and spiritual well being. As the sonnet depicts, this is the place where the unimaginable becomes possible and what is generally conceived by rational thinking fades away for a boundless magical realm that corresponds with the lyrical inner sense of imagination. In fact, the subject of the sonnet can converse with the “peaceful stars” of the cosmos. The peaceful celestial world of stars represents the other side of reality, far distant from the disordered world of men.

²⁰⁰ See Schulz, *Novalis Werke*, p. 523.

²⁰¹ Opening quatrain of sonnet 8.

²⁰² See Zhuangzi, *Library of Chinese Classics: Chinese-English*, Vol. 1, Hunan People's Publishing House, Beijing, 1999, p. 2.

The imagery of the stars also appears in various poems of the Romantic age in Europe: the English poet John Keats, for instance, wrote that he wished he could be as steadfast as the bright star, even though not on the same terms. Keats addressed the bright star expressing his longing for permanence while rejecting its loneliness, sleeplessness and its dispassionate constant watching over the tides and seasons.

With the opposite implication, the lyrical voice of the sonnet yearns to establish contact with the stars on a human level. The poet ascribes anthropomorphic traits and behaviour to the stars; however, the idea of peacefulness and quietude remain in strong contrast with the idea of human interaction and the poet's intention of conversing. As a result, these visionary lines demand to be approached from a different angle. In fact, what is most striking in the lines of this particular sonnet is the yearning of the poetic voice to establish a union with nature and converse with it on some terms that cannot be generally defined by human rationality: the lyrical self desires to hold onto a legendary bird of ancient times so to fly high and escape the world of disorder finding refuge in far-stretching and peaceful space.

Similar to the Romantic poetry of Eichendorff, Feng Zhi combined a traditional image of Chinese mythology with a romantic spirit. The romantic spirit of *Sehnsucht* and wanderlust become evident when reading Feng Zhi's poems in light of the German Romantic teaching and poetry. The re-evaluation of the popular tradition and the rise of the unquiet, sentimental and melancholic nature of Romantic poetry are evoked in the few, yet intense, lyrical verses of Feng's compilation of sonnets.

The same desirous tone that marks the verses on sonnet 8 is conveyed in one of Eichendorff's best-known lyrical compositions, "Mondnacht", a spiritual poem that decisively establishes some of the main leitmotifs of the Romantic poetry:

"And my soul spread
Its wings wide,
Flew through the quiet land

As if it were flying home”²⁰³

“Mondnacht” represents, as well as “Schöne Fremde” and “Frühlingsnacht”, an example of songs of the night that portray Romantic moments of solemn realisation. These particular poems emphasise the narrator’s emotional stance in front of nature and its reconciliation with the nocturnal world. What the lyrical voice does in these verses is very similar to the experiences of the lyrical self of the Chinese sonnets: transcend the physical boundaries of space and time.

The poetic voice yearns for self-completion and wishes to transcend his inner world to the far distant realm of an outer world where the impossible comes possible to human eyes and perceptions. Although the predilection for nature in Chinese context roots back into the Classical tradition, this new experience and interaction with nature need to be examined through the leading role of imagination, as also widely acclaimed by the forerunners of German Romanticism. Novalis’s poetry is particularly exhaustive in this regard as he followed Fichte’s definition of the absolute subject and experimented the transcendental perspective to the poetic imagination and assumed it as a poetical principle “endowing nature with the radiance and dignity of the unknown”²⁰⁴. In one of his fragments found in the *Allgemeine Brouillon* (1798-99), Novalis explains how one can understand all things through self-alienation (*Selbstfremdmachung*), self-mutation (*Selbstveränderung*) and self-observation (*Selbstbeobachtung*).²⁰⁵ He also argues that an outer world (*Außenwelt*) can be found inside of us; this is bound with our inner self through an analogous tie that connects the outer world and our senses. These two outer worlds are, in turn, connected with one another in the same way as our own inner self relates to our outer self.²⁰⁶ On Novalis’s terms, the outer world that exists within us

²⁰³ “Und meine Seele spannte/ Weit ihre Flügel aus,/ Flog durch die stillen Lande,/ Als flöge sie nach Haus.” in David Ferris, *Schumann's Eichendorff Liederkreis and the Genre of the Romantic Cycle*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 144.

²⁰⁴ Herman Servotte and Ortwin de Graef, *Sense and Transcendence: Essays in Honour of Herman Servotte*, Leuven, Leuven UP, 1995, pp. 40-41.

²⁰⁵ Hans-Joachim Mähl (ed), *Novalis: Das Allgemeine Brouillon: Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik 1798/1799*, Philosophische Bibliothek, Vol. 450, Hamburg, Meiner Verlag, 1993, p. 189.

²⁰⁶ “[Wir] sehen, daß es auch eine Außenwelt in uns gibt, die mit unserm Innern in einer analogen Verbindung, wie die Außenwelt außer uns mit unserm Äußern, und jene und diese so verbunden sind wie unser Inneres und Äußeres.”

represents that hidden side of nature, which we can fully recognise once we change ourselves.²⁰⁷

Moreover, essential to this theory is Novalis's transcendental philosophy that explains the relation between an object and its representation in complete new light. Novalis, in fact, stresses the power of thoughts through which only one can witness the inner self and soul of nature as well as its outer image and body through sensations.²⁰⁸

In line with what Novalis theorised in his writings about nature, Feng Zhi evidently shows to have assimilated the same concept of self-alienation that sees both nature and the inner self change through the power of imagination: the lines of the sonnets also suggest that nature is no longer the sole supreme source of inspiration, but rather the outcome of a complex and methodical process in which the poet distances himself from his own feelings or activities.

The lines of sonnet 9 also express the imaginative journey towards infinity of an ancient hero:

“In the battlefield, you are an immortal hero
Turning towards another world in the skies,
Freeing yourself, finally, as a stringless kite:

But, of this fate you cannot complain,
You have surpassed them, and they cannot
Hold your flight, your infinity.”²⁰⁹

The poem eulogises here the heroic vestiges of a soldier of ancient times²¹⁰ whose millennial past enables him to overcome and surpass the degraded generation, and

Mähl, *Novalis: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, p.189.

²⁰⁷ See Servotte and de Graef, *Sense and Transcendence*, p. 41.

²⁰⁸ “Daß wir also nur durch Gedanken das Innere und die Seele der Natur vernehmen können, wie nur durch Sensationen das Äußre und die Körper der Natur.

Mähl, *Novalis: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, p.189.

²⁰⁹ Sestet of sonnet 9.

²¹⁰ Feng Zhi's sonnets also frequently make reference to the far-reaching past. The ancient time is not only associated with the idea of heroic prestige. In fact, life frailty, suffering and human turmoil also seemingly appear to be rooted within the temporal line of creation. The weeping girl of the open plain (sonnet 6) symbolise hardship and the plight of a hopeless universe: “I think they have cried since ancient

ultimately to transcend the material and earthly world. The soldier is depicted as a spirit that becomes a stringless kite, which flies high above reaching the skies, towards a state of infinity that the terrestrial world cannot hold, nor glimpse. The flight of the soldier towards infinity is depicted as a powerful journey that cannot be held by the disordered state of the world. Feng Zhi's poem gives the soul of the soldier a transcendental power through imagination to free itself and surpass the boundaries of mortality and mutability. The impotence of the world is epitomised by the absence of the string that normally ties and controls the levitation of the kite.

times, and these never-ending tears are those of a hopeless universe" (last tercet of sonnet 6). This rather pessimistic vision of the universe as being hopeless and man's suffering as being remotely rooted is also contemplated in the first Elegy of Rilke: "Sollen nicht endlich uns diese ältesten Schmerzen fruchtbarer werden?" [Shouldn't these ancient sufferings become finally fruitful for us?]

2.3 Infinity through nostalgic gaze into the past

The motive of temporal and spatial infinity, epitomised by the condition of far-away distance that the poet and all humanity is bound to experience in life, is also conveyed by the continuous and nostalgic gaze into the past. The author makes reference and commemorates some illustrious figures of the past in at least four of his sonnets and through his literary creativity confers them immortal spiritual fate and evanescence in the earthly world.

In Sonnet 9, the poet sings of the soul of an ancient soldier and confers on his millennial past and journey temporal infinity through his poetry. It is worth noticing that Feng Zhi composed the sonnets during a very turbulent period in modern Chinese history: the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese war and the advent of the effects of World War Two. Although Feng Zhi managed to reach the city of Kunming, where he wrote the sonnets, the choice of words and themes related to warfare was inevitable. The image and effects of war are contrasted by the romanticisation process of the past. In fact, as the voice of the poem suggests, the soldier returns to a city that is engulfed by degradation and despair, and his past, compared to that of a soldier of ancient times, is glorified.

At the edge of life and death you grow all year round,
One day you return to this degraded city,
Hear its frivolous songs,
You shall be like a hero of ancient times

Who suddenly returns from a millennial past,
In the midst of this changed, degraded generation,
You search for loyal and genuine stance,
Feeling distraught beyond expectation.

Moreover, the poet confers immortal fame on the respected figure of Cai Yuanpei, admired Chinese pedagogue; Lu Xun; Du Fu, a poet of the Tang dynasty; and Van Gogh, a Dutch post-impressionist painter.

Feng Zhi, in line with a Romantic trend of immortalising the spiritual essence through the romanticising process of imagination, succeeds in honouring the spirits

of the characters he exalts granting them enduring fame and eternal existence through the mighty means of poesy.

2.4 Far-away distance through farewell and separation

The creative innovation of Feng Zhi lies in his lyrical juxtaposition of themes found in Western literature with motives that had always been sung in the classical Chinese tradition in a new and experimental poetical form: the sonnet. The theme of far-away distance, for instance, finds its deep roots in the long history of Chinese tradition and characterises part of the classical sensitivity.

In Classical Chinese literature, in fact, the image of distance is commonly connected with the theme of farewell or separation and is also generally attached to the inner and spiritual condition of the poet. The essence of the far-away distance, both spatial and temporal, symbolises the deep moral personality and the high ideals embodied by the sensitive character of the poet. The concept of distance leads the poet to a transcendental realm, where the unceasing passage of time and the infinity of the cosmic space merge together.

Feng Zhi, scholar in German literature and philosophy, succeeded in assimilating the core concepts of early German Romanticism with some of the elements that characterise the poetry of the classical Chinese tradition. The theme of far-away distance is, in fact, also prominent in the landscape paintings and poetry of the Wei-Jin period, in between the Han and Sui dynasties. During this historic period, Taoist and Buddhist philosophical ideas exerted great influence on the sensitivity of poets and painters of the period, who conveyed the *jīng* of distance in their works. In classical literature, poets like Wang Wei and Liu Zongyuan conveyed the *jīng* of distance using the image of birds and mountains.

The same theme of separation found in the verses of the Tang poet travelled across time and space finding fertile soil in the sensitivity of the Austrian composer Gustav Mahler and its musical work *Das Lied von der Erde* (“The Song of the Earth”, 1909). As Theodor W. Adorno puts it, the Chinese lyrical verses served as a means for Mahler to rediscover that ‘otherness’ he longed for and even searched in German folk songs. Following the establishment of sinology as a discipline in a number of universities in Europe at the turn of the 20th century, Chinese philosophy, literature arts began to draw the attention of many Western scholars who contributed

to the widespread of Chinese knowledge through a number of translations and essays. One example of this was the German edition and publication of Chinese poems by Hans Bethge in his work *Die Chinesische Flöte: Nachdichtungen chinesischer Lyrik* [“The Chinese Flute: Variations of Chinese Poetry”, 1907], based on the translation of some Chinese poems into French by the scholar Marquis d’Hervey de Saint-Denys. The reading of the paraphrased texts and German renditions of the Tang poems as well as the influence of Eastern philosophy in Gustav Theodore Fechner inspired Mahler in the composition of *Das Lied*. The Sixth Movement of the composition, *Der Abschied* [The Farewell], consists of the paraphrased rendition of two poems: *Su yeshi shanfang dai tingda buzhi* 宿業師山房待丁大不至 [Staying at the Teacher’s Mountain house while waiting for Ding who has not arrived] by Meng Haoran 孟浩然 (689/691–740) and *Songbie* 送別 [Bidding Farewell] by Wang Wei.

The final section of *Der Abschied* is a paraphrase of Wang Wei’s poem and clearly contains traits that juxtapose the composer’s sensitivity with the classical Chinese tradition:

“He alighted from his horse and offered him the draught
Of farewell. He asked him where
He was bound and also why it had to be.
He spoke, his voice was veiled: My friend,
Fortune was not kind to me in this world!
Where do I go? I walk, I wander into the mountains.
I seek peace for my lonely heart.
I go to my homeland, my abode!
I will never roam in distant lands.
My heart is still and awaits its hour.
The beloved earth everywhere blossoms and greens in springtime
Anew. Everywhere and forever the distances brighten blue!
Forever... forever...”²¹¹

The full original poem by Wang Wei reads:

下馬飲君酒
問君何所之
君言不得意
歸卧南山陲

²¹¹ Gustav Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde. In Full Score*, New York, Dover Publications Inc., 1988, p. viii.

但去莫復問
白雲無盡時

Dismounted, we toasted with wine bidding farewell
I asked, "Where are you heading to, Sir?"
He said, "I have not accomplished my wish
I shall return to the crags of Nanshan"
"Then go, you shall have no doubts."
White clouds will drift forever.

Among the main elements of Wang Wei's poems those of relevance are 'empty mountains', 'voice' and 'white clouds'. The image of the mountain, often seen from afar or simply recalled, epitomises the lyricist's longed-for place of solitude, the place where the lyrical subject attempts to escape the ordinary world and go into *sunyata*, the Buddhist principle of universal emptiness. The 'voice', spoken and heard inside the poem, refers to the human interaction and the means by which a relationship is generally established. The 'voice' of the poem enables the encounter of friends in the open and wide lyrical setting. All these elements come into action and work for the transcendence of the poetic subject, and more broadly of the poet.

Although Wang Wei was a devout Mahayana Buddhist and followed a Chan master, he did not employ a formal religious register nor did he quote sutras, hymns or doctrines in his poetry. Nonetheless, his poems still convey profound Buddhist and Taoist notions through the use of allegorical interpretation. In fact, as Burton Watson suggests, some Buddhist writings, and especially poetry, maintain their philosophical meaning "much farther down the surface" and it were not for the knowledge of the author's identity, their Buddhist spirit would almost be indiscernible.²¹²

Tang poets ingeniously achieve their lyrical result with just a few words and immediate simplicity. The same result was also achieved in landscape paintings with simple lines that attain absolute clarity and immediacy. All nature images are kept in their simple and absolute state as synecdoche of the human of the human situation as a whole. A single element in nature can represent the whole human dimension and state of mind. It is no surprise that Taoist writings make nature the ultimate refuge

²¹² See Burton Watson, *Chinese Lyricism: Shih Poetry from the Second to the Twelfth Century*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1971, p. 171.

for mankind. The theme of separation and distance is, hence, interestingly juxtaposed with characteristics that are typical of the natural realm:

山中相送罷
日暮掩柴扉
春草明年綠
王孫歸不歸

By the mountains we bade farewell
And closed the wooden door by dusk.
Grass will be green again next spring!
Will you, my Lord, come back again?

What is so peculiar about Wang Wei's verses is the distinctive approach of the lyrical subject. The natural element embodied in the image of the mountain exemplifies the theme of distance and spatial detachment from a place or other people. The presence of nature in the lines and its mutable characteristics enhances the sensorial perception and the mood of the lyrical subject. In fact, the image of nature changing its colours as seen in the grass, which will complete and repeat its unbroken and everlasting cycle, enhances the theme of temporal distance: the lapse of time until the two friends meet again is contemplated by the completion of a natural cycle, that is the coming of a new season and its resulting iridescent manifestation in nature. Nature does not only serve as a source of inspiration for the sensitive poet but it also represents the fundamental and original meaning that enables the lyricist to express his spiritual stance and need.

The movement within space is accomplished by reference to natural elements that delineate the course, as in the case of far-away mountains that recall the distant places, and time, as in the case of blades of grass changing their colour and flowers blossoming. The constant change in nature is the ultimate expression of the constant change of men within space and time.

The concept of far-away distance stretching into infinity was very close to the Tang poets' heart as it was to Feng Zhi's. Li Bai, one of Tang China's best-known and still acclaimed poets, makes reference to remote places, such as mountains and waterfalls, which become the object of contemplation in many of his lyrical compositions:

日照香爐生紫煙
遙看瀑布掛前川
飛流直下三千尺
疑是銀河落九天

At sunshine, Xianglu releases a purple mist;
The waterfall at distance hangs upstream:
Plummeting three thousand feet down,
As if it were the Milky Way falling from above.

The idea of separation and ultimate feeling of solitude are here epitomised by the image of a remote, far-looking mountain down which the stream of a waterfall flows for at least three thousand feet. The mist of the water of the distant waterfall reminds the poet the far-away stars and planets that form the Milky Way: the juxtaposition of these two natural elements emphasises the perception of distance perceived by the lyrical subject – a concept of distance that is not fixed but changes exponentially. The lyrical subject evokes the image of a remote waterfall flowing down a high mountain stretching towards the galaxy and infinity.

The concept of “level distance”²¹³ employed in Feng Zhi’s lines was already conceived during the tenth century to describe some of the visual and literary works of the Tang poet Wang Wei. In fact, both “level” and “distant” appear as the first characters of the titles of the “Eight Views of Xiaoxiang”, a series of paintings that ultimately symbolise the theme of exile.²¹⁴ Through the depiction of natural elements, the poet conveys his inner feelings and attempts to free his spirit and connect with nature. Every single element found in nature expresses the emotional, psychological and physical situation of mankind. By referring to natural phenomena, Wang Wei, for instance, depicts separation, intended as both seasonal and physical distance, enquiring about the changes that affect nature:

來日綺窗前
寒梅著花未

The day you left, by the patterned window

²¹³ Alfreda Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China: The Subtle Art of Dissent*, Cambridge (Mass.) and London, Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 122.

²¹⁴ Murck, *Poetry and Painting in Song China*, p. 122.

Was the cold plum tree in bloom?²¹⁵

In the lines of this poem, nature portrays the lovers' separation also on a temporal level. The image of a "cold" plum tree that overcomes the winter season is juxtaposed to that of farewell between two lovers. Moreover, another vivid example is given by the image of an empty mountain that is not conceived as a barren, but as scholar Zong-qi Cai explains, "empty" (*kong*) would be the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit Buddhist term *śūnyatā*, which implies permanence:

空山不見人
但聞人語響

On the empty mountain, no one is seen
But the sound of voices is heard²¹⁶

Furthermore, the recurrent theme of far-away distance runs vividly throughout the verses of Li Bai. The very well-known lines of "Quiet Night Thoughts" exemplify the motive of distance conveyed by the image of the bright moonlight, which brings the poet emotions along with pangs of homesickness.

床前明月光
疑是地上霜
舉頭望明月
低頭思故鄉

Before my bed, the bright moonlight
I mistake it for frost on the ground
Raising my head, I stare at the bright moon;
Lowering my head, I think of home.²¹⁷

The poet's interaction with nature or its mere manifestation brings him with feelings of longing for home and intensifies his frail condition of being far away. The image of the moon, or full moon as hinted by its brightness causing the poet to mistake it for frost on the floor, mostly invokes the idea and feeling of unity in classical Chinese literature. The moon, recalling the value of togetherness, causes the poet to lower his head and engulfs his heart with pangs of nostalgia and melancholy. The

²¹⁵ Wang Wei, "Miscellaneous Poems No. 2" in Zong-qi Cai, *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2008, p. 205.

²¹⁶ Wang Wei, "The Deer Fence" in Zong-qi Cai, *How to Read Chinese Poetry*, p. 207.

²¹⁷ Li Bai, "Quiet Night Thoughts" in Zong-qi Cai, *How to Read Chinese Poetry*, p. 210.

poet suddenly experiences the ache of distance and homesickness when he is confronted with the image of the bright moon, epitome of family and home.

2.5 A thick veil of fog

A further image, also typical of the European Romantic movement, is that of the thick veil of fog that covers the landscape. In one of his sonnets, Feng depicts the image of a thick veil of fog that pervades the city just like the mist that covers the horizon and the landscape of the very notable painting of the Romantic period “Wanderer above the Sea of Fog”²¹⁸ by Caspar David Friedrich. The analogy with the German painting becomes intriguingly evident when both the Chinese poet and the German wanderer find themselves on the top of a mountain summit and contemplate the vastness of the fields before their eyes. The German wanderer observes the far-away undefined and endless landscape hovered by strips of fog and is struck with feelings of cosmic infinity.

Nature is usually the main character in Romantic paintings where man is mostly absent or in complete harmony with it; thus, blending with nature and celebrating the “absolute”.

我們的生長、我們的憂愁
是某某山坡的一棵松樹，
是某某城上的一片濃霧；

Our growth, our worries
Are pine tree on some hillside,
Or a veil of thick fog over a city;

Another analogy between the German painting and the Chinese sonnet is the position the wanderer holds towards nature and towards the spectator: both the observer of the painting and the reader of the sonnet see and can contemplate the same scenery as the protagonist. In fact, both the poet and the painter succeed in engaging their respective spectator and share with them their sorrows, wistful yearning desire and cerebration of the “absolute”. The reader of the sonnet can perceive what the wanderer sees and through imagination, he can even sense the lyrical subject’s longing for absolute and infinity.

²¹⁸ Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer – 1818, Hamburger Kunsthalle.

The image of the fog did not always have a positive connotation for the early German romantics: they believed that fog held infinity.²¹⁹ Moreover, other critics even evaluated the image of fog as a representation of the “unbelief”. In a paper about drostic landscape, “Drostische Landschaft”, Bernd Kortländer defines the movement of the formless fog within the natural from a religious perspective: the fog covers the earth and hinders the way.²²⁰ The same hindering power and property of fog drew the attention of other Romantic poets, like S. T. Coleridge, who in his “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” uses the positive image of an albatross that proves himself as a bird of good omen and follows the ship as it returned through “fog-smoke white”.²²¹

Another interesting and relevant characteristic of the thick veil of fog is the intangibility of the natural element. What is strikingly important to the lyrical subject is the juxtaposition of man’s sorrows and destiny with the image of a veil of fog. The incommensurability and unpredictability of sensations find their suitable projection in the unquantifiability of mist. Mist, just like emotions and man’s destiny, becomes hard to suppress and its control goes beyond the bounds of possibility.

The poet claims that his growth and his sorrows vanish or dissolve before nature and become integral part of the landscape. It is through the power of imagination that the earth-bound condition of man can reach nature, thus, transcending into the absolute. The character of Feng’s sixteenth sonnet can be regarded as a typical Romantic who is constantly wandering and is led by a yearning desire for the unattainable and infinity.

²¹⁹ Matthäus von Collin and Friedrich von Gentz, *Jahrbücher der Literatur*, Vol. 75, Vienna, Gerold Verlag, 1838, p. 126.

²²⁰ Bernd Kortländer, “Drostische Landschaft” in Bodo Plachta (ed.), *Literatur als Erinnerung: Winfried Woesler zum 65. Geburtstag*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004, p. 204.

²²¹ Stanley Appelbaum (ed.), *English Romantic Poetry: An Anthology*, Mineola and New York, Dover Thrift Editions, 2004, p. 65.

CHAPTER THREE

LONELINESS AND COLLECTIVENESS

Among the most recurrent themes that characterise the lyrical production of Feng Zhi and that are predominantly visible in his mature writings is that of loneliness. The state of solitude that is analysed in this chapter does not merely refer to the common sense of loneliness aroused by the state of being ‘alone’, but rather it encompasses a wider and more holistic dimension perceived by the ‘self’ when this establishes contact with the outer world. The relationship between solitude and collectiveness finds a new poetic expression in modern and pre-modernist Chinese writings thanks to the philosophical experimentations of Feng Zhi. The moment when the lyrical self is put in stark contrast with the overwhelming dimension of the surrounding ‘group’, a series of inevitable aesthetic experiences succeed one after another and engulf the poetical subject into a new state of realisation, which ultimately concludes with the fulfilment of the poetic identity.

From the analysis of Feng Zhi’s both early and mature writings, it has become evident that the aesthetic sense of solitude and its perception both in the natural and human world are particularly close to the Chinese poetic agenda of the period. It is also important noticing that the idea of loneliness as well as its sensorial emotional perception and philosophical elaboration represent the main striking theme that

noticeably unites the early writings of the young poet with his more mature compositions.

The conducting theme of solitude already traceable from the first writings, notably those collected in *Songs of Yesterday*, as well as its progressive evolution and mature thematic exemplification elaborated in the sonnets accompany the poet throughout his personal, emotional and lyrical growth as promising scholar and man of letters. After a comprehensive and analytical reading of Feng Zhi's poems, one can ultimately discern a clear shift from a more holistic idea of cosmic solitude, which mostly pervades the verses of the early writings, to a more personalised and physically perceived sense of lonesomeness that, as brought forward by Feng Zhi, epitomises the charactering nature of mankind.

This evolution of the perception of solitude stands in line with the maturity and the aesthetic experiences gained by the poet, who had already visited Germany, studied at Heidelberg, lived and experienced the essence of the German philosophical circle of the mid-twentieth century when he found himself in Kunming composing the sonnet collection.

To start with, in order to discern the nature of the deep root of solitude that characterises the sonnets of Feng Zhi, it becomes essential to consider a few of the most important events and experiences that shaped the character of the author as well as his theorised perception of interpersonal relationships: his personal background and his attentive and 'direct' influence from the poetry and philosophical stance of his German admirers.

With regards to his personal background, it is important to mention that Feng Zhi was born into an impoverished family of north China. His father was away from home most of the time and he spent most of his childhood alone or in close relationship with his mother, who tragically died of tuberculosis when he was nine years old. The early loss of his mother left the young poet with an upsetting trauma that influenced his character, triggering an unsatisfiable state of loneliness. The unquenchable sense of belonging to someone and the resulting exacerbated spirit of

loneliness are the fuelling source of his Romantic, and later on also pre-Modernist, lyricism.

The unexpected and early loss of the mother at a very young age is what seemingly exacerbated the continuous desperate search for company and ignited an unbearable feeling of loneliness that animate the core of the early poems as well as his more mature philosophical concept of interpersonal attachment and relationship.

This unendurable state of solitude is what gave rise to the poet's 'romantic' wanderlust and necessity of far-away wanderings in infinity discussed in the previous chapter. In fact, some of Feng Zhi's early poems can be interpreted as allegories of the whole human race, a poetic form that narrates, from a mythical perspective, the experiences of humanity and its constant movement within the immensity of the cosmic space. Remarkably, the recurring motifs of his early poetic compositions also convey the young author's lyrical vision and early aesthetic perception of life that become increasingly relevant to the critic investigation and appreciation of his mature writings.

What is characterizing of Rilke is that while trying to find the true destination of mankind, he also affirms the need for everyone to face loneliness, pain, fear and even death. In Rilke's view, only when faced with loneliness it is possible to find the authenticity of the world and life. Therefore, facing loneliness and the truth of the world in silence is the fundamental guarantee for a poet. Feng Zhi's experience of loneliness, the social and cultural environment in his hometown is rather stagnant.

The limited care and attention given by a very busy mother with housework and a father who was constantly out of town for work lay the foundations of a sensitivity and personality marked by a shadow of loneliness during childhood. During the middle school and college years, on the other hand, the trend of a new line of thought led Feng Zhi to see a new idealised world. The way in which Feng Zhi composed his letters show how these represented the only companion of the poet, especially during the years of formation in Germany.

For a writer, the real external influence is the use of his own psychological mechanism to actively select and transform the foreign cultural information he is exposed to and chooses to transform. Feng Zhi's acceptance of Rilke's view can be seen as the result of the change of his original psychological stance. Feng Zhi's personal experience during childhood, endurance of loneliness, disillusionment of ideals and own creative practice during his youth can justify Feng Zhi's choice and 'inevitable' agreement with Rilke's unique attitude towards loneliness. If Feng Zhi attempted to escape loneliness after his teaching period at Harbin by accepting the scholarship for Germany, a greater sense of solitude awaited him there. As a poet, Rilke regards loneliness as a fundamental premise for devoting himself to the art and seeking the authenticity of life. In the eyes of Rilke, man still remains on the surface of life as much as the authenticity of the world remains boring despite the fact that the modern society in which mankind lives has progressed, despite its culture, religions and wisdom. In such a state of loss of authenticity, the poet's mission is to reveal the truth hidden by the various forms of confusion and make the world poetic. As Rilke wrote on a letter to his Polish translator Witold Hulewicz who had asked him explanations to his *Duino Elegies*:

Ja, denn unsere Aufgabe ist es, diese vorläufige, hinfällige Erde uns so tief, so leidend und leidenschaftlich einzuprägen, daß ihr Wesen in uns „unsichtbar“ wieder aufersteht. Wir sind die Bienen des Unsichtbaren. Nous butinons éperdument le miel du visible, pour l'accumuler dans la grande ruche d'or de l'Invisible. Die „Elegien“ zeigen uns an diesem Werke, am Werke dieser fortwährenden Umsetzungen des geliebten Sichtbaren und Greifbaren in die unsichtbare Schwingung und Erregtheit unserer Natur, die neue Schwingungszahlen einführt in die Schwingungs-Sphären des Universums. (Da die verschiedenen Stoffe im Weltall nur verschiedene Schwingungsexponenten sind, so bereiten wir, in dieser Weise, nicht nur Intensitäten geistiger Art vor, sondern wer weiß, neue Körper, Metalle, Sternnebel und Gestirne).²²²

[Yes, for it is our task to imprint this provisional, perishable earth so deeply, so patiently and passionately in ourselves that its reality shall arise in us again "invisibly". We are the bees of the invisible. Nous butinons éperdument le miel du visible, pour l'accumuler dans la grande ruche d'or de l'Invisible.. The Elegies

²²² Reiner Maria Rilke's letter dated 13 November 1925, in Hinderek M. Emrich, *Texte zu Rilke*, Göttingen, Cuvillier Verlag, 2008, p. 14.

show us at this work, at the work of these continual conversions of the beloved visible and tangible into the invisible vibrations and excitation of our own nature, which introduces new vibration-frequencies into the vibration-spheres of the universe. (Since different elements in the cosmos are only different vibration-exponents, we prepare for ourselves in this way not only intensities of a spiritual nature but also, who knows, new bodies, metals, nebulae and constellations.)]²²³

This section reveals the reason that the poet must first separate himself from the tumultuous and chaotic material world in which he has lost his authenticity and become the ‘lonely’ person. Relinquishing loneliness means giving up on the inquiry of the authenticity of the world, giving up the bounden duty as a poet and plunging into meaningless materiality.

By the time Feng Zhi composed the twenty-seven sonnets, the sense of loneliness had already become a theme deep rooted in the author’s past. In fact, what the sonnets primarily attempt to convey is relationship between the man, the human world and the natural realm: the relationship between individual life and society. The personal world has become the world that is shared among all individuals: “Which road, which brook does not meet, which gust, which cloud does not accord: The cities we have passed, mountains and streams, have all become our lives (哪条路、哪道水，没有关联，哪阵风、哪片云，没有呼应：我们走过的城市、山川，都化成了我们的生命).²²⁴

Life, the one thing that is best represented as the most personal element of the ‘I’, has transmuted into ‘us’: the individual lives that grow silently in loneliness have transcendently changed into everything that surrounds mankind.

²²³ Reiner Maria Rilke, “Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, Vol. II, 1910-1926”, trans. by Jane Bennard Greene and M. S. Herter Norton, https://archive.org/stream/lettersofrainerm030825mbp/lettersofrainerm030825mbp_djvu.txt

²²⁴ Second quatrain in sonnet 16.

3.1 The early poems

Feng Zhi's lyrical notion of loneliness cannot be merely regarded as a form of poetical exemplification of sentimentalism, but rather as the embodiment of poetic self-reflection and aesthetic experience. From one of his writings, entitled *Haohua kaifang zai zui jimode yuanli* 好花开放在最寂寞的园里 [Beautiful flowers blossom in the loneliest gardens], it is possible to remark the poet's theorised belief on the utter state of solitude that comes mightily upon humanity, where man becomes lonely from the time he is born and where even the beloved ones turn out to be only ephemeral relations and evanescent experiences of a moment. The poet seemingly realises that what only and always remains close and faithful to man is his own shadow.²²⁵ As he wrote: “There is no poet whose life is not lonely, and there is no poet who does not face up loneliness.”²²⁶

There are indications, as also remarked by scholar Dominic Cheung, that Feng Zhi began a prolific period of poetic activity at the age of fifteen in 1920, thus, much before his enrolment and reading at Peking University. According to various sources, Feng Zhi appears to have written more than a thousand poems that, as Cheung also points out, are all unpublished and only limited to private circulation among friends.²²⁷ Thankfully, the author published three of these undisclosed and mysterious poems on the *Chuangzao jikan* (*Creation Quarterly*) in 1929: “Mailman”, “Inquiring” and “Thus I sing”.

Through the lines of the poem “Wo zheyangde gechang” 我这样的歌唱 (Thus I Sing), Feng attempted to disperse his anxiety and worries through the voice of a genuine man who wonders about life, conceived as an unceasing journey that man is bound to take in search for comfort from birth to death. As the poet puts it, man wanders towards the bosom of a universe that is too spacious to even define its boundaries:

²²⁵ Feng Zhi, “Haohua kaifeng zai zui jimode yuanli” in Han Yaocheng, *Feng Zhi Quanji* (*Complete Works of Feng Zhi*), Vol. 3, Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999, p. 170.

²²⁶ Feng Zhi, *Fengzhi Quanji*, 1999, in David Der-Wei Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time: Modern Chinese Intellectuals and Artists Through the 1949 Crisis*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 132.

²²⁷ Cfr. Dominic Cheung, *Feng Chih*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1979, p. 54.

Leaving my mother's bosom
I run, towards the bosom of the universe!
Being on such a journey,
Thus I sing!

Just leaving my mother's bosom,
The universe seems too spacious,
Being on such a journey,
Thus I sing!

Seeking in vain for the bosom of the universe,
Anxiously, I am worried and confused.
Being on such a journey,
Thus I sing!

God reveals to me my lover's bosom,
Saying that it can lead my way.
Being on such a journey,
Thus I sing!

For the bosom of my lover,
Pensively I wander, everywhere,
Being on such a journey,
Thus I sing!²²⁸

It is worth noticing that this restless journey into the 'mysterious' unknown is what inspired many responsive and sensitive poets through the ages, specifically those stirred and influenced by the Romantic sensitivity in Europe and subsequently in East Asia, to embark on a philosophical quest for self-completion and search for sublimity.

Right from the opening lines of the poem, the reader immediately discerns what appears to be strongly affecting the feelings and deeply stirring the heart of the poet: his profound state of loneliness and dire need for affective attachment. In fact, the use of imagery and the recurring theme of spatial and temporal distance particularly contribute to Feng Zhi's portrayal of man's loneliness and unceasing journey towards the "bosom of the universe".

As the poet repeats at the end of each stanza, it is the power of 'singing' that keeps him going farther. This core element takes the poem to a higher philosophical

²²⁸ Feng Zhi, "Thus I sing", translated by Prof. Dominic Cheung in Cheung, *Feng Chih*, pp. 54-55.

realm, redefying the lyrical theme of the text and the poet's sublime activity. Anxiety and confusion pervade the mood as the poet wanders endlessly within the open cosmos.

As the poet suggests, man starts his journey from the moment he is born and leaves his mother's bosom. The frailty of human life as a whole is particularly emphasised by the poet's awareness of the meaninglessness of this journey as man seeks in vain the bosom of the universe. Thus, nature, represented by the cosmic infinity of the universe, and human life are transcendently brought into a meaningful striving for totality and affection.

This conception of universe seemingly reflects the lyricist's interiority and both his poetic activity and vain wandering can be seen as constructing image of the poetic subject's inner growth or, from a more ample perspective, as a metaphor of life – a metaphysical journey within nature that connects the poetic self's origin from his mother's bosom with the far unreachable ever-lasting end of the unknown.

Very interestingly, the ultimate source of hope comes from a farther powerful figure: the divine power of an omniscient God that can show man the right way towards their final goal. The heavenly figure, which Feng Zhi refers to in "Thus I sing", does not necessarily stand as a symbol for a deistic God or as the archetypal "divine immanent in the self"²²⁹ that is recurrent in the Romantic theology, but it rather epitomises a form of spiritual and emotional surrender to an omnipotent entity that overcomes and assists humankind.

The lover's bosom represents a form of refuge for the poetic voice who strives for human interaction and affection. It is this fundamental depiction of love that gives the subject the strength to continue on his endless journey into the unknown and remain steadfast in his poetic activity of 'singing'. As the poet conveys in the verses reiterated at the end of each stanza, the suggestion and then identification of the lover's bosom as his fortunate finding can be regarded as a romanticised form of hope over his undeviating sense of wistful longing and *Sehnsucht*.

²²⁹ Christopher John Murray (ed), *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era: 1760-1850*, Vol. II, New York and London, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004, p. 1129.

If in the first instance the poet wanders aimlessly within the spacious universe seeking in vain the gentle feeling of fondness and comfort, his gaze is subsequently redirected to a more positive and idealised source of human interaction and heart's affection. The high philosophical realm of the poem is intensified by the choice of words that Feng Zhi employs in order to convey his deep conception of unattainability and ineffable mysteries of interpersonal relationship and affinity.

The lyrical 'I' is set on a journey towards infinity, a realm depicted by the Romantics as an unconceivable emptiness that stirs the heart of men. The solitude of the lyrical 'I' enables the poet to catch a glimpse of 'infinity' and experience the essence of the sublime. As Edmund Burke theorised, "another source of the sublime, is infinity [that] has the tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect, and truest effect of the sublime."²³⁰

The second poem released on the journal *Creation Quarterly*, "Lüyiren" 绿衣人 (Mailman, 1921), is another exemplification of the poetic voice's state of solitude and depiction of sorrow that follows from it:

A green dressed mailman,
Walking with his head drooped;
Looking occasionally at the sidewalks.
His face, very common,
His life, mostly content –
Bears no sorrow.
Who will notice his
Walking, daily, to and fro.
Yet his small hands are delivering
Reality to some dreams.
When he knocks at the door,
Who will take note and ponder –
"Here comes the receiver's horrendous hour."²³¹

²³⁰ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Mineola, Dover Publications, 2008, p. 53.

²³¹ This translation of *Lüyiren* is given by Dominc Cheung in Cheung, *Feng Chih*, p. 57.

This poem tells of the experience of an ordinary mailman in green dress in Beijing conducting his unvarying life and job in delivering messages. The colour green of his uniform appears as a symbolic sign, which relates the character with his status and confers on him a sense of belonging.

Feng Zhi uses the image of a disheartened mailman to represent the tragic unfolding destiny of a man of ordinary status who walks keeping his head low and whose common life does not display any sense of grief nor obsequious sorrows. The drooping posture of a man walking with his head lowered down generally manifests his inner state of submission, driven by affection or fear, defeat or exhaustion. The mailman, for instance, is depicted as a conscientious diligent character who is often undervalued and neglected by others regardless of his relevant duty and attribute, despite his ‘small hands’, of bringing dreams to people’s fate. The image of the mailman as well as that of the ‘pedestrian’ (*xingren* 行人) is significant in Feng Zhi’s poetry and relevant to his recurring theme of ‘walking’, *xingzou* 行走. It is not a mere coincidence that Feng Zhi’s most significant novel, *Wu Zixu* 伍子胥, narrates of an important journey.

From a wider perspective, this portrayal of a mailman could also be seen as a poetic portrait. In fact, Feng Zhi writes about his time in Beijing and describes the city as gloomy and grey. As he mentioned in an essay published on *Shikan* 诗刊 (*Poetry Journal*) in 1959, while in Beijing the writer saw the image of poverty and could even hear grieved and sorrowful voices echoing from corner of the city, where “no flower, no light, no love”²³² could be seen.

Moreover, the writer recounts his frequent walks and continuous meanders through the city, which inevitably instilled into him a deep and abiding sense of solitude that made him capable of sympathising with a mailman he saw on the street and even discerning his fate. Feng Zhi, hence, employed the image of a common mailman in green dress in order to convey his intimate state of solitude, personal experience and inner self. The climax of the poem occurs towards the end when the

²³²“那时的北京城是一片灰色，街头巷尾，到处是贫苦的形象和悲痛的声音 [...] 没有花，没有光，没有爱”*Shikan* (*Poetry Journal*), Nr. 9, 1959, pp. 111-113.

postman is about to knock at the door – the mood is suddenly filled with suspense and the verses foreshadow the symbolic juncture of the postman and the receiver's fate.

The use of common images and habits pertaining to the everyday life is characteristic of Feng Zhi's poetry. The ingenious adaptation of words and their deep symbolic meaning is what also characterises the style of his mature writings and, more specifically, the essential lyrical and philosophical concepts unfolded in his sonnets. It is the intimate experience resulted from the juncture of the self and the surrounding environment that the poet attempts to embody in his lyrical work: common objects and images, such as that of a postman and the messages that he carries, are attributed high philosophical concepts, which ultimately express the poet's existential gesture.

The aesthetic experience of the self as well as its consequential reaction to the outer world conclusively leads to the poet's awareness of his state of loneliness. Both the postman and the message that he carries become symbols of the dreams and destiny of men. The psychological and emotional state of a person receiving a message unexpectedly is affected by a sense of anxiety and uncertainty that is typically felt when the "receiver's horrendous hour" has come.

Expressing one's own self by taking the role of others is another poetic means employed by Feng Zhi to convey his inner state of solitude. In fact, as Joseph Kotarba also maintains, the "self" is both something that one possesses and "something that constitutes a social process for symbolic interactions."²³³ The strive for social interaction that is characteristic of Feng Zhi's early and mature poetry is ostensibly influenced by the poet's own experience and yearning for interpersonal relationship and affective attachment.

The lyricism of Feng Zhi's early poem collection, *Zuori zhi ge* 昨日之歌 (*Songs of Yesterday*, 1927) and of the lyrical narrative *Beiyong ji qita* 北游集其他

²³³ Joseph A. Kotarba, *The Existential Self in Society*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1987, p. 25.

(*Northern Journey and Others*, 1929), published through the *Sunken Bell Quarterly*, predominantly centres on the poet's experience of his engulfing melancholic state of solitude and on the portrayal of an adapting lyric strength and igniting will power that enable the poet to overcome loneliness. Since times immemorial, in fact, one of the most recurring themes in poetry of different nations and cultures has treated the expression of solitude; and one of the most emblematic poems of the collection *Songs of Yesterday* that best explores this strong expression of loneliness is "She" 蛇 (Snake):

My loneliness, a long snake,
Mute, silent.
If you, by chance, should dream of it,
Don't ever be afraid.

It is my faithful companion,
Whose heart is sick
With feverish nostalgia;
It dreams of the luxuriant prairie –
Your head's dark, thick hair.

Soft as the moonlight, it swiftly
Glides to you,
Bringing you a dream
Like a pink flower held in its mouth.²³⁴

The poem strikingly opens with the writer's realisation of his state of loneliness, which Feng Zhi compares to a snake that is still and does not have a true language or words. The poem recalls the themes of pastoral songs and its suggestive and vivid imagery are borrowed, as Feng Zhi recalled, from one of the illustrations in black ink of the English aesthete and writer Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), who, like Oscar Wilde, was also a leading figure in the Decadent movement in England towards the end of the nineteenth century. The illustration that drew Feng's attention also depicts a snake curling up and holding a flower in its mouth in front of a lady.²³⁵

The fawning image of the snake conceals sinister symbolic meanings in the West as much as it does in China. Nonetheless, as the poetic voice clearly confesses

²³⁴ Translation by Dominic Cheung, in Cheung, *Feng Chih*, p. 34.

²³⁵ See Wang, *The Lyrical in Epic Time*, p. 135.

in the opening verse of the poem, the snake is the bodily representation and projection of his own state of loneliness, which is ingeniously exemplified on a philosophical and symbolic level that goes far beyond the ordinary suggestion of a slithering creature. In fact, the sensual, smooth and gentle movements of the snake epitomise the poetic subject's yearning for affection and infatuation for his beloved woman.

Moreover, the image of the snake is not only a physical manifestation of the poetic voice's lust and passionate desire, but it also represents his fervid hope for an ideal and complete romance. The poetic aspiration for enduring expressions of romance is also evoked and further intensified by the revitalising image of the flower that meaningfully closes the poem. In fact, the flower that the snake symbolically holds in its mouth involves a system of traditional values, such as youth, life, passion and beauty that figuratively characterise the vehement desire of the snake. Thus, both the flower and the snake are manifested projections of the poet's predilections and inner poetic nature.

Although it seems that he was exposed to German literature and to Rilke's writings from a very young age, it was during his time of study at Heidelberg that Feng Zhi fully grasped and recognised Rilke's modern concept of philosophical engagement with a self-reflexive subjectivity. In fact, the metaphysical image of the snake is foreshadowed within the theme of loneliness depicted in his mature lyrical works of the 1940s, which provide a more complex and telling picture of the poet's deep philosophical introspection and an analysis of the state of subjective solitude that poetically recall Novalis's notion of self-annihilation and Goethe's art of relinquishing or renouncement [*Entsagung*].

The continual search and gesture of love and affection are also vividly depicted in "Mantian Xingguang" 满天星光 (A Starry Sky, 1923), a poem also belonging to the former collection *Songs of Yesterday*, in which the poet transcends reality by flying towards infinity, surpassing the cosmic space with his lover and metaphysically rearranges the star patterns of the sky:

Into my bosom,
I gather all the stars;
With threads of love,
I string them up
Like drops of tear pearls;
And have them woven into an overcoat
To put on my lover.²³⁶

By virtue of his lyrical power of imagination the poet is able to transcend his earth-bound condition, gather all the stars of the cosmos to his arms and weave them into a celestial overcoat with threads of love for his beloved woman. The gratified sense of belonging to his lover confers the poet the transcendental power to fly over the infinite cosmos aiming towards “the end of the sky”. Together with his lover he can go beyond the range of reality and change the order of the starry patterns in the sky:

We sing to the classic immortals,
We fly to the end of the sky,
And spread out an overcoat
To rearrange the star patterns in the sky.²³⁷

It is the prevailing union in love and his heart’s affection that not only console the poet, but it also enables him to reach out for infinity and overcome his frail and earth-bound condition.

It is also worth noticing that the idea of weaving in the universe has a long tradition in ancient Chinese mythology. According to a traditional stellar myth, the Heavenly Weaver Girl, daughter of August Sun, was the weaver goddess of the clouds who was given as spouse to Heavenly Herdsman, tender of the cattle of heaven. However, given their intense love and passionate care for each other, the two lovers were punished by the gods for neglecting their activity in the sky. So it happened because of their enduring love and heavenly punishment that the Weaver Girl, having become the star Vega, and the Herdsman, known as either the star Altair or the constellation of Aquila, are now found at the extremities of the cosmos and are separated by the river of the Milky Way. However, on the seventh night of the

²³⁶ Cheung, *Feng Chih*, p. 58.

²³⁷ Cheung, *Feng Chih*, p. 58.

seventh moon of each year, magpies form a bridge across the Milky Way allowing the Weaver Girl to meet with her beloved husband.²³⁸

The image of establishing and crossing over bridges, which metaphysically enable man to overcome his own state of loneliness, is a recurrent theme in Feng Zhi's early lyricism as well as remedy for the yearning interpersonal relationships that the poet sought in his later poetic works. The concept of bridges that connect points and people over space and time gains a philosophical approach and attention that is close to the poet's heart as well as to his aesthetic experiences.

German Romantic poetry, which Feng Zhi evidently read and analysed, also markedly uses nature motifs to evoke solitude and the lyrical conveyance of loss and memory. A remarkable example of this lyrical expression is also Ludwig Tieck's poem "Einsamkeit" (Solitude, 1802), which instils into the reader's mind and heart a striking sentiment of solitude, melancholy and isolation. Tieck is particularly acclaimed for his renowned collection of Romantic fairy tales, *Volksmärchen* (1797), among which his dark short novel *Der blonde Eckbert* (*Eckbert the Fair*, 1797) ingeniously depicts the unceasing and sinuous movement in space as well as the distinctive solitude of the characters:

Forest solitude
You console me,
So will you tomorrow as you do today
And for all eternity –
My consolation,
Forest solitude.²³⁹

The term 'forest solitude', which reduces the semantic connotation of the German word *Waldeinsamkeit*, originally employed by Tieck, vividly recalls the feelings of loneliness and melancholy that also affected the modern Chinese poet who, like the German Romantics, also sought comfort and the sublime by endlessly wandering within the far-reaching bounders of nature – a theme that also became a recurrent matter in German Romantic painting.

²³⁸ See David Leeming, *A Dictionary of Asian Mythology*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 68.

²³⁹ Ludwig Tieck, "Der blonde Eckbert" in Linda Siegel, *Caspar David Friedrich and the Age of German Romanticism*, Boston, Branden Publisher, 1980, p. 26.

Feng Zhi's romanticised concept of loneliness finds its roots in his early years as a child and adolescent. Notably, as he spent most of his childhood time alone, the lines of "Zuihou zhige" 最后之歌 (Swan Song), last poem collected in his *Songs of Yesterday*, are epitome of an emotional turmoil aggravated by his state of loneliness. As the poet recollects his mother's last prayers before her death, her words become for him the "last songs of life".²⁴⁰ The description the poet gives of the moment when his mother took her last breath of life is noticeably filled with nostalgia, melancholy and sorrow:

The candle burned vehemently in the holder,
as if in the universe, there would be no tomorrow -
she left me the atmosphere of that moment,
and on my clothes the warmth of her hands.²⁴¹

Feng Zhi's close emotional bond to his mother evidently appears to be the motivating factor of the little attention the poet gave on romantic love and affairs in his writings. An instance of this emotional attachment is conveyed in the essay "Laowu" ("The old house") that portrays the poet's affection towards his mother as well as his reaction to her premature death:

"When I raise my head, the "death" of my mother has already walked into the hallway. It seems to know me. It is silent like a shadow, solemn like a shadow. I cry out, "What a lonely 'death' of my mother!"²⁴²

Similarly, such theory is maintained by scholar Xiaojue Wang, who also claims that the sudden maternal loss and separation must have triggered or increased a deep sense of loneliness, which pervaded the author's poetry and sensitivity until his last days.

²⁴⁰ "是一曲最后的"生命之歌"

²⁴¹ Feng Zhi, "Zuihou zhige", translation from Xiaojue Wang, "Fashioning Socialist Affinity: Feng Zhi and the Legacy of European Humanism in Modern Chinese Poetry", in Xiaojue Wang, *Modernity with a Cold War Face: Reimagining the Nation in Chinese Literature across the 1949 Divide*, Cambridge (Mass.) and London, Harvard University Press, 2013, p. 213.

²⁴² Feng Zhi, "Laowu", translation from Xiaojue Wang in Wang, *Modernity with a Cold War Face*, p. 214.

The poetic motif of solitude and isolation that distinguished and permeated Feng Zhi's lyricism was particularly intensified during the time when the young scholar finished his studies on German philosophy and literature at Peking University in 1927 and provisionally moved to the northern city of Harbin. Short but significant extracts from his heart-stirring experience and laments over his profound state of loneliness fill the last verses of his long poetic narrative work *Northern Journey and others*, which poetically instils a romanticised need for attention and fondness:

“At that moment, the moon was like the gas light that was burning out,
So dim that it would vanish in my lap;
At that moment, the gas light was like the moon that was falling,
In my lap, in the room, in the universe, it was gloomy, gloomy.”²⁴³

The lyrical subject of these verses is found in a Japanese wine shop and becomes frantic and notably anxious because of his “lonely youth in the hostile foreign world.”²⁴⁴ To close the last verses of his poem and emphasise his unendurable feelings of loneliness, Feng had originally quoted the lines of a *haiku*, which he later removed for the revised version of 1955, by the eighteenth-century Japanese poet Issa Kobayashi (1763-1827) whose poetry particularly reflected the small joys of life as well as the human state of solitude:

“Well here it is my final home?
Five feet of snow” (1812)

The analogy with the Japanese *haiku* serves the poet to juxtapose images of his utter state of solitude with the feelings and lyricism of other poets emphasising the collective state of loneliness that engulfs mankind as a whole. Moreover, the extent of the poet's disconsolation in Harbin was such that Feng Zhi compared his surroundings and his experience to the image of Pompeii, the ancient and quintessential city of love and sin.

²⁴³ Feng Zhi, *Beiyong ji qita* in Xiaoju Wang, *Modernity with Cold War Face*, p. 212.

²⁴⁴ Feng Zhi, *Beiyong ji qita* in Xiaoju Wang, *Modernity with Cold War Face*, p. 212.

When it comes to the more direct lyrical influence and ultimate transtextual cues in Feng Zhi's poetry, and more specifically the twenty-seven sonnets, from his German admirers, poet Rainer Maria Rilke was an epitome of solitude. Other than Rilke, as shown in Feng Zhi's own research and doctoral thesis, traces of transtextuality also connect the Chinese poems with other texts of German Romantic idealists and philosophers. These mainly paved the philosophical ground upon which Feng Zhi's mature poetic writing is based.

3.2 The sonnet collection

While still studying in Germany until 1935, Feng Zhi recounts of his days and time spent in solitude. In fact, in a letter to Hui Xiu and Xiang He dated 9 December 1931, the poet confessed to have spent days when he experienced loneliness and times when he did not even utter a single word in a whole day (我近来才真是感到寂寞了有时甚至于一天不说一句话).²⁴⁵

A few years after his return from Germany, the political and social instabilities produced by the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese conflict in 1937 caused various professors and scholars, including Feng Zhi, to roam the Chinese countryside. Feng Zhi's journey finally ended in 1939, when he finally settled at Kunming and was made professor at the National Southwest Associated University.²⁴⁶

This was an enduring period of poetic and creative silence that lasted until 1943 when he wrote the article “Gongzuo er dengdai” 工作而等待 (“Worked and waited”), and which also culminated with the ‘aesthetic awakening’ that enabled him to write and publish his refined mature lyrical collection of sonnets. This aesthetic awakening is also what comparatively unites the lyrical production of Feng Zhi with the philosophy and aesthetic experiences of German writer Rainer Maria Rilke.

In fact, as Feng Zhi stressed during the ceremony of the Inter-Nationes Kunstpreis in 1987, Rilke's and Goethe's writings played a vital role in the shaping of his emotional stance. From what transpires from the poems of Feng Zhi, the modern Chinese writer learnt from Rilke's and Goethe's way of dealing with solitude and society and developed an innovative concept of aesthetic thought that places him on a pre-modernist scale.

²⁴⁵ Feng Zhi's letter to Hui Xiu and Xiang He, dated 9 December 1931 in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanjì*, Vol. 12, p. 131.

²⁴⁶ With the advent of the Sino-Chinese conflict in 1937, Peking University, Tsinghua University and Nanking University united forces and moved to Changsha and Kunming, establishing the National Changsha Temporary University (国立长沙临时大学 *Guoli Changsha Linshi Daxue*) and National Southwest Associated University respectively – 国立西南联合大学 *Guoli Xinan Lianhe Daxue*.

It is very interesting to notice that both Rilke and Feng Zhi experienced a similar enduring period of poetic and creative silence, which for Feng officially closes in 1943 with the publication of “Gongzuo er dengdai”. In this essay, Feng also quoted the lines of two significant authors: Bian Zhilin’s translation of the English poem “In Time of War” (Sonnet XXIII), written by W. H. Auden (1907-1973) in Wuhan during the Japanese invasion, and Rilke’s “work and endurance”²⁴⁷.

The British poet Auden referred to Rilke in his sonnet in *Journey to a War* (1939) and even if he praised Rilke’s poetical achievements, he could not fully agree with his detachment from the real and daily problems. In fact, Auden believed that the world is the place where the poet lives and a complete detachment from it would interfere with the latter’s realisation of literary motifs and poetic subject: a poet can be active in the world he lives in, but he has to be careful on the extent to which he interacts with his environment “without causing more harm than good.”²⁴⁸

This kind of relationship with the environment is also what characterises the poetic themes of Rilke’s lyricism, which often ends up with the realisation of the utter state of solitude. The German poet saw solitude as essential for the protection of creativity. According to Rilke, solitude manifests itself to the sensitive man not in form of imposition from society but rather as the awareness of the human insight into the realm of the self and reality. “Einsamkeit” (“Solitude”, 1902) is one of his early poems that clearly deals with this introspective matter:

Solitude is like a rain
That from the sea at dusk begins to rise;
It floats remote across the far-off plain
Upward into its dwelling-place, the skies,
Then o’er the town it slowly sinks again.
Like rain it softly falls at that dim hour
When ghostly lanes turn toward the shadowy morn;
When bodies weighed with satiate passion’s power
Sad, disappointed from each other turn;
When men with quiet hatred burning deep
Together in a common bed must sleep-
Through the gray, phantom shadows of the dawn

²⁴⁷ Wang, *Modernity with a Cold War Face*, p. 216.

²⁴⁸ David Garrett Izzo, *W.H. Auden Encyclopedia*, Jefferson and London, McFarland Publishers, 2004, p. 228.

Lo! Solitude floats down the river wan...²⁴⁹

It is evident here that Rilke, alone in an unknown city, was adjusting his imagination of solitude as the natural element of the mind.

Every moment of man's life that involves especially involves a change is marked by the experience of solitude. However, solitude is not a melancholic thought for Rilke as it is not for Feng Zhi either: solitude, as it is best exemplified in sonnet 5, is revalorised as the occasion for man to reconsider his experiences and gain a clearer understanding of himself and his identity.

In Feng Zhi's sonnets, the incapacity of the solitary self to merge completely and permanently into one holistic group and become part of it is depicted through various images, such as that of bridges, boats, arms and tree roots. In relation to this, the main character of Rilke's novel *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (*The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, 1910), Malte, a twenty-eight-year old Dane, moves to Paris, remaining the solitary foreigner in the big city, thus, never becoming part of the crowd. Much can also be said about the definition of solitude in the context of pure creativity. In *Letters to a Young Poet*, for instance, Rilke advises his correspondent to cultivate his muse by avoiding literary critics and excessive self-criticism. The German writer rather advises his reader to establish contact with the natural world and to freely plumb the self. To Rilke, a considerable component of the self was found in childhood and memory; for this reason he wrote:

"Try to raise up the sunken feelings of this enormous past; your personality will grow stronger, your solitude will expand and become a place where you can live in the twilight, where the noise of other people passes by, far in the distance."²⁵⁰

It is very interesting to notice that Feng Zhi took the advice of Rilke: in his sonnets, especially those that relate to the far-off past and destiny, the lyrical voice makes constant references to the feelings of the "enormous past" (sonnet 1, 18, 19) or to places where the hero is not affected by the "noise of the other people" far in the distance (sonnet 9).

²⁴⁹ Rilke, *Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. in English by Jassie Lamont, The Floating Press, 2012, p. 30.

²⁵⁰ Ray Soulard (ed), *Letters to a Young Poet by Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. in English by Stephen Mitchell, Portland, Scriptor Press, 2001, p. 6.

In *Letters*, Rilke also clarifies the slim transition from the solitude that has been identified as essential to the safeguard of creative work to the new concept of solitude as a virtue. As he wrote:

“What is necessary, after all, is only this: solitude, vast inner solitude. To walk inside yourself and meet no one for hours — that is what you must be able to attain. To be solitary as you were when you were a child, when the grown-ups walked around involved with matters that seemed large and important because they looked so busy and because you didn’t understand a thing about what they were doing.”²⁵¹

A further teaching directly coming from Rilke’s *Letters* regards the attention for ordinary things that the solitary lyrical self is found to contemplate and establish a kind of relation. In fact, as Rilke suggested his correspondent, it is much for efficient to share one’s feelings with the things that are found in the surroundings especially when one cannot share anything with any person:

“[...] even if, outside any position, you had simply tried to find some easy and independent contact with society, this feeling of being hemmed in would not have been spared you. — It is like this everywhere; but that is no cause for anxiety or sadness; if there is nothing you can share with other people, try to be close to Things; they will not abandon you; and the nights are still there, and the winds that move through the trees and across many lands; everything in the world of Things and animals is still filled with happening, which you can take part in; and children are still the way you were as a child, sad and happy in just the same way — and if you think of your childhood, you once again live among them, and the grown-ups are nothing, and their dignity has no value.”²⁵²

The sadness and anxiety Rilke mentions in his *Letters* are easily traceable in the sonnets of Feng Zhi, who also looks at the world of things and ‘animals’ rather than the world of people to search for that specific happening that Rilke declared in his writings. Feng Zhi dedicates a whole lyrical composition to the birth of a few puppies in sonnet 23:

Rain has not stopped falling for a fortnight,
Since you came to life,
You’ve only known the damp and gloom.
One day, the rainy clouds have suddenly dispersed,

Sunlight has shone over the walls,
I saw your mother
Holding and taking you to the sunlight,

²⁵¹ Soulard, *Letters to a Young Poet*, p. 19.

²⁵² Soulard, *Letters to a Young Poet*, p. 20.

So letting your whole bodies

Feel the warmth of light for the first time,
The sun has set, she's taken you back.
You cannot remember,

But this first time experience
Will blend into your future sounds of bark,
And you will bring light again in the nights.²⁵³

The very enigmatic lines of this sonnet can be interpreted in light of what Rilke, especially meant when he wrote that “the thought of being a creator is nothing without the thousand fold assent from Things and animals” as these are full of inherited memories “of the engendering and birthing of millions”:

““The thought of being a creator, of engendering, of shaping” is nothing without the continuous great confirmation and embodiment in the world, nothing without the thousandfold assent from Things and animals—and our enjoyment of it is so indescribably beautiful and rich only because it is full of inherited memories of the engendering and birthing of millions.”²⁵⁴

The poetic subject is said to find enjoyment in the indescribable beauty and richness found in the assent from “Things and animals”, which, according to Rilke, bring forward an eternal and unceasing passage of memories from kind to kind. This is what Feng Zhi seemingly implies in the concluding tercet of sonnet 23, where the puppies are said to bring light again in the nights through the sounds of bark that conceal those first-time experiences of the warmth of light. In fact, the gloom and rain of the first lines of the sonnet stand in contrast with the enjoyable notion and images of sun, light and warmth that are mystically embodied within the sound of the puppies’ future bark.

Furthermore, the Chinese poet also makes reference to another basic view of Rilke, where plants and animals are silent enduring forms of love and yearning. The plants and animals in Feng Zhi’s verses, such as the autumn trees, cicada and moths of sonnet 2, the tiny insects fluttering forever young in sonnet 24, and particularly those tiny insects of sonnet 1 that are praised for having accomplished their first union; are enduring forms of love, in front of the solitary man, that patiently and

²⁵³ Sonnet 23.

²⁵⁴ Soulard, *Letters to a Young Poet*, p. 15.

willingly unite, multiply and grow for their great necessity. This notion is in complete accordance with what Rilke wrote in his *Letters*:

“He [the solitary man] can remember that all beauty in animals and plants is a silent, enduring form of love and yearning, and he can see the animal, as he sees plants, patiently and willingly uniting and multiplying and growing, not out of physical pleasure, not out of physical pain, but bowing to necessities that are greater than pleasure and pain, and more powerful than will and withstanding. If only human beings could more humbly receive this mystery — which the world is filled with, even in its smallest Things —, could bear it, endure it, more solemnly, feel how terribly heavy it is, instead of taking it lightly.”²⁵⁵

Feng Zhi could have also taken a further exemplifying note of ‘solitary union’ from Rilke’s writings and teachings and applied it to his own sonnets. In fact, it is possible to distinguish a mystified form of ‘union’ of at least two people in most of Feng Zhi’s sonnets as many of these poems are narrated from a plural perspective: “we” 我们. Nonetheless, if one had to take Rilke’s philosophical perspective again as point of reference and demystifying reading key, a further and more subtle meaning of Feng Zhi’s “we” would not be limiting the semantic Chinese reading of *women* 我们 to a completed union of two bodies merging into one new being. Instead, as it also transpires from some of the sonnets, notably the Venetian sonnet (sonnet 5), the Chinese plural personal pronoun *women* would, in actual fact, refer to the ‘union’ of two ‘solitary beings’ that share the same destiny.

Moreover, in the essay published in 1945, “Gede yu ren de jiaoyu” 歌德与人的教育 (“Goethe and the Education of People”), Feng Zhi also borrowed Goethe’s concept of society and alleged his idea of community consciousness while simultaneously emphasising pure individualism. Feng Zhi implies here that the fruitful power of a community lies in its sense of collectiveness. This became particularly evident after the Chinese writer took the example of Napoleon’s defeat and Germany’s final victory. Feng Zhi conceptualises a new individual (*xinren* 新人) whose life has to be suitable for collectiveness [适宜于集体生活]. The main characteristic of this *xinren* lays in his self-consciousness. The union of these new individuals would ultimately construct an ideal society based on community. Within this ideal community-society, each individual retains his own expertise in his own

²⁵⁵ Soulard, *Letters to a Young Poet*, p. 14.

field: “Each individual has to be helpful to others everywhere” [每个人要到处对己对人都有用处]²⁵⁶. As he continues, all occupations are equal and the distinction between high and low is only based on whether or not the occupation’s attitude is genuine. With regards to this notion, Goethe, as Feng Zhi clarifies, demanded an example of a new man (*xinren*) suitable for collective life: “people know each other, know exactly what they are doing and think for all of mankind. Is this not what we are asking now? Goethe had felt this urgency more than hundred years ago” [人们精确地认识自己的事务而处处为全人类着想这种人不是我们现在所要求的吗? 在一百多年前歌德已经迫切地感到了].²⁵⁷

What Feng Zhi implies with *women* in his sonnets seemingly corresponds to the union of people into collectiveness, hence, forming a community. The title given to one of the already mentioned essays, “Gongzuo er dengdai”, also contains Feng Zhi’s exploration interpersonal relationship especially between the individual and the group: the individual and the group are not necessarily in antithesis. In fact, they are both ostensibly connected and complementary. Proper and hard-working individuals create the base upon which a “sound community”, as Feng Zhi claims, can be built. As he emphasised in another writing, “Lun geren de diwei” 论个人的地位 (“On The Status of the Individual”) a sound community will not deny the status of an individual: “only a chaotic society [would] not allow an individual’s status” [只有一个混沌的社会才不允许个人的地位].²⁵⁸ Feng Zhi admits that pure individualism was rare to find within the Chinese society. Instead, it was mainly selfishness and egoism and wide spread everywhere [反而是自私主义, 利己主义, 到处蔓延着].²⁵⁹ As Feng Zhi claims, genuine individualism does not harm a sound society: “it would be unfair to say that individualism has any sin” [如果说个人主义有什么罪,

²⁵⁶ Feng Zhi, “Gede yu ren de jiaoyu” 歌德于人的教育 (“Goethe and the Education of People”) in Han Yaocheng 韩耀成, *Feng Zhi Quanji* 冯至全集 (*The Complete Works of Feng Zhi*), Vol. 8, Shijiazhuang, Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999, p. 86.

²⁵⁷ Feng Zhi, “Gede yu ren de jiaoyu” in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 86.

²⁵⁸ Feng Zhi, “Lun geren de diwei” 论个人的地位 (On the Status of the Individual) in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 288.

²⁵⁹ Feng Zhi, “Lun geren de diwei” in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 288.

就未免不公平了].²⁶⁰ The solution Feng Zhi proposes for a sound society that is free from chaos is that of respecting “the solemn work and criticism of the individual” [尊重个人的严肃的工作与澈的批评].²⁶¹

Feng Zhi suggests the integration of the individual into the collective group. The amalgamation of the individual within the group should not involve the complete demise of the same individual. Instead, in line with Goethe’s concept of rebirth and what Feng Zhi also theorised in his doctoral dissertation, the individual acquires a new life within the group: “dying is only a process towards a higher life” [死只是一个走向更高的生命的过程].²⁶² In the 1890s, Goethe considered the question of whether poetry and natural science could be combined. Using Goethe’s own confession of the categorization of the individual phenomenon as a universal law, Feng Zhi concluded that Goethe was not a trained expert in science, but rather a thinker closer to natural philosophy who found universal laws from individual phenomena through his own experiences and applies them.²⁶³

In the process of interaction between individuals and groups, Feng Zhi focuses on the important role of "despair" or "discontinuity" in the integration of the two parts. He pointed out that Rilke, Goethe and Du Fu, who lived in times of turmoil, have respectively experienced the despair of reality and the "remembrance of life". From what Feng Zhi claims in his essays, the author is seemingly also experiencing an analogous form of desperation. By quoting Goethe in his essay, Feng Zhi asserts that the German poet deeply experienced the profound distress of life and concludes that “no one can live without despair and constantly make positive efforts from despair is the greatest strength in Goethe’s rich writings, but people cannot see the illusion in his work” [从绝望中不断地产生积极的努力，是歌德最伟大的力蜚歌

²⁶⁰ Feng Zhi, “Lun geren de diwei” in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 288.

²⁶¹ Feng Zhi, “Lun geren de diwei” in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 5, p. 289.

²⁶² Feng Zhi, “Cong ‘Fashige’ li de ‘renzaoren’ lue lun Gede de ziran zhexue” 从〈浮士德〉里的‘人造人’略论歌德的自然哲学 (From the ‘Homunculus’ of Faust – Brief Reflections on Goethe’s Philosophy of Nature) in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 55.

²⁶³ See Feng Zhi, “Lun Gede, de huigu, ming yu buchong” 《伦歌德》的回顾，明与补充 [“Clarification and Supplement to the Review of the Essay on Goethe”] in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 19.

德的著作这样丰富，但是人们在他的作品里看不见空幻]。²⁶⁴ With this regard, Feng Zhi's poetry treats "despair" and "suffering" as the necessary journey leading to the ultimate goal and as a necessary experience of life. Despair and suffering become epitome of the sublime, necessary elements for self-consciousness and amalgamation of the individual within the community.

Goethe's and Rilke's poetry veritably played a vital role in the shaping of Feng Zhi's pre-Modernist thought and poetic exemplification. Their inter-personal relationships and the way the two German poets dealt with solitude and collectiveness seemingly played a decisive role in the making of Feng Zhi's lyrical voice and the latter's relationship with the other. Nonetheless, when it comes to love affair and enduring love relationships at least, seen as the ultimate union of two individuals, it is possible to discern a clear difference between Feng Zhi's and Rilke's life experiences: despite the feelings of loneliness that animate his lyrical production, Feng Zhi married and had a daughter; whereas Rilke, from what it is possible to learn from his poetic production and life, failed to find enduring love relationships not seeing any hope in marital union already after two years of marriage.

However, with regards to the loving relationship with their own parents, even if not exactly the same, both Feng Zhi and Rilke did go through a similar painful experience. Rilke's parents' love was corresponded on the same terms, whereas in the case of Feng Zhi, as claimed by the same poet several times in different occasions, he was very much attached to his mother who accidentally passed away while he was still a very young boy.

It is in *Letters to a Young Poet* that Rilke admitted of not seeing lovers scarifying as a union, encouraging love between two human beings rather than love from man to woman:

"This advance (at first very much against the will of the outdistanced men) will transform the love experience, which is now filled with error, will change it from the ground up, and reshape it into a relationship that is meant to be between one human being and another, no longer one that flows from man to woman. [...]. And

²⁶⁴ Feng Zhi, "Gede yu ren de jiaoyu" in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanj*, Vol. 8, p. 86.

this more human love [...] consists in this: the two solitudes protect and border and greet each other.”²⁶⁵

Novalis’s idea of union in marriage was much stronger and also much more in line with what Feng Zhi was apparently exposed in China since a very young age. The concept of union as opposed to solitude, as it is found in Novalis’s *Fragmente*, implicitly appears as another possibility to read Feng Zhi’s *women*. In fact, Novalis saw marriage as the highest secret [das höchste Geheimnis] and lamented that man is faced with two extreme options: either marriage or solitude [die Wahl zwischen Ehe und Einsamkeit]. In a very interesting sentence, the German Romantic poet reflects on how few people are actually capable of real marriage and also how few people could endure solitude [wie wenig Menschen sind einer eigentlichen Ehe fähig – wie wenig können auch Einsamkeit ertragen]. Novalis declares that marriage is an eternal union and that applies to Feng’s lyrical subject’s transcendental journey into infinity with his companion: “Marriage is an infinite union. Is the woman the purpose of man and is woman without a purpose? [Eine unendliche Verbindung ist die Ehe. – Ist die Frau der Zweck des Mannes und ist die Frau ohne Zweck?]²⁶⁶.

It is relevant to remind that the life of Novalis was also filled with significant spiritual experiences that, in a way or another, do equate with Rilke’s own aesthetic experiences. These were essential for the Romantic poet who embarked on spiritual metaphysics and mysticism. In fact, with the death of Sophie von Kühn in 1797, Novalis began to glimpse the inner spiritual realm and the astral light. The feeling of solitude and the following sense of overbearing fear escorted the poet to the edge of the spiritual world. Novalis’s result is similar to what Feng’s poetic voice experiences on the high mountaintop before the intertwined paths of the far-stretching plain: “above the region hovered my freed and new-born spirit” [über der Gegend schwebte mein entbundner, neugeborner Geist]²⁶⁷.

²⁶⁵ Soulard, *Letters to a Young Poet*, p. 26.

²⁶⁶ Novalis, *Neue Fragmente* “Sophie, oder über die Frauen” [Sophie, or about women] (Chapter 1), offered by Projekt Gutenberg – DE, <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/neue-fragmente-5231/1>. Accessed 5 February 2017.

²⁶⁷ Karl-Maria Guth, *Novalis: Hymnen an die Nacht – Geistliche Lieder*, Hofenberg Verlag, Berlin, 2016, p. 133.

Affective relationship, not merely intended as spiritual metaphysical process and attachment as in Novalis's hymns, was what troubled Rilke throughout his poetic career and personal life. In fact, the modern German poet maintained a quite distant emotional relationship with many of his friends and acquaintances, who ended up tolerating and accepting his requests. After all, Rilke, as also seen in Feng Zhi's poetry, believed that man is born solitary and must come to terms with his state of solitude:

"And to speak of solitude again, it becomes clearer and clearer that fundamentally this is nothing that one can choose or refrain from. We are solitary. We can delude ourselves about this and act as if it were not true. That is all. But how much better it is to recognize that we are alone; yes, even to begin from this realization."²⁶⁸

Moreover, the correspondent to Rilke's letters might also come up with the question of what is profitable or, better, what can society, hence, the collectiveness, give to the individual solitary being. The answer, also implied in one of Feng Zhi's lines, is rather intriguing: a form of amusement.

In one particular passage of *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke mentions the "most varied inventions", such as boats and water wings, that society has been able to create and provide some forms of "easy, cheap, safe and sure public" amusements:

"No area of human experience is so extensively provided with conventions as this one is: there are live-preservers of the most varied invention, boats and water wings; society has been able to create refuges of very sort, for since it preferred to take love-life as an amusement, it also had to give it an easy form, cheap, safe, and sure, as public amusements are."

In one of Feng Zhi's poems, sonnet 8, the lyrical voice evokes a dream of ancient times when man wished to reach the skies and the stars. The subtle hint amusement is reserved for those who belong to the "utterly confused" world. Amusement of this kind is, however, only an ephemeral and provisional state of enjoyment apt to entertain man for a very short period of time, as man "cannot forget this confused world":

It is a dream of ancient times,
The world of today utterly confused,
I wish to hold onto a roc and fly high

²⁶⁸ Soulard, *Letters to a Young Poet*, p. 29.

And talk with the peaceful stars.

An ancient dream, like an old man
Awaiting the best descendants...
Today, men fly towards the stars,
Yet, can not forget this confused world.²⁶⁹

Among Rilke's poetic writings, the most striking plea for transcendental love is encompassed in the *Duino Elegies*. The *Duino Elegies* represent a search for transcendence in order to overcome pain, and being love external, the poetic voice of the elegies attempts, unsuccessfully, to internalise it. The elegies were finalised during the last years of his life in Muzot, where Rilke exemplified solitude as artistic and solitary and almost turned into a hermit.

After his aesthetic awakening, Feng Zhi succeeds to write and publish his mature lyrical collection of sonnets, *Shisihang ji*, in 1941 and his work *Wu Zixu* in 1943. From this moment on, Feng Zhi began to conceive a new tendency towards an enigmatic and existentialist attitude that addressed the close and mutual relationship between the individual and the surrounding community.

The pre-Modernist idea of self-completion achieved through the full aesthetic realisation of the individual and his position within a systematic community characterise the poetry and the modernist form of the sonnets. It is by means of this aesthetic experience that the poetic self succeeds to overcome his limited condition of finitude and achieve a metaphysical state of infinity that could soothe and mitigate the poet's state of loneliness. This aesthetic experience of self-completion sung in the sonnets leads the poetic voice to a firmer realisation of his inner self and how this relates to a new other world. Imagination and self-realisation empower an increasing sense of longing for infinity, which is attained and quenched through a metaphysical experience that goes beyond the normal and physical level.

The theme of longing for infinity merges together with that of the desire for communion. The development of this theme in Feng's sonnets is what clearly marks the advent of modernity and man's longing for company. The continuous change of

²⁶⁹ First octave in sonnet 8.

man's sense of solitude and search for interpersonal relationships become evident throughout the sonnets.

To begin with, the first sonnet of the collection opens with a clear enigmatic “we” 我们 that emphasises the poet's perception of individualism versus collectiveness: “We prepare ourselves to deeply receive” 我们准备着深深地领受. To stress the idea of communion, the poet uses words that normally denote unity, relationship and intimacy, such as “the first embrace” 第一次的拥抱, “the first copulation” 第一次交媾 or always implied cries of collective perseverance as in “our entire lives we endure” 我们整个的生命在承受.

The tiny insects sung in sonnet 1 are praised for having accomplished the culminating moment of union that cannot be limited here to mere sexual intimacy. The implied concept of union must be extended to the metaphysical merging of two or more bodies into one holistic system. This exemplification of primordial unity is also what prefigures the salvation of the species as a whole over the ceaseless running of time. As the poem claims, these tiny insects might have also endured or escaped the incumbent danger although they happen to transiently terminate their beautiful lives as the unexpected breaks – the passing of a comet:

“We praise those tiny insects,
That accomplished their first union,
Or that resisted their first danger,

Now, their wondrous lives come to an end.
Our entire lives we endure
A rushing wind swiftly blows, a comet appears.”

The rushing wind that swiftly blows metaphorically appears like the vision of a comet that unexpectedly comes over men's life. The collective endurance sung in sonnet 1 is what momentarily helps men to stay united and provides them with the right attitude to receive the wonders of life. The poet conveys the image of nature that teaches a lesson of survival instinct, which safeguards the species from perishing during the endless course of time.

The capacity of establishing these interpersonal relationships eventually leads men to create a unity that keeps them steady until the very last and propitious moment. The idea of collectiveness conveyed in sonnet 1 does not include interpersonal relationships that are only possible through the communion of the flesh but also through the share of common feelings: the lyrical ‘we’ of the poem informs the reader of a sentimental bondage that united the parts over time. These take the shape of “motionless forms” 不动的形体 of “past sorrows and joys” 过去的悲欢 that are experienced by mankind during the course of life and that suddenly become rising insurmountable figures.

The relationship of the poetic subject with another part enables him to accomplish life cycles. In sonnet 2, for instance, the lyrical voice is once again accompanied by the presence of another person, perhaps the beloved half, who together with the subject undergoes metaphysical changes. The mutations that normally belong to the life cycle are mirrored in nature. The poet reminds here the image of the moulting cicada and moth to evoke the changeable property of human and natural life. What is here of utmost importance is the identification of collectiveness enables the change. The poetic voice informs of a body disposition that does not only occur individually but rather collectively. The circle is finally closes with the realisation that such mutations affect the whole cosmic sphere: human and natural.

This poetic realisation empowers the phenomenal change of things within the cosmos as man can ultimately glimpse the different stages of life neatly represented in nature:

“What could ever fall from our body,
We shall let it turn into dust:
We dispose ourselves in this age
Like the autumn trees, bough after bough

Bearing leaves and tardy flowers
For the autumn wind, freeing its boughs
Stretching out for the rigid winter; we dispose ourselves
Within nature, like the moulting cicada and moth

That leave their shell in the mud;
We prepare ourselves for that

Coming death, resembling a song”

The autumn trees, whose boughs are freed of leaves and tardy flowers by the autumn wind, become here presage of death. The fatal image is then filled with other natural elements that indicate the last stage of the life cycle.²⁷⁰ In fact, as the moulting cicada and moth leave their shells in the mud, the poetic subjects become ready to receive the propitious gush of wind that takes the last breath away. Also in sonnet 2 the poetic voice informs of a collective stance that unites more parts: “We prepare ourselves for the coming death” 我们把我们安排给那个未来的死亡.

The counterbalance between the sense of loneliness and its contrastive state of collectiveness is immediately found in sonnet 3, which the poet dedicated to the eucalyptus tree.

The sonnet reveals another hidden truth of Feng Zhi’s poetic vision: the metaphysical guidance of a powerful being that is here associated with the image of the eucalyptus tree. As the lyrical voice puts, the tree appears as a high and “holy body” 生者的身体 that sublimates the surrounding. The poetic self declares the eternal nature of the tree that he regards as his personal “guide” 引导:

“You, jade tree that soughs in the autumn wind
Are a melody in my ear
That builds a solemn temple,
Let me reverently enter.

And you, tower that pierces the clear sky
Rise before me so high,
You resemble a holy body,
And sublimate the clamour of the whole city.

²⁷⁰ From the overall understanding of Feng Zhi’s sonnets, the reader immediately finds that nature undergoes an unbroken cycle of change and rebirth, whereas man does not. Man seems to have no control over time and no remedy to his mutable condition. Unlike the tree or the cicada, which can moult and change their outer skin, man has nothing that can fall from his body; he can only “return into dust” (sonnet 2). This notion is also transtextually also contemplated in Rilke’s first Elegy: “Aber die Liebenden nimmt die erschöpfte Natur in sich zurück, als wären nicht zweimal die Kräfte, dieses zu leisten” [But lovers are taken back by the exhausted Nature, as if there it no longer had the power to make them again].

You, eternally shed your bark,
Wither and manifest your maturity;
In the intertwined paths of the countryside

You are my guide:
May you be eternal, as I wish to gradually
Decay for the soil under your roots.”

The personal choice of the lyrical self to decay under the soil and roots of the tree reveals the subtle importance of solitary fulfilment that cannot be achieved otherwise if contoured by other defiling things and beings. There is here a further vital element of Feng’s poetry, reminiscent of German and European Romanticism: the identification of the sublime in nature and its eternal manifestation to mankind. In fact, such a poetic view and realisation had become accepted in Europe already during the 17th century, when the metaphysical Welsh poet and mystic Henry Vaughan (1621-1695) unleashed his remarkable spiritual intuition and sensitivity to nature in his very much acclaimed poem “The Water-fall” (1655). Vaughan’s poem manifests a conventional notion of nature as means of communication between God and mankind. During the Middle Ages in Europe, nature at times regarded as a book used by God to convey messages of truth to men. Nature is then full of human meanings, hence close to men – a useful medium between mankind and God and the source of recognition of the self:

“What sublime truths and wholesome themes
Lodge in thy mystical deep streams!
Such as dull man can never find
Unless that Spirit lead his mind
Which first upon thy face did move,
And hatch’d all with his quick’ning love.”²⁷¹

A completion to this thought is the German romantic idea of longing for wholeness and organic unity, a nostalgic escape from the regular alienation of “modernity” and the world. This outcry of flight into the natural realm is attained through the metaphysical change of the poetic subject’s ephemeral human condition into a permanent and steady dimension. The evanescent order of man is here highlighted by

²⁷¹ Henry Vaughan “The Water-fall” in Jay Parini, *The Wadsworth Anthology of Poetry*, Boston, Thomson Wadsworth, 2006, p. 1290.

the solitary condition of the poetic self and is further epitomised by the image of the “jade tree” 玉树.

The image of the tree as whole is the epitome of solitude in Feng Zhi’s poetry. This can be best elucidated when considering the introductory lines of the Chinese poet’s preface 译者序 to the translation of Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet* [给一个青年诗人的十封]. It is in this section that Feng Zhi officially proclaims his vision of men’s solitude by affirming that every man who is born on this world is lonely and is just another tree put in a garden together with other trees standing in lines [入到世上来，是艰难而孤单。一个个的人在世上好似园里的那些并排着的树].

The figure of the tree embodies multiple correlated meanings in the poetry of Feng Zhi. As German poet Rilke also wrote in his *Duino Elegies* (published in 1923):

“Maybe what’s left
for us is some tree on a hillside we can look at
day after day, one of yesterday’s streets,
and the perverse affection of a habit
that liked us so much it never let go.”²⁷²

Both Rilke and Feng Zhi depict their inner self and sense of anxiety through the mystified image of a tree that is found somewhere on a slope. The symbol of the tree is connected with the fate of the lyrical subject; and the eucalyptus tree, which the Chinese sonnet eulogises, is the way to the poet’s inner self – his ‘guide’. The personification of the tree is further enhanced in Feng Zhi’s poetry through the exploitation of the sense of loneliness: the lyrical self finds complete fulfilment of the sublime only when he has metaphysically and physically ‘entered’ the dimension of nature. The poetic voice exhorts and idolises the tree that mystically creates a temple of music thanks to the souging of the wind among the branches and leaves of the holy body.

²⁷² Rainer Rilke, *Duino Elegies* (The First Elegy) in Mark Doty (ed.), *Rainer Maria Rilke: Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. in English by A. Poulin, New York, First Mariner Books, 2005, p. 5.

The romantic-modernist lyricism of Feng Zhi and his notable attention to the Rilkean ideology as well as modern German philosophy are particularly recurrent in sonnet 5, which the Chinese poet dedicated to the city of Venice. During the Internationales Kunstpreis in 1987, Feng Zhi admitted to have attended some lectures of German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), whose theory on existentialism and concept of infinite 'shipwreck of existence' clearly marked and characterised the poetry of the young Chinese scholar.

The state of melancholy and unquenchable sense of solitude that particularly affect the new modern era and mankind are represented in sonnet 5 through a series of analogies and stylistic allusions. The city of Venice becomes here an aesthetic expression of the human condition:

I will never forget
That water city of the West,
Symbol of mankind,
Group of myriads of lonely beings.

Each an island,
Each making friends.
Your hand stretches towards me,
Like a bridge over the water;

You smile at me,
Like a window on an island
That suddenly opens.

But, in the deep and silent night,
Those windows are closed,
And on the bridges not even the footprints.

The senses and emotions aroused by the image of Venice have been the poetic subject for a number of centuries. Even modern German writer Thomas Mann evoked the aesthetic decadence of the city in his short novel *Death in Venice* (*Der Tod in Venedig*, 1912). The attractive and aesthetic decadence of the city is also what increased and strengthened the inner state of frustration and solitude of the main character who ends up being annihilated and decides to die rather than leaving the lagoon.

The image and the sense of solitude as well as the impotence before the human condition of isolation, stylistically symbolised by the analogy with the city of Venice, are those sentiments deeply rooted in the nature of mankind that generate the poetic essence in the verses of Feng Zhi's sonnet.

It is interesting to notice that Venice is the second Italian city evoked in the writings of Feng Zhi. In his long poem *Journey to the North and Others*, the author had already made reference to the ancient city of Pompeii as the place where love and sin converge into one. Nevertheless, the Venetian sonnet landed in Italy on 11th September 1987 for the first time when the Chinese scholar, at that time honorary president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), introduced the poem to the Italian audience in occasion of the trip to Palermo and the award of the Mondello International Literary Prize to the contemporary Chinese writer Wang Meng 王蒙 (1934-).²⁷³ During this trip to Palermo, Feng Zhi also tells of his memories of his first journey to Italy and of his sonnet dedicated to Venice. Moreover, the Chinese scholar explains further all the comparative studies he had conducted with the philosophy of Jaspers and Kierkegaard, making references to Taoism and Buddhism and finally bringing Western and Chinese philosophy closer.

The fourteen lines of sonnet 5 encapsulate the poetry and the philosophical thought of Feng Zhi. Like the other sonnets of the collection, the poem was written during the years of the Sino-Japanese conflict and reveals a substantial part of Feng Zhi's maturity and thought. The state of solitude here expressed and the author's consistent awareness of the incapacity and difficult human condition to stop his melancholic state of separation clearly show the philosophical inspiration and literary influence exerted by the works of Rilke, Nietzsche and Jaspers onto his lyrical production. According to Nietzsche, the precondition of the artist-philosopher for being the creator of himself is 'solitude'. In numerous works Nietzsche develops the concept of solitude. For instance, in the second part of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister* (*Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, 1879), the German philosopher advocates that the human condition has

²⁷³ Vilma Costantini, "E Wang sbarca a Palermo", *La Repubblica*, 3 September 1987, <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1987/09/03/wang-sbarca-palermo.html>. Accessed 10 November 2016.

to decide between solitude and the presence of many. In one of his aphorisms of the section 348 “Aus dem Lande der Menschenfresser” (From the Land of Man-Eaters), Nietzsche wrote: “In der Einsamkeit frisst sich der Einsame selbst auf, in der Vielsamkeit fressen ihn die vielen. Nun wähle.”²⁷⁴ (In Solitude, the solitary man eats himself, whereas in collectiveness, he is eaten up by others. Now choose). Moreover, in *Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, 1883-91), Nietzsche implies that one can only learn about humans by staying far from them: “Man verlernt die Menschen, wenn man unter Menschen lebt: zu viel Vordegrund ist an allen Menschen – was sollen da weitsichtige, weitsüchtige Augen!”²⁷⁵ Finally, when Zarathustra delivers his war sermon against the external obstacles, his first target is the state, that is the new idol for those who have become tired of their desires. Zarathustra does not recommend revolution to overthrow the state, rather he advises to flee to solitude for the sake of freedom.²⁷⁶ Freedom is his important cause and that is manifested as freedom from passions and from the state.

It is important to remember that during his period of formation, Feng Zhi was not only initially attracted by Goethe’s philosophical thought but was also particularly fascinated by the expression of the pictorial philosophical reality of Van Gogh. In fact, what especially struck the young Chinese scholar was the way in which these two artists dealt with the question of interpersonal relationship with society and the outside world. Rilke’s life and aesthetic experiences deeply influenced the way in which Feng Zhi began to perceive the matter of interpersonal and affective relationships with the outer world. In fact, during his period of reflection and poetic silence, Feng Zhi developed a new lyrical subjectivity based upon the aesthetic and philosophical model of Rilke: a subjectivity that leads man to attempt to establish aesthetic relationships and ties with the outer world regardless of his melancholic state and condition of isolation. Furthermore, as he even wrote in the concluding lines of his preface to the Chinese translation of Rilke’s *Letters to a*

²⁷⁴ Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (eds), *Nietzsche Werke: Gesamtausgabe. Menschliches, Allzumenschliches II. Nachgelassene Fragmente 1878-1879*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1967, p. 156.

²⁷⁵ Colli and Montinari, *Nietzsche Werke*, pp. 229-30.

²⁷⁶ See T. K. Seung, *Goethe, Nietzsche, and Wagner: Their Spinozan Epics of Love and Power*, Oxford, Lexington Books, 2006, p. 172.

Young Poet, composed after his return from Germany in 1936, Rilke's poetry does not receive its power from sentiments or inspirations, but rather from daily experiences. These daily aesthetic experiences and the result from the relationship and convergence between the poetic self and the outside world are the elements that provide the lyrical fragments for the composition of the twenty-seven sonnets.

In Feng Zhi's lyricism, the lagoon of Venice becomes the mystic symbol of humanity: many small islands that are communicating with one another create an ensemble, an agglomeration and an organised collective group of individuals. The bridges that are created and established between and among the islands are references of the interpersonal relationships among the individuals and, as such, represent only outer ephemeral connections, which time and other unexpected events²⁷⁷ are bound to wear out. The bridges built to connect the various islands of the lagoon are allegories of social, cultural and personal bonds and obligations among people. These bridges connect the islands just like human arms connect people and are apt to guarantee the well-being and prosperity of these relationships.

The representation of the concept of 'isolation' is symbolically given, as the etymology of the Latin word *insula* also suggests, by the image of myriads of islands that form and characterise the Venetian lagoon. Despite the numerous bridges that artificially connect the surface of the territory, every island is and remains a whole world for itself, completely surrounded by water, free, autonomous and independent from other surrounding bodies. Feng describes Venice like an agglomeration of myriad solitary bodies, each and every one of them having their own identity and moral value. This introspective model of the inner world of men as poetic strength lies at the base of the post-Romantic and pre-Modernist concept of individualism for Feng Zhi as for other modern Chinese writers.

The poet does not deny the natural disposition of man who attempts to establish effective bonds of solidarity or friendship. In fact, given his awareness of the condition of the individual as distinct being and fundamentally independent from others, the poet uses analogies and poetic images that recall the profound need of

²⁷⁷ See the unexpected coming of the comet and the rushing wind of sonnet 1.

man to build interpersonal relationships. Sonnet 5 expresses the most simple and concrete form of human contact through the image of hands or arms stretching out to reach other individuals. If bridges connect two islands the same was as arms connect two people, the poet further enhances this idea through the image of windows, which metaphorically represent the mouths of people.

A typical element of Rilkean poetry is the absence, or better the mystification, of sound and outside voice to represent the concept silence, which ultimately also emphasises the poet's state of solitude. In his *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke writes:

“There is only one kind of loneliness, and it is great and is not easy to bear; and almost all of us have known hours which we would gladly have bartered against any kind of company, however cheap or banal, against the least semblance of any accommodation at all, even with something second-rate, something unworthy. [...] What is required is this: solitariness, great inner solitariness. The going-into-oneself and the hours on end spent without encountering anyone else: it is this we must be able to achieve. To be as lonely as we were when we were children.”²⁷⁸

It is worth noticing that man's state of solitude and his inability to build affective and long-lasting relationships are what guarantee the fullness and accomplishment of his being. In fact, the state of isolation and separation are what define and characterise the typical properties of an island asserting its identity. Feng Zhi, by juxtaposing the image of the human being with that of the island, exalts the intrinsic peculiarities and circumscribes the identity of man: like an island is connected with other lands by means of artificial and short-lasting bridges, so man is also transiently connected with other individuals.

The position of Feng Zhi is in synch with the philosophical thought and concept of solitude of Rilke, who perceived this melancholic state and isolation as an occasion to reconsider his own human condition and experiences in order to fully

²⁷⁸ Stephen Cohn (ed.), *Rainer Maria Rilke, Sonnet to Orpheus: With Letters to a Young Poet*, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 191.

comprehend his own self.²⁷⁹ Given his view of the state of solitude, Rilke considered the risk of becoming a kind of hermit as an inevitable consequence.

In the preface to his Chinese translation of Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, Feng Zhi describes silence and the condition of loneliness by using the image of trees that are aligned inside of a garden. In fact, as already mentioned before, according to Feng Zhi, every man who is born in this world is like a new tree inside a garden: although the branches and leaves conform themselves to the fronds of other trees, the roots, that stretch down the soil beneath the surface to draw the nourishments, are independent from each other, silent and solitary.²⁸⁰

The concept of solitude expressed through the image of the tree recalls the modernist idea of man and his relationship with society as well as the modern concept of individualism. The tree, like man, is a solitary being, which, independently from its interpersonal contacts with his kinds, finally remains isolated and in silence. This idea also seems to be in syntony with what German writer and philosopher Hannah Arendt affirmed by explaining that solitude and isolation are two ways in which man succeeds to remain with his self.²⁸¹

The silence that can be perceived by man, conceived first as a tree in line within a circumscribed garden and then as an island that together with others of its kind form the Venetian lagoon, can be regarded as the outer manifestation and representation of what is left from the failed communication with the world. Silence, furthermore, elevates the personality of the poet above all interpersonal level and defines his state of solitude.

The connections among individuals, just like the affective relationships between the lyrical voice and the external world, are only ephemeral moments. In his

²⁷⁹ See Ulrich Baer, "The Status of Correspondence in Rilke's Work" in Karen Leeder and Robert Vilain (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 27-38, p. 34.

²⁸⁰ Han Yaocheng 韩耀成, *Feng Zhi Quanjì 冯至全集 (The Complete Works of Feng Zhi)*, Vol. 11, Shijiazhuang, Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999, p. 282.

²⁸¹ Serena, Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity: A Phenomenology of Human Rights*, New York and London, Routledge, 2008, p. 157.

sonnets, Feng Zhi underlined the fugacity and frailty of these social ties by also epitomising the image of the night, which anxiously and vehemently sets over the Venetian lagoon. In fact, as sun sets and night wears on, all the social ties the individual had built with the others and the outside world simply vanish: the windows close as also the mouths that bring smiles. The bridges empty from the footprints of the people who used to cross them. The night, which for centuries had been element and lyrical symbol in the Romantic poetry and beyond, comes down silently and serene as the propitious moment in which man returns to his senses and get closer again to his 'self'. The night and its terror represent the cessation of every activity and the 'fall' of every connection with the daytime world, triggering those strong emotions that take the poet back to his state of solitude and utter isolation.

Very much in line with the poetry of Novalis and his *Hymns to the Night* (*Hymnen an die Nacht*, 1797-98), the last verses of the Venetian sonnet echo and revoke that mystification of the night as Romantic ideal of the contrast between terrestrial life, represented by the day, and the ultra-terrestrial reality, revealed by the night. In one of his hymns, the German poet admits that the poet succeeds in experimenting the full immersion in his own self and discovers the inexpressible with the coming of the night. Feng Zhi suggests that every island returns to be the usual solitary entity with the coming of the night and rediscovers the fullness of its identity. As soon as every bond and smile vanish away, man returns to deal with himself and rediscovers the ineffability of his own being.

The sense of collectiveness is later enhanced in sonnet 7, where the poet evokes the image of streams merging into the ocean as allegory of a group of people. The idea behind the image of the streams is similar to the theme of solitude that was previously successfully experimented by the poet in sonnet 5. Every stream represents a soul; an individual being that like a stream of water leads his life independently from the others. What results from the union of the many water streams is the ocean – the one accumulative agglomeration of molecules and substance that form every water stream:

Under a pleasant sunshine
We reach the outskirts,
Like different water streams

Merging together into an ocean.²⁸²

The lines here recall the image of a number of people who gather together in the outskirts of a city during the air bombing of war time. The poet had already elaborated the subtle meaning of these lines in the Venetian sonnet: every man is an island or, as allegorically meant in these lines, a water stream: a whole independent world in himself that finds completion and the fullness of its identity in his nature that by definition is found and must be independent and solitary.

What unites all the single and solitary water streams is their destiny. The people who escape running towards the outskirts and form this agglomeration of individual beings share the same call:

The same awakening
Dwells in our hearts,
It is the same destiny
Resting upon our shoulders.²⁸³

The awakening that rests upon the shoulders of each individual and that calls them to this evanescent union represents the propitious occasion for each and every being to cherish this very last moment. In fact, the poetic voice is made aware of the call that brings all people together under the same sunshine and destiny. This could seemingly also be seen as a form of social commitment or concern manifested in the poetry of Feng Zhi. This transitory amalgamation ostensibly recalls the temporary unification of the Chinese people under the same wills and purposes.

Will cherish this awakening,
Will cherish this destiny,
The danger has soon passed.²⁸⁴

Grief, pain and desolation dominate the last tercet of the sonnet the moment in which the danger has passed and every stream returns to its course. The call for unity has vanished with the danger, the unexpected coming of the comet that brings man to a

²⁸² First quatrain of sonnet 7.

²⁸³ Second quatrain of sonnet 7.

²⁸⁴ First tercet of sonnet 7.

moment of self-reflection. The water streams that form the ocean are said to part and flow again within those divergent paths of life:

Those divergent paths will
Absorb us back again:
The ocean breaks into water streams.²⁸⁵

The identification of danger that brings all individual under the same call is the recurrent manifestation of the same idea of helplessness, which at times takes the shape of intangible moments or unexpected wonders.

This is also what characterises the concept of functional collectiveness in Feng Zhi's poetry: man is solitary unless he is found under unusual circumstances – the artificial bridges lose their purpose meaning as they rid themselves of all footprints at night as the vanishing danger enables all individuals to part and become again the usual divergent water streams of the plains.

What the poet also conveys in his sonnets is the way collectiveness stands in stark contrast with the identity of each individual and the self-completion of every being. As already analysed in sonnet 5, a man is an island that by its definition is meant to be left independent. If an island were to be connected with another piece of land, it would be probably regarded as a peninsula, thus, losing its original form, identity and self. The same image is epitomised in sonnet 7 by the merging of the water streams into a whole mass: the ocean.

Another significant element for metaphysical transcendence, as analysed in the previous chapter on temporal and spatial infinity in Feng Zhi's sonnets, is loneliness. The moment in which the self is at full completion and has commenced the transcendental journey to infinity, the assurance of accomplishing the mission is ultimately empowered by the state of aloneness of the human being. In fact, as the military soldier eulogised in sonnet 9 is commemorated as an immortal hero in the 'battlefield', hence, undoubtedly together with other fellow soldiers who are also brought together under the same destiny, which can be identified as the soldiers'

²⁸⁵ Last tercet of sonnet 7.

common call for war, he does attain spiritual freedom as he turns towards another world in the skies:

In the battlefield, you are an immortal hero
Turning towards another world in the skies,
Freeing yourself, finally, as a stringless kite:

But, of this fate you cannot complain,
You have surpassed them, and they cannot
Hold your flight, your infinity.²⁸⁶

As the lines of sonnet 9 suggest, the soldier has commenced his metaphysical flight towards infinity now that he is no longer found in the battlefield together with his comrades. The empowering image of the “stringless kite” 断线的纸鸢 does emphasise the idea of freedom and distance from the same kinds. The completion of the self is, therefore, once again enabled by the condition of loneliness and independence from the rest. In fact, the poet uses words, such as “surpassed” 超越 and “them” 他们 to convey the physical and semantic distance that there is between individual and group or loneliness and collectiveness.

Sonnet 10, the poem dedicated to Cai Yuanpei, brings forward another theme that was also instilled in the Venetian sonnet, that is the secrecy found in the solitary self of man. If the windows on each island show and hide secrets just as the mouths do, so does the soul Cai Yuanpei who maintained secret his splendour and fame:

Your name often mingles with
Many other names, without
Any distinction, but you forever
Maintained secret your splendour.

We can see you only at dawn and dusk:
The morning star and the Vesper,
At midnight with other common stars
You mingle. How many the youths are²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Last sestet of sonnet 9.

²⁸⁷ First octave in sonnet 9.

The idea of solitude is further enhanced by the juxtaposition of the image of man with that of a star that is also lonely and silent. Once again, the idea of mingling with other kinds appears in this poem.

It is always possible to discern and trace a sort of gradual change that takes the individual island, water stream or star into a collective group of the same kinds. This steady and gradual movement is often regulated by time, that is daytime against the dark of night. The choice of images is not accidental, as stars, water streams and islands enjoy their greatness and splendour when these are found in isolation. In fact, Chinese pedagogist Cai Yuanpei metaphysically changes into a star that is best visible and wondrous at the crack of the dawn and fall of night. These are the moments when the morning star and the Vesper appear and are easily recognisable for their splendid luminosity in the sky.

Another interesting point to notice in the concept of collectiveness in Feng Zhi's poetry is the identification of misery or misfortune. As one could perceive in sonnet 7, the gathering of people was brought about by the arrival of danger. This is also present in sonnet 14, which Feng Zhi composed while pondering on the artistic production of Van Gogh:

Your burning passion embraces everything,
It burns the sunflowers,
The strong cypresses,
And burns the people under the scorching sun.

That warmth affects them all,
Flames that cry out towards the sky;
But in the shade are some rosy flowers,
Imprisoned in small yard,

A few men with their heads low
Peeling potatoes inside a poor house,
Like pieces of ice that will never melt.

In the midst of this you painted a bridge,
You painted a light boat: will you
Go search for those unfortunates?²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ Sonnet 14.

The burning passion of the artist is poetically transferred onto the burning characteristic of fire and heat of the painting. The sunflowers, cypresses and people are imagined to be burning under the scorching sun in Feng Zhi's poem. The flames and the suffering brought upon nature and humanity affect everything and everyone. People are painted and immortalised in their grievous moment of hunger while peeling potatoes inside of a poor wretched house. The hopeless idea perceived by the Chinese poet is that of unquenchable needs that will never be satisfied: the people are immortalised while still peeling potatoes, thus, without fully accomplishing the act of eating them. This could be in antithesis with one of the painting of Van Gogh, *The Potato Eaters*, which depicts five poor farmers in the act of eating hot fuming potatoes and drinking black coffee inside of a shabby old barn; but which does also express the same monochrome sense of suffering.

Whenever the reader finds references to collectiveness, a sinister feeling of oppression, desolation or discomfort does most likely find its way. The positive individual sphere of man is put in stark contrast with that of collectiveness. If collectiveness is not necessarily and explicitly represented with highly negative terms or tones, it does soon evoke feelings of hopelessness that loom over mankind as a whole.

It is interesting to note also that Van Gogh began painting sunflowers soon after leaving the Netherlands for France with the hope of establishing a kind of intellectual and creative artistic community. Rather significant is also the final period of Van Gogh's life: before committing suicide, the Dutch artist transferred the despair, anger, solitude and the kindness he still had in his heart onto *Wheatfield with Crows*. Here, as in Feng Zhi's poems, a tempest, representation of a harbinger of doom and death, is about to strike onto a wheat field over which a flock of crows flies. What also foreshadows the incumbent sense of isolation is the central path that seems to lead nowhere and that slowly gets lost in the horizon. The idea of paths fading away in the horizon is also one of Feng Zhi's central images and recurrent theme throughout the sonnets.

Feng Zhi's characters and images of sonnet 14 originate from Van Gogh's paintings. These, in turn, are not unusual people or images, but rather natural

characters of pertaining to everyday life; and, as in the case of *The Potato Eaters*, ordinary peasants living their life in their normal shelter. This aspect is further conveyed by the depiction of the peasants' faces and hands as they sit around the small oil lamp eating their meager and spare meal of potatoes.

For Feng Zhi, the bridge and the boat appear as means used by people to reach other kinds and places. It is not a case that a bridge is represented in the middle of Van Gogh's painting *Langlois Bridge at Arles* – this for the Chinese poet evokes a great sense of connection and metaphor of interpersonal relationship, aroused also by the image of the small boat near the women washing in the river.

The extended meaning of the boat for the Chinese poet would be that of recollecting and reaching others. In a very meaningful question put by the poet to the artist, the lyrical voice asks whether the boat shall be used to save those who are wretches and unfortunate: “Will you go search for those unfortunates? 你可要把那些不幸者迎接过来?”.

The metaphysical transcendence of the poetic voice and following blending into nature and the cosmos is also attained when the lyrical self is found together with a companion, possibly the lover. Sonnet 16 is one the poems of the collection and most neatly represents this supernatural process and phenomenon. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the lyrical voice is found on top of a mountain overlooking the ‘infinite’ plain:

We stand up on the high mountain peak
Merging into the infinite distance,
Blending into the vastness of the plain before us,
Dissolving in the entangled paths of the fields.²⁸⁹

It is important to notice the contrast between the union of the lyrical voice and his companion brought forward by the plural pronoun ‘we’ 我们 and the image of the intertwined paths of the fields. The idea of the paths can be easily reconnected with the ‘individualistic’ sense of solitude in which each and every pathway finds its own

²⁸⁹ First quatrain of sonnet 16.

completion within its identity. The paths of the fields, like the roots of the trees, can be entangled and communicating with other paths or roots. However, they still cannot deny their fundamental nature of being lonely, independent from one another and silent.

What the poet defines in sonnet 16 is the inevitability of mankind to interact with other kinds. If man is like an island of the Venetian lagoon or a root of a tree, then it becomes inevitable for this not to be related in some kind of connections with other peers, should these be other islands, roots or pathways in the meadows:

Which road, which brook does not meet,
Which gust, which cloud does not accord:
The cities we have passed, mountains and streams,
Have all become our lives.²⁹⁰

The poetic voice also implies that whenever two kinds of the same order meet and interact with one another, it is also inevitable for them not to be influenced and share parts of their identities. In fact, the poetic subject concludes the first octave of the sonnet declaring that all the cities, mountains and streams that they have passed have all become part of their lives. This idea of interpersonal relationship goes back to the philosophical poetry of aesthetic experiences of Rainer Rilke, who also defined man's actions and knowledge as the fruit of the daily aesthetic experiences that the self is bound to gain by interacting with the outside world and society.

To stress the idea of union and intimacy, Feng Zhi makes frequent reference to nightfall and moments in which the poetic voice is found together with his lover in affection and intimate moments:

We often spend an intimate night
Inside an unknown room, its appearance²⁹¹

Once again, the moment of intimacy with his lover is the time when the extraordinary can happen and reality meets the inexpressible and sublime:

Close your eyes! Let that this intimate night

²⁹⁰ Second quatrain of sonnet 16.

²⁹¹ First lines in first quatrain of sonnet 18.

And unknown place weave inside our chests:
Our lives are like that open plain outside the window²⁹²

The union of the poetic voice and his lover with the surrounding environment is the result of a metaphysical process that permits the lyrical self to transcend reality and merge with the “open plain outside the window”.

Feng Zhi also expresses one of man’s most common outcries of solitude in his sonnets: the desire to be together with someone else. This is particularly vivid in sonnet 21, where the lyrical voice urges his lover to stay together in embrace as if one body cannot live without the other:

We tightly embrace,
As if one cannot stay on his own.²⁹³

This represents one of Feng Zhi’s most evident expressions of the need of collectiveness by man: the need to look for interpersonal relationships. The constant search for company that is implied in the writings of Feng Zhi is what the poet, or better the lyrical voice of the poems, is particularly made aware of. The unsolved question of how and whether it is fundamentally conceivable for man to establish long-lasting interpersonal relationships is what principally troubles the sensitive self of the poetic ‘I’.

²⁹² First tercet in sonnet 18.

²⁹³ First tercet of sonnet 21.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERMANENCE AND MUTABILITY

The European Romantic poetry was often characterized by a continuous inner conflict between permanence, or at least the individual poets' strive for intransience, and mutability. Many sensitive poets belonging to the British Romantic movement, such as John Keats, sought to express this constant poetical conflict and yearning for permanence. Other exponents of the German side counted Goethe whose poetry also shows considerable intertextuality with Feng Zhi's lyrical production and thought.

John Keats is sometimes regarded as one of the "Big Six" Romantic poets – Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Blake – whose work is considerably marked by imagination, freedom in versification and love of nature. Many of Keats's poems reveal his attempt through the visionary imagination to identify something that is essential and 'permanent'. The theme of permanence and mutability features in many of Keats's poems and odes, such as "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode to a Grecian Urn" and "Bright Star". For the mature Keats what is of true and of everlasting value can be paradoxically found only within the actual world of change and progress.

In "Ode to a Nightingale", the "weariness, the fever, and the fret" of human condition as well as the world where nothing remains constant, and even "beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes" are portrayed. The poet attempts to conceptualise a

reconciliation of beauty and permanence through the symbol of the nightingale. In this particular ode, the poetic voice longs for some intoxicant that would let him achieve union with the nightingale, take him out of the world and allow him to forget human suffering. Being human, death would be the only escape to achieve permanence; and yet death is rejected, as the lyrical subject realises that the bird would sing on. While all human must die, the nightingale is, in some sense, permanent: “thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!”. Keats is not referring to the individual bird, but to the species. The immortality and permanence of nature embodied by nature is in contrast with the mutable and corruptible earthbound conditions of the human being. The poet is human and therefore bound to the world of change.

Keats recognises beauty, hence, permanence in art. In “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, the lyrical subject addresses an ancient Greek urn and reflects upon its images, which, unlike reality, are eternal and permanent. The subject contrasts the perfection of static with imperfection, transience and sorrow of human life. Art represents nature in its beauty and steadiness: “Ah, happy, happy boughs! That cannot shed your leaves, nor never bid the Spring adieu”. The “unravished bride” will never consume and experience the fullness of life. Finally, the poetic self also recognises that the perfection of the “Cold Pastoral” portrayed in the urn is even deathlike: it offers no change, no movement, hence, no fulfilment. The virtues of durability are outweighed by the disadvantages of fixity. At the centre of Keats’s mature vision is the paradox that one can only increase his sense of beauty and joy only by gaining an awareness of mortality.

The need for permanence is also conveyed in the poem “Bright Star, would I were steadfast as thou art”. The poetic subject addresses here a star, expressing his longing to be as steadfast, even if not on the same terms. The lyrical self, in fact, wishes to be steady and permanent while pillowed upon his love’s breast, instead of being a “sleepless Eremit” and as dispassionate as the star. Eventually, the subject moves to seek immortality within the human condition and to find an enduring perfection within the actual world of change. The image of permanence is prominent throughout the poem as the poet develops the star as a symbol of perfection and steadfastness for which he longs by employing words such as “eternal”. The poet

realises that what he is longing for is unattainable and impossible; therefore his alternative: “or else swoon to death!” Death would be the only way in which permanence can be achieved within the corruptible and precarious world, where everything is affected by the continuous and constant mutability.

When it comes to the German literary context, poets like Goethe and Rilke, whom Feng Zhi was much more familiar with, also dealt with the issue of permanence, especially when put in stark contrast with change. Permanence is what gives comfort to the Romantic generation of poets, as already mentioned, for instance, in the case of John Keats. Nonetheless, relevant to the analysis of the theme of permanence and perception of mutability in this study is the Feng Zhi’s reception of Rilke’s poetry. In fact, in line with the mythological accounts of the first Elegy of Rilke, the lyrical subject of Feng’s lines cry out an insatiable need for comfort. Whereas Rilke’s aesthetic manifestation of beauty is embodied in the image of the ‘angel’, Feng’s concept of highness and almighty source of consolation is ultimately found on a higher transcendental level: the cosmos as whole, epitome of permanence. However, one of the most striking differences between these two examples of consolation lies in their characterising nature: Rilke’s angels represent the ultimate expression of beauty, which turns out to be terrifying given its terrestrial difference with the corruptible condition of men.

As Rilke writes in his first Elegy, beauty represents the beginning of terror: a force that lies beyond human understanding and that could therefore annihilate humanity. If not angels, man or animals, the poet wonders about whom else could be there to satiate his innate need for consolation. Only familiar objects and old habits could bring solace and relief to man and Feng Zhi clearly shows to have found no objection to this stance. In fact, the verses of the Feng Zhi’s sonnets repeatedly evoke familiar objects, places, roads and old habits, which, despite the corruptive action of time and mutability, finally bring stability, strength and comfort to the lyrical self.

Familiar objects are generally arranged in a way so that they are memorable and recognisable to the poet. The poetic subject of Sonnet 25, for instance, is said to spend entire days with someone else, probably his lover, while pondering about silent and motionless things that are very familiar to him:

“Objects are set on the table,
Books are arranged on the shelf,
All day, amidst some silent things
We constantly meditate.”

The repeated action of daily walks on familiar roads, especially those who lead back home, seems to be very close to poetical subject's heart. The idea of walking on pathways that are unknown brings discomfort, physical and mental restlessness. Sonnet 26 vividly portrays this sense of loss and dismay:

“Everyday, we walk on a familiar road
To return to our dwelling place;
But, in the woods still hide
Many small paths, both dark and unknown

Walking on a new one brings agitation,
Fear increases as we go farther, as we lose our way”

The poet confesses the state of agitation and discomfort followed by fear that powerfully affect and overwhelm the person who takes unfamiliar paths. The fear of losing his way and sense of insecurity increase as the he individual moves farther away.

Joy is found in the rediscovery of familiar objects. As Sonnet 26 continues, the vision of one's dwelling place after having lost their way is compared to that of a “new island appearing on the horizon”:

Like a new island appearing on the horizon;
So many things are close to us
That yearn to be rediscovered:

Must not believe everything to be familiar;
When death comes, caress your own hair and skin
Asking the question: whose body is this?

Familiar objects, places and habits need to be rediscovered and never fail their characterizing attribute of bringing comfort and reassurance after defeating the sense of anxiety and loss within the world of change.

However, Feng Zhi leaves a hint of mistrust when it comes to the assertion that everything around us is familiar. In fact, the concluding lines of Sonnet 26 leave the reader wonder about the extent to which something or someone is well known to us. The final question the poet puts to his reader is very profound and requires thoughtful consideration. In many instances throughout the sonnets, Feng Zhi makes reference to the various stages of life, especially birth and death. These two do not only belong to the same cycle but they also represent two different points in which man begins or completes and, to some extent, accomplishes his mutable condition.

The act of change is by its definition the antithesis of the notion of familiarity and its physical manifestation is what leaves the poet to meditate. The moment when “death comes” and one feels the texture of hair and skin altered by the signs of age or other physical conditions, all firm convictions and levels of confidence are undoubtedly questioned by the causes of mutability. What was known to us suddenly becomes unknown and mysterious; and what comforted us suddenly turns into the source of agitation and emotional turmoil.

Rilke goes further by epitomising the loss of man’s mission in this world because of distraction and the deceiving promise in Creation of the coming of a lover. Feng Zhi seems to have surpassed the incumbent deception of Creation by praising and immortalising the union with his lover. The greatest accomplishments sung in the sonnets, for instance, see the lyrical subject together with a companion, often mystified in the embodiment of a lover, to gain the aesthetic experiences, transcend and submerge into the sublime. Where there is change and where permanence prevails, the self is mystically accompanied by a companion who does not only assist but also takes part.

Feng Zhi’s lyrical subject does not attempt to escape from nature, as it may be idealised by Rilke’s terrifying angels, on the contrary, it strives to be part of it by either dissolving amidst the meandering paths or by decaying down in the soil underneath the roots of the ‘mature’ tree.

As it can be perceived from the analysis of Feng Zhi’s poetic voice, human beings always take a stand within the world of change by occupying it. The result is

never the same: man can, in fact, be fascinated, delighted or even horrified by the world. Things and objects are part of nature and the way man sees them changes constantly. In fact, as Husserl claims, man encounters things in the world and views them as phenomena in consciousness.

Feng Zhi's sonnet 26 clarifies that the natural environment that surrounds mankind is still full of things "that yearn to be rediscovered: Must not believe everything to be familiar". The state of 'home-detachment' that characterises the sensation brought forward by uncanny feelings is, hence, the true state of human existence. Feng Zhi's lyrical self enunciates that man must face this even when he has a clear target, which in the case is manifested by the ordinary action of returning back to his dwelling place. The modern Chinese poet further enhances the source of uncanniness by identifying it with the corruptible nature of existence that is in constant and unrestrainable change: "When death comes, caress your own hair and skin asking the question: whose body is this?" (sonnet 26).

Feng Zhi's concept of permanence and change also seem to echo Nietzsche's philosophical approach to the same matter. According to Nietzsche, change belongs to the essence. It would be a defect of the world as we know it if it were not affected by mutability. In fact, it would also be impossible for mankind to even imagine 'change' if this power did not exert his essential force onto the world. As a matter of fact, according to Nietzsche the "multiplicity of interacting forces" as well as its "existence as a multiplicity with respect to which 'change' is of the essence" are two basic undisputable features of the world.²⁹⁴

This notion of change is what triggers motion in all the sonnets of Feng Zhi. The essential force of change significantly enables and also explains the transformative impulses that govern the world depicted in Feng Zhi's sonnets. For instance, the first sonnet of the collection opens already with the lyrical subject's readiness to receive a cosmological change setting the stage upon which the other sonnets are played. In line with Nietzsche's thinking, Feng Zhi's scenes portray a world in which not only potential and tangible changes just unfold, but also where

²⁹⁴ See Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche: The Arguments of the Philosophers*, London and New York, Taylor and Francis, 2013, p. 230.

change represents the essential factor of it. Nietzsche, in fact, considers it indispensable to conceive of the world in a way that “permanence of change can be accounted for.”²⁹⁵ The processes in the world are regulated by “ordering transformation” that according to the various instances can take different forms, such as “subjugation, regulation, structural articulation and fixation and harmonization of constellations of forces.”²⁹⁶

When it comes to man’s reaction to the surrounding natural world of change, in the lines of his two “Metamorphosis” poems, “Parabase” and “Epirrhema”, Goethe also conveyed his sense of wonder at the harmony and integrity of the created world, especially when looking at the holistic vision given by complimentary factors and antithetical pairings, such as that of big and small, far and close, inner and outer, permanence and mutability. The poem “Dauer im Wechsel” (“Permanence in Change”) is a contemplation on the continuous change and evanescence of all living creatures; an observation that derived from Goethe’s reading of neurologist Johann C. Reil’s work, who had already argued on the constant and progressive change of the human body and of each and every atom of the human organism.²⁹⁷ In his modern Chinese rendering of this same notion, Feng Zhi meditates on a few natural elements that also convey an analogous sense of change as that expressed by Goethe:

“If only this early blessing
Could last a single hour!
But the warm west wind is shaking
Over me a rain of flowers.
Shall I take pleasure in the leaves
Whose shade I once enjoyed?
Soon a storm will scatter sheaves
Through autumn’s trembling void.”²⁹⁸

Feng Zhi makes reference to the rushing wind that blows the leaves and empties the boughs of the tree in autumn as in sonnet 2: “Like the autumn trees, bough after

²⁹⁵ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, p. 229.

²⁹⁶ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, p. 229.

²⁹⁷ See Lesley Sharpe, *The Cambridge Companion to Goethe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 55.

²⁹⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Gedichte* (1766-1832), “Dauer im Wechsel” (“Permanence in Change”) in “Selected Poems”, trans. in English by A. S. Kline, http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/German/Goethepoems.htm#anchor_Toc74652123. Accessed 20 July 2017.

bough bearing leaves and tardy flowers for the autumn wind, freeing its boughs stretching out for the rigid winter”. Goethe’s poem also depicts a west warm wind that shakes down the trees in a bloomy rain [Blütenregen] and scatters their sheaves over the autumn landscape. The spare around is being also changed by the presence of life, and what clearly strikes both Goethe and Feng Zhi are those nostalgic feet or steps that once strode the landscape and that are now no longer visible to the “ever-changing eye” [stets mit anderen Augen]:

“Wasted now are those lips
Kisses healed once long ago
And the feet now that skipped
On cliffs like mountain goats.”²⁹⁹

The nostalgic gaze of Feng Zhi’s lyrical subject is found to contemplate on the progressive change of the landscape the stained steps of people walking on field paths: “Steps of countless passers without a name who set foot on these lively roads [...] Solitary children, grey-haired couples, and also many young companions, and also friends who passed away, they all have beaten these paths for us; we will remember their walks, let us not leave these paths to overgrow” (sonnet 17).

Both Goethe and Feng Zhi also meditate on the unstoppable change that affects the human body. In “Permanence in Change”, Goethe depicts the gentle movement of the hands that “show a different nature”, or, as literally translated from the German, “now that everything is something else” [Alles ist ein andres nun]:

“And the hand that gently moved,
That articulated structure,
Generously, to do good,
Shows a different nature.”³⁰⁰

With a very strong and decisive line, Feng Zhi concludes sonnet 26 letting his reader wonder on the progressive change of man’s skin and hair as he approaches to death: “When death comes, caress your own hair and skin asking the question: whose body is this?”

²⁹⁹ Goethe, “Selected Poems”.

³⁰⁰ Goethe, “Selected Poems”.

Mankind is doomed in the world of change and can only assist impotent mutability affecting nature and the flesh. With a very crucial sentence, Goethe's poem reveals the truth behind the world of change: "Laß den Anfang mit dem Ende sich in eins zusammenziehen!" [Let the end and the beginning gather themselves in one!].

The survival of creation is affirmed by the perpetual change, regeneration and by the laws that govern macrocosm and microcosm. This ordered consistency of existence is regulated by the present flux of time. Goethe's 'living treasures' celebrate this poetic credo and Feng Zhi acknowledges the flux of time by also re-evoking the past and anticipating the future. If Goethe contemplated his sense of wonder in creation, Feng Zhi also voiced his delight before the edelweiss and eucalyptus tree in lyrical and natural terms to emphasise his conviction.

The cosmic order that is regulated by harmony and peace is reflected in the landscape both during daytime and at night. In the sonnets, the lyrical voice is often found enclosed inside of a room or a hut and still wonders about the ordered far-reaching plains outside the window.

Change is nothing other than the continuous mutable condition of all creation and the end of a stage represents only the beginning of a new one. This idea is rendered also in Feng Zhi's sonnets by the image of the moulting cicada and the eucalyptus tree "eternally changing" its bark: "You, eternally shed your bark, wither and manifest your maturity" (sonnet 3). Moreover, it is of fundamental importance to notice that the epithet 'maturity' given to the tree is reminiscent of Novalis's teaching and devotion to the world of plants as discussed in Feng Zhi's own doctoral dissertation.

At first glance, it would be plausible to deduce that Feng Zhi's notion of mutability and its sense of infinite cycle are originally alimented by the Buddhist idea of rebirth and endless cycle of *samsara*. Nevertheless, after a close study on the poet's own research work, analytical notes and lyrical production, notably the sonnets, it becomes now evident that such a view need not to be taken into serious consideration.

Furthermore, the lyrical voice that animates Feng Zhi's sonnets appears to be even unaware of the philosophical importance of good and bad *karma* that enables and determines the fulfilment of the rebirth cycle in the Buddhist philosophy. Instead, Feng Zhi's experimentation of poetry based on the concept of change is more in line with Goethe's theorisation of mutability and his own analogy with the ancient Egyptian phoenix, which, as supported in his dissertation, is re-born from fire and ashes into a newly generated and re-invigorated being. This concept of resurrection from fire and death-to-come idea gains utmost importance for the comprehensive understanding of the Goethean sonnet (sonnet 13) and for all other references in the sonnets to the idea of change. The lyrical voice in sonnet 13, in fact, addresses Goethe affirming that the German poet knows "why the moth fluttered into the flame" and "why the snake shed its skin to grow". The concluding lines of the sonnet appear very meaningful supporting the idea of death-to-become and resurrection: "All living creatures benefit from your words, revealing the true sense of life: 'die and become'".

Feng Zhi writes in his letters that he used to "abandon the urgent needs" of the day and devote a considerable amount of time to the reading of Goethe's works and his philosophical theory of metamorphosis. Goethe was always in the centre of his attention during his studies at the German Department of Peking University, where he "read Goethe's novels and poems with great enthusiasm". As Feng Zhi notes, by observing plants, Goethe believed that thousands of species of plants have evolved from the earliest 'prototype', the original plant, which eventually transformed at different stages. This is the theory, which Goethe called 'metamorphosis' and which he applied to animals and minerals. The same theory was even used by the German poet to explain the growth of human beings and the development of society [歌德通过对植物的观察, 认为千种万类的植物都是从最早的一个“原型”即原始植物演化出来的, 它们一个阶段一个阶段地转变, 而且不断提高。歌德把这种理论称为蜕变论, 并把它运用在动物, 矿物上边, 甚至用以解

说人的成长和社会的发展...]³⁰¹. As Feng Zhi theorises, this transformation from one stage to another is not an easy process. It is necessary to use the painful death of the previous stage in order to achieve the following delightful stage of rebirth. The examples that Feng Zhi takes directly from Goethe are the image of the snake that sheds the old skin in order to grow and the image of the legendary phoenix that gains a new life from self-immolation [可是从一个阶段发展到另一阶段并不是轻而易举的, 必须要用前一阶段痛苦的死亡换取后一阶段愉快的新生。蛇脱去旧皮才能生长, 传说中的凤鸟从自焚中获得新的生命...].³⁰²

From a Chinese literary perspective, however, it must also be noticed how Feng Zhi ingeniously succeeded in recalling the same imagery for permanence and its effective counterpart of change also once evoked in the Tang poems. As mentioned in the previous chapters, the Chinese poet's formation and initiation to the Chinese classics began when Feng Zhi was still a young boy. Although, his later doctoral dissertation in the field of German Romantic literature only made a very short reference to Laozi, Feng Zhi's early writings undoubtedly manifest the poet's deep knowledge and sharp understanding of the Chinese classics. It is no surprise, then, that his mature writings, even though predominantly influenced by Western literature and despite being poetic witnesses of transtextual confluence from German Romantic poetry, recall images and literary cues that are typical of the Chinese tradition.

It is worth noting that on the eve of his return to China in September 1935, after carefully listening to Feng Zhi's story and feelings about his study in Germany, Yang Hui 杨晦, one of his elder brother's friends, told him: "Stop dreaming, open

³⁰¹ Feng Zhi, "Lun Gede, de huigu, ming yu buchong" 《伦歌德》的回顾, 明与补充 ["Clarification and Supplement to the Review of the Essay on Goethe"] in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 6.

³⁰² Feng Zhi, "Lun Gede, de huigu, ming yu buchong" 《伦歌德》的回顾, 明与补充 ["Clarification and Supplement to the Review of the Essay on Goethe"] in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, Vol. 8, p. 7.

your eyes, see the reality, how many people are fighting, bleeding and dying” [不要再做梦了，要睁开眼睛看现实，多少人在战斗，在流血，在死亡]. This passage left a strong impression on Feng Zhi. After half a century, the Chinese poet still vividly remembered this and made numerous references to this in his articles. It is mainly during the war period that Du Fu and Goethe entered the world and the poetry of Feng Zhi. As he writes: “Since the beginning of the war of resistance against the Japanese aggression and during the years of war, I felt more and more close to Du Fu first and then to Goethe. I absorbed a lot of spiritual nutrition from them [从抗日战争开始以后，在战争的年月，首先是对杜甫，随后是对歌德，我越来越感到和他们接近，从他们那里吸取许多精神的营养].”

While Goethe sought to affirm the significance and possibility of human self-salvation under the premise of no God, although he finally had to turn to God for support, Feng Zhi seems to have directly drawn support from the traditional theory of “cultivation of one’s moral character” (修身) in order to exclude the God that Goethe had to rely on in the end. The Chinese poet, hence, transformed the “Faustian spirit” into a Confucian ethical thought.

Feng Zhi uses Goethe’s own quote to summarise the deed of Faust as an “effort that becomes nobler and purer until death” [一个越来越高尚越纯洁的努力，直到死亡].³⁰³ Feng Zhi, however, goes further and compares Faust’s quest with a traditional Chinese quote drawn from the Book of Change: “Heaven, in its motion, (gives the idea of) strength. The superior man, in accordance with this, nerves himself to ceaseless activity³⁰⁴ [天行健，君子以自强不息]³⁰⁵.” The ancient Chinese quote refers to the movement of the sky (i.e. nature) being strong and to the striving of the gentleman who should live in accordance with it for self-improvement. To

³⁰³ Feng Zhi, “Fushide li de mo” 《浮士德》里的魔 [“The Devil in *Faust*”] in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanjì*, Vol. 8, p. 28.

³⁰⁴ *Book of Changes*, Qian, trans. by James Legge. <https://ctext.org/book-of-changes/qian>

³⁰⁵ Feng Zhi, “Fushide li de mo”, p. 28.

this end, Feng Zhi makes two annotations: in order to strive unremittingly (for self-improvement), one must inevitably lose his way; at the same time, if someone strives for self-improvement throughout his life, he must be saved.

By asserting so, Feng Zhi merged the forces: the Western idea of individualism and Confucian thought of the self-sufficient nature of life. Feng Zhi's cultural belief mainly developed through the merging and assimilation of a Confucian thought revival, the recognition of the Western individualism, and Du Fu's reality of suffering, dedication and optimistic personality. Feng Zhi ultimately also completed a successful transformation of the Chinese traditional culture revealing its necessity in a creative and efficient way. Feng Zhi has, therefore, made a milestone in the development of Chinese poetry.

Although this study cannot certainly affirm and elucidate which Chinese classical poems mainly triggered the literary sensitivity of Feng Zhi, it is possible to identify certain traditional lyrical traits that re-emerge in the modern sonnets. Like Feng Zhi with his innovative poetic forms in modern China, so was Xu Hun 许浑 versatile also in regulated verse [*jintishi* 近体诗], also a Tang dynasty poem innovation. At least two of Xu Hun's poems are even included in the anthology *Tangshi sanbai shou* 唐诗三百首 (*Three Hundred Tang Poems*) first compiled by Qing scholar Sun Zhu 孙洙 (1722-1778) around 1763. Some of Xu Hun's poems are particularly famous for their recall of historical events, such as the poem "Jinling huaigu" 金陵怀古 ("Recalling the Ancient Times at Jinling"):

玉树歌残王气终，景阳兵合戍楼空。
松楸远近千官冢，禾黍高低六代宫。
石燕拂云晴亦雨，江豚吹浪夜还风。
英雄一去豪华尽，惟有青山似洛中。

“The “Song of the Jade Tree” faded, the imperial court came to an end;
At the Jingyang Palace, the troops gathered, the watch-towers deserted.
Pines stand, near and far, by the tombs of thousand ministers;
Rice and millet grow, high and low, over the palaces of six dynasties.
Stone swallows fly through clouds, rain or shine;
Dolphins in the river spout in waves amid night wind.
All the heroes are gone, so are all the glory and luxury,
Only the green hills still stand just like around Luoyang.”³⁰⁶

As Luo Yuming points out, the poem makes a contrast between the permanence of nature and the transience of human condition. As implied in the poem, all glory is destined to fade away and leave space for desolation. The recurrent image of the “Jade tree” is also used as epithet by Feng Zhi to address the eucalyptus tree in sonnet 3: “You, jade tree that sighs in the autumn wind”. Moreover, the image of the pine tree, recalling also Rilke’s pine, set the scene as the tree is found in a position that is close or near the lyrical subject leaving only a sense of anxiety prevailing the mood of the poem. Feng Zhi’s sonnet evokes the pine tree as epitome of the subject’s growth and worries (sonnet 16): “Our growth, our worries are a pine tree on some hillside”.

Moreover, of importance is also the Taoist perspective of durability over mutability. This classical Chinese philosophy, in fact, opposed man’s centrality in the universe and promoted the consciousness of permanence in the midst of change. According to Taoist thought, furthermore, the principle of human equality is based on the cosmic, eternal element of *dao* that is present in all men and all things of creation.

With a very talented touch, Feng Zhi’s last sonnet (sonnet 26) concludes a cycle that summarises all philosophical attempts to conceptualise change and permanence in one poem. The sonnet collection begins with the lyrical voice’s disposition to receive the unexpected wondrous of life evoked as ephemeral as the coming of a comet to the artistic awareness of the self that grants permanence in a world of change. Once again, in line with Goethe’s poetic philosophy, even Feng Zhi proposes, or better hopes to render ever lasting what is affected by progressive and

³⁰⁶ Luo Yuming, *A Concise History of Chinese Literature*, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2011, p. 364.

unstoppable mutability: “In vain we heard the night wind, in vain we saw the grass turn yellow and the leaves red, whither shall our thoughts be directed to? Could only these poems, like a flag, hold things which cannot be held.”

CHAPTER FIVE

NIGHT AND DEATH

In European Romantic literature, themes related to the image and perception of night and death gained enormous popularity among the intellectual circles of literati because of rather deep reasons that are closely related to both the re-discovery and experimentation of the irrational sphere by the Romantics. This was set in stark opposition to the rational stance of Enlightenment; and what also attracted the Romantics' attention was the new sense of mystery, which was almost conceived as a cult during the Romantic age and was best exemplified by the night.

German philosopher, philologist, linguistic and theologian Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788), author also of the very influential work entitled *Officium Tenebrarum*, celebrated the night as the moment in which the philosophy of sentiments faces the realm of only one solar and diurnal truth typical of Enlightenment rationalism. The image of the night as so conceived only belongs to the poets, the only intellectuals who are capable of grasping the essence of the real and life.

In his lyrical composition *Hymns to the Night* (*Hymnen an die Nacht*) written between 1797 and 1798 but published in 1800, Novalis poetised this contrast between diurnal earthly life with all its apparent values and true reality as revealed by the night. In the first of his six hymns, the poetic voice mentions the coming of the night as astronomical moment also as the moment in which the lyrical subject experiments those internal vibrations that allow him to sink within his own self and know the ineffable. After a first section in which the light of the day is also poetised as the vivifying power of all beings, the lyrical voice turns towards the image of the night and considers it by construing an antithesis between light and darkness:

“BEFORE all the wondrous shows of the widespread space around him, what living, sentient thing loves not the all-joyous light, with its colors, its rays and undulations, its gentle omnipresence in the form of the wakening Day? The giant-world of the unresting constellations inhales it as the innermost soul of life, and floats dancing in its azure flood; the sparkling, ever-tranquil stone, the thoughtful, imbibing plant, and the wild, burning multi-form beast inhales it; but more than all, the lordly stranger with the sense-filled eyes, the swaying walk, and the sweetly closed, melodious lips. Like a king over earthly nature, it rouses every force to countless transformations, binds and unbinds innumerable alliances, hangs its heavenly form around every earthly substance. Its presence alone reveals the marvelous splendor of the kingdoms of the world. Aside I turn to the holy, unspeakable, mysterious Night. Afar lies the world, sunk in a deep grave; waste and lonely is its place. In the chords of the bosom blows a deep sadness. I am ready to sink away in drops of dew, and mingle with the ashes.-- The distances of memory, the wishes of youth, the dreams of childhood, the brief joys and vain hopes of a whole long life, arise in gray garments, like an evening vapor after the sunset. In other regions the light has pitched its joyous tents. What if it should never return to its children, who wait for it with the faith of innocence?”³⁰⁷

The immersion inside the nocturnal realm represents for the lyrical subject the way to be separated from the daily diurnal world of appearances. Night permits man to open the eyes of his soul and see things that are not humanly visible during daylight: the profound essence of reality and the souls of those who are found in the afterlife.

The second hymn of the collection exemplifies the Romantic idea of nocturnal time and associates it with the moment in which the self can transcend reality. The sleep, identified as the gift of the night, gains the characteristics of eternity as it instils the divine in those who belong to the initiating community of the believers of the night:

³⁰⁷ Novalis, *Hymns to the Night*, I, rans. in English by George McDonald, http://www.george-macdonald.com/etexts/hymns_to_the_night.html. Accessed from June 2016 to October 2017.

“Endless is the duration of sleep. Holy Sleep, gladden not too seldom in this earthly day-labor, the devoted servant of the Night. Fools alone mistake thee, knowing nought of sleep but the shadow which, in the twilight of the real Night, thou pitifully castest over us.”³⁰⁸

Sleep is therefore oneiric and through dream the invisible reality is manifested:

“They know not that it is thou who hauntest the bosom of the tender maiden, and makest a heaven of her lap; never suspect it is thou, opening the doors to Heaven, that steppest to meet them out of ancient stories, bearing the key to the dwellings of the blessed, silent messenger of secrets infinite.”³⁰⁹

As previously mentioned in the first chapter of this study, Feng Zhi had personally dealt with Novalis’s own perception of night in his doctoral dissertation. The night is not just a mere astronomical phenomenon that stands at stark contrast to the diurnal world, but it rather entails a much wider and deeper realm essential to the lyrical subjects for introspective reflections, transcendence and closer vision of the inner self. Because of the salient influence exerted by Rilke’s poetry, Feng Zhi’s elaboration of the concept of night and death regularly shifts from post-Romantic to a pre-Modernist approach. The study of the theme of the night as the bridge of transcendence goes deeper and beyond the mental and spiritual construction advanced by the Romantics. Feng Zhi’s investigation of the issue of intrapersonal relationships and the definition of the self take the lyrical exemplification of the night to a higher level. The night becomes not only the bridge to long-lasting transcendence, but also the medium for aesthetical experiences. As particularly visible in sonnet 5, for instance, as soon as night falls, man, evoked through the metaphor of an island, has no choice but to come to terms with his inner, silent and solitary self.

It is worth noticing that both Novalis and Rilke did independently deal with the delicate relationship between the “self-identity” and the theme of life and death. They both attempted to establish a balance between the ephemeral aspect of existence and the yearning for infinity. For Novalis, for instance, life and death exist in a dialectical relationship, which, in other words, involves the interaction of

³⁰⁸ Novalis, *Hymns to the Night*, II.

³⁰⁹ Sergei O. Prokofieff, *Novalis: Hymns to the Night: Spiritual Songs*, London, Temple Lodge Publishing, 1992, p. 11.

opposites: they depend on and can mutate in each other. As theorised in *Das allgemeine Brouillon* (Notes Romantic Encyclopaedia), death represents a “transformation [Verwandlung] – displacement of the individual principle [Verdrängung des Individualprinzips] – which now enters into a new, more permanent and capable union.”³¹⁰ The arrival of the night is a ritual, which introduces the arrival of death. This notion of transformation that enables the individual to enter into a new form of union with the surrounding is what mainly stirred the modern Chinese poet when composing sonnet 18:

Close your eyes! Let that this intimate night
And unknown place weave inside our chests:
Our lives are like that open plain outside the window³¹¹

The lyrical subject encourages his lover or his reader to close the eyes and establish a metaphysical connection with the intimate night [亲密的夜] and the unfamiliar room [生疏的房], so that these can become part of the self and later be able to experience the fullness of mystic transcendence. The poetic subject is found to contemplate the far-stretching plains outside the window and is aware of the mystic force of night that can reunite him with the boundless landscape outside [我们的生命象那窗外的原野].

Novalis also believed that death was the romanticisation and idealisation of life, which takes man closer to the godliness, thus, to infinity. The arrival of the night, hence, the coming of death, serves as a prelude to the beginning of a new existence in a higher realm. In fact, according to Feng Zhi, life should relentlessly overcome all weakness and ultimately strive for completion and infinity.

Psychiatrists and psychoanalysts Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud theorised that unconscious thoughts and impulses try to find expression in dreams. According to Freud’s theory, indeed, the dream ultimately represents the fulfilment of a wish. The primary function of imagination is to integrate sensory input and render it meaningful. This is not a mere mental capacity to manipulate mental imagery but it

³¹⁰ David W. Wood (ed. and trans.), *Novalis: Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2007, p. 17.

³¹¹ First tercet of sonnet 18.

is also responsible for fantasy, inventiveness and insightful thought. Imagination's ability to 'embrace the future' becomes possible as it offers the experience of transcendence by binding all the elements of the earth.

As the lyrical voice of Feng Zhi's sonnet 10, dedicated to Cai Yuanpei, implies, it is that transition from dawn to dusk, from life to death that confers immortal fame and everlasting endurance to the life of the commemorated name. On a temporal level, at the zenith of the night, the demised person mingles with the starry sky and shines brightly as a steadfast celestial body. The image of a bright star, here epitome of the everlasting property of nature, is also traditionally regarded as a symbol of permanence in Western literature. However, what Feng Zhi suggests is a transcendental process occurring at night, at the dusk of life, which enables the earthly human body to make no difference among the other luminous bodies of the sky.

The same recurring motif distinguishes the concluding lines of sonnet 13, which Feng Zhi dedicated to Goethe, one of his German literary and philosophical mentors. Death, serving as a bridge for metamorphosis, is revealed as the secret and ultimate meaning of life. The idea of reaching the zenith of the night in order to transmute and become one with nature conveyed in Feng Zhi's sonnets can be regarded as the completion of an everlasting cycle. This perpetual cycle is first encountered in nature and Feng Zhi vividly appears to have fully embraced Goethe's ideology of death to become. This primary notion, as also mentioned in previous chapters, was treated by Feng Zhi in his doctoral dissertation first and then experimented in his mature compositions, notably in the Goethean sonnet.

Goethe's own implication of "Stirb und Werde" is the "wisdom that is so difficult to access"³¹². As Martin and Erika Swales also theorise, this philosophical notion, which is still today so mysterious in Goethe's poetry, is closely associated with ideas of experimental dynamic and change, with "processes in which the emergence of new from old entails many intermediate deaths."³¹³ What critics,

³¹² Martin and Erika Swales, *Reading Goethe: A Critical Introduction to the Literary Work*, Rochester, Camden House, 2002, p. 54.

³¹³ Swales, *Reading Goethe*, p. 54.

however, are certain of is the nature of this change – a force that is rooted within the “transformatory and self-transformatory law of this-wordly experience.”³¹⁴ This would entail a force of never-ending and repeated transformation from death to life and *vice versa*. For such a reason, it becomes plausible to accept Feng Zhi’s re-interpretation of Goethe’s ideology and pre-Modernist refinement when poetising elements of the natural realm as epitomes of death-to-become fulfilment and self-completion.

Goethe’s poem “Selige Sehnsucht” (“Blissful Yearning”, 1819) begins and concludes proclaiming the importance of mystery: “Das Lebend’ge will ich preisen, das nach Flammentod sich sehnet” [I wish to praise the living thing that yearns to death in the flames]. This trace of transtextual confluence in Feng Zhi’s sonnet 13 takes the mystery of the modern Chinese verses to a higher philosophical realm that can be equated with that which Goethe poetises. Goethe’s view of the world as “dark earth” [dunkle Erde] and opinion on those who cannot grasp its sense of life are also re-portrayed in Feng Zhi’s sonnets. The very much-acclaimed verses of “Selige Sehnsucht” read:

“Und so lang du das nicht hast,
Dieses: Stirb und werde!
Bist du nur ein trüber Gast
Auf der dunklen Erde.”³¹⁵

[“And as long as you have not achieved it,
This: Die and become!
You will only be a miserable guest
On the dark earth”]

Sehnsucht can be seen in both the German writings taken into exam and Feng Zhi’s poetry as the ‘bad of desire’. Typical of the Romantic sense of nostalgic melancholy is the love for the irresolute and ambivalence, inquietude and restlessness. The German word “Sehnsucht” must not be confused with “Heimweh”, a nostalgic sense of longing for a return to that state of happiness that was once gained or that is at least known and determinable. Sehnsucht is rather a sentimental state that can never reach its aimed target as this is unknown or cannot be discerned. In fact, as the word

³¹⁴ Swales, *Reading Goethe*, p. 54.

³¹⁵ Johann W. von Goethe, “Selige Sehnsucht” in *West-östlicher Divan (West-Eastern Diwan)*, <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/-3656/2>. Accessed until October 2017.

suggests, Sehnsucht entails a sense of emotional suffering originated by the unfulfilling craving or addiction [Sucht] to desire [Sehnen]. It is interesting to note also that the German verb “sehnen” often implies a sense of desire that is not unattainable as it longs for something that is undefined or indefinable. The word “Sehnsucht” in this work has been oft left in the original German version because it appears that the peculiar meaning entailed by it cannot be rendered with an adequate translation into English or other languages. Romantic historian Ladislao Mittner defined Sehnsucht as the ‘desease’ (Sucht) of ‘desire’ (Sehnen): “a wish for everything and nothing at once [...] ‘Sehnsucht’ is really a search of desire, a desire to desire, a desire that is felt as unquenchable.”³¹⁶ This is best expressed in the poet’s re-elaboration of the theme of the night and prelude of death.

Moreover, it is interesting to notice, though, that in Goethe’s poem the reason why the moth, or butterfly [Schmetterling], flies to the flames and burns to death is explicated by the living thing’s zealous yearning for light:

“Keine Ferne macht dich schwierig,
Kommst geflogen und gebannt,
Und zuletzt, des Lichts begierig,
Bist du, Schmetterling, verbrannt.”³¹⁷

No distance makes you heavy,
you come fluttering and bewitched,
And finally, yearning for the light,
You, moth, are burnt”

The rhyming pattern of Goethe’s poem interestingly falls on two words that are not semantically connected, but logically and meaningfully related to the purpose of the German poet’s ideology: “gebannt” and “verbrannt”. The state of being bewitched [gebannt] by a spell is what leads the butterfly to the light of the flames, thus, dying burnt [verbrannt]. This mystery is what Feng Zhi seeks to evoke in his sonnet by announcing that Goethe knows the mystic natural rule that governs all living creatures to this transition from life to death and beyond: “万物都在享用你的那句

³¹⁶ Ladislao Mittner, “Dal pietismo al romanticismo (1700-1820)” in *Storia della letteratura tedesca*, vol. II, Turin, Einaudi Editore, 2002, p. 700.

³¹⁷ Mittner, “Dal pietismo al romanticismo”, p. 700.

名言，它道破一切生的意义：“死和变” [“All living creatures benefit from your words, revealing the true sense of life: “die and become”].

Goethe’s exemplification of the night, as it might concern us expressly for Feng Zhi’s poetry, is particularly manifested in the German poem “Um Mitternacht” (“At Midnight”, 1819). In this poem, the night, and more particularly ‘midnight’, becomes a moment of aesthetical transition – a moments in life characterised by the activation of the thinking, reflection, transition, hence, change. “Um Mitternacht” was called by the poet himself as his “Lebenslied” [life poem] as it sings of autobiographical elements as poetic life. The aesthetical experience is particularly implied in the little boy’s bewilderment for the beauty of the stars in the sky at midnight:

Stern am Sterne
Sie leuchteten doch alle gar zu schön;
Um Mitternacht.
[Stars all starry,
Their really lovely sparkling was such joy;
At midnight.]³¹⁸

Death in flames brings the reader back to Feng Zhi’s analogy in his doctoral dissertation with the death and rebirth of the phoenix. Death in Feng Zhi’s sonnets, as it is in Goethe’s lyrical production, does not represent the “antagonist of life”, but as Erika Swales also stresses, death as “part of life lived at the greatest pitch of intensity.”³¹⁹ The moth of Goethe’s poem transfigures in Feng Zhi’s sonnets by gaining a rather symbolic function. As the cicada that moults its shell and the tree that sheds its bark, so does the image of the moth whose life cycle is characterised by a series of die-to-become transformations from the moment it etches from the egg to caterpillar, chrysalis and flying creature. Goethe’s epithet of man as guest appears very accurate when describing man’s transience on earth: given his ephemeral stay and relatively limited time in the world, man is rather a guest who comes and goes while undergoing continuous transformation. According to Goethe, as also

³¹⁸ Johann W. von Goethe, “Um Mitternacht” in Matthew Bell, *Goethe: Selected Poems*, trans. in English by John Whaley, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1998, pp. 124-5.

³¹⁹ Swales, *Reading Goethe*, p. 54.

emphasised by Feng Zhi's lines and reference to the German poet's philosophical advancement, without an understanding of the fundamental notion of "Stirb und werde" [die and become /死和变] man would only be a transient melancholic guest.

It must be reminded that such life cycle was also advanced by Feng Zhi in his re-elaboration of Novalis's poetry during his period of study in Germany. The Chinese poet expressed a thorough consideration of the life process in nature according to Novalis by chiefly referring to elements found in the animal and plant world. For instance, the German Romantic poet, as Feng Zhi proposes, gains his central idea of the seeds' cycle of life in the plant world and applies it to humanity, and by analogies, to the whole cosmos. The cycle of living things is evoked in mystic logic especially by juxtaposing terms that are generally in opposition, such as day and night, light and darkness, spirit and body and ultimately life and death. All these factors exerting all a different force upon humanity and the wide world are connected and built inside of a ring. The extreme end of day is linked with that of the night and the night is concomitantly linked with the day again inside an eternal cycle. Feng Zhi's evocating image of the moulting cicada is the fruit of analogical searches within the natural world to emphasise the notion: from the seed comes an organism, which will bring forth new seedlings; from this one life comes in again. It is from this perspective that Feng Zhi assumed Novalis's mystic ideology of infinity: life is the beginning of death and that death is the beginning of life – both become one.

Just like "Selige Sehnsucht" confronts the facts of transience and death, so do Feng Zhi's sonnets, notably those that closely relate to the theme of nightly transience and death. Feng Zhi's sonnets subtly imply but ultimately do not exalt the boundaries that restrain human life in terms of life or death. On the other hand, what the Chinese steady and confident lyrical self seeks to evoke is a certain understanding of those limitations that sheds light on the aesthetical experiences apt to the human fulfilment in the living world. The Chinese poet makes reference to the unexpected wondrous moments in life that appear out of the blue and that do have a devastating effect onto human life. The coming of death is also represented as one of those unexpected phenomenon that unfolds over humanity. The historical background in China that encompasses the period when the sonnets were composed was very much

distinguished by moments in which human life was put on the extreme stretches of anxiety, uncertainty and suffering. During war period, death comes unexpectedly and stresses the limitations of human frailty.

Rilke, on the other hand, as also Nietzsche, eulogises the existence of man and praises the beauty of the ephemeral side life, where death is a triggering component that enables the completion of life. Rilke's poem collection *Die Sonette an Orpheus* of 1922 follows the same attention for death. In his sonnets, Rilke stresses the terrestrial experience and terrestrial life and also criticises the biased orientation of Christianity. Nietzsche's thoughts about life in his work *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (*So Spoke Zarathustra*) and about art and life conditions of the artists in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 1872) deeply inspired Rilke. The image of distance is also influenced by the concept of art and symbolic images of Rilke and Novalis, which also gives a metaphysical and transcendental hue.

According to Rilke, experiences are the bridge that connects life with death, and the power of the aesthetic experience and art enables infinity. The song and music of Orpheus are the best embodiment of art. As godly singer, Orpheus resembles Apollo in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* of Nietzsche. The relationship between art and life is a common theme in Nietzsche and Rilke.

One of the main phenomena brought forward by the fall of night and its aesthetical experience is the return to the self. Night is depicted in Feng Zhi's sonnets as a silent and still atmospheric phenomenon that paves the right way for the poet to experience the ineffable and unconceivable. When considering the Venetian experience in sonnet 5, one can easily realise and appreciate the importance given to the tranquillity instilled by the night, described as deep and still [夜深静悄]. This peculiar and striking aspect ascribed to the night turns out to be an essential component in cosmos that enables the lyrical subject to come to terms with his self. The image portrayed in the last tercet of the sonnet vividly sets the scene at night in preparation for self-fulfilment and completion. The windows that were felt open during daylight are now closed and those bridges that used to connect the islands

during the day are now empty: each island reaffirms its own identity as solitary and independent being.

Sonnet 10, dedicated to Cai Yuanpei, echoes the teachings of Goethe and concept poetised in “Um Mitternacht”. Goethe’s poem announced the act of a little boy walking across the churchyard at night and his amusement at looking the starry sky shining bright at midnight with sparkling stars instilling joy in the boy’s heart (stars all starry, their really lovely sparkling was such joy; at midnight³²⁰). This transition emphasised by the occurrence of midnight is what enables Cai Yuanpei to shine bright in the skies and mingle with other stars at midnight [到夜半你和一般的星星也没有区分]. The concept of midnight as being the temporal zenith of the lyrical voice also stresses the idea of continuity, recurrence and advancement of a life cycle. Cai Yuanpei is said to be visible to the poetic subject especially at dawn and dusk in the shape of “the morning star and the Vesper” [我们只在黎明和黄昏认识了你是长庚，是启明].

The night, for Feng Zhi, also exerts a great mystification force over the self, the landscape and the world. In sonnet 18, for instance, the night is first associated with the idea of intimacy: spending an intimate night together with his lover [我们有时度过一个亲密的夜]. The term “intimate” [*qinmi* 亲密] employed here by the Chinese poet does not necessarily stand as a euphemism for a form of closeness that is generally achieved through a sexual relationship, but also to the state of being closely acquainted or familiar with the given situation and involving very close private connections with his surrounding. The lyrical subject’s certainty and confidence with the state of intimacy towards the night stands at stark contrast with the unfamiliarity of the physical and natural surrounding:

We often spend an intimate night
Inside an unknown room, its appearance
In daytime, we will never know, nor
Can we say of its past and future. The open plain...

³²⁰ “Stern am Sterne sie leuchteten doch alle gar zu schön; um Mitternacht” - Johann W. von Goethe, “Um Mitternacht” in Matthew Bell, *Goethe: Selected Poems*, pp. 124-5.

Stretches boundlessly outside the window,
We just vaguely remember at nightfall
The road we took, the one we know,
We will depart tomorrow, and never return.³²¹

The lyrical subject of the sonnet explicitly expresses his concern about the limiting constraints that are imposed onto his surrounding environment. The vague uncertainty about the future and the past of the room in which the poetic subjects are found is further amplified by the doubts about the appearance of the habitation during daytime. The night exerts great effect on the remembrance of the poetic self to the point of infusing melancholic and nostalgic sentiments of sorrow and impotence. The mystic force of the night is so effective upon the aesthetic self that what appears to be deeply rooted within the consciousness and knowledge of the poetic voice begins to fade away [我们只依稀地记得在黄昏时来的道路，便算是对它的认识].

Night is also immeasurable, far-reaching and intangible in its essence. Feng Zhi equates the essence of the night with that of the ocean, which like the former is also far stretching and represents the manifestation of a mystic and poetic source. In sonnet 20, the poet clearly gives evidence of this philosophical equation: through the voice of the wise lyrical subject, he does not hesitate to deliver deep philosophical messages of the collective union:

But many lives bonded together,
The fusion blooms into a flower, will it bear fruit?
Who can lead his own life
In such an ocean-like boundless night?

The lyrical voice appears to be doubtful on the future and prosperity of this union. As discussed in most of the themes in this work, apart from the notion of permanence, all the rest appears to be ultimately affected by the perishable force of time making everything that is found under the sun rather ephemeral. Human and all forms of interpersonal relationships are not an exception and are also bound to be affected by the consumable force of change and matter. Will this union bear fruit? – In other words, as already symbolised in other sonnets, the lyrical voice asks himself or his reader whether this union is long lasting. From lessons of nature, man has learnt that

³²¹ First octave in sonnet 18.

the fruit of plant is preceded by the appearance of the fruit. Hence, if the union between men has reached the first stage of transformation, the following question of truth now regards the prosperous feasibility and the chance this union has to last. Sonnet 7 had already portrayed the unification of man running to the outskirts of the city in order to escape the danger of war. Danger and fear to perish under the threat of attacks, such as air bombardment, enabled the collective gathering in the outskirts of civilians. Nevertheless, as circumstances also advocate, such a union was merely evanescent and did not last long:

“Will cherish this awakening,
Will cherish this destiny,
The danger has soon passed.

Those divergent paths will
Absorb us back again:
The ocean breaks into water streams.”³²²

Danger, or the wondrous moments epitomised by the coming of a comet in sonnet 1, are what paradoxically unite mankind into one amalgamated being. This modern vision of man is in perfect harmony with the advent of modernity in China and the introduction of Western values. Individualism, in fact, was already among those new and innovative values being introduced into China by reformists, such as Chen Duxiu, along with humanism, democracy and gender equality. This individualistic perspective taken by Feng Zhi was not a real innovation in China during the time when the sonnets appeared. Nevertheless, what appeared to be striking is the pre-Modernist approach of psychological impotence to build lasting relationships – clear evidence of Rilke’s influence in the making of the modern Chinese poet’s thought. The ocean, or water, appears in both sonnets and their infinite grandeur to the eye of the lyrical subject confirms the intangible and elusive property of the natural element. The night is described as boundless as water [这茫茫如水的夜色]³²³, hence, stressing the overwhelming, infinite and impalpable characteristic of the temporal phenomenon. Man-nature relationship, conceived also in a mirroring effect, is often used in Feng Zhi’s sonnets to convey ideas that are related to the absolute, evanescence, change and continuity. It is no surprise then to encounter many of these

³²² Sestet in sonnet 7.

³²³ Concluding line in the octave of sonnet 20.

correspondences in the Chinese sonnets where images of man and natural phenomena are ingeniously juxtaposed into a series of poetic analogies.

The uncontrollable and peculiar state of water and its representation in the image of the ocean serves the poet to emphasise the instability of human bondage and contacts. As sonnet 7 suggests, men are gathered into an amalgamation and soon breaks again into many water streams, each following an individual and independent course. It is then possible to enlighten why the lyrical voice of sonnet 20 puts such a question to himself or to his imaginary listener: “Who can lead his own life in such an ocean-like boundless night?” A plausible clarification would be that man’s life is led by its own unpredictable and wondrous course like the river flows over its own bed.

Night, as water, cannot be contained nor conceived in its whole essence by man. Feng Zhi poetises water as one primordial natural element and night as temporal phenomenon in their impalpable essence and peculiarity. In the last sonnet of the collection, Feng Zhi reasserts this notion by accentuating the impotence of man to contain what cannot be contained in its wholeness:

From a shapeless expanse of water,
A man came to fill an oval vase,
So, this now obtains a determined shape³²⁴

The poetic voice of the sonnet sings about water by emphasizing one of the attributes that most peculiarly characterises this natural and essential element in the natural world: its shapelessness. In fact, as the lyrical narrator recounts, a man comes to fill a vase from “a shapeless expanse of water” [从一片泛滥无形的水里] and attempts to give it what is ‘natural’ to water: a prescribed shape dictated by the will of man [一个定形].

Among others, the last of the twenty-seven sonnets summarises the theme of far-away distance and the Romantic absolute conveyed in all the other poems by evoking the contrast between light and darkness, permanence and change and by

³²⁴ First quatrain in sonnet 27.

inferring pre-Modern perceptions of collective helplessness in light of modern individualism. Light and darkness are seen from a distance and even the plants are urged from afar to rush and embark on their journey towards infinity.

The poem of Feng Zhi that most vividly reconnects the Romantic ideals sung by Novalis with the modern Chinese rendering is sonnet 22. On Novalis's terms, the night is the beginning of mystic encounters and experiences that can be explicated through metaphysical transcendence. The sonnet opens by announcing and glorifying the essence of the deep night [深夜] as imposing as a deep mountain [深山]. The force of the night is first perceived by its visual manifestation of hindering and hiding whatever is found beyond and within it. The poet juxtaposes images that are close and far to the poetic subject and seeks to evoke a sensation of nostalgia by recalling them vividly in the memory of the lyrical self:

Deep night, another deep mountain,
The sound of the night rain pouring.
A mountain village ten miles away,
A market place twenty miles away,

The theme of distance is emphasised by the night that mystically blurs all boundaries and contours. The mighty force of the night instils a sense of doubt into the lyrical subject who even starts to wonder about the existence of the villages that are or should be found beyond the presence of the engulfing night:

Do they still exist?
Mountains and rivers of ten years ago,
Illusions of twenty years ago,
All deeply immersed in the rain.

The mystic hazing effect of the night onto the landscape outlines is even strengthened by the slowly fading effect onto the contours caused by the unstoppable passing of time. The night, intended as a temporal phenomenon, is accentuated by the mighty essence of time that plays a vital role in the definition of the objects found in the memory of the lyrical subject. Both the running of time and the night, phenomenal representation of time, exert the same wearing effect onto the focal vision and perception of objects found in both the inner and outer world of the poetic voice. Such a vision can also be interpreted transculturally in light of what Novalis

theorised in *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, where the night enables the travel of man to the antipodes in a world “where everything is the same as here, except inverted with respect to time”³²⁵.

Moreover, the image of the darkening night plays another effect onto the sensitive perception of the lyrical self who, on Rilke’s terms, collects continuous aesthetic experiences. In fact, as night gently falls and light gradually fades leaving space for darkness, the lyrical subject experiences a sense of return to the primeval time of existence.

Once again, as in sonnet 1, the lyrical self is found ready to receive wondrous experiences and proclaims his steadiness in ‘entreating’ in the deep night:

All around is so narrow,
It’s like returning into the mother’s womb;
I entreat in the deep night

The unfathomable line “it’s like returning into the mother’s womb” [好象回到母胎] finds its explanation in Feng Zhi’s own doctoral dissertation and re-elaboration of Novalis’s notion of night and death and Goethe’s idea of death and rebirth. As already mentioned, for both Novalis and Goethe, night or death did not merely represent the end of a life or temporal phase, but rather the beginning of a new cycle. Therefore, if death is the beginning of life and the night is the beginning of day, Feng Zhi’s inauguration of night is perceived as the initiation of a rebirth. Feng Zhi’s lyrical voice describes his sensorial perception of his surrounding being affected by the continuous progress of existence by announcing that “all around is so narrow” by the disappearance of light and that nightfall is like preparing for being born again from the “mother’s womb” [母胎]. Such assertion reaffirms Feng Zhi’s philosophical and poetical embrace of the German thought concerning the notion of continuous change and the die-to-become [Stirb und werde / 死和变] resolution.

The lyrical voice is found pleading in the night or, as other possible interpretations may suggest, to the night for metaphysical infinity in his heart. The

³²⁵ Wood, *Novalis: Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, p. 147.

human heart is limited and bound to the fleshly condition and beseeches the night to grant a “vast universe”:

With incessant voice:
“Give my narrow heart
A vast universe!”

The meaningful elements in this sonnet render the philosophical appreciation of Feng Zhi’s poetry ambivalent and especially prone to multiple interpretations. Feng Zhi’s experience of the night and its evocative aesthetic effect upon the sensitive voice define this particular poem as arena of modern experimentations and resolutions. The key factor that characterises the essence of the poem lies at the central rediscovery of the self in modern individualistic terms. The modern concept of individualism addressed by modern Chinese writers like Feng Zhi cannot be merely equated with the most recurrent and often widely accepted connotation of individualism as a habit or principle of independent self-reliance. Although a first glance of literary individualism might give a self-centred feeling usually expressed through greedy selfishness or egoism, a more accurate interpretation of this notion actually reveals much more than what the eye can see.

In fact, the individualistic approach that was pivotal in modern Chinese writings, as it was formerly experimented and brought forward by some modern poets like Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862-1922) or Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867-1916) in Japan, rather centred around the modern concept of man intended as an individual universe to rediscover. The individualist approach, hence, should be re-conceived as the new dimensioning of the human being and the self in the world. In the very short and confined space of the poetic form of the sonnet, modern Chinese Feng Zhi lies the foundation of this epochal shift from universe from outer to inner world. The small and fleshly narrowed heart metaphorically represents that inner world that modern man has to deal with and ultimately needs to investigate on. The outlining contrasts set by the poetic voice evoking images of objects that are found far both in space and in time highlight this sense of analogical juxtaposition of narrow and vast, finite and universe. The image and sensorial experience of the night, also possibly intended as a metaphor for death encroaching man little by little during the course of his life, is perceived as a phenomenon that makes the poetic subject feel returning to

the beginning: the mother's womb. As previously mentioned, following Goethe's teachings on the matter, death can no longer be understood as the end of a journey, but rather as the beginning of a new cycle.

The poetic voice concludes sonnet 22 with powerful words of prayer as the deep night engulfs him: "Give my narrow heart a vast universe" [给我给我狭窄的心一个大的宇宙]. It is worth noticing that the original Chinese version of the poem written by Feng Zhi in the 1940s makes use of modern punctuation and inverted commas to indicate that this last line is being quoted by other text. After a closer investigation on the matter, it was not possible to identify the precise source at this stage of research from which Feng Zhi's quote was extracted and which could maintain the same context or attributed meaning. Nevertheless, the choice and order of the words employed in Chinese by Feng Zhi remind of some lines found in the Qur'an, in the Sura Taha (20:25). In the Sura Taha of the Qur'an, Moses is chosen from God to return to the pharaoh and speak to him with gentle speech so that he might be reminded or fear and finally set the Children of Israel free from his torments and bondage. As soon as God speaks and entrusts him with this task, Moses uttered the phrase: "[Oh Lord] Expand for me my chest"³²⁶. In other words, what Moses really implied by this request was for his narrow heart to be expanded and enlarged in order to be responsive, joyful and hungry for knowledge, wisdom and spiritual light. The Arabic word for chest (صَدْر) is usually interchangeable with that for heart (قَلْب) especially when it comes to man's disposition to accomplish something. The transtextual cue in this regard functions as imagery loan for Feng Zhi in order to express his plight and request for his heart to be transmuted into what is ineffable.

The openness of the lyrical subject's heart breaking through all constrictive boundaries would allow him to receive that knowledge, wisdom, courage and steadfastness in the re-establishment of his own self. Although the Chinese and Arabic verse do not really represent the same context, the recurring imagery embodies in the modern Chinese sonnet the same mighty, supernatural and

³²⁶ Abdullah Yusuf Ali (trans.), *The Holy Qur'an*, Surat Taha 20:25, Kent, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000, p. 254.

metaphysical power. Moses beseeches God to expand his heart through linguistic expression that is also often associated with a plight to receive patience. Feng Zhi's sonnet also depicts an outer world that affects the lyrical subject to the point of losing hope in front of old illusions that keep on cropping up and fade away with the pouring rain. In fact, as the poet personally confesses in the preface of the second edition of the sonnet collection, these words are uttered through the mouth of the poetic self in order to manifest the disillusioned and disappointed heart of the poet in front of modern humanity, which appears as rather disordered and unreal [纷杂而又不真实的社会里更要说出这迫切的祈求给我狭窄的心一个大的宇宙]³²⁷. These words, as Feng Zhi puts it, came out as an urge to declare through a mystified poetic voice these words of prayer. The disheartened and rather dismayed subject feels the same need and desire to gain a supernatural understanding of what surrounds the lyrical persona. In other words, both Moses and Feng Zhi, even if on two rather distinct levels and distant contexts, appear to manifest the same plight and desire for their heart to be granted a much larger and indefinable property in order to adjust their self and disposition in front of their circumstances. Both Moses and Feng Zhi embark on a mission that appears rather unrealistic to their human eyes, being that to save a people from the enslavement of the pharaoh or that to endure the suffering of a world that is in constant change and imbued with colourful disillusionments.

Typical Romantic was the theme of the human finitude compared to the infinity of the godly, in this case, the night. The limited human condition was also put in contrast with the infinity of hope, desire for immortality or permanence, and to the desire to ascribe a meaning to one's own existence. Attention to and meditation about these themes featured in the philosophy of many other epochs; nonetheless, it must be revealed that the Romantics lived this opposition with extreme tension imputing to life the true contradiction between finitude and infinity, as life leads to

³²⁷ Han Yaocheng 韩耀成, *Feng Zhi Quanji* 冯至全集 (*Complete Works of Feng Zhi*), Vol. 1, Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999, pp. 214-15.

death, hence, longing for immortality. Man aspires to a full life and to a total relationship with the infinite and permanent condition of the universe or the godly. However, the reality of man's existence is rather dominated by insurmountable limitations that constrain his life in time and space.

Feng Zhi's lyrical voice in sonnet 22 appears to be once again in syntonic agreement with Novalis defined in his Romantic notes about the meaning of cosmology. Feng Zhi's poetic voice informs his reader of a plight to the night for the universe to be implanted within his heart. If Spinoza, as Novalis argues, posited everything outside, it was Fichte who posited everything, hence the universe, within. As Novalis writes:

"It is immaterial whether I posit the universe within myself, or myself in the universe [...] So too with freedom. If freedom is within the whole, then freedom is also in me. If I call freedom necessity, and necessity is in the whole, then necessity is in me, and vice versa."³²⁸

Moreover, another important point from Novalis's notes regards Feng Zhi's poetic stance with regards to the heart and the sentiments that stir within: "Whatever is emotionally moving or penetrating, quickly enters into us-before we have time to grasp it."³²⁹

Another very interesting lyrical relation between Feng Zhi's sonnets and Novalis's theories regards the concept of sleep, which is very much connected with the theme of night. In sonnet 25, the lyrical narrator informs his reader that the air is filled with amusement even when man sleeps and that things still happen inside and outside the human body without man being aware. When Novalis attempts to give a physiological explanation of the act of sleeping and its relationship with the human body, the first notion that one can easily grasp is that sleep is a mixed state of the body and the soul [Schlaf ist ein vermischter Zustand des Körpers und der Seele]³³⁰. There is a relationship between body and soul that is stronger especially at night, in fact, in Novalis's words,

³²⁸ Wood, *Novalis: Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, p. 114.

³²⁹ Wood, *Novalis: Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, p. 40.

³³⁰ Novalis, *Fragmente I*, <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/fragmente-i-6618/13>. Accessed in June 2017.

“The body and soul are chemically united in sleep. The soul is evenly distributed throughout the body in sleep – the human being is *neutralised*. [...] Sleep is a digestion of the soul; the body digests the soul (*Withdrawal of the soul-stimulus*).

This soul digestion [Seelenverdauung] particularly re-echoes within the blood vessels of the Chinese lyrical subject:

Only in the sleep of our bodies,
When the night is still, the rhythms awake:
The air is filled with amusement,

The sea salt plays within our blood...
In our dreams, it is like hearing
The sky and the sea calling our names.³³¹

The lyrical exploitation of the theme of the night along with its implied metaphysical and philosophical recall to death in Feng Zhi's poems connects different visions pertaining to the German Romantic poetry and its modernist re-elaboration. From what it was possible to perceive, Feng Zhi clearly shows to have acquired sound knowledge of the German Romantic approach to the theme of night, especially when it comes to Novalis's theorisation and romanticisation of the world. Feng Zhi's rendering of night serves the lyrical voice to experiment and experience the sublime as well as to re-establish his original and sensorial identity. It was also possible to demystify in this work Feng Zhi's interpretative use of the image of the night as well as the high idealistic meaning behind it thanks to poet's own notes on his proper understanding and theorisation of the theme in his doctoral dissertation.

The recurrent instances in which Feng Zhi's lyrical narrator makes reference to the coming of death is also in line with the German Romantics' fascination with death. As already mentioned in the case of Novalis, the fascination with the unanticipated coming of death, the theory of the growing and decaying organism or the relation of physical decay with spiritual becoming become central elements in the appreciation of Feng Zhi's post-Romantic writing.

Furthermore, what originally distinguishes Feng Zhi's poetry and its evocation of the night motif is the indisputable reading and translation of Rilke's writings,

³³¹ Sestet of sonnet 25.

which finally exerted notable influence on the refinement of the modern Chinese lyrical expression in Feng Zhi. The embodiment of the Romantic motif finds another form of expression revealing a different *Weltanschauung* that is relevant to the new challenges of the modern individual: the scission between the inner self and the outer world. Prelude of modernist writings, Feng Zhi's lyrical voice reveals the alienation and loneliness of man accentuated by the night, that temporal phenomenon that best permits man to re-establish a connection with his own being and attain self-fulfilment.

CHAPTER SIX

TRACES OF ORPHIC MYTH

The Hellenistic world is found at the core of most Romantic and some post-Romantic poetry, considering that it is exalted as the pinnacle of civilisation and artistic accomplishment. Greek mythology is therefore frequently used as a bridge connecting concepts from antiquity to modern era. Poets use common imagery from mythology, which are taken for granted as being universally accepted, to evoke and explain themes that are deep rooted in the human nature and concept of thought.

Although it is not explicitly mentioned in any of the poems of Feng Zhi, the meaningful concept of the Orphic myth, reminiscent of the Rilkean poetry, has left indelible marks in the some the sonnets revealing a new key of understanding and appreciation of the modern Chinese writings in exam.

In fact, traces of this pre-Modernist concept easily influence other themes found within Feng Zhi's poetry that have been previously examined. The conceptualised idea of infinity and transcendence, for instance, are also particularly evoked by the Orphic motif by means of the metaphorical characteristics of a new idealised creative process.

Mythologically, Orpheus is believed to have been an extremely talented musician and a poet with the ability to move anybody and anything with his music. The son of either a king or a god, Orpheus was able to enchant beasts, trees and rocks with a lyre given to him by Apollo and with a music taught to him by the Muses. Upon his return from his voyage on the Argo - his poetic powers being necessary to avoid the bewitching but fatal songs of the Sirens, Orpheus marries Eurydice and when she dies after being bitten by a serpent, he ventures into the underworld to retrieve her following the advice of nymphs and deities.

His most famous account centres on this historic quest to retrieve his beloved Eurydice from the Underworld back to living world: Thanks to his music and poetry which delights even the hearts of Hades and his wife Persephone, Orpheus manages to gain admittance and to be granted the wish to allow Eurydice to follow him back to the living world. The only condition that Hades provides him is that not to look back at his wife as he leads her outside from the Underworld. However, on the very threshold of life, Orpheus anxiously looks back and loses Eurydice. Orpheus is overcome with doubt whether Eurydice is in actual fact behind him. He turns and she is lost to him forever. What follows is Orpheus's desperation at having lost the one chance to have his wife back. The image of Orpheus, hence, has become a harbinger of loss, longing, and loneliness. Orpheus's loss of faith that his wife was in fact following him from the underworld is a relatable notion, which can be associated to the loss of faith or hope in one-self. In fact, as Walter Strauss claims, "there are certain particularities in the Orpheus myth that make it eminently suited to a certain kind of modern mentality."³³²

The myth concludes with Orpheus being torn into pieces by the Thracian Maenads out of jealousy with regards the desolate grief over his wife. His body scattered over the soil at the foot of Olympus; the head thrown into the River Hebrus with his lyre - both still singing as they drifted into the sea. Finally, Apollo bade Orpheus's head be silent in Lesbos and his lyre was placed as a constellation in the Heavens by Zeus.

³³² Walter Strauss, *Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 5.

Over time, however, Orpheus has suffered a number of poetical transformations, and in the modern age has become what Strauss refers to as ‘the agony of poetry’. Strauss further elaborates by stating that “his metamorphosis is the change in poetic climate itself, placed against an ever-darkening sky in which poetry recedes more and more toward secret and unexplored spaces, spaces that are obscure and must be illuminated by constellations of the mind ever threatened by disaster and extinction.”³³³

The heroic quest of Orpheus, descending into the underworld to search for his beloved Eurydice and bring her back to life explains the symbolic image of the so-called ‘Orphic tree’. The image of the tree is epitomised by its characteristic of having roots extending down beneath the soil and reaching downwards. The Orphic myth proves the extensive influence exerted by Rilke’s poetry on Feng Zhi and by the German author’s poetic experiences. It is worth noticing, though, that both Rilke and Feng Zhi seem to have gone through the same enlightening process that freed their spirits and united it with nature. Rilke admitted to have written his *Sonnets to Orpheus* under very “mysterious” and “enigmatic dictations” while in the garden of the Duino Castle in Switzerland, where the poet claims to have encountered the other side of nature.

Rilke's work *Die Sonette an Orpheus*, also bearing the subtitle *Geschrieben als ein Grab-Mal für Wera Ouckama Knoop*, was written upon hearing of the news of the death of a friend of his daughter. Much like how Orpheus was compelled to turn around and look at his wife Rilke also felt that Wera's ghost was "commanding and impelling" him to write. Prior to his writing of the sonnets, Rilke had been facing an existential crisis due to bouts of depression that led him to have thoughts on the reason of living. German philosophy of the time jilted the idea of god and religion, while the emergence of psychoanalysis brought to light other aspects of human relationships other than love. Rilke's own experiences in love led him to concede on the idea that love could be a driving force in life.³³⁴ Rilke believed that modernity

³³³ Strauss, *Descent and Return*, p. 17.

³³⁴ See Karen Leeder and Rober Vilain, *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 96-97.

concealed aspects of life, which were considered unappealing to society. Death and thoughts related to death were often frowned upon, but Rilke believed that it was important “to keep life open in the face of death.”³³⁵

Choosing the Orphic myth was therefore no coincidence as it portrays a living being entering the dwelling of the dead. Life and death are juxtaposed; death becomes another aspect of life that had previously been disapproved by society, but which Rilke believes “is the face of life that is turned away from us, not illuminated by us.”³³⁶

Rilke wrote the fifty-five sonnets in February 1922 as if being under a divine ‘dictation’ after the many years dedicated to the composition of the *Duino Elegies*. Although Rilke had long mastered the sonnet form, the collection of the *Sonnets to Orpheus* represents his first and only sonnet sequence. Just like Feng Zhi’s collection *Shisihang ji*, the sonnet sequence can be regarded as a series of individual poems that are though linked by common themes and by the same mastery. Both Rilke, influenced by the sculptor Auguste Rodin, and Feng Zhi, persuaded by Rilke’s poetry and aesthetical experiences, developed a new style of lyric poetry in two different stages and times: *Ding-Gedichte* (“object poem”) for Rilke and the sonnet for Feng Zhi.

Feng Zhi confessed of gaining a transcendental experience during his study and visit in Heidelberg in 1935. The poet tells his experience of walking among the hills around Heidelberg while reading a book that contained the verses of the poem “Song wuke shang ren” 送无可上人 of Jia Dao 贾岛 (779–843), a poet of the Tang dynasty. Feng Zhi was particularly struck by the penultimate lines of the poem:

独行潭底影，数息树边身。

Walking alone, shadow under the pond
Resting for a few moments, body against the tree.

³³⁵ Leeder and Vilain, *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, p. 97.

³³⁶ Leeder and Vilain, *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, p. 98.

In fact, in his essay “Shanshui” 山水 (Landscape, 1935), Feng Zhi explains the contradiction that is found when a writer wishes to stroll in the mountains while carrying a book. The reason, as Feng Zhi puts it, is that if one lets his own heart sink into the book, he is bound to forget about the beauty of the surrounding scenery; and if one does not wish to forget about the far-reaching plains and the trees that are found in front of his eyes, then it would also be very hard for him to concentrate his whole attention onto the book. Sometimes, as the writer continues, he wishes to sit on that marvellous bench made of stones and read *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781) by Immanuel Kant and let the self experience the beauty of the scenery and find out whether man’s pure reason is capable of blending therein. However, as Feng Zhi adds, one day, while walking on a tree-lined path and reading those words from Jia Dao’s famous poem, he could feel the silent trees and see every word contained in the poem turning into every blade of grass and tree.³³⁷

Both instances can be seen as the identification of the self with a natural object. This illustrates the concept of the Orphic tree, where the poet, being reclined towards it, establishes a cohesive existence with it. The body of the poet is thought to project and integrate with the body of the tree. The aim of the Orphic poet is that to create a cohesive existence of his self and the surrounding environment.

Rilke is considered by Strauss as an Orphic poet striving to achieve through poetry an integration of man’s individual existence.³³⁸ During the ten-year period in which he composed the *Duino Elegies*, Rilke attempted to tackle such diverse themes as existence, creativity, destiny, poetry, death and affirmation with varying degrees of success. Such themes also re-emerge in Feng Zhi’s sonnets. In sonnet 2, for instance, the modern Chinese poet writes about the frailty of human existence, the inevitability of death, and the following transformation into the environment. In the second Elegy, Rilke also talks about the transience and incompleteness of the human

³³⁷ See Feng Zhi, “Shanshui” 山水 in Yaocheng Han 韩耀成, *Feng Zhi QuANJI* 冯至全集 (*The Complete Works of Feng Zhi*), Vol. 3, Shijiazhuang, Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999, p. 23.

³³⁸ See Strauss, *Descent and Return*, p. 141.

being and how everything is fleeting and disappears, including beauty.³³⁹ He elaborates further about the role of man as a transient being in the ninth elegy, with the power of transformation through entering a realm of consciousness.³⁴⁰

Interestingly, the Orphic poet attempts and succeeds in establishing a relationship between the inner self and the world around. Analogous to Rilke's transcendental experience, who while reclining against the tree felt nature diffusing its spirit into his body, so could Feng Zhi also feel and ultimately understand the aesthetic experience of the tree's existence. The poet's inner self is in complete harmony with nature and can sensor the invisible movements of the plant. The body leaning against the tree is a metaphor that Feng Zhi employs, quoting Jia Dao's couplet, to convey the idea that he could feel the tree draw the nourishments from the soil up to its branches and leaves the same way as blood flows inside the human body.

The Orphic myth deals with the relationship between man and his surroundings, and the blurring state of boundaries of man and object with finally becomes one with nature is fundamental feature in this philosophical concept. In "Shanshui", Feng Zhi makes frequent reference to the problem of boundaries, as already mentioned in the 'couplet' [两句诗] section of the essay. Moreover, the image of the 'orphyic tree' becomes the embodiment of fusion between the outer physical world and the inner invisible world, which ultimately pertain to two distinctive realms. The roots of the tree are given high symbolical values as they are beneath the visible world, reflecting the world of Hades, the realm of death. Moreover, the visible physical part of the tree is divided into two parts: the trunk being the solitary component and a further section that may build ephemeral connections through its branches with other branches belonging to other surrounding trees. Nonetheless, given its natural physiology, the trunk is bound to keep distance from other trees also out of sheer necessity in order to guarantee its own subsistence and endurance.

³³⁹ A.S. Kline (ed.), *The Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Poetry in Translation, 2001, p. 13. Retrieved from Amazon.com.

³⁴⁰ See Kline, *The Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, p. 130.

In the *Duino Elegies* Rilke evokes the presence and image of angels, who, unlike the Christian concept, appear with a complete transformation from the visible to the invisible. The German poet establishes a parallel between the Christian concept of the garden of Eden. After the acquisition of knowledge, the self-consciousness alienates man from the perfect harmony of his being one with nature, and turns back to the sacred in death.³⁴¹ Rilke seeks to establish “interactions between the angelic and humans”³⁴² and discover what alienates them from each other. The poetic self in the first Elegy cries out, but fails to receive an answer. The angelic is depicted as beyond man’s reach. However, because they fail to answer, man is doomed to remain alone due to his failure of his mission to reach unity. It is this constant quest for a connection between the invisible world, the soul and reality, which is at the core of the human existence.

Furthermore, in the *Elegies*, Rilke highlights the suffering of unrequited lovers, heroes and children who die at a young age. According to the German poet, adults are too preoccupied with daily struggles and lose complete sight of what is important in life. Therefore, humans are left to suffer because of the limitations of the boundaries of time, space, separation, death and isolation.³⁴³ The lover, whose passion is unreciprocated, interacts with this other form of consciousness, thereby seeking to overcome all limitations. This love is shaped into poetical forms, the vehicle of personal transcendence, changing death from end to beginning. In other words, as also exemplified in Feng Zhi’s sonnets, loneliness becomes an essential human state for self-improvement, self-completion. The implied call would be that of attempting to embrace it rather than escaping from it. This poetical form highly influenced Feng Zhi’s own perception of loneliness, as the Chinese writer repeatedly declared in different occasions.

The first poem in his *Sonnets to Orpheus* gives the reader the image of a “towering tree within the ear!” It is strikingly surrounded by the same stillness

³⁴¹ Kathleen Komar, “The Duino Elegies” in Karen Leeder and Robert Vilain, *The Cambridge Companion to Rilke*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 84.

³⁴² Komar, “The Duino Elegies”, p. 82.

³⁴³ Komar, “The Duino Elegies”, pp. 84-85.

echoing the theme of solitude on Feng Zhi's terms. Through its majesty, it attracts others, and for them builds a temple. Moreover, in his fourth Elegy, Rilke also evokes the tree of life, this time contrasting its immortality through the cycles of the seasons with this inability to do so in human beings.

Very seemingly, Feng Zhi's sonnet 3 also portrays a tree that is 'sky-piercing' to whom the poetical subject beseeches to "build a solemn temple" of music in his ears. Transtextuality can be seen here with the lines of Rilke's "The Solitary", a poem belonging to the collection *Neue Gedichte* [New Poems, 1907]:

"No! A tower shall arise from my heart
and I be placed at the top
where nothing else is, neither one last hurt,
nor the ineffable, where the world shall stop;..."

The image employed by the depicted piercing high tower is also recurrent in the image of the eucalyptus tree that is also a "tower" standing high before the lyrical persona of sonnet 3. The aesthetic experiences gained by the two poetic subjects appear analogous.

The idea of the Orphic tree is that of loneliness, where on the surface there can be some interconnectedness, but through the roots being completely separate, indicating that loneliness is essentially an intrinsic part of the human experience and provides self-fulfilment. In both sonnets, the tree appears to be immortal, given a god-like quality in Rilke's sonnets, where others come out to revere it, whilst presented as eternal in Feng Zhi's sonnet, with man, a transient being, providing its nutrient.

This sense of merging of all things of the inner and the outer world occurs during moments of solitude, when the spirit of the poet fuses with the environment and experiences, as the lines of the first sonnet suggest, the rushing wind and the coming of a comet. The ineffability of the Orphic myth foreshadows an increasing sense of wanderlust, which leads the poet to the fulfilment of his existence and lured into the unreachable and inexpressible infinite. There are many instances in the

sonnets where the infinite space outside instils its own spirit within the poetical subject establishing a somewhat cohesive relationship with the lyrical self.

In fact, as Feng Zhi described in “Shanshui”, even the blood of seems to be transfused and in close feeling with the trees and surrounding world. However, it is fundamental to note also that Feng Zhi denied the complete union with nature at this stage: the merging of the self within nature is not a mere assimilation where the original self loses his own identity, but rather a situation where the self is aligned with nature and be able to communicate on equal terms. In “Shanshui”, Feng Zhi comments how in modern European literature, many poets still sing about Narcissus, the young man who was terribly concerned about his own image reflected on the water. The ancient Chinese could see their own nature being reflected in the coarse and rough water. The poet also made an analogy between the “body leaning against the trunk of a tree” [身体靠在树干上] with the image of a butterfly resting upon a flower [蝴蝶落在花上]³⁴⁴: the life of the butterfly mingles with the colour and fragrance of the flower as the life of the man resting against the tree. According to Feng Zhi, the human body that is against the tree can feel his own blood circulating inside as well as the tree absorbing its nutrients from under the ground and then transporting them to all its branches and leaves: “我们从我们全身血液的循环会感到树是怎么从地下摄取养分，输送到枝枝叶叶，甚至仿佛输送我们的血液里”³⁴⁵. In his writing, Feng Zhi compares his aesthetical experience to that of Rilke, who, as the Chinese poet claims, also wrote in one his prose of an analogous aesthetical experience: a tree instilled its spirit inside the body of the poet as he approached it.

Moreover, Rilke suggests the hollowness of human existence and mentions the ‘hero’, in his first and sixth Elegies. The hero represents an opportunity for internal transformation, leading to a fuller life.³⁴⁶ Very interesting, as already mentioned in the previous chapters, Feng Zhi also refers to the image of the hero in sonnet 9, presumably dedicated to a friend who had fought during the war, where he presents

³⁴⁴ Feng Zhi, “Shanshui” in Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, p. 24.

³⁴⁵ Han, *Feng Zhi Quanji*, p. 24.

³⁴⁶ See Kline, *The Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, p.8 and p. 32.

the idea of a soldier with timeless infinity who, as a classic immortal hero, can be free like an aimless and “stringless kite”. The imaginary travel of the hero in Feng Zhi’s sonnet can also be interpreted as another exemplification of the Orphic tree: the soul of the dead soldier travels from the dark world of mankind to a celestial and higher place. In fact, as in the case of the Orphic tree that obtains its nutrients from the darkness of the underground, the nourished substance travels upwards along the roots and inside vessels inside the trunk until it reaches the above ground and clearer level that is exposed to the sun and light.

The pre-Modernist element in Feng Zhi’s lyrical production centres upon the analogous modernist experimentation of Rilke: the realisation of a fragmented humanity that filled the epoch of the respective writers. The constant reference to the past in both Rilke’s and Feng Zhi’s works can be interpreted as the writers’ attempt to recuperate the expressive value of those traditions from the past and meld them into a new force. The Orphic myth has its mythic hero descend into the underworld to rescue what needs to be brought back to life. In Feng Zhi’s case, the reference to this temporal and spatial channel is animated by different elements in the sonnets, such as that of the singing voice that calls for man’s destiny from far-reaching eras. With their visions and voices, Rilke’s new Orpheus and Feng Zhi’s aesthetical experiences in their respective sonnet cycles accomplish a unique mission in the modern world. Rilke’s hero is not the Romantic Prometheus that rebelled in Goethe’s poem and ended up enduring the eternal curse from the gods, but Orpheus, who is able to transform “the self and the world through sound and Orphic song.”³⁴⁷

Rilke’s sixth Elegy starts with exalting the fig tree, which the poet uses as a symbol of life, that quickly comes to fruition and completion. In fact, the fig tree follows a somewhat distinct pattern in its fructification: it has no visible flowers on the branches. Fig flowers are very concealed within the body of what is generally called the fruit. The figs already appear autumn but are not normally ripen until the late summer of the following year:

“Fig tree, you’ve been so meaningful to me so long –
The way you almost completely neglect to bloom

³⁴⁷ Erika M. Nelson, *Reading Rilke’s Orphic Identity*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2005, p. 34.

And then, without fanfare, pour your purest
Secret into the season's determined fruit [...]"³⁴⁸

Similarly, Feng Zhi, in his sonnet 4, exalts the edelweiss plant that clings to its identity and lives a minute life. Brevity is a theme shared by both authors, as is the idea of self-completion, referred to by Rilke as fruition, but in Feng Zhi's case, he alludes to self-completion being achieved through loneliness just like self-completion for the flower is achieved through its brief lifespan.

Whilst the *Duino Elegies* appear to have provided inspiration in relation to themes explored, it is the work of the *Sonnets to Orpheus* that appear to have had a bigger impact on Feng Zhi, particularly in the construction of the poems themselves, and the use of the sonnet as an ideal means to convey his message, even though he appeared to downplay Rilke's influence in this regard.³⁴⁹

The legend of Orpheus suggests that the power of poetry is not only limited to words and hence over thought, but that it also has power over objects in the natural world and on the behavior of these. Feng Zhi's concluding lines of the last sonnet suggests the same lyrical power being bestowed onto poetry: "Could only these poems, like a flag, hold things which cannot be held" (sonnet 27). Orpheus is a creator in the traditional Orphic myth and the world is rescued by his sacrifice. Moreover, the Orpheus in Rilke's work represents the omnipresent poet within us - present in everything and everywhere. Poetry becomes a consummate and indispensable blossom of the great tree of life; the sound and the essential purpose of the universe; the communicative means between the living world and the underworld. No longer is poetry a bizarre and insignificant sentiment within the chaos that is the world, but rather the only medium by which mankind can be saved from its alienation.

The trees found in both Feng Zhi and Rilke's work both represent metaphorically the creative processes involved in poetry and its transcendental force.

³⁴⁸ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies and The Sonnets to Orpheus*, Boston and New York, First Mariner Books, 2005, p. 43.

³⁴⁹ See Lloyd Haft, "Some rhythmic structures in Feng Zhi's sonnets", *Modern Chinese Literature*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1996, pp. 297-326, p. 303.

A remarkable trace of transtextual confluence between the two respective poets can unsurprisingly be found in the following quoted lines:

A tree stood up. Oh pure uprising!
Orpheus is singing! Oh tall tree in the ear!
And everything grew still. Yet in the silence there
Changes took place, signals and fresh beginnings.³⁵⁰

(Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, First Part, Sonnet 1)

You, jade tree that soughs in the autumn wind
Are a melody in my ear
That builds a solemn temple,
Let me reverently enter.

(Feng Zhi, sonnet 3)

Another significant Orphic motif appears in the first octave of Feng Zhi's sonnet 24, in which the poet interprets the function of the song. The theme of song, singing and music is presented elsewhere in Feng Zhi's poems, namely in sonnet 3, 9 and 12. In the *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Orpheus is depicted as a singing god (book 1, sonnet 2) and as a teacher of songs (book 1, sonnet 3). The songs Orpheus teaches are songs of praise towards concrete things and, consequently, the song represents the Orphic theme of 'existence'. In fact, as Zhang Kuan also claimed, the song does not only stand for poetry, it is a "symbol of the Orphic form of existence as well."³⁵¹ Therefore, the song is manifestation of 'existence' in itself. Life 'sings' every time it regenerates at springtime after a rigid winter and songs such as those by Orpheus remain lingering within the creation to whom they are sung. This song motif is clearly found in Feng Zhi's sonnets. In the aforementioned sonnet 24, the lyrical voice expresses how even before man is born, a song singing about his forthcoming existence had already been sung a thousand years ago and this is a song that resounds everywhere from the green grass and the pines, just like the music of Orpheus:

Here, myriads of years ago
Everywhere, it seems
Our lives already existed;

³⁵⁰ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, p. 3.

³⁵¹ Zhang Kuan, *A Remarkable Cultural Encounter: The Reception of German Romanticism, Rilke, and Modernism in Feng Zhi's Poetry*, Doctoral Dissertation, Stanford University, 1999, p. 152.

Before we were born

A singing voice already
From the changing sky,
From the green grass, the pine trees
Chanted our destiny.

The Orphic mystery was the “crystallization in ritual of man's mystic realization of the identity of his turbulent transitory Self with the divine eternal All”³⁵², that is, the Orphic myth and the symbol of the Orphic tree allowed poets and thinkers to focus on their existential self, a unprecedented aspect in literature which had not been put in focus before. Orpheus’s journey down to the underworld and the image of the Orphic tree reaching down to the roots to get its nutrients symbolise man's yearning for a greater understanding of the self.

Moreover, Feng Zhi’s various evocation of elements pertaining to the natural and human world emphasise the poet’s experimentation of new poetic forms. The Orphic myth re-emerges through different elements and reasserts the modern Chinese poet’s position within a larger literary arena. The concept of the Orphic tree and its subtle cues of incumbent challenges derived from the poet’s own aesthetical experiences with modernity enable further considerations on the appreciation of Feng Zhi’s lyrical production. The recurring traces of the Orphic myth redefine the literary criticism of Feng Zhi’s mature writings, notably the *Sonnets*, between two distinct literary and cultural movements: Romanticism and Modernism. In fact, the experimentation of the Chinese lyricist’s new poetical forms and themes, such as that of individualism and aesthetical approach to the collectiveness, are what best define Feng Zhi’s pre-Modernist understanding and poetical contribution.

The traces of the Orphic myth in Feng Zhi’s sonnets redefine the poetical subject’s relationship with the outer world and its final constructive perception of his position within society, nature and the cosmos as a whole. Feng Zhi’s poetisation of natural elements, such as that of the tree, finally reveals the effect of the various aesthetical experiences gained by the self when put in contact with the world.

³⁵² Louise Mallinckrodt Kueffner, *Orphic Echoes in Modern Lyric Poetry: Ernst Lissauer's Der Strom*, Modern Language Notes, Vol. 30, No. 6, 1915, pp. 172.

The Venetian lagoon, for instance, being made up of a thousand lonelinesses, further expands on the theme of the Orphic tree with the introduction of analogous elements that also vividly depict the poet's perception of modern individualism. In this case, rather than the branches connecting on the surface, it is the bridges that allow that connection. However, this connection is only a construct, transitory and impermanent, like the windows that can allow brief glimpses into what is inside. It is at times an uncomfortable subject matter, and this is perhaps Feng Zhi, though highly appreciated in China, does not hold the same esteem in the hearts of the general Chinese person that poets like Xu Zhimo hold. This would finally make him even more unique, especially because, whilst still retaining some elements and inspirations of classical Chinese literature, he placed particular attention to the need of individualism, understanding of inner self, which very much runs counter to the collectivist approach in mainstream Chinese literature.

CONCLUSION

The chapters that articulate this study have singularly examined the transtextual and transcultural confluences as well as interactions between German and Chinese literature in the modern period, particularly between 1920 and 1940. Western literature, and particularly German Romantic, aesthetic and transcendentalist writings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have considerably influenced the modern Chinese literary arena; and the mature poetic writings of Feng Zhi, translator and scholar of German studies, served here to elucidate the extent to which intercultural elements have confluenced between these two literary worlds.

The aim of this seminal work was to explore and seek to establish a relationship between Feng Zhi's poetic tendency as a Romantic, Aesthetic, metaphysical and narrative poet with other forms of cultural expression that characterise the poetic activity of some of the German writers who played a vital role in the refinement of the young Chinese poet's education and artistic *esprit*. The objective of this question was to identify the extent to which one can ascertain the common and differentiating traits between the cultural and artistic movement sprung in the Germany of the late eighteenth century and its counterpart manifested in China, and more specifically in the poetry and philosophical activity of Feng Zhi. To do so, the salient changes over time and space of the literary movement of Romanticism and later Rilkean writings, which reached and affected the sensitivity of some of the young Chinese writers of the twentieth century, played a vital role in the here-advanced re-evaluation and re-definition of Feng Zhi's poetic activity.

This concluding section shall briefly reiterate some concepts of metaphysical infinity, transcendence, loneliness and permanence as well as mutability discussed in the previous chapters in the context of Feng Zhi's sonnet collection. The opening chapter above began by acknowledging the association of post-Romantic poetry in Feng Zhi's sonnets as demonstrated in his own German doctoral dissertation on the poetic style of Novalis. In fact, for the purpose of this study, Feng Zhi's dissertation was treated as one of the pivotal primary sources to construe a new analytical and critical re-elaboration of his modern poetry. Substantial transtextual evidence between the modern Chinese writings and the German sources, mainly those related to Romanticism, passed through the poet's own critical interpretation: this personal construal understanding and experimentation finds its visible roots down to his own training 'notebook' – his doctoral dissertation. Poetic themes and motifs, such as the mystic way of thinking, the way to the inner self and idealism, reoccur in the *Sonnets* with clear transcultural pieces of evidence.

The terms used in mystical logic are living fundamental forms taken from the life circles of things. Terms that are otherwise always in opposition, such as day and night, light and darkness, spirit and body are linked and built inside of a ring in both Novalis's and Feng Zhi's poetry. For instance, the day is linked with the night and the night is connected with the day again, having all extreme ends connected in an interminable cycle. Feng Zhi uses images belonging to the natural world to convey this principle. He then also hints the same Buddhist concept of rebirth to emphasise the infinite cycle of nature. The Goethean sonnet (sonnet 13), for instance, as earlier demonstrated, ends with a very enigmatic sentence that is clearly taken from Goethe's poetic repertoire: "Die and become" [Stirb und werde - 死和变]. This also represents one of the most striking and meaningful transtextual shreds of evidence in Feng Zhi's poetry. Moreover, from the seed comes an organism, which brings new seeds from which eventually life comes in again. From this perspective, the mystic poet affirms one of the core elements of his poetic Weltanschauung, that life is just the beginning of death and that death stands as the beginning of life – both become one. Through the image of the moulting cicada or moths, for instance, that leave their shell in the mud (sonnet 2), the Chinese poet succeeds in conveying this fundamental

awareness with meaningful notes: “A singing voice fallen from the body of music, the sole remaining body that changes into a chain of voiceless mountains.” According to what Feng Zhi analysed in his work, the inspiration of nature, the imagery in language as well as the power of nature with its spirit apt to create analogies, which build and support Novalis’s own style, are deeply rooted in the magic idealism of Novalis and German Romanticism.

Following the spirit of the early German Romantic movement, Feng Zhi emphasised emotions and the newly attained perceptions as a source of aesthetic experiences. The result of these experiences is subsequently moderated by a feeling of reverential respect that is mixed with awe and wonder when the poetical persona is confronted with the sublime of the natural realm. The perception of infinity, which moves the poetic persona, is discerned as a state of boundlessness that affects both time and space. The lyrical self of Feng Zhi’s poems gains a new aesthetic experience of temporal and spatial infinity through a personal interaction with nature. Once the lyrical voice dissolves in nature, it can transcend reality, overcome the earth-bound condition of the living world and embrace spatial and temporal perpetuity. This supernatural post-Romantic approach to reality can also be perceived as the acting force of the consciousness of the poet identified as an individual being capable of experiencing the sublime through aesthetical experiences. Special attention is given to the temporal characteristic of anticipation: present and past merge into one temporal line of unfolding events that seem to be in close relationship. The Romantic notion of transcendence and freedom from the real world of space and time is certainly a legacy of German Romanticism, which Feng Zhi researched on giving an authoritative contribution through his doctoral thesis, as well as characteristic feature of the Victorian definition of the Romantic poet. In fact, C. H. Herford wrote in his work *The Age of Wordsworth* of the Romantic as the ‘transcendent’ and the ‘lyrical’ that in “apparently detaching us from the real world [...] seems to restore us to the reality at a higher point – to emancipate us from the ‘prison of the actual; by giving us spiritual rights in a universe of the mind, exempt from the limitations of matter, and time, and space”.³⁵³

³⁵³ Herford, *The Age of Wordsworth*, London, George Bell, 1897, as cited in Mark Kipperman, ‘Absorbing a Revolution: Shelley Becomes a Romantic, 1889-1903’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 47. 2, September 1992, pp. 187-211, p. 205.

The pre-Modernist idea of self-completion achieved through the full aesthetic realisation of the individual and his position within a systematic community characterise the poetry and the prelude of a modernist form of the sonnets. It is by means of this aesthetic experience in line with Rilke's teachings that the poetic subject succeeds to overcome his limited condition of finitude and achieve a metaphysical state of infinity that could soothe and mitigate the state of loneliness of the lyrical self. This aesthetic experience of self-completion sung in the sonnets leads the poetic subject to a firmer realisation of his inner self and how this relates to a new other world. Imagination and self-realisation empower an increasing sense of longing for infinity, which is attained and quenched through a metaphysical experience that goes beyond the normal and physical level. Moreover, the synecdochic holistic image of the tree is the epitome of solitude in Feng Zhi's poetry. This can be best elucidated when considering the introductory lines of the Chinese poet's preface to the translation of Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*. In this section Feng Zhi officially declares his vision of man's solitude by sustaining that every man born on this world is lonely and is just another tree put in a garden together with other trees standing in lines: although the branches and leaves conform themselves to the fronds of other trees, the roots, that stretch down the soil beneath the surface to draw the nourishment, are independent of each other, silent and solitary.³⁵⁴

Another motif of Feng Zhi's sonnets demystified in this work centres around the concept of change and its closely related connection with permanence. Change is nothing other than the continuous mutable condition of all creation and the end of a stage represents only the beginning of a new one. This idea is rendered in the sonnets by the image of the moulting cicada and the eucalyptus tree "eternally changing" its bark: "You, eternally shed your bark, wither and manifest your maturity" (sonnet 3). As demonstrated in the previous chapters, Feng Zhi's experimental poetry based on the concept of change reveals a clear poetic connection with Goethe's theorisation of mutability and his own analogy with the ancient Egyptian phoenix, which, as supported in his dissertation, is re-born from fire and ashes into a newly generated and re-invigorated being. This concept of resurrection from fire and death-to-come

³⁵⁴ Han Yaocheng, *Feng Zhi Quanji (Complete Works of Feng Zhi)*, Vol. 11, Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999, p. 282.

idea gains utmost importance for the comprehensive understanding of Feng Zhi's Goethean sonnet (sonnet 13) and for all other references in the sonnets to the idea of change. The lyrical voice in sonnet 13, in fact, addresses Goethe affirming that the German poet knows "why the moth fluttered into the flame" and "why the snake shed its skin to grow". The concluding lines of the sonnet appear very meaningful supporting the idea of death-to-become and resurrection: "All living creatures benefit from your words, revealing the true sense of life: 'die and become'".

Moreover, relevant to the appreciation of Feng Zhi's sonnets is the idealised vision of the night, which does not represent a mere astronomical phenomenon that stands at stark contrast to the diurnal world, but it rather entails a much wider and deeper realm essential to the lyrical subjects for introspective reflections, transcendence and closer vision of the inner self. Because of the salient influence exerted by Rilke's poetry, Feng Zhi's elaboration of the concept of night and death regularly shifts from post-Romantic to a pre-Modernist approach. The study of the theme of the night as bridge of transcendence goes deeper and beyond the mental and spiritual construction advanced by the Romantics. Feng Zhi's investigation of the issue of intrapersonal relationships and definition of self take the lyrical exemplification of the night to a higher level. The night becomes not only the bridge to long-lasting transcendence, but also the medium for aesthetical experiences. As particularly visible in sonnet 5, for instance, as soon as night falls, man, evoked through the metaphor of an island, has no choice but to come to terms with his inner, silent and solitary self. In fact, one of the main phenomena brought forward by the fall of night and its aesthetical experience is the return to the self. The night is depicted in Feng Zhi's sonnets as a silent and still atmospheric phenomenon that paves the right way for the poetic subject to experience the ineffable and unconceivable.

The last theme analysed in this study concerns the submersion into lyrical Orphism. Although it is not explicitly mentioned in any of the poems of Feng Zhi, the meaningful concept of the Orphic myth, reminiscent of Rilkean poetry, has left indelible marks in some of the sonnets revealing a new key of understanding and appreciation of the modern Chinese writings taken into exam. In fact, traces of this pre-Modernist concept easily influence other themes found within Feng Zhi's poetry

that have been previously examined. The conceptualised idea of infinity and transcendence, for instance, are also particularly evoked by the Orphic motif by means of the metaphorical characteristics of a new idealised creative process. Interestingly, the Orphic poet attempts and succeeds in establishing a relationship between the inner self and the world around. Analogous to Rilke's transcendental experience, who while reclining against the tree felt nature diffusing its spirit into his body, so could Feng Zhi also feel and ultimately understand the aesthetic experience of nature's existence during a transcendental and metaphysical experience occurred while in Germany. The poet's inner self is in complete harmony with nature and can sensor the invisible movements of the plant. The body leaning against the tree is a metaphor that Feng Zhi employs, quoting Jia Dao's couplet, to convey the idea that he could feel the tree draw the nourishments from the soil up to its branches and leaves the same way as blood flows inside the human body. The image of the 'Orphic tree' becomes the embodiment of fusion between the outer physical world and the inner invisible world, which ultimately pertain to two distinctive realms. The roots of the tree are given high symbolical values as they are beneath the visible world, reflecting the world of Hades, the realm of death. As established in the previous chapter, the traces of the Orphic myth in Feng Zhi's sonnets redefine the poetic subject's relationship with the outer world and its final constructive perception of his position within society, nature and the cosmos as a whole.

The final results of this research demonstrate how ideals and images typically associated with the German Romantic movement and modernist writings also find a stimulating and harmonising counterpart in China. Images that were also sung in the poems of the rich classical tradition of China have also been re-asserted through the recurrence of literary artefacts and essential motifs, such as that of the rootless wanderer led by his sensitive spirit, strong desire for self-completion and wanderlust.

As critically and exegetically ascertained throughout this study, even though Classical Chinese imagery is often recurrent in the lines of Feng Zhi's sonnet collection to set lyrical emotions, a different key of reading and construable understanding was deemed indispensable in order to gain a more comprehensive appreciation of the significance and reception of the poetry in Feng Zhi's twentieth-century literary works.

Feng Zhi's conscientious reading and understanding of German eighteenth and nineteenth-century lyrical works, especially those of Novalis and Rilke as well as his own doctoral research dissertation on the poetry of Novalis, for instance, offer a new valuable key to read, perceive and finally interpret the poetry of the *Sonnets*. Verily, as the author of this work has attempted to sustain, Feng Zhi does not propose a mere replication or garbled version of Novalis's and Rilke's works, but rather a careful post-Romantic re-elaboration of preconceptions followed by a sensitive interpretation and constructed analysis of values and ideals typical of German Romanticism and Rilkean poetry. This critical interpretation and analysis was also extended to the metaphysical and aesthetic experiences of the *fin de siècle*, which Feng Zhi finally synthesised with great success also by means of his extensive knowledge of the classical Chinese tradition. Feng Zhi took different approaches to Romantic and modernist motifs as experienced by the individual throughout his poetic career, sometimes even within the same poem, experimenting ideas against others and allowing for recurrent ambivalence and debate.

It was essential to the purpose of this study to re-evaluate Feng Zhi's lyrical creativity and production into three major poetic stages, which clearly define the Romantic, post-Romantic and pre-Modernist approach taken by the modern poet. Throughout the elaboration of this seminal study, it was also regarded appropriate to re-label the poetry of Feng Zhi as post-Romantic and pre-Modernist in order to grant the modern Chinese poet a precise identity that neatly differentiates him from the other modern Chinese intellectuals that were also in close contact with Western Romantic literature.

In fact, in light of what has been so far written about the poetry of Feng Zhi and what emerges from the Chinese poet's own research on the theories of Romanticism in his doctoral degree at Heidelberg, a new critical re-evaluation of his poetry had become necessary for a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the poet's works. For instance, when particularly focusing on Feng Zhi's early writings and the *Sonnets*, the present study has proposed to explore the insights offered by Romantic poetry into both the sense of time as experienced and lived by the individual as well as the cosmological sense of time perceived by the sensitive

poet. Moreover, as far as the Romantic experience of temporality is concerned, a deeper critical study and analysis of a metaphysical state of timelessness also became appropriate to further discern Feng Zhi's pre-Modernist poetry.

The present study has led the author to consider Feng Zhi as a post-Romantic writer, rather than a general 'Romantic' or even 'Realist Romantic' poet, as he embodies the traits of a new aesthetic and intellectual tendency that aims at reconciling and at the same time overcoming both the Romantic and the Realistic movements. Moreover, in contrast with the exponents of the Chinese Romanticism, such as Guo Moruo, Feng Zhi does not wear the hat of a 'true and faithful Romantic' as he did not wish to rebel against his bourgeois life: he rather found refuge in his intimacy, solitude and marginality giving some hints of materialistic principles typical of Realism. It would be impossible to find exact parallelisms with post-Romanticism in the West, as Feng Zhi also found comfort in aestheticism and notions of existentialism that became close to his heart since his direct contact with Karl Jaspers in Germany. Post-Romanticism represents a rather complex and multifaceted literary and cultural phenomenon that clearly changes from nation to nation, from literature to literature and, ultimately, from poet to poet. Nevertheless, in the end, what genuinely unites these artists is the manner in which they emerged as relevant to their times.

In the core of the lyrical self of Feng Zhi's sonnets, one can find the anguish expressed by an insurmountable conflict between Romanticism and Realism, which at times flows into regressions or omens of death.

In a way, one might very baldly attempt to even claim that Feng Zhi's post-Romantic approach embodies a sort of Romantic reminiscence and survival. This is chiefly due to the representation of nature, night or the 'sublime' rediscovered as a Romantic tradition that remains reminiscent in the works of Feng Zhi. The post-Romantic approach of Feng Zhi creates a philosophy that reconciles the Romantic stress upon passion and nature with the typical modern emphasis on originality and experimentation of his time.

A further distinction had to be made in order to distinguish Feng Zhi's lyrical production from other Chinese Modernist writings. In fact, according to well-accepted modern and contemporary criticism, Chinese Modernism mainly developed as a response to Walt Whitman's, Ezra Pound's, Amy Lowell's and other American imagists' literary writings in the 1920s and 1930s. The term 'pre-Modernist' adopted in this study does not necessarily refer to the temporal advancement or anticipation of the well-established Modernist tendency, but rather to a philosophical differentiation in terms of intensity and influence from the English and American 'Modernist' sources. The 'pre-Modernist' term becomes even more meaningful and gains relevance when comparing Feng Zhi's 'modernist' voice with that of other young Chinese modernist poets, such as Dai Wangshu, Bian Zhilin or even Wen Yiduo. Other Chinese poets, on the other hand, such as Guo Moruo and Ai Qing, even absorbed and blatantly imitated symbolism and Whitman's thought.

Generally speaking, Modernist and post-Modernist writers tend to attack those intimate connections between human identity, feelings and their lyrical and passionate expressions. As critics advise, acclaimed Modernist writers would also suggest that it is rather naïve if not speculative to accept that true sentiments are the basis of human nature, that such a nature exists at all, and that if it really exists, it can be spoken without alteration.³⁵⁵ Relevant to Feng Zhi's post-Romantic stance is his approach to nostalgia, clearly manifested throughout the twenty-seven poems of the sonnet collection. Recurrent references to past time and experiences or even to the primeval era of destiny reflects that same nostalgia for the youth. Post-Romantic poetry, as a whole, along with art seeks to evoke past memories of youth and instill them into those who inescapably aged. It somehow stimulates the imagination to trigger nostalgia, not as the 'disease' of Sehnsucht, as it often was for the Romantics, but as a source of transformed vitality and strength.

Another striking element of Feng Zhi's post-Romantic poetry is the expression of passionate love. Although the sonnets do not expressively portray a resounding image of passion, love is still that emotional bondage that ties the lyrical subject with a companion. The change in the expressive magnitude of love in these modern

³⁵⁵ See Claudia Moscovici, *Romanticism and Postromanticism*, Lanham and New York, Lexington Books, 2007, p. 52.

Chinese poems can also be regarded as the fruit of influences from Western values that permeated within the intellectual circles in China during the first decades of the 20th century. The initial signs of the advent of feminist sensibilities and the resulting approach to gender equality finally also influenced the way modern men of letters poetised about love. In fact, with stark contrast to the predominant formulas of the Romantic poetry in the West, where the male sensitive poet sang about his love for his ethereal muse, post-Romantic love is rather reciprocal. The time in which Feng Zhi composed his sonnets did not foresee the idea pursued by the Romantics of the artist as male and the muse as female. In fact, as the reader of the sonnets can deduce, both members of the couple, which in Feng Zhi's terms is possibly conveyed by the plural pronoun "we" and by the description of intimate moments, engage in creativity and, most importantly, share the same aesthetical experiences on a symmetrical level. This was also due to the rise of successful female writers that emerged during the modern period in China.

Furthermore, while Romanticism tends to idealise the beloved muse and the world, post-Romantic writing, as in the case of Feng Zhi's sonnets, extrapolates the imperfection. In fact, in post-Romanticism, the source of inspiration is not a "crystallized or idealized object of the imagination [...]" but a contingent person who is known in the smallest details of his or her reality."³⁵⁶ It would be inappropriate discern this form of writing according to the legacy of realism or naturalism, as Feng Zhi's implication of love does not conform to the scientific predictable norm or the 'grotesque' as in Zola's naturalist fiction. On the other hand, the union of Feng Zhi's lyrical subject with a companion in his sonnets underlines the bondage, thus, the making of endurable values in transient life.

As demonstrated by the transtextual paradigms taken into exam in this study, the poet or better, the poetic voice of the sonnets, succeeds to overcome his limited condition of finitude and achieve a metaphysical state of infinity by means of aesthetic experiences. This pre-Modernist stance is what then particularly soothes and mitigates the state of loneliness the lyrical self. The aesthetic experience of self-completion sung in the *Sonnets* leads the lyrical voice of the poems to a firmer

³⁵⁶ Moscovici, *Romanticism and Postromanticism*, p. 89.

realisation of his inner self and how this relates to a new other world. Imagination and self-realisation empower an increasing sense of longing for infinity, which is attained and quenched through a metaphysical experience that goes beyond the normal and physical level.

The natural world portrayed in the sonnets undergoes continuous change and renewal. The trees are depicted as seasonally shedding their bark while the cicada breaks free from its larva shell when moulting and the snake sloughs off its old skin. A common theme that is also in line with Goethe's, Rilke's and Nietzsche's poetry sees metamorphosis, continuous change and the overcome of all weaknesses allow the completion of life.

As already discussed, the recurring theme of mutation and concept of continuous change stand with central interest in Feng Zhi's poetic evolution and lyrical appreciation. The early writings that belong to the poem collection of *Songs of Yesterday* explore man's possibility to undergo change and metaphysical transcendence. The poet's final experimentation of metaphysical change finds its root both in the Chinese classical tradition, and more precisely in the lyrical writings of the Tang and Song dynasties, as well as in his poetical response to modernity and appreciation of Goethe's philosophical poetry. If modernity by definition and exemplification entails a conscious and delineated rupture with the past followed by a rediscovery of new themes and ideas that are relevant to the current era, Feng Zhi succeeds in giving it a personal touch with a Chinese sensitivity. In fact, he does not limit himself to a mere exploitation of new trends and emulation of foreign forms and styles, but he succeeds in merging his post-Romantic and modernist attempt for change with some enriching aspects pertaining to the classical tradition, especially when these exalt or recall universal needs or the core desires of mankind.

In man's life, the Romantics found the innate inclination towards infinity, a sense of anxiety for self-perfection and purity. The Romantics, moreover, lived this experience dramatically and constantly pondered with nostalgia about the scission between the far-reaching ideal and the lower state of their real life. Like the Romantics, who did not portray a vague image of utopia nor conveyed absurd aspirations that were far from humanity, through his sonnets, Feng Zhi also insisted

on the fact that the ‘ideal’ is something of extreme concreteness, albeit different from the concreteness of reality. Nevertheless, Feng Zhi’s post-Romantic approach exalts the authentic force of inner self that is alive and mighty: it gives a concrete sense to the continuous, transient and uncatchable passing of time; it brings back the attention onto man’s action and it grants him a glimpse of truth and hope. This ideal involves a form of hope that is found at a mental and spiritual level.

Post-Romantic Feng Zhi does not limit himself to the Romantic appreciation of time. In fact, given the historical and social circumstances of his time, the Chinese poet does not fail in adding a modern element to the equation – the pre-Modernist sensitivity. The modern individual appears to have lost the serene vision of the Romantics who could still get a glimpse of divinity as expression of nature and nature as harmonising reconciliation among all beings. The man of modern times suffers from an incurable internal scission within his own self. If the Romantics found consolation in nature, which reconciled his peaceful vision of permanence and godliness with the tragic awareness of his earth-bound existence, modern man has lost all of this. His sentiment of the tragic originates from the conflict between the self and nature, the self and the divine: his life has become tragic as it is intimately lacerated. Feng Zhi’s mature poems, and particularly the Venetian sonnet, outline this innate internal scission of man that separates him from the rest of the world as he perceives it. Allegorically speaking, humanity is represented by the Venetian lagoon, where each and every lonely person represents a solitary and silent island. Interpersonal connections remain ephemeral manifestations of man’s heart desire to build relationships with the outside world. These connections are only artificial makings that like the bridges, which connect the various islands, have a limited and determined time before becoming useless at night, when no one makes use of them, and man returns to his self as a solitary being. Feng Zhi’s modern view of the world is in line with the historical and social changes that characterise China during the years that witnessed the outbreak of war and the composition of the *Sonnets*. Modern man loses hope in interpersonal relations and can only find comfort in his own solitary and silent condition. As Feng Zhi wrote in one of his earlier compositions, the most beautiful flowers bloom in the loneliest gardens.

Finally, as in the case of his Romantic predecessors, this study highlights Feng Zhi's intellectual creativity in capturing, as post-Romantics did, sensuality but also a rather personalised view of reality that merges the poet's romantic nostalgic gaze as well as a modern and innovative touch. This undoubtedly exalts Feng Zhi's philosophical and literary originality.

Feng Zhi's poetry, along with its transtextual and literary connections with German literature, seeks to connect various areas of experience suggesting a sense of totality. As Friedrich Schlegel claimed, "Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry"; and as the results of this study suggest, Feng Zhi's re-discovery of Novalis's and Rilke's sensitivity make his own lyrical experimentation no less so.

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Annex 1

我们准备着

我们准备着深深地领受
那些意想不到的奇迹，
在漫长的岁月里忽然有
彗星的出现，狂风乍起。

我们的生命在这一瞬间，
仿佛在第一次的拥抱里
过去的悲欢忽然在眼前
凝结成屹然不动的形体。

我们赞颂那些小昆虫，
它们经过了一次交媾
或是抵御了一次危险，

便结束它们美妙的一生。
我们整个的生命在承受
狂风乍起，彗星的出现。

We prepare ourselves

We prepare ourselves to deeply receive
Those unexpected wonders,
Amidst endless years suddenly appears
A comet and a rushing wind swiftly blowing:

Our existence, at this last moment,
Resembles the very first embrace
Sorrows and joys of the past suddenly arise
Shaping into insuperable, motionless forms.

We praise those tiny insects,
That accomplished their first union,
Or that resisted their first danger,

Now, their wondrous lives come to an end.
Our entire lives we endure
A rushing wind swiftly blows, a comet appears.

二

什么能从我们身上脱落

什么能从我们身上脱落，
我们都让它化作尘埃：
我们安排我们在这时代
象秋日的树木，一棵棵

把树叶和些过迟的花朵
都交给秋风，好舒开树身
伸入严冬；我们安排我们
在自然里，象蜕化的蝉蛾

把残壳都丢在泥里土里；
我们把安排给那个
未来的死亡，象一段歌曲，

歌声从音乐的身上脱落，
归终剩下了音乐的身躯
化作一脉的青山默默。

What could ever fall from our body

What could ever fall from our body,
We shall let it turn into dust:
We dispose ourselves in this age
Like the autumn trees, bough after bough

Bearing leaves and tardy flowers
For the autumn wind, freeing its boughs
Stretching out for the rigid winter; we dispose ourselves
Within nature, like the moulting cicada and moth

That leave their shell in the mud;
We prepare ourselves for that
Coming death, resembling a song,

A singing voice fallen from the body of music,
The sole remaining body that
Changes into a chain of voiceless mountains.

三

有加利树

你秋风里萧萧的玉树
是一片音乐在我耳旁
筑起一座严肃的殿堂，
让我小心翼翼地走入

又是插入晴空的高塔
在我的面前高高耸起，
有如一个圣者的身体，
升华了全城市的喧哗。

你无时不脱你的躯壳，
凋零里只看着你成长；
在阡陌纵横的田野上

我把你看成我的引导：
祝你永生，我愿一步步
化身为你根下的泥土。

Eucalyptus

You, jade tree that sighs in the autumn wind,
Are a melody in my ear
That builds a solemn temple,
Let me reverently enter.

And you, tower that pierces the clear sky
Rise before me so high,
You resemble a holy body,
And sublimates the clamour of the whole city.

You, eternally shed your bark,
Wither and manifest your maturity;
In the intertwined paths of the countryside

You are my guide:
May you be eternal, as I wish to gradually
Decay for the soil under your roots

四

鼠曲草

我常常想到人的一生，
便不由得要向你祈祷。
你一丛白茸茸的小草
不曾辜负了一个名称

但你躲避着一切名称，
过一个渺小的生活，
不辜负高贵和洁白，
默默地成就你的死生。

一切的形容、一切喧嚣
到你身边，有的就凋落，
有的化成了你的静默：

这是你伟大的骄傲
却在你的否定里完成。
我向你祈祷，为了人生。

Edelweiss

At times, when I think of men's life,
I cannot resist praying to you.
You, bunch of white luxuriant grass
Your name have never let down,

But you hide from all names,
Live a short life,
And devoted to what is noble and pure,
Your cycle of life you quietly complete.

All descriptions, the entire clamour
Reach you; some pass away,
Others join your silence.

This is your greatest pride,
Yet, fulfilled in your denial.
To you I pray, so that you may live.

五

威尼斯

我永远不会忘记
西方的那座水城，
它是个人世的象征，
千百个寂寞的集体。

一个寂寞是一座岛，
一座座都结成朋友。
当你向我拉一拉手，
便象一座水上的桥；

当你向我笑一笑，
便象是对面岛上
忽然开了一扇楼窗。

只担心夜深静悄，
楼上的窗儿关闭，
桥上也断了人迹。

To Venice

I shall never forget
That water city of the West,
Symbol of mankind,
Group of myriads of lonely beings.

Each an island,
Each making friends.
Your hand stretches towards me,
Like a bridge over the water;

You smile at me,
Like a window on an island
That suddenly opens.

But, in the deep and silent night,
Those windows are closed,
And on the bridges not even the footprints.

六

原野的哭声

我时常看见在原野里
一个村童，或一个农妇
向着无语的晴空啼哭，
是为了一个惩罚，可是

为了一个玩具的毁弃？
是为了丈夫的死亡，
可是为了儿子的病创？
啼哭的那样没有停息，

象整个的生命都嵌在
一个框子里，在框子外
没有人生，也没有世界。

我觉得他们好象从古来
就一任眼泪不住地流
为了一个绝望的宇宙。

Weeping of the open plain

I often see in the open plain
A peasant child, perhaps a farmer's wife,
Shedding tears before the blue, speechless sky
Is it because of a punishment, or

A toy that is broken?
Is it because of the death of a husband,
Or the illness of a son?
That crying cannot cease;

It is like a whole life portrayed
In a frame, outside of which
no life can endure, no world can exist.

I think, they have cried since ancient times,
And these never-ending tears
Are those of a hopeless universe.

七

我们来到郊外

和暖的阳光内
我们来到郊外，
象不同的河水
融成一片大海。

有同样的警醒
在我们的心头，
是同样的运命
在我们的肩头。

要爱惜这个警醒，
要爱惜这个运命，
不要到危险过去，

那些分歧的街衢
又把我们吸回，
海水分成河水。

We reach the outskirts

Under a pleasant sunshine
We reach the outskirts,
Like different water streams
Merging together into an ocean.

The same awakening
Dwells in our hearts,
It is the same destiny
Resting upon our shoulders.

Will cherish this awakening,
Will cherish this destiny,
The danger has soon passed.

Those divergent paths will
Absorb us back again:
The ocean breaks into water streams.

八

一个旧日的梦想

是一个旧日的梦想，
眼前的人世太纷杂，
想依附着鹏鸟飞翔
去和宁静的星辰谈话。

千年的梦象个老人
期待着最好的儿孙——
如今有人飞向星辰，
却忘不了人世的纷纭。

他们常常为了学习
怎样运行，怎样降落，
好把星秩序排在人间，

便光一般投身空际。
如今那旧梦却化作
远水荒山的陨石一片。

A dream of ancient times

It is a dream of ancient times,
The world of today utterly confused,
I wish to hold onto a roc and fly high
And talk with the peaceful stars.

An ancient dream, like an old man
Awaiting the best descendants...
Today, men fly towards the stars,
Yet, can not forget this confused world.

At times, as they want to learn
How things orbit and descend,
They set on earth the order of stars,

And like a blaze they rush into space.
But today, this ancient dream has become
A piece of desert mountain meteorite, far from water.

九

给一个战士

你长年在生死的边缘生长，
一旦你回到这堕落的城中，
听着这市上的愚蠢的歌唱，
你会象是一个古代的英雄

在千百年后他忽然回来，
从些变质的堕落的子孙
寻不出一些盛年的姿态，
他会出乎意料，感到眩昏。

你在战场上，象不朽的英雄
在另一个世界永向苍穹，
归终成为一只断线的纸鸢：

但是这个命运你不要埋怨，
你超越了他们，他们已不能
维系住你的向上，你的旷远。

To a Soldier

At the edge of life and death you grow all year round,
One day you will return to this degraded city,
Hear its frivolous songs,
You will be like a hero of ancient times

Who suddenly returns from a millennial past,
Amidst this changed, degraded generation,
You search for loyal and genuine stance,
Feeling distraught beyond expectation.

In the battlefield, you are an immortal hero
Turning towards another world in the skies,
Freeing yourself, finally, as a stringless kite:

But, of this fate you cannot complain,
You have surpassed them, and they cannot
Hold your flight, your infinity.

十

蔡元培

你的姓名常常排列在
许多的名姓里边，并没有
什么两样，但是你却永久
暗自保持住自己的光彩；

我们只在黎明和黄昏
认识了你是长庚，是启明，
到夜半你和一般的星星
也没有区分：多少青年人

从你宁静的启示里得到
正当的死生。如今你死了，
我们深深感到，你已不能

参加人类的将来的工作——
如果这个世界能够复活，
歪扭的事能够重新调整。

To Cai Yuanpei

Your name often mingles with
Many other names, without
Any distinction, but you forever
Maintained secret your splendour.

We can see you only at dawn and dusk:
The morning star and the Vesper,
At midnight with other common stars
You mingle. How many the youths are

Who through your still revelation
Gain a life worth living. Now you are gone,
And we deeply feel, you no longer can

Partake in the work of humanity's future,
If this world could resurrect,
All that went wrong could be put right again.

十一

鲁迅

在许多年前的一个黄昏
你为几个青年感到一觉；
你不知经验过多少幻灭，
但是那一觉却永不消沉。

我永远怀着感谢的深情
望着你，为了我们的时代：
它被些愚蠢的人们毁坏，
可是它的维护人却一生

被摒弃在这个世界以外——
你有几回望出一线光明，
转过头来又有乌云遮盖。

你走完了你艰苦的行程，
艰苦中只有路旁的小草
曾经引出你希望的微笑。

To Lu Xun

At the evenfall of many past years,
For a few youths you had an awakening.
You felt too many disillusionments,
But that awakening will never be vain.

My heart will eternally be grateful
For you, for our epoch:
Ruined by a bunch of fools,
But its people who long defended it

Are rejected by this world,
You have often hoped for a ray of light,
But as you turn your head, you find a covering dark cloud.

Your difficult journey has come to an end,
In difficult times, only the short grass along the road
Could draw your smiles of hope.

十二

杜甫

你在荒村里忍受饥肠，
你常常想到死填沟壑，
你却不断地唱着哀歌
为了人间壮美的沦亡：

战场上健儿的死伤，
天边有明星的陨落，
万匹马随着浮云消没…
你一生是他们的祭享。

你的贫穷在闪烁发光
象一件圣者的烂衣裳，
就是一丝一缕在人间

也有无穷的神的力量。
一切冠盖在它的光前
只照出来可怜的形象。

To Du Fu

You endured hunger in some lost village,
You often thought of the dead filling the ditches,
But you unceasingly sang elegies
To this magnificent fallen world of ours:

Heroic warriors die on battlefields,
On the horizon is the fall of the stars,
Thousands of horses vanishing on floating clouds...
And your life is an offering to them.

Your poverty sparkled,
Like the soft clothes of a saint,
Whose filament and thread in this world

Have also an infinite divine power.
All crowns before his light
Only become reflections of pathetic images.

十三

歌德

你生长在平凡的市民的家庭，
你为过许多平凡的事物感叹，
你却写出许多不平凡的诗篇；
你八十年的岁月是那样平静，

好象宇宙在那儿寂寞地运行，
但是不曾有一分一秒的停息，
随时随处都演化出新的生机，
不管风风雨雨或是日朗天晴。

从沉重的病中换来新的健康，
从绝望的爱里换来新的营养，
你知到飞蛾为什么投向火焰，

蛇为什么脱去旧皮才能生长；
万物都在享用你的那句名言，
它道破一切生的意义：“死和变。

To Goethe

You grew in a family of commoners,
You sang about many common affairs,
But the poems you composed are yet so marvellous;
You were serene at the age of eighty.

Like the universe in that lonely and still movement,
That has never stopped for a minute, for a second,
That every time and everywhere creates forces of life,
Despite the wind, the rain, the bright sun and the clear sky.

A heavy illness changes into a burst of health,
Love despair changes into nourishment,
You why the moth fluttered into the flame,

Why the snake shed its skin to grow,
All living creatures benefit from your words,
Revealing the true sense of life: “die and become”.

十四

画家梵·高

你的热情到处燃起火，
你燃着了向日的黄花，
燃着了浓郁的扁柏，
燃着了行人在烈日下——

他们都是那样热烘烘
向着高处呼吁的火焰；
但是背阴处几点花红，
监狱里的一个小院，

几个贫穷的人低着头
在贫穷的房里剥土豆，
却象是永不消溶的冰块。

这中间你画了吊桥，
画了轻盈的船：你可要
把那些不幸者迎接过来？

To Van Gogh

Your burning passion embraces everything,
It burns the sunflowers,
The strong cypresses,
And burns the people under the scorching sun.

That warmth affects them all,
Flames that cry out towards the sky;
But in the shade are some rosy flowers,
Imprisoned in small yard,

A few men with their heads low
Peeling potatoes inside a poor house,
Like pieces of ice that will never melt.

In the midst of this you painted a bridge,
You painted a light boat: will you
Go search for those unfortunates?

十五

看这一队队的驮马

看这一队队的驮马
驮来了远方的货物，
水也会冲来一些泥沙
从些不知名的远处，

风从千万里外也会
掠来些他乡的叹息：
我们走过无数的山水，
随时占有，随时又放弃，

仿佛鸟飞翔在空中，
它随时都管领太空，
随时都感到一无所有。

什么是我们的实在？
我们从远方把什么带来？
从面前又把什么带走？

Look, a team of packhorses

Look, a team of packhorses
Carrying goods from far-away places,
Water can also wash their slit
From some unknown distant places,

The wind, from countless miles away
Can take the breaths of many far-away lands:
We've crossed countless mountains and rivers,
Now conquering them, now losing them again,

Like a bird that flies high in the sky,
Now having control over the open space,
Now feeling to have lost it all.

What is our reality?
What do we bring from far-away places?
And what do we take from here?

十六

我们站立在高高的山巅

我们站立在高高的山巅
化身为一望无边的远景，
化成面前的广漠的平原，
化成平原上交错的蹊径。

哪条路、哪道水，没有关联，
哪阵风、哪片云，没有呼应：
我们走过的城市、山川，
都化成了我们的生命。

我们的生长、我们的忧愁
是某某山坡的一棵松树，
是某某城上的一片浓雾；

我们随着风吹，随着水流，
化成平原上交错的蹊径，
化成蹊径上行人的生命。

We stand up on the high mountain peak

We stand up on the high mountain peak
Merging into the infinite distance,
Blending into the vastness of the plain before us,
Dissolving in the entangled paths of the fields.

Which road, which brook does not meet,
Which gust, which cloud does not accord:
The cities we have passed, mountains and streams,
Have all become our lives.

Our growth, our worries
Are pine tree on some hillside,
Or a veil of thick fog over a city;

We are led by the rushing wind, the streams,
Dissolving in the entangled paths of the fields,
And in the life of those who cross them.

十七

原野的小路

你说，你最爱看这原野里
一条条充满生命的小路，
是多少无名行人的步履
踏出来这些活泼的道路。

在我们心灵的原野里
也有几条宛转的小路，
但曾经在路上走过的
行人多半已不知去处：

寂寞的儿童、白发的夫妇，
还有些年纪青青的男女，
还有死去的朋友，他们都

给我们踏出来这些道路；
我们纪念着他们的步履
不要荒芜了这几条小路。

Paths of the open plain

You say, in the open plains you love to stare
Are strips of paths full of life,
Steps of countless passers without a name
Who set foot on these lively roads.

In the open plains of our soul
Are also countless winding paths,
But the passers who once crossed these roads
Did not mostly know their aim:

Solitary children, grey-haired couples,
And also many young companions,
And also friends who passed away, they all

Have beaten these paths for us;
We shall remember their walks,
Let us not leave these paths to overgrow.

十八

我们有时度过一个亲密的夜

我们有时度过一个亲密的夜
在一间生疏的房里，它白昼时
是什么模样，我们都无从认识，
更不必说它的过去未来。原野——

一望无边地在我们窗外展开，
我们只依稀地记得在黄昏时
来的道路，便算是对它的认识，
明天走后，我们也不再回来。

闭上眼吧！让那些亲密的夜
和生疏的地方织在我们心里：
我们的生命象那窗外的原野，

我们在朦胧的原野上认出来
一棵树、一闪湖光，它一望无际
藏着忘却的过去、隐约的将来。

We often spend an intimate night

We often spend an intimate night
Inside an unknown room, its appearance
In daytime, we will never know, nor
Can we say of its past and future. The open plain...

Stretches boundlessly outside the window,
We just vaguely remember at nightfall
The road we took, the one we know,
We will depart tomorrow, and never return.

Close your eyes! Let that this intimate night
And unknown place weave inside our chests:
Our lives are like that open plain outside the window,

We recognise in the misty open plain
A tree, a reflection of a lake, and as far as the eye can see
Hide the forgotten past, the vague future.

十九

别离

我们招一招手，随着别离
我们的世界便分成两个，
身边感到冷，眼前忽然辽阔，
象刚刚降生的两个婴儿。

啊，一次别离，一次降生，
我们担负着工作的辛苦，
把冷的变成暖，生的变成熟，
各自把个人的世界耕耘，

为了再见，好象初次相逢，
怀着感谢的情怀想过去，
象初晤面时忽然感到前生。

一生里有几回春几回冬，
我们只感受时序的轮替，
感受不到人间规定的年龄。

Farewell

We wave our hands, as we part
Our world is divided in two,
Feeling cold, suddenly the vastness,
Like two infants just come to life.

Ah, parted once, born once,
We bear the toil of work,
Changing the cold into warmth, birth into maturity,
Each one working his own world,

Bidding farewell is like meeting for the first,
Treasuring feelings of gratitude for the past,
Like our first encounters recalling sudden feelings of former lives.

How many springs and winters in a lifetime?
We only sense the course of time,
And not the limited time of human age.

二十

有多少面容，有多少语声

有多少面容，有多少语声
在我们梦里是这般真切，
不管是亲密的还是陌生：
是我自己的生命的分裂，

可是融合了许多的生命，
在融合后开了花，结了果？
谁能把自己的生命把定
对着这茫茫如水的夜色，

谁能让他的语声和面容
只在些亲密的梦里萦回？
我们不知已经有多少回

被映在一个辽远的天空，
给船夫或沙漠里的行人
添了些新鲜的梦的营养。

How many faces, how many voices

How many faces, how many voices
So vivid in our dreams,
No matter if intimate or unknown:
These are a scission in my own life,

But many lives bonded together,
The fusion blossoms into a flower, will it bear fruit?
Who can lead his own life
In such an ocean-like boundless night?

Who can let his voice and face
Dwell only in some intimate dreams?
How many times already, without knowing,

Have we crossed the far-reaching sky,
Instilled in a sailor or a desert traveller
Are the nutrients of a refreshing dream.

二十一

我们听着狂风里的暴雨

我们听着狂风里的暴雨，
我们在灯光下这样孤单，
我们在这小小的茅屋里
就是和我们用具的中间

也有了千里万里的距离：
铜炉在向往深山的矿苗，
瓷壶在向往江边的陶泥，
它们都象风雨中的飞鸟

各自东西。我们紧紧抱住，
好象自身也都不能自主。
狂风把一切都吹入高空，

暴雨把一切又淋入泥土，
只剩下这点微弱的灯红
在证实我们生命的暂住。

We hear the heavy rain through the gusty wind

We hear the heavy rain through the gusty wind,
We are such lonesome in the light,
We are inside this little thatched house
Surrounded by our daily tools

And a far-stretching distance:
The copper pot sighing for its deep mountain mine,
The porcelain pot sighing for its clay of the riverbank,
They're all like birds in midst of the elements,

Each one for itself. We tightly embrace,
As if one cannot stay on his own.
The wind blasts everything into the sky,

And yet the rain drenches everything onto the earth,
Only this feeble light remains
To confirm our ephemeral life.

二十二

深夜又是深山

深夜又是深山，
听着夜雨沉沉。
十里外的山村、
念里外的市廛，

它们可还存在？
十年前的山川、
念年前的梦幻，
都在雨里沉埋。

四围这样狭窄，
好象回到母胎；
我在深夜祈求

用迫切的声音：
“给我狭窄的心
一个大的宇宙！”

Deep night, another deep mountain

Deep night, another deep mountain,
The sound of the night rain pouring.
A mountain village ten miles away,
A market place twenty miles far away,

Do they still exist?
Mountains and rivers of ten years ago,
Illusions of twenty years ago,
All deeply immersed in the rain.

All around is so narrow,
It's like returning to the mother's womb;
I entreat in the deep night

With incessant voice:
“Give my narrow heart
A big universe!”

二十三

几只初生的小狗

接连落了半月的雨，
你们自从降生以来，
就只知道潮湿阴郁。
一天雨云忽然散开，

太阳光照满了墙壁，
我看见你们的母亲
把你们衔到阳光里，
让你们用你们全身

第一次领受光和暖，
日落了，又衔你们回去。
你们不会有记忆，

但是这一次的经验
会融入将来的吠声，
你们在黑夜吠出光明。

A few newborn puppies

Rain has not stopped falling for a fortnight,
Since you came to life,
You've only known the damp and gloom.
One day, the rainy clouds have suddenly dispersed,

Sunlight has shone over the walls,
I saw your mother
Holding and taking you to the sunlight,
So letting your whole bodies

Feel the warmth of light for the first time,
The sun has set, she's taken you back.
You cannot remember,

But this first time experience
Will blend into your future sounds of bark,
And you will bring light again in the nights.

二十四

这里几千年前

这里几千年前
处处好象已经
有我们的生命；
我们未降生前

一个歌声已经
从变幻的天空，
从绿草和青松
唱我们的运命。

我们忧患重重，
这里怎么竟会
听到这样歌声？

看那小的飞虫，
在它的飞翔内
时时都是新生。

Here, myriads of years ago

Here, myriads of years ago
Everywhere, it seems
Our lives already existed;
Before we were born

A singing voice already
From the changing sky,
From the green grass, the pine trees
Chanted our destiny.

As our misery is heavy,
Here, how can we still here
This singing voice?

Look, that tiny insect,
In its fluttering circles,
Is forever young.

二十五

案头摆设着用具

案头摆设着用具，
架上陈列着书籍，
终日在些静物里
我们不住地思虑。

言语里没有歌声，
举动里没有舞蹈，
空空问窗外飞鸟
为什么振翼凌空。

只有睡着的身体，
夜静时起了韵律：
空气在身内游戏，

海盐在血里游戏——
睡梦里好象听得到
天和海向我们呼叫。

Objects are set on the table

Objects are set on the table,
Books are arranged on the shelf,
All day, amidst some silent things
We constantly meditate.

No words have sound,
No actions have motion,
We ask in vain why the birds outside the window
Flap their wings high in the sky.

Only in the sleep of our bodies,
When the night is still, the rhythms awake:
The air is filled with amusement,

The sea salt plays within our blood...
In our dreams, it is like hearing
The sky and the sea calling our names.

二十六

我们天天走着一条小路

我们天天走着一条熟路
回到我们居住的地方；
但是在这林里面还隐藏
许多小路，又深邃、又生疏

走一条生的，便有些心慌，
怕越走越远，走入迷途，
但不知不觉从树疏处
忽然望见我们住的地方，

象座新的岛屿呈在天边
我们的身边有多少事物
向我们要求新的发现：

不要觉得一切都已熟悉，
到死时抚摸自己的发肤
生了疑问：这是谁的身体？

Everyday, we walk on a familiar road

Everyday, we walk on a familiar road
To return to our dwelling place;
But, in the woods still hide
Many small paths, both dark and unknown

Walking on a new one brings agitation,
Fear increases as we go farther, as we lose our way,
Only unwittingly through the trees
We suddenly glimpse our home,

Like a new island appearing on the horizon;
So many things are close to us
That yearn to be rediscovered:

Must not believe everything to be familiar;
When death comes, caress your own hair and skin
Asking the question: whose body is this?

二十七

从一片泛滥无形的水里

从一片泛滥无形的水里，
取水人取来椭圆的一瓶，
这点水就得到一个定形；
看，在秋风里飘扬的风旗，

它把住些把不住的事体，
让远方的光、远方的黑夜
和些远方的草木的荣谢，
还有个奔向远方的心意，

都保留一些在这面旗上。
我们空空听过一夜风声，
空看了一天的草黄叶红，

向何处安排我们的思、想？
但愿这些诗象一面风旗
把住一些把不住的事体。

From a shapeless expanse of water

From a shapeless expanse of water,
A man came to fill an oval vase,
So, this now obtains a determined shape;
Look, the flag waved by the autumn wind,

Holding things which cannot be held,
Let the far distant light, the far distant darkness
The glory of far distant plants withering,
Still urge rushing towards the infinite,

And preserve something of this flag.
In vain we heard the night wind,
In vain we saw the grass turn yellow and the leaves red,

Whither shall our thoughts be directed to?
Could only these poems, like a flag,
Hold things that cannot be held.

Annex 2

Résumé en français de la thèse

« Influences littéraires et philosophiques allemandes sur la poésie chinoise de Feng Zhi : les sonnets »

Introduction

L'objectif de la recherche menée dans cette thèse est d'analyser les relations intertextuelles entre des œuvres littéraires et philosophiques allemandes et la production poétique de l'écrivain et traducteur chinois moderne Feng Zhi (1905-1993) à la lumière de la théorie et de la réinterprétation du concept de « transtextualité » par Gérard Genette. Le but de cette étude critique est d'analyser et de discerner dans quelle mesure il est possible d'établir des relations « transtextuelles » et transculturelles entre la littérature primaire, notamment les textes de Novalis et de Rilke, la thèse de doctorat de Feng Zhi soutenue à Heidelberg en 1935, et son recueil de sonnets. En fait, la principale contribution innovatrice de la recherche, dans l'état actuel des connaissances, est la démonstration critique de la façon dont la thèse de Feng Zhi a joué un rôle vital dans le développement de sa voix poétique. La thèse du poète représente donc l'une des sources primaires les plus influentes qui ait finalement contribué à la réalisation de sa production lyrique postromantique, et qui donne en outre de nouvelles perspectives sur la relation transtextuelle entre les sources allemandes et les exemples modernes d'écriture du poète chinois.

Les textes analysés dans le cadre de cette étude visent à montrer comment certains indices transculturels de la poésie de Feng Zhi définissent la tendance poétique de l'écrivain en tant que postromantique, esthétique et métaphysique, alors qu'une recherche plus approfondie et d'autres évidences transtextuelles encadrent sa production lyrique parmi les premiers exemples de littérature moderniste chinoise. Aussi un des objectifs de cette étude est d'élucider l'approche postromantique et

prémoderniste dans le lyrisme des sonnets de Feng Zhi, et de montrer la tendance du poète à adopter une disposition énigmatique et existentialiste qui touche à la relation étroite et mutuelle entre l'individu et la collectivité environnante, ainsi qu'à une idée prémoderniste d'accomplissement de soi, achevée par la réalisation esthétique complète de l'individu dans sa position au sein d'une collectivité systématique.

À cette fin, une attention particulière sera accordée à la convergence transculturelle des traits philosophiques et ontologiques des études sur la métaphysique, l'esthétique et l'existentialisme issues des débats intellectuels européens et des critiques sur les œuvres littéraires du romantisme et du symbolisme. En fait, comme il sera démontré, étant donné que Feng Zhi a été inspiré par la poésie mystique de Novalis, la philosophie idéaliste et existentialiste de Karl Jaspers ainsi que par la poésie des expériences esthétiques de Rainer Maria Rilke, la voix lyrique chinoise dont il est ici question exprime un sens particulier d'une conscience moderne : une sensibilisation moderne au principe de l'indépendance, à la ténacité et à l'introspection qui correspondent également aux idéaux du nouvel esprit national qui caractérisaient la scène littéraire chinoise moderne pendant la première moitié du XXe siècle.

L'analyse de type comparatiste entre divers types de littérature, d'ouvrages philosophiques et de traditions culturelles effectuées dans cette étude constitue la base sur laquelle le résultat critique de la recherche même est formulé. En fait, les genres et les textes littéraires étudiés appartiennent à des époques historiques différentes, à des disciplines académiques et à des types de recherche intellectuelle divers. Cette analyse critique des textes, de souche allemande et chinoise, vise d'ailleurs à une meilleure compréhension globale de la manière dont des éléments rhétoriques et esthétiques de ces textes formulent les valeurs sociales et les croyances philosophiques pertinentes aux sonnets de Feng Zhi.

Les questions concernant les écarts historiques entre les textes européens et les auteurs analysés dans ce travail doivent être clarifiées dès le début afin de comprendre comment des éléments relatifs à différentes étapes historiques apparaissent simultanément dans l'œuvre de Feng Zhi. En effet, tous les textes allemands examinés dans cette étude sont considérés comme des expressions culturelles dont la réception

et la convergence intertextuelle dépassent les frontières linguistiques, sociales et historiques. Une telle approche est fondamentale pour clarifier certaines questions qui peuvent surgir si on considère les écarts historiques et les caractéristiques de l'époque entre les auteurs, comme Novalis, un philosophe du premier mouvement romantique allemand qui vécut pendant la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle ; Goethe, intellectuel et homme de lettres du Sturm und Drang et du Classicisme de Weimar, qui vécut entre la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle et la première moitié du XIXe siècle ; Reiner Maria Rilke, poète symboliste et moderniste austro-bohémien qui vécut entre la fin du XIXe siècle et le début du XXe siècle ; et enfin Karl Jaspers, un philosophe contemporain de Feng Zhi. Par conséquent, cette étude cherche à rapprocher les distances géographiques et temporelles entre les langues et les époques afin de considérer les points de convergence entre deux littératures éloignées, et pourtant si proches.

La relation esthétique entre les textes littéraires chinois et les textes allemands a aussi été rendue possible par l'intérêt artistique et intellectuel montré par le poète même dans la période de sa formation en Allemagne et de recherche dans les universités chinoises. En fait, il était très courant, sinon incontournable, que de jeunes intellectuels chinois du vingtième siècle comme Feng Zhi se trouvaient être éventuellement en contact au moins avec les œuvres les plus représentatives de la littérature occidentale. Dans le cas de Feng Zhi, par exemple, ce qui attire les plus l'attention et caractérise la formation artistique du jeune poète est la lecture en traduction chinoise de textes littéraires et philosophiques allemands.

La nouvelle tendance littéraire des années 1920-1940

La nouvelle tendance de modernisation en Chine du début du vingtième siècle, et par conséquent l'occidentalisation, qui encourageait la connaissance de la culture occidentale, découlait principalement d'une émulation consciente et d'une intégration par des intellectuels chinois modernes des formes stylistiques littéraires occidentales. Les écrits littéraires de la première moitié du vingtième siècle sont des exemples marquants de ce phénomène. La scène littéraire chinoise moderne était principalement caractérisée par des œuvres qui témoignaient d'une façon assez frappante de signes de la modernisation et de l'occidentalisation chinoise. De jeunes intellectuels dynamiques qui vivaient sous l'influence du mouvement du 4 mai ou du « mouvement

de la nouvelle culture » (Xin wenhua yundong), aussi historiquement animé par Hu Shi (1891-1962), étaient de plus en plus inspirés par le lyrisme occidental.

Cette nouvelle forme de littérature répondait principalement à la revendication de liberté poétique par rapport aux formes rigides de la versification chinoise classique adressée par les poètes modernes. En outre, elle préconisait une nouvelle littérature écrite en langue vernaculaire concernant les peuples et leurs préoccupations contemporaines au lieu des thèmes conventionnels et des images statiques de la tradition poétique classique.

Dans ce contexte, il convient de noter que l'influence de la poésie occidentale en Chine reposait principalement sur l'expérience esthétique qui variait de poète en poète et qui ne pouvait ni nier son identité ni négliger son sentiment d'appartenance à l'esthétique poétique chinoise traditionnelle. La scène poétique de ces vingt années intenses était animée par des intellectuels qui suivaient des formes lyriques différentes, telles que les modèles anglais, français, allemands et américains. En fait, certains poètes et traducteurs chinois modernes choisissaient principalement et délibérément les poèmes occidentaux à traduire en fonction de leur ressemblance ou de leur affinité implicite avec les images, les émotions et les thématiques aussi récurrentes dans la longue tradition chinoise. Par exemple, les thèmes poétiques dans les écrits de Feng Zhi, comme celui de l'auto-accomplissement dans la solitude, montrent clairement comment le poète chinois a réussi à intégrer l'essence de la littérature allemande avec des traits et des thèmes qui sont aussi récurrents dans la tradition classique chinoise.

Suivant l'esprit du mouvement de la nouvelle culture, certains poètes chinois consacraient leur activité littéraire au développement de nouvelles formes et de nouveaux vers qui pourraient mieux s'adapter à la poésie en *Baihua*, la langue vernaculaire ; tandis que d'autres poètes imitaient des formes poétiques typiques de la tradition occidentale. Dans de ce dernier cas, Feng Zhi, éminent spécialiste chinois de littérature et de philosophie allemandes, peut être considéré comme le plus célèbre compositeur moderne de sonnets de Chine. Sa créativité intellectuelle et littéraire a même été louée en 1935 par Lu Xun, qui a défini Feng Zhi comme « le poète le plus remarquable de la Chine ».

Le recueil de sonnets de Feng Zhi entièrement traduit en anglais à partir de la version originale en chinois et analysé dans cette étude, a été composé lors du déclenchement du deuxième conflit sino-japonais et montre un monde et une pensée moderne, qui sont à la fois conformes et à la fois en rupture avec les idées prémodernes.

Comme ce travail entend le montrer, inspiré par la poésie mystique de Novalis, la philosophie de l'idéalisme et l'existentialisme de Karl Jaspers ainsi que par la poésie des expériences esthétiques de Rainer Maria Rilke, la voix lyrique de Feng Zhi exprime un sentiment de conscience moderne : une sensibilisation moderne à l'indépendance, la ténacité et l'autoréflexion qui correspond aussi aux idéaux du nouvel esprit national. L'essai poétique de Feng Zhi a également été possible grâce à l'expérimentation d'une nouvelle forme de langage qui était très utilisée parmi les élites urbaines et les cercles intellectuels de l'époque. Le concept de « moderne » et l'utilisation d'une nouvelle langue nationale contribuent finalement à la définition d'une scène littéraire diversifiée, qui caractérisait principalement la première moitié du vingtième siècle. L'utilisation novatrice du *shi* comme forme de poésie, loin des formes stylistiques du *wenyanwen*, a clairement permis aux poètes modernes d'écrire dans une forme plus libre et plus fluide.

Ce qui intéresse particulièrement le lecteur pour une compréhension et une appréciation plus holistique de la période et des tendances littéraires ici prises en compte est le phénomène de l'occidentalisme — imitation consciente et intégration de la littérature et de la philosophie occidentale dans la Chine moderne. Il est important de noter ici que cette nouvelle tendance de modernisation, et par conséquent d'« occidentalisation », ne résultait pas seulement de l'effet de l'esthétique, mais de l'imitation consciente et de l'intégration de la littérature occidentale par les intellectuels chinois modernes. Parmi les modèles de ce phénomène, on compte les écrits de la première moitié du vingtième siècle, lorsque le contexte littéraire chinois moderne se caractérisait principalement par des œuvres témoignant de l'apparition de la modernisation et de l'« occidentalisation » en Chine. Les jeunes et dynamiques poètes chinois qui vivaient sous l'influence du Mouvement du 4 mai ou du

« Mouvement de la nouvelle culture » étaient de plus en plus inspirés par le lyrisme occidental.

Cette nouvelle forme de littérature permettait aux poètes de la première moitié du vingtième siècle, ouverts au changement et au défi, de se libérer des chaînes formelles rigides de versification typiques de la tradition littéraire classique chinoise, et d'écrire une nouvelle littérature en langue courante, le *baihua*.

Dans ce contexte, il est intéressant de noter que l'influence de la poésie occidentale en Chine dépendait aussi de l'expérience esthétique qui variait de poète en poète et qui ne pouvait pas non plus nier son identité ou négliger ses racines dans l'esthétique poétique chinoise traditionnelle. En fait, les poètes et les traducteurs chinois modernes choisissaient principalement et délibérément les poèmes occidentaux à traduire pour leur ressemblance ou leur affinité implicite avec les images, les émotions et les thèmes également récurrents dans la longue tradition chinoise. Par exemple, les thèmes poétiques des premiers et des derniers écrits de Feng Zhi, tel celui de la « solitude », montrent clairement comment le poète chinois réussit à joindre l'essence de la littérature allemande avec des traits et des thèmes aussi récurrents dans la tradition chinoise classique.

En suivant l'esprit du « Mouvement de la nouvelle culture », certains poètes chinois consacraient leur activité littéraire au développement de nouvelles formes et de nouveaux vers qui puissent mieux correspondre à la prosodie en *baihua* ; tandis que d'autres poètes imitaient et introduisaient des formes poétiques typiques de la tradition occidentale. À cette dernière fin, Feng Zhi est généralement considéré comme le plus célèbre compositeur moderne de sonnets de Chine. Sa créativité intellectuelle et littéraire était même louée en 1935 par Lu Xun qui le définissait comme « le meilleur poète de la Chine ».

La traduction anglaise des sonnets de Feng Zhi

Quand il s'agit de traduire de la poésie ou de la prose chinoise en anglais, comme Ivor A. Richards l'affirme dans l'un de ses récits les plus connus, « nous avons ici ce qui peut très probablement être le type d'événement le plus complexe jamais produit dans l'évolution du cosmos ». Après presque deux mille ans de théories de la traduction, ce

défi n'a pas encore été résolu. Il y a alors une notion qui s'est répandue à partir de l'époque du romantisme allemand et qui affirme le concept d'intraduisibilité, considéré par Andrew Chesterman comme les « mêmes » de la traduction.

Comme suggéré par A. Chesterman, suivant l'étymologie latine du mot « traduire », ce travail cherche à « transposer » les significations contenues dans les mots chinois dans la traduction sémantique et communicative étant donné les différences majeures de structure sémantique du chinois moderne et de l'anglais. L'auteur de ce travail est conscient que, comme le pensait un jour le philosophe médiéval Roger Bacon en se référant aux écritures grecques et hébraïques, il est pratiquement « impossible que la qualité particulière d'une langue soit préservée dans une autre ». Néanmoins, la traduction proposée des sonnets de Feng Zhi ne reflète pas seulement la connaissance de l'auteur des langues source et cible pour le rendu « étranger » des poèmes chinois, mais aussi une connaissance approfondie et une appréciation critique du sujet du texte. La traduction proposée, en fait, ne se concentre pas seulement sur l'original chinois composé par Feng Zhi dans les années 1940, mais elle prend également en considération les textes et sources allemands que le poète chinois moderne avait rencontrés, étudiés, traduits en chinois et qui présentent finalement des traces évidentes de confluences transtextuelles.

Alors que la traduction anglaise dans ce travail cherche à rester aussi fidèle que possible aux sonnets originaux en chinois, il est primordial de garder à l'esprit que certains éléments se rapportant à la prosodie chinoise en *baihua*, tel que les compteurs et l'agencement des rimes ne peuvent pas simplement être reproduits en anglais principalement en raison du système de syllabe discordant qui différencie les deux langues. Parmi les défis techniques les plus saillants rencontrés au cours du processus de traduction des sonnets figure la conscience douloureuse de l'impuissance du traducteur à maintenir ou à imiter une métrique qui soit proche de celle employée par le poète chinois moderne. En fait, les divers schémas de rimes adoptés par Feng Zhi dans ses sonnets rendent l'effet sonore final des poèmes plutôt difficile, sinon impossible, à être finalement imité dans une autre langue.

La seule caractéristique technique qui revête une importance fondamentale et qui a également été maintenue dans la traduction anglaise est la forme de sonnet. Feng

Zhi semble avoir expérimenté et adopté la forme du sonnet dans sa composition poétique de Rilke. Comme les poèmes qui forment les *Sonnets à Orphée*, tous les poèmes de Feng Zhi qui appartiennent au recueil de sonnets sont composés de deux quatrains et deux tercets, suivant ainsi la structure du sonnet de Pétrarque (4433). La tradition du sonnet en Allemagne n'était pas aussi fixée et établie que dans la littérature italienne ou anglaise. En outre, en considérant les normes formelles lyriques du sonnet allemand avancé par August Wilhelm Schlegel, on remarque immédiatement que Rilke ne s'est même pas conformé à ces règles traditionnelles. Les schémas de rimes de Rilke et de Feng Zhi varient d'un sonnet à l'autre.

Même s'il est possible d'identifier des traits communs parmi les diverses formes de sonnet en Occident, il convient de noter cependant que le schéma de rimes du sonnet européen variait de littérature à littérature. Par exemple, le sonnet commun de Pétrarque utilise un modèle de hendécasyllabes et suit l'ordre abab abab ou abba abba dans le huitain et cdc dcd ou cde cde ou cde dce dans le sizain. Le sonnet anglais ou shakespearien est principalement écrit en utilisant le pentamètre iambique où chaque ligne a dix syllabes divisées en cinq paires (iambs) et suit l'ordre abab cdcd efef gg. Les sonnets de Rilke, tout comme les sonnets de Feng Zhi, présentent différents schémas de rimes et schémas syllabiques. Une partie du sonnet de Rilke, par exemple, suit l'ordre abab cdcd ou abba cddc dans le huitain et l'eef ggf ou efg efg ou même efg gfe dans le sizain et fait usage d'enjambements pour caractériser la structure du verset.

En 1941, Feng Zhi vivait sur les montagnes qui entourent la ville de Kunming et il avait l'habitude de marcher au moins deux fois par semaine sur une distance de 15 *li* pour atteindre la ville et l'endroit où il enseignait. Ces « très belles promenades », telles que définies par l'auteur lui-même, se sont avérées cruciales pour la création des sonnets. En fait, comme Feng Zhi le note, quand un homme se retrouve sur un chemin de montagne, il est presque inévitable qu'il ne commence pas à s'interroger sur le passé et les nombreux jours qui lui appartiennent. À l'époque, il n'avait pas été poétiquement productif depuis longtemps : à peine dix poèmes entre 1930 et 1940 ; quand tout à coup, pendant un après-midi d'hiver, il a regardé un avion argenté de loin s'élever haut dans le ciel bleu cristal qui lui a rappelé le mythique oiseau *peng* dont rêvaient les anciens. Il a profité de ce rythme spontané sans perdre de temps et a

soudainement inventé un poème rimé. C'était le premier croquis du huitième sonnet du recueil. Et comme Feng Zhi l'écrit, c'était aussi la forme la plus ancienne et la plus prématurée de tous les sonnets, car il n'avait pas écrit de poèmes depuis longtemps.

Toujours dans cet esprit, tout ce qui est chanté dans les poèmes est profondément lié : des personnages historiques immortels aux filles paysannes sans nom, des cités lointaines et éternelles aux insectes volants et aux petits brins d'herbe des collines, de petites parties de la vie individuelle à l'expérience commune qui unit beaucoup de gens. Quant au choix d'adopter la forme du sonnet, Feng Zhi souligne que son choix était purement dicté par la commodité personnelle et non par l'intention de transplanter cette forme poétique en Chine. Comme il l'écrit, il a utilisé cette forme poétique seulement parce que cela l'a aidé. Tout comme Li Guangtian l'écrit dans son essai *Shisihang ji (Le Sonnet)*, en raison de ses caractéristiques d'avoir des couches sur des couches qui montent et descendent régulièrement, qui se concentrent progressivement puis se déconnectent aussi bien qu'à cause de sa forme de beaux motifs sonores qui vont et viennent, le sonnet ne limite jamais la pensée hyperactive du poète, mais, comme Feng Zhi le souligne, il accorde plutôt à sa pensée un arrangement approprié.

La première édition des sonnets de 1942 à Guilin ne comporte pas de préface ni de post-scriptum, car Feng Zhi croyait vraiment qu'un poème devait d'abord être une gravure ou un tableau et qu'il n'avait donc pas besoin d'explications supplémentaires. Néanmoins, dans la deuxième édition de son recueil, l'auteur a ressenti la nécessité d'ajouter ces notes explicatives.

La thèse de doctorat de Feng Zhi sur la poétique de Novalis

En 1935 Feng Zhi soutient sa thèse de doctorat en histoire de la littérature allemande sur la poésie de Novalis au sein de la faculté des sciences humaines de l'Université de Heidelberg. L'œuvre de Feng Zhi, intitulée «Die Analogie von Natur und Geist als Stilprinzip in Novalis' Dichtung» [L'analogie de la nature et de l'esprit comme principe de style dans la poésie de Novalis], est entièrement écrite en allemand.

Dans cette thèse, nous nous proposons d'examiner la manière mystique de penser de Feng Zhi ; l'idéalisme magique ; le style poétique et divers élément naturel

lié à la poésie de Novalis. L'analyse de la thèse de doctorat de Feng Zhi acquiert une importance cruciale dans l'interprétation de la poésie du poète chinois moderne pendant la période de la guerre. En fait, comme cette étude vise à le montrer, il est possible d'établir diverses relations transtextuelles entre la propre recherche doctorale de Feng Zhi et ses écrits matures, notamment le recueil de sonnets des années 1940. La critique moderne et la critique contemporaine s'accorde sur le fait que Feng Zhi, en tant que spécialiste des études allemandes, a été directement influencé par les œuvres littéraires et philosophiques allemandes. De nombreux sinologues ont cherché à donner une interprétation critique de ces apparentes influences à travers des comparaisons littéraires entre la poésie de Feng Zhi et quelques œuvres allemandes, notamment celles de Novalis et de Rilke. Néanmoins, comme ce travail vise à le montrer, on pourrait établir et fournir des cas substantiels de transsexualité entre les écrits chinois matures de Feng Zhi et les sources allemandes, principalement celles liées au romantisme, transmis par l'interprétation critique du poète. Cette compréhension et cette expérimentation personnelle trouvent leur raison d'être dans son propre « cahier de formation » : sa thèse de doctorat. Pour la réévaluation des travaux de l'écrivain chinois moderne et la position postromantique dans la poésie, la thèse de doctorat de Feng Zhi est traitée dans cette étude comme l'une des sources primaires les plus marquantes.

Dans son travail, Feng Zhi recherche comment « sujet » et « objet », monde intérieur et extérieur, esprit et nature convergeaient dans les œuvres lyriques de Novalis et comment son style poétique s'en trouvait par conséquent affecté. Selon Feng Zhi, le style poétique de Novalis repose sur sa philosophie de la nature dont il tire ensuite les principes de son style lyrique.

Les écrits et la poésie de Novalis ressemblent à un monde où tous les bords sont flous, toutes les fins sont liées et tous les contraires sont réconciliés. Ce qui l'a vraiment frappé de la nature est sa « großes Zugleich », l'apparition simultanée de phénomènes naturels dans le monde : ce qui est étranger est connu en même temps, et ce qui est loin est simultanément proche.

Tous les bords et limites disparaissent dans l'espace, n'établissant aucune distinction entre le lointain et le proche, le haut et le bas, la finitude et l'infini.

Enthousiasmé par son premier amour pour Mathilden, Heinrich von Ofterdingen écrit : « toutes les distances sont si proches de moi, et le paysage riche est pour moi comme un fantasma intérieur » [Jene Fernen sind mir so nah, und die reiche Landschaft ist mir wie eine innere Phantasie].

Dans les contes de fées, la terre et le ciel se rencontrent dans « süße Musik ». Les infinis se comportent comme la finitude et ceux-ci sont en changement continu. La constante mutation ne se réfère pas seulement à l'espace, mais aussi au temps : le passé et le futur, le commencement et la fin, la durée et l'instantanéité. Il faut également noter que ces éléments et caractéristiques complémentaires du changement des forces opposées animent aussi l'esprit poétique des sonnets de Feng Zhi. Dans ses sonnets, par exemple, le poète chinois fait constamment référence au passage du temps en termes de finitude et d'infini. Par l'imagination métaphysique, le moi est alors capable de vaincre les deux conditions du temps et de l'espace, étant loin et simultanément loin : « Nos vies sont comme cette plaine ouverte à l'extérieur de la fenêtre » (sonnet 18). Le dilemme de Feng Zhi concerne le mouvement de soi dans une dimension espace-temps illimitée : « Qui peut mener sa propre vie dans une nuit sans limites semblable à l'océan ? » (Sonnet 20).

Le temps et l'espace se comportent de manière relative : ils sont un être comme sujet et objet. L'espace est un temps permanent tandis que le temps s'écoule dans l'espace [Raum ist beharrliche Zeit - Zeit ist fließender Raum]. Novalis considère chaque connexion humaine comme une condition relative.

Par la considération du processus de la vie dans la nature, comme le cercle de vie des graines dans le monde végétal, le poète mystique acquiert son idée fondamentale, qu'il applique ensuite à l'humanité et au cosmos tout entier. Les termes utilisés dans la logique mystique sont des formes fondamentales vivantes tirées des cercles de vie des choses. Les termes qui sont par ailleurs toujours en opposition, tel que le jour et la nuit, la lumière et les ténèbres, l'esprit et le corps sont ici liés et construits à l'intérieur d'un anneau. Le jour est lié à la nuit et la nuit est de nouveau liée au jour. Toutes les extrémités extrêmes sont connectées dans un cycle éternel. C'est ce même cycle naturel qui résonne constamment dans les sonnets de Feng Zhi qui utilise des images appartenant au monde naturel pour transmettre également ce

principe. Il fait également allusion au même concept bouddhiste de renaissance pour souligner le cycle infini de la nature. Le sonnet goethéen (sonnet 13) se termine par une phrase très énigmatique, clairement tirée du répertoire poétique de Goethe : « Meurs et deviens » [Stirb und werde].

De la graine vient un organisme, qui apportera de nouvelles graines. De celui-ci, la vie rentre à nouveau. De ce point de vue, le poète mystique affirme que la vie est le commencement de la mort et que la mort est le commencement de la vie — les deux deviennent un. Dans les sonnets de Feng Zhi, par exemple, à travers l'image de la cigale mue ou des mites qui laissent leur coquille dans la boue (sonnet 2), le poète chinois tente de transmettre la même conscience. Ce qui frappe le lecteur est la note finale du même sonnet : « Une voix chantante tombée du corps de la musique, le seul corps restant qui se transforme en une chaîne de montagnes sans voix. » L'idée apportée se manifeste vivement dans l'image des montagnes silencieuses qui prennent forme l'une après l'autre pour préfigurer le cycle infini de la vie : la vie après la mort et la mort, c'est-à-dire le commencement de la vie.

Le monde vrai et haut est comme l'image voilée de la déesse de Saïs. Pour dévoiler cette image, il faut un long pèlerinage. L'homme est le Messie de la nature : il doit sauver la nature.

Où est la vraie nature ? Qui peut sauver la nature ? Novalis donne à son lecteur quelques allusions dans le couplet très célèbre : « Quelqu'un est arrivé là — qui a levé le voile de la déesse, à Sais. - Mais qu'a-t-il vu ? Il s'est vu — merveille des merveilles — lui-même. »

Selon Feng Zhi, dans ces lignes se trouve la clé de déverrouillage pour comprendre le mysticisme de Novalis. Il faut noter ici que Feng Zhi a également laissé entendre que le chemin vers la nature est une simple représentation du chemin vers le soi. Si ce n'est pas la nature qui n'est pas reflétée dans la vie de l'homme, c'est l'humanité qui se reflète sur les merveilles de la nature. Dans le sonnet 16, par exemple, la voix lyrique déclare que « notre croissance, nos soucis sont un pin sur une colline, ou un voile d'épais brouillard sur une ville ». De plus, dans le sonnet 18, le sujet poétique pousse son compagnon à « laisser que cette nuit intime et cet endroit

inconnu tissent dans nos coffres : nos vies sont comme cette plaine ouverte à l'extérieur de la fenêtre : nous reconnaissons dans la plaine brumeuse un arbre, le reflet d'un lac, et à perte de vue se cache le passé oublié, le vague avenir. »

Dans le monde féérique de Novalis, on rencontre aussi des fleurs et des fruits. Le paysage de Saïs est en pleine illumination. Dans le conte de Klingsohr, la ville et la plaine sont lumineuses. Les sonnets de Feng Zhi font aussi clairement référence à la lumière. Dans le sonnet 11, Feng Zhi fait l'éloge de la figure de Lu Xun et associe l'image de la lumière à l'espérance, surtout en évoquant l'espoir que Lu Xun aurait dû apporter à sa génération : « Vous avez souvent espéré un rayon de lumière, mais au fur et à mesure que vous tournez la tête, vous trouvez un nuage sombre et couvert. » Dans le sonnet 12, Feng Zhi s'adresse au génie poétique de Du Fu en associant l'imagerie de la lumière au pouvoir divin. En fait, en plaçant le poète de la dynastie Tang dans une position poétique plus élevée, la voix lyrique du sonnet de Feng Zhi déclare : « Toutes les couronnes devant sa lumière ne deviennent que des reflets d'images pathétiques ». Dans le sonnet 21, Feng Zhi étend le concept de la lumière comme une analogie à la vie et à sa fugacité : « Seule cette faible lumière reste à confirmer notre vie éphémère ». Dans le sonnet 23, le sujet lyrique se trouve devant quelques chiots nouvellement nés. L'idée de la lumière ici est beaucoup plus profonde que dans tout autre sonnet : l'image simple et plus directe de la lumière, à laquelle les chiots sont exposés grâce aux soins de leur mère, implique aussi une conception plus élevée de l'espoir. En fait, les rayons du soleil doivent être maintenus dans le soi intérieur de chaque chiot et être libérés sous une forme différente, celle du son, en cas de désespoir ou d'absence : « Vous ne pouvez pas vous souvenir, mais cette première expérience se fondra dans vos futurs sons d'écorce, et vous apporterez de nouveau la lumière dans les nuits ». Une autre idée positive de la lumière, surtout lorsqu'elle est associée au soleil et à la chaleur, est amenée dans le sonnet 7, où les gens se rassemblent aux abords de la ville « sous un soleil agréable ». Enfin, la référence de Feng Zhi à la lumière implique également la « vitesse ». Pour cette raison, l'auteur de cette étude a choisi de traduire « light » 光 comme « blaze » dans le sonnet 8, rendant ainsi l'idée d'immédiateté et de rapidité : « Ils mettent sur la terre l'ordre des étoiles, et comme un flamboiement se lancent dans l'espace » [好把星秩序排人间, 便光一般投身空际].

Chez Feng Zhi, la lumière, l'eau et le feu, que Novalis appelle « les sources primaires d'énergie », sont très représentatifs dans la poésie du romantisme allemand, car ils possèdent des pouvoirs créateurs égaux dans la nature. Dans les œuvres de Novalis, ce n'est pas le feu destructeur qui brûle toujours, mais plutôt une flamme qui anime tout et fait du bien au monde. Le feu possède des pouvoirs magiques : le feu peut unir les particules séparées et aussi séparer ce qui est déjà lié ensemble. Dans la poésie romantique, le feu est généralement associé à l'amour.

C'est le même processus de consommation et de régénération de l'ancien phénix égyptien, qui plonge dans le feu et ressurgit sous une forme renouvelée et plus jeune – le même processus du « Stirb und Werde » de Goethe. Dans cet esprit, il est possible de comprendre la haute importance de la compréhension du sonnet goethéen de Feng Zhi : les lignes énigmatiques et la référence au « Stirb und Werde » de Goethe sont clairement expliquées dans la ré-élaboration de la poésie romantique et de l'imagerie du feu de Feng Zhi même. En fait, dans le sonnet 13, la voix lyrique loue le travail de Goethe et sa profonde sagesse en affirmant que ses œuvres peuvent au moins révéler le secret caché de la vie qui peut être encapsulée dans l'expression « mourir et devenir » : « Dans un élan de santé, le désespoir de l'amour se change en nourriture. Vous savez pourquoi le papillon a volé dans la flamme, pourquoi le serpent a laissé sa peau pour grandir ; toutes les créatures vivantes profitent de vos paroles, révélant le vrai sens de la vie : « mourez et devenez » [Stirb und werde —死和变].

En outre, comme Feng Zhi l'écrit dans sa thèse, dans le monde de Novalis l'air aussi est pur et bleu et il exerce une grande influence sur la disposition naturelle de l'homme. Le vent n'est rien d'autre que le mouvement de l'air. Il est poétique et musical et signifie beaucoup pour le « cœur solitaire et nostalgique ». Le vent se précipite dans les régions aimées et dissout son chagrin silencieux avec ses mille tons sombres et mélancoliques dans un profond soupir mélodieux qui vient de la nature entière. C'est ici qu'une autre trace de confluence transtextuelle du texte de Novalis dans la propre poésie de Feng Zhi se produit. Dans le sonnet 15, Feng Zhi donne une description similaire du vent qui se précipite et transporte les souffles de régions

lointaines : « De certains endroits lointains inconnus, le vent, d'innombrables kilomètres, peut prendre le souffle de nombreuses terres lointaines. »

Novalis montre de l'amour pour toutes les créatures, plus particulièrement pour les plantes. Si l'arbre symbolise la croissance et est noble, la floraison est poétique. Le développement d'un artiste est comparé à la croissance de la plante la plus noble qui doit être protégée avec beaucoup de soin de la sévérité sombre du ciel du nord. Les poètes, selon Novalis, devraient s'abaisser et sombrer dans le monde végétal : ils réveilleront la vie secrète des bois et des esprits cachés dans les troncs. C'est ce genre de noblesse que Feng Zhi essaie d'évoquer dans le sonnet qu'il consacre à l'edelweiss (sonnet 4). Il est intéressant de noter que le mot allemand pour « edelweiss » est composé de « edel » pour noble et « weiss » pour blanc. Ce ne pouvait pas être une simple coïncidence de toutes les plantes et fleurs du réel naturel que Feng Zhi ait choisi cette fleur blanche spécifique sans défense et délicate comme objet lyrique de son poème. La délicatesse de la fleur, qui appelle les soins donnés par Novalis à tous les poètes, est soulignée par le bref spam de la plante, que Feng Zhi a décidé de poétiser : « Vivre une vie courte, dévouée à ce qui est noble et pur ».

La prière que la voix lyrique du poème chinois prononce pour la petite fleur illustre la relation étroite et la descente dans la végétation : « Parfois, quand je pense à la vie des hommes, je ne peux pas résister à la prière. Toi, bande d'herbe luxuriante blanche, ton nom n'a jamais déçu. » Avec une note décisive et nostalgique, Feng Zhi conclut son sonnet en priant et en souhaitant une longue vie à l'edelweiss : « Pour toi je prie, afin que tu puisses vivre. » La voix lyrique de Feng Zhi dans le sonnet 4 peut être définie comme un rappel à la position romantique essentielle pour l'apparente « romanisation du monde » [die Romantisierung der Welt].

Feng Zhi : un poète entre Romantisme et modernisme

Il est possible d'identifier au moins trois étapes distinctes dans le développement lyrique de Feng Zhi : la période sentimentale, mélangée à la sensibilité traditionnelle chinoise et aux idéaux et motifs romantiques allemands (1923-1930) ; la période expérimentale (1930-1946), marquée par l'expérience et la recherche en Allemagne et caractérisée par l'élaboration d'une nouvelle expression poétique imprégnée de traits postromantiques et modernistes ; et une période d'après-guerre (1946-93) marquée

par la participation de Feng Zhi à la scène littéraire de la nouvelle République populaire.

Avec d'autres jeunes intellectuels chinois, Feng Zhi a fondé deux associations littéraires lorsqu'il était encore étudiant à l'université, la « Qiancao she », qui contribuait à la diffusion des écrits littéraires chinois modernes entre mars 1923 et février 1925, et « Chenzhong she », en 1925, qui rappelait le drame poétique de conte de fées *La cloche engloutie* (1896) par l'auteur naturaliste allemand Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946).

Les motifs poétiques de la solitude et de l'isolement qui distinguent et imprègnent le lyrisme de Feng Zhi s'intensifient particulièrement lorsque le poète durant ses années d'études à Pékin en 1927 et de collaboration à Harbin. Des extraits courts, mais significatifs de son expérience émouvante et de ses lamentations sur son état profond de solitude remplissent les derniers vers de son long récit poétique *Beiyou ji qita* [*Voyage au nord et autres*] qui suscite poétiquement un besoin romantique d'attention et d'affection.

Pendant ses études à Heidelberg, Feng Zhi comprend pleinement et reconnaît le concept moderne d'engagement philosophique de Rilke avec une subjectivité autoréflexive — ça marque le début de sa deuxième étape poétique. Une nouvelle approche métaphysique et une redéfinition des concepts, tels ceux de la solitude et de la collectivité ou de l'infini spatial et temporel, caractérisent les œuvres lyriques matures des années 1940. Ces œuvres fournissent une image plus complexe et plus révélatrice de l'introspection philosophique profonde du poète et une analyse de l'état de solitude subjective qui rappelle poétiquement la notion d'auto-annihilation de Novalis et l'art de savoir renoncer de Goethe (Entsagung).

Au cours de cette phase et des années de formation avancée en Allemagne, entre 1930 et 1935, Feng Zhi s'intéresse particulièrement à la philosophie de Goethe, Rilke et Novalis, dont les travaux littéraires, comme il le soulignera lors de la cérémonie des InterNationes Kunstpreis en 1987, contribuaient à la redéfinition de sa position émotionnelle. Son enthousiasme pour la poésie de Rilke commence avec la lecture de la ballade du poète allemand *Die Weise von Liebe und Tod des Cornets Christoph*

Rilke [La chanson d'amour et de mort du cornette Christoph Rilke]. Ensuite, il rencontre les *Neue Gedichte* [Les Poésies nouvelles], *Duineser Elegien* [Les Élégies de Duino], *Die Sonette an Orpheus* [Les Sonnets à Orphée], le seul roman de Rilke *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* [Les Cahiers de Malte Laurids Brigge] et ses lettres. Les œuvres de Rilke qui ont plus particulièrement exercé une grande influence sur la sensibilité et la production lyrique de Feng Zhi sont *Les Poésies nouvelles*, les *Élégies de Duino* et *Le Cahier de Malte Laurids Brigge*. Le petit livret de Rilke *Briefe an einen jungen Dichter* [Lettres à un jeune poète] stimulent immédiatement les sens et la créativité du jeune poète chinois au point qu'il commence sa traduction en 1931. Il devient évident que cette étape lyrique de sa vie est principalement marquée par l'influence et sa fascination « pathologique » pour Rilke. Il faut noter que dans une lettre adressée à Hui Xiu et Xiang He, Feng Zhi avoue que traduire les lettres de Rilke était dicté par son propre destin et qu'il ne pouvait pas le négliger autant qu'il ne pouvait pas refuser de vivre (为我 以为 这是 运 的 运 命, 我 不能 不 翻译 它, 正如 我 不能 不 生活 一样).

Parmi les thèmes centraux et motifs des sonnets de Feng Zhi qui montrent clairement le changement et l'évolution du lyrisme du poète chinois du Romantisme (typique de ses premiers écrits) au pré-modernisme sont le thème de l'imagination, la relation entre la solitude et la contraste entre permanence et mutabilité, les thèmes de la nuit et de la mort ainsi que les traces littéraires du mythe orphique.

Les sonnets de Feng Zhi : l'imagination, l'infini spatial et temporel

Le thème de l'imagination dans la poésie de Feng Zhi est conçu de manière holistique comme un puissant moyen d'atteindre l'infini, de surmonter la solitude et la collectivité, et de percevoir le sens de mutabilité contre la permanence. La perception de l'infini est discernée comme un état d'incommensurabilité spatiale et temporelle. En fait, la voix lyrique des sonnets acquiert souvent une nouvelle expérience esthétique d'infini temporel et spatial par une interaction personnelle avec la nature : une fois dissous dans la nature, le soi lyrique peut transcender la réalité, surmonter la condition terrestre du monde vivant et atteindre la perpétuité. Cette approche surnaturelle postromantique de la réalité donne déjà des allusions à un élément pré-moderniste : la réalité est perçue comme une force agissante sur la conscience du sujet

lyrique identifié comme un individu capable de vivre le sublime à travers des expériences esthétiques personnelles. Une autre caractérisation de cette approche du thème de l'infinité spatiale et temporelle est rendue possible par une nouvelle philosophie théorisée de la relation entre l'être humain et le temps sur un niveau transcendantal de l'existence humaine. Un élément caractérisant de l'existence humaine et sa relation avec l'espace et le temps est sa fonction de « transcendance ». L'être humain ne reste pas inactif devant les phénomènes qu'il observe, mais il tente de s'élever plus haut et d'en recevoir une compréhension holistique. Les versets de Feng Zhi transmettent cependant une perception du temps qui peut être comprise comme « anticipation temporelle » où la voix lyrique chinoise chante des éléments dans le temps, qui semblent être affectés par la prédestination.

Par ailleurs, concernant le thème de l'espace et du temps et leur perception imaginative dans les sonnets de Feng Zhi, il est possible d'établir des liens transtextuels entre les travaux et les élaborations philosophiques de Novalis, sa thèse de doctorat sur la poésie de Novalis et sa propre production lyrique. En fait, selon Feng Zhi, les écrits et la poésie de Novalis ressemblent à un monde où toutes les frontières sont floues, où toutes les fins sont liées et où tous les contraires sont réconciliés. Comme Feng continue, enthousiasmé par son premier amour à Mathilden, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, un poète lyrique moyen-allemand presque fictif, écrit: « toutes les distances sont si proches de moi, et le paysage riche est pour moi juste comme un fantasme intérieur ». L'interprétation de Feng Zhi et l'exemplification du problème de la réalité se réalisent à travers une approche pré-moderniste centrée sur les perceptions sensorielles acquises par le soi poétique à travers des expériences esthétiques et une adaptation des anciennes déductions ontologiques typiques de l'âge romantique.

Le concept implicite de distance que l'on trouve dans les premiers écrits et sonnets de Feng Zhi peut être identifié comme la portée transcendantale qui est nécessaire pour atteindre l'autre côté de la réalité et du monde terrestre. Il sert à relier les scènes naturelles représentées, créées à la fois dans l'esprit du sujet percevant et dans les lignes des sonnets, avec l'intériorité de l'artiste - la connexion ultime qui on désire établir entre les royaumes divisés de l'univers : le soi et le monde extérieur propre. Des objets naturels bien définis et tangibles, tels que les montagnes, l'eau, les

plaines et les chemins, personnifient au sens figuré l'effort spirituel intérieur inaltérable de l'artiste (Sehnsucht). Comme Feng Zhi l'explique, « le monde inconnu, mystique, infini est la quintessence de la nature, à laquelle Novalis aspire beaucoup [Sehnsucht] ». Il faut noter que c'est exactement ce qu'il essaie de transmettre à travers ses sonnets : la nature, dans sa quintessence et sa sublime manifestation, est perçue par la voix lyrique à travers des images de l'inconnu, du mysticisme et finalement d'infini. Le mysticisme de Feng Zhi et son désir de l'infini à travers la sublime qualité de la nature ressortent du sonnet 3, le poème dédié à l'eucalyptus. Par une apostrophe adressée à l'arbre, le poète commémore la sainteté de la nature en se déclarant également guidé par la magnificence de la plante. Dans le tercet du sonnet, le sujet lyrique souhaite que l'arbre soit « éternel » et exprime son désir de se dissoudre dans le sol sous ses racines et d'exister pour toujours.

Le sujet lyrique du sonnet 18 se retrouve avec un compagnon à l'intérieur d'une chambre inconnue, contemple la plaine qui s'étend à l'extérieur de la fenêtre et invite soudainement son amant à fermer les yeux et à imaginer la campagne à l'extérieur. Cet acte d'imagination romantique est ce qui permet au moi lyrique de transcender et de trouver son reflet auto-pénétrant dans la nature. Cette réflexion transcendantale et lumineuse se reflète ensuite dans leurs vies : « Ferme tes yeux ! Laisse que cette nuit intime et lieu inconnu tissent dans nos coffres : nos vies sont comme cette plaine ouverte à l'extérieur de la fenêtre. »

La distance spatiale chantée dans les sonnets de Feng Zhi représente une manière dont le poète peut exprimer et évoquer l'autre côté du monde terrestre. L'infini spatial et temporel permet au moi poétique de transcender la réalité et d'atteindre le domaine éthéré et ultra-terrestre. Dans le sonnet 16, le poète évoque le thème traditionnel du regard dans le lointain : « Nous nous levons sur le sommet de la haute montagne, fusion dans la distance infinie, se fondre dans l'immensité de la plaine devant nous, se dissoudre dans les chemins enchevêtrés des champs. » En outre, la nature semble inviter le moi poétique à s'unir à elle en suivant le souffle du vent ou des flots qui jaillissent de la montagne, pour enfin se dissoudre dans les « sentiers enchevêtrés des champs » et se mêler à la « vie de ceux qui les traversent ».

En outre, le motif de l'infini temporel et spatial, personnifié par la distance lointaine que le poète et toute l'humanité sont appelés à expérimenter dans la vie, est également caractérisé par le regard continu et nostalgique vers le passé. En fait, l'auteur fait référence à certaines figures illustres du passé qu'il commémore dans au moins quatre de ses sonnets et leur confère un destin spirituel immoral à travers sa créativité littéraire.

Les sonnets de Feng Zhi : solitude et collectivité

Le deuxième thème le plus récurrent est celui de la solitude et de sa projection dans la collectivité. Un état de solitude qui ne se réfère pas seulement au sens commun de l'isolement suscité par l'état d'être « seul », mais plutôt un sens qui englobe une dimension holistique perçue par le « moi » quand cela établit une relation avec le monde extérieur. Il est important de préciser que le thème de la solitude est aussi ce qui caractérise l'approche romantique prise dans les premiers écrits de Feng Zhi. D'autre part, quand il s'agit de la composition lyrique plus mature, le thème de la solitude et sa relation avec la collectivité est ce qui rattache de manière éclatante la poésie de Feng Zhi à la pensée de Rilke. Dans les sonnets de Feng Zhi, l'incapacité du moi solitaire lyrique à se joindre complètement et de façon permanente à un groupe en faisant partie intégrante est évoquée par diverses images, comme celle des ponts, des bateaux, des bras et des racines des arbres.

Pendant sa deuxième phase poétique, Feng Zhi commence à concevoir une nouvelle tendance vers une attitude énigmatique et existentialiste qui aborde la relation étroite et mutuelle entre l'individu et la communauté environnante. L'idée pré-moderniste de l'accomplissement de soi réalisée à travers la pleine réalisation esthétique de l'individu et de sa position au sein d'une communauté systématique caractérise la poésie et la forme pré-moderniste des sonnets. C'est au moyen de cette expérience esthétique que le soi poétique réussit à surmonter sa condition limitée de finitude et à atteindre un état d'infinité métaphysique qui pourrait calmer et atténuer l'état de solitude de la voix poétique. Cette expérience esthétique de l'accomplissement de soi chanté dans les sonnets conduit la voix poétique à une réalisation plus ferme de son monde intérieur et son rapport au monde extérieur. L'imagination et la réalisation du moi donnent un sentiment croissant de désir de

l'infini qui est atteint à travers une expérience métaphysique qui dépasse le niveau normal et physique.

Les petits insectes chantés dans le sonnet 1 sont loués pour avoir accompli le moment culminant de l'union qui ne peut se limiter ici à une simple intimité sexuelle. Le concept implicite d'union doit être étendu à la fusion métaphysique de deux corps ou plus en un système holistique. Cette exemplification de l'unité primordiale est aussi ce qui préfigure le salut de l'espèce dans son ensemble sur la course incessante du temps. La capacité d'établir des relations interpersonnelles conduit finalement les hommes à créer une unité qui les maintient stables jusqu'au dernier moment propice.

L'image de l'arbre dans son ensemble est l'épitomé de la solitude dans la poésie de Feng Zhi. Cela peut être mieux élucidé en considérant l'introduction de la préface de la traduction en chinois des *Lettres à un jeune poète* de Rilke [给一个青年诗人的十封]. C'est dans cette section que la voix poétique de Feng Zhi proclame officiellement sa vision de la solitude de l'humanité en affirmant que tout homme qui naît dans ce monde est solitaire et n'est qu'un autre arbre placé dans un jardin avec d'autres arbres dressés dans les rangs.

L'état de mélancolie et le sentiment inextinguible de solitude qui affectent particulièrement l'ère moderne et l'humanité sont représentés dans le sonnet 5 à travers une série d'analogies et d'allusions stylistiques. La ville de Venise devient ici une expression esthétique de la condition humaine : de nombreuses petites îles qui communiquent entre elles créent un ensemble, une agglomération et un collectif d'individus organisés. Les ponts qui sont créés et établis entre et parmi les îles représentent les relations interpersonnelles entre les individus et, en tant que tels, ne représentent que des connexions externes éphémères que le temps et d'autres événements inattendus sont voués à consommer. Les épouses construites pour relier les différentes îles de la lagune sont des allégories d'obligations sociales, culturelles et personnelles entre les gens. Ces ponts relient les îles, tout comme les bras humains relient les gens et sont susceptibles de garantir le bien-être et la prospérité de ces relations. Le poète ne nie pas la disposition naturelle de l'homme qui tente d'établir des liens effectifs de solidarité ou d'amitié. En effet, conscient de sa condition

d'individu, en tant qu'être distinct et fondamentalement indépendant des autres, le poète utilise des analogies et des images poétiques qui rappellent le besoin profond de l'homme de construire des relations interpersonnelles. Le sonnet 5 exprime donc la forme la plus simple et la plus concrète du contact humain à travers l'image des mains ou des bras qui s'étendent pour atteindre d'autres individus.

Finalement, il semble que Feng Zhi ait pris une autre notion d'union solitaire des écrits et des enseignements de Rilke et l'ait appliqué à ses propres sonnets : la forme mystifiée de l'« union » d'au moins deux personnes dans la plupart des sonnets de Feng Zhi se fait narrateur dans de nombreux sonnets. Néanmoins, si on devait reprendre la perspective philosophique de Rilke comme point de référence et clé de lecture démystifiante, une signification plus subtile du « nous » de Feng Zhi ne limiterait pas la lecture sémantique chinoise de *women* à une union complète de deux corps reliés en un seul nouvel être. En revanche, comme il ressort également de certains des sonnets, notamment le sonnet vénitien (sonnet 5), le pronom personnel pluriel chinois ferait référence, en réalité, à l'« union » de deux « êtres solitaires » qui partagent le même destin.

Les sonnets de Feng Zhi : permanence et mutabilité

Le troisième thème le plus récurrent est celui de la permanence et de la mutabilité. En effet, comme on peut le voir, le monde naturel représenté dans les sonnets subit un changement et un renouvellement constants. Les arbres sont représentés comme s'ils versaient leur écorce de façon saisonnière tandis que la cigale se libère de sa coquille de larve lorsqu'elle mue et le serpent se débarrasse de sa vieille peau. Un thème commun qui correspond également à la poésie de Rilke, Nietzsche et Goethe voit la métamorphose, le changement continu et le dépassement de toutes les faiblesses qui permettent l'achèvement de la vie. L'expérimentation de la métaphysique par le poète trouve ses racines à la fois dans la tradition classique chinoise, et plus précisément dans les écrits lyriques des dynasties Tang et Song, ainsi que dans sa réponse poétique à la modernité. Si la modernité par définition et par exemplification implique une rupture consciente et délimitée avec le passé suivie d'une redécouverte de nouveaux thèmes et idées pertinents à l'époque actuelle, Feng Zhi réussit une telle quête. En fait, il ne se limite pas à une simple exploitation des nouvelles tendances et émulations de formes et de styles étrangers, mais il réussit à combiner sa tentative de

changement moderniste avec certains aspects enrichissants de la tradition classique, surtout quand ceux-ci exaltent ou rappellent les besoins ou les désirs fondamentaux de l'humanité.

Étant conscients du pouvoir mutable qui affecte toute chose, seulement les objets familiers et les vieilles habitudes peuvent apporter réconfort et soulagement à l'homme — Feng Zhi montre clairement n'avoir trouvé aucune objection à cette position. Les sonnets évoquent à plusieurs reprises des objets familiers, des lieux, des routes et de vieilles habitudes qui, malgré l'action corruptrice du temps et de la mutabilité, apportent finalement stabilité, force et confort au moi lyrique. Le sujet poétique du sonnet 25, par exemple, passerait des journées entières avec quelqu'un d'autre, probablement son amant, tout en méditant sur des choses silencieuses et immobiles qui lui sont très familières : « Les objets sont mis sur la table, les livres sont disposés sur l'étagère, toute la journée, au milieu de choses silencieuses nous méditons constamment. »

En outre, Goethe comme Feng Zhi méditent également sur le changement imparable qui affecte le corps humain. Dans « Dauer im Wechsel », Goethe dépeint le doux mouvement des mains qui « montrent une nature différente », ou, comme traduit littéralement de l'allemand, « maintenant que tout est quelque chose d'autre » [Alles ist ein andres nun]. Avec une ligne très forte et décisive, Feng Zhi conclut le sonnet 26 en laissant son lecteur s'interroger sur le changement progressif de la peau et des cheveux de l'homme à l'approche de la mort : « Quand la mort arrive, caressez vos cheveux et votre peau en posant la question : À qui appartient ce corps ? »

Le changement n'est rien d'autre que la constante condition mutable de toute la création et la fin d'une étape ne représente que le commencement d'une nouvelle étape. Cette idée est également rendue dans les sonnets par l'image de la cigale en mue et de l'eucalyptus qui « change éternellement » d'écorce : « Toi, tu jettes éternellement ton écorce, flétris et manifeste ta maturité » (sonnet 3). En outre, il faut aussi noter que l'épithète « maturité » donnée à l'arbre rappelle l'enseignement de Novalis au monde des plantes, comme discuté dans la propre thèse de doctorat de Feng Zhi.

Les sonnets de Feng Zhi : la nuit et le thème de la mort

En raison de l'influence marquante exercée par la poésie de Rilke, l'élaboration par Feng Zhi des concepts de la nuit et de la mort passe d'une approche postromantique à une approche pré-moderniste. L'étude du thème de la nuit comme le pont de la transcendance va plus loin et au-delà de la construction mentale et spirituelle avancée par les Romantiques. L'enquête de Feng Zhi sur la question des relations interpersonnelles et la définition du moi portent l'exemplification lyrique de la nuit à un niveau supérieur. La nuit ne devient pas seulement le pont vers la transcendance durable, mais aussi le moyen d'expériences esthétiques. Comme on le voit particulièrement dans le sonnet 5, par exemple, dès que la nuit tombe, l'homme, évoqué à travers la métaphore d'une île, n'a d'autre choix que de se réconcilier avec son être intérieur, silencieux et solitaire.

L'arrivée de la nuit est un rituel qui introduit l'arrivée de la mort. Cette notion de transformation qui permet à l'individu d'entrer dans une nouvelle forme d'union avec l'entourage est ce qui a surtout agité le poète chinois moderne en composant le sonnet 18. Le sujet lyrique encourage son amant ou son lecteur à fermer les yeux et à établir une connexion métaphysique avec la nuit intime et la chambre inconnue afin que ceux-ci puissent devenir une partie du moi et puissent ensuite vivre la plénitude de la transcendance mystique. Le sujet poétique est en train de contempler les plaines qui s'étendent à l'extérieur de la fenêtre et est conscient de la force mystique de la nuit qui peut le réunir avec le paysage illimité.

En outre, comme la voix lyrique du sonnet 10, dédiée à Cai Yuanpei, le laisse entendre, c'est cette transition de l'aube au crépuscule et de la vie à la mort qui confère une renommée immortelle et une endurance éternelle à la vie du nom commémoré. Sur le plan temporel, au zénith de la nuit, la personne démise se mêle au ciel étoilé et brille comme un corps céleste inébranlable. L'image d'une étoile brillante, ici personnification de la propriété éternelle de la nature, est traditionnellement considérée comme un symbole de permanence dans la littérature occidentale. Cependant, ce que suggère Feng Zhi est un processus transcendantal qui se passe la nuit, au crépuscule de la vie, en laissant au corps humain terrestre de ne faire aucune différence parmi les autres corps lumineux du ciel.

On retrouve le même motif dans les vers finaux du sonnet 13 que Feng Zhi dédie à Goethe. La mort, servant de pont pour la métamorphose, se révèle être le sens secret et ultime de la vie. L'idée d'atteindre le zénith de la nuit pour transmuter et devenir un seul ensemble avec la nature amenée dans les sonnets de Feng Zhi peut être considérée comme l'achèvement d'un cycle éternel. Ce cycle perpétuel, que le poète chinois traite dans sa thèse, est tout d'abord rencontré dans la nature.

La nuit est également incommensurable, profonde et intangible dans son essence. Feng Zhi assimile l'essence de la nuit à celle de l'océan, qui, comme la nuit, s'étend aussi très loin et représente la manifestation d'une source mystique et poétique. Dans le sonnet 20, le poète donne clairement la preuve de cette équation philosophique : à travers la voix du sujet lyrique sage, il n'hésite pas à livrer des messages philosophiques profonds de l'union collective : « Mais beaucoup de vies sont liées ensemble, la fusion fleurit, fleurira-t-elle ? Qui peut mener sa propre vie dans une nuit sans limites semblable à l'océan ? »

L'état incontrôlable et particulier de l'eau et sa représentation à l'image de l'océan servent au poète à souligner l'instabilité des liens et des contacts humains. Dans le sonnet 7, par exemple, les hommes sont rassemblés en un amalgame et se transforment rapidement en de nombreux cours d'eau, chacun suivant un parcours individuel et indépendant. Il est alors possible de clarifier pourquoi la voix lyrique du sonnet 20 se pose une telle question ou la pose à son auditeur imaginaire : « Qui peut mener sa propre vie dans une nuit sans limites semblable à l'océan ? » Une clarification plausible serait que la vie de l'homme est conduite par son propre cours imprévisible et merveilleux de la même façon que la rivière coule sur son propre lit. La nuit, comme l'eau, ne peut être contenue ni conçue dans toute son essence par l'homme. Feng Zhi poétise l'eau en tant qu'élément naturel primordial et la nuit en tant que phénomène temporel dans leur essence impalpable et leur particularité. Dans le dernier sonnet du recueil, Feng Zhi réaffirme cette notion en accentuant l'impuissance de l'homme à contenir ce qui ne peut être contenu dans sa totalité : « D'une étendue informe de l'eau, un homme est venu remplir un vase ovale, donc, cela obtient maintenant une forme déterminée. »

Finalement, le poème de Feng Zhi qui reconnecte le plus vivement les idéaux romantiques chantés aussi par Novalis avec le rendu chinois moderne est le sonnet 22. Dans les termes de Novalis, la nuit est le début de rencontres mystiques et d'expériences qui peuvent être expliquées par la transcendance métaphysique. Le sonnet s'ouvre en annonçant et glorifiant l'essence de la nuit profonde aussi imposante qu'une montagne profonde. La force de la nuit est d'abord perçue par sa manifestation visuelle d'entraver et de cacher tout ce qui se trouve au-delà et en son sein. Le poète juxtapose des images proches et lointaines du sujet poétique et cherche à évoquer une sensation de nostalgie en les rappelant vivement dans la mémoire du moi lyrique : «Nuit profonde, une autre montagne profonde, le son de la pluie de la nuit tombant. Un village de montagne à dix miles, une place de marché à vingt miles de là ».

Le thème de la distance est souligné par la nuit qui brouille mystiquement toutes les frontières et les contours. La force puissante de la nuit instille un doute dans le sujet lyrique qui commence même à s'interroger sur l'existence des villages qui sont ou devraient être trouvés au-delà de la présence de la nuit engloutissante : «Est-ce qu'ils existent encore ? Montagnes et rivières d'il y a dix ans, illusions d'il y a vingt ans, le tout profondément immergé sous la pluie. » L'effet de bizutage mystique de la nuit sur les contours du paysage est même renforcé par l'effet qui s'estompe lentement sur les contours causés par le passage imparable du temps. La nuit, conçue comme un phénomène temporel, est accentuée par l'essence puissante du temps qui joue un rôle essentiel dans la définition des objets trouvés dans la mémoire du sujet lyrique. Le fonctionnement du temps et de la nuit, représentation phénoménale du temps, exerce le même effet d'usure sur la vision focale et la perception des objets qui se trouvent dans le monde intérieur et extérieur de la voix poétique. Une telle vision peut aussi être interprétée transculturellement à la lumière de ce que Novalis théorise dans *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, où la nuit permet le voyage de l'homme aux antipodes dans un monde « où tout est comme ici, sauf inversé par rapport au temps ».

Les traces de mysticisme orphique dans les sonnets de Feng Zhi

Bien qu'il ne soit explicitement mentionné dans aucun des poèmes de Feng Zhi, le concept significatif du mythe orphique, qui rappelle la poésie rilkéenne, a laissé des

marques indélébiles dans les sonnets en révélant une nouvelle clé de compréhension et d'appréciation des œuvres chinoises modernes évaluées dans ce travail. Les traces de ce concept prémoderniste influencent facilement d'autres thèmes trouvés dans la poésie de Feng Zhi qui ont été examinés précédemment. L'idée conceptualisée de l'infini et de la transcendance, par exemple, est aussi particulièrement évoquée par le motif orphique au moyen des caractéristiques métaphoriques d'un nouveau processus créatif idéalisé.

La quête héroïque d'Orphée, descendant dans le monde des enfers pour chercher sa bien-aimée Eurydice et la ramener au monde des vivants, explique aussi l'image symbolique du soi-disant « arbre orphique ». L'image de l'arbre est évoquée par sa caractéristique d'avoir des racines qui s'étendent sous le sol et qui descendent vers le bas. Le mythe orphique prouve l'influence considérable exercée par la poésie de Rilke sur Feng Zhi et par les expériences poétiques de l'auteur allemand. Feng Zhi avoue avoir acquis une expérience transcendantale lors de son étude à Heidelberg en 1935 en marchant dans les collines autour de la ville pendant il lisait un livre contenant les vers d'un poème de Jia Dao, poète de la dynastie Tang. Le poète orphique parvient à établir une relation entre le soi et l'environnement. Parallèlement à l'expérience transcendantale de Rilke, Feng Zhi semble avoir également ressenti et finalement compris l'expérience esthétique de l'existence de l'arbre au cours d'un moment très mystique et métaphysique d'interaction avec la nature. Le mythe orphique doit permettre à l'intérieur du sujet lyrique de rester en parfaite harmonie avec la nature et de capter le mouvement invisible des plantes.

L'ineffabilité du mythe orphique préfigure un sentiment croissant d'errance qui conduit le poète à l'accomplissement de son existence et l'attire dans l'infini inaccessible et inexprimable. Il y a beaucoup d'exemples dans les sonnets où l'espace infini à l'extérieur instille son propre esprit au sein du sujet poétique, établissant une relation quelque peu cohérente avec le sujet lyrique. La fusion du moi dans la nature n'est pas une simple assimilation où le moi originel perd sa propre identité, mais plutôt une situation où le moi s'aligne sur la nature et est capable de communiquer sur un pied d'égalité.

L'élément pré-moderniste de la production lyrique de Feng Zhi est centré sur l'expérimentation moderniste analogue de Rilke : la réalisation d'une humanité fragmentée. Les références constantes au passé dans les œuvres de Rilke et de Feng Zhi peuvent être interprétées comme la tentative des auteurs de récupérer la valeur expressive de ces traditions du passé et de les mêler en une nouvelle force. Le mythe orphique voit son héros mythique descendre dans le monde des morts pour sauver ce qui doit être ramené à la vie. Dans le cas de Feng Zhi, la référence à ce canal temporel et spatial est animée par différents éléments dans les sonnets, tels que celui de la voix chantante qui appelle le destin de l'homme à partir d'époques lointaines. Avec leurs visions et voix dans leurs cycles de sonnets, le nouvel Orphée de Rilke et les expériences esthétiques de Feng Zhi accomplissent une mission unique dans le monde moderne.

Par ailleurs, dans son sonnet 4, Feng Zhi exalte l'usine d'edelweiss qui s'accroche à son identité et vit une vie très courte. La brièveté est un thème partagé par les deux auteurs, tout comme l'idée de l'accomplissement du moi. En effet, Feng Zhi fait allusion à l'accomplissement du moi qui est accompli par la solitude juste comme l'accomplissement de la fleur est accompli par sa courte durée de vie.

Conclusion

Les chapitres qui composent cette étude ont singulièrement examiné les confluences transtextuelles et transculturelles ainsi que les interactions entre la littérature allemande et chinoise à l'époque moderne, particulièrement entre 1920 et 1940. La littérature occidentale, et en particulier les écrits romantiques, esthétiques et transcendentalistes allemands des dix-huitième et dix-neuvième siècles ont considérablement influencé la scène littéraire chinoise moderne ; et les écrits poétiques matures de Feng Zhi, traducteur et spécialiste des études allemandes, ont servi ici à élucider la mesure dans laquelle des éléments interculturels se sont conflués entre ces deux mondes littéraires.

L'objectif de ce travail séminal est d'explorer et de chercher à établir une relation entre la tendance poétique de Feng Zhi en tant que poète romantique, esthétique, métaphysique et narratif avec d'autres formes d'expression culturelle qui caractérisent l'activité poétique de certains écrivains allemands, rôle essentiel dans le

perfectionnement de l'éducation et de l'esprit artistique du jeune poète chinois. L'objectif de cette question était d'identifier la mesure dans laquelle on peut constater les traits communs et différenciants entre le mouvement culturel et artistique issu de l'Allemagne de la fin du XVIIIe siècle et son équivalent manifesté en Chine, et plus particulièrement dans la poésie, la philosophie et l'activité de Feng Zhi. Pour cela, les changements dans le temps et dans l'espace du mouvement littéraire du Romantisme et des écrits rilkiens matures, qui atteignirent et affectèrent la poétique de certains jeunes écrivains chinois du XXe siècle, jouèrent un rôle essentiel dans la réévaluation et redéfinition de l'activité lyrique de Feng Zhi.

Dans le cadre de cette étude, la thèse de Feng Zhi a été considérée comme l'une des principales sources d'interprétation d'une nouvelle analyse critique de sa poésie moderne. Des preuves transtextuelles substantielles entre les écrits chinois modernes et les sources allemandes, principalement celles liées au Romantisme, ont traversé l'interprétation critique du poète : cette compréhension et cette expérimentation personnelles trouvent leurs racines visibles dans son propre « cahier de formation » : sa thèse de doctorat. Des thèmes et des motifs poétiques, tels que le mode de pensée mystique, le chemin vers le moi intérieur et l'idéalisme, se répètent dans les sonnets avec des preuves transculturelles claires. Des termes qui sont toujours en opposition, tel que le jour et la nuit, la lumière et les ténèbres, l'esprit et le corps sont liés et construits à l'intérieur d'un anneau dans la poésie de Novalis et de Feng Zhi. Par exemple, le jour est lié à la nuit et la nuit est reliée au jour, ayant toutes les fins extrêmes connectées dans un cycle interminable. Feng Zhi utilise des images appartenant au monde naturel pour transmettre ce principe. Il fait également allusion au même concept bouddhiste de renaissance pour souligner le cycle infini de la nature. Le sonnet goethéen (sonnet 13), par exemple, se termine par un vers très énigmatique clairement tirée du répertoire poétique de Goethe : « Meurs et deviens ». Cela représente également l'une des preuves transtextuelles les plus frappantes et significatives de la poésie de Feng Zhi. De ce point de vue, le poète mystique affirme l'un des éléments fondamentaux de sa *Weltanschauung* poétique : la vie n'est que le début de la mort et la mort le commencement d'une nouvelle vie. À travers l'image de la cigale en train de muer, par exemple, qui laisse sa coquille dans la boue (sonnet 2), le poète chinois parvient à transmettre cette conscience fondamentale par des notes significatives : « Une voix chantante tombée du corps de la musique, seul corps

restand qui se transforme en une chaîne de montagnes sans voix. » Selon ce que Feng Zhi a analysé dans sa thèse, l'inspiration de la nature, l'imagerie dans le langage ainsi que la puissance de la nature avec son esprit propre à créer des analogies, qui construisent et soutiennent le style de Novalis, sont profondément enracinés dans l'idéalisme magique de Novalis et le Romantisme allemand.

L'idée pré-moderniste de l'accomplissement du moi réalisée à travers la pleine réalisation esthétique de l'individu et de sa position au sein d'une communauté systématique caractérise la poésie et l'expérimentation d'une forme moderniste dans les sonnets. C'est au moyen de cette expérience esthétique conforme aux enseignements de Rilke que le sujet poétique parvient à surmonter sa condition limitée de finitude et à atteindre un état d'infinité métaphysique apaisant et atténuant son état de solitude. Cette expérience esthétique de l'accomplissement du moi chanté dans les sonnets conduit le sujet poétique à une réalisation plus ferme de son être intérieur et comment cela se rapporte au monde extérieur. L'imagination et la réalisation de soi donnent un sentiment croissant de désir de l'infini, qui est atteint et éteint à travers une expérience métaphysique qui dépasse le niveau normal et physique. De plus, l'image holistique synecdotique de l'arbre est la quintessence de la solitude dans la poésie de Feng Zhi. Cela peut être mieux éclairé en considérant les lignes introductives de la préface du poète chinois à sa traduction chinoise des *Lettres à un jeune poète* de Rilke. Dans cette section, Feng Zhi déclare officiellement sa vision de la solitude de l'homme en soutenant que chaque homme né sur ce monde est solitaire : il est juste un autre arbre planté dans un jardin avec d'autres arbres alignés ; bien que les branches et les feuilles se conforment aux frondes d'autres arbres, les racines qui s'étendent sous la surface pour en tirer les nourritures sont indépendantes les unes des autres, silencieuses et solitaires.

Un autre motif des sonnets de Feng Zhi démystifié dans cette thèse tourne autour du concept de changement et de sa relation étroitement liée à la permanence. Le changement n'est rien d'autre que la condition mutable constante de toute la création et la fin d'une étape ne représente que le début d'une nouvelle. Cette idée est rendue dans les sonnets par l'image de la cigale mue et de l'eucalyptus « changeant éternellement » d'écorce : « Toi, tu jettes éternellement ton écorce flétrie, et manifestes ta maturité » (sonnet 3). Comme démontré, la poésie expérimentale de

Feng Zhi basée sur le concept de changement révèle une relation poétique claire avec la théorie de la mutabilité (ou métamorphose) de Goethe et son analogie avec l'ancien phénix égyptien qui renaît du feu et des cendres dans un être nouvellement généré et revigoré. Ce concept de résurrection du feu et de l'idée de mort à venir prend toute son importance pour la compréhension globale du sonnet goethéen de Feng Zhi (sonnet 13) et pour toutes les autres références dans les sonnets à l'idée de changement. La voix lyrique du sonnet 13, en fait, s'adresse à Goethe en affirmant que le poète allemand sait « pourquoi le papillon a volé dans la flamme » et « pourquoi le serpent a versé sa peau pour grandir ». Les lignes finales du sonnet sont très significatives, soutenant l'idée de mort à devenir et de résurrection : « Toutes les créatures vivantes profitent de vos paroles, révélant le vrai sens de la vie : “Meurs et deviens” ».

En outre, l'image de la nuit appréciée dans sonnets de Feng Zhi ne représente pas un simple phénomène astronomique qui contraste fortement avec le monde diurne, mais elle implique plutôt un domaine beaucoup plus large et profond qui est essentiel au sujet lyrique pour une réflexion introspective et transcendante, et pour une vision plus proche du propre être intérieur. L'étude du thème de la nuit comme pont de la transcendance va plus loin et dépasse la construction mentale et spirituelle avancée par les Romantiques. La nuit ne représente pas seulement le pont vers la transcendance durable, mais aussi le moyen d'expériences esthétiques. Comme on le voit particulièrement dans le sonnet 5, par exemple, dès que la nuit tombe, l'homme, évoqué à travers la métaphore d'une île, n'a d'autre choix que de se réconcilier avec son moi intérieur, silencieux et solitaire. En outre, l'idée conceptualisée de l'infini et de la transcendance est aussi particulièrement évoquée par le motif orphique à travers des caractéristiques métaphoriques d'un nouveau processus créatif idéalisé. Le poète orphique tente et réussit à établir une relation entre le moi intérieur et le monde qui l'entoure. Analogue à l'expérience transcendante de Rilke, qui, tout en s'inclinant contre l'arbre, sentait que la nature diffusait son esprit dans son corps, Feng Zhi pouvait aussi ressentir et finalement comprendre l'expérience esthétique de l'existence de la nature pendant une expérience transcendante et métaphysique.

Cette thèse a visé à mettre en lumière la créativité intellectuelle de Feng Zhi qui a capturé, comme les postromantiques, la sensualité, mais aussi une vision de la

réalité plutôt personnalisée qui fusionne le regard nostalgique romantique du poète ainsi qu'une vision moderne et novatrice. Cela exalte sans aucun doute l'originalité philosophique et littéraire de Feng Zhi. Cette poésie, riche de liens transtextuels avec la littérature allemande, cherche à relier divers domaines d'expérience suggérant un sentiment de totalité. Comme le poète Friedrich Schlegel l'a écrit : « la poésie romantique est une poésie universelle et progressive » ; et comme les résultats de ce travail le suggèrent, la redécouverte par Feng Zhi de la sensibilité de Novalis et de Rilke ne rend pas moins son expérience lyrique.

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