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On Poetic Discourses and Ways of Expression of 'Empty' and 'Silence' Categories in the Chinese Lyric Poetry of Six Dynasties (Liu Chao, III–VI A.D.) and Tang (VII–X) Epochs

Abstract

The written Chinese language has a broad scale of lexical meanings for articulating the 'empty' and 'silence' categories in all their essential aspects. The present study is limited to a discussion of the *kong* 空 cognitive term, in its single semantic case only, as 'empty' ('emptiness'), coinciding normally with 'silence' (ji 寂, jing 靜); and of two poetic scenarios, which can be roughly defined as 'dwelling in empty mountains' and 'dwelling in [an] empty chamber.' The first of these is most typical of Tang lyric poetry, especially the works of Wang Wei 王維 (ca 701–ca 761); the second, of poetry on amorous themes beginning with the individual verses of the second century A.D. In this paper I argue that in spite of all essential differences between these scenarios – one praising living alone as escaping from social existence, the other representing living alone as loneliness, i.e. having an utterly negative sense – both are grounded at bottom on ancient views of vision and audial perception. Their archetypal background is formed by the idea of spiritual movement, implying the 'cutting off' of sensory perception in favour of self-concentration, which leads to the sharpening of receptive faculties for gaining keener and keener perception of all external things. Above all, the 'empty' and 'silence' categories appear to universally express the abundance of one's surroundings and inner conditions, including mentality and feelings, which places these categories among the chief artistic techniques of Chinese lyric poetry.

Key words

China, lyric poetry, poetic means, sensory perception, audial, visual, 'empty,' 'silence,' spiritual movement, self-concentration, verses with eremitic motifs, verses on amorous themes, Taoism, Buddhism

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The written Chinese language has a broad scale of lexical meanings for articulating the ‘empty’ and ‘silence’ categories in all their essential facets. This study is limited to a discussion of the *kong* 空 cognitive term in its single semantic case as ‘empty’ (‘emptiness’), coinciding normally (Luo 1991: 409) with ‘silence’ (*ji* 寂, *jing* 靜); and of two poetic scenarios, which can be roughly defined as ‘dwelling in empty mountains’ and ‘dwelling in [an] empty chamber.’ In both, *kong* is applied, if considered in terms of the poetic surface, to spatial distinctions of the narration and to the entourage of the poem’s protagonist.

The motif of dwelling in *kong* mountains or another, more local, natural place, usually a forest (*lin* 林), is most typical of Tang lyric poetry, particularly of the works of Wang Wei 王維 (ca 701–ca 761). Among them, the most notable for this analysis is the famous ‘Lu zhai’ 鹿柴 (‘Deer Park’) poem, the fifth of twenty pentametric quatrains (*jueju* 絕句), grouped in the likewise very well-known *Wangchuan ji* 輞川集 (Wang River collection), created during the *Tianbao* 天寶 era (742–56)¹ and, as Wang’s preface explains,² on his Wangchuan country estate,³ each poem in a particular spot within the place. ‘Lu zhai’ reads:

空山不見人，但聞人語響。返景入深林，復照青苔上。

On the empty mountain, seeing no one, / Only hearing the echoes of someone’s voice; / Returning light enters the deep forest, / Again shining upon the green moss. (transl. by Richard W. Bodman & Victor H. Mair: Mair 2000: 92)

Upon first reading, the poem provides an impression of either linguistic or essential simplicity (insofar as the notion of ‘simple’ can generally be applied to Chinese poetry), giving the illusion that it is no more than a masterfully executed landscape miniature, reflecting, certainly, the poet’s mood (longing to be a recluse), and the perceptive specifics of his personal nature (including aesthetic insight), but lacking a true deep core

¹ On this period of Wang’s life, his internal conditions and creative activities see: Liu 2002: 73–85.

² The *Wangchuan ji* original text is presented in many Chinese editions, ongoing from the Chapter (*Juan* 卷) 128 from the *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (*Complete Tang Poems*) compendium, compelled at the beginning of 1700s by a numerous group of experts under the leadership of Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 (1645–1719), and several times republished in China, including: Peng 1999: II, 1300–1301.

³ In the foothills south of Changan 長安, the Tang imperial capital, at the place of modern Xian 西安 city, Shaanxi 陝西 province.

beneath its surface, along with any additional required expositions. (e.g. You 1981: II, 41) No wonder that it could have been published with only brief commentaries and explanations, or even entirely without, (e.g. Mair 2000: 92) or that it is sometimes taken merely as a sample of the formal (in terms of tonal patterns) and linguistic perfection of the Tang 'recent style' (*jin-ti* 近體) lyric poetry. (e.g. Liu 1962: 41; Yu 1985: 199) The apparent simplicity of 'Lu zhai' is one of several possible reasons it attracts translators. (Kroll 2001: 295) About 30 (or even more) alternative renditions have been published in English, French and other European languages.⁴ Under different titles ('Dear Enclosure,' 'Deer-Park Hermitage,' 'Deer Fence,' 'The Form of Deer,' etc.), and authored by scholars as well as professional poets, they vary from near-literal translations⁵ to variations on a theme.⁶

Over the past few decades, scholarly approaches to the poem have changed considerably in the direction of recognition of its semantic richness. Evaluations predominant in current Chinese⁷ and Western studies⁸ can be condensed into the following summary. First, the 'Lu zhai' poem is the most important from the Wang River collection and introduces us to some of the key modes of consciousness of the poet's entire oeuvre: emphasis on perceptual and cognitive limitations, transcendence of tempo-

⁴ The most concentrated amount of these renditions is given at: Weinberger & Paz 1987. On English translations of Wang's verses after 1980s see: Yu 2012: 91–92. There are also several renditions of 'Lu zhai' in Russian, made by A. Gitovich (1909–1966) and A. Shteinberg (1907–1984), in the first hand, published and republished in various editions, see: Sorokin 1986: 117–122.

⁵ E. g. 'On the empty mountains no one can be seen, / But human voices are heard to resound. / The reflected sunlight pierces the deep forest / And falls again upon the mossy ground.' (transl. by James J. Y. Liu: Liu 1962: 41)

⁶ E. g. 'Deep in the mountain wilderness / Where nobody ever comes / Only once in a great while / Something like the sound of a far off voice. / The low rays of the sun / Slip through the dark forest, / And gleam again on the shadowy moss.' ('Deep in the Mountain Wilderness', transl. by Kenneth Rexroth, 1905–1982, in: Weinberger & Paz 1987: 22)

⁷ On the Chinese studies since the 1980s of Wang's poetry and *Wangchuan ji* in concrete in the aspect of its philosophical implications and spiritual background see: Lü & Zhang 2003: II, 735–759.

⁸ The Western revisions of 'Lu zhai,' including arguments in favor of its Buddhist overtones (starting with connotations of its title with the name of the site near Benares where the Buddha preached his first sermon after becoming enlightened), are summarized best of all in: Yu 2012: 87–88.

ral and spatial distinctions, and a sense of the harmony of the individual and nature. Second, it links keenly observed and deceptively simple perceptions with far-ranging Buddhist, Chan-Buddhist (Buddhism's southern branch, *Nan-Chan zong* 南禪宗),⁹ and Taoist implications.¹⁰ Third, *kong* is the crucial word of the text, used by Wang in its Buddhist meaning as a translation of the Sanskrit word *śūnyatā*, a key term in Buddhist traditions, denoting the illusory or 'empty' nature of all reality and the ultimate reality; the word embodies natural 'silence' and 'emptiness.' Within Chinese scholarship the *kong shan* binome is also commonly recognised as representing the exterior of empty and silent mountains and forests (*kongji de shanlin* 空寂的山林: Tao 2004: 162); or a more composite picture of an evening landscape becoming immersed in darkness and silence after the sunset. (Liu, Tian and Wang 1988: 351) Thus we come to the question of the connotations of *kong* in terms of visual and audial perception, which deserves to be an item of special inquiry.

The idea of visual and audial perception as the basis for human sensitivity goes back to ancient (*Zhou* 周 epoch, ninth to third centuries B.C.) thought, where it is realised in two variant models related to Confucianism and Taoism. The first is offered in the frame of the theory of *wu shi* 五事: 'five personal matters,' (Legge 2004: II, 110) or 'Five Duties,' (Nylan 1992: 16) initially narrated by the *Hongfan* 洪範 (Great Plan) treatise, a chapter of the classical *Shujing* book (Documents, Book of History, or Book of Documents; also known as the *Shang shu*, Hallowed Documents). Current scholarship (reversing the traditional chronological order and challenging the authenticity of *Shujing* as a record of high antiquity¹¹) would date the compilation of *Hongfan* chapter roughly to the fourth century B.C. (Nylan 2001: 137)

The five personal matters spoken about in the *Hongfan's* Section 2 are: *mao* 貌, 'bodily demeanor'; *yan* 言, 'speech'; *shi* 視, 'seeing' or 'vision'; *ting*

⁹ On Southern Chan impact on Wang's poetry see, for example: Ge 1993: 240–241; Su 2007: 183–185.

¹⁰ The Taoist influence on Wang Wei and his woks, Taoist implications of *Wangchuan ji* and Taoist correlations of *kong* are mostly accurate argued in: Qiao & Chen 2000: I, 326–327.

¹¹ Tradition held that a divine Great Plan of governance was originally conferred by Heaven upon Xia (Great) Yu (Xia Yu 夏禹, Da Yu 大禹), the primeval flood-queller and founder of the Xia Dynasty; and then was passed on to King Wu (Wu-wang 武王), the Zhou founder, by Jizi 箕子, a wise uncle of the last king of Shang 商 state, who had been forced to join to the King Wu. (Nylon 2001: 139–140)

聽, 'hearing'; and *si* 思, 'thinking.' (Gu and Liu 2005: III, 1156) *Shi* and *ting* are associated respectively with *ming* 明, 'clearness ('clarity'), and *cong* 聰, 'distinctness' ('perceptiveness'), which produces, in its turn, a perceptible result in the man of virtue (a ruler), characterising his capabilities: *ming* makes for wisdom (*zhe* 哲), *cong* for deliberation (*muo* 謀).¹² A parallel is also constructed between these physical and personal resources (cognitive and sensory) and 'Five Agents' (*wu xing* 五行) or five natural resources of the state in that context (Nylan 2001: 140): 'water' (*shui* 水), 'fire' (*huo* 火), 'wood' (*mu* 木), 'metal' (*jin* 金), and 'earth' (*tu* 土), listed exactly in that order in section 1. 'Seeing' is placed so as to correspond with 'fire,' 'hearing' with 'water.'¹³ Thus, human sensory perception appears to be in harmony with natural forces and cosmic patterns. Yet, proceeding as it does from *Hongfan's* broad-spectrum aim of fashioning a model of ideal kingship, (Nylan 2001: 141–2) the *wu shi* theory is frequently considered merely in terms of its connections with social order and governmental affairs.

The Taoist model of visual and audial perception is expressed best of all in Chapter 8, 'Pianmu' 駢拇 ('Webbed Toes' or 'Joined Toes') of *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (*Master Zhuang*) attributed to the half-legendary thinker Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (fourth to third centuries B.C.) As *Zhuangzi* says (Guo 1988: 148):

吾所謂聰者，非謂其聞彼也。自聞而已矣。吾所謂明者，非謂其見彼也。自見而已矣。

What would I call 'keen of hearing' does not refer to what is heard, but self-perception. What I would call 'keen of sight' does not refer to what is seen, but a keen insight.' (transl. by Wang Rongpei: Qin & Sun & Wang 1999: 133)¹⁴

¹² 'Demeanor is characterized by respect. Speech is characterized by compliance. Sight is characterized by clarity. Hearing is characterized by perceptiveness. Thought is characterized by capaciousness. Respect makes for gravity. Compliance makes for orderliness. Clarity makes for wisdom. Perceptiveness makes for deliberation. Capaciousness makes for sageliness.' (Nylon 1992: 16)

¹³ Afterwards there came into being another renders of 'Five Agents,' due to what the pointed connotations also changed. (Gu & Liu 2005: III, 1158)

¹⁴ The cited passage also has several renditions, beginning with the translation of James Legg (1815–1864): 'When I pronounce men to be quick in hearing, I don't mean that they hearken to anything else, but they hearken to themselves; when I pronounce them to be clear of vision, I do not mean that they look to anything else, but they look of themselves.' (Legg 1970: I, 274) Or: 'What I speak of good hearing, I don't mean listening to others, I mean simply listening to yourself. When I speak of good eyesight, I don't mean looking at others; I mean simply looking at yourself.' (Watson 1968: 103) Or: 'What I mean by calling a person "keen of hearing," does not refer to her hearing

Keen vision and hearing are obviously assumed by the *Zhuangzi* to be maintained by paying attention to one's inner self instead of becoming subservient to external qualities. (Mair 1994: 72) Thus it is quite correct, in the primary approach to the problem, to assume a diametrical opposition between the Confucian and Taoist models, one being of an extroverted type among instruments of the state, the other entirely focused on self-reflection.

It must be kept in mind, however, that, on one hand, the hedonist strand in the *Zhuangzi* has, along with its underlying idea ('what is good for me is good for the universe'), this reasoning behind it: if the individual is part of *dao*, then whatever he or she feels and wants is also part of *dao*, and therefore all one's personal desires are expressions of the greater cosmic goodness and must be satisfied without fail. (Kohn 2009: 37) This leads to the idea of self-reflection as gaining spiritual potential for knowing the patterns of *dao* and adapting to its rhythms. On the other hand, the Confucian thinkers also work with the conception of self-cultivation, which implies a self-reflective understanding of the self for making a choice in regard to a goal or a vision. (Cheng 2004: 125) Emphasising the importance of self-cultivation, they ascribe, first, this capacity for self-reflection to the heart-mind (*xin* 心), assigning it a guiding role. And, second, the process of constantly reflecting on and examining oneself was aimed at bringing about primary ethical improvements in oneself. (Shun 2004: 187) Regarded from the paradigm of the heart-mind and ethical self-cultivation, sensory perception could only lose the relevance attached to it by the *wu shi* theory, as stated by Confucius's idea of three levels of 'listening': with the ears, with the heart-mind, and with the *qi* 氣 (inner substance). 'It is better to listen with your heart-mind than to listen with your ears, but better still to listen with your *qi* than to listen with your heart-mind. Listening stops with the ears.' (Slingerland 2003: 182–183) This notion can be reduced to the basic statement that one who follows the heart-mind is a great person, while one who follows his (or her) sense organs is a petty person (*xiao-ren* 小人). (Taylor 2005: I, 236–237)

While differing seriously regarding the mechanism of the self-reflecting process, the Confucian and Taoist views on self-reflection neverthe-

anything else, but only to her hearing herself. What I mean by calling a person "keen sighted," does not refer to her seeing anything else, but only to her seeing herself.' (Mair 1994: 79)

less have more in common than not in designating the strategy of spiritual movement: reflecting on and examining oneself in order to (to summarise the above) improve one's personal abilities and obtain perfection in understanding external things, even, in this case, the social order or cosmic patterns. This strategic scheme, joined with the ideas of sensory perception, crystallised as in *Zhuangzi* as the *wu shi* theory (emphasising precisely vision and hearing), was theorised and transferred to poetic creative activities by Lu Ji 陸機 (261–303) in his *Wenfu* 文賦 (The Art of Writing, or, The Poetic Exposition on Literature, or, Rhapsody on Literature) rhapsody, one of the germs of Liu Chao rhyming prose (Xiao 1959: I, 345–56)¹⁵ and among the most important works, as is widely known, in the field of the literary mind.

The second section of *Wenfu*'s main (following the Preface) text or the 'Process' section (Fang 1974: 8) opens with the following passage:

其始也，皆收視反聽。耽思傍訊，精驚八極。心游萬仞。(Lines 15–18)

Thus it begins: retraction of vision, revision of listening, / Absorbed in thought, seeking all around, / My essence is galloping to the world's eight bounds, / My mind roaming ten thousand yards, up and down. (transl. by Steven Owen: Owen 1992: 96)

There is no question of determinative position in these phrasings of the *shou shi*, 'retraction of vision,' and *fan ting*, 'revision of listening' binomes, which are used, in accordance with the commentaries of interpreters, in the sense of 'not seeing and hearing' (*bu shu ting* 不視反聽, Xiao 1959: I, 350); and which mean, according to Steven Owen's observations, (Owen 1992: 96–7) not a vacuity achieved by 'cutting off' the senses, but rather a true 'inversion' of the senses – looking and listening within the microcosm of the self. One of the sources of the *shou shi* and *fang ting* phrasing cited by commentators is a passage from *Shiji* (Historical Records): 'Reversing of listening is called quickness of mind, internalised vision is called understanding.' (Owen 1992: 97) Consequently, the main goal of spiritual concentration by looking at and seeing oneself is not

¹⁵ Four its English renditions are verse to mention, authored by Ernest Richard Hughes, 1883–1956, (Hughes 1951) Sam Hamill, (Hamill 1987) David R. Knechtges, (Knechtges 1996: 211–232) and Steven Owen, (Owen 1992: 76–181) the latter one is mostly close to the original version and notable for additional comments and clarifications. Translation and on it in Russian see: Alekseev 2002: I, 367–376.

self-examination as such, but once again the sharpening of receptive faculties in order to gain keener and keener perception of all external things, which, in my opinion, is strongly confirmed by another passage of *Wenfu*, this time from the concluding sections of the work:

思風發於胸臆. 言泉流於唇齒. 紛葳蕤以駭速. 唯毫素之所擬. 文徽徽以溢目. 音泠泠以盈耳. (Lines 229–234)

Winds of thought rise in the breast, / A stream of words flows through lips and teeth, / Burgeoning in tumultuous succession, / Something only the writing brush and silk can imitate. / Writing gleams, overflow the eyes, / The tones splash on, filling the ears. (Owen1992: 175)

Beginning with the ‘cutting off’ of sensory perceptions, the spiritual movement ends with the triumph of vision and hearing; the last two lines could be understood as referring not only to written patterns (*wen* 文) and poetic tones (*yin* 音), but all outward patterns and sounds, the idea expressed in Sam Hamill’s rendition of *Wenfu*: ‘Every eye knows a pattern, every ear hears a distant music.’ (Hamill 1987: 26) It is hard not to agree also with Patrick Laude’s remark on Lu’s theoretic assembly as a kind of ontological participation in the whole of reality by means of concentration on its Mysterious Centre. (Laude 2005: 95)

The next point to be discussed involves possible methods of not-seeing and not-hearing. One of them is described by Ly Ji: the *shou shi* binome, from a physiological point of view, can mean nothing but how to close one’s eyes. Let us refer once again to Hamill’s rendition: ‘Eyes closed, he hears an inner music.’ (Hamill 1987: 11) Another method comes from the *Jiude song* 酒德頌 (Ode to the Virtue of Wine, Xiao 1959, II: 1034–35) by Liu Ling 劉伶 (ca 225–ca 280), the text on drinking as major vehicle for the Great Man (*Da-ren* 大人). Picking up on the *Zhuangzi* metaphor of a drunken man (immersed in utter forgetfulness, he did not know he was riding, he does not know he has fallen), Liu Ling takes it literally when picturing his hedonistically inspired ideal, that is, the happy-go-lucky immortal, with a wine flask or gourd, who has in his own way found ease in perfect happiness. (Kohn 2009: 45)¹⁶ With the help of wine, the latter

¹⁶ ‘He takes Heaven and Earth as a single morning, / A thousand years as one short moment. / The sun and the moon are windows for him, / The Eight Wilds are his garden... / Stopping, he grasps his wine-cup and maintains his goblet; / Moving, he carries a casket and holds a jar in his hand. / His only obligation is toward wine, / And of this he knows abundance.’ (Kohn 2009: 46) On Liu’s work see also: Xu 1999: 168–169; transl. and on

obtains a kind of ecstatic, or, better yet, mystical inner condition, leading, along with perfect happiness, to physical insensitivity to any external factor (heat, cold), and loss of audial and vision perception in its profane nous:

靜聽不聞雷霆之聲, 熟視不都泰山之形. (Lines 32–33)

[His ability of] listening [is so] calm, that [he] does not hear sounds of thunderstorm. / [His ability of] vision [is so] skilled, that does not see the [gigantic] form of the Mount Tai.

Whether caused by ‘closing eyes’ or ecstatic ‘not-seeking’ and ‘not-hearing,’ such artificial deafness means nothing more than one who is as if enclosed by silence and emptiness, which leads us directly to its equivalence with *kong*.

Thus, there are reasons enough to suggest that the ‘case of dwelling in empty mountains’ aroused in its bottom from the Chinese ancients, crystallised primarily within Taoist thought, is a model of spiritual movement allied with the ideas of sensory perception. It is quite apparent also that the strategic scheme of self-perfection it suggests is more suitable than any kind of meditation process. If so, then logically one might assume that poetic scenarios with *kong* must be influenced in some way by works belonging to thematic poetic mainstreams derived from Taoism, i.e. lyric poetry with philosophical overtones and inspired by Taoist religious motifs. Both mainstreams flourished during the third and fourth centuries A.D. and are embodied in a large number of texts of various titles and essences, the most representative of which are the *zhaoyin* 招隱 (summoning a recluse) and *youxian* 遊仙 (wandering immortals or roaming into immortality) categorical groups, arranged by a set of verses, ordinarily titled, respectively, *Zhaoyin shi* 招隱詩 (Summoning a recluse) and *Youxian shi* 遊仙詩 (Wandering immortals). (Kravtsova 2011: 186–7) But none of these works, best exemplified by the poems of such men of literature as Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232), Guo Pu 郭璞 (276–324), Lu Ji, Zhang Hua 張華 (232–300), and Zuo Si 左思 (ca 250–ca 305), deals with the ‘*kong* mountain’ subject or any of its separate details. The only explanation for this, in my opinion, is that the above-mentioned groups, though focussed on eremitic motifs, were intended to highlight the magnificent and weirdness of nature rather than to speak of one’s self-perfection. Thus they present descriptions of land-

it in Russian: Alekseev 2006: I, 200–221; Menshikov 2007: 71–73; Titarenko 2008: 347.

scapes, whether natural or with a scent of mystery, saturated by various pictorial details, while devoting no space to silence or emptiness.¹⁷

Apparently the 'kong mountain' scenario came into being under Buddhist influence, perhaps primarily in connection with Buddhist meditative practices instead of the *śūnyatā* concept. These assumptions are based on *Guo Juxishan fan ceng* 過瞿溪山飯僧 (When Passing by Mount Juxig, Give Alms to a Buddhist monk) by Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), one of the first Chinese lyric pieces on Buddhist themes authored not by a poet-monk but by a lay believer (*upāsaka*).¹⁸ It contains the following passage (Huang 1958: 40):

清霄浮颺煙。空林響法鼓。忘懷狎鷗鱗。攝生馴兕虎。(Lines 9–12)

Light smoke drifts windborne on the pure air, / Through the empty forest echoes the Drum of Law. / They tame seagulls and wishes by forgetting their minds. / Daunt rhinoceros and tiger by holding firmly on life.¹⁹ (transl. by J. D. Frodsham: Frodsham 1967a: 127)

The cited passage not only anticipates Wang's 'Lu zhai' poem in its quintessence and vocabulary, but establishes the overall composition of the 'kong scenario': being in a 'kong situation,' possibly real (a silent and empty place in the bosom of nature), or possibly artificial (by 'cutting off' the impact of external factors), achieving a moment of self-concentration to the extent that one is able to perceive something previously enigmatic, and gaining certain spiritual values. It is also noteworthy that in both Xie's

¹⁷ E. g. '...The hidden man lives deep in the valley... / Light branches there seem to form a cloud-reaching palace, / And dense leaves, a canopy of kingfisher plumes. / Clear sounds haunt the orchid-filled forests; / Sweet-smelling odors hover the splendid trees. / How the mountain brooks gurgle / As the gushing fountains rinse the singing jade-like!...' (Lu Ji, *Zhaoyin shi*: Lu 1983: I, 689–690; transl. by Donald Holzman, Holzman 1996: 114–115) And: 'I built my hut upon the Eastern mountains, / Where nut fall down and grow into hazel-trees... / Among these fresh and brilliant blues and emeralds, / Bamboo and cypress realize their true nature. / Their tender leaves are hung with frost and snow, / But from their soaring verdure water drips...' (Zuo Si, *Zhaoyin shi*: Lu 1983: I, 735; transl. by J. D. Frodsham, Frodsham 1967a: 95)

¹⁸ The formative stage of by the poetry with Buddhist overtones corresponds with the Eastern Jin (*Dong Jin* 東晉, 317–420) and is marked by literary activities of the Buddhist priesthood. The most active was Zhi Dun 支盾 (Zhi Dao-lin 支道林 314–366), to whom 18 poems are attributed. (Lu 1983: I, 1077–1083; transl. and on it: Xu 1999, 558–559; Frodsham 1967: I, 86–105)

¹⁹ Both phrasings come from the Taoist lexical figures and metaphors standing for the Taoist virtues, but applied by Xie to Buddhist monks. (Frodsham 1967a: 127–128)

and Wang's texts the transitive flash is marked by a distant sound, *xiang* 響, originating, respectively, from a musical instrument (though this could be a metaphor for 'sounds of Teaching') and from some human voices. Then why not assume that 'the echoes of someone's voice' phrasing, besides signifying that other people are actually present on the mountain at some distance, contains an implicit allusion again to the Buddhist authenticities or symbols: the voices of monks, from a monastery hidden in the mountains, for instance, or the metaphor of sounds engendering faith in the Teaching?

One more remark applies to the specifics of 'silence' (*jijing* 寂靜) as expressed by Wang Wei's landscape verses related to the '*kong* scenario.' Its main quality, also pointed out by Chinese scholars, (Ge 1993: 190) consists of never being absolute, as in 'silence without sounds' (*jijing wu sheng* 寂靜無聲), but full of various auidal images like birds' voices and flowing noises, sounds of spring or autumn rain, or echoes of a stream. It is suggested that this inner richness of 'natural silence' is a result of 'keen listening to the world,' (Liu, Jun and Wang 1988: 353) which completely corresponds to the spiritual movement scheme, its mode coming from ancient thought and the Six Dynasties literary mind. Ithaca, as 'Lu zhai' in concrete as Wang Wei's verses in a similar spirit, all have much more complicated ideological and artistic origins than those derived from the pure Buddhist and Taoist concepts, and accumulate the entire native intellectual and creative experience.

Most intriguing is that the *kong* category, accompanied by ideas of visual and auidal perception, was rather actively employed by poetry on amorous themes, which would seemingly keep its distance from any theoretical constructions. This refers to the case of 'dwelling in [an] empty chamber.'

The new '*kong* scenario' also coincides with two general images, of an 'empty chamber' (room, *kong fang* 空房) or 'apartment' (*kong shi* 空室) and of an 'empty bed' (*kong chuang* 空床), marking again a general spatial configuration and its local microcosm, placing these images in a semantic parallel with those of 'empty mountains' and 'empty forest.'

Within the massive corpus of individual lyric poetry (*shi* 詩), this motif originates from three poetic epistyles by Qin Jia 秦嘉 (second century A.D.) to his wife, known as *Zeng fu shi* 贈婦詩 (To My Wife) and considered one of the first works in this area. (Xu 2001: 23–4, also in: Lu 1983: I, 186–7; You 1981: I, 180; transl.: Birrell 1982: 45–6) Coverage images are used twice in this loop:

獨坐空房中，誰與相勸勉。長夜不能眠，伏枕獨展轉 (Poem 1, lines 11–14)

[I am] sitting alone in empty [bed]room / With whom to talk and consult? / Long night cannot sleep / Leaning on pillow, alone toss and turn [on bed]

And:

顧看空室中, 髣髴想姿形。一別懷萬恨, 起坐為不寧 (Poem 3, lines 5–8)

Turning around, [I am] observing empty apartment / [As if] looking in distance, imagine [your] face and appearance / Once parted, have fostered ten thousand misgivings, / Get up, sit [again], not able to calm down.

The cited passages look quite different from all other kinds of poetic pieces on reclusiveness and landscape details and lack any observable traces of the impact of certain concepts. Nevertheless, a person's love-caresses are pictured in a way that has much in common with the spiritual pavement scheme. It is precisely the '*kong* situation' that makes him concentrate on his self-experience and feelings of love in this state of affairs, because his sensory perception is sharpened through the imaginary vision of his distant beloved.

The next example of this type comes from the *Wei Guan Yanxian zeng fu wang fan si shou* 為觀彥先贈婦往反四首 (Four Epistles, Sent by Guan Yanxian to his Wife and Written by Her in Answer) by Lu Yun 陸 (262–303), an imitation of spousal epistles. (Xu 2001: 86–88; also in: Lu 1983: I, 717–718; transl.: Birrell 1986: 94; transl. and discussed in Russian sources: Kravtsova 2004: 168–70; Titarenko 2008: 342) The '*Kong* situation' is embodied there in the rather rare lexical formula *kong jin* 空襟 ('empty garments'), strengthened by the word *du* 獨 ('alone'):

目相清惠姿, 耳在淑媚音。獨床多遠念, 寤言撫空襟 (Poem 1, lines 5–8)

Before [my] eyes is [still you, so] perfect and charming, / In [my] ears [your voice is still] sound, [so] gentle and enchanting. / Sleeping alone, in [my] dreams [I am always] going far away [to you], / When awake, [start to] speak [to you], stroking empty garments.

Moreover, the '*kong* situation' greatly intensifies one's awareness of external phenomena and natural patterns, including the rapid passage of time as exemplified by the *Daowang* 悼亡 (Bereavement or Lament for a Dead Wife) of Pan Yue 潘岳 (247–300), arranged in three separate stanzas. (Xiao 1959: I, 500–2; also in: Xu 2001: 69–70; Lu 1983: I, 635–636; transl. by Birrell 1986: 83, Frodsham 1967; 86–88; transl. and discussed in Russian sources: Kravtsova 2004: 172–178; Titarenko 2008: 380)

皎皎窗中月，照我室南端。清商應秋至，暑暑隨節闌。凜凜涼風升，始覺夏衾單。豈曰無重纊，誰與同歲寒。歲寒無與同，朗月何朧朧。展轉晒枕席，長簾竟床空。床空委清塵，室虛來北風 (Poem 2, lines 1-12)

So bright the moon in the window, / Shines upon the southern end of my room. / Pure *shang* [sounds] responds to arriving of autumn, / The damp head fades away following ending of the [summer] season. / Cold gust of cold wind, / Makes me realize summer guilt to thin. / [But] to whom [I can now] say, that lack padded quilt? / With whom shall spent the winter frost? / [During] the winter frost [days] there'll be no one with me, / Bright moon can be closed by haze, [but then will be bright again]. / Tossing and turning, [I] stare at [her] pillow and mat, / Long canopy closes the bed, which should remain empty. / Empty bed will be covered by untainted dust, / [My] chamber broke into a gust of northern wind.

Do not the initial lines of this passage resemble, in some portion of their details, the nature pictures typical of landscape poetry or poetry with eremitic motifs? Yet there is a clear and unequivocal line separating the 'kong scenarios.' The fundamental distinction between the two is that 'dwelling in empty mountains' has an absolute positive implication praising living alone as escaping from social existence, whereas the case of 'dwelling in [an] empty chamber' stands for living alone in an utterly negative sense. Such double meanings are found in all other poetical footings associated with *kong*, beginning with 'silence' (in all its lexical presentations) and 'alone' (*du* 獨, *gu* 孤), terms which, in the case of living alone as escape, are used for strengthening one's apartness from other people; and in the case of living alone as loneliness, as one's solitude. Let me refer to one more textual example, a second poem from Zhang Hua's *Qinshi wushou* (Five Poems on Love-emotion or Emotion) set (Xu 2001: 65-66):

明月曜清景。朧光照玄墀。幽人守靜夜。迴身入空帷。(Lines 1-4)

The bright moon shimmers with clear rays, / Soaring light shines on a dark porch. / A secluded person keeps still night vigil, / Turns and enters empty bedcurtains (transl. by Anne Birrell: Birrell 1986: 79)

The main criteria for this difference and for recognising the meaning of *kong* and its attendant vocabulary in each concrete case derive not from the poetic experience, but from the opposition between free action and random action. When caused by the choice of a human being, living alone turns out to be affirmative in all its aspects; when caused by external circumstances, it transforms through contrast.

My analytical outline of the ‘dwelling in empty mountains’ and ‘dwelling in [an] empty chamber’ poetic scenarios affords an opportunity to draw a set of primary conclusions. First, the poetic discourses of the ‘empty’ and ‘silence’ categories are centred on the views of sensory (visual and aural) perception. Their archetypal background is formed by the ideas of spiritual movement, implying the ‘cutting off’ of sensory perception for self-concentration, which leads to the sharpening of receptive faculties for gaining keener and keener perception of all external things. Second, this scheme was realised within poetic practice in two general modes, determined again by reasons external to creative activity. If caused by human choice, remaining in ‘emptiness and silence’ stands for reclusiveness and self-perfection. If caused by a random action, the same situation leads to solitude in its absolutely negative implications. Third, having principally altered semantics, the ‘empty’ and ‘silence’ categories appear to express universally the great abundance of one’s surroundings and inner conditions, including mentality and feelings, which put them among the chief artistic means of Chinese lyric poetry.

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