

# Travels of a Culture: Chinese Poetry and the European Imagination<sup>1</sup>

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THE TOPIC of classical Chinese poetry resonates in interesting ways with the time-honored mission of the American Philosophical Society. Like its Western lyric counterpart, Chinese poetry was regarded as an important means of individual self-expression, but it also served as “useful knowledge” and as an important index of a person’s likely utility in the public sphere. For centuries at a time over the past millennium poetic composition was therefore tested on the most difficult civil service examination that would qualify scholars for the most prestigious career in premodern China, the government bureaucracy. And the early history of literary translation of poetry from Chinese into European languages raises equally fascinating questions about the production and transmission of knowledge that remain provocative today. Almost forgotten in that story, however, is the role played by a young Frenchwoman named Judith Gautier (1845–1917).

In 1867 Gautier published a volume of renditions of Chinese poetry into French entitled *Le Livre de jade*. It has gone through at least five subsequent editions or reprintings (most recently in 2004) and has been translated into numerous other languages—German, English, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Polish, and Russian—not to speak of retranslations in French. Although opinions have varied significantly regarding the fidelity and quality of her translations, and, of course, about whether fidelity and quality have anything to do with one another, there is no question about the far-reaching influence they exerted. Indeed, for more than half a century her volume—described by Kenneth Rexroth as “that minor classic of French letters”—served, both directly and indirectly, as the general European public’s primary access to Chinese

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poetry.<sup>2</sup> That this can be said of a work produced by a twenty-two-year-old woman, a genuine amateur, constitutes a remarkable tale of literary influence.

For a partial explanation of this remarkable phenomenon we must seek not “la femme,” but rather “le père.” Judith Gautier was the daughter of the celebrated writer Théophile Gautier (1811–1872), who sat at the hub of mid-nineteenth-century French letters and has been singled out as the first in that milieu to develop an interest in things Chinese. His most significant contribution to shaping his daughter’s future activities occurred in 1863, when he engaged a Chinese gentleman known as Ding Dunling 丁敦齡 (?1830–1886) as tutor for Judith and her younger sister, Estelle.<sup>3</sup>

Multiple stories accounting for Monsieur Ding’s appearance in Paris circulated, but it is most likely that he had been brought to France to work on a French-Chinese dictionary and found himself suddenly without means when his patron died in 1862. Informed of Ding’s predicament, Théophile Gautier initially offered to send him back to China, a proposition the refugee rejected as likely to lead to his certain execution—he had perhaps been implicated in the Taiping rebellion<sup>4</sup>—at which point the poet offered him employment. Both of his daughters studied with Ding for several years, with Judith, who was eighteen when they began, the more enthusiastic and diligent student of the two. Encouraged by her father to “unwind this yellow man and see what lies hidden in his mysterious brain,”<sup>5</sup> no sooner had she begun to “stammer Chinese” (as a friend later recalled) than she determined to undertake “the most difficult task, the most impossible task, which made the most informed Sinologists flinch: the task of translating the untranslatable Chinese poets.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Muriel Détrie, “Translation and Reception of Chinese Poetry in the West,” *Tamkang Review* 22.1–4 (Fall 1991): 52. This is true although print runs of the book itself appear to have been rather limited in number, with some editions, often beautifully illustrated, clearly intended primarily for the collector’s market. Only 125 copies, for example, were printed of the exquisite *Album de poèmes tirés du Livre de jade* (London: The Eragny Press, Hammer-smith, 1911). Rexroth’s comment appears in “The Influence of French Poetry on American,” *World Outside the Window: The Selected Essays of Kenneth Rexroth* (New York: New Directions, 1987), 146.

<sup>3</sup> For the most informative account of the man who was known as “Théophile Gautier’s ‘Chinaman,’” see Stephan von Minden, “Une expérience d’exotisme vécu: ‘le Chinois de Théophile Gautier,’” *L’Orient de Théophile Gautier: Bulletin de la Société Théophile Gautier* 12 (1990): 35–54.

<sup>4</sup> See Muriel Détrie, “*Le Livre de jade* de Judith Gautier: un Livre pionnier,” *Revue de littérature comparée* 633.3 (1989): 305n1.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Gautier, *Le Second rang du collier: Souvenirs littéraires* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999), 163.

<sup>6</sup> Cited by Joanna Richardson, *Judith Gautier: A Biography* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987), 25.

The next four years were busy ones for both of them, with almost daily lessons and then frequent trips to the Bibliothèque Impériale to copy out texts from the Chinese manuscripts in its possession. And in 1867 Gautier's *Book of Jade* appeared, issued by the innovative publisher Alphonse Lemerre and dedicated to her tutor, "Tin-Tun-ling, Chinese poet."

Very little Chinese poetry had been translated into French—or any European language—at this point. Missionary attention had primarily focused on Chinese history, philosophy, and science, and the vast eighteenth-century Jesuit compilations of translated texts from China contained but a handful of poems, included largely for ethnographic interest and interspersed, as one scholar has put it, "between notices and letters dealing with miscellaneous subjects such as the life of bees or the beneficial properties of rhubarb."<sup>7</sup> Among other reasons, the task was regarded as simply too daunting—it did in fact, as Gautier put it, make the "Sinologists flinch." The accomplished scholar Abel Rémusat, who produced the first French grammar of Chinese in 1822, flatly despaired, "Chinese poetry is truly untranslatable, and one could perhaps add that it's often unintelligible."<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps in light of these challenges, the seventy-one poems in the 1867 edition of the *Book of Jade* were, according to Gautier's memoirs, only tentatively presented as based on Chinese originals. More confident by 1902, she added more poems and corrected her translations "ruthlessly," and the title to later editions was changed to make this explicit: *Poésies traduites du chinois par Judith Gautier*. She even added Chinese characters next to the names of each poet, but these were deleted in 1908 when it became clear that many of the attributions were shaky or their representation flawed (the characters for the well-known Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 [712–770], for example, were printed upside down on one page).

Gautier's arrangement of her translations into eight thematic sections—Lovers, The Moon, Travelers, The Court, War, Wine, Autumn, and Poets—has few parallels among anthologies of Chinese poetry in any language, but even more distinctive are the challenges posed to the reader curious about original texts or, for that matter, the identity of their authors. Barely two-thirds of the 110 poems in the expanded edition can be matched to Chinese originals with any certainty. The reasons are multiple. Since Ding Dunling knew little French, it is quite possible that their entire collaboration was grounded in what Hugh

<sup>7</sup>Détrie, "Translation," 46.

<sup>8</sup>Cited by Stanislas Julien, *Hoëi-lan-ki ou l'Histoire du cercle de craie* (London: 1832), XI; see Détrie, "Livres," 307n1.

Kenner has referred to as a flourishing misunderstanding.<sup>9</sup> It is also not clear if the two employed a regularized system for transcribing Chinese into French, and some poets' names are therefore difficult to recognize from their spelling. And faulty note-taking may have been responsible for mistakes in attribution and, indeed, the integrity of texts themselves. (In one case, for example, a figure in a poem is misidentified as its author.) Gautier's mastery of Chinese was at best uncertain, and she was clearly not fluent in the language, as one biographer claims. Still, Kenneth Rexroth's accusation that she knew no Chinese at all and worked with a Thai informant who did not command the language either is in my view also without basis.<sup>10</sup> The problem lies rather in what she chose to do with what she presumably did know.

First, she dispensed with almost all of the original poem titles and substituted ones of her own. Second, she eliminated almost all specific references to person and place, replacing them with generic terms instead. Third, more often than not she did not translate an entire poem, usually selecting only the first few lines of a work and sometimes even altering their order. While this may simply reflect how she dealt with what she didn't understand, her excisions also appear at times intended as purposefully creative fashionings to make the anthology itself a more tightly integrated work of art. Fourth, working in the opposite direction, she frequently interpolated explanations or embellishments of images and allusions in the translation itself, thus obviating the need for annotations but adding significantly to the length of a line. Small wonder, then, that the search for original texts is something of a challenge. Some have speculated that poems attributed to unidentified contemporaries with improbable Chinese names, moreover, may have been composed by Gautier herself.<sup>11</sup>

One interesting example of her practice appears at the end of a well-known work by the Tang poet Li Bo 李白 (701–762):

Le départ d'un ami (Li-Taï-Pé)

Par la verte montagne, aux rudes chemins, je vous reconduis  
jusqu'à l'enceinte du nord.

L'eau écumante roule autour des murs, et se perd ver l'orient.

C'est à cet endroit que nous nous séparons. . . .

<sup>9</sup> "The Poetics of Error," *MLN* 90 (1975): 739.

<sup>10</sup> "Chinese Poetry and the American Imagination," in *The New Directions Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York: New Directions, 2003), 209.

<sup>11</sup> This is a possibility suggested both by Yves Daniel in his edition of Gautier's *Le Livre de jade* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 2004), 205, and by Pierre Nogrette, "Judith Gautier et 'Le Livre de jade,'" *Bulletin de la Société de Théophile Gautier* 14 (1992): 168. Some of the other practices described above have been noted by Fusako Hamao, "The Sources of the Texts in Mahler's 'Lied von der Erde,'" *Nineteenth-Century Music* 19.1 (Summer 1995): 85–86.

Je m'en retourne, solitaire, et je marche péniblement. Il me semble,  
maintenant, que j'ai plus de dix mille lis à parcourir.  
Les nuages légers flânent, paresseusement, comme mes pensées.  
Bientôt le soleil se couche, et je sens plus vivement encore la  
tristesse de la séparation.  
Par-dessus les broussailles, une dernière fois, j'agite la main, au  
moment où vous allez disparaître.  
D'un long hennissement, mon cheval cherche à rappeler le vôtre. . . .  
Mais c'est un chant d'oiseau qui lui répond! . . .<sup>12</sup>

*By the green mountain on rough paths I lead you back to the  
northern rampart.  
The bubbling waters flow around the walls and vanish toward  
the east.  
It is here that we part. . . .  
I return alone, walking wearily. It now seems that I have more than  
a thousand miles to traverse.  
The light clouds drift lazily, like my thoughts.  
Soon the sun sets, and I feel more intensely again the sadness of  
separation.  
Through the brush I wave my hand one last time, just as you're  
about to disappear.  
With a long whinny my horse tries to call out to yours. But it's a  
bird song that replies!*

Compare Gautier's version with a more literal one:<sup>13</sup>

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Farewell to a Friend                             | 送友人   |
| Green peaks stretch along the northern ramparts, | 青山橫北郭 |
| White waters wind around the east city wall.     | 白水遶東城 |
| From this place once taking leave                | 此地一爲別 |
| A lone tumbleweed travels ten thousand miles.    | 孤蓬萬里征 |
| Floating clouds: a traveler's thoughts.          | 浮雲遊子意 |
| Setting sun: an old friend's feelings.           | 落日故人情 |
| Waving hands, we go from here—                   | 揮手自茲去 |
| Xiao xiao the parting horses neigh.              | 蕭蕭班馬鳴 |

The skeleton of the original is readily recognizable despite the expanded interpretations of the relationships among the images that she inserts into her translation. The final bird, however, is an original and surpris-

<sup>12</sup> Judith Gautier, *Le Livre de jade*, 119.

<sup>13</sup> Wang, Qi 王琦, ed., *Li Taibo quanji* 李太白全集 (repr. Taipei: Heluo tushu chubanshe, 1976): 8/406. All translations are my own.

ing contribution to the poem. I suspect that it reflects her dissection of the line's last word *ming*, translated as “neigh,” which consists of components meaning bird and mouth and also refers to a bird's cry. This incidentally prefigures a controversial method employed by a later well-known English translation that “split up” Chinese characters to foreground their visual effects.<sup>14</sup>

In another case, a quatrain attributed to Wang Wei 王維 (Ouan-Oui, 701–761) and titled “Pour oublier ses pensées” (*Livre de jade*, 159) does not appear in the poet's collected works:

Réjouissons-nous ensemble et remplissons de vin tiède nos tasses de  
porcelaine.  
Le frais printemps s'éloigne, mais il reviendra; buvons tant que nos  
lèvres auront soif.  
Et peut-être oublierons-nous, que nous sommes à l'hiver de notre âge.  
Et que les fleurs se fanent.

*Let's rejoice together and refill our porcelain cups with warm wine.  
The spring cool is gone, but it will return; let's drink while our lips  
are thirsty.  
And perhaps we'll forget that we're in the winter of our years.  
And that the flowers are fading.*

It is, in fact, a song titled “Farewell to Spring” that is, according to his Qing dynasty editor, only uncertainly by Wang Wei:<sup>15</sup>

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Song of Farewell to Spring               | 送春辭   |
| Day after day men age in vain,           | 日日人空老 |
| Year after year spring comes back again. | 年年春更歸 |
| Let's take delight in a goblet of wine:  | 相歡在尊酒 |
| No need to pity the flowers in flight.   | 不用惜花飛 |

Here the principal difference between Gautier's rendition and the more literal translation lies in the order of the poem's original four lines, which have been rearranged from 1-2-3-4 to 3-2-1-4. She also expands the description of each image. Why did she do this? I suspect because she wished to foreground her reasons for placing it in a section on the theme of Wine and thus opened with the third line, which refers to drinking.

<sup>14</sup> Florence Ayscough and Amy Lowell, *Fir-Flower Tablets* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921).

<sup>15</sup> Zhao Diancheng 趙殿成, *Wang Youcheng ji jianzhu* 王右丞集箋註 (repr. Taipei: Heluo tushu chubanshe, 1975): 15/274. In this eighteenth-century edition the poem is placed in an appendix, with a note that some anthologies credit it to Wang Ya 王涯 or Zhang Zhongsu 張仲素.

One of Gautier's most enigmatic translations was another poem attributed to Li Bo and translated as "Le Pavillon de porcelaine" (155):

Au milieu du petit lac artificiel, s'élève un pavillon de porcelaine  
verte et blanche; on y arrive par un pont de jade, qui se voûte  
comme le dos d'un tigre.

Dans ce pavillon, quelques amis, vêtus de robes claires, boivent  
ensemble des tasses de vin tiède.

Ils causent gaiement, ou tracent des vers, en repoussant leurs  
chapeaux en arrière, en relevant un peu leurs manches,

Et, dans le lac, où le petit pont, renversé, semble un croissant de  
jade, quelques amis, vêtus de robes claires, boivent, la tête en  
bas dans un pavillon de porcelaine.

*In the middle of the small artificial lake rises a green and white  
porcelain pavilion, reached by a jade bridge that arches like a  
tiger's back.*

*In this pavilion some friends clad in light dress drink cups of warm  
wine together.*

*They chat gaily or sketch some verses, pushing their caps back and  
lifting their sleeves a bit.*

*And in the lake, where the little bridge, inverted, looks like a jade  
crescent, some friends, clad in light dress, drink, their heads  
below in the porcelain pavilion.*

There is no poem by this title in Li Bo's corpus, and the original poem is not in fact "The Porcelain Pavilion" but rather, as demonstrated in 1995 by Fusako Hamao, "A Banquet at Tao's Pavilion" 宴陶家亭子 (Wang 20/460):

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| On a winding path to the recluse's dwelling,      | 曲巷幽人宅 |
| Through lofty gates to the nobleman's house:      | 高門大士家 |
| A pond opens out, a mirror reflecting one's gall; | 池開照膽鏡 |
| In the forest bloom flowers that crack a smile.   | 林吐破顏花 |
| Emerald waters harbor the springtime sun,         | 綠水藏春日 |
| Green balconies hide evening's rosy clouds.       | 青軒祕晚霞 |
| If one's heard these marvelous pipes and strings  | 若聞絃管妙 |
| Even Golden Valley can't be praised.              | 金谷不能誇 |

Gautier has, it appears, erroneously read the surname Tao in the title literally as "porcelain," perhaps led astray not only by her dictionary (the word *tao* means ceramic) but also by the construction of an actual porcelain pavilion at the Paris Exposition in 1867, the same year her book was published. Moreover, she's rewritten virtually the entire poem,

while shrinking it from eight lines to four. Few of the original scenic details—path, gates, forest, flowers—have been retained. She has kept the green color of the water and balconies from the original, but now they refer to a jade bridge that arches over a pond that has become an “artificial lake.” Why the arching tiger’s back? Perhaps it’s her way of incorporating the original description of the pond as a mirror so clear it reflects one’s gall bladder, the seat of courage. Gautier’s main focus is the scene of poets drinking and composing verses, and this is only obliquely alluded to in Li Bo’s poem. For this she has interpolated the Qing dynasty annotator’s explanation of the reference to Golden Valley, a place rich in natural beauties where an extravagantly wealthy man in the third century gave a lavish farewell party at which music was played, wine was drunk, and poetry written under competitive circumstances that kept increasing the consumption and produced a small collection of poetry. Note that Gautier’s poem, with its last line referring to the water’s reflection of the bridge and inverted scene on the pavilion itself mirroring earlier lines, also provides a formal analogue to what it is describing. This highly crafted representation of a craft at the height of exquisiteness and cultural value was responsible for the enormous popularity of this poem. It was one of the favorites of translators working after Gautier; the most visually intriguing version was the following rhymed one in German by Gottfried Böhm, which reproduces the poem’s scene as described by Gautier—the bridge’s arc and its reflection in the water:<sup>16</sup>

### Das porzellanene Pavillon.

Von Li-Bo-Te.

Lieblich  
 Hell erhebt sich  
 Aus des Sees Mitte  
 Ein Haus, nach Chinesen Sitte  
 Aus Porzellan in grün und weißen Stücken.  
 Dorthin führen Künstgeschwung’ne leichte Brücken,  
 Gleiches ganz des Tigers braun und gelb gefärbtem Rücken.  
 Lustig zehende Genossen, weiße bunte Kleider tragen, —  
 Erlösen Klaren, lauen Wein aus Tassen in des Herzens Wohlbehagen,  
 Plaudern frohlich, schreiben süße Verse, die erblühen tief in dem Gemüthe,  
 Stützen rückwärts ihrer schönen Kleider Ärmel und vom Haupte fallen ihre Hälte.  
 Aber in des Wassers leicht bewegten, weichen, wons’gen, schonnen Spiegelwegen  
 Gleichet einem Halbmond nur der Brücke umgeschwärt, leichtest Bogen  
 Hab man fest die lustig zehenden Genossen all, die bunten,  
 Fröhlich plaudernd sitzen dort, gekrönt das Haupte nach unten.  
 Und das Lusthaus selber auf des Sees fernem Rücken,  
 Aus Porzellan in grün und weißen Stücken,  
 Aufgeschwärt nach Bäter Sitte,  
 In des Sees Mitte  
 Abwärts senkt sich  
 Lieblich!

<sup>16</sup> *Chinesische Lieder aus dem Livre de Jade von Judith Mendès* (Munich: Theodor Adermann, 1873), 82.

*The Porcelain Pavilion* is even the title of a set of adaptations from French translations of Chinese poems published by the Russian poet Nikolai Gumilev in 1918.<sup>17</sup>

Gautier's *Livre de jade* was received enthusiastically by the world of French letters, with literary luminaries inclined to consider it an original work, whether out of conviction, generosity to her, ignorance, or disbelief that such poetry could have been produced in China. Thanks to widespread respect for this and her many subsequent publications she was elected in 1910 to the Académie Goncourt—its first woman—as “the leading literary interpreter of the Far East” to the French public.<sup>18</sup> Some Sinologists have been less charitable to Gautier's efforts, chiding her for betraying the translator's duty to “be exact” for the sake of “novelty,” transforming what would be taken as conventional in the original into something falsely strange, fantastic, and “purely exotic.”<sup>19</sup> But not all experts have been so unequivocally harsh. One French Sinologist credited Gautier with inspiring his interest in Chinese studies and described *Le Livre de jade* as “the only truly beautiful translation of Chinese poems” he knew, one that had been able to join “conscientiousness and fidelity” to “the poetic expression of feeling.”<sup>20</sup> And the renowned translator Arthur Waley remarked that “the book . . . shows a [wide] acquaintance with Chinese poetry on the part of whoever chose the poems. Most of the credit for this selection must certainly be given to Ting Tun-ling, the *litteratus* whom Théophile Gautier befriended. But the credit for the beauty of these often erroneous renderings must go to Mademoiselle Gautier herself.”<sup>21</sup>

While the enthusiastic reception of Judith Gautier's *Book of Jade* can be attributed in part to the nineteenth century's fascination with

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<sup>17</sup> See Maria Rubins, “Dialogues across Cultures: Adaptations of Chinese Verse by Judith Gautier and Nikolai Gumilev,” *Comparative Literature* 54.2 (Spring 2002): 146. This first edition, illustrated with Chinese characters and Asian woodblocks from the University of Petrograd's collection, did not name the Chinese poets but did acknowledge Gumilev's French sources. In a subsequent 1922 edition and after, the names of the poets are provided, though not often correctly spelled or identified.

<sup>18</sup> William Schwartz, *The Imaginative Interpretation of the Far East in French Literature 1800–1925* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1927), 46. Anne Danolos describes the Académie and its voting procedure, noting that Gautier took the spot vacated by Jules Renard, defeating Paul Claudel in the 1910 election. Not until 1945 was a second woman, Colette, elected. See *La Vie de Judith Gautier* (Paris: Editions Fernand Lanore, 1990), 166.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Basile Alexéiev, “La littérature chinoise et son lecture,” *La Littérature chinoise: Six Conférences au Collège de France et au Musée Guimet* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geutner, 1937), 110–11.

<sup>20</sup> Georges Soulié de Morant, *Essai sur la littérature chinoise* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1912), 199.

<sup>21</sup> *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1919), 35.

the Orient in general and chinoiserie in particular, that's only a partial explanation. It was also appealing because it provided a concrete model of how *not* to write like an early nineteenth-century French poet. To the Parnassian and Symbolist colleagues of Théophile Gautier, the exquisite imagery, subdued emotions, esteem for the poetic vocation, and lapidary quality of the Chinese poems as represented by Judith Gautier embodied to a remarkable degree their ideals of a finely wrought and dispassionate aesthetic that both elevated the work of art and provided a salutary counter-example to an earlier overblown Romanticism and the fetters of French meters. Her contemporaries clearly regarded Judith Gautier as a poetic innovator of the first order. Hugh Kenner suggests that Gautier may have been the first European to suspect that "there might be in Chinese modes of poetry never so much as intuited by the West" (739), an inspiration for both other poets and translators alike.

As noted earlier, Gautier's anthology was itself translated into many other European languages, and typically not at the hands of anyone who knew Chinese. Perhaps the most interesting and influential examples of these were German, beginning with Böhm's 1873 rhymed translation, which served as the basis for a volume of unrhymed translations in 1905 that was in turn used two years later by a third German poet, Hans Bethge (1876–1946), who, like his predecessors, didn't know Chinese, to produce a collection of what he referred to as "versions" of Chinese poetry. Titled *Die chinesische Flöte*, Bethge's book was an immediate and lasting success, with some seventy-eight thousand copies sold in eighteen reprintings.<sup>22</sup> From his account of what struck him about Chinese poetry, it's clear that Gautier's presentations were the most influential of his sources, because of what he termed their "illuminated melancholy" and "tremblingly delicate, fine-tuned lyrical quality."<sup>23</sup> "Romantically inclined schoolgirls of the period" were evidently especially susceptible to the highly charged sentiment in *The Chinese Flute*. The best-known reader of Bethge's volume, however, was no fainting adolescent but rather the composer Gustav Mahler, who was sent a copy by a friend shortly after its publication in 1907.

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<sup>22</sup> Yimin Jiang, "Die chinesische Flöte von Hans Bethge und Das Lied von der Erde von Gustav Mahler: Vom Textverständnis bei der Rückübersetzung," in *Ostasienrezeption zwischen Klischee und Innovation: Zur Begegnung zwischen Ost und West um 1900*, ed. Walter Gebhard (Munich: Iudicium, 2000), 331.

<sup>23</sup> "Geleitwort" to *Die chinesische Flöte: Nachdichtungen chinesischer Lyrik* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1922), 103. This introduction is translated by Donald Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler: Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 620–23.

Bethge's *Chinese Flute* apparently exerted a deep impression on Mahler at a moment in his life when, having learned that he suffered from a heart condition, he was especially susceptible to the mixture of laments over human mortality and acceptance of nature's permanence conveyed by the volume's "imitations." One biographer writes that there can be no "serious doubt" that "here were texts with a special resonance, of immediate relevance to him as man and artist," and that while Bethge's style was "perfeverid in a way that the Chinese poets were not . . . , who knows, if Mahler had encountered cool, authentic versions of the texts, it might have left him—musically speaking—correspondingly cold."<sup>24</sup> Instead, he was moved to rework seven of Bethge's poems, some of which were based directly on Gautier, into the six pieces in his song-cycle *Das Lied von der Erde*, completed in 1908 and first performed in 1911. This story is far too long to tell here, but suffice it to say, first, that it may be viewed in some sense as an important musicological counterpart to Kenner's "poetics of error," and, second, that it is largely thanks to the painstaking detective work of Mahler scholars and devotees that the original sources of some of Gautier's translations have been identified.

What can we make, finally, of the long and winding itinerary of the first "poetic" translation of Chinese poetry into a European language? Was Judith Gautier an irresponsible exoticizer and an inadequate translator? Or was her volume simply an event in the history of modern French literature? Neither judgment, in my mind, recognizes her distinctive contributions to the history of Chinese poetry in the West and the curious and lasting resonance of her work over the years. The mistakes abound, and the integrity of many individual Chinese poems is utterly disregarded. But the overall impression she provides of some of the most enduring themes and obsessions of classical Chinese poetry does not, I think, mislead. More important, her adaptations were of enormous appeal—much more so than the one contemporary scholarly translation of Chinese poetry<sup>25</sup>—and were read, re-read, and reworked in both French and countless other languages. In many countries her translations and their imitations "were often . . . the only means of access to Chinese poetry,"<sup>26</sup> and readers responded to their invitation. As one scholar noted toward the end of Gautier's life, no one before her "had penetrated the charm of China and Japan, and no one has known

<sup>24</sup> Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler*, 342, 351.

<sup>25</sup> The Marquis Léon d'Hervey-Saint-Denys's *Poésies de l'époque des Thang* (Paris: Amyot: 1862).

<sup>26</sup> Détrie, "Translation," 52.

better than she how to make it accessible to our minds and our sensibility. She has been the first interpreter of Far Eastern thought for the French public.”<sup>27</sup> Her work was popular and influential, and extended an awareness of Chinese poetry to an orbit far beyond that reached by the Sinological community, both then and now. Knowledge circulates by multiple routes, after all, and we could do worse than hope that the fruits of our own scholarship might travel as far and as widely as Judith Gautier’s little volume did.

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<sup>27</sup> André Chevrillon, “Homage à Madame Judith Gautier,” *L’Action nationale* (February 1911), 14, in Barbara Jessome-Nance, “The Passionate Pursuit of Beauty: The Literary Career of Judith Gautier (1845–1917)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1988), 169.

