

翻译文体的问题: THE MANIFESTATION OF THE TRANSLATION STYLE IN BEI DAO'S  
POETICS

by

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Honors Thesis

Appalachian State University

Submitted to the Department of English  
and The Honors College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

May, 2019

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**Abstract:**

Bei Dao, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese poet, occupies a unique place in the context of contemporary Chinese poetry as a representative of the Misty poetry movement from the 1970s and 80s. Bei Dao's poetry is composed in what he calls the "translation style," a poetic form that originated with translation work done in underground literary circles in Beijing during the Cultural Revolution. The gap in scholarship regarding analysis of this integral aspect of Bei Dao's poetics has led to critique of the translation style without acknowledging its origins and features. In order to effectively analyze Bei Dao's poetry, an understanding of the translation style and its features is necessary. In this thesis I propose to define the translation style and categorize it into four manifestations: abrasion, dislocation, immunization, and inflammation. These manifestations are indicative of the consequences of and the methods of resistance to the restrictions imposed on language during the Cultural Revolution. I use close readings of five poems and categorize them by these four manifestations to examine the poetic performance of the translation style in Bei Dao's work.

## “The First Meeting” - Introduction

Bei Dao, a Chinese poet born in 1949 – the same year as the founding of the People’s Republic of China – is one of the most influential Chinese poets of his generation, both at home and abroad. The popularity of his poems outside of China is due in part to the efforts of translators to circulate his work, but also as a result of the intrigue associated with his politically-driven exile. Bei Dao’s popularity has propitiated a large body of scholarship about his work. However, in spite of the comparatively large amount of work that has been done on Bei Dao, scholars in general have neglected to address one of the recurring topics that arises in interviews with the poet: what Bei Dao calls the *fanyi wenti* (翻译文体) or the “translation style.” The lack of scholarship on the translation style has led to harsh criticism of Bei Dao’s poetry. As the translation style is integral to Bei Dao’s poetics, readings of his work regularly center around its features. With the definition and implications of the translation style largely ignored in analysis of his poems, however, the features of the translation style are often interpreted as flaws, leading to overall negative impressions of his style and language.

The translation style, at its core, is characterized by contradiction and inconsistency that can be found at nearly all levels of Bei Dao’s poems. On the level of individual themes and images, contradiction and paradox are inexorable elements of the style. On a more metatextual level, the translation style manifests in contradictory ways: as a symptom and a tool, as an intentional poetic choice and as poetic error, and a self-defined style and a result of external influences. These contradictions are due to the origins of the style, as well as how it has manifested in Bei Dao’s poetry, and present difficulties for a comprehensive understanding of the translation style. However, if these contradictions are not considered a flaw but an inherent characteristic of the style, they enable more thorough readings of Bei Dao’s body of work.

In this thesis, I propose a model to define the poetic characteristics of Bei Dao's translation style and identify the complexities involved in the creation and employment of the style. The opening sections recapitulate the historical background of the school of Misty poetry and the influence of the Cultural Revolution on Bei Dao and the translation style, as well as some of the most prominent critical debates around his work.

Following this background, I introduce the four manifestations of the translation style that I have identified. I organize these manifestations through the following categories: abrasion, which identifies the translation style as a symptom of trauma; dislocation, or translation as a symptom of a disconnect from tradition; immunization, translation as a tool for self-preservation; and inflammation, or the translation style as a tool for resistance. I then use close readings of five poems to demonstrate and expand upon the four manifestations of the translation style. Rather than presenting the poems in chronological order, I have organized them as corresponding to specific manifestations, and then organized the manifestations into two categories: translation style as a symptom and translation style as a tool. For close readings of "The Answer," "Let's Go," and "Road Song," I rely on translations by Bonnie S. McDougall and Eliot Weinberger. However, for "The Primal" and "Everything," I have produced my own translations in order to allow more accurate analysis of the stylistic elements of the text.

### **"The Fan of History" - The Origins of the Translation Style**

我来到这个世界上，  
只带着纸、绳索和身影，  
为了在审判之前，  
宣读那些被判决了的声音：

告诉你吧，世界，  
我——不——相——信！  
（“回答” 9-14）

I came into this world  
Bringing only paper, rope, a shadow,  
To proclaim before the judgment  
The voice that has been judged:

Let me tell you, world,  
I—do—not—believe!  
（“The Answer” 9-14）

A proclamation of vehement disbelief adorned posters at the site of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. These passionate words come from “The Answer,” a poem by Bei Dao, whose wintery voice became the rallying cry for a generation of Chinese students, inspiring famous bravery that led to waves of change in their country. These students’ - and this poet’s - fierce disbelief stemmed from years of living in a political climate where language acted not as a means of communicating ideas and beliefs, but as a tightly regulated expression of state-sanctioned political fervor. The state of “total isolation” brought about by this regulation of language is what Bei Dao cites as the origin for his poetry, and what inspired him to begin participating in the “forbidden game” of the underground Beijing literary scene in the 1980s (Gleichmann 388). These lines of verse are autobiographical and illustrate Bei Dao’s reliance on obscure poetry to express himself: when “paper, a rope, a shadow” is your birthright, writing secret fantasies of yelling broadly to the world is a momentary escape.

The mistrust and betrayal evinced in Bei Dao’s famous lines belonged to a larger school of poetry that had its origins in Cultural Revolution-era China. The name *menglong*, or “misty,” was given to a group of poets who made their names in the underground literary circles in Beijing. The descriptor Misty was assigned to the poets by the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign of 1983 for the purpose of formally denouncing their use of “obscure” language, which actively rebelled against officially sanctioned discourse (Tan 4). These poets desperately pursued a form of expression to subvert the government’s strict ideological control through the theft and surreptitious circulation of banned books, known in these underground circles as “yellow books” due to their bright yellow covers. Banned books frequently included works of European philosophers and literary writers such as Kafka and Sartre. Exposure to these literatures led to another feature of the genre of Misty Poetry: *ouhua*, or Europeanisms, which garnered a

significant amount of criticism from both the Chinese government's cultural committees and later critics, who accused the poetry of being out of touch with the Chinese poetic tradition (Featherston).

The strict rules imposed upon the circulation of these books meant that they had not been made available in Chinese translations and instead remained in the language of the original text. This barrier did not discourage the members of these underground poetry circles, often consisting of former professors and creative writers, who simply learned to translate the works into their own tongue. One of these translators was Zhao Zhenkai, primarily known by his pen name Bei Dao, who became one of the most prominent Misty poets due to his involvement in political discourse and his founding of the literary journal *Today*, which ran from 1978 to 1980 before it was censored. This journal featured nearly all of the poets of this poetic school that would become famous, including Shu Ting and Yang Lian. Bei Dao's origins were fairly typical for a member of his generation: he came from a middle-class family before the Cultural Revolution, received an "ordinary education" (in the best middle school in Beijing), became a member of the Red Guard as a teen, and was then trained as a construction worker. After he was sent to a mountainous region to do construction work, however, he was overtaken by an "urge to write" due to his excessive isolation. His work served as a pass into the underground literary circles in Beijing, to which he returned "in winter when there was little to do in the fields," in order to "[exchange] books and their own creative writings" (Gleichmann 388).

These underground literary circles were where Bei Dao first began translating, but after censorship became slightly more relaxed in the 1980s, Bei Dao began translating poetry professionally in order to make a living. Among those poets that he cites as his major influences are Federico García Lorca, Paul C elan, and Gunnar Ekel of, of whom he speaks extensively and

very highly. Authors such as Kafka were also influential on Bei Dao, as he says that when he read *The Trial* for the first time, he “was shocked. For the first time I realized that literature could be written this way.” This led to what he says is his “close spiritual affinity with Western literature,” which certainly influenced his poetic style (Gleichmann 389).

Later, Bei Dao became heavily involved in the political movements taking place in Beijing universities, lending the words of his poetry to protest signs and composing letters of petition to be signed by student bodies. After leaving the country in 1989 before the Tiananmen Square protests, it became apparent that he would not be able to return to his country without facing imprisonment and execution, and so he entered a period of exile. In exile, he has lived in England, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, France, and the United States. During this period of time he has continued to compose poetry, as well as occasionally teaching creative writing.

It was during the period of intense translation in the 1980s that Bei Dao began to give name to what he calls the *fanyi wenti*, or the “translation style.” He suggests that the basis for the poetry composed within Beijing’s underground literary circles is this translation style, which was “a marginal form totally different from the official language” that involved using the “style [of European writers] as a basis of [their] language and [their] writing” (Featherston). Effectively, the poets were composing their original poems as if they were translating their thoughts through another language, finally ending up in Chinese.

The translation style that originated from these circumstances has distinct poetic elements that characterize the Misty genre. Foremost of these is the use of contradiction and juxtaposition on all levels to create a sense of instability and groundlessness. These contradictions can be between distinct sequential images, thematic elements, or syntactical structures. Poems

composed in the translation style also tend to heavily rely on images to represent complex concepts, which is juxtaposed with a sense of abstraction that give individual images a destabilized quality. Images and perspectives in these poems tend to be constantly shifting as either a tool to directly criticize language or as a symptom of the poet's mindset. The translation style also features mimicry of other poetic forms, whether that appears as traditional Chinese figurative language, Europeanisms, or appropriation of the Chinese Communist Party's language of propaganda. Due to the translation style's developmental origins in the translation of European poems, the Chinese used in this style is generally very colloquial and removed from classical Chinese stylings.

### **“A Thousand Challengers” - Perspectives on Bei Dao and the Translation Style**

The translation style found in Bei Dao's poems has been criticized by Chinese and foreign literary critics alike. Bei Dao himself in later years has echoed some of these criticisms, suggesting that much of his early poetry indicated a lack of understanding of the Chinese poetic tradition (Tang 3). Bei Dao, as well as other Chinese critics, have suggested a desire to move away from the translation style in order to minimize the influence of Western literature on contemporary Chinese poetry, allowing them to “purify Chinese” (Featherston). Other critics such as Michael S. Duke and Vera Schwarcz have critiqued the obscurity of the language used in Bei Dao's poems as a result of the translation style, suggesting that the proliferation of vivid images used to convey the poet's intentions leads to a disjointed reading experience at best.

Bonnie S. McDougall, on the other hand, has suggested that the reason Bei Dao's poems have achieved significant success in English-speaking countries is precisely a consequence of the translation style. As the first translator of Bei Dao's early poems into English, McDougall

“asserted the universal value of Bei Dao’s poetry” as a result of his use of vivid images without reliance on abstract, difficult-to-translate language (Edmond 109). McDougall translated Bei Dao’s poems on an uncontracted basis, ostensibly in order to “free the study of modern Chinese literature from the reductive political approaches” that were prevalent at the time, but more obviously in order to win political protection for Bei Dao in the light of the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign and his subsequent exile (Edmond 110). Later translators like Eliot Weinberger would follow McDougall’s example in translating Bei Dao’s poems by attempting to convey the tangibility of their imagery, while sacrificing some of the aesthetic obscurity found while reading the Chinese texts.

On the translation of his poems, Bei Dao has said “the translation is another poem... poetry should be translated, and it doesn’t matter if there are differences in the text” (Featherston). Despite this relaxed understanding of the implications of translation, his comments on the translation style, as well as his own work on translation, the scholarship done on the issue of translation in his poems is less extensive than one might think. When writing about Bei Dao’s poetry, authors such as Dian Li and Chee Lay Tan tend to focus on the paradoxical nature of some of his poetic images and similar themes. Only Jacob Edmond has done a full-length analysis on the idea of the translation style in Bei Dao’s poetry in his book *A Common Strangeness: Contemporary Poetry, Cross-Cultural Encounter, Comparative Literature*. But even in this case, the chapter titled “Bei Dao and World Literature,” the term “translation style” is mentioned only once in favor of looking at “The Answer” as a singular allegory for translation in a nonspecific sense.

In the introductory chapter to *What is World Literature?*, David Damrosch also discusses Bei Dao’s poetry in relation to Stephen Owen’s critique of the translation style (although

Damrosch does not propose a term for the style). Owen, a sinologist and expert on comparative poetics, holds a rather negative outlook on the implications of the translation style as a manifestation of “world poetry,” which he attributes to Westernization and the erasure of local poetic tradition. Damrosch criticizes this specialist outlook and forgoes a specialist reading of the translation style in favor of acknowledging the poet’s awareness of the issues of language and circulation. This suggests Damrosch’s interpretation of the translation style as an active stylistic tool. He indicates that rather than being a symptom of the homogenization of literature, Bei Dao’s translation style in his poetry is emblematic of a “world literature” that gains in translation as it ceases to be solely Chinese literature. This resonates somewhat with McDougall’s assertion of the universality of Bei Dao’s poetry due to the translation style, but also with Venuti’s conceptualization of translated poetry as a different text (which aligns, in turn, with Bei Dao’s understanding of translation).

Venuti’s suggestion that translation represents a utopic space is also relevant here. In his essay “Translation, Community, Utopia,” he states that translation “harbors the utopian dream of a common understanding between foreign and domestic cultures” (Venuti 486). In order to introduce this premise, Venuti uses several texts as examples of those that are “hopeful of communicating the foreign significance of the foreign text through a domestic inscription,” and that allow the reader to conceptualize the ideal translation as a space where cultures can meet and communicate. Bei Dao’s experiences with translation, however, encourage questioning of this concept. He began translating out of necessity and developed his translation style as a reaction to adverse political circumstances – in his case, translation was not a communication between national and linguistic cultures, but an attempt to reckon with the conflicting ideologies and modes of expression within Chinese culture at the time. In Bei Dao’s poetry, translation is not a

utopic space, but a dystopic one in which language can only manifest as viewed through the lens of translation due to trauma and violence. Here, the origins of the contradictions inherent in the translation style again become apparent, as translation is used as both an idealistic tool against the regime of Maoist China and as a last resort for dealing with trauma.

### **“A New Conjunction” – Conceptualizing the Translation Style**

The translation style found in Bei Dao’s poetry requires a type of comparative analysis that challenges typical notions of translation, as the translation style functions as more than a tool for creating a common understanding between cultures and instead entails a commitment to the idea of political resistance. In addition to creating a separate mode of expression from the official discourse of the Cultural Revolution, the translation style allowed Bei Dao to express and criticize directly the failings of language. Composition of poetry in the translation style and the subsequent possibilities for translation into other languages enable Bei Dao to draw attention to the imprecision of language, which in this context encourages criticism of the epistemological and sociopolitical position of language in contemporary Chinese culture. Bei Dao’s translation style creates a liminal space that permits this criticism, which mirrors his experiences as a poet in exile, and suggests that translation itself is an exilic space where the unsteady themes of Bei Dao’s poetry converge. Due to the prominence of the translation style in Bei Dao’s poetic repertoire, his poems cannot be reliably understood, either in the original or in translation, without a familiarity with these factors.

I propose distributing the signs of this complex form of resistance in four different modalities. The terms that I’ve chosen to name these features of the translation style – abrasion, dislocation, immunization, and inflammation – are formulated according to different bodily

conditions. Contextualizing these elements using bodily metaphors allows a more grounded analysis of the physical effects of the translation style on Bei Dao's poetry. Aspects of the translation style can be subdivided into manifestations of the style as a symptom of the author's political circumstances and as a tool to subvert these circumstances, they are named according to these divisions as either conditions imposed upon the body (abrasion and dislocation) or as reactions of the body to physical stress or pathogens (immunization and inflammation).

In the first category, as a symptom of Bei Dao's political exile and his response to the Cultural Revolution's violence against language, the translation style expresses itself as a type of trauma literature that allowed him to dissociate from the pain of expressing himself within the strictly regulated official language. I use the term trauma literature here to refer to writing that is created or influenced by traumatic events and situations in order to cope with or express these situations. This exhibits itself in differing ways in Bei Dao's poetry as it has evolved but exists as a persistent feature. I call this abrasion or abrasive translation to refer to Bei Dao's language as analogous to the physical condition of abraded skin.

The Chinese Communist Party's efforts to eliminate influence from China's literary history also acted as the progenitor for the second manifestation of the translation style – which I call dislocation. Bei Dao's language of translation exists as a symptom of his generation's disconnect from the Chinese poetic tradition. Westernization also played a role in this, as exposure to European literature and philosophy in Beijing's underground literary circles created a sense of hybrid aesthetics and inspired attempts at reclamation of the Chinese poetics that manifested in the translation style.

The third manifestation of the translation style, designated here as immunization or immunizing translation, is not a symptom, but an intentionally wielded poetic tool constructed in

order to allow Bei Dao to avoid the worst consequences of his political situation. Bei Dao's poetic style has gradually moved from obviously outwardly political poems to a more abstract, unsteady subject matter. This movement towards the abstract appears as a strategy for Bei Dao to avoid political persecution for himself and his family. This is also evinced in the evolution of his comments on his poetry and politics over the years – he moved from drafting petitions in support of amnesty for political prisoners and founding revolutionary journals in the 1970s and 1980s to a total denial of political intention in his poems in later interviews.

Finally, I propose as the fourth category the term inflammation to designate the characteristics of the translation style manifested as a tool of resistance to challenge linguistic and political constructs perceived as constrictive. The strict control of language and literature imposed by the Chinese government served as the origin for the translation style in general and is the most conspicuous of Bei Dao's targets of resistance. However, the translation style, in its abstraction and contradictory qualities, also allows resistance against the imposition of China's literary history, Westernization, and the philosophical burdens of exile.

In the following sections I will suggest that these four manifestations of the translation style, classified as symptoms or tools, are simultaneously contradictory and form a cohesive impression of the translation style in the same way that Bei Dao's contradictory images form a unified body of work. I will use a combination of my own translations and translations by Bonnie McDougall and Eliot Weinberger in order to analyze the implications of the translation style, with analysis of translational decisions where it is relevant to my argument. The analytical method I will implement varies in accordance to the aspect I am interested in foregrounding. As such, I intend to discuss one poem per manifestation and in two cases draw from "The Answer" to expand on the topic.

## Abrasion – Translation as a Symptom of Trauma

Bei Dao's poetry can be read as a symptomatic manifestation of trauma stemming from the cultural and political circumstances that the poet has been situated in since the 1970s. I propose that the disjointedness of the imagery and the unsteadiness of Bei Dao's language in general – all characteristic features of the translation style – are a direct result of the trauma that the poet experienced during the Cultural Revolution's violence towards language. These manifestations of the translation style are heavily criticized in Bei Dao's poetry, as critics disregard the notion of the translation style in general. This leads to complaints of “striking images and juxtapositions scattered throughout the poems that as a whole did not make any sense to [the critics]” (Duke) being common. When read through the lens of the translation style as a response to trauma, however, the poetry takes on another dimension of dissociative pain that allows the poetry to be read as giving insight into the painful effects of regulated language.

“Road Song” (2005) is a visceral look at the manifestation of Bei Dao's trauma through the translation style. This poem is from his most recent collection, *The Rose of Time*, which features many poems composed in this heavily-criticized style. Since the 1970s, these elements that signal trauma in his poetry have evolved and become more apparent, which I believe speaks to the inability of the poet to confront and resolve his conflicts with his mother tongue while living in exile. Eliot Weinberger's translation preserves the sequence of images and simplicity of the sentence structures found in Bei Dao's original, and so allows analysis of the elements of trauma in this work. Here is the full text:

In the oblivion between the trees  
 The lyric attacks by dogs  
 At the end of an endless trip  
 Night turns all the keys of gold  
 But no door opens for you

在树与树的遗忘中  
 是狗的抒情进攻  
 在无端旅途的终点  
 夜转动所有的金钥匙  
 没有门开向你

A lantern follows The ancient principles of winter I walk straight toward you As you open the fan of history That's folded in an isolated song	一只灯笼遵循的是 冬天古老的法则 我径直走向你 你展开的历史折扇 合上是孤独的歌
The evening bell slowly questions you Echoes answer for you twice Dark night sails against the current Tree roots secretly generating electricity Have lit your orchard	晚钟悠然追问你 回声两度为你作答 暗夜逆流而上 树根在秘密发电 你的果园亮了
I walk straight toward you At the head of all the foreign roads When fire tries on the heavy snow Sunset seals the empire The earth's book turns the page of this moment	我径直走向你 带领所有他乡之路 当火焰试穿大雪 日落封存帝国 大地之书翻到此刻

The first stanza of “Road Song” opens with the line “in the oblivion between the trees,” which creates not a literal setting for the poem but a metaphorical one: “oblivion” here also evokes memory and forgetfulness, casting the trees into a realm of mist and uncertainty that seems to separate it from physicality. The second line introduces the concept of violence in the attacks of the dogs, but the word “lyric” here recontextualizes the first line to reference language and poetry. Using these two lines as a critical foundation allows a reading that intimately links the themes of violence and language. The next line exhibits one of the first symptoms of trauma in the poem: an almost instantaneous shifting away from the subject of the poem as described in the first lines. The poet relocates the reader to “the end of an endless trip,” away from the violence.

This shifting through and away from action will be repeated throughout the poem as the poet jumps between images and themes. Lines 1 and 3 use the same simple “in (place)’s...(location)” structure, which in accordance with the characteristics of the translation style emphasizes the juxtaposed images and locations. Lines 4-5 return to Bei Dao’s conflict

with language and introduce an element of frustration, as the “golden key” (a Chinese idiom for the best solution to a problem) is unable to allow him entrance into a gate - the attempted escape from the content of the first two lines comes to an abrupt halt as even the most perfect selection of words is inadequate to grant him distance from violence. These lines also resonate with Bei Dao’s experiences in exile, as his poetry has earned him renown and relative stability, but his home country – and by extension, his family and his language – are denied to him by virtue of his position as a political symbol.

The second stanza features a similar dissociative movement away from the subject matter. The lines “A lantern follows/ The ancient principles of winter/ [...] As you open the fan of history/ That’s folded in an isolated song” (6-10) evoke Bei Dao’s struggles with negotiating his relationship with the Chinese poetic tradition. The Cultural Revolution’s attempted erasure of a significant amount of Chinese history and literature in a bid to modernize the country led to poets like Bei Dao being divorced from their poetic history, which led to Misty poetry and the translation style. In this stanza, Bei Dao establishes antiquity as the subject and then swiftly moves away from it, walking towards an unnamed individual who inevitably brings him back to the topic by “[opening] the fan of history” in a sort of parabolic arc. This arc dramatizes intrusive thoughts and dissociation associated with trauma, representing the inescapability of experience and the poet’s instinctive reaction to resist memory. The last two lines of the stanza feature the juxtaposition of opening (unfolding) the fan and the fan’s subsequent folding in the “isolated song,” which calls back to the first stanza’s reference to lyric poetry and the “oblivion” of language.

The “isolated song” is interrupted by the sounding of a bell. The expected impression of the noise of the bell is disrupted by describing it as as questioning “slowly,” which is upset again

by the description of echoes instead of an outright ringing in the next line. This stanza also features the juxtaposition of water and earth, darkness and light, and natural and industrial, creating a jarring experience that causes the reader to question and internalize the irregularities. The last stanza repeats the line “I walk straight toward you,” interrupting the progression of the poem by flashing back to line 8. Here walking is again employed as an escape from the jarring images in the third stanza, and the setting is shifted to the “head of all the foreign roads.” However, the focus moves away from the speaker to highlight the paradox of fire attempting to grasp the snow, followed by the image “sunset seals the empire.” Here the poem attempts to “seal” the text, but the final line indicates that the figurative wax does not have time to dry on the pages, and so the page is turned leaving the poem resisting resolution.

This resistance to interpretation and constant shifting is an aspect of the translation style that symptomatizes trauma. Read this way, the refocusing between perspectives, images, and settings evokes a discomfort with confrontation and being grounded. By constantly employing this technique, Bei Dao can use language without having to re-experience being constrained by it. Additionally, read as trauma literature, the resistance to interpretation and resolution in the poem’s style sheds light on the discomfort associated with having one’s experiences decoded by another. This perspective allows us to consider Bei Dao’s poetic style as an extension of his recent insistence that his poetry not be interpreted as solely political.

The interpretation of Bei Dao’s work as political, in addition to being resisted by the author, has also been criticized by scholars such as Dian Li for the tendency of this type of interpretation to be steeped in ideology and interpretation that idealizes Bei Dao’s work. Instead, he suggests that while Bei Dao’s poetry was a product of its political circumstances, it still exhibits qualities and values of the official language of Maoist China. Dian Li names these

values as the following: “poetry for a higher use, collective consciousness and patriotism, and unconditional optimism” (Dian 373). While much of Bei Dao’s later poetry intentionally avoids these propagandistic themes and rhetorical constructs, his early poetry features them heavily. This points towards another aspect of the translation style connected to trauma: the use of official structures of discourse as a symptom of linguistic conditioning, and the appropriation of these structures as a method of limiting their psychological damage.

“The Answer” (1976) exhibits both of these qualities that demonstrate the translation style’s manifestation as trauma literature. The most authoritative translation of this poem was that done by Bonnie S. McDougall. While critics such as Owen have denounced her translations as displaying a “prosaic prosody and lurking sentimentality” (Damrosch 24), this translation displays most clearly the influences of the official language on Bei Dao’s translation style. The sloganizing tendencies of the official language and the socialist values that Dian Li describes above are best symptomized in the following excerpt:

Let me tell you, world, I—do—not—believe! If a thousand challengers lie beneath your feet, Count me as number thousand and one.	告诉你吧，世界， 我——不——相——信！ 纵使你脚下有一千名挑战者， 那就把我算做第一千零一名。
I don't believe the sky is blue; I don't believe in thunder's echoes; I don't believe that dreams are false; I don't believe that death has no revenge.	我不相信天是蓝的， 我不相信雷的回声； 我不相信梦是假的， 我不相信死无报应。
If the sea is destined to breach the dikes Let all the brackish water pour into my heart; If the land is destined to rise Let humanity choose a peak for existence again.	如果海洋注定要决堤， 就让所有的苦水都注入我心中； 如果陆地注定要上升， 就让人类重新选择生存的峰顶。
A new conjunction and glimmering stars Adorn the unobstructed sky now; They are the pictographs from five thousand years. They are the watchful eyes of future generations.	新的转机和闪闪的星斗， 正在缀满没有遮拦的天空， 那是五千年的象形文字， 那是未来人们凝视的眼睛。

The similarity of the first stanza in the selection – the fourth stanza in the poem as a whole – to Cultural Revolution propagandistic slogans is readily apparent. In particular, the line “I—do—not—believe!” and the encouragement to act in subsequent lines resonates with the simple four-character slogan used to encourage Chinese peasants during the Great Leap Forward: “敢想敢干,” or “dare to think, dare to act” (Boyle). This stanza, as well as the following, served as the basis for many of the posters of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations and as the mottoes of a generation. The ease with which these lines of poetry were appropriated as revolutionary slogans speaks to their linguistic similarity to the state-sanctioned slogans that Bei Dao was attempting to subvert. The optimism that Dian Li suggests manifests as a remnant of the official language is clearly evinced in this stanza, most poignantly with the lines “I don’t believe that dreams are false / I don’t believe that death has no revenge.” The use of natural imagery in the last two stanzas of this selection also evokes another of the slogans used in this period: “百花齐放” or “let a hundred flowers bloom.” This phrase was used when Mao enacted a policy intended to allow criticism of the Party, which ended a year after it began. Ironically, this slogan was borrowed from a phrase during the Warring States Period (475–221 BC), indicating that Maoist slogans in turn were unable to escape the influence of Chinese tradition (Boyle).

This adherence to the rhetorical strategies employed in the official language, as an aspect of Bei Dao’s poetic style, represents the impact that being constrained by the official language had on him. However, as a manifestation of the translation style, the use of this official language allows Bei Dao to subvert these structures and minimize the damage done by them. This is accomplished through the use of contradicting ideas and unsteady language, as detailed above. In this poem contradiction as a poetic strategy takes the form of the negation of ideas in the “I don’t believe” sentence structure. The optimism in the face of traumatic events that Dian Li criticizes

is less due to ideological conditioning than Bei Dao's attempts to express his views using a language that would make them less traumatic. This language, the translation style, allows him to translate his view of the world into poetry that helps him reckon with his relationship to his language.

### **Dislocation – Translation Style as a Disconnect from Tradition**

Bei Dao's manifestation of the translation style as a way to mediate his reality through language is a symptom of a general disconnect from the Chinese literary tradition. As a result of the Cultural Revolution's concerted efforts to erase any history or art that it deemed morally inconsistent with the values of Maoism, Misty poets as a whole experienced a feeling of withdrawal from Chinese poetics. This is especially devastating in the specific case of China, as so much of its pre- Cultural Revolution culture was formulated around the obsessive preservation of history and its values. Bei Dao himself has shown an acute awareness of the significance of history within the greater scheme of Chinese culture: "the Chinese life is intrinsically linked with history. It must carry the burden of history" (Pozzana 98).

As a result of this disconnect from the Chinese poetic tradition, the Misty poets developed their style in a sort of void – there was no poetry being published, other than governmentally-sanctioned declarations of political fervor. Most of the Chinese poetic tradition was banned except for the minimalist poems of the Book of Poetry, and European literature was available only to the highest officials (Featherston). This atmosphere is what led to the creation of the underground literary circles which circulated the personally-translated works of European poetry and philosophy that influenced the Misty poets so strongly. This artistic void compelled the Misty poets, including Bei Dao, to attempt to reclaim poetry to subvert governmental

restrictions on language. However, this poetry manifested the translation style as a juvenile attempt at reclamation due to Bei Dao's detachment from Chinese poetics and influence from European literature.

"Let's Go," from Bei Dao's earliest published poetry, exemplifies this affliction. Bonnie S. McDougall's translation most clearly evinces the facets of this poem that illustrate how the translation style symptomatizes an attempt at reclaiming Chinese poetry. In particular, her translation preserves the majority of the sequence of images, with the exception of inverting syntax to increase readability. This decision to produce a more readable translation mimics the experience of reading the poem in Chinese, as it's one of Bei Dao's more straightforward works.

The full text is here:

Let's go – Fallen leaves blow into deep valleys But the song has no home to return to	走吧， 落叶吹进深谷， 歌声却没有归宿。
Let's go – Moonlight on the ice Has spilled beyond the river bed	走吧， 冰上的月光， 已从河面上溢出。
Let's go – Eyes gaze at the same patch of sky Hearts strike the twilight drum	走吧， 眼睛望着同一片天空， 心敲击着暮色的鼓。
Let's go – We have not lost our memories We shall search for life's pool	走吧， 我们没有失去记忆， 我们去寻找生命的湖。
Let's go – The road, the road Is covered with a drift of scarlet poppies	走吧， 路呵路， 飘满了红罌粟。

As a whole, this poem can be read as a direct call to action to reclaim Chinese poetry as an art form and to reconnect with its history. The first stanza attempts to make use of the poetic construct known as *bi xing*, a form of figurative language found in the Book of Poetry that

uses a seemingly unrelated image juxtaposed with a thought or emotion in order to make a connection between the two to draw a moral conclusion. For example, poems such as “Mulberries in the Lowlands” use a parallel between the observation of mulberry trees and of the speaker’s lord in order to indicate the joy of reunion: “Lovely are the mulberries in the lowlands/ Their leaves are flourishing/ Now I have seen my lord/ How great is my pleasure!” (Cai 17). This use of disconnected images is found in much of Bei Dao’s poetry and is a symptom of attempting to use this poetic construct out of context of the rest of the poetic stylings found in the Book of Poetry. Line 3 uses the word “song” to reference language and poetry as a whole, which makes the line’s focus on the poetry’s connection to tradition clearer. Here the image of leaves aligns with Chinese poetry in general, and their falling motion evokes the notion that Chinese poetry is being blown away from the source, in this case the tree. The valley in this case represents the potential “home” of poetry in the greater Chinese cultural context, but the fact that the song in line 2 does not have a corresponding home in line 3 suggests the potential loss of traditional poetry.

The second stanza seeks to use disconnected images of nature to elucidate a point, in the style of Tang poetry such as that of Du Fu. The image of “moonlight on the ice” evokes reflection, which again calls back to the Chinese poetic tradition. Chinese poems, particularly those in the Book of Poetry, are meant to present a reflection of the world in literary form. The ice on the river bed corresponds to the art of Chinese poetry and its capability to represent the world. Therefore, the image of the reflection spilling beyond the confines of the ice suggests that the world that seeks representation in poetry – in this case the moonlight – is unable to find purchase or a home within poetry at the time of this poem’s writing.

The third stanza is a clear attempt at the style of parallelism also found in Du Fu’s poetry,

where each character in a line of a couplet corresponds to the character in the same position of the next line. Translated literally, lines 3 and 4 of Du Fu's "Spring Scene" provide a flawless example of this form: "feel time flower shed tear/hate separation bird startle heart" (Cai 162). Due to Bei Dao's use of colloquial Chinese, however, the character count is off by one. This could have been fixed by eliminating the number in line 8 or the second character of the word for "sky," which would have been permissible in classical Chinese, but due to his unfamiliarity with poetic classical Chinese these lines appear awkward and fail to adhere to the form. It seems that Bei Dao has an awareness of the difficulties of trying to reclaim the poetic tradition, as in recent years he has commented that rather than attempting to utilize traditional forms without experience and understanding, a poet must understand that "the breadth and beauty of tradition is like huge wind pressing down on a tiny sail," and that a poet must "know how to use the wind if the boat is going to go far" (Tang 2).

The colloquial language in this poem is also a feature of the translation style – because Bei Dao is composing through the lens of another language, the structures of the "translated" language do not align to the brevity of classical Chinese. Additionally, the image of "eyes [gazing] at the same patch of sky" evokes the concept of connection with future generations. In the same vein of walking in the footsteps of earlier poets, a contemporary poet can experience many of the same images and inspirations as them and use similar poetic structures in order to connect to them. The "hearts [striking] the twilight drum" resonates with this, as two individual poets separated by generations can use the same words – here represented by the drum – to create impressions on an audience.

The next lines, "We have not lost our memories/ we shall search for life's pool" serves as a direct call to action. These lines can be read as Bei Dao's assertion that the poetic tradition is

not fully lost to China, and through memory, it can be reclaimed. “Life’s pool” echoes the concept of the source of poetry found in the first stanza, as the tree from which leaves blow corresponds to “life’s pool.” This pool subsequently corresponds to the frozen river found in the second stanza, which uses water to represent the poetic tradition. Here poetry is the source of life, but more importantly, the water is no longer frozen – poetry has been renewed.

The plural “we” in the lines “we have not lost our memories/ we shall search for life’s pool” is addressed to an undefined person or group of people. The call to action in these lines, in addition to serving as an example of the sort of propagandistic qualities of Bei Dao’s earlier work mentioned earlier, resonates with the line “let’s go,” which is repeated throughout the poem. This refrain gives the poem a songlike quality, the structure of which refers to the equivalence between poems as songs in line 3, “the song has no home to return to.” This resonated with Bei Dao’s implicit suggestion for improving the state of Chinese poetry: to return to the source or roots of traditional poetry and forms.

The phrase “let’s go” in the Chinese text allows the poem to come to a rounded conclusion in the last stanza, as 走 refers to both “to go” and “to walk.” As the poem has spurred the reader to move through the stanzas, the act of reading the poem corresponds to the act of walking, which becomes clear in the final lines of the poem: “the road, the road/ is covered in a drift of scarlet poppies” (14-15). These poppies evoke the symbolic significance of the color red: in the context of Mao-era China, red is always emblematic of Maoism and governmental forces. In interviews Bei Dao has exhibited an acute awareness of the political significance attached to the poetic use of color, where he notes that the image of “green sunlight” as a symbol of rebellion was one of the first connections he had to poetry (Gleichmann 388). Read as a reference to Bei Dao’s situation, the poppies correspond to obstacles on the road to reclaim

poetry from tight governmental regulation. These lines are also steeped in a sense of wistfulness in the original Chinese, as the lines “the road, the road” would be more accurately translated as “road, oh road” as the particle 呵 functions as an exclamation or an exhalation of breath.

In the context of the translation style, this wistfulness has clear implications. If Bei Dao’s poem acts as a necessary attempt to reclaim Chinese poetry, the fact that it is composed in this translation style means that even such an optimistic pursuit has clear barriers to success. While this reading of the poem suggests Bei Dao’s awareness of these obstacles, the less than masterful use of traditional Chinese poetic styles manifests as a symptom of disconnect from tradition. Additionally, the colloquial language used as a facet of the translation style indicates a lack of familiarity with the complex and succinct diction used in classical Chinese language. This separation from poetic language was forced on Bei Dao and other Misty poets by the limitations of the Cultural Revolution, and it manifests in both the language and symbolic content of his poems.

### **Immunization - Translation Style as Self-Preservation**

The manifestation of Bei Dao’s translation style as revealing evidence of linguistic trauma and a forced disconnect from the Chinese poetry tradition can be interpreted as the translation style exhibiting itself as a symptom of his sociopolitical circumstances. This reading by itself, however, limits the agency of the poet in his construction of this poetic style. The translation style also manifests itself as a poetic tool. One of the features of the translation style is the use of abstract and “misty” language to represent images and ideas, which is one of the reasons the style gained so much criticism from official institutions during the Cultural Revolution.

In its inception, the abstraction of the language in the translation style served a dual purpose: it allowed for a style of expression that stood outside of the tightly controlled official discourse, and it allowed for poets to express their political opinions in a fashion that was not blatantly in opposition to the party, which in turn enabled them to avoid (most of the time) being placed indefinitely in prison or being executed. Over time, Bei Dao's poetry has exhibited more and more of these abstract qualities, which has garnered criticism from scholars of contemporary Chinese poetry. This increasing abstraction, however, does not manifest as a symptom like some of the other tendencies in Bei Dao's poetry. Instead, Bei Dao's movement toward the abstract is a tool that he employs in order to avoid political persecution.

As an exile since 1989, Bei Dao's residential situation has been precarious. He has lived in various places under the employ of universities that wanted to boast support of an exiled writer. Bei Dao has spoken on the "positive" aspects of exile – "you get to travel to twenty or thirty countries for free, see the world, meet many writers. If I were not an exile, I would not have these opportunities" (Gleichmann 391). However, in interviews and collections of essays, he has also spoken on the uncertainty associated with not having access to a home country, as well as the internal negotiations that a poet must contend with while in exile.

While the abstraction of the translation style in Bei Dao's later poems does manifest as a symptom of the struggles associated with exile, the abstraction has the practical purpose of avoiding continued conflict with Chinese authorities. Despite a realization that returning to China after the Tiananmen demonstrations would be hazardous, he attempted to go home multiple times, only to be blocked at customs and sent back to his country of residence. The increasing degree of abstract images and decreasing political content in his poems can be interpreted as a product of desire to mend relations with his home country and return to Beijing.

Additionally, Bei Dao's avoidance of conflict with the Chinese authorities while in exile is likely also due in part to a desire to protect his family. After his exile, Bei Dao's (now-former) wife Shao Fei and daughter Tiantian were not allowed to leave China for many years, which meant that they were within reach of the Chinese authorities and possible political punishment. The concept that his family would be harmed was not an unfounded fear – Bei Dao noted in a 1994 interview that while he was active in underground literary circles in the 1970s, “there were some people who were picked up by the police. The police had been paying attention to us anyway. Some were arrested, some were interrogated and harassed” (La Piana). The fact that his family was essentially being held hostage in China certainly led Bei Dao to temper the fervor of his earlier poems by estranging them from political activism.

This movement away from politics is evident in much of Bei Dao's post-exile commentary on his poetry. While in exile, Bei Dao has begun commenting on the trend of interpreting his earlier poetry as solely political, suggesting instead that the aim of the poems was not to criticize the government but instead to “create a new kind of language and expression” and that he is a “nonconformist but not a revolutionary.” Despite the clear activist slant of poems such as “The Answer,” he has stated in interviews that “the struggle among artists and writers in China has been to separate writing and creative impulses from politics” (Ratnier 159). About *Jintian*, the poetry journal founded to house the work of the Misty poets that was shut down in 1980 for its anti-government slant, Bei Dao says the following:

It contained no political statements whatsoever. Naturally I met people from other magazines who were much more political. But if I saw myself as a leader at all, it was as an artistic one. The problem for China in the last half century has been what exactly politics means. On the other hand, it is also true to say that everything that I have done

has always been interpreted politically. And this, for me, is an enormous problem to deal with... Naturally, for Western readers, they're very happy to feel that I belong to the Democracy Movement as a 'leader.' But I see myself, first and foremost, as a creative artist, as a poet. (Ratnier 153)

This reluctance to claim ownership of the politics of his poetry is directly at odds with other comments that Bei Dao has made in other interviews, such as when he claims that “poetry is a form of rebellion against the decades of chaos in China” (Gleichmann 388). I propose that as Bei Dao has developed his translation style over the years, he has employed abstract language in order to distance himself from political interpretation and decrease negative attention from the Chinese authorities. In the context of the Chinese poetic tradition, movement away from outward political commentary, ironically, has more political implications than outward critique. As one of Du Fu’s innovations in the Tang dynasty was the use of regulated verse to discuss history and politics directly, such as commentary on the effects of the An Lushan rebellion of 755 in “Spring Scene”, movement toward the abstract represents a kind of regression to Book of Songs-style poetry that used images to obliquely discuss politics. In contemporary terms, the Maoist government also favored this style of poetry due to its brevity and apparent straightforwardness. Additionally, the contradictions between different pieces of commentary that he has made also manifest themselves in the translation style, as the style explicitly allows contradiction as a poetic element.

“那最初的” or “The Primal,” a poem published in the 2005 anthology *The Rose of Time* is an example of the type of abstraction found in Bei Dao’s poems that have been so highly criticized. In my translation I have tried to preserve some of the disorientation that the reader experiences while reading it in Chinese in order to emphasize the abstraction. Additionally, I’ve

avoided restructuring the order of words to create a more disjointed reading experience, with the exception of a few lines where grammatical structures require it. The most significant alteration I made was in lines 5-6, as I connected the words that mean “bell chime” and “nostalgia” where they were separated in the original in order to clarify the spatial relations between “memory” and “picture frame.”

### The Primal

那最初的

Day and night take their leave at the peak of a huge tree  
Wings fold last rays of light  
On waves of youth a boat navigates  
Death disorients the heart's compass

日夜告别于大树顶端  
翅膀收拢最后光芒  
在窝藏青春的浪里行船  
死亡转动内心罗盘

Memory's tyranny outside of time's  
picture frame – a bell chimes nostalgia  
Storm-searching policeman  
recognizes the light's fingerprints, dizzying

记忆暴君在时间的  
镜框外敲钟——乡愁  
搜寻风暴的警察  
因辨认光的指纹晕眩

In a pond, the sky nurses its wounds  
Stars reserve seats in the theatre of night  
An orphan leads the song of the blind  
Greets the moon at a mountain pass

天空在池塘养伤  
星星在夜剧场订座  
孤儿带领盲目的颂歌  
在隘口迎接月亮

That primal thing has no name  
Rivers update the schedule  
Sunlight unfurls its brilliant umbrella  
Acting as a stranger's send-off

那最初的没有名字  
河流更新时刻表  
太阳撑开它耀眼的伞  
为异乡人送行

With just a cursory reading, the difference between later poems like this and earlier works such as “Let's Go” and “The Answer” becomes excruciatingly clear. Due to the abstraction in this poem and its resistance to a single definitive interpretation, I will propose a reading on the basis of abstraction juxtaposed with viscerality as the theme of the poem. This theme in itself is one of the defining poetic features of the translation style. From the first line, “day and night” bid farewell to each other. In the context of Bei Dao's work being criticized as cloaked in mist and shadows, this seems to correspond to the parting of the clear images of his

earlier language and the obscured layers of meaning in poems such as this one. His meaning is shrouded in veils of shifting images which correspond to the folding wings in the second line. Here it is unclear whether the wings are doing the folding or if the “last rays of light” is a separate image: in Eliot Weinberger’s translation of this line as “wings close last light,” the space between the images creates an alternate impression of a jarring shift between concepts.

The next two lines are connected by the image of a navigating boat and a compass, but the juxtaposition of youth and death serve to resist a continuity of meaning and suggest the disorientation of the poem as a whole. The reversal of the calibration of the compass projects a wish for a reversal of the expectations projected on Bei Dao’s poetry through the implementation of the translation style. In the second stanza, “time’s picture frame” and “memory’s tyranny” evokes an awareness of the obstacles that Bei Dao faces in creating that “new kind of language and expression” (Ratnier), including the perception of his poems as political. The “storm-searching policeman” in line 7 then seems to correspond to critics that seek to identify political traces. The “fingerprints of light” in the following line correspond to scars left by lightning in a tempest, representing imprints on his poems which make it impossible to escape association with politics.

In the third stanza, the images in the poem become more aligned with the title of the poem and less self-referential. The lines become connected by a series of images: sky is connected to stars and night in line 10, and theatre in line 10 is connected to the “song” in line 11. Line 12 is a continuation of line 11 as designated by the spatial designator word 在, but this line in turn connects back to the images of sky and night. These lines refer to the “primal” aspects of the world that Bei Dao wants to represent in his poetry.

His search for a way to “separate writing and creative impulses from politics” (Ratnier

159) and his frustration with his perception of the Chinese language's limitations is represented in the following stanza: "that primal thing has no name/ rivers update the schedule/ sunlight unfurls its brilliant umbrella/ acting as a stranger's send-off" (13-16). Following this reading, Bei Dao seems to be lamenting the inadequacy of language to represent the "primal" aspects of the world despite the natural world's influence on constructs ("rivers update the schedule"). The final two lines refer back to the image of day and sunlight in the beginning of the poem as a metaphor for clear, precise language. He suggests that this language serves as a "send-off" or perhaps a starting gun for action. In the context of the consequences of revolutionary action in Communist China – and in exile – it is understandable that Bei Dao would be wary of this and move towards the abstract language that makes the interpretation of this poem so uncertain.

Despite the heavy criticism that this abstract style has garnered, the movement away from political commentary has seemed to be successful for Bei Dao. After withdrawing his association with the Human Rights in China organization, Bei Dao has been allowed to return to China and teach in Hong Kong. He has been keeping a low political profile, and some factions of the public and dissident groups believe that "he has intentionally stayed away from politics and avoided politically sensitive topics" as part of an agreement to allow him to return to China. Wei Jingsheng, the chair of the Overseas Chinese Democracy Coalition has stated that Bei Dao's return to China "is no positive signal. It must be part of the 'united front policy' of the CCP" to intentionally disintegrate dissident groups (Bei).

### **Inflammation – Translation Style as Political Resistance**

Bei Dao's recent distance from political matters and subversive poetry casts a somewhat pessimistic light on the final manifestation of the translation style as a tool of resistance. The

translation style originated as a way for underground dissident poets to organize their thoughts and communities using a language that was not controlled by the government. The creation of this type of language allowed for individuals to both express their political opinions and learn the opinions of other poets, which was revolutionary in a political system in which the spread of information and ideas themselves was tightly regulated by the government, to say nothing of the language that surrounds those ideas. This idea of art as a form of resistance is found in countless other cultures, but the creation of the translation style of poetry in China is almost poignant considering the country's long history with intertwined poetry and politics.

In addition to allowing members of the resistance to organize, this style of poetry also as a distinctly personal element. The spread of these poems up until their adoption by the May Fourth movement were generally circulated among “a small circle of friends.” This is due in part to the fact that “because it was a time of great repression, it was dangerous to have one's poems go too far afield” (Ratnier 156). Many of Bei Dao's early poems were composed in solitude without any expectation of readers. This lends a much more intimate context to Bei Dao's poems as a personal method of resistance – in a way, they appear as a way to maintain resolve and sanity in a climate of intellectual repression.

Read in a more personal light, Bei Dao's poem “Everything” from the early 1970s takes on the tone of both self-consolation and pessimistic resignation. My translation attempts to convey the resignation of the original by preserving the simplicity of sentence structures and language while attempting to convey the depth of meaning in the vocabulary. Unfortunately, the Chinese text has a distinct quality of prosody that I was unable to reproduce.

Everything

一切

Everything is fate  
Everything is mist

一切都是命运  
一切都是烟云

Everything is without the end's beginning	一切都是没有结局的开始
Everything is a fleeting pursuit	一切都是稍纵即逝的追寻
Every joy is without a smile	一切欢乐都没有微笑
Every suffering is without a tearstain	一切苦难都没有泪痕
Every language is iteration	一切语言都是重复
Every contact is the first meeting	一切交往都是初逢
Every romance is in the heart	一切爱情都在心里
Every past event is in a dream	一切往事都在梦中
Every expectation takes notes	一切希望都带着注释
Every conviction brings a moan	一切信仰都带着呻吟
Every explosion has a moment of tranquility	一切爆发都有片刻的宁静
Every death has an interminable echo	一切死亡都有冗长的回声

The structure of this poem makes use of the repetition of “every” in order to create a regular rhythm, particularly in the first few lines. This is juxtaposed with the content of the lines, which become progressively more confrontational in their intentional dismantling of perceived truths. This echoes some of the inherent anger found in “The Answer,” as Bei Dao here seems to be reacting against the concept of immutable truth. Similar to lines 17-22 of “The Answer (I don't believe the sky is blue;/ I don't believe in thunder's echoes;/ I don't believe that dreams are false;/ I don't believe that death has no revenge), the simple and colloquial syntax is again juxtaposed with the force behind the lines.

The initial few lines are not inherently confrontational: “everything is fate” is a more or less inoffensive concept in Chinese poetry. “Everything is mist” seems to be slightly more pessimistic, yet still relatively unfrontational compared to later lines of the poem. Line 3, however, proposes an end without a beginning, or an outcome without an outset, which in the context of a highly regulated language with no room for ambiguity is a radical concept. This line challenges the concept of progress without connection to history or memory, and suggests that without these grounding factors, progress is nothing but a “fleeting pursuit.”

The next two lines, “Every joy is without a smile/ Every suffering is without a tearstain,”

call into question the sincerity of emotions in a society where everything is coded in relation to politics and a certain degree of political fervor is required in order to avoid persecution.

Additionally, they consider the question of whether emotion can be genuine when methods of communication – in this case body language but more generally language – are controlled.

Language is criticized again in line 7 when Bei Dao suggests that “all language is iteration.”

Here “iteration” can also be translated as repetition or duplication, but “iteration” seems more fitting as a criticism of language. This resonates with the use of slogans and propaganda to replace genuine interactions, but also with the failings of language in general to express thoughts in words other than clichés.

Lines 8 and 9 both criticize and break down interpersonal relations and the social structures built up around them. Line 8 suggests that people have changed every time you meet them and that aiming to know someone is a futile endeavor. Line 9 calls into question romance and whether or not there is any such thing as love that cannot be reduced to chemicals and sentiment. Lines 10-12 respectively challenge the objectivity of reality, the sincerity of belief, and the efficacy of conviction (every past event is in a dream/ every expectation takes notes/ every conviction brings a moan). The final two lines of the poem come to a violent denouement, as the frustration and confrontation in the rest of the poem culminates in an “explosion” or a breaking-out. The “moment of tranquility” inherent in the explosion, either before or after the blast, gives the reader a moment to breathe before the final line.

In contrast to the rest of the poem, the final line seems to have a more optimistic slant that casts the rest of the text into a new light. “Every death has an interminable echo” suggests the sentiment that despite the darkness and finality of death, mortal sacrifices can have positive effects on history that reverberate beyond the experiences of a singular individual. Read in this

vein, the rest of the poem appears as a cathartic exhalation that allows Bei Dao to vent his frustrations without losing faith in the concept of resistance.

Interestingly, this poem garnered a response by another famous Misty poet called Shu Ting that attempted to contradict Bei Dao's work by reinforcing a more hopeful message. This broaches the subject of a different type of criticism of Bei Dao's poetry: if in fact the translation style is a tool of resistance and dissident activity, what are the cultural implications of Bei Dao's poetic messages and style? This is a source of Chinese criticism of the translation style that suggests that it represents a Westernization of Chinese poetry that is at odds with the concept of reclaiming the Chinese language.

Despite the negativity present in "Everything," Bei Dao also uses the translation style as a tool for inspiring resistance on a broader scale. "The Answer" (1976) is once again one of the most poignant examples of this, as evinced in its widespread use and adoption by the May Fourth movement. The optimism present in the following lines from the poem is obvious and effective:

If the sea is destined to breach the dikes	如果海洋注定要决堤，
Let all the brackish water pour into my heart;	就让所有的苦水都注入我心中；
If the land is destined to rise	如果陆地注定要上升，
Let humanity choose a peak for existence again.	就让人类重新选择生存的峰顶。

A new conjunction and glimmering stars	新的转机和闪闪的星斗，
Adorn the unobstructed sky now;	正在缀满没有遮拦的天空，
They are the pictographs from five thousand years.	那是五千年的象形文字，
They are the watchful eyes of future generations.	那是未来人们凝视的眼睛。

The first stanza of this selection resonates with the acceptance of inevitable death and subsequent cathartic freedom found in "Everything." If "everything is fate" and "the sea is destined to breach the dikes," then the speaker can make the best of the hand they have been dealt. In acceptance of the negative, Bei Dao suggests that the reader must not resign themselves to evitable circumstances and act to seize opportunities – such as the "new conjunction and

glimmering stars” that “adorn the unobstructed sky.” Through utilizing the translation style as a tool of resistance, Bei Dao composed a poem that inspired a generation to act on their beliefs in a manner that would be seen by the “watchful eyes of future generations.”

### **“Last Rays of Light” – Conclusion**

These four manifestations of the translation style paint a picture of a poetic style that is defined by contradiction. Not only does the concept of the translation style manifesting as a symptom contradict its manifestation as a tool, but also contradictions are evident within these categories. The translation style as a type of trauma literature stems from Bei Dao’s intense and nuanced relationship with the Chinese language, where the translation style as symptomatic of detachment from the Chinese poetic tradition indicates a disconnect between him and his mother tongue. Likewise, Bei Dao’s use of the translation style as a tool to protect himself from political consequences contradicts his use of it to articulate political positions. These contradictions should not be read as a flaw of the style, however: they represent the material conditions that led to the creation of this genre of poetry. While Bei Dao and other Misty poets faced significant adversity in regard to the creation of their poetry, they adapted to their circumstances by adopting irregularity as a poetic form and embracing its implications.

The obscurity of the translation style in Bei Dao’s poetry has been, as discussed earlier, a source of criticism from both Western critics and the Chinese officials that dubbed the genre Misty. While these criticisms ostensibly have different reasonings behind them, it seems that both schools of criticism have similar underlying motivations. In each case where the translation style has been criticized for its Mistiness or obscurity of language regarding its employment of contradiction or disjointedness, the criticisms seem to hold the same sentiment: Bei Dao’s

“translation style” isn’t what Chinese poetry is meant to be. In the case of the Chinese officials, their conceptualization of Chinese poetry is that it should conform to the stylings of the Book of Songs and maintain a “Chinese” simplicity that aligns to the ideological positions of the Chinese Communist party. In the case of non-party aligned Chinese critics, the view is that Bei Dao’s poetry does not demonstrate a sense of “Chineseness” in his language, images, or poetic structures. Western critics such as Michael S. Duke decry the colloquial language and the “almost hermetic symbolism that is as often as arresting as it is incomprehensible.” Other critics and interviewers constantly question the representation of “Chineseness” in his writing, which Bei Dao himself seems to have little time for. These viewpoints seem to be grounded in the conception that Chinese poetry should have any one distinct style or aesthetic – whether that aesthetic should be the simplicity found in the Book of Songs or the vivacity of the *fu* rhapsody style depends on the critic. Regardless, this reveals a limiting essentializing notion regarding Chinese poetry as a whole.

Irrespective of its influence on the perceived literary value of Bei Dao’s poetry, the translation style has implications regarding our understanding of translation in a broader sense. Instead of simply consisting of a communicative endeavor, Bei Dao’s translation style manifests itself as a negotiation between internal and external as a way to assert the self in adverse circumstances. Bei Dao confronts his traumas and his aspirations through his poetry, allowing a safe and productive framework for expressing complex realities. This is further complicated by the fact that Bei Dao’s poetry is expressed through the lens of history and politics – the extent to which Bei Dao’s poetry expresses the translation style is reliant on the background of the Chinese literary tradition and language that he seeks to subvert.

As the translation style manifests itself as a mode distinct from one identified as translation in the most literal sense, rendering Bei Dao's work in another language is a compelling task. I began this project with the intent to produce a greater number of my own translations than the ones I have presented here, but through the process of researching Bei Dao and the circumstances from which his poetry originated, I instead turned to an analysis of the translation style. Given more time to expand upon this project, I would like to analyze more of Bei Dao's poems and translate them with the translation style in mind as a framework for producing translations. Additionally, I think that the translation style has significant poetic potential based on its fourth manifestation as a method of resistance. It interests me how the translation style might be used as a model for other poets to inspire similar political resistance in the face of oppression. Were I to continue work on this subject, I would like to expand my analysis to include other Misty poets such as Duo Duo and Shu Ting in order to examine other performances of the translation style. I would also like to do readings of poems in the translation style in order to identify the bodily implications of translation, which I have alluded to in my categorization of the translation style as indicative of abrasion, dislocation, immunization, or inflammation.

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