

Reading Prosodically, Reading Serendipitously: Fine-Tuning for the Unheard Melodies of “*Dao*”*

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ABSTRACT

Feng Shengli 馮勝利’s studies of prosodic morphology have directed the author’s attention to the crucial but often underestimated influences of the sound of words over meaning. This paper argues how we might re-read the familiar and the classical, such as the aesthetically visual poem by Ma Zhiyuan 馬致遠 (1250-1321) and the ambiguous text of *Daodejing* 《道德經》, especially the first two sentences, not only in terms of the cultural milieu but also in accordance with the linguistic environment that defines the particular textual expressions. Along these lines, we can also better understand the intricate relationships between meaning and sound, mind and rhythm, eye and ear, and intra- and extra-linguistic elements, for a healthy counterbalance to our habitual emphasis on meaning or its cultural and visual appearance, often at the expense of sound. In this way, we can understand how otherwise “silent” or insignificant sound also influences the way we read or interpret both poetry and prose.

Key words: prosodic literature, philosophy, classical Chinese literature, comparative literature, translation

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For John Keats (1795-1821), “heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter,” but to capture such sweeter melodies, we need help to listen to “the spirit ditties of no tone” in each syllable of word in each sentence through a “more endear’d pipe” that awakens our aesthetic sensitivity. Such “more endear’d pipe” should probably be searched again in linguistics (Keats 1986: 822). The twentieth century saw many inspiring methodical and disciplinary innovations, one of which came with the significant influences from linguistics in the name of structuralism, especially in terms of how it constructs and then deconstructs our analytical approaches to initiate quite a revolution in literary criticism, philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and semiotics. Argued in two of his major publications, *Studies on Chinese Prosodic Grammar* 《漢語韻律語法研究》(2005) and *Interactions between Morphology Syntax and Prosody in Chinese* 《漢語的韻律詞法與句法》(1997), Feng’s prosodic research has the potential of fine-tuning the “more endear’d pipe” for the sweeter unheard melodies of *Dao* 道, even though it may initially appear utterly irrelevant to philosophy and literature in general being so technically concentrated on the issues of prosody.¹

Feng’s theory focuses on how words mean and evolve in meaning because the way words can, cannot, or must be sounded according to or contrary to what they are supposed to mean via intrinsic and self-regulated sound relationships in conjunction with extra-lingual, i.e., cultural, influences. Such sound relationships, as Feng argues, significantly dictate how Chinese develops from its pre-Qin two syllabic structure to its distinctive multi-syllabic phrases and sentence structures in poetry and prose through Han period. Sound, as Feng emphasizes, is the key to “hermeneutics”² because what word to be

¹ The paper was literally started and completed during the last two years of Dr. Feng’s tenure at Harvard University until his resignation in 2010 for his current appointment at Hong Kong Chinese University. I thank Dr. Feng for his friendship, mentorship, and encouragement that have not only occasioned but also sustained my years-long interest in Chinese prosody whether in the form of tete-a-tete talks, quick email messages, or brief telephone conversations.

² If sound is essential of “*Xungu* 訓詁,” roughly a Chinese version of “hermeneutics,” understanding sound or the musical quality of Chinese words is truly essential in interpreting the syntax and meanings especially of classic Chinese texts “訓詁之旨本於聲韻,” “以聲音通訓詁,” and “以聲音通句法,” emphasizes Feng (1997: 3-4), echoing Lu Zhongda 陸宗達. So is this importance stressed by Liang Zhongdai 梁宗岱 (1903-1983) referring to the character 讀, which means reading when pronounced “*du*” or “rhythm” or “pause” when pronounced “*dou*” (Liang 1984: 37). To read, especially in ancient time, emphasizes Zhu Guanqian 朱光潛 (1897-1986), often means to pause, *not* for the sake of meaning but for the desirable beat or rhythm. The logic of meaning, in other words, is often disrupted for the rhythm of sound as with the poem “Guanguan Jujiu” 關關雎鳩 from *The Book of Songs* 《詩經》. For the desirable musical effect, the whole phrase or sound of onomatopoeia of 關關 (*guanguan*), which mimics

added, deleted, or stressed, and in what order in a Chinese text is not always done for the sake of meaning but often, consciously or involuntarily, executed according to sheer formal conjunction of sound elements.³ Feng shows us the subtle but instrumental influences of the way each word sounds in poetry and prose otherwise invisible or inaudible.⁴ We therefore must read with our ears open, not just our eyes. Sound and ear are as cognitively significant as eye and written words.⁵

the singing of ospreys 睢鳩 (*jujiu*), for instance, can be read as 關關 (*guan-guan*), and the phrase of visual onomatopoeia 窈窕 (*yaotiao*), which depicts the graceful appearance and manner of a beautiful girl 淑女 (*shunu*), as 窈窕 (*yao-tiao*). Even the word 睢鳩 (*jujiu*) for ospreys can be read as 睢鳩 (*ju-jiu*) (Graham 1982: 164). With further theoretical rigor and vigor, Feng’s studies suggest additional promise in the light regarding what active role that sound plays in influencing our way of reading and understanding beyond our usual consciousness.

³ Even though the Chinese language does have so-called “visual onomatopoeia,” such “visual effect” as A. C. Graham (1919-1991) points out, is often overemphasized at the expense of what is supposed to be the most important – the sound effect, which is, after all, the life source of Chinese poetry (Graham 1982: 223). This overemphasis, however, is quite understandable since non-native speakers, such as the “imagists,” may hardly feel the sound that makes the images. Also, for Feng, while it is necessary to understand the social and cultural influences on the development of language as we usually do, it is equally necessary for us to turn our attention to the language itself, i.e., the “genetic” mechanism or organism that defines the language from within itself in conjunction with the external influences or conditions (Feng 1997: 3).

⁴ It is like what philosophers, such as Wittgenstein (1889-1951), try to do, that is, to bring our lofty philosophical investigation back to the basic, the language itself, so that we can better understand what is said in terms of how it is said or to link our otherwise abstract thinking, as William James (1842-1910) does, even to “things” as seemingly “insignificant” as the functional words, i.e., “prepositions” and “conjunctions.” With our attention thus re-oriented toward the undeniable importance or the ever-present influences of sound, such a prosodic approach that Feng pursues seems to de-construct the deconstruction of phonocentrism. Reading with both our eyes and ears open for the unheard melodies this way also enables us to experience what is cognitively and aesthetically invisible but essential. It is particularly helpful in dealing with the “hearing loss” problem of our times that demand quick grasp for meaning visually often at the enormous expense of *sound*, the integral part of meaning.

⁵ As indicated in his major works cited in the paper and various other publications, what Feng has been working to achieve is, as I would like to call, a “transformational generative prosody of the Chinese language.” Feng means to paint a clear picture of how sound quietly influences our way of reading and thinking in Chinese as Chomsky’s TG grammar does theoretically on the issues of syntax and cognition. Feng’s prosody thus not only enriches our understanding of the Chinese language and literature, especially in terms of translation (as the paper so indicates), but also suggests practical measures in terms of classroom teaching. With regard to the surreptitious influences of sound over meaning the way Feng emphasizes, we should teach, for instance, not only through silence, that is, reading and thinking quietly, but also through sound, which means reading and thinking aloud. Reading poems from other cultures in the original to students who do not understand the languages may sound silly, but it is cognitively crucial.

In the phrases, such as “唯命是聽，何人不識，何辜之有” (Do as ordered whatsoever, No one doesn’t know, and What do I do wrong)⁶ (Feng 2005: 41), the underlined words, as Feng points out, is not added for meaning but for sound. The same is true with auxiliary verbs, such as “作夢，作聲，作遊戲，作朋友” (to dream, to make a sound/noise, to play, and to make friends) (ibid: 262). In the phrases, such as “時不我待” (Time waits for no one), the word order is reversed for the sake of sound not meaning (ibid: 258). The same is true with “吾喪我” (I lost myself) from *Zhuangzi* (ibid: 254). The word “我” is posited instead of “吾” for the sake of “stress of sound” that the sentence needs. The phrases “被誅” (is killed) and “被暴誅” (is cruelly killed) may sound different in meaning but the word “暴” is not added for meaning to depict the way or manner someone is being killed. Rather, it is added, emphasizes Feng, for the sound, because without “暴” being so added, the sentence simply does not sound “right” to stand by itself. Between “被誅” and “被暴誅,” there is no actual difference in meaning because the word “暴” is added for pure prosodic reason, particularly at the time when the classical Chinese is in the process evolving from its pre-Qin stage to the two-Han’s period. The same is true with “被戮” and “被殺戮” (to be killed/slaughtered) (ibid: 259).

Also according to Feng, even those grammatically perfect sentences, such as “阿 Q 很敬重士兵們” (A Q respects the soldiers very much), may not sound right with the word “們,” which is used, as the general rule of grammar would so require, to indicate plural. But it is exactly because of this grammatically required word “們” that the sentence does not sound right or “grammatically correct” to the ear until its removal to let the sentence *be* solely on singular for the correct expression of plural 阿 Q 很敬重士兵

Students, such as mine, do enjoy the “interesting” sounds or “beautiful” rhythms of the poems read aloud to them in Chinese, French, or Japanese, even if they cannot “understand” them this way. The sounds of the poems however make them somewhat or somehow able to feel or visualize the “meanings” before or after reading through translation. Reading aloud for unheard melodies should at least suggest what is cognitively and aesthetically invisible but essential. Similarly, once I decided to let myself go with the natural rhythm or flow of sounds instead of focusing on the syntax while having conversation every other week with Kazuyo Rumbach Sensei, my wonderful Japanese language teacher, I started to follow her better with a more instant and intimate *feel* of and response to the language. But, unquestionably, while emphasizing the surreptitious influences of sound over meaning, there is always a danger for one to appear “plac[ing] unusual emphasis on the importance of *sound* for meaning and hermeneutics” or “going excessively overboard along the line of the thought (無限上綱),” according to the insightful observations from the two anonymous reviewers regarding the paper’s argument. A clear and subtle awareness or restraint therefore must be well in place for an appropriate application of Feng’s theory.

⁶ My translation.

(Feng 2005: 166).⁷ Similarly, we also see such quite common or normal but redundant, if not ridiculous, expressions. Words, such as 眼 (eye), 龜 (tortoise), 蒜 (garlic), for instance, have to be paired up with other ones for the same meaning in such phrases as 眼睛, 烏龜, and 大蒜. Often, we also hear that 鹽 (salt) is called 鹹鹽 (salty salt), 井 (well) as 水井 (water well), and 冰 (ice) as 涼冰 (cool ice). Could “salt” be by any means sweet? Is “well” not where we get water? Could “ice” be ever warming not cool? However ridiculous as these daily expressions may sound in terms of sheer logic or common sense, they make good *sense* prosodically – the way our ears so demand for meaning (Feng 1997: 142).⁸

These examples should significantly indicate how the grammatical and syntactic structure could be understood, not as we usually do, that is, mainly from social and cultural aspects, but also through the intricate relationships of sound. What is “correct” must also sound “right,” that is, whether or how a phrase or sentence is correct is as much a crucial matter to the ear as to the eye. It is therefore important to understand how complementary the word and sound relationships really are. Understanding meaning through such complementary relationships is not a momentary necessity but a continuous process for us to be responsive to the complex relationships between seeing and hearing while analyzing prosodic and grammatical elements for comprehension of the semantic and cultural issues. It is because the intricate complementary relationships are often

⁷ This indeed sounds very paradoxical but the reason as Feng explains must be understood prosodically in terms of its crucial “Nuclear Stress Rule” because functional words, such as 們 (*men*) and 了 (*le*), as a rule, cannot be stressed. As in the phrase 士兵, with 士 becoming stressed and 兵 unstressed, the additional 們 thus sounds awkwardly out of place. This is why, as Feng emphasizes with additional examples, prosody depends on syntax but, at the same time, also restrains syntax (Feng 2005: 162-178). For further reference on the issues, see Tsai and Feng (2006).

⁸ Probably this famous rhythmical sentence from Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145 or 135-86 BC), “狡兔死，走狗烹，飛鳥盡，良弓藏，敵國破，謀臣亡” (Once the cunning bunnies are no longer available for hunting, the dogs for the spot is then useful only as food; when the swift-flying birds are one day completely cleared of the sky as games, it is the time for the high-quality bows to be put away; after the enemies are wiped out, the days of those courtiers good for war strategies and tactics are truly numbered) could also be understood in this way. Words that may otherwise seem redundant can now make perfect sense. Why do we need, for instance, the word “flying” to describe “birds” here? Do not birds usually fly? Why cannot we make it simpler in this way, “兔死、狗烹、鳥盡、弓藏、敵破、臣亡” ? This simplified version however does not sound as nice or “right” as the original. Furthermore, if it seems to be such a necessity to use the adjective “cunning 狡” to describe what kind of “bunnies” are referred to, it then also seems to be prosodically justifiable to use the adjectives of “running 走” and “flying 飛” in the same sentence for the sake of the effective meaning-assisting flow of sound and rhythm, even if these adjectives may sound so redundant or unnecessary – semantically speaking.

intertwined in a single word, phrase, sentence, and sound as to make everything so visually audible or audibly visual. If *Dao* is ever alive in our language, it would not be possibly heard or seen unless through such a harmonizing process, which suggests, in many subtle ways, the ways of the “Way.”

Feng’s theory thus suggests to us how to re-cognize the “voices” of words, which often create “unspeakable” aesthetical effects, such as the subtly suggested motion, mood, and movements with “untranslatable” meaning. While reading a poem, it is not just the image but the fluid “rhythm picture” that often touches our hearts. Even if we cannot see the sound, it is all live with the rhythm as in the lines from Du Fu’s 杜甫 (712-770) “無邊落葉蕭蕭下，不盡長江滾滾來，”⁹ from Chen Zi’ang’s 陳子昂 (661-702) “念天地之悠悠，獨愴然之涕下，”¹⁰ and from Li Qingzhao’s 李清照 (1084-1151) “尋尋覓覓冷冷清清，悽悽慘慘慙慙。”¹¹ Why are these poetic lines so unforgettable to so many? It is because the rhythms have become so much the heartbeats of one’s cultural senses awakened through the seemingly monotonous sounds, which are, however, so rich of the unspeakable meanings. Words are no longer just words but *notes* of what is profoundly ethical and aesthetical echoed in every single syllable arranged in ways so instantaneously sense provoking in sound and visual imagery.¹² How can we not then be

⁹ Du’s lines depict how the poet is touched by the very sight of the autumn scene with leaves falling ceaselessly and the great Yangtze River rolling on and on. But what make these two lines so unforgettable are the sounds of onomatopoeia *xiaoxiao* of 蕭蕭 and *gungun* of 滾滾. Thus in perfect parallel both visually and audibly as 無邊落葉蕭蕭下，不盡長江滾滾來 (*wubian luoye xiaoxiao xia, bujin changjiang gungun lai*), one line so vividly describes not only the ways but also the sounds of the leaves endlessly falling from the trees of dense forests with such an intensity and immensity; the other, also as quite a visual onomatopoeia in marvelous parallel, catches the ways and sounds of the vast and endlessly flowing water of the great Yangtze River that rolls on and on, waves after waves, day and night.

¹⁰ In Chen’s well-known lines, *youyou* of 悠悠 is also the crucial sounds of onomatopoeia that captures the very moment, both physically and psychologically, when the poet sheds tears emotionally in silence 愴然 at the very sight and thought of the immeasurable immensity, immediacy, and intimacy of the great universe 天地 (*tian di*) that quietly opens up before his eyes as he ascends to the top of a hill.

¹¹ Of these most famous two initial lines of Li’s famous poem “Sheng Sheng Man” 〈聲聲慢〉, the usual phrases, such as 尋覓 (*xunmi*, searching, i.e., companionship or something invaluable, etc.), 冷清 (*lengqing*, lonely), 悽慘 (*qican*, sad), 悽慙 (*qiqi*, melancholy), are all paired up in this unique way as 尋尋覓覓冷冷清清，悽悽慘慘慙慙 (*xunxun mimi lengleng qingqing, qiqi cancan qiqi*) to suggest the immeasurable and immense sadness that the poet or the persona of the poem so keenly feels especially in the company of the ceaselessly monotonous sounds of the drizzling rain on the leaves of *wutong* trees outside the window in the chilly dusk of the evening, which the sounds of these initial lines so vividly mimic to evoke the unusual simultaneously visual and auditory imagery.

¹² As if in the motion picture, the sound of onomatopoeia does suggest a “special effect,” which could be further appreciated in terms of “synaesthesia,” the important but often overlooked rhetorical term.

with *Dao* or to be so touched to feel it? Each word thus sounds so fresh as if it has never been spoken or read before with such subtlety and fluidity so suggestive of *Dao*; the fluidity of *Dao* is thus embodied through the fluidity of *Dao*-suggesting rhythm.

As to how perfect visual imagery in poetry can be prosodically further appreciated, here is “Tian Jing Sha” 〈天淨沙·秋思〉 by Ma Zhiyuan.

枯藤老樹昏鴉， A few withered vines, an old tree, the crows at dusk,
 小橋流水人家， A small bridge, a flowing river, plus the scattered cottages,
 古道西風瘦馬， An ancient road, the west wind, and a gaunt horse –
 夕陽西下， Down on the horizon is the evening sun, and,
 斷腸人在天涯。 Alone, stands a heart-broken man.

With such simple and clear-cut verbal image, the poem uses nothing but “le mot juste” for every object depicted. The man also becomes part of the scene. The poem is so “objective” in description with neither verbs nor “auxiliaries” but sheer nouns that however suggest vivid motion of stillness and emotion. If words, such as “a gaunt horse” and “the setting sun” are not counted as simultaneously objective and subjective, the only possible word that may tell how one feels, not just what one sees, is “heart-broken.” The poem paints a perfect picture with perfect verbal economy. It begins, like a Chinese scroll

“Synaesthesia” indicates how a “holistic” process can transform the conflicting into the complementary through the unusual (but undoubtedly universal) aesthetic moment when the ordinary sense experiences dissolve with the audible simultaneously becoming visual and the visual audible. In his poem “London,” William Blake (1757-1951), for instance, suggests that he not only hears but also sees “... the hapless soldier’s sigh/Runs in blood down palace walls” (Black 1991:899). In *Nostromo*, Joseph Conrad (1867-1924) describes how “the solitude appeared like a great void, and the silence of the gulf like a tense, thin, cord to which [Don Martin Decoud] hung suspended by both hands,” and how “the cord of silence snap[s] in the solitude of the Placid Gulf” with the self-inflicted gunshot that ends the passionate misanthrope’s life (Conrad 1974: 498-9). In “Tong Gan” 〈通感〉, Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書 discusses how much a little flower of apricot sticking out the wall of yard suggests *noisy* color of the coming spring “紅杏枝頭春意鬧” and how severely this wonderful choice of word “noisy” is ridiculed by some straight thinking critics, such as, Li Yu 李漁 (1611-1680), as “illogical” (Qian 1984: 21). Qian also refers to mystics like Saint-Martin, who confesses, “I heard flowers that sounded and saw notes that shone” (ibid: 28). In both “Tong Gan” and *Guanzhui Pian* 《管錘篇》 (Qian 1979: 482-484), Qian mentions about the interesting cases in the *Liezi* 《列子》 regarding how one’s eye can hear like ear, how one’s ear can smell like nose, how one’s nose can taste like mouth, how everything becomes so instantly interconnected and how all the usual distinctions or forms of things quickly disappear when one’s mind and heart are fully in concentration; Qian also discusses with further reference to the *Liezi* how a disciple of Laozi can hear and see the *Dao* after being enlightened (Qian 1979: 482; Wang 2003: 84; Graham 1990: 77).

that rolls out inch by inch, with “withered vines,” “old tree,” and “crows,” followed by a vista of a small bridge, a flowing river, the scattered cottages, an ancient road, the west wind, the evening sun, a gaunt horse, and finally ends with a heart-broken man.¹³ Everything depicted is so still and the only objects that may suggest motion are the “the west wind,” “a flowing river,” and “the evening sun.” Likewise, the only element that suggests motion so visually is the evening sun – as it sets down slowly in a barely noticeable pace. But with all these images so vivaciously juxtaposed, do we not also see *everything* in a Gestalt way? The poem conveys a touch of timelessness, real and surreal, especially with the image of a heart-broken man. He is as much a live person as a unique symbol of humanity.¹⁴

But such an image perfect poem would not touch us the way it does without sound or note perfect sound. Every word in the poem is, in fact, so quietly musical. It is these quiet, unheard, or unacknowledged simple and plain musical notes that give the poem the rich history-echoing and heart-touching power. Do we not *ever* feel in the simple rhythm of this poem the similar power and beauty of simplicity in another from *The Book of Songs*, “斷竹，續竹，飛土，逐肉”？¹⁵ Are they not the pure musical notes and heartbeats that detain and retain our culturally enriched and enlivened sense of history? No doubt, it is these notes of simple infinity that echo eternity in the poem.¹⁶ Practically, what this poem really strikes us with is *the sound* behind, beneath, and between the verbal imagery. Such simple and clear-cut verbal imagery, so often appreciated for its seamless visual composition of perfect stillness, is however also quite musically suggestive of its heart-touching motion, mood, and moment. Every simple image in the poem is so simultaneously and audio-visually perfect note that rings in our ear and touch our heart like pieces of pearl, slightly different in size, “dropping on the plate of jade” in simple and rhythmical sequence.¹⁷ Stripped almost entirely of any

¹³ It is very much like Robert Frost’s poem “Stopping by the Woods on the Snowy Evening” suggestive of a possible spiritual crisis and consequent recovery from it in an equally simple but profoundly significant rhythmic pattern.

¹⁴ My translation.

¹⁵ The famous simple poem reads as *duanzhu* (斷竹), *xuzhu* (續竹), *feitu* (飛土), *zhurou* (逐肉) and vividly describes the ancient drama of hunting, “cut bamboo, make sling, sling the clay ball, and the ball chases the game.”

¹⁶ How can this simple poem touch us the native speakers with such power? It seems as if the sound of *Dao* echoes history *live* in the poem with simple and pure rhythm. One of the problems with “Imagists” in the 20’ and 30’s is that they often *see* the images in the classic Chinese and Japanese poems but not the sound that keeps or makes the images so alive *not* as a kind of “soundtrack” but as “the thing itself.”

¹⁷ It sounds like the rhythm of the pearls that drop one by one slowly on a tray of jade, to borrow the famous

auxiliaries or adjectives, with virtually no verbs but clear-cut nouns juxtaposed through pure two-syllabic phrases until the last lines, everything in the poem appears so self-sufficient to be completely of itself to pose for eternity. Each image is so clear-cut to the bare necessity to stand for/in perfect timeless stillness. It is exactly *with* or *through* this perfect motionlessness – so subtly but heart-touchingly punctuated by simple monotonous rhythm, the poem suggests perfect motion of stillness with deep emotion recollected in profound tranquility.

Feng’s prosodic clue can also help us to read, understand, and appreciate words synaesthetically for the sound of *Dao*, which could be as essential but invisible as the air. It could be particularly helpful for us to take a fresh look at the initial two lines of *Daodejing*. It is often said that *Dao* is neither abstract nor transcendental. Undoubtedly, it could be as wide spreading as Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) and Walt Whitman’s (1819-1892) grass or as ubiquitous as in “the shit and piss” (道在屎溺).¹⁸ However much we like compare it to water, *Dao* is probably better to be grasped as something as essential, real, and invisible as air, especially following Feng’s prosody theory, which may help us to hear the often so inaudible sound of *Dao* in words. The sound of words that could suggest sounds of *Dao* are so subtle and mundane in the classics that we often miss it. “道可道，非常道，名可名，非常名” (The Tao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal Tao; The Name that can be named is not the eternal name) (Chan 1963: 139).¹⁹ What

analogy from Tang poet Bai Juyi’s “大珠小珠落玉盤,” but in an irregular succession with uncertain pause and suspension. It could probably also be “visualized” with such famous lines I (a leaf falls one lines) from E. E. Cummings’ (1894-1962) “I (a)”

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¹⁸ Sometimes it is “*shi*” (矢) that appears in the classic texts since “*shi*” and “*屎*” (*shi*), both of the third tone, are often used interchangeably therein.

¹⁹ The English translation provided here as usual for the convenience of reading by non-China specialists may indeed somewhat appear to overshadow or contradict an open case that just starts to reveal how many good possibilities there actually are in translating these initial two lines according to the prosody theory in question. Whether singled out for the position or juxtaposed in the text with others for

does Laozi really mean? Does he mean that there is no way that we can comprehend the “eternal” *Dao* through our common language? If so, why did he write that much, as many have already so questioned? The lines read like a classical Chinese version of Cretan paradox. What does Laozi really mean with such a paradox? Does he want to caution us about the dubious reliability of language? Does he intend to encourage us to maximize the usefulness of language by bringing to our full attention its inherent limit? Does he mean to point out our blind faith in language that often misleads us? Perhaps, the real question is *not* what Laozi means but rather what we read from him or what we assume him to mean through these two decisive initial lines. Interpretations of *Daodejing* vary significantly, but our reading of these initial lines in original Chinese and in English remains, quite interestingly, consistent.²⁰

Of the representative translations below, there are observable difference and similarity. “Eternal” is the choice for Chan Wing-tsit (1901-1994), Ch’en Ku-ying, Stephen Mitchell, and Victor H. Mair in translating “常” (*chang*), while “constant” is the word for D. C. Lau (1921-2010) and Philip J. Ivanhoe, with Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall (1937-2001) using “not really” for “恆” (*heng*), which is the original word in their text. Instead of the more popular word choice for “to be spoken of,” Mair used “walked” and Ivanhoe “followed” for the second “*Dao*.” There are additional significant difference and similarity in whether 道 is capitalized and pluralized.

1. “The Tao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal Tao; The Name that can be named is not the eternal name.” (Chan 1963: 139)
2. “The way that can be spoken of is not the constant way; The Name that can be named is not the constant name.” (Lau 1963: 57)
3. “The Tao which can be spoken of is not the eternal Tao; the name which can be named is not the eternal name.” (Ch’en 1977: 51)
4. “The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao; the name that can be named is not eternal Name.” (Mitchell 1988: 1)
5. “The ways that can be walked are not the eternal Way. The names that can be named are not the eternal name.” (Mair 1990: 45)

comparison and contrast, no single translation, as a matter of fact, could be considered as absolutely better than any other ones particularly in terms of the prosodic possibilities under discussion.

²⁰ Often it sounds like the taunting or tantalizing “Notice” that Mark Twain (1835-1910) puts ahead of *Huckleberry Finn*: “Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.” (Twain 1986: one of the unnumbered pages that precede the main text)

6. “A way that can be followed is not constant Way. A name that can be named is not constant name.” (Ivanhoe 2002: 1)
7. “Way-making (*dao*) that can be put into words is *not really* way-making, And naming (*ming*) that can assign fixed reference to things is not really naming.” (Ames & Hall 2003: 77)

But if we try a different look at the interpretations by taking out the *negative* connotation from the “negative expressions,” such as “not constant,” “not eternal,” or “not really,” we may have a quite different but equally legitimate reading. The two lines may then suggest that *Dao* can be spoken of but not to be spoken of as something constant or eternal or to be expressed in any constant and regular way, terms, or language. Instead of being “constant” or “eternal,” *Dao* could be as short-lived as the “morning dew,” “morning mushroom,” whose life span, as Zhuangzi 莊子 points out, could be as brief as no more than half a day, or as something whose appearance could be as instantaneous or swift as a “white horse” in a split second. But once we understand *Dao* in this way, we may have a better understanding of constancy and eternity as well. It is because with stress fall on “*ke* 可” and “*fei* 非” instead on the last word of each phrase, the sentence can be read not as, in the usual version, “*Dao* that can be spoken of is not ...” but as “*Dao* can be spoken of, but should by no means be spoken of as/in ...”

With stress falling on “*chang*” or “*heng*” as key words, the sentences could thus be read with different understandings. It is because the word “*chang*” or “*heng*” could be immediately understood in two self-contradictory and yet complementary ways in the verbal context, since “*chang*” does have such dialectical meanings as in its usual translation in English as “constant” or “eternal” – with or without any negative or positive connotations. On the one hand, “constant” could also refer to things “regular” or “steady” or things that are so regular or steady as to suggest everlasting stability, immutability, or eternity. It could thus also mean commonplaceness in the line of thought. On the other hand, the word “constant” could equally suggest “consistent,” “steady” or “regular” pace or rhythm of things in motion or mutation – day by day, minute by minute, or second by second. Thus “*fei chang*” 非常 could mean “not irregular in motion,” thus “regular,” “steady,” or “stable,” and, at the same time, “not regular,” “fixed,” or “business as usual,” which then implies constant pace or process of things in motion or in mutation. With “*chang*” understood in this way, do the sentences suggest that *Dao* is alive, or can be spoken of, in the regular language/way or in unusual way?

Stress, according to Feng, is very much like air, which is neither “visible” nor

“touchable,” but undoubtedly “real” (Feng 1997: 72). How to stress or where to stress, for Feng, varies as subtle as air. For Zhu Guangqian, it is also a matter of *personal* decision or a business of “improvisation” in accordance with pure cont/textual verbal relations in addition to the general rules (Zhu 1982: 195). Even though every culture has its own general rules on how to make rhythm whether in terms of “foot,” “cesura,” or “*dou* 讀” or “*dun* 頓,” there are however theoretically infinite ways for “improvisation” on subtle variation as in music, especially in jazz. How each word should be stressed and how long one needs to pause from one word to another, all depend on one’s understanding, which is infinitely variable from person to person.

Also, in Chinese, often *not* for the sake of meaning but rhythm, words that usually are not stressed become stressed or the other way around. The word “文” in “漢文帝有高臺” (The Emperor Wen of the Han built a majestic platform), as Zhu points out, usually should not be stressed with a pause but must be stressed in the context for the effect of music even at the expense of fluidity of meaning.²¹ The same is true with “堪” (can) and “是” (is) in “紅雁不堪愁裡聽，雲山況是客中過。”²² Although these are merely functional or auxiliary words 虛詞 (“*xuci*”) and should in general not be stressed with a pause, they must be stressed there with prolonged pauses for the desirable sound effects. As key words, “悲” (sad) and “好” (good) in “永夜角聲悲自語，中天月色好誰看” should certainly be stressed with pauses, but the stresses instead fall on “聲” (sound) and “色” (color) to make the poem sound right (Zhu 1982: 121).²³ The actual duration of pause, however, also varies from person to person in terms of how it is read with what literal, metaphorical, ironical, or paradoxical implication captured. These are the matters often too subtle or too variable to be noted down or to be noticeable, but so decisive in terms of whether or how we can capture *Dao* in words. It is these “small” things that reveal individual personality as well as *Dao in* and *of* words or that, according to Stephen Toulmin (1922-2009), speaks for the “great” knowledge of people, such as Zhuangzi’s Cook Ding’s, which is not “perception that measures and categories” but one’s responsiveness in “try[ing] to use what cannot be measured in an entirely practical way”

²¹ This is the first line of the poem by Cui Shu 崔曙 (704-739), a Tang poet, describing his experience with the intoxicating scenery on Emperor Wen of Han’s high platform known as “Immortal-Meeting Station.”

²² This is a Tang poem by Li Qi 李頎 (690-751) describing the poet’s sad feeling while seeing off a friend. The very sound of passing geese and very sight of cloud-clad mountains only remind him of how instant life really is.

²³ The two lines from Du Fu’s famous poem “Su Fu” 〈宿府〉 describe his lonely feeling and homesickness while residing alone at night in an official mansion; he has neither anyone to talk except the company of the sad sounds of horn from afar nor anybody to share with the beautiful moon in the sky.

(Toulmin 2001: 180).

Thus, as previously discussed, with stress falling on “*ke*,” “*fei*,” and “*chang*” in addition to the end word – whether as noun or verb in “道可道，非常道；名可名，非常名” the whole meanings of sentences could be quite different. All different translations of the sentences could then be significantly understood in accordance with where stresses should fall, even though such a matter might be too subtle to be within the usual scope of our immediate consciousness. What really characterize *Dao* in this regard is not something constant, regular, usual, eternal, permanent, everlasting, or “fixed.” The “negative” expressions, such as “not eternal” or “not constant,” should not be taken negatively but rather positively, that is, the real *Dao* or “real way-making” can only be expressed by our temporary means, since *Dao* is truly so “processual” and “provisional” the way Ames and Hall propose. With possible stresses on such key words as “*fei*” and “*chang*,” what best describes *Dao* is therefore anything but being constant, eternal, or permanent. It is because *Dao* is so characteristic of such “processual” and “provisional” motion, momentum, movement, but, at the same time, so promisingly infinite and everlasting.²⁴ Like the infinitely open-ended motion and movement suggested in the sentence structure, “狡兔死，走狗烹，飛鳥盡，良弓藏，敵國破，謀臣亡” from *Shiji* 《史記·韓信傳》(Sima 1959: 798), the short three-syllable structure of the first two lines of *Daodejing* also suggests an infinite verbal motion or movement, which is indeed endlessly “processual and provisional” or inexhaustible for freedom of “improvisation” with a variety of possibilities for different “beats.”²⁵

²⁴ For the paper, I am particularly thankful to Dr. Roger T. Ames of University of Hawai‘i at Manoa for his constant emphasis on *Dao* as an ever-present and infinite “meaning-making,” “way-making,” “world-making,” and even “human-becoming” process on so many occasions including various casual conversations; his emphasis has fine-tuned my attention to the “sounds” of *Dao* the way I make my argument in the paper in accordance with Dr. Feng’s prosody theory, especially in terms of my interpretation of the initial two lines of *Daodejing*.

²⁵ Like music notes, no matter how they are written, when we read them, we bring out, *our ways*, the meaning or the life of music however exactly we follow the notes. There is always *something* so subtle and so personal *of* life and *in* music that cannot be accurately noted down. This is also what makes it not only possible but also necessary for us to improvise, to make it, on the spot, *our* music of *any* music that we play. There is always something in between words or the sounds of words that can never be “noted down,” either, such as how many split seconds that we must pause, whether or how we should prolong the beat, or how we “syncopate.” This quite indefinite or infinitely flexible in-between space of words could make each reader a creative musician. Even though this in-betweenness is quite untranslatable, it makes everything alive. This is probably why William James calls to our attention the seemingly trivial functional words, such as conjunctions. To emphasize why his radical empiricism is *radically* different from the ordinary empiricism, James stresses that his philosophy embodies the immediately felt life

As a matter of fact, following Feng's research, the n-v and v-n prosodic verbal pattern of the three-syllabic sentence structure became *further* developed in Han period. The two initial lines in *Daodejing*, as a result, do allow for two different readings within the same verbal choice and structure that suggest certain slight but significant differences in terms of stresses and meanings.²⁶ The n-v structure is much in line with the traditional translation "Dao that can be spoken of." According to Feng, it is actually a quite popular verbal structure then as in "狡兔死，走狗烹，飛鳥盡，良弓藏，敵國破，謀臣亡." Thus with the n-v structure, the parts of the two initial line of *Daodejing* that should be stressed are the last ones in each sentence of "道可道，非常道；名可名，非常名，" which actually also parallels in structure with "牆有茨，不可埽也。中冓之言，不可道也。所可道也，言之醜也。" from *The Book of Songs*.²⁷ But as to which parts of the

through "connection of things" (my italics) exemplified by the seemingly trivial words, i.e., "with, near, next, like, from, towards, against, because, for, through," which are, nonetheless, the "primordial elements of fact" (James 1996: 95) that not only "designate types of conjunctive relation arranged in a roughly ascending order of intimacy and inclusiveness" (ibid: 45) but also "flow out of the stream of pure experience, the stream of concretes or the sensational stream, as naturally as nouns and adjectives do, and... melt into it again as fluidly when we apply them to a new portion of the stream" (ibid: 95, italics added).

²⁶ In addition, however different all existing translations as above could possibly be in terms of word choice, they, nonetheless, each in its own way, confirm the same verbal structure, from which all different translations emerge and may probably continue emerging onto infinity – at least theoretically so. If the word choices can be compared with branches of a tree, the sentence structure is the trunk or the tree itself, which, in other words, has the potential or capability of yielding further different verbal choices. There are therefore three possible ways of interpreting the initial lines in terms of verbal choice and structure. (1) "Noun-Verb-Noun" in "The Dao that can be spoken of is not the eternal/everlasting/constant Dao (道 (n) 可道 (v), 非常道 (n); 言 (n) 可言 (v), 非常言 (n))." (2) "Noun-Verb-Verb" in "道 (n) 可道 (v) 【但】非常道 (v); 言 (n) 可言 (v), 【但】非常言 (v)." (3) "Verb-Noun-Noun" in "道 (v) 可道 【之道】(n), 【但】非常【言之】道 (n) 言 (v) 可言【之言】(n), 【但】非常【言之】言 (n)." With the first reading, the difficulty or the impossibility of reaching out to *Dao* is emphasized: *Dao* is simultaneously related but beyond what can be grasped in language. With the second reading, the sentences seem to suggest possibility and creativity. There is always the possibility in speaking the unspeakable in the usual language through an unusual way, as our "experience," as Ames and Hall put it, is processual and is thus always provisional" (Ames and Hall 2003: 77). The two lines seem to suggest that the unspeakable *Dao* is in the ordinary tongue but can only be talked about in *unusual* way. They thus do not deny the possibility of speaking of *Dao* but confirm it; at the same time, they also suggest the way of how to speak of it, that is, not in our usual way. We need, in other words, to be creative in taking the road not taken within the road well travelled on to look for and talk of *Dao*. The third possibility actually confirms the first but in a slightly different way, which suggests that *Dao* can be spoken of but *only* partially and through unusual way.

²⁷ The poem "Qiang You Ci" 〈牆有茨〉, from which the lines are taken, is arguably one of the earliest and

phrases should receive stress in ways permissible within the same sentence structure, here is also the possibility in terms of the v-n structure, especially because, according to Feng, it is the most powerful or effective structure of the three-syllabic pattern in poetry and prose then as in Mei Sheng’s *Fu* (賦) “揄流波，雜杜若，蒙清塵，披蘭澤，嬾服而御。”²⁸ If so, the first *Dao* could also be read as a verb in line with the v-n structure “道可道，非常道；名可名，非常名。” In fact, a skillful writer with talented ear for music, such as Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (179-127 BC), often use both structures in an alternative way for the beat of beauty as in the following passage of “Rhapsody of Sir Vacuous” 〈子虛賦〉 (*Zi Xu Fu*).²⁹

most skillfully composed political innuendos targeting the scandalous behaviors of the ruling elites within the palace. Here are the quoted lines as translated by An Zengcai “On the wall there are puncture vines / Which cannot altogether be brushed away. The scandals within the palace chambers / They cannot be told. If they were told / They would be the vilest!” (An 1999: 113)

²⁸ These are some of the representative sentences regarding the magnificent outing scenes in the famous *Han Fu* titled “Qi Fa” 〈七發〉 (Seven Stimuli) by Mei Sheng 枚乘 (?-140 BC), another master of *Han Fu*, the unique verbal “rhapsody,” along with Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53-18 BC). In the piece, Mei Sheng creates an imagined dialogue between the bed-ridden Prince Chu and a visitor from Wu, who finally cures the prince of his incurable disease by shocking him into full awareness that his luxurious life style is the very source of all his problems. The visitor uses all the visual and auditory imagery verbally possible and describes in great detail the magnificent life that the prince takes so much for granted, such as the best of music, food, palace, and processions of outing and hunting, etc., only to emphasize at the very end that the prince has been slowly poisoning himself with this kind of life. But, the sheer or pure beauty of language of this famous piece itself also seems to take a life of its own even though it might be arguably intended as a political and social satire. The situation is compatible with Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, which, like a beautiful mirror that reflects the ugly reality, often gives the impression that what is being described, the vulgar reality, may have nothing to do with what is being described *with*, the purely aesthetic language.

²⁹ This passage describes King of Shu’s magnificent hunting procession. But even with such a masterly translation as David Knechtges’s, the uniquely rhythmic and sensuous auditory imaginary of the description does not quite flow out. Of course, what these ancient Chinese poets and prose writers try to capture and cultivate our sensitivity with is exactly these *Dao*-suggesting or way-making sounds. This is also what Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) and French symbolists, such as Paul Verlaine (1844-1896), try to bring it out through the *music* of their words. It often seems that words for them are not to be used to mean but to suggest the hard-to-describe mood or sentiment, which can only be felt through seemingly “meaningless” verbal replays. For Poe, who defines poetry as “rhythmical creation of beauty,” poetic sentiment reveals itself “very especially in music” or through the music of words, however much it “may develop itself in various modes – in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance” (Poe 1969: 98-9). This is why we can be so taken by the “meaningless” poems, such as Verlaine’s well-known “Il pleure dans mon cœur,” which may strike as quite pointless, but we still like it anyway, as if the meaningless flow of sounds does touch our hearts or catch up with something so subtle in our hearts. The words, in

於是乃相與獠於蕙圃
 嫫珊勃率上金隄

撿翡翠
 射鷓鴣
 微矰出
 織繳施
 弋白鵠
 連駕鵝
 雙鶴下
 玄鶴加
 怠而後發
 游於清池
 浮文鷁
 揚桂枻
 張翠帷
 建羽蓋
 罔瑋瑁
 釣紫貝
 攢金鼓
 吹鳴籟
 榜人歌
 聲流喝
 水蟲駭
 波鴻沸
 湧泉起
 奔揚會
 礪石相擊
 硠硠礚礚
 若雷霆之聲
 聞乎數百里之外

And then, together, they hunt in Basil Garden.
 Sauntering slowly, lingering leisurely, they ascend
 the Metal Dike.
 They net kingfishers,
 Shoot golden pheasants.
 Tiny arrows go forth,
 Their folds unfolding,
 Darting the white swan,
 Entangling the wild goose.
 A pair of gray cranes falls;
 A black crane is hit.
 Wearied, they set off again,
 To tour the clear pond.
 Drifting on figured heron prows,
 They hoist banner poles,
 Spread halcyon-plume curtains,
 Raise feathered sunshades.
 They net hawkbill turtles,
 Angle for purple cowries.
 They strike the metal bell-gongs,
 Blow the singing panpipes.
 The chief oarsman sings,
 His voice fluid then sobbing.
 The water creatures are startled,
 Waves grandly surge,
 While bubbling fountains spurt,
 And the dashing swells converge.
 Giant boulders scrape together,
 Grinding and grating, clashing and clattering,
 Like the noise of the thunder and lightning,
 Heard a hundred miles and Beyond.

other words, do mean something but not anything that can be clearly spelled out or expressed by any usual verbal means. So profound or subtle, the beauty of ambiguity can only be suggested in the beautifully ambiguous sounds.

將息獠者	About to give the hunters rest,
擊靈鼓	They beat divine drum,
起烽燧	Light the beacon fires.
車案行	Chariots fall into line,
騎就隊	Horsemen return to their squads,
纚乎淫淫	Strung together in a steady stream,
班乎裔裔	Spread out in a catenating cortege.

(Xiao 1987: 66-67)

If the sound has such a role to play in the poem and prose, is it not possible for us to hear the sound of *Dao* in the first two sentences in terms of how they might sound varying with the ways we read them? Whether there is a *Dao* beyond the language or outside the ways it is spoken of, what these different interpretations have in common is *how* or in what way it can be spoken of. What really matters, in other words, is not what *Dao* is but *whether* or *how* it can be spoken of. It is these *how*'s or *whether*'s that determine what *Dao*, in what way, *is*, such as how it sounds in the language and to what ear or how it is read and by whom with what images it thereby creates.³⁰ It is indeed “processual” and “provisional” this way. But, besides the *Dao* that can be spoken of, is there *Dao* that cannot be? Is *Dao* always in between what cannot be spoken of and what can be spoken of but not in the un/usual way?³¹ Of course, all these could likely “mean

³⁰ This situation does sound like what Wittgenstein tries to remind us of because our mental picture of reality often resembles a picture that pictures a *picture* of reality, the way we see it – the way of an opaque mirror that reflects not only an ambiguous image of reality but also our actual capacity and motivation to see or to *perceive* it. It is because “the possibility of describing the world by means of Newtonian mechanics,” as Wittgenstein explains, “tells us nothing about the world; but what does tell us something about it is the precise *way* in which it is possible to describe it by these means” or “the fact that it can be described more *simply* with one system of mechanics than with another.” Therefore, “mechanics,” for Wittgenstein, is only “an attempt to construct according to a single plan all the *true* propositions that we need for the description of the world,” even though “the laws of physics, with all their logical apparatus, still speak, however indirectly, about the objects of the world” (Wittgenstein 1961: 139, italics added).

³¹ For Chad Hansen, who does not believe that *Dao*, or *daos*, ever transcend language or the *ways* we use language, which are often of the most “intuitive” and “performative” nature (Hansen 1992: 216). Zhuangzi’s “lyricism,” which is, for instance, “filled with creative onomatopoeia” (ibid: 274), as Ames and Hall would agree here, is not only “meaning-making” but also “way-making” or “world-making” in using language, especially with regard to Zhuangzi’s synaesthetically holistic account of Nanguo Ziqi’s experience with *Dao*. In *Zhuangzi*, particularly the first chapter, what we often see are various word-

nothing occult or metaphysic” nor do they necessarily suggest anything like “a magic eye able to penetrate something ordinary minds cannot apprehend” but only something hard to describe but is truly working, “something perfectly ordinary, empirical, and quasi-aesthetic in the way it works” as “it is the same with doctors and sailors: some cases do not ‘smell right’” (Toulmin 2003: 182).³² As the sound of *Dao* could be so situated in

painted vivid pictures or visual images. But what makes these word pictures so alive is also the music of the words, without which the visual images would be dry or dead. The sound or the music of words, as a matter of fact, is the very verbal condition, like the indispensable water, which makes the fish, the words, alive and active. Whether we read a poem or article, in silence or aloud, what we actually respond to is not just meaning but sound or the meaning-making sound, beat, or rhythm, the importance of which we, however, often overlook or take so much for granted, even though it is the crucial part of meaning. Therefore, with such a “hearing loss,” a return to sound through help from such theories as Feng’s is now an urgent matter. But to better understand Feng’s complex theory, we may probably need to ask ourselves a simple question: Why do we dance to music not to painting or any form of visual art? Why are we so excited about poems? Often, it is not the meaning that excites us but the rhythm that appeals to our sense experiences like music. A good poem must be a painting *and* music. Otherwise, it cannot both *be* and *mean*. The moment we read, we hear the music, which may excite us to sense *something* right away, even though what that *something* exactly means may not be, or would never be, clear enough for us. This is also why E. E. Cummings tries so hard or so radically with his poems arranged in such a “visual” way – to make it possible for us to *see* sound of meaning while hearing it or to make it double sure that we really hear it, since we often never listen to the sound even when we read aloud.

³² To illustrate how language is so “situated,” Toulmin also goes back to *Zhuangzi* with reference to the story of Cook Ding because Ding’s great knowledge “is not perception that measures and categorizes” but his indescribable but “entirely practical” responsiveness to live situation. To further illustrate such “situation,” which requires unspeakable “knack,” Toulmin refers to “a class in which Wittgenstein talked about the skills of field geology.”

When we watch experienced geologists on a hillside using geological hammers to cleave rocks and see what they consist of, it seems so effortless and intuitive: they turn rocks over in one hand, then choose where to tap them, and they fall neatly into halves with their internal structures clearly presented. This is not a skill that relies on formal inferences formal scientific theory, nor does it even use a specific disciplinary technique. Would it be highfaluting to call it the Way? There may be no other convenient name for it. (Toulmin 2003: 180)

As if it is not quite enough, Toulmin even refers to Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997)’s lecture on Political Judgment, broadcast in 1957, which is so suggestive of how language is situated and in need of understanding synaesthetically.

We resort to metaphors. We speak of some people as possessing antennae, as it were, that communicate to them the specific contours and texture of a particular political or social situation. We speak of the possession of a good political eye, or nose, or ear, of a political sense which love or ambition or hate may bring into play, of a sense that crisis and danger sharpen (or alternatively blunt), to which experiences is crucial, a particular gift, possibly not

language, we do need to read, to smell, to sense, with all our senses open, the infinitely rich sound, color, and smell of *Dao* as we do with our daily thought-refreshing air.³³

altogether unlike that of artists or creative writers. (ibid: 181)

³³ For the paper, as for the numerous others in print, I am also so grateful to my colleagues and the librarians extraordinaire, Janet Brooks and her predecessor, Andrea Kempf (recently retired), for their marvelous help that enabled me to obtain in no time almost all the books I needed through the interlibrary loan system including even the rare editions in the original. Here, I would also like to thank Carolyn Kadel, my colleague, mentor, and friend, for her all time and often very timely support and trust in me regarding how much else I could do besides and beyond my formal training as a scholar of Henry James and the nineteenth-century American literature. As Director of International Education (until her retirement in May of 2012), Professor Kadel indeed represents or personifies, along with the librarians extraordinaire, the indispensable institutional support of my college as the “hospitable space” neatly phrased by Dr. Marilyn Rhinehart, our vice president, where I have been encouraged to grow professionally in areas other than what I was trained for.

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中國古典詩文的韻律學解讀

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摘 要

基於馮勝利以韻律學理論探討音韻對詞義的影響，本文從作品特殊表達方式的文化氛圍，以及語言學所言環境的角度，選取馬致遠〈秋思〉中意象獨特的美學現象，以及《道德經》中歧義重重的頭兩句，重新解讀中國古典詩文的精要部分。一改過去偏重詞義及其文化因素和視覺效果的習慣，本文側重品讀詮釋詩歌散文的音韻，期能進一步理解意義與音韻、頭腦與節律、眼睛與耳朵（視覺與聽覺），以及語言內在與外在因素間的微妙關係。

關鍵詞：韻律學，哲學，中國古典詩文，比較文學，翻譯學

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