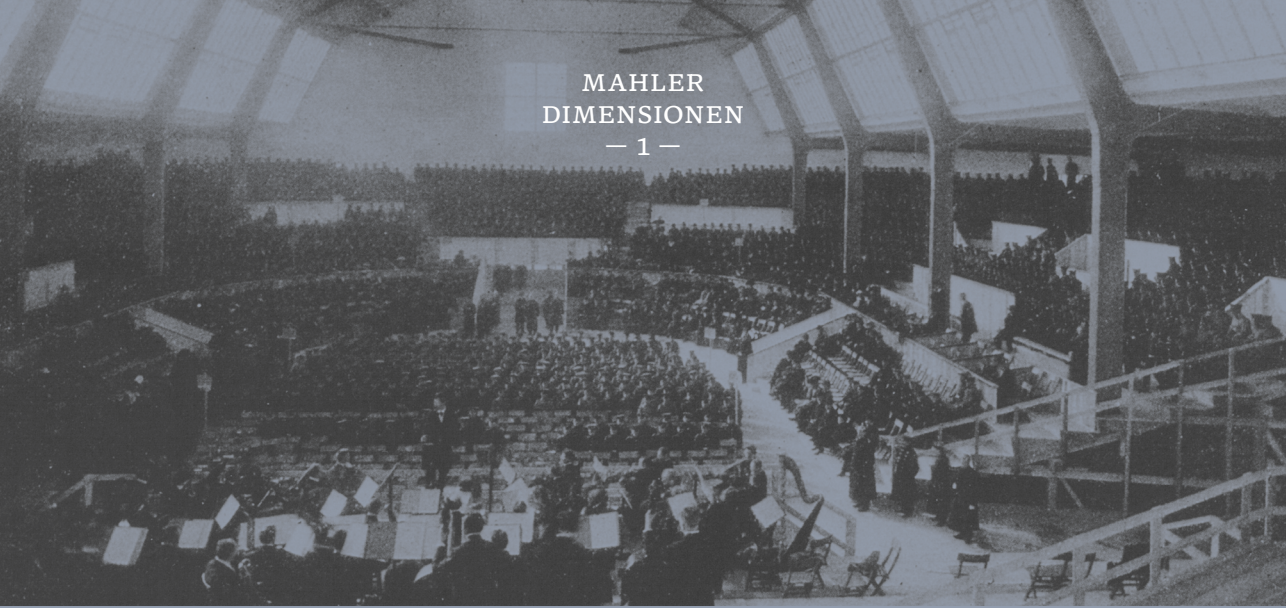




MAHLER
DIMENSIONEN

— 1 —

TOBIAS JANZ & CHRISTIAN UTZ (HG./EDS.)

Gustav Mahlers Klang

*Zwischen Schaffensprozess,
Interpretation und Rezeption*

Gustav Mahler's Sound

Between Compositional Process,
Performance, and Reception

HOLLITZER
— H —

Forschungsergebnisse von | Research findings from:
Austrian Science Fund (FWF): <https://doi.org/10.55776/P34710>

Veröffentlicht mit Unterstützung des | Published with the support of the
Austrian Science Fund (FWF): <https://doi.org/10.55776/PUB1347>

FWF Österreichischer
Wissenschaftsfonds

<https://doi.org/10.83452/9783990946893>

Open Access: Die vorliegende Publikation ist – wo nicht anders festgehalten – gemäß den Bedingungen der internationalen Creative-Commons-Lizenz Namensnennung 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) lizenziert, die die Nutzung, gemeinsame Nutzung, Anpassung, Verbreitung und Vervielfältigung in jedem Medium oder Format erlaubt, solange Sie den:die ursprüngliche:n Autor:in bzw. die ursprünglichen Autor:innen und die Quelle in angemessener Weise anführen, einen Link zur Creative-Commons-Lizenz setzen und etwaige Änderungen angeben.

Creative-Commons-Lizenz: Die Bilder oder anderes Material Dritter in der vorliegenden Publikation sind durch die Creative-Commons-Lizenz der Publikation abgedeckt, sofern in einem Verweis auf das Material nichts anderes angegeben ist. Wenn das Material nicht durch die Creative-Commons-Lizenz der Publikation abgedeckt ist und die beabsichtigte Nutzung aufgrund von gesetzlichen Bestimmungen nicht gestattet ist oder über die erlaubte Nutzung hinausgeht, muss die Genehmigung für die Nutzung direkt von dem:der Urheberrechtsinhaber:in eingeholt werden. Sämtliche Angaben in dieser Publikation erfolgen trotz sorgfältiger Bearbeitung ohne Gewähr; eine Haftung des:der Autor:in, des:der Herausgeber:in oder des Verlags ist ausgeschlossen.

Für diese Publikation wurde ein Double-Blind-Peer-Review-Verfahren durchgeführt.

Tobias Janz und Christian Utz (Hg./eds.),

Gustav Mahlers Klang. Zwischen Schaffensprozess, Interpretation und Rezeption

Gustav Mahler's Sound: Between Compositional Process, Performance, and Reception

Hollitzer Verlag, Wien 2026

Umschlagabbildung: Generalprobe von Gustav Mahlers Achter Symphonie, München, Ausstellungshalle, 11. September 1910 (Jaeger & Goergen, Generalprobe zur Uraufführung von Mahlers 8. Sinfonie, September 1910, aus: Richard Specht, *Gustav Mahler*, Berlin und Leipzig, Schuster & Loeffler, 1913, Bildtafel 52. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3618578>).

Redaktion: Tobias Janz, Christian Utz, Thomas Wozonig, Dimitrios Katharopoulos, Dieter Kleinrath und Mahak Sadeghzadehpishjari

Lektorat: Marion Linhardt

Englisches Lektorat: Gabriel Jones

Umschlaggestaltung und Satz: Gabriel Fischer

Gedruckt und gebunden in der EU

Die Nutzung für Text und Data Mining i. S. v. Art. 4 (3) Richtlinie (EU) 2019/790 vorbehalten.

Hollitzer Wissenschaftsverlag

Trautsongasse 6/6, A-1080 Wien

kontakt@hollitzer.at

www.hollitzer.at

HOLLITZER


ISBN 978-3-99094-689-3

ISSN 3061-1970

Mishearing Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*¹

Edwin K. C. Li

Introduction

Judith Gautier's *Le Livre de Jade* (*The Book of Jade*) (1867), a French interpretation of a collection of seventy-one Chinese Tang poems and one of the sources for Hans Heilmann's anthology *Chinesische Lyrik* (*Chinese Poetry*) (1905), is laden with inconsistencies.² Widely discussed is how Gautier originally attributed "Le soir d'automne" (The Autumn Night) in the first edition of *Le Livre* – which ultimately made its way into Gustav Mahler's second movement of his song-symphony *Das Lied von der Erde*, "Der Einsame im Herbst" (The Lonely One in Autumn) – to the poet "Tché-Tsi."³ In the second edition of 1902, a significantly expanded version of the first, Gautier altered the Chinese romanization from "Tché-Tsi" to "Tchang-Tsi," and added two prominent brush-painted Chinese characters next to the romanization: 李魏.⁴ The two characters are pronounced "lei ngai" in Cantonese (which is generally believed to have preserved some phonological traits of the Middle Chinese spoken during the Tang dynasty), or "li wei" in modern Mandarin (which became the standard language of China during the Ming dynasty), both of which contradict the romanization "Tchang-Tsi." Curiously, in the 1902 edition, "Tchang-Tsi" was also paired with another set of Chinese characters, 張說, for the poem "L'épouse vertueuse."⁵ Heilmann faithfully adopted Gautier's authorship attribution and translated, almost literally, her French interpretation in German as "Herbstabend der Einsamen" (Autumn Night of the Lonely One) in *Chinesische Lyrik*.⁶ In 1907, Hans Bethge further adapted Heilmann's text – retitling it "Die Einsame im Herbst" (The Lonely One in Autumn) while preserving the authorship – in *Die chinesische Flöte: Nachdichtungen chinesischer Lyrik* (*The Chinese Flute: Adaptations of Chinese Poetry*), which Mahler received and studied in the summer of 1908 for *Das Lied*.⁷

1 This chapter builds upon the epilogue of my article Edwin K. C. Li, "Re-translating Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 150 (2025), no. 2, 401–435, <https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2025.10043>, which briefly discusses Daniel Ng Yat-chiu's Cantonese adaptation of *Das Lied* in comparison with Zheng Xiaoying's Mandarin retranslations as part of broader state-supported efforts at cultural reclamation. The present chapter homes in on Ng's adaptation process, examining the work's critical reception and developing a framework of mishearing that throws light on transculturation, translation, and contestation of cultural values in postcolonial mediatization of Gustav Mahler's sound. I thank Jermyn Li Chun Man for his assistance with the research for this chapter. Romanization of Chinese names in this chapter follows the order of: Surname First Name (e.g., Ng Yat-chiu). All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

2 Judith Gautier used the pseudonym Judith Walter for the first edition of *Le Livre de Jade* (1867), but the second edition appeared under her real name.

3 Judith Gautier, *Le Livre de Jade*, Paris: Alphonse Lemerre 1867, 69–70.

4 Judith Gautier, *Le Livre de Jade: Poésies traduites du chinois*, Paris: Félix Juven 1902, 219.

5 *Ibid.*, 47–48.

6 Hans Heilmann, *Chinesische Lyrik vom 12. Jahrhundert v. Chr. bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich: Piper 1905, 89.

7 Hans Bethge, *Die chinesische Flöte: Nachdichtungen chinesischer Lyrik*, Leipzig: Insel 1912 [1907], 59. The precise Chinese original for Mahler's "Der Einsame im Herbst" remains a matter of scholarly debate. While Fusako Hamao

Any belief that Gautier was attempting a faithful translation of Chinese poetry would be unsettled by her deliberate choice to preface each poet's name with *selon* (according to).⁸ The expression signals that the French poems are not claimed to be direct, literal translations, but rather free translations, interpretations, adaptations, or renditions inspired by Chinese originals or themes. Perhaps it is precisely because of, not despite, the creative distance, liberty, and cross-textuality engendered by Chinese poetry, that Mahler's *Das Lied* has been habitually celebrated as an apex of interculturality within the tradition of Western art music.⁹ The perception and reception of *Das Lied* through rose-colored spectacles may have stemmed from a string of factors alongside persisting orientalisms: the perception of translation as a fungible token of artistic freedom and its resonance with Western neoliberal ideals, the ability of translation to challenge historiographical models based on nation-states and their borders, Mahler's global sacredness as a canonic composer of Western art music, the growing interest in intercultural networks in musicology, and so forth.¹⁰ Elsewhere, I have complexified this much-rehearsed theatrical narrative through counter-tales: since the 1980s, Mahler's *Das Lied* has incited Chinese neo-nationalist sentiments and inspired Chinese (Mandarin) retranslations with a view to reclaiming cultural sovereignty, not only by replacing Mahler's work *per se*, but also by reinstalling an epistemic infrastructure surrounding the process of translation.¹¹ By homing in on Zheng Xiaoying's retranslations of *Das Lied* in my previous work, I amplify the synecdochic forces of her archives in characterizing cultural operations of translation and politics of knowledge production through music in contemporary China.

Building on this work, I turn the kaleidoscopic lens applied to *Das Lied* in this chapter toward the late Hong Kong businessman Daniel Ng Yat-chiu's 伍日照 (1937–2013) Cantonese chamber adaptation. This adaptation provides a provocative sounding board for critical reflection on musicological questions about translation, authenticity, language, culture, and music, in the context of an ostensibly monolithic nation. Furthermore, it invites such questions to be read against burgeoning frameworks – derived from multiple epistemic standpoints –

proposes that it derives from Qian Qi's 錢起 poem "Xiaogu qiuye chang 效古秋夜長" (An Autumn Night), Lo Kii-Ming has raised significant doubts about any conclusive identification. See Fusako Hamao, "The Sources of the Texts in Mahler's *Lied von der Erde*," *19th-Century Music* 19 (1995), no. 1, 83–95: 86–91, <https://doi.org/10.2307/746721> and Lo Kii-Ming 羅基敏, "You Zhongwenshi dao Male de 'Dadi zhi ge' – yishi, fangzuoshi yu shiyi de zhuanhua 由中文詩到馬勒的《大地之歌》– 譯詩、仿作詩與詩意的轉化" [From Chinese Poetry to Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*: Translated Poetry, Adapted Poetry, and the Transformation of Poetic Intent], in: *Dadi zhi ge – Male de renshi xinsheng* 《大地之歌》– 馬勒的人世心聲 [Das Lied von der Erde – A Synthesis of Mahler's Worldviews], ed. by Lo Kii-Ming and Jürgen Maehder, Taipei: Jiuyun Wenhua 2011, 17–63: 22–33. For an introduction to Mahler's *Das Lied*, see Stephen E. Hefling, *Mahler: Das Lied von der Erde*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000.

8 For a critical and multi-faceted discussion of Gautier's *Le Livre*, see Pauline Yu, *Chinese Songs in a French Key: How Judith Gautier's Book of Jade Introduced Europe to Chinese Poetry*, New York: Columbia University Press 2025.

9 The difficulty of translating from Chinese into German is wonderfully parodied in Robert Neumann's *Mit fremden Federn* in 1927. In the parody, an ancient Chinese poem was found to be a reverse translation of a translation performed by a Chinese student. The student translated a well-known verse "Konrad, sprach die Frau Mama" from Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* into Chinese. The title of the final German version reads: "Ernte des Kaisersohnes" ("Harvest of the Emperor's Son"). Hans Bethge was the one being confused. See Robert Neumann, *Mit fremden Federn: Parodien*, Wien: Desch 1955 [1927], 213–217. I thank Alexander Rehding for directing me to this parody.

10 For an excellent discussion of Mahler's *Das Lied* and orientalism, see Francesca Draughon, "The Orientalist Reflection: Temporality, Reality, and Illusion in Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*," in: *Germany and the Imagined East*, ed. by Lee M. Roberts, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press 2005, 159–173.

11 See Li, "Re-translating Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*."

for understanding global reception histories of Western art music and, more broadly, global musical modernisms.¹² It is curious that Ng's Cantonese *Lied*, which adapts the "original" Tang poetry to the composer's music, has yet to garner any meaningful attention from the Mahler research community in Europe and North America, to say nothing of musicology at large. Premiered on 14 August 2004 by the Chamber Orchestra Anglia at the British Library in London under the baton of Sharon Andrea Choa with soloists Robynne Redmon and Warren Mok,¹³ Ng's *Lied* was recorded and released by BIS Records with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra in 2007, with conductor Lan Shui and soloists Liang Ning and Warren Mok. Its piano score, with Cantonese lyrics overlaying Mahler's, was published by Universal Edition a year later. In the summer of 2016, the Asia Society Hong Kong Center hosted the Philharmonia APA to premiere the Cantonese *Lied* in Hong Kong, conducted again by Choa, with soloists Liang Ning and Justin Lavender. The same group performed the *Lied* to open the Hong Kong-Vienna Music Festival a week later, exactly twelve years after the London premiere, at Das MuTH in Vienna, under the auspices of the Vienna Boys Choir Music Academy Foundation and China First Capital Group Limited.¹⁴

Despite its international presence, the Cantonese *Lied*'s cryptic aesthetics seem to have precluded easy appreciation. Ng's idea of "prompting a retroactive encounter" between Mahler and the alleged Chinese poets in his Cantonese *Lied* activated a peculiarly anti-historicist (or what Gilles Deleuze would call, rhizomatic) imagination, where the Tang poems, overdetermined by Ng, despite ongoing debates that destabilize their definitive identity, were grafted onto Mahler's music in admittedly eccentric ways.¹⁵ In Ng's romantic vision, *Das Lied* should have been a dialogical aggregate of Cantonese-sounding poetry and Mahler's musical evocation. Ng's Cantonese *Lied* delivers a political statement through this vision: translation, as a mediating agency, must be flouted to avoid reinforcing or even producing what the cultural theorist Tejaswini Niranjana calls "hegemonic versions of the colonized," historically-effaced representations of cultural artifacts.¹⁶ What Ng did to realize this vision was to inject a retroactive, nomadic history into *Das Lied*, so that the work could acquire a renewed interculturality, and, through an ethnomusicological reimagining of potential mishearing, bring into the limelight the glossed-over capacity of translation to realize Western colonial fantasies of the non-West.

12 See, for example, Björn Heile, *Musical Modernism in Global Perspective: Entangled Histories on a Shared Planet*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2024. Ng's chamber arrangement of Mahler's *Lied*, prepared in collaboration with conductor Glen Cortese, departs from the well-known reduction first performed by Arnold Schoenberg in 1921 and later completed by Rainer Riehn in 1983 (Universal Edition UE 18379). Among the many differences, one is particularly striking: Schoenberg-Riehn's version introduces the harmonium (doubling on celesta) to the Mahlerian sound world, whereas Ng-Cortese's retains the signature harp from Mahler's *Lied*.

13 International Dunhuang Programme, "IDP News," 24 (Autumn 2004), 5. <https://idp.bl.uk/newsletters/autumn-2004/#downloadpdf> (30/06/2026).

14 Asia Society Hong Kong, "Mahler's Das Lied Revisited – in Chinese," [2016] <https://asiasociety.org/hong-kong/events/mahler-s-das-lied-revisited-chinese> (30/06/2026).

15 Asia Society Hong Kong, "Das Lied Revisited," [09-08-2016] <https://asiasociety.org/hong-kong/das-lied-revisited> (30/06/2026). On Mahler, Deleuze, and rhizomatic history, see Jeremy Barham, "Mahler and the Game of History," in: *Rethinking Mahler*, ed. by Jeremy Barham, New York: Oxford University Press 2017, 315–351.

16 Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1992, 3.

This chapter uses Ng's *Lied* as a sounding board to illuminate a framework of mishearing that prompts us to reflect on the ramification of translation through its absence in music, and highlights intercultural miscommunications as productive avenues for interpretation, listening, and living, thereby reimagining cultural values born from the interactive complexities of (in)authenticities. Ng's *Lied* sounds out a critical reminder for musicology of the need to shift from viewing intercultural relations merely as musical and material dialogues to complexifying them as colliding experiences of comprehension and miscommunication, listening and mishearing, and the interplay of gain and loss in postcolonial worlds.

Challenges and Solutions

In his postface to *Die chinesische Flöte*, Bethge unreservedly expressed his transfixing obsession with Chinese poetry, undisturbed by its translated form:

When I first laid my eyes on some of these lyrics from the Chinese, I was utterly enchanted. Imagine my feelings on encountering so lovely a lyric art! I perceived a fragile, quasi-*evanescent* tenderness of lyrical sound. I gazed at a fully realized *imagistic* art in words that illuminated melancholy and the riddle of existence. I sensed a tremblingly delicate, fine-tuned lyrical quality, pregnant with symbolism, something tender, fragrant, of the nature of moonlight, flower-like in a graceful rendering of emotion.¹⁷

It would be hard to doubt that Ng did not feel a deep connection with Bethge while working on his Cantonese *Lied* with the Tang poetry. Best known as the entrepreneur who brought the McDonald's franchise to Hong Kong and a member of the Board of Governors for the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Ng must have been captivated by the allure of Chinese lyrics chanted in Cantonese. The rhythm, rhyme, timbre, and musical expression embedded in the language with nine tones, so distinct in all these respects from the four-tone Mandarin, likely inspired him not only to replace Mahler's text and movement titles with those of Tang poetry, but also to insist that his work be sung in Cantonese, not Mandarin.¹⁸

Ng's insistence on the sung language merits further deliberation. As art critic Ken Smith writes in the liner notes for the recording of Ng's *Lied*, "Although the northern Mandarin dialect is today's most common spoken tongue, the poets of the Tang Dynasty wrote with much different sounds in the ear. Precise pronunciations are lost to us today, but their vestiges still thrive in southern China, thus explaining this edition's choice of dialect: when spoken in Cantonese, the lines of the Tang poetry still rhyme."¹⁹ Ng's conceit in associating Cantonese –

17 "Als ich das erstmal lyrische Gedichte nach dem Chinesischen zu Gesicht bekam, war ich ganz bezaubert. Was für eine holde lyrische Kunst trat mir da entgegen! Ich fühlte eine bang verschwebende Zartheit lyrischen Klanges, ich blickte in eine von Bildern ganz erfüllte Kunst der Worte, die hinableuchtete in die Schwermut und die Rätsel des Seins, ich fühlte ein feines lyrisches Erzittern, eine quellende Symbolik, etwas Zartes, Duftiges, Mondscheinhaftes, eine blumenhafte Grazie der Empfindung." Bethge, *Die chinesische Flöte*, 103. Quoted in HLG-E4, 1297. Translation by Donald Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler: Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death*, London: Faber 1985, 620.

18 Asia Society Hong Kong, "Das Lied Revisited," video clip, 1:35:57–1:36:07.

19 Ken Smith, Liner Notes "Mahler: *Das Lied von der Erde*. Ning Liang, Warren Mok, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Lan Shui (Bis Records, BIS-SACD-1547, 2007)," 2007, 5.

now spoken by over 80 million people, primarily in Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macau and other diasporic communities – with an authentic musical-phonological representation of Tang poetry in Mahler's music is salient, particularly when we appreciate that Middle Chinese was itself an idealized, "supradialectal" composite rather than the spoken vernacular of any single region.²⁰ Dialectological research shows that, compared to northern dialects like Mandarin, Cantonese is relatively conservative, owing to its preservation of key phonological features from Middle Chinese. These include entering tones (-p, -t, -k) and nasal finals (-m, -n, -ng), which maintain rhyme distinctions in Tang poetry. Other Sinitic varieties, however, including Min (e.g., Hokkien), Hakka, Wu, and Xiang, retain different Middle Chinese traits just as tenaciously.²¹ Crucially, then, no modern Sinitic language can be claimed to singularly resurrect the aural experience of Tang poets and audiences; rather, modern Sinitic languages collectively approximate the lost, imaginary soundscape of the Tang dynasty.

The claim to authenticity may be doubly qualified by studying the added poetic sources that informed the Cantonese *Lied*. The Appendix to this chapter reproduces the Cantonese *Lied*'s text-setting as reflected in its piano score, juxtaposed with its poetic sources.²² It is apparent that Ng devoted a considerable amount of time to studying authoritative poetic sources, as evidenced by his prudent choice of historically-informed Chinese characters.²³ More importantly, he added poetic texts that do not originally appear in Mahler's *Lied*, perhaps in light of the fact that Mahler's music is significantly longer than the Chinese poetry. An intuitive solution is to repeat a stanza or a significant portion of it to accommodate the vocal melody, as Ng did in the third movement, where the ternary musical structure allowed him to recycle part of the poem in the music's final section. But the Chinese poems are too short for the fourth movement and the finale, and rehashing them would risk tedium. Thus, Ng added to the former the third and fifth quatrains from Li Bai's 李白 "Lyrics for the Girls of

20 Zhongwei Shen, *A Phonological History of Chinese*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2020, 8.

21 See, for example, Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Middle Chinese: A Study in Historical Phonology*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 1984, Matthew Y. Chen and John Newman, "From Middle Chinese to Modern Cantonese (Part 1)," *Journal of Chinese Linguistics* 12 (1984), no. 1, 148–198, and Dah-an Ho, "Chinese Dialects," in: *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Linguistics*, ed. by William S-Y. Wang and Chaofen Sun, New York: Oxford University Press 2015, 149–159. I thank Siu Chun Ho for his expert advice in this area.

22 The Cantonese romanization in this chapter and the Appendix follows that used in Ng's *Mahler: Das Lied von der Erde (chinesisch), für Soli und Orchester*, Vienna: Universal Edition 2008 (UE34224), which itself adopts the Sidney Lau romanization system. I retain the Mandarin romanizations of the poets' names due to their more common usage. To ensure consistency and facilitate easy reference across sources, I adopt the English translation of the poems' titles and Mahler's movement titles from Liner Notes, "Mahler: *Das Lied von der Erde*. Ning Liang, Warren Mok, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Lan Shui (Bis Records, BIS-SACD-1547, 2007)," 2007, 22–35. Because Ng's Cantonese text does not map neatly onto the syllable count, phrasing, or poetic structure of Bethge's/Mahler's German, the line numbering in the Appendix follows the layout and breaks of the published score rather than the original poetic meter of Bethge or Mahler. This results in occasional hyphenated German words split across lines and numbering that sometimes appears non-intuitive when compared to standard editions of *Das Lied*. The numbering is retained here to allow precise cross-reference with the score and recording, but readers should treat it as a visual aid for the adapted text-setting rather than a faithful representation of the German poetic original.

23 I consulted the following authoritative editions in reproducing the poetic sources for Ng's *Lied*: *Tangshi sanbai shou* 唐詩三百首, ed. by Kang Zhen 康震 and Chen Poru 陳珀如, Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju 2013, 28, 29, 181, for Meng Haoran's "In Dreamland," "Waiting for Master Ding," and "Goodbye to Wang Wei" respectively; Li Bai, *Li Taibai wenji* 李太白文集, ed. by Song Minqiu 宋敏求 and Zeng Gong 曾鞏, Chengdu: Bashu shushe 1985, 19, 32, 95, 110, 125, for Li Bai's "Lotus-Picking Song," "Song of Sorrow," "Drinking in the T'ao Pavilion," "Rising Drunk on a Spring Day," and "Lyrics for the Girls of Yue" respectively; Qian Qi, *Qianzhong wenji* 錢仲文集, ed. by Gu Kuang 顧況, Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 1993, 6, for Qian Qi's "An Autumn Night."

Yue" (a five-character quatrain) in the B section of the rounded binary form, which evokes, in parallel with the poet's "Lotus-Picking Song," the motif of a flirtatious lotus-gathering scene on Ruoye Creek – the same radiant, half-shy maidens retreating into the flowers. To the finale, the longest movement, Ng incorporated two additional poems by Meng Haoran 孟浩然, "*Laubit Wong Wai* 留別王維" (Goodbye to Wang Wei) and "*Hayat Naamting waai San Daai* 夏日南亭懷辛大" (In Dreamland). These poems share kindred imageries with "Waiting for Master Ding" and "Goodbye to Meng Haoran," enabling Ng to circumvent the problem of redundancy while preserving the thematic coherence of the Chinese texts.²⁴ Through enacting poetic distance from Mahler's *Lied*, Ng's project injects its own artistic definition of authenticity into the composer's music, a claim we will return to and complicate at the end of this chapter.

The gestation of Ng's *Lied* dates back to 2001 (when Mahler's music was still rarely performed live by professional orchestras in Hong Kong despite frequent airplay on classical radio), as revealed in a 2016 post-concert interview with Choa and Liang at the Asia Society Hong Kong Center, moderated by Smith. Knowing that Choa, a Hong Kong-born conductor, was leading a chamber orchestra in England, Ng reached out and proposed a meeting at the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival that year.²⁵ Choa had never met Ng, but appreciated his "extraordinary idea" during their encounter in Germany for the first festival appearance of the Silk Road Project – initiated by Yo-Yo Ma in 1998 and of which Ng was a board member – outside Tanglewood.²⁶ In stripping away the text of Mahler's *Lied* to foster a literal, trans-epochal, and trans-geographical dialogue between Tang poetry and Mahler's music, Ng, as Choa recounted, was motivated by a vocation to let the world "understand how great Chinese culture, literature, and history [are], and also that great art really transcends time."²⁷ Smith added that Ng's project embodies the "Silk Road project mentality" in promoting intercultural music-making, albeit in the form of miscommunication.²⁸ Mahler's *Lied*, Smith remarked candidly, "is not really Chinese." With his Cantonese adaptation, Ng wanted to "take that from the other angle to show that, if you take just the Chinese, it is not originally Mahler. [...] No matter what direction you come at from this piece, there is something to discuss later. And the discussion is as important as the piece itself."²⁹

Well-meaning as the project's artistic conception was, Ng faced considerable challenges in execution. For a start, in German, a word can consist of one or more syllables, whereas in Cantonese (and also broadly in Chinese), each character (*zi* 字) corresponds only to a single

24 Mahler separated the song into two halves, each preceded by an orchestral prelude. The first corresponds to "Waiting for Master Ding" and the second to "Goodbye to Meng Haoran." Ng seemed acutely aware of the music's formal structure, as he placed the two additional Tang poems within the first half in order for the Cantonese "Goodbye to Meng Haoran" to land in time at the first vocal entry of the second half. For a formal scheme of "Der Abschied," see Christian Utz, "Form und Sinn in Gustav Mahlers *Abschied*. Konkurrierende Deutungen in der Geschichte der Mahler-Interpretation," in: *Musik im Zusammenhang: Festschrift Peter Revers zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. by Klaus Aringer, Christian Utz, and Thomas Wozonig, Vienna: Hollitzer 2019, 685–722: 694–695, <http://phaidra.kug.ac.at/o:104445>.

25 Asia Society Hong Kong, "Das Lied Revisited," video clip, 1:15:57–1:16:45.

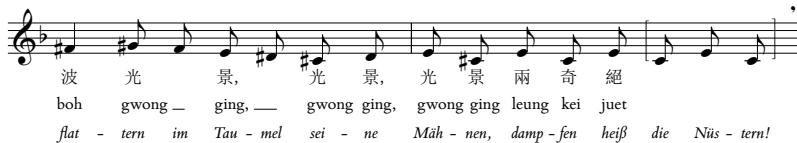
26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 1:40:46–1:41:08.

28 Ibid., 1:41:26–1:42:35.

29 Ibid.

syllable and can function as a mono-morphemic structure (*ci* 詞).³⁰ As a result, the same idea can often be expressed using fewer syllables in monosyllabic Cantonese than in polysyllabic German. Ng was thus confronted with the task of fitting more syllables (and musical notes) into Mahler's music than the Tang poems could accommodate. It is uncommon in Ng's *Lied* for the number of syllables in a German phrase to match exactly the number of Chinese characters in the corresponding text. An exceptional alignment occurs between the five-syllable phrase "Der Vogel zwitschert" (the bird twitters) and the five-character line "*chunfung yue lauang* 春風語流鶯" (the spring breeze speaks to the black-naped oriole) in "Der Trunkene im Frühling." More commonly, one Chinese character is set to multiple German syllables, either through melismatic treatment or by tying repeated notes. When, on rare occasions, both syllable-to-syllable correspondence and melismatic setting proved ineffective, Ng tweaked the music to shorten the phrase by jettisoning certain musical notes and parts of the text. A case in point can be found in the fourth movement, where the three notes for "die Nüstern" (the nostrils) in measure 95 are omitted altogether (EX. 1).³¹



EXAMPLE 1: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Cantonese version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, iv, mm. 94–95
© Universal Edition 2008 (UE34224).



AUDIO EXAMPLE 1: Mahler: *Das Lied von der Erde*, Cantonese version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, iv, mm. 94–95, Ning Liang, Warren Mok, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Lan Shui (Bis Records, BIS-SACD-1547, 2007, Track 4, 3:59–4:04).³²
→ <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20446978>

As a consequence of forcing the monosyllabic Chinese into the polysyllabic German mold, linguistic phrases – a group of characters functioning as a cohesive syntactic unit – are at times separated by musical rests and may become semantically ambiguous. As shown in **EXAMPLE 2**, the line "*kamming jaulok leung seungdak* 琴鳴酒樂兩相得" (the sound of zither playing and the pleasure of drinking complement each other) at measures 60 to 68 of the first movement exemplifies the conflict between the linguistic phrase in Chinese and the musical unit conceived in

30 Edwin G. Pulleyblank, *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 1995, 3–11. The concept of "word" in Classical Chinese is different from that in modern Chinese. In the latter, a word usually refers to a two-character form consisting of two syllables and two free or bound morphemes. On the idea of wordhood in modern Chinese, see Jerome L. Packard, *The Morphology of Chinese: A Linguistic and Cognitive Approach*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2000, 1–20.

31 The musical notes that Ng decided to discard are often anacrusis of a phrase or the final part of a repeated melodic pattern, so as to minimally compromise the integrity of the music. Occasionally Ng had to insert extra musical notes to accommodate more Chinese characters than the German syllables the music allowed by breaking a long or tied note into two. In "Der Abschied," for example, the dotted-half note "Welt" (world) in measure 148 is split into a half note and a quarter note to match with "jam 音" (sound) and "sai 世" (world) respectively.

32 In Audio Example 1, the second "gwongging 光景" (spectacle) is sung as "saangwong 山光" (light from the mountainside).

German. “Die Gärten” (the gardens), “der Seele” (of the soul), and “welkt hin” (fades away) are meaningful constituents or phrases separated by rests. To these musical units Ng set the three disjointed fragments “*kamming jau* 琴鳴酒” (the sound of zither playing and drinking), “*lok leung* 樂兩” (the pleasure, each other), and “*seungdak* 相得” (complement) respectively, which severely undermines the comprehension of the seven-character line.³³

(trotz zarter Tongebung stets mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck)



我 有 三 尺 琴 琴 鳴 酒 樂 兩 相 得 一
 ngoh yau saam chek kam kam ming jau lok leung seung dak yat
 lie - gen wüsst die Gär - ten der See - le, welkt hin und

EXAMPLE 2: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Cantonese version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, i, mm. 60–68

© Universal Edition 2008 (UE34224).

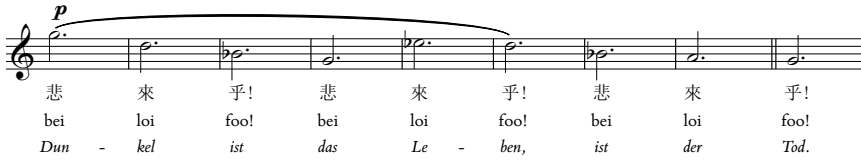


AUDIO EXAMPLE 2: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Cantonese version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, i, mm. 60–68, Ning Liang, Warren Mok, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Lan Shui (Bis Records, BIS-SACD-1547, 2007, Track 1, 1:15–1:28).

→ <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20446978>

As noted, a second and related adaptational challenge for Ng was that the Chinese poems were too short to adequately fit with Mahler’s music. Ng’s *Lied* is not so much a sentence-by-sentence mapping between Mahler’s text and Tang poems, as an artistic work of tallying the Chinese characters with the German syllables and the musical notes. One of Ng’s solutions was to lengthen the Chinese poems through repetition. Short phrases, words, and sentences are often restated to compensate for the excess of German syllables. A notable example, illustrated in **EXAMPLE 3**, is the refrain “Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod!” (Dark is life, is death!) of the first movement, where Ng repeated the phrase “*bei loi foo* 悲來乎!” (Sorrow comes!) three times, in place of the Tang poem’s two iterations. Each of the nine syllables of the German phrase thus perfectly corresponds to a Chinese character. Repetition works exceptionally well when it coincides with Mahler’s repetition of Bethge’s text. One such instance, reproduced in **EXAMPLE 4**, takes place in measures 42 to 44 of the fifth movement, where the repetition of “mir ist” (to me it seems) is set to that of “*chuesai* 處世” (navigating the world).

33 The untreated dissonance between the Chinese syntactic structure and the musical phrasing could, however, be resolved here by matching “die Gärten” to “*kamming* 琴鳴” (the sound of zither playing), “der Seele” to “*jaulok* 酒樂” (the pleasure of drinking), and the remaining line “welkt hin und stirbt die Freude der Gesang” (the joy of singing withers and dies) to “*leungeungdak* 兩相得 / *yatbooibatchi chingwangam* 一杯不啻千鈞金” (complement each other / A drink is no less than thousand taels of gold) syllable for syllable. Nonetheless, the solution adopted by Ng reflects a text-setting approach that is unrestrained by fidelity to both the German text and Mahler’s music.



EXAMPLE 3: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Cantonese version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, i, mm. 81–89
 © Universal Edition 2008 (UE34224).



AUDIO EXAMPLE 3: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Cantonese version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, i, mm. 81–89; Ning Liang, Warren Mok, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Lan Shui (Bis Records, BIS-SACD-1547, 2007, Track 1, 1:42–2:00).
 → <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20446978>



EXAMPLE 4: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Cantonese version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, v, mm. 42–44
 © Universal Edition 2008 (UE34224).



AUDIO EXAMPLE 4: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Cantonese version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, v, mm. 42–44; Ning Liang, Warren Mok, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Lan Shui (Bis Records, BIS-SACD-1547, 2007, Track 5, 2:13–2:29).
 → <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20446978>

Ng's third challenge was to decide whether to translate, adjust, or simply jettison Mahler's text. In measures 88 to 95 of the fourth movement, for example, Mahler expanded on Bethge's text and set it to a hurried and exciting passage to depict vividly the motions of galloping horses that enrich the lotus-picking scenery in previous sections. Rather than translating Mahler's elaboration into Chinese, Ng maintained, almost in a revisionist or purist fashion, the thematic essence of the movement by incorporating Li Bai's fifth quatrain of "Lyrics for the Girls of Yue," suggesting a poetic continuity that has attracted severe criticisms, as we will see in the next section. In measures 460 to 500 of "Der Abschied," Ng translated the lyrics penned by Mahler himself: "daaidei wooi chunluk 大地回春綠, laamhung yiu yatcheung 藍空耀日長" (the earth turns spring and green, the blue sky shines bright all day long). The last two characters, "yatcheung 日長" (all day long), which evoke eternity, are then repeated five times to accommodate the seven utterances of "ewig" (eternal) in the extended coda.

Ng's final challenge, and perhaps the most significant to Cantonese speakers, was to make sense of the lyrics with a predetermined vocal melody. Cantonese is a tonal language with nine tones; the meaning of a word may differ depending on the pitch of the word. For the right

words to be comprehensible when sung, the melody must conform to the tones and contours of the words to avoid any tone-melody mismatch. Many have theorized the mapping between Cantonese speech tones and musical melodies. A recent attempt by Chan Kai-Young, a practice-led researcher and composer from Hong Kong, underscores that optimal text-setting for intelligibility is a fluid concept that varies across intervallic and pitch contexts.³⁴ A general rule of thumb for an intelligible Cantonese text-setting, nevertheless, is that the intervallic and melodic direction should align, and the interval size should be contextually appropriate.

Ng, however, sidestepped the issue of tone-melody mapping in his Cantonese *Lied* altogether. Tone-melody mismatches are painfully ubiquitous throughout the song-symphony. Most lines are not set intelligibly by aligning the melodic contours and movements with the tones of the words properly. At the beginning of the first movement, a pivotal moment that reels the listeners in, the first two characters “*jueyan* 主人” (master), according to Chan’s system, should be optimally set to a descending interval between a perfect fourth and a major ninth.³⁵ However, Ng set “*jueyan*” to an ascending major second, which may sound like “*jueyan* 主因” (primary cause) to a Cantonese speaker.

In Ng’s *Lied*, tone-melody mismatches not only impair the listener’s comprehension of the text, but they also complicate the singers’ performance. In the aforementioned 2016 post-concert interview, Liang confessed that it was difficult for her to perform the work in Cantonese as “the tone [of the music] is not [suited for] the Cantonese tone, so you [felt] like [you were singing the] wrong tone.”³⁶ Choa interjected with an anecdote from their rehearsals, where they joked about the two level-tones “*saangwong* 山光” (light from the mountainside) in measures 198 to 199 in “Der Abschied,” as the ascending major sixth led them to mishear it as “*saangwong* 散光” (astigmatism), with *saang* being a high-rising tone.³⁷ For Liang and Choa, both native Cantonese speakers, the distorted Cantonese sung text made the piece challenging to perform; at the same time, Choa reflected, it was “quite funny if you listen [to the Cantonese text] with Mahler’s setting.”³⁸ The text-setting, assisted by conductor Glen Cortese and musicologist Joanna C. Lee, and the completely different set of phonemes in Cantonese, compelled Liang to relearn the piece. Mok, in the 2007 recording, even rephrased the vocal melodies in Mahler’s *Lied* by repositioning breathing spots. For example, a sensible place to breathe in the phrase “Dein Keller birgt die Fülle des goldenen Weins!” (Your cellar is full of golden wine!) in “Das Trinklied vom Jammer” would be between “Fülle” (“abundance”) and “des” (“of the”). In Ng’s setting, however, the two syllables of the word “Fülle” are respectively matched to the last character of the previous Chinese line (*sau* 守) and the first of the next (*foo* 富), as **EXAMPLE 5** illustrates. Mok therefore breathed after the syllable “Fül-” instead, so that the Chinese lyrical phrasing could be preserved.³⁹

34 Kai-Young Chan, “From Constraints to Creativity: Musical Inventions through Cantonese Contours in Hong Kong Contemporary Music,” *Principles of Music Composing* 21 (2021), 41–59. https://zurnalai.lmta.lt/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/MKP-XXI_Kai-Young-Chan.pdf (30/06/2026).

35 For a comprehensive table of all intelligible intervals for two-tone successions, see *ibid.*, 44–47.

36 Asia Society Hong Kong, “Das Lied Revisited,” video clip, 1:25:15–1:25:25.

37 *Ibid.*, 1:25:30–1:25:59. “*saangwong* 山光,” a tone-1-to-tone-1 bigram, should ideally be mapped onto a repeated pitch.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Mok and Liang adopted different approaches in the recording when the lyrical and musical phrasing of the two languages collides. While Mok accommodated the Chinese syntactic structure, Liang preserved mostly the

(*sempre ff*)

金 玉 滿 堂 應 不 守 富 貴 百 年 能 幾 何
 gam yuk moon tong ying bat sau foo gwai baak nin nang gei hoh
 Dein Kel - ler birgt die Fül - le des gol - - de - nen Weins!

EXAMPLE 5: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Cantoneese version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, i, mm. 116–125
 © Universal Edition 2008 (UE34224).



AUDIO EXAMPLE 5: Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Cantoneese version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, i, mm. 116–125; Ning Liang, Warren Mok, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Lan Shui (Bis Records, BIS-SACD-1547, 2007, Track 1, 2:28–2:43).

→ <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20446978>

In addition to phrasing, the performers of the Cantoneese *Lied* must also attend to the rising tones of the language, a problem that did not concern Ng. Cantoneese consists of two rising tones, tone 2 (high-rising) and tone 5 (low-rising). Both begin with a lower pitch and glide into a higher pitch. An example of this is the low-rising “*ye 冶*” (free-spirited) in the phrase “*yauye long 遊冶郎*” (wandering, free-spirited lad) in the fourth movement. Liang noted that it was easier for her to sing the fourth movement in Cantoneese than the second or the sixth. She explained this by showing that she could “turn the tone” of the phrase “*yauye long*” to make it sound more Cantoneese- or *naamyam*-like (a narrative singing tradition in Cantoneese).⁴⁰ Certainly, *naamyam* is by no means the only musical genre sung in Cantoneese that requires attention to rising tones.⁴¹ But what Liang was trying to highlight in her genre-bending thinking was that a slight portamento or upward slide was needed on characters with a rising tone. If they were not pronounced accurately, they would sound bizarre and no longer recognizably Cantoneese. Since Ng did not supply any performance directions in the score regarding this matter, performers were required to understand specific tonal operations in Cantoneese.⁴²

German. For instance, Liang took a breath after “Blicks” (gaze) / “*fa 花*” (flower) instead of “*schwingt*” (swings) / *hui 去*” (away) in measure 120 of the fourth movement, thus retaining the German sentence structure but distorting the Chinese one.

⁴⁰ Asia Society Hong Kong, “Das Lied Revisited,” video clip, 1:24:10–1:24:43.

⁴¹ Rising tones are also treated with care in other forms of vocal music sung in Cantoneese such as Cantoneese opera, contemporary vocal works, and popular music. See, for instance, Bell Yung, “Creative Process in Cantoneese Opera I: The Role of Linguistic Tones,” *Ethnomusicology* 27 (1983), no. 1, 29–47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/850881>, Chan, “From Constraints to Creativity,” and Edwin K.C. Li, “Cantopop and Speech-Melody Complex,” *Music Theory Online* 27 (2021), no. 1. <https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.21.27.1/mto.21.27.1.li.php>.

⁴² The way Mok and Lavender respectively performed the tone-2 character “*jau 酒*” (wine) in “*gwan yau so dau jau 君有數斗酒*” (the lord has several liters of wine) of the first song offers an excellent comparison between how a Cantoneese native speaker (Mok) and a non-native speaker (Lavender) might treat a character with a rising tone. Whereas Mok delivered the word with a clear upward glide, Lavender sang the note relatively straight without the characteristic rise, causing “*jau 酒*” to sound closer to a tone-3 syllable and evoking homophones such as “*jau 皺*” (wrinkle) or “*jau 咒*” (curse).

De(con)struction

Given the challenges and the specific ways Ng responded to them, it is small wonder that the well-traveled and conceptually refreshing craft did not see a warm reception in its afterlives. Tony Duggan, a seasoned English critic of renditions of Mahler's works, penned a scathing review of the 2007 recording of the Cantonese *Lied*:

The sung texts here are the responsibility of Daniel Ng. What he has done is to take original Tang Dynasty poems, only some of which are behind those of Bethge and Mahler, and further adapt those to the music. Material that is often profoundly different from those in Bethge's work as well. So here "Das Trinklied von [sic] Jammer der Erde" becomes (if translated into English) "Song of Sorrow" rather than "Drinking Song of Earth's Sorrow" with references to specific characters. Bethge's repeated phrase set by Mahler "Dark is life, is death" here becomes "woe is me, woe is me", which is far less dark and profound and surely not what Mahler intended at all. Later the version of "Der Abschied" that we have here is, we are told in the notes, assembled by Ng from five different sources as opposed to just the two used by Bethge with the added end lines stitched on by Mahler himself. These two examples must suffice to illustrate that what we have here is very far indeed from what Mahler intended and, I think, in the end does no favours at all to Chinese listeners and certainly not to Mahler. But there is a further impediment to consider, maybe a clincher. As the liner-notes explain, German is polysyllabic whereas Chinese is not. So, to quote the infamous remark by the Emperor to Mozart, there are too many notes to spread around and what we get is a kind of vocal running which destroys Mahler's careful composition completely. Listen to the end of "Der Abschied" if you want a more convincing case against this project. For such a carefully composed work as this maybe German is the only way to hear it.⁴³

Duggan was not alone in putting forward the claim that Ng's *Lied* was a work of destruction. The American music critic David Hurwitz shared the same ethos in reviewing the recording:

[I]n returning to the purported Chinese texts, the relationship between Mahler's musical imagery and the actual words in some cases has been totally destroyed. Thus, the "sun of love" outburst at the end of the second movement has no motivation whatsoever when the words are "Beside the lucent window she hears the falling leaves, Alas for her whose solitude a lover's absence grieves!" (I'm not even going into the miserable English translations from the Chinese). In *Of Beauty* the entire stanza of youths on horseback galloping through the maidens' garden is missing, making complete nonsense of the movement's central eruption. The poem itself is also too short for Mahler's musical setting, necessitating a literal repeat of the opening text, which further weakens Mahler's poetic point.⁴⁴

43 Tony Duggan, CD Review "Mahler: *Das Lied von der Erde*. Ning Liang, Warren Mok, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Lan Shui (Bis Records, BIS-SACD-1547, 2007)," [n.d.] in: *MusicWeb International*, http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2009/jan09/Mahler_Chinese_bissacd1547.htm (30/06/2026).

44 David Hurwitz, CD Review "Mahler: *Das Lied von der Erde*. Ning Liang; Warren Mok; Singapore Symphony Orchestra; Lan Shui (Bis Records, BIS-SACD-1547, 2007)," [n.d.] in: *Classics Today*, <https://www.classicstoday.com/review/review-13947/> (30/06/2026).

While Duggan and Hurwitz may not be entirely wide of the mark when it comes to syllabic reconstruction and the undermining of Mahler's poetic-musical synthesis, they were unaware of a foundational problem in the Cantonese *Lied* that can further bolster their argument of destruction: the entire piece is conspicuously incomprehensible to both native and non-native Cantonese speakers. It is a musical work injected with an eccentric conviction that produces an all-around soundscape of mishearing, a soundscape whose semantic barricade against everyone invites a collective imagination of participating in a particular retroactive history that one can only fantasize about. The unclear, the disjointed, and the misfit collectively engender a peculiar way of listening that is aesthetically challenging, because it brazenly betrays the expectation of classical finesse even for an adaptation, and bends the perfectly shaped cookie-cutter by shoving rearranged Chinese poems into Mahler's music. Ng's *Lied* thus produces a sustained intercultural dissonance: the orchestral gestures and vocal melodies speak in a late-Romantic German idiom, yet the audible language, Cantonese, speaks gibberish.

But Duggan and Hurwitz might be too hasty to judge. It is, from Ng's standpoint, Mahler's music that is destructive. The imaginary encounter between Mahler and the Chinese poets stages an embarrassing screenplay for the composer in that his music was a complete misfit. The perfectly shaped cookie-cutter, in this view, was the Tang poetry, and it was Mahler's music that bent the mold. What Ng produced is an audible colonization of the Cantonese language through Western art music. For native speakers like Choa and Liang, the music "others" and degrades them by producing a persona with amateurish linguistic skills. For non-native speakers like Lavender, the music deludes them into thinking that they can speak the language very well. The music's destructive agency is at once constructive. The work enacts a paradigm of mishearing that marks an inequitable, orientalist parallel, one that disables the indigenous and empowers the non-indigenous. What has been swept under the rug of a destructive incomprehensibility is a constructive prompt that potential power imbalances can emerge from enchantments of intercultural intervention.

(In)authenticity and Untranslatability

If making sense of Ng's work at the literal level may not be the best hermeneutic route to take, then we may take another route to appreciate incomprehensibility and inauthenticity as part and parcel of the art-making process and its meaning. Theodor W. Adorno's philosophical exegesis on *Das Lied*, which champions the inauthenticity of *Das Lied* as its eloquence, may serve well as a foil to animate Ng's *Lied* in their conceptual resonance.

Das Lied is, for Adorno, a souvenir to commemorate what was forgotten. Fred Rush channels Adorno's thought this way: *Das Lied* "presents a musical expression of present utopia, but only under the form of absent utopia."⁴⁵ Put differently, Adorno argues that *Das Lied* enacts a utopia by disengaging from it.⁴⁶ We are then prompted to wonder: why China? How do Chinese poetry and its imaginary pentatonic manifestations relate to Mahler's (and Adorno's)

45 Fred Rush, "Cloudcuckooland: Adorno's Musical Utopianism," *New German Critique* 43 (2016), no. 3, 73–89: 83. <https://doi.org/10.1215/0094033X-3625373>

46 Ibid., 80.

utopianism? Adorno's most explicit answer to these questions can be found in the following statement: "The Orient is pseudomorphous [...] as a cover for Mahler's Jewish element."⁴⁷ This is a loaded statement that can be understood in light of the Chinese-Jewish connections in *fin-de-siècle* Austria, and how the image of China was appropriated as an alternative haven to the repressed Jews in Europe at large, owing to the discriminatory political climate of the time.

Around 1900, China was viewed as a utopia for Jews in Austria. For example, on 21 February 1890, *Die Neuzeit: Wochenzeitschrift für politische, religiöse und Cultur-Interessen* quoted from an article by a Chinese diplomat in France, Tschenk Ki Tong (Chen Jitong in Mandarin). In his article – "Die Juden in China" (The Jews in China) – Chen reversed "the dichotomy of civilization and barbarism" by expressing how China, in contrast to Europe's antisemitism and Austria's antisemitic Christian Social party led by Karl Lueger, was a place that granted refuge and religious freedom to Jews.⁴⁸

There are no antisemites in China, because people there have never known such a thing as religious fanaticism. [...] So I can claim with good reason that in such matters as religious confessions and the rights of the human conscience, a great part of European citizens are not yet able to comprehend the freedom granted [...] in China!⁴⁹

The representation of China as a philosemitic place "[subverted] the received European notion of a despotic, backward and inhumane oriental monarchy," and made China an ideal destination for Jewish emigration at the time.⁵⁰ But the Chinese-Jewish connections were much deeper than that. Martin Buber, an Austrian Jewish intellectual and a staunch supporter for Cultural Zionism, for instance, saw spiritual affinities between Jews and Chinese. He located parallels, in his translation of Chinese philosophical writings by Zhuangzi into German, between "the Chinese Tao teachings, the Indian theory of salvation and the Jewish-early Christian doctrine of the Kingdom of god,"⁵¹ and positioned Jews and Chinese under the same "Oriental type."⁵² There Buber identified a spiritual compatibility between Jews and Chinese that enabled him to access the realm of Chinese Taoism. Such ethnic and spiritual solidarity was further heightened by racial discrimination in Europe against Jews and Chinese, which categorized both peoples as "yellow."⁵³ Buber's positioning of "Jews and Chinese into the co-constituted, essential space of the Orient" was thus due to "both groups' common Otherness in Europe and the Occident, respectively."⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1992, 149.

⁴⁸ Shuangzhi Li, "'Wenn ich ein Chinese wäre'. The Austrian-Jewish Imagination of China around 1900 Revisited," *Austrian Studies* 24 (2016), 94–108: 96. <https://doi.org/10.5699/austrianstudies.24.2016.0094>

⁴⁹ "Kleine Chronik. Paris," *Neuzeit, Wochenzeitschrift für politische, religiöse und Cultur Interessen*, 21 February 1890, 79; cited in *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Li, "'Wenn ich ein Chinese wäre,'" 97.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 101. One can dive deeper into this issue by examining the image of China represented by Austrian writers of Jewish descent around 1900: Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Franz Kafka, and Karl Kraus, to name just a few prominent ones with which Adorno was familiar. But we can observe a general pattern from their writings: China was seen

However, for Adorno, this “China as utopia” thinking is negated in Mahler’s *Lied*. China, according to Adorno, is not an “alternative living space” for Jews but a “pseudomorph” for the composer’s Jewish element.⁵⁵ China is a false (pseudo-)form (*morph*) of Mahler’s Jewishness in *Das Lied*, a “principle of stylization.”⁵⁶ For Adorno, *Das Lied* exhibits Mahler’s inauthentic Chineseness, but such an inauthenticity is “a pseudomorph that does not take itself literally but grows eloquent through inauthenticity” itself.⁵⁷ In explaining how inauthentic Mahler’s Chineseness is, Adorno describes the music’s Chinese elements as being “sketched with extreme discretion,”⁵⁸ but written in a way that can shake the basis of Western tonality. Elsewhere, Adorno cites the text from “Von der Jugend,” and foregrounds the fictionality embodied in Mahler’s text: “‘Friends, in fine attire, are drinking, talking,’ *which they never really do*, as in the miniature of memory, which promises it to those unborn.”⁵⁹

One does not need to take Adorno’s claim only at face value. As Adorno explains the composer’s inauthenticity elsewhere in his monograph, “it is only in the moment of inauthenticity, which unmasks the lie of authenticity, that Mahler has his truth.”⁶⁰ Consider another statement by Adorno in relation to his claim about the fictionality of Mahler’s text: “The enemy of all illusion, Mahler’s music stresses its inauthenticity, underlines the fiction inherent in it, in order to be cured of the actual falsehood that art is starting to be.”⁶¹ This is what Adorno finds in Mahler’s music that is unique: it “expresses entirely within music the inadequacy of music’s main pretension: to be able to configure a utopian world by disengaging from the real one.”⁶² It is, in a characteristically Adornian swerve, through this indirectness – that Mahler’s music expresses what it cannot – that Mahler’s inauthenticity subtly reflects what is authentic.

Ng’s *Lied* has an uncanny resonance with Adorno’s philosophy. We could easily accuse Mahler’s music of colonizing Chinese culture, domesticating and devaluing it by translating the indigenous text into the colonizer’s language. As Robert Young puts it, translation can be “part of the process of domination, of achieving control, a violence carried out on the language, culture, and people being translated.”⁶³ But in resisting translation, Ng delivered a decolonial promise that musicologists often envision but rarely seek to realize. The outcome is far from happy: the liberation from a translational domination can result in a failure in intercultural communications; the music sounds one way, the speech tones sound another. As fragments of different languages, both music and text vie for authenticity, but simultaneously render one another inauthentic. The authentically Tang is inauthentically German, but the authentic Mahler lies paradoxically in its inauthentic musical-poetical representations. As a container of such interactions of cultural (in)authenticities, Ng’s *Lied* reflects a dialogical possibility in intercultural mishearing that ultimately gestures toward an Adornian critical

as an alternative host country for Jews, “a metaphorical and exotic space on which they project their desire to escape from an antisemitic environment and experience a self freed from the forces of assimilation.” *Ibid.*, 108.

55 *Ibid.*, 107.

56 Adorno, *Mahler*, 148.

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*

59 *Ibid.*, 152, emphasis mine.

60 *Ibid.*, 32.

61 *Ibid.*, 30.

62 Rush, “Cloudecockooland,” 80.

63 Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press 2003, 140.

utopianism. In my view, it is through mishearing such (in)authenticities, and through staging fictionality as a truth-making apparatus, that Ng, in an Adornian spirit, sought to reflect what is authentic.

The historiographical play also beckons us to contemplate more broadly the role of translation in music, not least through the untranslatability implied by its absence. Unlike other adaptations and retranslations of *Das Lied*, notably Zheng Xiaoying's Mandarin *Das Lied* which celebrates comprehensibility as an aesthetic quality,⁶⁴ Ng's Cantonese *Lied* opens up hermeneutic windows of "poetics of error" – an openness to be misheard and misunderstood without translation, such that the work, to summon Adorno once again, can live as a "pseudomorph that does not take itself literally but grows eloquent through inauthenticity."⁶⁵ In actualizing an imaginary historical episode and mapping poetic authenticity onto preexisting music, Ng sought to stage intercultural miscommunications as productive ways of interpreting, listening, meaning-making, valuing, and living, through which one can reconceive cultural values that emerge from interactions of (in)authenticities. As a "prototype of untranslatability,"⁶⁶ Ng's *Lied* brought into view the 19th-century European exotic view of Chinese poetry as "truly untranslatable,"⁶⁷ but positioned untranslatability differently as an epistemic fulcrum to write "against the Platonic tradition of positing truths in an absolute sense, as a kind of mathematical intelligence un beholden to language."⁶⁸ Untranslatability dramatizes the resistance towards assimilation as a counter-hegemonic practice, and it is in the space of active non-assimilation that musicological thoughts across uneven global terrains can be generatively destabilized. Ng's *Lied*, in foregrounding the sounded language itself as a locus of performative critique, models a conceptual shift from thinking intercultural relations only in terms of musical dialogues, to theorizing them as conditions of possibility emerging from multiple standpoints of understanding and miscommunication, hearing and mishearing, gain and loss, and acceptance and denial of mediatization, amidst and across the temporalities and complexities of postcolonial worlds.

⁶⁴ Li, "Re-translating Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*."

⁶⁵ Hugh Kenner, "The Poetics of Error," *MLN* 90 (1975), no. 6, 738–746. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2907016>

⁶⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music," in: *Essays on Music*, ed. by Richard Leppert, translated by Susan Gillespie, Berkeley: University of California Press 2002, 135–161: 142.

⁶⁷ Muriel Détrie, "Le livre de jade de Judith Gautier: Un livre pionnier," *Revue de littérature comparée* 63 (1989), no. 3, 301–324: 307n1.

⁶⁸ Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, London: Verso Books 2013, 31.

Appendix: Gustav Mahler, *Das Lied von der Erde* (2004), Cantonese Version by Daniel Ng Yat-chiu

Mahler's <i>Lied</i>		Ng's Cantonese <i>Lied</i>		Romanization	Poetic sources
Mvt	"Das Trinklied von Jammer der Erde"	悲歌行		Beigoh hang	Li Bai 李白
1	(Drinking Song of the Sorrow of the Earth)	(Song of Sorrow)			悲歌行
1	Schon winkt der Wein im gold'nen Pokale,	主人有酒且莫斟	jue yan yau jau che mok jam		悲來乎, 悲來乎!
2	doch trinkt noch nicht, erst sing' ich euch ein Lied!	聽我一曲悲來吟	ting ngoh yat kuk bei loi yam bei loi yam		主人有酒且莫斟
3	Das Lied vom Kummer soll auf-	悲來不吟還不笑	bei loi bat yam waan bat siu		聽我一曲悲來吟
4	lachend in die Seele euch klingen.	天下無人知我心	tin ha mo yan ji ngoh sam		悲來不吟還不笑
5	Wenn der Kummer naht,	君有數斗酒	gwan yau so dau jau		天下無人知我心
6	liegen wüst	我有三尺琴	ngoh yau saam chek kam		君有數斗酒
7	die Gärten der Seele, welkt hin	琴鳴酒樂兩相得	kam ming jau lok leung seung dak		我有三尺琴
8	und stirbt die Freude, der Gesang.	一杯不啻千鈞金	yat booi bat chi chin gwan gam		琴鳴酒樂兩相得
9	Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod.	悲來乎! 悲來乎! 悲來乎!	bei loi foo bei loi foo bei loi foo		一杯不啻千鈞金
10	Herr dieses Hauses!	天雖長地雖久	tin sui cheung dei sui gau		悲來乎, 悲來乎!
11	Dein Keller birgt die Füll-	金玉滿堂應不守	gam yuk moon tong ying bat sau		天雖長, 地雖久
12	le des goldenen Weins!	富貴百年能幾何	foo gwai baak nin nang gei hoh		金玉滿堂應不守
13	Hier diese Laute nenn' ich mein!	死生一度人皆有	sei saang yat do yan gaai yau		富貴百年能幾何
14	Die Laute schlagen und die Gläser leeren,	孤猿坐啼墳上月	goo yuen joh tai fan seung yuet		死生一度人皆有
15	das sind die Dinge, die zusammenpassen.	且須一盡杯中酒	che sui yat jun booi jung jau		孤猿坐啼墳上月
16	Ein voller Becher Weins	鳳鳥不至河無圖	fung niu bat ji hoh mo to		且須一盡杯中酒
17	zur rechten Zeit ist mehr wert,	微子去之箕子奴	mei ji hui ji gei ji no		鳳鳥不至河無圖
18	ist mehr wert, ist mehr wert als	漢帝不憶李將軍	hon dai bat yik lei jeung gwan		微子去之箕子奴
19	alle Reiche dieser Erde!	楚王放卻屈大夫	choh wong fong keuk wat daai foo		漢帝不憶李將軍
20	Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod!	悲來乎! 悲來乎! 悲來乎!	bei loi foo bei loi foo bei loi foo		楚王放卻屈大夫
21	Das Firmament blaut ewig,	秦蒙李斯早追悔	chun ga lei si jo jui fool		悲來乎, 悲來乎!
22	und die Erde wird lange feststeh'n und aufblüh'n im Lenz.	虛名, 虛名撥向身之外	hui ming hui ming boot heung san ji ngoi		秦蒙李斯早追悔
23	Du aber, Mensch, wie lang lebst denn du?	范子何曾愛五湖	faan ji hoh chang oi ng woo		虛名撥向身之外
24	Nicht hundert Jahre darfst du dich ergötzen	功名名遂身自退	gung sing ming sui san ji tui		范子何曾愛五湖
25	an all dem morschen Tan-	劍是一夫用	gim si yat foo yung		功名名遂身自退
26	de dieser Erde!	書能知姓名	sue nang ji sing ming		劍是一夫用
					書能知姓名

惠施不肯干萬乘
卜式未必窮一經
還須黑頭取方伯
莫讓白首爲儒生

wai si bat hang sau chin sing
buk sik mei bit kung yat ging
waan sui hak tau chui fong baak
mok maan baak sau wai yue saang
kam ming kam ming jau lok leung seung dak
yat booi bat chi chin gwan gam
bei loi foo bei loi foo bei loi foo

惠施不肯受千乘
卜式未必窮一經
還須黑頭取方伯
莫讓白首爲儒生
琴鳴，琴鳴酒樂兩相得
一杯不啻千鈞金
悲來乎！悲來乎！悲來乎！

27 Seht dort hinab! Im Mondschein
28 auf den Gräbern hockt eine wildgespenstische Gestalt.
29 Ein Aff' ist's! Hört ihr, wie sein Heulen
30 hinausgellt in den süßen Duft des Lebens!
31 Jetzt nehmt den Wein! Jetzt ist es Zeit, Genossen!
32 Leert eure gold'nen Becher zu Grund!
33 Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod!

Mvt	"Der Einsame im Herbst" (The Lonely One in Autumn)	Haaugoo chauyue cheung	Qian Qi 錢起 效古秋夜長
1	Herbstnebel wallen bläulich überm See;	chau hon fei yuk seung	秋漢飛玉霜
2	vom Reif bezogen stehen alle Gräser;	chau hon fei yuk seung	北風掃荷香
3	man meint, ein Künstler habe Staub von Jade	bak fung bak fung so hoh heung	
4	über die feinen Blüten ausgestreut.	bak fung so hoh heung	
5	Der süsse Duft der Blumen ist verfliegen;	ham ching fong jik goo dang jun,	含情紡織孤燈盡
	ein kalter Wind beugt ihre Stengel nieder.	goo dang jun	拭淚相思寒漏長
6	Bald werden die verwelkten, gold'nen Blätter	sik lui seung si hon lau cheung	
7	der Lotosblüten auf dem Wasser zieh'n.	sik lui seung si hon lau cheung	
8	Mein Herz ist müde. Meine kleine Lampe erlosch mit Knistern,	ham ching ham ching fong jik goo dang jun	簫前碧雲靜如水 月中樓烏啼烏起
9	es gemahnt mich an den Schlaf.	sik lui seung si hon lau cheung	
10	Ich komm' zu dir, traute Ruhestätte!	sim chin bik wan jing yue sui	
11	Ja, gib mir Ruh, ich hab' Erquickung not!	yuet diu chai woo tai niu hei	
12	Ich weine viel in meinen Einsamkeiten.	sui ga siu foo si yuen gei	誰家少婦事簫機
13	Der Herbst in meinem Herzen währt zu lange.	gam mok wan ping sam yim fei	錦幕雲屏深掩扉
14	Sonne der Liebe, willst du nie mehr scheinen,	baak yuk cheung jung man lok yip man lok yip	白玉窗中間落葉
15	um meine bitteren Tränen mild aufzutrocknen?	ying lin hon nui duk mo yi	應憐寒女燭無衣
Mvt	"Von der Jugend" (Of Youth)	Y'in Toga tingji	Li Bai 李白, 宴陶家亭子
1	Mitten in dem kleinen Teiche steht ein	kuk hong yau yan jaak	曲巷幽人宅
2	Pavillon aus grünem und aus weissem Porzellan.	go moon daai si ga daai si ga	高門大士家
3	Wie der Rücken eines Tigers wölbt die Brücke sich aus Jade	kuk hong yau yan jaak kuk hong yau yan jaak	
4	zu dem Pavillon hinüber.	go moon daai si ga	
5	In dem Häuschen sitzen Freunde, schön gekleidet,	chi hoi jiu daam geng	池開照牆鏡
6	trinken, plaudern, manche schreiben Verse nieder.	lam toh poh ngaan fa	林吐破顏花

- 7 Ihre seidenen Ärmel gleiten rückwärts, ihre
8 seidenen Mützen hocken lustig tief im Nacken.
9 Auf des kleinen, kleinen Teiches stiller, Wasserfläche
10 zeigt sich alles wunderbarlich im Spiegelbilde.
11 Alles auf dem Kop-
12 fe stehend in dem Pavillon aus grünem und aus weissem
Porzellan;
13 wie ein Halbmond steht die Brücke,
14 umgekehrt der Bogen.
15 Freunde, schön gekleidet,
16 trinken, plaudern.

綠水藏春日
青軒祕晚霞
若聞絃管妙，若聞絃管妙
金谷不能誇，金谷不能誇
池開照膽鏡
林吐破顏花，林吐破顏花，破
顏花
綠水藏春日
青軒祕晚霞
若聞絃管妙
金谷不能誇

luk sui chong chun yat
ching hin bei maan ha
yuek man yin goon miu yuek man yin goon miu
gam guk bat nang kwa gam guk bat nang kwa
chi hoi jiu daam geng
lam to poh ngaan fa lam to poh ngaan fa poh
ngaan fa
luk sui chong chun yat
ching hin bei maan ha
yuek man yin goon miu
gam guk bat nang kwa

綠水藏春日
青軒祕晚霞
若聞絃管妙
金谷不能誇
池開照膽鏡
林吐破顏花
綠水藏春日
青軒祕晚霞
若聞絃管妙
金谷不能誇

Mvt
4 "Von der Schönheit"
(Of Beauty)

採蓮曲
(Lotus-Picking Song)

Choi lin kuk

Li Bai 李白
採蓮曲

Yuet nui chi 越女詞
(Lyrics for the
Girls of Yue,
third and fifth
quatrains,
enclosed in * and **
respectively)

- 1 Junge Mädchen pflücken Blumen,
2 pflücken Lotosblumen an dem Uferande
3 Zwischen Büschen und Blättern sitzen sie, sammeln Blüten,
4 sammeln Blüten in den Schoss und rufen sich einander Neckereien zu.
5 Gold'ne Sonne webt um die Gestalten, spiegelt sie im blanken Wasser wider,
6 Sonne spiegelt ihre schlanken Glieder, ihre süßen Augen wider,
7 und der Zephyr hebt mit Schmeichelkosen das Gewebe ihrer Ärmel auf,
8 führt den Zauber ihrer Wohlgerüche durch die Luft.
9 O sieh, was tummeln sich für
10 schöne Knaben dort an dem Uferand auf
11 mut'gen Rossen, weithin glänzend wie die
12 Sonnenstrahlen, schon zwischen dem Geäst der
13 grünen Weiden trabt
14 das jungfrische Volk einher!
15 Das Ross des einen wiehert
16 fröhlich auf und saust dahin,

若耶溪傍採蓮女
笑隔荷花共人語
日照新粧水底明
風飄香袖空中舉
岸上誰家，誰家遊冶郎
三三五五映垂楊
紫艷嘶入落花去
見此剏斷空斷腸
耶溪採蓮女
見客棹歌回
笑入荷花去
伴羞不出來
笑入荷花去
伴羞不出來
鏡湖水如月
耶溪女如雪

yuek ye kai pong choi lin nui
siu gaak hoh fa gung yan yue
yat jiu san jong sui dai ming
fung piu heung jau hung jung gui
ngon seung sui ga sui ga yau ye long
saam saam ng ying sui yeung
ji lau si yap lok fa hui
gin chi chi chue hung duen cheung
ye kai choi lin nui
gin haak jau goh wooi
siu yap hoh fa hui
yueung sau bat chut loi
siu yap hoh fa hui
yueung sau bat chut loi
geng woo sui yue yuet
ye kai nui yue suet

若耶溪傍採蓮女
笑隔荷花共人語
日照新粧水底明
風飄香袖空中舉
岸上誰家遊冶郎
三三五五映垂楊
紫艷嘶入落花去
見此剏斷空斷腸
*耶溪採蓮女
見客棹歌回
笑入荷花去
伴羞不出來*
**鏡湖水如月
耶溪女如雪
新粧蕩新波
光景兩奇絕**

- 17 über Blumen, Gräser wanken hin die
18 Hufe, sie zerstampfen jäh im Sturm die
19 hingesunk'nen Blüten, heil wie flat-
20 tern im Taumel seine Mähnen, dampfen heiss die Nüstern!
21 Gold'ne Sonne webt um die Gestalten,
22 spiegelt sie im blanken Wasser wider.
23 Und die schönste von den Jungfrau'n sendet
24 lange Blicke ihm der Sehnsucht nach.
25 Ihre stolze Haltung ist nur Verstellung
26 In dem Funkeln ihrer grossen Augen,
27 in dem Dunkel ihres heissen Blicks schwingt
28 klagend noch die Erregung ihres Herzens nach.
- 17 鏡湖水如月
18 耶溪女如雪
19 新粧灩新波
20 光景, 光景, 光景兩奇絕
21 若耶溪傍採蓮女
22 笑隔荷花共人語
23 日照新粧水底明
24 風飄香袖空中學
25 岸上誰家遊冶郎
26 三三五五映垂楊
27 紫鸞嘶入落花去
28 見此踟躕空斷腸
- geng woo sui yue yuet
ye kai nui yue suet
san jong dong san boh
gwong ging gwong ging gwong ging leung kel juet
yeuk ye kai pong choh lin nui
siu gaak hoh fa gung yan yue
yat jiu san jong sui dai ming
fung piu heung jau hung jung gui
ngon seung sui ga yau ye long
saam saam ng ng ying sui yeung
ji lau si yap lok fa hui
gin chi chi chue hung duen cheung

Mvt	"Der Trunkene im Frühling" (The Drunk in Springtime)	春日醉起言志 (Rising Drunk on a Spring Day)	Chunyat juihei yinji	Li Bai 李白 春日醉起言志
1	Wenn nur ein Traum das Leben ist,	處世若大夢	chue sai yeuk daai mung	處世若大夢
2	warum denn Müh' und Plag'?	胡為勞其生	woo wai lo kei saang	胡為勞其生
3	Ich trinke, bis ich nicht mehr kann, den ganzen lieben Tag!	所以終日醉	soh yijung yat jui soh yi jung yat jui	所以終日醉
4	Und wenn ich nicht mehr trinken kann, weil Kehl' und Seele voll,	頹然, 頹然臥前楹, 頹然臥前 楹	tui yin tui yin ngoh chin ying tui yin ngoh chin ying	頹然臥前楹 鬱來臥庭前
5	so taum! ich bis zu meiner Tür und schlafe wundervoll!	覺來臥庭前, 覺來臥庭前	gaau loi paan ting chin gaau loi paan ting chin	一鳥花間鳴
6	Was hör' ich beim Erwachen? Horch!	一鳥, 一鳥花間鳴, 鳴	yat niu yat niu fa gaan ming ming	借問此何時
7	Ein Vogel singt im Baum.	一鳥花間鳴	yat niu fa gaan ming	
8	Ich frag' ihn, ob schon Frühling sei,	借問此何時	je man chi hoh si	
9	mir ist, mir ist als wie im Traum.	處世, 處世若大夢	chue sai chue sai yeuk daai mung	春風語流鶯
10	Der Vogel zwitschert:	春風, 春風, 春風, 春風語流鶯	chun fung yue lau ang	感之欲歎息
11	Jai Jai Der Lenz, der Lenz ist da, sei kommen über Nacht!	感之欲歎息, 感之欲歎息, 歎息	chun fung chun fung chun fung chun fung chun fung yue lau ang	對酒還自傾
12	Aus tiefstem Schauen lauscht' ich auf, der Vogel singt und lacht!	對酒還自傾, 對酒還自傾	gam ji yuk taan sik gam ji yuk taan sik taan sik	浩歌待明月
13	Ich fülle mir den Becher neu und leer' ihn bis zum Grund		dui jau waan ji king dui jau waan ji king	
14	und singe, bis der Mond erglänzt am schwarzen Firmament!	浩歌待明月, 浩歌待明月	ho goh doi ming yuet ho goh doi ming yuet	曲盡已忘情
15	Und wenn ich nicht mehr singen kann,	曲盡已忘情	kuk jun yi mong ching	處世若大夢
16	und wenn ich nicht mehr singen kann,	處世若大夢	chue sai yeuk daai mung	胡為勞其生
17	So schla! ich wieder ein.	胡為勞其生	woo wai lo kei saang	所以終日醉
18	Was geht mich denn der Frühling an!? Lasst mich betrunken sein!	所以終日醉, 所以終日醉	soh yi jung yat jui soh yi jung yat jui	

Mvt 6	"Der Abschied" (Departure)	送別 (Parting)	Sungbit	孟浩然 Meng Haoran 宿業師山房待丁大不 Suk yipsi saanfong doi Ding Daai batji (Waiting for Master Ding) 留別王維 Laubit Wong Wai (Goodbye to Wang Wei, enclosed in *) 夏日南亭懷辛大 Hayat Naamting waai San Daai (In Dreamland, enclosed in **) 王維 Wang Wei 送別 Sungbit (Goodbye to Meng Haoran, enclosed in ***) Mahler's "Der Abschied" (enclosed in ****)
1	Die Sonne scheidet hinter dem Gebirge. In alle Täler steigt der Abend nieder	夕陽度西嶺 夕陽度西嶺	jik yeung do sai ling jik yeung do sai ling	夕陽度西嶺 群壑倏已暝
2	Mit seinen Schatten, die voll Kühlung sind.	群壑倏已暝	kuan kok suk yi ming	松月生夜涼
3	O sieh! wie eine Silberbarke schwebt der Mond am Blauen Himmelsee herauf.	松月生夜涼, 夜涼松 月生夜涼	chung yuet saang ye leung ye leung chung yuet saang ye leung	風泉滿清聽 樵人歸欲盡
4	Ich spüre eines feinen Windes Weh'n hinter den dunklen Fichten!	風泉滿清聽, 風泉滿清聽	fung chuen moon ching ting fung chuen moon ching ting	煙鳥棲初定 之子期宿來 孤琴候蘿徑
5	Der Bach singt voller Wohllaut durch das Dunkel. Die Blumen lassen im Dämmererschein.	樵人歸欲盡, 樵人 歸欲盡	chiu yan gwai yuk jun chiu yan gwai yuk jun	
6	Die Erde atmet	煙鳥棲初定	yin niu chai choh ding	
7	voll von Ruh' und Schlaf.	之子期宿來	ji ji kei suk loi	
8	Alle Sehnsucht will nun träumen.	孤琴候蘿徑	goo kam hau loh ging	
9	Die müden Menschen gehn heimwärts,	寂寂竟何待	jik jik ging hoh doi	*寂寂竟何待
10	um im Schlaf vergess'nes Glück	朝朝空自歸	jiu jiu hung ji gwai	朝朝空自歸
11	und Jugend neu zu lernen!	欲尋芳草去	yuk cham fong cho hui	欲尋芳草去
12	Die Vögel hocken still	惜與故人違	sik yue goo yan wai	惜與故人違
13	in ihren Zweigen.	當路誰相假	dong lo sui seung ga	當路誰相假
14	Die Welt schläft ein!	知音世所稀	ji yam sai soh hei	知音世所稀

15	Es weheth kühl im Schatten meiner Fichten.	只因守寂寞	只應守寂寞
16	Ich stehe hier und harre meines Freundes;	還掩故園扉	還掩故園扉
17	Ich harre sein zum letzten Lebewohl.	故園扉	
18	Ich sehne mich,	山光忽西落	**山光忽西落
19	o Freund, an deiner Seite	池月漸東上	池月漸東上
20	die Schönheit dieses Abends	散髮乘夜涼	散發乘夕涼
21	zu geniessen.	開軒臥閒敞	開軒臥閒敞
22	Wo bleibst du?	誰相假	荷風送香氣
23	Du läßt mich lang allein!	開軒, 開軒臥閒敞	竹露滴清響
24	Ich wandle auf und nieder	荷風送香氣	欲取鳴琴彈
25	mit meiner Laute	竹露滴清響	恨無知音賞
26	auf Wegen, die vom weichem Gra-	欲取鳴琴彈	感此懷故人
27	se schwellen.	無知音賞	中宵勞夢想
28	O Schönheit! O ewigen Liebens,	感此懷故人	
29	Lebens trunk'ne Welt!	中宵勞夢想	
30	Er stieg vom Pferd und reichte ihm den Trunk des Abschieds dar.	下馬飲君酒, 飲君酒	***下馬飲君酒
31	Er fragte ihn, wohin er führe und auch warum, warum es müßte sein.	問君何所之, 問君何所之	問君何所之
32	Er sprach, seine Stimme war umflort:	君言不得意	君言不得意
33	Du, mein Freund, mir war auf dieser Welt das Glück nicht hold!	君言, 君言, 不得, 不得意	歸臥南山陲
34	Wohin ich geh? Ich geh', ich wand're in die Berge.	歸臥, 歸臥南山陲	但去莫復問, 莫復問
35	Ich suche Ruhe, Ruhe für mein einsam Herz!	但去莫復問, 莫復問	歸臥南山陲, 歸臥南山陲
36	Ich wandle nach der Heimat! meiner Städel	歸臥南山陲, 歸臥南山陲	白雲, 白雲,
37	Ich werde niemals in die Ferne schweifen.	白雲, 白雲,	白雲無盡時, 無盡時
38	Still ist mein Herz und harret seiner Stunde!	大地, 大地	大地, 大地
39	Die liebe Erde allüberall	大地回春綠, 大地回春綠	大地回春綠, 大地回春綠
40	blüht auf im Lenz und grünt aufs neu Allüberall	藍空耀日長, 藍空耀日長,	藍空耀日長, 藍空耀日長,
41	und ewig, ewig blauen licht die Fernen,	日長, 日長,	日長, 日長,
42	Ewig, ewig, ewig, ewig,	日長, 日長,	日長, 日長,
43	ewig, ewig,	日長	日長

Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (1908–1909) is a symphonic work in which the sounded language – the materiality, timbre, and prosody of the sung German text – constitutes a critical source of its intercultural meaning and affective power. Daniel Ng Yat-chiu's Cantonese *Lied* (2004) radically reconfigures Mahler's phonosonic layer by preserving the scaffolding of Mahler's music while replacing the German text with newly arranged Tang poetry. Taking Ng's Cantonese restaging of Mahler's *Lied* as a sounding board, this chapter develops a framework of mishearing that treats the absence of linguistic translation as a generative epistemic condition. Ng's *Lied* produces a sustained intercultural dissonance: the orchestral gestures and vocal melodies continue to speak in a late-Romantic German idiom, yet the audible language, Cantonese, is virtually incomprehensible due to tone-melody mismatches throughout. Rather than resolving such sonic tension, this chapter celebrates such collisions as interpretively rich sites for reimagining cultural values, born from the interactive complexities of (in)authenticities. Ng's *Lied* sounds out a critical reminder for contemporary musicology: intercultural relations in music must be heard not merely as dialogues of musical material or stylistic confluence, but also as theatrical, fraught, and uneven encounters between understanding and miscommunication, hearing and mishearing, gain and loss, and acceptance and denial of mediatization, amidst and across the temporalities and complexities of postcolonial worlds.

Schlagworte/Keywords: Cantonese, Daniel Ng Yat-chiu, *Das Lied von der Erde*, Gustav Mahler, Kantonesisch, mishearing, translation, postcolonialism, Postkolonialismus, Übersetzung

Edwin K. C. Li is Assistant Professor of Music at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research spans a wide range of topics – from timbre and Chinese contemporary music to the philosophy of video games – and has been published (or is forthcoming) in journals such as *Analytical Approaches to World Musics*, *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*, *Journal of Music Theory*, *Music Theory Online*, *Music & Letters*, and *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*. His article "Cantopop and Speech-Melody Complex" (2021) was awarded the Adam Krims Award from the Society for Music Theory's Popular Music Interest Group. With Chris Stover and Anna Yu Wang, he co-edited a special issue of *Music Theory Online* (2024) on translations of music-theoretical sources from under-represented languages, which was recognized with the 2025 Citation of Special Merit from the Society for Music Theory. His monograph, *Border Listening: Decolonizing Western Art Music from Hong Kong* (under contract with Oxford University Press), theorizes contingencies of decolonial listening through stories of historiography, translation, joy, and love. He earned his PhD in Music Theory from Harvard University.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8744-2973> | edwinli@cuhk.edu.hk



Li, Edwin K. C. 2026. "Mishearing Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*." In *Gustav Mahler's Sound: Between Compositional Process, Performance, and Reception*, edited by Tobias Janz and Christian Utz, 421–443. Vienna: Hollitzer Verlag.
→ https://doi.org/10.83452/9783990946893_21