

# Multilingual Recitations of “Ancient Tang Poetry” and Cross-Cultural Appreciation of “Charming Shaanxi”—Exploring Shaanxi Through Tang Poetry

Shanshan Wang\*

School of International Languages and Cultures, Xi’an Fan Yi University, Xi’an 710000, Shaanxi, China

\*Corresponding author: Shanshan Wang, 27150344@qq.com

**Copyright:** © 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

**Abstract:** In the 5,000-year splendor of Chinese civilization, Tang poetry shines as the brightest star in the cultural firmament. Shaanxi, with its profound history and rich heritage, has inspired countless Tang and Song dynasty verses. As the birthplace of Tang poetry—particularly in its ancient capital Chang’an (modern Xi’an)—Shaanxi offers a unique opportunity to explore cultural landmarks through the lens of classical poetry. This approach not only boosts cultural tourism but also serves as an intelligent pathway to showcase Shaanxi’s beauty and disseminate Chinese culture globally. Drawing on master translator Xu Yuanchong’s acclaimed English and French renditions of Tang poems, this study intertwines poetic appreciation with introductions to Shaanxi’s iconic sites. By conveying the rhythmic elegance and artistic imagery of Chinese poetry, it aims to deepen international audiences’ understanding of Shaanxi’s regional culture.

**Keywords:** Tang poetry; Xu Yuanchong; Shaanxi scenic spots

**Online publication:** March 10, 2025

## 1. Appreciating the Chan River and Ba River through the Tang Poem “In the Hills”

English version: (Translated by Xu Yuanchong, the only expert on English and French rhymes in Chinese poetry)

In the Hills (Wang Wei)<sup>[1]</sup>

Translated by Xu Yuanchong

White pebbles hear a blue stream glide;

Red leaves are strewn on cold hillside.

Along the path no rain is seen,

My gown is moist with drizzling green.

French version:

Le Ruisseau brumeux (Wang Wei) <sup>[2]</sup>

Traduit par Xu Yuanchong

Cailloux blanchis dans l'eau limpide;

Feuilles rougies sur le mont vert.

Est-ce qu'il pleut sur le sentier vide?

En émeraude s'égoutte l'air.

“In the Hills” is a five-character quatrain composed by Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei. Written during early winter, this work captures the poet’s reflections during a mountain journey. It paints a vibrant winter landscape through the imagery of a crystalline stream with glistening stones, crimson autumn leaves, and endless emerald foliage—a scene rich in chromatic contrast and poetic charm, diverging from traditional wintry desolation.

The “Jing Stream” mentioned in the poem refers to the Chan River, originating from Lantian County, Shaanxi Province, which flows northward into the Ba River near ancient Chang’an (modern Xi’an). Collectively called Chanba, these two rivers—the Chan and Ba—both rise from the Qinling Mountains and form part of the historic “Eight Rivers Encircling Chang’an.” In September 2004, Xi’an established the Chanba Ecological Zone, spanning 129 km<sup>2</sup> with an 89 km<sup>2</sup> core conservation area, now colloquially known as “Chanba.”

## 2. Exploring the Xianyang Palace Ruins through “Farewell to Yuan Er on His Mission to Anxi”

English version:

Seeing Yuan the Second off to the Northwest Frontier (Wang Wei) <sup>[1]</sup>

Translated by Xu Yuanchong

No dust is raised on the road wet with morning rain;

The willows by the hotel look so fresh and green.

I invite you to drink a cup of wine again;

West of the Sunny Pass no more friends will be seen.

French version:

Chant d'adieu à l'ouest (Wang Wei) <sup>[2]</sup>

Traduit par Xu Yuanchong

La pluie au matin fait retomber la poussière;

Autour de l'auberge les saules sont verdis.

De mon vin je vous prie de boire encore un verre:

A l'ouest vous ne trouverez plus de vieux amis.

“Song of Weicheng” (also titled Seeing Yuan the Second off to the Northwest Frontier), a masterpiece by Tang poet Wang Wei, opens with two lines depicting the Weicheng post station’s scenery—establishing the time, location, and atmospheric setting of parting. The latter couplet shifts to unspoken sorrow, where a simple wine toast encapsulates profound farewell sentiments. Written in unadorned yet resonant language, the poem achieves a seamless fusion of

scene and sentiment, creating enduring artistic power. Its universal emotional resonance led to immediate musical adaptation, cementing its status as an immortal masterpiece in Chinese cultural history.

The “Weicheng” mentioned in the poem refers to present-day northwest Xi’an City, Shaanxi Province, on the north bank of the Wei River, the site of the ancient Qin-era Xianyang City. Today, visitors can explore the Qin Xianyang City Site to experience the grandeur of the former Qin capital. The Qin Xianyang City Site, the capital of the late Warring States period to the Qin dynasty, is located in Xianyang City, Shaanxi Province. No city walls have been discovered at the site, which spans approximately 870 meters east-west (from Baijiazui to Maowanggou) and 500 meters north-south (up to the Gaogan Canal). The central-northern area contains the ruins of Qin-era palace structures, surrounded by rammed-earth palace walls. On January 13, 1988, the site was designated as part of the third batch of National Key Cultural Relics Protection Units by the State Council of China. It was included in the National Archaeological Site Park List on October 9, 2010, and recognized among the “Top 100 Archaeological Discoveries of the Century” on October 18, 2021.

### 3. Exploring Shangshan through “Early Departure from Shangshan”

English version:

Early Departure on Mount Shang (Wen Tingyun) <sup>[1]</sup>

Translated by Xu Yuanchong

At dawn I rise, with ringing bells my cab goes,  
But grieved in thoughts of my home, I feel lost.  
As the moon sets over thatched inn, the cock crows;  
Footprints are left on wood bridge paved with frost.  
The mountain path is covered with oak leaves,  
The post-house bright with blooming orange trees.  
The dream of my homeland last night still grieves,  
A pool of mallards playing with wild geese.

French version:

Départ avant l’aube (Wen Tingyun) <sup>[2]</sup>

Traduit par Xu Yuanchong

Je me lève avant l’aube au son de la clochette.  
O mon pays natal, combien je te regrette!  
Au chant du coq, de lune la chaumière est ivre;  
Le pont en bois est parsemé de pas et givres.  
Le sentier est tout couvert de feuilles de chêne;  
Les fleurs d’oranger scintillent au mur à peine.  
Comment puis-je ne pas rêver de mon village  
Où l’étang fait écho aux cris des oies sauvages?

“Early Departure on Mount Shang” was composed by Wen Tingyun as he left Chang’an (modern Xi’an) for Xiangyang to seek refuge with Xu Shang. The poem, celebrated for its lucid language, meticulous structure, and

evocative blend of emotion and scenery, depicts the cold, desolate dawn journey of a traveler, conveying the loneliness, homesickness, and existential weariness of life on the road.

The “Mount Shang” referenced in the poem, also known as Shangban or Chu Mountain, lies at the intersection of modern Shanyang County and Danfeng County in southeastern Shangluo City, Shaanxi Province. Situated 7.5 kilometers west of Danfeng County’s urban area on the south bank of the Dan River, Shangshan captivates not only with its fame but also its poetic allure. At its heart stands the ethereal Shangshan Temple, famed for its mist-veiled pavilions and cloud-framed windows, nestled amid emerald peaks, ever-shifting mists, and surreal landscapes akin to a fairyland on earth. Surrounding the temple are scenic wonders like Songyan (Pine Rock), Guilin (Laurel Grove), Meiwu (Plum Valley), Hetang (Lotus Pond), and Luping (Deer Meadow), earning it the title of “foremost scenic wonder of Shangyan.”

#### **4. Exploring Leyou Plateau through the Tang Poem “On the Plain of Imperial Tombs”**

English version:

On the Plain of Imperial Tombs (Li Shangyin) <sup>[1]</sup>

Translated by Xu Yuanchong

At dusk my heart is filled with gloom;

I drive my cab to ancient tomb.

The setting sun seems so sublime,

But it is near its dying time.

French version:

Le Plateau d’anciens tombeaux (Li Shangyin) <sup>[2]</sup>

Traduit par Xu Yuanchong

Au soir, d’un coeur mélancolique,

Je monte sur l’ancien plateau.

Le soleil couchant magnifique,

Hélas! Descend vers son tombeau.

“On the Plain of Imperial Tombs”, a five-character quatrain by Tang poet Li Shangyin, praises the twilight landscape of the plateau while expressing the poet’s introspective reflections. The first two lines reveal his motivation for ascending the plateau, while the latter two marvel at the beauty of the evening vista, rich in symbolism and profound aesthetic and philosophical significance. The poem’s language is unadorned yet rhythmic, blending contemplative depth with universal wisdom.

The “Plain of Imperial Tombs” mentioned in the poem lies south of Chang’an (modern Xi’an), occupying the highest elevation within the Tang capital. Originally established as Leyou Temple (or Leyou Garden) by Emperor Xuan of the Han dynasty, this elevated landform offers sweeping panoramic views, with the entire capital appearing as if “cupped in one’s palm” when gazed upon from its summit. It is also strategically positioned near landmarks such as the Qujiang Lotus Garden to the south and the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda to the southwest, both appearing within sight when viewed from afar. These features made it a perennial attraction for visitors. Key sites include the Qinglong



Temple, the Kukai Memorial Monument, and commemorative halls. Beyond its famed cherry blossoms, the plateau is adorned with peonies and lotus flowers. A particularly enchanting spectacle occurs in late April when falling cherry petals intertwine with budding peonies, creating a poetic interplay of seasons.

## 5. Exploring Xiangji Temple through the Tang Poem “Passing by Xiangji Temple”

English version:

Toward the temple of heaped fragrance (Wang Wei) <sup>[1]</sup>

Translated by Xu Yuanchong

Not knowing the way to the Temple of Heaped Fragrance,  
Under miles of mountain-cloud I have wandered  
Through ancient woods without a human track;  
But now on the height I hear a bell.  
A rillet sings over winding rocks,  
The sun is tempered by green pines....  
And at twilight, close to an emptying pool,  
Thought can conquer the Passion-Dragon.

French version:

En passant par le temple au parfum cache (Wang Wei) <sup>[3]</sup>

Traduit par HE Ru

Qui le connaît, le temple au parfum caché,  
A plusieurs li d'ici, sur le pic nuageux?  
Sentier à travers la forêt ancienne: nulle trace...  
Au coeur du mont, sons de cloche, venant d'où?  
Bruit de sources, sanglots de rocs dressés,  
Teinte de soleil, fraîcheur entre les pins.  
Au soir, sur le lac désert, méditant au Ch'an,  
Quelqu'un apprivoise le dragon venimeux.

“Toward the temple of heaped fragrance”, a landscape poem by Tang dynasty poet Wang Wei, exudes a serene and tranquil tone. Through a Buddhist-inspired calm, Wang Wei paints the secluded environment of the ancient mountain temple, crafting a reclusive and meditative atmosphere. The poem focuses on the temple while subtly highlighting its surroundings to accentuate its spiritual grandeur. Its concluding lines—reflecting on an emptied deep pool and the subdued metaphorical “poisonous dragon” of delusion from Buddhist scriptures—symbolize the mastery of worldly desires as a path to profound Zen enlightenment.

The “temple of heaped fragrance” referenced in the poem was a renowned Tang-era monastery. According to the *Comprehensive Gazetteer of the Qing Dynasty*, it stood on the Shenhe Plateau south of Chang'an County (modern Xi'an, Shaanxi Province). Built in 681 CE (the second year of the Yonglong era under Emperor Gaozong of the Tang), its original site is now lost to time. The present-day Xiangji Temple, bordering the Hao River to the south and Fanchuan Plain to the north, is led by Abbot Benchang. It was established by Huaiyu—disciple and successor of Shandao, the

second patriarch of Pure Land Buddhism—as a memorial following Shandao’s passing. Upon completion, the temple became the epicenter of Pure Land Buddhist practice, earning recognition as the sect’s birthplace. It remains a vital institution, designated by the State Council as a key Buddhist temple for Han Chinese regions.

## Funding

2024 Shaanxi Provincial Social Science Popularization Funding Project (Grant No. 2024KP066) — “Multilingual Recitations of “Ancient Tang Poetry” and Cross-Cultural Appreciation of “Charming Shaanxi”: Promotional Short Videos for “Exploring Shaanxi Through Tang Poetry.”

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Xu YC, 2021, Three Hundred Tang Poems. China Publishing Group Zhongyi Press, Beijing, 30–31, 84–85, 194–195, 690–691.
- [2] Xu YC, 2008, Selected Tang Poems and Painting. Five Continents Communications Press, Beijing, 32, 36, 120, 124.
- [3] He Ru, 2003, One Hundred Tang Poems in French Translation. Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Beijing, 24.

### Publisher’s note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.