**Global France, Global French: beyond the monolingual**

Comment peut-on être monolingue?

Abdelfattah Kilito (2013, 18)

The article considers the theme of ‘Global France, Global French’ in the frame of current debates on monolingualism and multilingualism. It explores questions of language use in contemporary France, and focuses on the linguaphobia evident in a number of contemporary ideological, political, social and cultural contexts. The study suggests that the study of France and French in a global frame requires greater attention to questions of multilingualism and of the contact of the French language and Francophone cultures with other linguistic zones. The phenomenon of the ‘translingual’ or ‘exophonic’ writer is presented as a key example of such shifts, and the article concludes with a study of the academician François Cheng, whose writing may be seen as a ‘translation zone’ situated between French and Chinese cultures. The relationship between Cheng and the earlier twentieth-century author Victor Segalen reveals the extent to which the sociolinguistic situations evoked at the opening of the article cannot be limited to the contemporary, and underlines the extent to which an understanding of ‘Global France, Global French’ requires the elaboration of new models of literary, cultural and historical analysis that are contained neither by the present, nor by the boundaries of a single language or nation.

L’article considère le thème de « la France globale, le français global » dans le cadre des débats actuels sur le monolingualisme et le multilinguisme. Il explore des questions de l’utilisation des langues dans la France contemporaine, et se concentre sur la glottophobie évidente dans un certain nombre de contextes idéologiques, politiques, sociaux et culturels contemporains. L’étude suggère que pour étudier la France et le français dans un cadre global, il faut une plus grande attention aux questions du multilinguisme et du contact de la langue française (et des cultures francophones) avec d’autres zones linguistiques. Le phénomène de l’écrivain « translingue » ou « exophone » se présente comme un des exemples-clés de ces transformations, et l’article se termine par une étude de l’académicien François Cheng, dont l’écriture peut être considérée comme une « zone de traduction » située entre les cultures françaises et chinoises. La relation entre Cheng et l’auteur du début du vingtième siècle Victor Segalen révèle la mesure dans laquelle les situations sociolinguistiques évoquées au début de l’article ne peuvent se limiter à l’époque contemporaine, et souligne comment comprendre « la France globale, le français global » nécessite l’élaboration de nouveaux modèles d’analyse littéraire, culturelle et historique qui ne sont contenus ni par le présent, ni par les limites d’une langue ou d’une nation unique.

1. **Linguaphobia and the ideologies of monolingualism**

In a recent essay, *Discriminations: contre la glottophobie*, linguist Philippe Blanchet explores the ways in which language-based prejudice – ranging from discrimination on the grounds of accent, to the outright refusal to acknowledge the right of others to speak in their mother tongue – is often invisible or eclipsed by dominant ideological discourses and positions. Blanchet’s starting point is to identify the ways in which, although language rights are enshrined in a number of examples of European and international law, they are largely absent from French legislation: “comme l’unification linguistique est un, voire *le*, pilier central de la construction stato-nationale française, la question des discriminations linguistiques, donc de l’utilisation condemnable de différences linguistiques censées ne pas exister, constitue un point doublement aveugle pour la société française” (emphasis in the original, 2016, 14).

In exploring the ideologies of monolingualism in France, the Corsican linguist Jean-Marie Comiti had previously described an alternative practice of “babélophobie,” by which he meant “l’incapacité des uns ou le refus des autres à mettre en place les structures officielles d’un équipement linguistique de base” (2005, 36). This is a tendency arguably evident in France’s persistent refusal since 1992 to sign the Charte européenne des langues régionales ou minoritaires on the grounds of the (linguistic) indivisibility of the Republic, but a position that also needs to be historicized in the light of the ethnolinguistic nationalism that has formed a consistent part of the French republican project since the Revolution (but is certainly not restricted to France) (see Marácz and Rosello, 2012). Such doctrinal insistence – notwithstanding, of course, the lived everyday multilingualism of contemporary France, whether in the linguistic landscape or in communication in the public and especially the private sphere – on the reduction of national identity to a single language has wider transnational resonance in the Francosphere: the manoeuvres of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie against the Anglophone emphases of globalization are based, for instance, on advocacy for a *diversité* that is significantly *culturelle* and not explicitly *linguistique*; and even a movement hostile to the OIF, that launched by the *littérature-monde* manifesto of March 1997, limits the openness of its reach by appending to “world-literature” the restrictive, monolingualizing and seemingly oxymoronic “en français” (see Hargreaves, Forsdick, and Murphy, 2010).

For Blanchet, the flipside of the ideological construction of monolingualism (associated with what he considers *glottophilie* and even *glottomanie*) is what he terms *glottophobie*, a word he coins to situate language-based prejudice intersectionally in the context of a series of other *altérophobies* (see Piller, 2016; see also Gramling, 2016). Evidence of institutionalized *glottophobie* is found in language policy, in the practices of institutions such as the national education system, and in official approaches to immigration. Blanchet also burrows down into everyday experience, and describes the ridicule of speakers of minoritized languages and non-standard forms of French (see Smith, 2015), as well as the policing of the use of languages other than French (most notably Arabic) in the public sphere. His conclusion is that there is a need to “réinsérer la question linguistique dans un projet de société” (Blanchet, 2016: 175), and this thesis chimes here with an increasing acknowledgement that language merits recognition as a social category in its own right, and it is to be acknowledged – in various forms of cultural investigation – to be as important as other variables such as gender, class, ethnic origin and sexual identity.

The implications of such an approach for those who study France and the wider French-speaking world from a variety of perspectives, and via a wide range of objects of study, are becoming increasingly apparent. Although competence in the French language, and an awareness of multiple linguistic contexts, remains central to French studies, I suggest that the traditional monolingual emphases on which the area was founded, with the various blind spots and even practices of epistemicide these entail, are increasingly untenable. This is linked in part to what Alison Phipps has called a more general “unmooring” of languages in the twenty-first century (Phipps, 2013). This phrase encapsulates a situation generated by one of the key shifts inherent in the challenge of diversity, i.e., a recognition that the historically monolingualizing tendencies of centralized states such as France have been increasingly challenged by what Yasemin Yildiz has called, in another context, the contemporary condition of “post-monolingualism” (Yildiz, 2012).

In the specific terms of French language and culture, the possibilities of such a designation are double-edged. On the one hand, the post-monolingual diversification of objects of study (and, in parallel, of approaches to them) permits exploration of a persistent semiodiversity within linguistic systems that scholars such as Claire Kramsch consider essential to the study of languages and cultures. In Kramsch’s terms:

Monolingualism is a handicap, but so is the assumption that one language = one culture = adherence to one cultural community. German culture speaks Turkish, Turkish culture speaks German. Spanish-speaking illegal immigrants in the U.S. are also Yucatec Maya or Guatemalan Indians who do not identify with any particular community, neither within nor outside the U.S. They have worldviews and express meanings that may differ from those of established communities. Monolingualism is the name not only for a linguistic handicap but for a dangerously monolithic traffic in meaning. The problem, as [Michael] Halliday said recently, is not a lack of glossodiversity but of semiodiversity. (2006, 102)

Kramsch’s examples here could be supplemented by equally valid ones from the Francosphere, evidence of her concluding observation that “[t]he role of the language teacher should be to diversify meanings, point to the meanings not chosen, and bring to light other possible meanings that have been forgotten by history or covered up by politics” (2006, 103). At the same time, however, French is not only a language variegated in its usage in this way, present as a world language, and requiring, as a result, approaches that Laurent Dubois and Achille Mbembe have called more “global and heterodox” (2014, 42). It is also a means of communication that exists in diglossic and polyglossic situations (alongside other world languages, but also with minoritized and community languages) not least in France itself, where it is subject to daily processes of translation, but is also drawn actively into new linguistic and cultural phenomena such as creolization and translanguaging.

Despite the field’s emphases on a degree of contrastive comparatism inherited from philology and even on the ethnographic capabilities of the cultural outsider (see Kelly, 2014), the foundational assumptions of French studies in the English-speaking have always risked replacing an Anglophone monolingual mind-set with a Francophone equivalent, normalizing monolingualism as what Elizabeth Ellis calls “the unmarked case” (Ellis, 2006), and replacing “Anglonormativity” (McKinney, 2016) with a different but equally problematic “Franconormativity”. The development of the field of French studies has often depended on what Robert Young – critiquing single language departments and the institutional restriction of postcolonial comparatism – has called “un système d’apartheid jalousement gardé” (Young, 2014: 45), and it has consequently engaged in the “dangerously monolithic traffic in meaning” against which Kramsch cautions in the passage cited above. Thinking about global France and global French – whether the “becoming-global” on which this depends is seen to occur within the national space of France, or instead transnationally across the country’s boundaries, or even within a much wider Francosphere with the fuzzy linguistic boundaries this implies – requires the recognition and acquisition of new languages, or at the very least initiation of collaborative activity and a multilingual consciousness (operating, in Glissantian terms, “en présence de toutes les langues du monde”) that prizes open any residual monolingualism of the field. As Dubois and Mbembe have pointed out: “Any student who wishes to do any serious work in Haiti needs a command of both Creole and French” (2014, 42). A similar point could be made about the need for French *and* Arabic for the conduct of serious work in certain cities in contemporary France. This does not mean that the French language – in its variegated forms and multiple interconnections – can no longer serve as a focal point for fields that may risk becoming increasingly diffuse, but nevertheless requires that the literary and otherwise verbally standardized elements of that language need to be relativized, historicized and understood in their complex interactions with other languages and cultures.

1. **Language, mobility, translation**

To this end, understanding the intersections of languages and the world becomes crucial. One of the first steps towards considering France and the wider Francosphere in post-monolingual terms, as what might be seen as a “translation zone,” is to reflect on language and mobility. This is the title of a study by Alastair Pennycook, in which he explores the “unexpected” places in which languages (and the cultural artefacts and thoughts that they freight) emerge (2012). Pennycook’s more recent book with Emi Otsuji, on *Metrolingualism: Language in the City*, investigates this idea more closely, with a series of case studies that illustrate not only the everyday multilingualism of the twenty-first century, in which repertoires of languages are deployed in various configurations, but also what they call the “complex traffic and interaction of trajectories, historicities and mobilities” on which this depends (2015: 14). Several of their examples are French-related but not France-based: one is *Petit Paris*, a reproduction of a Paris bistro in Tokyo, with an Algerian-born owner, a Japanese manager, staff from France, Réunion and Côte d’Ivoire, and a multilingual range of clients. Language in such spatialized contexts reveals processes of transplantation, entanglement and re-localization, linked to histories of colonialism, postcolonial relations and migration, challenging any “imagined immobile Paris” that in this case the establishment’s name might evoke, and providing instead what he calls a “diversity of possibilities of ‘French-ness’” (Pennycook and Otsuji, 2015: 131).

It is the need to acknowledge and explore the manifold manifestations and implications of this “diversity of possibilities of ‘French-ness’” that is of increasing interest and relevance. This is not least – as has been suggested above – in terms of their relationship to phenomena such as semiodiversity and glossodiversity, both of which are to be understood as intralingual and interlingual, revealing the complex dynamics of the “translation zone”. Such an approach will not be universally adopted or endorsed, especially in France itself where the institutions and structures of Higher Education tend to adapt slowly to the pressures of transnational formations, as the slow evolution of *lettres modernes* in the light of the implications of postcolonial literature in French (as well as the long tendency to quarantine “Francophone” writing in Comparative Literature departments) has made amply clear (see Murphy, 2002). A recent article in *Le Monde* described a “fossé qui se creuse entre la perception française de la culture et de la littérature et celle qu’on cultive [ailleurs]” (Weill, 2015), and it is precisely such emerging divisions that underline the need – identified by Maya Angela Smith in a recent article in *French Cultural Studies* (2015) – to interrogate the perceived neutrality of terms such as “French speaker” and “French writer,” to explore the complexities of “language ownership,” to understand the gate-keeping mechanisms that link linguistic competence to more general questions of cultural legitimacy. Minorities exist not only in visible but also in audible forms, identified and on occasion stigmatized as a result of their use of different languages and their different use of language. As Philippe Blanchet suggests, in France this audibility is closely, many would suggest increasingly, politicized and policed.

Several of the issues discussed above are acutely evident in the field of Sociolinguistics, and the references deployed in the preceding observations are also in part a reminder that Modern Languages has much to learn from an overdue dialogue with Applied Linguistics. As I have suggested already, however, questions of multilingualism and the impact of various forms of globalization on language use are pertinent for all those engaged in the wider project of French and Francophone studies, forming part of any ongoing attempt to dismantle the monolingualizing and singularizing tendencies of the field. The remainder of the article seeks, therefore, to reflect on the cultural and linguistic implications of invoking global France and global French for the study not only of language and society, but also of literature, suggesting that increasing awareness of the dynamics of monolingualism and multilingualism also enhances literary analysis and encourages reading of creative writing as a “translation zone” in its own right. Reine Maylaerts has discussed the use of translation in this context, moving away from interlingual understandings of the term, and suggesting it is “not taking place *in between monolingual* realities but rather *within* *multilingual* realities [and] contributes to creating culture, in mutual exchange, resistance, interpenetration” (2013, 519). Contemporary manifestations of these translational phenomena need, of course, to be historicized in relation to a long tradition of multilingual writing and the creation of “translation effects” in the literary text. They are evident already for instance in early modern writing, before the clear codification of literary language, can be seen in the *hétérolinguisme* of the nineteenth-century Quebec novel, or in the estrangement strategies adopted by European modernist writers seeking clearer understanding of their own medium of expression (Taylor-Batty, 2013).

The literary “translation zone” is apparent but inflected in alternative ways, in the growing body of translingual or exophonic literature in French, a variegated corpus by authors who have in various ways migrated to the French language as a means of literary production (Forsdick, 2015). Many of the texts that make up that corpus have in recent years been recognized by French prize culture and thus drawn actively into the French literary field, but notwithstanding such institutional recuperation, I would suggest that translingual writing leads to increasing recognition of the fact that literature in French is itself always already culturally diverse, regulated according to national frames but persistently spilling beyond them; and it makes necessary, as a result, an awareness of the frames of cultural diversity and multilingualism in which cultural artefacts – even within a single language tradition – emerge and evolve.The borders of nation-states and the patterns of linguistic distributions rarely overlap. As such, it might be argued that translingualism – along with various forms of postcolonial writing – is in the vanguard of the disruptive but increasingly pervasive paradigm of post-monolingualism, serving as a reminder that the monolingual assumptions discussed above underpinning a variety of domains – cultural, social, political and ideological – are under increasing pressure.

1. **Translingualism, multilingualism and pluralization**

The institutional treatment of translingual writing demonstrates the ways in which French literary culture has the mechanisms to recuperate and assimilate cultural and linguistic difference. Yet the presence of translingual writers in the French literary canon serves a dual purpose, at once radical and conservative, disrupting any equation of a single nation with a single language, but also maintaining the distinctiveness of French as a language that seeks to project its status in a global frame. The elevation of a number of translingual writers to the *Académie française* highlights the tensions inherent in these processes (e.g., Eugène Ionesco [in 1970], and more recently François Cheng [2002], Michael Edwards [2013], and Andrei Makine [2015]), as does the sense that acceptance into a “national” French literature is filtered and seen to be associated with responsibilities and even indebtedness. This is a position with which Andreï Makine is most acutely associated, not least because of his pronouncements in a text such as *Cette France qu’on oublie d’aimer* (2006). Here, adopting the rhetoric of declinism, he evokes “cette impalpable quintessence française qui m’intéressait avant tout,” and bemoans what he sees as its inexorable disappearance from literary production (apart from, one assumes, his own) (Makine, 2006: 23). As such interventions suggest, much translingual writing in French fails to display to linguistic experimentation and creative verve evident in a U.S.-based author such as Junot Diaz, who reflects from the perspective of his Dominican Republic origins on the potential of literature to collude with rather than combat the organic transformations of language:

[Language] sweeps. It’s like a tide. But that’s why people are so aggressive and so angry about language. It’s that thing that you can’t control which makes you the most uncomfortable. That’s why nations are always legislating languages. The French have an academy for it, the Japanese don’t allow foreign words into their newspapers. They have a special vocabulary, a special language to show foreign words because they don’t want the contamination. I think that speaks to the mongoose-like power of language, how difficult it is to contain. (Celayo and Shook, 2008, 17)

This evocative “mongoose-like power of language” is evident in literary production in French, characterized by new interlingual and intralingual configurations. Such potential is present in the *polar*, for instance, as well as in film. To cite just one example, Karim Miské’s *Arab Jazz* is a work of detective fiction based in a multilingual area to the north-east of Paris, populated by Hassidic Jews, Muslims “de toutes les teintes,” and evangelical Christians from all around the world (2012). The novel depends on observation of these various communities in interaction, an aspect evident in what the work’s English translator Sam Gordon has called “the intricate layering of Miské’s multicultural world,” something acutely evident in the linguistic dimensions of the world, a persistent reminder to the reader that “a multicultural environment is by necessity a multilingual one” (2015: 105). As the recent work of Gemma King and others has also demonstrated, numerous works in recent French cinema – films such as *Un prophète* (2009) and *Polisse* (2011) – have also moved from using multilingualism as an ornamental or secondary element, as an identity or location marker, to transforming it into a central narrative component. King studies “code-switching as power strategy” in *Polisse*, and reveals the ways in which, in a number of other recent films, “[s]equences depicting interpreting and translation, language classes, conflicts between different cultural groups, intertextuality and code-switching” provide “an important comment on the place of foreign languages in contemporary French society, and the protectionist concept of ‘Frenchness’ as inextricably linked to the French language” (2015, 163).

These examples reveal how we are increasingly challenged to turn the “becoming-global” of the porous and diversified “French” in “French studies” into a defining strength rather than any sign of weakness and fragmentation. Marc Quaghebeur has stated: “L’Espace francophone [including, it must be underlined, France itself] sera pluriel ou il disparaîtra” (2013, 185). Such pluralization is not only cultural and geographical, encapsulating processes that can occur intralingually or in terms of semiodiversity, but is also reflected as part of a multilingualization of the Francosphere. The aim of the concluding section of this article – exploring the already mentioned translingual author François Cheng, but understanding his work in a wider historical frame by drawing it into conversation with that of the early twentieth-century author Victor Segalen – is to understand the growing importance of defining globally the “French” in French studies, and to reflect on the ways in which such a move manifests itself in the area of literary creation and analysis. I have reflected elsewhere – in a study of Segalen’s connections with Edouard Glissant – on the ways in which a new literary history of what has been dubbed “French global” requires the development of reading practices that are more radical and even actively disruptive in their challenge to conventional literary chronology (Forsdick, 2014; see also McDonald and Suleiman, 2010). There is an increasing recognition – not least through the work of medieval scholars – that what is known as “French literature” has always already been a transnational, multilingual phenomenon, meaning that its progressive alignment with national boundaries and monolingual expression may be seen as a relatively recent phenomenon (see Kinoshita, 2010). Glissant (2003) detected a clear resonance between pre-codified early modern expression and that of the contemporary French Caribbean, underlining the extent to which approaches deemed “postcolonial” are not to be restricted to a narrowly defined chronological moment. Reading literature in French in a transnational or global frame requires such an openness, at once historical, geographical and cultural, meaning that we are encouraged to read together texts and authors between whom connections might not be immediately apparent. Such reading practices challenge traditional chronological understandings and the asymmetrical dynamics of centre and periphery. At the same time, they stress the need for continued attention to the implications of the sociology of literature, and to the material and ideological conditions of its production, circulation and consumption – issues that are particularly evident in a Francospheric context where the institutional protection of language is complemented by a highly centralized publishing industry.

1. ***Cette langue, comment dire tout ce que je lui dois?*: François Cheng and the limits of translingual writing**

In studying Cheng and Segalen, it is striking that the former – born in China in 1929, and only slowly integrated into France after arrival in 1948 following his acquisition of the French language – has played a much greater role in the French literary establishment than the latter, whose premature death in 1919 contributed to his relative obscurity as a French author. Segalen sought a Goncourt prize (unsuccessfully) for his self-published novel *Les Immémoriaux* in 1907, but his career is marked otherwise by a chronic extroversion, aesthetic, geographical and institutional. Cheng has, however, been awarded a series of major prizes (not least the Prix Femina for his novel *Le Dit de Tianyi* in 1998), and was also in 2002 – as noted above – elected to the *Académie Française*. Cheng was certainly not the first “exophonic” author to become an *immortel*, but he was the first writer of Chinese origin to be honoured in this way. In the speech marking his election to the *Académie*, Cheng highlighted the exceptional nature of his reception into the institution as a translingual writer whose geographical migration to France had been complemented by a parallel linguistic shift to the French language (“Discours,” 2003). Addressing a French audience and focussing on what he called “cette longue marche transcontinentale vers vous,” he described the historical and cultural implications of the occasion: “Sans doute, convient-il qu’un jour, par-dessus l’écoulement des siècles, depuis l’autre bout du continent Eurasie, depuis ce vieux pays qu’est la Chine où les lettres étaient vénérées comme choses sacrées, quelqu’un vînt jusqu’ici, jusqu’en ce lieu consacré, pour rendre hommage aux plus hauts représentants de la culture d’un pays qui est l’un des phares de l’Europe occidentale” (“Discours,” 2003).

Alongside the customary rhetoric of respect – for France, for French culture, and for the institution established to defend and regulate the language with which their history and evolution are so closely intertwined – is an associated manoeuvre whereby Cheng challenges any sense of diametrical opposition of China and France (respectively Far East and Far West). He asserts a Eurasian transcontinental continuity, and underlines at the same time the long-standing, privileged place of literature and culture in both countries. China’s traditional status as *Zhongguo* (“Middle Kingdom”) is seen to parallel France’s own role as the “‘pays du Milieu’ de l’Europe occidentale, ouvert à tous les orients”; and French social hospitality is complemented by a cultural equivalent: “Tel un immense arbre, à partir des souches originelles, [la France] a reçu apports et influences venus de tous côtés, constituant des contradictions ou des complémentarités” (“Discours,” 2003).

As one of the most prominent figures associated with Franco-Chinese connections in the post-war period, Cheng stresses his acquired Frenchness – “c’est en tant que Français que je m’adresse à vous” – whilst at the same time underlining the importance of the French language in his naturalization: “Cette langue, comment dire tout ce que je lui dois? Elle est si intimement liée à ma vie pratique comme à ma vie intérieure qu’elle se révèle l’emblème de mon destin.” The benefits of French are presented as multiple – the language is presented as: facilitator of an almost ethnographic perspective on his culture of origin; as a means of access to a rich literary heritage; and generator of a new cross-cultural pragmatics and poetics, rooted in an “aptitude à repenser le tout, à transmuer ce tout en un lucide acte de re-création”. This emphasis on transformative rethinking and recreation reveals the extent to which Cheng sees his translingualism not as an uprooting but rather as a logical extension of his relationship to his culture of origin: “Loin de me couper de mon passé, elle l’a pris en charge.” At the same time, France is presented as the niche in which this personal evolution occurred, a country that Cheng – borrowing from Paul Valéry – describes as one which “a fini par devenir un creuset où l’on *devient* français” (emphasis in the original). The speech is, as the protocol requires, a homage to his predecessor, Jacques de Bourbon, but at the same time operates as a reflection on becoming and belonging, raising questions central to the discussion of translingual writing in France, namely whether institutional integration of authors such as Cheng represents a form of recuperation and even neutralization, or whether it reflects a more radical form of hospitality in which the host culture accepts the change that may accompany the admission of transnational influence.

FrançoisCheng belongs to a now well-established tradition of exophonic writing in French by writers of Chinese heritage dubbed by Yinde Zhang a “francophonie chinoise”. This body of work was first evident in the writing of early twentieth-century authors such as Tcheng Ki-tung and Cheng Tcheng, and has been represented more recently by the novels, poetry, memoirs and theatre of key figures such as the Nobel laureate Gao Xingjian and the author of *Balzac et la petite tailleuse chinoise*, Dai Sijie (Zhang, 2008). Cheng himself, who has become one of the most prominent of contemporary French translingual authors of Asian origin, arrived in France in 1948, and has since that date played an increasingly visible role in French literature and thought, most notably as a *passeur* of Chinese culture (particularly poetry and art), but also as an interpreter from an external perspective of key French literary texts (Bertaud, 2009; Bertaud and Pei, 2014; Cheng, 2015). In a short essay entitled *Le Dialogue*, Cheng describes his own cultural and linguistic development (as the title suggests) dialogically, presenting himself as an author who for historical and biographical reasons has become “porteur de deux langues, chinoise et française” between which there exists “le plus grand écart qu’on puisse imaginer” (2002, 7). Although he has adopted French as his “outil de création,” Cheng describes the ways in which Chinese persists as a substratum in his work: “Mise en sourdine pour ainsi dire, cette dernière s’est transmuée, elle, en une interloctrice fidèle mais discrète, d’autant plus efficace que ses murmures, alimentant mon inconscient, me fournissaient sans cesse des images à métamorphoser, des nostalgies à combler” (2002, 8).

Cheng focuses on the processes of language acquisition, describing for instance how he tends to view certain French words ideogrammatically, subjecting French linguistic systems to forms of active defamiliarization; but he also locates his own practice within a national tradition marked by “des influences venant de tous côtés,” with French culture presented as “un creuset où s’entrecroisent les contradictions et les complémentarités” (2002, 40, 27). A question is implicit here regarding the propensity of French literature and culture to recuperate and neutralize external influence and the tensions to which it can give rise, but Cheng asserts an approach that is “stéréophonique” or “stéréoscopique” (2002, 79), underlining the extent to which his writing moves beyond what Bakhtin called almost a century ago the inherent “heterology” of the apparently monolingual text in order to operate instead as zone of active intercultural translation in its own right. In her discussion of translating Cheng’s poetry, Anne Magnan-Park captures this process by describing the ways in which French and Chinese co-exist as “two mutually enriching entities engaged in continuous, symbiotic dialogue with each other,” and stresses the extent to which Cheng’s emphasis is less on these languages as a binary pair than on the pivot that allow them to interact (2014, 26-27).

1. **Conclusion – *une rencontre singulière: à un siècle de distance***

With such an emphasis on “l’échange, le dialogue, la rencontre de l’autre” (Bertaud, 2007: 162), Cheng’s relationship to French is patently different from that of a number of his contemporaries on whom the language has been imposed in often post/colonial contexts. In his translations, criticism, poetry and fiction, he does not perform a “déchirement” that manifests itself in the form of a radically disruptive heterolingualism, but reveals instead an intention, “en écrivant une autofiction dans la langue de l’autre, à harmoniser le français avec ses expériences les plus profondes et sa culture d’origine” (Zhang, 2007: 150). Cheng’s writing requires, as a result, parallel reading practices that are in tune with the more generalized post-monolingual condition explored at the opening of this article. Given that key elements of his earlier work emerged from a sustained dialogue, and a process of *compagnonnage*, with the early twentieth-century author and traveller Victor Segalen, I suggest in conclusion these practices extend beyond Cheng’s work and have wider implications for the reading of earlier texts in ways that challenge the persistence of the monolingual as Ellis’s “unmarked case”.

A collection of Cheng’s texts on the theorist of exoticism produced across three decades were brought together in a 2008 volume, *L’Un vers l’autre. En voyage avec Victor Segalen*. These reveal the active role that Cheng has played in the recovery of his predecessor’s work over the past forty years, most notably since a lecture on Segalen delivered during a conference on the author at the musée Guimet in 1978. What becomes apparent in the achronological dialoguing between the two authors is the existence of a “fraternité spirituelle,” emerging not least because Cheng discovers in Segalen a mirror image of his own journey from China to France, as well as a reflection of the imaginary China through which he has maintained links to his home country while in exile. In his preface to *L'Un vers l’autre*, Jean Mouttapa describes “une rencontre singulière: à un siècle de distance” (2008, 7), and it is this meeting across the two ends of the twentieth century that plays a key role in Cheng’s own emergence as an author. With a particular emphasis on the 1912 collection *Stèles*, Cheng identifies (and identifies with) the de-familiarization of French evident in Segalen’s poetic language, its transformation into “un langage dense et distant” with close resemblance to that of Chinese poetry, and also the active juxtapostion of Chinese characters with French prose in the closed frame of the page e (2008, 47).

This evocation of the relationship between Cheng and Segalen for it reveals the extent to which the linguistic situations evoked at the opening of the article cannot be limited to presentist understandings. Cheng poses a key question that underlines the extent to which his engagement with the early twentieth-century author Segalen demands the elaboration of new models of literary analysis and history that are contained neither by the present nor by the boundaries of the nation: “Segalen avait-il jamais songé à être lu par un lecteur chinois? Avait-il jamais imaginé que de Chine, soixante ans après, quelqu’un viendrait ici parler de son oeuvre?” (2008, 16). The deployment of Cheng’s reading of Segalen not only underlines an understanding of the translingual author’s work as a “translation zone,” but also invites approaches to Segalen’s work that insert it into configurations and movements that spill beyond the immediate niche in which it was produced. The transhistorical association of the two writers, as well as the mutual illumination they provide of each other’s *oeuvre*, is a reminder that post-monolingualism is not limited to the present. As the contributors to Christie McDonald and Susan Suleiman’s *French Global* (2010) have made amply clear, the cultural production of France and the wider Francosphere has always already invited approaches that are both transnational and interlingual. Segalen’s writing struggled to find a readership among his contemporaries, but subsequent readers such as Cheng (as well as Patrick Chamoiseau, Édouard Glissant, Abdelkebir Khatibi and others) have drawn his work along new, often unexpected axes – translingual, transcultural, transcontinental and transoceanic – that have allowed new interpretations to emerge. Segalen’s texts reveal not only the multilingual configurations in which France and French exist, but also the cultural diversity (and associated post-monolinguality) inherent in them. Contemporary translingual writing in French – in this analysis, relating to France and East/Southeast Asia – thus has a complex genealogy, revealing interchanges that are mutually illuminating, both cross-culturally and transhistorically. To evoke global France and global French is to develop forms of cultural literacy that challenge monolingual forms of analysis along the lines suggested at the opening of this article: sensitive to cross-cultural and interlingual creativity, and willing to read backwards from the transnational and post-monolingual present to create connections with France’s always already transnational and multilingual pasts.

This article was written while Charles Forsdick was AHRC Theme Leadership Fellow for “Translating Cultures” (AH/N504476/1). The author records his gratitude for this support.

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