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Chinese Poetry and Translation : Moving the Goalposts

Maghiel VAN CREVEL
Leiden University

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Chinese Poetry and Translation: Moving the Goalposts

Poetry + translation will trigger claims the size of office blocks, all the way from Robert Frost (censored here) to Eliot Weinberger (*Poetry is that which is worth translating*). Add Chinese to the mix, and things get even better.

The translation of poetry is fun to bounce around in conversation, but winds up frequently in dead-end discourse full of zombie notions of equivalence, faithfulness, servitude, and so on—not to mention the specter of the genre’s “inherent untranslatability.” In June 2017, a dozen scholars and translators held a workshop at Lingnan University, assuming primariness and agency for translation instead. Most of all, rather than from real and imagined problems of (Chinese)-poetry-and-translation, speakers worked from its potential: for rocking the boat rather than providing safe passage, for moving the goalposts and getting away with it, for empowering the translator to choose, time and again, which rule s/he wants to break, and unleashing whatever it is that happens next.

We were grateful when the *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* offered us the opportunity to publish the papers as a special issue. While translation—interlingual and otherwise—is a central feature of the study of Chinese literature as practiced in an international community, it nevertheless doesn’t always get the attention it deserves, and we are happy to help address this. This special issue conjoins theoretical contributions with in-depth reflection generated from inside processes and results of translation and its infrastructure.

Chris Song and Nick Admussen conceptualized and organized the workshop, together with the undersigned. Lingnan University provided generous funding. A special word of thanks goes to Yifeng Sun, professor of translation studies and Dean of Arts, for his unstinting support and his hospitality on the day. I thank the authors for their readiness to revise and and expand their papers on a tight timeline, and Chris for his expert handling of the production of this special issue of *JMLC*.

Maghiel van Crevel, guest editor
Leiden, 1 December 2017