

METAMORPHOSES

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FOREWORD

I am so delighted to see this 2018 double issue finally coming into being. This special issue is devoted to the languages and literatures of China and the Chinese diaspora. The goal of this issue is to bring together in one place the literary works written by legendary and contemporary writers in various genres (e.g. poetry, rhapsody, and drama), styles, subject matters (e.g. human and nature, war, and love), periods (i.e. from 1000 BCE to present), and regions, and to showcase to Western readers the multifaceted, multilayered “Chinese” literature.

Any sort of publication takes time and patience. Translation, in particular, demands determination. It is a meaningful artistic activity which involves many angles of “reading and seeing.” It is a journey that needs constant negotiation with oneself, with the text, with one’s native language as well as the target language, and even more with other eyes and minds. I have been so humbled during the entire process of receiving, reviewing and editing the manuscripts. It is a process of learning and re-learning, doubting and believing.

Translation is a way of cultivating empathy. When we move between cultures and perspectives, thinking and looking from different angles is a must to get a whole picture. We understand that translations will differ based on different interpretations of the source text and approaches to translation itself. To translate is to bridge differences with empathy.

Lucas Klein’s essay “On Daily Bread” is a perfect piece to start the issue, for he has covered some issues of translation in general and translation from Chinese to English in particular. What I would reiterate here is: Untranslatable does not mean incomprehensible. In this special issue, some translators follow the wording of the original as closely as possible, while others actively reconstruct the text in their translations. Both are ways of mediating between languages and cultures, between social and political powers. Translation is the place where mutual understanding arises.

Translation is also a way of transformation. The text is transformed, so is the translator. We hope the readers of this special issue will also feel they are transformed.

This special issue has accompanied me for more than two years, and I have to thank Thalia Pandiri, the Editor-in-Chief of METAMORPHOSES, who approached me and offered me this great opportunity to grow—intellectually and professionally.

I am very grateful for all the hard-working contributors/translators who have brought us many outstanding literary pieces, many of which have never been translated before. Without these devoted translators, without the poets and writers of the past and present, without the anonymous reviewers, this special issue would not have been possible. Furthermore, my deepest gratitude goes to Jessica Moyer and the two wonderful student assistants, Emily Zhou and Yuxiao Meng. Without them, the completion of this special issue would still be up in the air.

A few notes for readers:

1. The order of translations: The pieces translated here fall into two sections: one of poetry, and one of prose and drama. Each section is arranged in reverse chronological order, taking the reader on a journey from the present to the past.

2. The order of names: For the original poets and authors, we follow the Chinese order of family name before given name (with the exception of Eileen Chang, who is frequently referred to by her English name). For translators, we follow the Western order, given name first and family name second.

3. Chinese scripts: Only poetry is accompanied by the Chinese text. Since there are two scripts—one traditional, the other simplified—used in different times and regions, we use the following method: For traditional poems, we use traditional Chinese script; and for modern/contemporary poems, we follow the script the poet uses (e.g. Xi Chuan's poems are in simplified script, and Chen Li's poems in traditional).

4. Regarding footnotes: We believe the literary works can speak for themselves. We have asked all the contributors to limit their footnotes to the minimum, keeping only those necessary for readers to understand.

5. Regarding "Translator's Notes": For readers who want to have background information in mind while reading, we suggest that you consult the "Translator's Notes" first, which are placed at the end of each work by the same author. Otherwise, you may just dive into the piece of your choice directly and savor the "Translator's Notes" afterward.