

The Power of Creative Freedom: Chen Jingrong and Poetry Translation in the 1940s and 1950s

Leanne Y. LAI

Leiden Institute for Area Studies (LIAS)

Chen Jingrong 陳敬容 (1917-1989) was a prolific Chinese female poet-translator in mid-twentieth century China. Her translations, particularly the renditions of Charles Baudelaire's poetry, exerted a significant influence on the poetry scene in her time. Although Chen's life and works have received more scholarly attention in the recent decade, the previous studies have not sufficiently considered the intricate interplay between gender, translation, and authorship which underlay the career trajectory of this influential female translator. This paper examines Chen's translation practice in the 1940s and 1950s, focusing on her wide-ranging translated poems published in contemporary literary journals, including *Poetry Creation* (*Shi chuangzao* 詩創造), *China's New Poetry* (*Zhongguo xinshi* 中國新詩), and *Translation* (*Yiwen* 譯文). I argue that Chen harnessed the power of translation to explore her literary thought and creative freedom from an original female perspective, which then facilitated her negotiation with the mainstream trends in a male-dominated and politically repressive literary field in the Civil War and Socialist eras. This case study enables us to explore the historical attitudes towards poetry translation and how Chinese women translators were conditioned by gender-related socio-cultural discourses when making sense of their translational pursuits. Equally importantly, this inquiry seeks to enrich our understanding of the politics between gender and translation in modern Chinese literary and translation history.