

## Achieving the Impossible: in Gratitude to *Renditions* over Twenty-five Years

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My first contribution to *Renditions* was an unsolicited translation of Yu Dafu's 郁達夫 short story 'Smoke Shadows' 煙影 in 1977, which was published in 1978. Encouraged, I sent in a second contribution in 1979, but the two poems by the orthodox mainland writer He Jingzhi 賀敬之 that I submitted were not considered suitable. Most of my correspondence then and over the next few years was with Stephen C. Soong, and was conducted at a high level of courteous formality.

In 1980 I went to China to work as a translator and editor for the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing. Although working at the FLP provided excellent training in translation in many ways, it was also frustrating because of the often poor quality of the material to be translated, the lack of expertise on difficult points of context and language, and editorial interventions which expurgated texts for English readers that Chinese readers were allowed to read in full. *Renditions* proved to be the ideal outlet for my frustrations.

In 1982 I became involved as an intermediary between Xiao Qian 蕭乾 and *Renditions* over a translation into Chinese of his English-language story 'Semolina' by his son, Xiao Tong 蕭桐. Apparently with Xiao Qian's consent, the translator added some passages and deleted others. Stephen Soong felt obliged to reject the translation, in spite of Xiao Qian's intercession, and in doing so, as in rejecting He Jingzhi's poems, he took great care to spell out his reasons. Although the two cases were quite different, on both occasions his thoughtfulness in making his decision and transmitting it were very much appreciated. (Xiao Tong's translation, co-translated with Tina Bailey, later appeared in a Joint Publishing Company Book of the same title in 1984.)

*Renditions* became especially valuable to me when I began looking for translation outlets for dissident mainland writers like Zhao Zhenkai (Bei Dao 北島) and Chen Maiping (Wan Zhi 萬之). The Editor at that stage was John Minford, and his personal enthusiasm helped greatly in overcoming the many obstacles to publication; it was at this time also that I first visited the *Renditions* office in Hong Kong. From the mid-1980s to the present, David Pollard and Eva Hung have continued to uphold the journal's high academic and professional standards, and it remains as always a pleasure to read and refer to.

Translation more often than not is a thankless task. It is an art or craft which is difficult to learn; the originators (if still living) expect us to perform many roles, not all of which are welcome; reviewers frequently ignore or patronize us; critics casually dismiss translation as 'impossible' despite its long history and crucial role in translingual communication; and readers blame us both for correcting and for not correcting flaws in the original texts. Some translators are sloppy and some translations are shoddy; so is much original work that circulates in millions of copies. In Chinese-to-English translation, no other body has provided as much encouragement and support to translators as *Renditions*. As a contributor, as a teacher, and as a reader over many years, I am profoundly grateful to its dedicated editors and editorial staff. ☒

B. McErgall