

Monuments in Translation

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My first experience with *Renditions* was both an enlightening and a humbling one. I had sent in my translation of a contemporary story, and received back a prompt and extensive response from George Kao. The cover letter was encouraging: he was prepared to consider the story for inclusion in *Renditions*; the remainder detailed errors in my understanding of the Chinese text, and (more embarrassingly) the clumsiness of the English version. What I had thought was a pretty fair translation needed to be completely redone, and with George Kao's editorial advice taken to heart, the task was completed, resulting in the translation of Zhu Lin's 竹林 'The Web' 網, which appeared in the Autumn 1981 issue. It was my first published translation of Chinese fiction.

I was, and remain, profoundly grateful to George Kao, though I never wrote to tell him so. He was prepared to take considerable trouble to correct an unsolicited manuscript from a graduate student living in New York, of a story by a little-known Chinese writer. I learned through this first contact that this is a journal that is truly eclectic, prepared to include the new as well as the old, the obscure as well as the celebrated; and that the highest standards are set for the translations that appear in it. I have tried to follow those standards in my subsequent work, both translating and teaching translation to students.

I discovered the same openness to an unsolicited proposal, and the same speed of response, when I contacted *Renditions* several years later. I had returned to my university in 1996 following three years of work in China, and proposed a special edition on the literature of the *zhiqing* (urban youth), the generation that was sent to work in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. I am the same age as the *laosanjie*, the members of the three senior graduating classes that went to the farms and villages in the late 1960s; I know many of that group, including several of the leading writers, and had kept up with the fiction they had written about their experiences. I felt the need to honour them with an anthology of their work, ideally one that could come out in late 1998, to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Mao directive that launched the mass rustication movement. The response from Eva Hung was swift and enthusiastic; with her help, I was able to complete the selection of writings, locate translators on four continents, complete the English versions, and see the *zhiqing* special issue in print before the end of 1998. In addition to being provided office space at the Research Centre for Translation and a period of residence at the Chinese University, I had the privilege of working with the *Renditions* staff, and benefited from the same rigorous editorial guidance from Eva Hung that I had first experienced from George Kao almost twenty years before. And what other journal would have welcomed a cycle of poems by an author so little known in China that even his colleagues in the real-estate company where he now works were unaware of his literary past? The poet was Xing Qi 邢奇, and his verses, many of them (as Eva Hung astutely observed) patterned on Mao's, were discovered on an American website

by the Australian-based scholar Song Xianlin 宋憲琳. Here is her translation, with Gary Sigley, of Xing Qi's elegy for his generation:

Where are these young people now?
 Scattered asunder like rain and stars,
 All have gone their separate ways.
 Gone is the past into the grave,
 This collection of poems stands as a monument,
 That marks the grave. (*Renditions* 50, p. 134)

Thanks to *Renditions*, this group of authors from that generation have a monument that English speakers can view as well.

Somehow the editors of *Renditions* have found the time, not only to produce a journal of sustained excellence, but also to offer collections, principally by modern and contemporary authors, in the *Renditions* Paperbacks series. I'm not sure how they do it all, but look forward to reading, and occasionally contributing to, the products of their forthcoming fourth decade. ☒

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Richard King (left) and Xing Qi,
 one of the urban youth writers.