

Acknowledgements

This all began in 1985 on a bus ride to the Taipei airport. We were two friends working our way through that awkward hour of parting with a casual conversation, a “wouldn’t it be interesting” kind of digression. Wouldn’t it be interesting for someone whose training was in classical Chinese poetry to write about contemporary poets and poems? We vaguely imagined an intellectual portrait of the Chinese poet in these near-postmodern times, set against the tradition of the poet in premodern China. And, yes, perhaps some translations as well: a little collection, just to round it all out. But when the idea came to pass, the translations began to overshadow the study, and this time the edges became the center.

That reconfigured project resulted in part from my good fortune of being funded in 1987–1988 by both a Fulbright Research Fellowship and a Language and Research Fellowship from the Inter-University Program and Academia Sinica in Taiwan. The first allowed me to live a year in Taipei and the second gave me access to the faculty and facilities of IUP (affectionately still known as the Stanford Center), where the project evolved into its present form. For a few months I led the ideal life. Early each morning I prepared the poems to be read and discussed (in Chinese) in classes that afternoon. After a late-afternoon bike ride through the hills around Taipei, I spent the evening trying to make the leap into English with rough translations of our afternoon readings. All to begin again the next morning. So the weeks went by and the poems became center to my life.

The poems translated here were selected in collaboration with the poets. I first asked Yang Mu and Lo Ch’ing each to select 150 of his favorite poems, with no criteria other than personal choice (neither poet had a selected works). Of the nearly three hundred poems, I translated (sometimes abortively) about half, and from those selected the poems presented here. I did not talk to the poets about the meaning or interpretation of any of their poems. In the end I chose translations that I thought worthy of the voices of the poets. I did not try to rewrite a given poem into its English version;

rather I tried to write the poem that I thought the poet might have written if he had written in English. That was the work that came to sustain me: trying to speak in their voices. In doing so I felt I was creating the poems themselves—the imperialism of translation.

From that bus ride to this final volume I have had many supporters and friends. First of all, Yang Mu and Lo Ch'ing helped in a multitude of ways, but especially by their generosity of spirit that allowed me to proceed blithely along massacring their art, pretending it was my own. Next were my two tutors at IUP, Chou Ch'ang-chen and Yang Chiu. Not only did they help keep me off the shoals of my own ignorance, they also provided tell-tales of how the poems sounded to a native reader. These two women are a writer's best audience: bright, widely read, articulate, and of open mind. Then there was my catalog of ships: student and friend Paula Fodor; Dr. Wu Jing-jyi, Tony Wang, and Amy Chou of the Taipei Fulbright office; my fellow Fulbrighters, especially Jerry Williams and Stephen Durrant; colleagues and readers Bill Matheson, Brett Millier, and Zhou Danlong; and Liu Shu-ling of Fu-jen University, who proofread the Chinese manuscript. I would also like to thank my friends at the University of Washington Press: Naomi Pascal, editor-in-chief; Veronica Seyd, production manager and designer of the book; and Lorri Hagman, who did double duty as copy editor and publicist—she even found the lost lawnmower. And always, of course, Lauren.

The bilingual publication of this book was made possible by a grant from the Council for Cultural Planning and Development, Executive Yuan, Taiwan, Republic of China, and brought to completion with a Pacific Cultural Foundation subsidy. The typesetting of the Chinese text was done by Meadea Enterprises of Taipei. A summer grant from Washington University Graduate School allowed me to complete the manuscript—my special thanks to Dean Edward N. Wilson. To all these friends and organizations, I am truly grateful.

Joseph R. Allen