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China's Battler Poetry, Zheng Xiaoqiong, and Hypertranslatability

ABSTRACT China's battler poetry (*dagong shige* 打工诗歌), also known in English as migrant worker poetry, projects images of China as the workshop of the world in the age of global capitalism. The recent product of a world-renowned tradition in which poetry has been a social practice as much as an art since antiquity, it speaks to a wide range of readers, in China and elsewhere. This article first offers some reflection on the interlingual translation of battler poetry. Extending the discussion to cultural translation, it then considers how foreign audiences can come to see a single author as the "face" of an entire genre, in this case Zheng Xiaoqiong. Next, it proposes the notion of hypertranslatability, and it shows how this helps explain the ubiquity of Zheng in foreign work on battler poetry to date. The article mostly dwells on material in English, but the subject matter is such that the argument may hold for material in other languages as well.

KEYWORDS battler poetry, migrant worker poetry, translation, subalternity, Zheng Xiaoqiong

LIFE

You all don't know but my name is now hidden in a work ID
 my hands are now part of the assembly line, my body signed over
 to a contract, hair gone from black to grey, what's left is the racket and the rush
 and the overtime and the wages . . . through the white-hot lamplight
 I see my tired shadow projected on the machine, slowly shifting,
 turning, bending, silent like a chunk of cast iron
 oh iron that speaks like a mute, covered in the trust and hopes of strangers
 all this iron rusting in time and trembling in reality
 I don't know how to protect a voiceless life
 this life that's lost its name and gender, mechanical life at the mercy of contracts
 where is it and how does it start, on eight iron dorm-room bunk beds moonlight
 shines on sorrow, in the roar of the machine there's slyly flirting love
 and youth berthed on a pay slip, how can this restless mortal life
 comfort a frail soul, if the moonlight comes from Sichuan
 my youth is set alight by memories but dies out on the assembly line seven days
 a week
 what's left is blueprints, iron, metal products, white

quality labels, red rejects, and under the white-hot lamp the loneliness I still
bear
and the pain amid the rush, hot and endless . . .

〈生活〉

你們不知道，我的姓名隱進了一張工卡裡
我的雙手成為流水線的一部分，身體簽給了
合同，頭髮正由黑變白，剩下喧嘩，奔波
加班，薪水 我透過寂靜的白熾燈光
看見疲倦的影子投影在機臺上，它慢慢地移動
轉身，弓下來，沉默如一塊鑄鐵
啊，啞語的鐵，掛滿了異鄉人的託付與期待
這些在時間中生鏽的鐵，在現實中顫慄的鐵
——我不知道該如何保護一種無聲的生活
這喪失姓名與性別的機器的生活，這合同包養的生活
在哪裡，該怎樣開始，八人宿舍鐵架床上的月光
照亮的，是鄉愁，機器轟鳴聲裡，悄悄眉來眼去的愛情
或工資單上停靠著的青春，這塵世間的浮躁如何
安慰一顆孱弱的靈魂，如果月光來自於四川
那麼青春被回憶點亮，卻熄滅在一周七天的流水線間
剩下的，這些圖紙，鐵，金屬製品，或者白色的
合格單，紅色的次品，在白熾燈下，我還忍耐的孤獨
與疼痛，在奔波中，它熱烈而漫長¹

China's battler poetry (*dagong shige* 打工詩歌), often called migrant worker poetry in English, is a relatively new thing.² Poetry is the most prominent genre of battler literature at large (*dagong wenxue* 打工文學), which I define as writing by precarious workers in postsocialist China that addresses their socioeconomic experience.³ Most of these workers are domestic rural-to-urban migrants, whose number since the 1980s is loosely estimated at three hundred million. A common designation in Chinese of what they do and what they are is *dagong* 打工, or, roughly, “working for the boss”: eking out a living while faced with the existential insecurity of precarious, low-status labor.⁴ For the expressions mentioned above, *dagong shige* and *dagong wenxue*, the Australian English “battler” is a suitable rendition. Just like *dagong*, it denotes precarious workers, it is a colloquialism, and it can be worn as a badge of pride—which clearly happens in China's battler poetry and in battler literature at large.⁵ Battler literature's designation in English as “migrant worker literature” offers helpful contextualization but is an explanation rather than a translation. When it comes to linguistic register and connotations, “battler literature” does more justice to the source term.

The recent product of a world-renowned tradition in which poetry has been a social practice as much as an art since antiquity, battler poetry projects images of China as the workshop of the world in the age of global capitalism. This poetry is written on the flip side of the MADE IN CHINA label, as it were, and a wide range of readers can relate to it, in China and elsewhere. They include journalists, labor activists, and others concerned with the growth of the precariat and issues of social justice in today's world, as well as scholars, translators, and other literary connoisseurs who recognize the power of this poetry but grapple with its deviations from the rules of more established literatures.

In China, battler poetry has been published since the 2000s, through official and unofficial channels: blogs, social media, print journals, websites, single-author collections, and multiple-author anthologies.⁶ Boasting dozens of well-known authors, battler poetry has had much exposure in scholarship and mass media, so there is plenty of source material for foreign work on this poetry. By “work” I mean interlingual translations and their paratexts but also scholarship and substantive media reporting. For the present purposes I take the latter two as instances of cultural translation, defined by Anthony Pym as the general activity of communication between cultural groups.⁷ By “foreign” I mean that this work is published outside China, in other languages than Chinese. Yet, while foreign work on battler poetry has been gathering steam since the early 2010s, it has overwhelmingly engaged with just two authors, one female and one male: Zheng Xiaoqiong 鄭小瓊 (b. 1980) and Xu Lizhi 許立志 (1990–2014), respectively. Reports on battler poetry in mainstream media and on labor activism platforms are mostly on Xu. Scholarship and interlingual translations overwhelmingly focus on Zheng.

The low visibility outside China of battler poets other than Zheng and Xu is caused in part by the natural delay of national canon formation in translation. Foreign work on a given national literature is generally done later than commentary in the home nation/language, and on a much smaller set of authors and texts. All the more so for battler poetry, whose reach inside China rarely extends to the literary infrastructure of bookstores, libraries, and literary and scholarly events. Xu Lizhi's visibility in foreign media and labor activism reporting is a consequence of his suicide and its association with his employment as an “iSlave” at Foxconn, an electronics company headquartered in Taiwan whose manufacturing plants in China epitomize the cruelty of global-capitalist labor regimes.⁸ So we know why Xu is here, and we know why others are not yet here. But why is everyone translating Zheng Xiaoqiong?

Below, I first reflect on the interlingual translation of battler poetry. Extending the discussion to cultural translation, I then consider how foreign audiences can come to see a single author as the face of an entire genre, in this case Zheng Xiaoqiong. Next, I propose the notion of hypertranslatability and ask how this might help explain Zheng's ubiquity in foreign work on battler poetry to date.

I will mostly dwell on material in English, but the subject matter is such that the argument may hold for material in other languages as well.

The Interlingual Translation of Battler Poetry

As regards subject matter, Zheng Xiaoqiong's "Life" (cited above) is vintage battler poetry.⁹ Most battler poetry speaks of physical, material, and psychological suffering in one way or another, ranging from exhaustion and occupational disease to family separation, discrimination, and alienation. There is more sadness here than happiness, even if it is punctuated by moments of solidarity and pride surrounding the labor that has fueled China's rise—and that has also led to socioeconomic advancement for many individuals, in a history of hardship that is also one of opportunity. While Zheng's voice and the voices of other accomplished battler poets are unmistakable, much of battler poetry counts as unsophisticated by the standards of established literatures, elite and popular alike, and it departs from traditions of high socialist literature and earlier incarnations of Chinese worker literature in the People's Republic of China.¹⁰ Battler poetry works toward social identification and the restoration of dignity in the precarious worker as a writing and reading subject in postsocialist China and toward testimony and advocacy. Several of its authors have said they write to change their destiny (*gaibian shengming* 改變生命), even as they realize this goal is hard to reach.

As with other subaltern literatures, key questions arise at the nexus of battler poetry's social significance and its aesthetic value. How does this poetry work and what does it mean, and to whom? These questions carry over into the translation of battler poetry when it travels into other languages and communities. In light of the genre's nature, it makes sense to take a functionalist perspective¹¹ and ask what drives the translation of battler poetry.

It is safe to say that most poetry translation is driven by an aesthetic impulse, with the translator addressing a literary audience of general readers, students, and fellow scholars. The translator offers the text to this audience for its (foreign) aesthetic value, even if its historical contextualization can be a profoundly ideological affair. The translation of battler poetry certainly has room for the aesthetic impulse and the literary audience; but because battler poetry is circumscribed and overdetermined by the social experience of its authors, a juxtaposition of aesthetic value and social significance is never far away. Also, battler poetry is capable of addressing audiences other than the literary, such as when it helps with community building among precarious workers and when it serves as evidence in the work of social scientists and labor activists.

Alongside the aesthetic impulse, then, there is also a moral impulse at work in battler poetry. This is triggered by the pursuit of justice as much as by the pursuit of beauty, and it is reinforced by the fact that in China poetry is a firmly rooted social practice that has endured from antiquity to the present. The moral impulse

extends to the translation of battler poetry, which regularly comes with paratexts that frame the poetry as the amplifier of a morally compelling message. In the afterword to *Iron Moon: An Anthology of Chinese Migrant Worker Poetry*, edited by Qin Xiaoyu, translator Eleanor Goodman writes: “It seems to me a very basic responsibility in this globalized world to try to learn something about the background of all those objects that stock our store shelves [and] to be curious about how other people live. . . . These poems offer an opportunity to do just that.”¹² Needless to say, the aesthetic impulse and the moral impulse are not mutually exclusive for the translator or for their audience, or for the source text author—not to mention the question of whose aesthetics and morality are at stake here, which should inform research and translation throughout. On the contrary, it is the very synergy of the aesthetic impulse and the moral impulse that defines battler poetry in Chinese and in translation, even though their proportions fluctuate.

The moral impulse further affects the genre’s translation as regards both the selection of source texts and the actual translations, meaning the translator’s choice of words in the texts that make it through. There is an obvious connection here with the platforms and venues where the translations appear and the audiences they address. The translation of other mainland Chinese contemporary poetry, mostly of the avant garde (*xianfeng* 先鋒) kind, is typically accommodated by small-press publishing and international poetry festivals. Battler poetry is making inroads into both settings, such as in Guo Jinniu’s 郭金牛 (b. 1966) and Zheng Xiaoqiong’s participation in the Rotterdam Poetry International festival in 2015 and 2019 respectively, and in the recent appearance of a full-fledged collection of Zheng’s poetry in Goodman’s translation.¹³ But it also appears on platforms for labor activism¹⁴ and in mainstream media,¹⁵ albeit usually in order to illustrate socioeconomic narratives rather than as literature per se.

Across the board, the selection of source texts tends to reflect the suffering, inequality, and injustice that trigger the moral impulse to translate. The rules and strategies that govern the actual translations differ considerably depending on the translator but also on the setting. For example, if the source text counts as unsophisticated by target-audience standards, does the translator “fix” this—and do they tell the reader? Lucas Klein writes that Goodman’s translations of Xu Lizhi in *Iron Moon* show painstaking attention to word choice but translations of Xu by a blogger called Nào on the Libertarian Communism website are marked by stiffness.¹⁶ Rather than inviting a comparative quality assessment, this may suggest that poetry is not Nào’s or LibCom’s usual medium, that they are not especially interested in linguistic subtleties or literary style, and that they publish their translations of Xu’s poetry for what they take to be a message that aligns well with their cause—to call attention to the dehumanizing effects of precarious labor. In sum, even if Goodman and Nào are united in their indictment of injustice, they operate in different settings and from different visions of translation. Translation

theory has shown the importance of such distinctions of purpose across genres and media.¹⁷ Battler poetry throws this into sharp relief, as is evident in Goodman's reflections on her work.¹⁸

The Author as Synecdoche

Literary translation starts with a process of selection, whether or not this process is undertaken consciously and made explicit; and the target-language corpus of a given literature is inherently much smaller than the source-language corpus. National canon formation in translation thus draws on fewer texts, by fewer authors, than does native national canon formation, and attention to the names that get there first can snowball. This raises questions of representation and representativeness, even if source-text authors and translators do not necessarily think about their work in these terms. Thus, it is especially in translation that a single author can come to operate as a synecdoche for an entire literary genre or indeed for an entire national literature or national culture vis-à-vis a foreign audience, and thereby become the face of that genre, literature, or culture. These authors are usually men. Think Confucius for Chinese culture or Goethe for German culture (as embodied in their networks of state-funded soft-power outposts), Shakespeare for the full gamut of English literature, or Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936) for modern Chinese literature. The latter example is illustrated by the translational machine that is the MCLC Resource Center. Its survey page of bibliographies on modern Chinese literature (edu.nl/tvnga) has a dedicated category called “Lu Xun,” which stands out amid generic categories of author studies, period, region, theme, genre, reference, translations in multiple-author collections, and translations by author.

Zheng Xiaoqiong is undisputably the face of Chinese battler poetry (I have called her this myself, as have others), so let us begin by noting that she helps to regender the author as synecdoche. Her sole competitor is Xu Lizhi, but the looming presence of Xu's suicide tends to take him into mainstream media and labor activism platforms that focus on his personal tragedy, which is then turned into a miniature of the horrors of precarious labor in China, sometimes simplistically so.¹⁹ By contrast, discourse on Zheng has engaged much more with the intricacies of subaltern cultural production. Also, while Zheng actively helps shape (Chinese) media representations of her life and work, Xu's public persona froze at the moment of its emergence in 2014, when he killed himself. His persona has remained static and voiceless except for what his poetry says—or rather, what others say it says.

Zheng has been the face of battler poetry since the late 2000s inside China and since the early 2010s outside China. In 2011, Heather Inwood called her “a poster girl” for battler poetry,²⁰ and Justyna Jaguścik called her “one of the most famous working poets”²¹ in the first of several of Jaguścik's publications that

feature Zheng. Also in 2011, Jonathan Stalling pioneered the English translation of Zheng's poetry, as the first of several translators who have since engaged with her work. Stalling calls Zheng "the public face of migrant worker poetry" but is careful to note that "her poetry defies many of the aesthetic expectations this label might imply."²²

The author as synecdoche is nobody's fault, nor is it inherently a bad thing that individual authors become the subject of unending scrutiny and discussion. But there is the risk of overconcentration on their work and their story, as commentary and new translations continue to proliferate while other voices remain unheard and unstudied. Today, overconcentration on Zheng Xiaqiong in foreign work on China's battler poetry is clearly in evidence. For interlingual translations, as of this writing the MCLC Resource Center category of translations by author (edu.nl/aqxxc) lists twenty-eight items for Zheng, of which eighteen are in English. Xu Lizhi has six, of which four are in English. Inasmuch as other battler poets are represented, there are three items for Guo Jinniu and one for Xiao Hai 小海 (b. 1987), and a nonfiction prose essay by Chen Nianxi 陳年喜 (b. 1970). The translations of Zheng's work are by a dozen different translators across six languages (in alphabetical order: Dutch, English, French, German, Indonesian, and Vietnamese). She is the only battler poet who has published book-length collections of her poetry in translation, in French (by Chantal Chen-Andro), Indonesian (by Willy Japaries), Vietnamese (by Hàn Hồng Diệp), and English (by Goodman).²³ Zhou Xiaojing additionally mentions Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish translations of Zheng's work.²⁴ The MCLC website lays no claim to completeness, certainly not outside English, and items listed under author studies often contain translations as well. At any rate, there is a lot of material here.

Moving on to the author studies, we find twenty-four items on Zheng Xiaqiong, twenty-three in English and one in Italian.²⁵ One is a media report, one a festival video, and the other twenty-one come under various scholarly genres: journal articles, book chapters, a PhD dissertation (by Jaguścik), and two research monographs, by Giusi Tamburello (in Italian) and Zhou Xiaojing (in English). Between them, Jaguścik and Zhou lay claim to twelve of these items, but this does not change the picture. For one thing, editors across various scholarly venues have seen fit to publish these successive contributions on Zheng by both scholars. For another, the full set shows no fewer than eight different scholars at work, which is a lot for an author from a marginalized group that has only recently attracted the scholarly gaze. Tellingly, Zheng Xiaqiong is the single battler poet included in Christopher Lupke and Thomas E. Moran's *Chinese Poets Since 1949*, volume 387 of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, in an entry written by Zhou.²⁶

For Xu Lizhi, the MCLC lists eight author studies. And not just the absolute numbers are different for Zheng and Xu, but the relative numbers are so as

well, in accordance with the division between media and scholarship mentioned above. Four items on Xu are media reports (three in English, one in German); one is a scholarly article on Xu alone (in English, by the present author) whose first outline appeared in an article for a literary journal (in Dutch, also by the present author); one is a scholarly book chapter on battler poetry that includes thumbnail vignettes on Xu and Zheng; and one is a scholarly book chapter containing case studies of five authors, including Xu. The latter also has a case study of Guo Jinniu, for whom two media reports are listed, in German and Dutch. There are three items for Xiao Hai: a media report in English but published in China, a blog post in Dutch (by the present author), and a web lecture in English (also by the present author). Finally, there are two recent media reports in English on Chen Nianxi that appeared in quick succession, one of them published in China.

In sum, those looking for foreign work on battler poetry are going to find Zheng Xiaoqiong and Xu Lizhi before they find anyone else. And if their interest in poetry extends beyond its clichéd status as a romantic accompaniment to personal tragedy, they are going to find only Zheng Xiaoqiong.

Hypertranslatability

Poetry is one of the usual suspects in lay and specialist conversations on untranslatability, a topic that haunts the study of translation. Others include philosophy and texts or expressions held to be so deeply imbued with local cultural or historical meaning that they are locally rooted and incapable of surviving elsewhere.²⁷ What can cause us to lump these categories together as “untranslatable” is our inability to banish equivalence as an axiomatic, exclusionary perspective for thinking about translation, even though efforts to this end have been ongoing in translation studies for decades.²⁸ Equivalence should be but one of many possible perspectives on translation. In fact, when thinking about translation in any context that is not purely instrumental, there are good grounds for starting from the notion of *difference* or *change* instead. This can be further specified as creative imitation, rewriting, and so on, in recognition of the impossibility to cut either the source text or the translation loose from their contexts.²⁹ Translation is not replication.

Interventions in this spirit have been made since the late twentieth century.³⁰ Jacques Derrida holds that “the more untranslatable a text, the more insistently it begs and demands to be translated.”³¹ Barbara Cassin notes that “to speak of untranslatables in no way implies that the terms in question, or the expressions, the syntactical or grammatical turns, are not and cannot be translated: the untranslatable is rather what one keeps on (not) translating”;³² or, in a more felicitous English rendition, “what one never ceases to (not) translate.”³³ Also, there is no point in thinking about translatability and untranslatability in binaries and absolute terms. Rather, moments and modes of (un)translatability may come into

view depending on relations between source and target languages and cultures, the translator's motivation and their poetics, and the complexity and the energy of their translation, first in their own hands and then in those of their readers.

My reflection on some personal run-ins with untranslatables on the contemporary Chinese poetry scene does not aspire to the philosophical prowess of Derrida and Cassin, but it does echo their thinking.³⁴ Thus, I propose to speak of *hypertranslatability*, not as a mirror image or a substitute for untranslatability but as an alternative to it. Here's a tentative definition: A text is hypertranslatable if it elicits especially high numbers of translations, whose perspectives on the source text and its reproduction may converge but may also differ widely and indeed irreconcilably.

The notion of hypertranslatability foregrounds the creative impulse triggered by the challenge that resides in all but the duller instances of translation. At a pragmatic level it can help us make sense of the fact that there are over eighty English translations of Homer's *Iliad* (edu.nl/489pm) as well as the unending contestation over competing translations of Paul Celan's poetry into various languages, including Chinese.³⁵ (Homer and Celan represent different types of hypertranslatability, on which more below. In a nutshell, the former is formal poetry and deeply culturally rooted, and the latter is explosive in its confrontation with the unspeakability of the Holocaust and is linguistically very "difficult.") But the notion of hypertranslatability also reflects a conceptual and ideological stance that emphasizes the power of translation and the need to think about it in terms of innovation and enrichment rather than the tired metaphor of loss.³⁶

How might the notion of hypertranslatability help us work with the usual suspects of untranslatability? It certainly offers a helpful perspective on philosophy, where translation is known to generate divergent rewritings, with Laozi 老子 translations being an eye-catching example from the China field.³⁷ It also clearly works for poetry,³⁸ which is especially capable of producing polyvalence, ambiguity, and elusiveness through the layered interactions of sound, sense, syntax, and setting (meaning social and cultural context, the latter including local intertextualities). These interactions can be arbitrary, as in the relation of signifier and signified. More generally, they can be radically innovative and experimental, with extreme cases that count as nonsensical by conventional standards—but *effectively* nonsensical. As a particular iteration of the creative imperative, poetry invites the translator time and again to choose which rule they wish to break, without the prospect of "getting it right"—but the absence of this prospect can be an opportunity rather than a threat. Thus, poetry is known to inspire multiple and contested translations of single source texts. As for locally rooted texts, in various genres that include poetry and philosophy, their rootedness comes in many shapes and hues. If the usefulness of the notion of hypertranslatability is less straightforward for this category, it is no less palpable, as I hope to show below.

Overall, if we shift perspective from untranslatability to hypertranslatability, the primary question is no longer what frustrates translation but what stimulates it, and what explains the fact that certain source texts elicit so much of it.

An Explanation

For the present purposes, in these stock examples of untranslatability—or hypertranslatability—I discern two operative notions. I will first consider these in connection with battler poetry as a genre and then home in on the case of Zheng Xiaoqiong.

The first operative notion—closely associated with poetry at large, if not exclusive to it—is what we might call the complex coincidence of the source text’s interactive layers and codes, which can mutually reinforce, reposition and reshape, contradict, and so on. As above, I summarize these here as sound, sense, syntax, and setting. This makes translating both formal poetry of the regulated kind and effectively nonsensical texts especially challenging. Regulated formal features present material obstacles that may goad the translator into separating out dimensions of the poem whose essence lies in their inseparability (“How can I render this rhyme scheme without compromising the poem’s semantics?”). By contrast, effectively nonsensical texts give the translator little to even hold on to and ask them to stake out the text’s space in the target language almost from scratch, in an exploration whose source coordinates can be as unreliable as they are inspiring.

In Chinese literature, formal poetry brings to mind the massive tradition of classical texts (because of powerful rules that govern not just rhyme and meter but also tonal contrast and calligraphy), whose translation has been undertaken in creative ways.³⁹ For effectively nonsensical texts, we might turn to the inimitable Che Qianzi 車前子 (b. 1963). Huang Yunte presents his English renditions of Che’s work as *No Poetry*, explaining that in Che, this phrase “does not mean a lack of poetry” but rather “a radical undoing of familiar conceptions of poetry.”⁴⁰ But by and large, although battler poetry invites debate on translational poetics with regard to matters such as literalness, paraphrase, and ennoblement,⁴¹ the notion of complex coincidence does not count as a key factor in its translatability. It is simply not that kind of writing. Perhaps needless to say, this is not a value judgment. The reader will recall the question of whose aesthetics are at stake here.

The second operative notion does count as a key factor in the translatability of battler poetry. This can be couched in terms such as the otherness and the unknownness of locally rooted texts, as in cultural and historical allusions that evaporate in literal transfer unless they are explained: for example, images of the sun in Chinese poetry written during the Cultural Revolution, which will make the native general reader think of Mao Zedong. But for engaging with battler poetry I prefer to mobilize another spatial image that is often used in the

context of translation and to speak of *distance* instead. A vision of translation that starts from difference rather than equivalence will question the received wisdom that what is closer is easier to translate. From there, with battler poetry as a case in point and investigating not just interlingual but also cultural translation, we might ask if translatability can also be enhanced by *greater* distance. Here, we should not just consider the cultural and historical components of distance but also its social component. Think, for example, of the distance between the socioeconomic experience of (1) precarious workers, (2) the most successful poets among them, and (3) the latter's translators, who are not usually subaltern subjects themselves. In relation to this point, Goodman asks poignant questions on issues of authenticity in her translations of battler poetry.⁴²

Thus, while battler poetry indexes hardships that are recognized throughout the world, such as assembly-line labor and the experience of displacement that comes with (forced) migration, its purchase on the foreign reader is evidenced by its cultural translation across vast distances in foreign media, when the poetry comes embedded in what we may call China stories. Let's consider two items from the *New York Times*, one for its telling first sentence and the other in some more detail (predictably, Xu Lizhi appears in both although he is not a key figure in either). In 2014, reporting from Beijing on a poetry contest that centrally featured battler poetry, Didi Kirsten Tatlow opens by suggesting that battler poets may be "the most penetrating chroniclers of the dramatic economic and social transformation of China since 1978."⁴³ In 2021 Vivian Wang implies something similar by showing how this transformation presents essential context—historical, cultural, and social—from which Chen Nianxi's personal experience cannot be disentangled. To explain Chen's success as a poet, Wang charts Chen's "hardscabble background" against the backdrop of China's "breakneck economic growth," of which she notes that it "has collided with growing awareness of the human toll exacted." She cites scholars Ma Zhen and Hui Faye Xiao, Ma as saying that Chen's poems carry "classical bloodlines," with frequent allusions to classical Chinese literature," and Xiao as saying that migrant workers "remain politically voiceless and socially marginalized."⁴⁴

The foreign reader sees a downtrodden subject writing poetry and claiming their dignity against the odds, in the shadow of an oppressive state in cahoots with global capitalism. What is more, this writing is part of an Other cultural tradition in which poetry as a social practice can be imagined to extend from court officials in antiquity to precarious workers today. Sure enough, "Poetry as Social Practice" is one of the subheads I used when *Jacobin* asked me for a contribution on battler poetry outside the ivory tower (2022). Media moments like this highlight how distance can in fact enhance the (cultural) translatability of battler poetry.

The social component of distance is especially capable of activating the moral impulse for the translation of battler poetry. This process is spurred by the

mediagenicity of cultural production by and/or about the (Chinese) subaltern and specifically the mediagenicity of battler poetry. This mediagenicity starts in China and then travels abroad. In China, state discourse and commercial media discourse have shaped representations of precarious workers in the public realm as despicable, admirable, and everything in between, all the while denying them agency and voice. An early article by Sun Wanning shows how the subaltern subject is malleable material for normative narratives that fuel audience identification with the national interest and/or with an emergent middle class whose self-image is one of superiority, in a mix of voyeurism and compassion.⁴⁵ State and mass media representations of precarious workers have since become less negative and patronizing⁴⁶ but still wield much discursive power. As a key platform for precarious workers to claim their own voice, battler poetry carries over mediagenicity from the subaltern subject to the cultural production undertaken by this subject. This process feeds on the romanticized convergence of precarious worker and poet in the same body.

As battler poetry crosses over from Chinese discourses into foreign ones, its representations inevitably shift. But its mediagenicity remains and is catalyzed as China becomes Other rather than Self, and this enables it to reach all kinds of foreign readers. These include not just poetry readers, scholars and students, translators, and cultural brokers, but also labor activists, China watchers, and mass media consumers who take an interest in China as the new superpower. It bears noting here that photo editors have it easier with battler poetry than with other poetry, insofar as other poetry makes it into nonspecialist venues to begin with. In an example from my own surroundings, none of the two dozen substantial anthologies of contemporary Chinese poetry in English translation published in the last thirty years would have stood a chance of being mentioned in the Dutch national press—except for *Iron Moon*, in a review accompanied by a picture of Chinese workers on the assembly line.⁴⁷ In other words, there are generic reasons why battler poetry can speak to foreign readers in interlingual and cultural translations. Especially if we consider the limitations of battler poetry's resources—time for the poets to write, for instance, or their access to literary infrastructure—calling it notably translatable *as a genre* might not be an exaggeration.

Turning now to Zheng Xiaoqiong, let me begin by suggesting that the notion of complex coincidence is no more a key factor in the translation of her work than it is in the translation of battler poetry at large. This is not because Zheng writes a simple poetry in terms of language, subject matter, or ideology. “Life,” which opens the present article, is a case in point, with its long, breathless lines marked by jagged rhythms and jarring enjambment, idiosyncratic configurations of concrete imagery and abstractions (“All this iron rusting in time and trembling in reality”), and questions of the kind raised by every poem that will challenge the interpretive and creative abilities of the reader who is also a translator. Should

wusheng 無聲 (1.9) be “silent” or “soundless” or “noiseless” or “voiceless”? Then again, most of Zheng’s poetry is in free verse, and much of it has narrative elements and presents an unmistakable indictment of social injustice. The dynamic of her work does not hinge on formal features of the regulated kind, on mystifying tensions between sound, sense, syntax, and setting, or on what I have called effective nonsensicality. So we need to look elsewhere. As above, this is not a value judgment.

Part of the explanation for Zheng’s ubiquity in foreign work on China’s battler poetry lies in the generic factors of cultural and social distance and battler poetry’s mediagenicity, coupled with equally generic mechanisms that can make a single author the face of an entire genre. But why *this* single author? What is it that makes Zheng stand out so conspicuously among her fellow authors? What is it that energizes the distance to the point that Zheng Xiaoqiong is not just notably translatable but hypertranslatable, so that her poetry has all but monopolized the stage so far? As I string together the elements of a possible explanation, I will draw on the accounts of Zheng’s life and work offered by Zhou (2021) and Sun (forthcoming), in addition to my fieldwork observations and personal communication with Zheng since 2016.

Self-evident as it may seem, the first thing to flag is Zheng’s sheer literary talent and dedication. Over the last two decades she has made what is by all accounts a fanatical, sustained effort at training and developing herself as a poet—against the odds indeed, certainly until her national breakthrough in the late 2000s. She has built an impressive oeuvre of thirteen books (not counting translations) in addition to countless blog and journal publications, with poetry and short non-fiction essays as her main modes of expression. Occasionally, just like literary authors associated with other marginalized groups, she has voiced concern about the reductive powers of the prefix, objecting to being called a “battler” poet rather than simply a poet. But perhaps a positively defined interest in battler poetry need not be reductive in nature, and Zheng herself has often reaffirmed her literary provenance in the battler community, for instance in a video portrait recorded for the Global Migrant Festival (2018).⁴⁸ One way of charting her poetic voice over the years would be to say it has shifted from agitation to contemplation, but her writing has been highly accomplished throughout, at the level of individual poems and of her purposefully wrought oeuvre at large.⁴⁹ This observation finds support in research by Margaret Hillenbrand that shows close reading is a rewarding method for approaching Zheng’s poetry.⁵⁰ Hillenbrand’s analysis dispels zero-sum dichotomies of social significance and aesthetic value not just for battler poetry but for subaltern cultural production at large, and it reaffirms the value of sensitive textual analysis anchored in rich contextualization. This recalls Stalling’s early warning against allowing Zheng’s history as a migrant worker to trigger easy assumptions about the aesthetics of her poetry. Zheng’s poetry can be

just as challenging—and hence stimulating—to the translator as the work of your average poet in the Chinese avant-garde tradition.

Calling Zheng's work accomplished is not another way of saying she knows how to make the battler's voice sing along with more established literatures after all. Rather, it is an observation of her work's ability to arrest the reader's attention with an original aesthetic that marks successful authors across genres and media. To the scattered descriptions of Zheng's style I have offered so far, let me add that her voice exudes the experience—firsthand and as an inside observer—of harrowing realities of the battler's existence, coupled with a sense of responsibility for documenting this experience and the ability to paint the big picture through the tragedies of “small” human lives. Many of the lives in question are those of women in environments marked by structural, gendered exploitation and discrimination, such as the factory workshop. Yet as Zheng taps into poetry's emotive potential and appeals to the reader to empathize with literary protagonists whose ordeal sends an alarming message about the real world, she steers clear of pamphleteering. Thus, while battler poetry at large invokes a China that features prominently in foreign media, Zheng's writing is particularly effective in this respect. I witnessed this during her reading at the 2019 Poetry International festival, which included a poem called “Hu Zhimin” 胡志敏,⁵¹ on the rural–urban divide in China as it plays out in the predicament of young rural women working not just on the assembly line but also in karaoke bars and sex parlors. Zheng's recital had an audience of over a thousand spellbound (video at edu.nl/juw6). Another example lies in several foreign musical and theater adaptations of the project of which “Hu Zhimin” is a part⁵² and a 2012 book by Zheng titled *Nügong ji* 女工記 (Stories of Women Workers). We will have a closer look at *Stories* below, as it is arguably Zheng's pièce de résistance.

Second, Zheng has captured the attention of highly diverse audiences, in China and abroad. This begins with her ability to straddle China's unofficial (*minjian* 民間) and official (*guanfang* 官方) poetry scenes. Having migrated in 2001 from rural Sichuan to become a factory worker in Dongguan, the industrial conglomerate in the heart of the Pearl River Delta, she sought mentorship in the unofficial scene, whose key role in shaping Chinese poetry today is well established. In the same year Zheng's “*Dagong, yi ge cangsang de ci*” 打工，一個滄桑的詞 (*Dagong*, a Word of Fickleness) appeared on the front page of *Dagong shiren* (The Battler Poet), a groundbreaking unofficial periodical. It would become a battler poetry classic. But from the mid-2000s onward she also secured the support of official (*guanfang* 官方) institutions such as the Writers Association and the journal *Renmin wenxue* 人民文學 (People's Literature). This resulted in time off from work to complete her first book of poetry in 2006, a literary award in 2007 that marked her breakthrough at the national level, and a growing list of official publications. Meanwhile, critical acclaim for her writing was on the rise,

one example being an essay by Zhang Qinghua 張清華 that reached not just a Chinese audience but also a foreign one (2010). Zheng landed first an internship and then a job at the Guangzhou-based journal *Zuopin* 作品 (Artworks) and became a local cultural official, rising through the ranks to become vice-editor in chief at *Artworks* in 2016. Foreign translations of her work have appeared since the early 2010s. Starting from the latter half of the decade she has traveled abroad and read at international poetry events, both of the genre-specific kind, such as the Singapore Migrant Worker Poetry Competition, and of the generic kind, such as Poetry International.

Third, Zheng has what one might call the perfect life story for attracting the interest of both Chinese and foreign readers. The summary of her literary career given above is but one of this story's building blocks. Most of the rags-to-riches tales told of migrant worker live-in maids (*baomu* 保姆) are really fairy tales that offer temporary escape from real-world exploitation and oppression, in which rags-to-riches is infinitesimally rare.⁵³ But Zheng is the exception to the rule. Her writing *has* in fact "changed her destiny." This also holds for a small number of other battler authors, such as novelist Wang Shiyue 王十月 (b. 1970), but Zheng stands out among them by her visibility in China and even more so abroad. The perfect story sees Zheng turn her prospects around through sheer perseverance, with poethood adding to her magnificence just like it adds to Xu Lizhi's misery. In a neoliberal vision, as pervasive in China as it is elsewhere, this is a tale of extraordinary achievement through self-reliance. In an idealist vision that sees the artist as uniquely equipped to address society's ills, especially in a politically oppressive environment, it is a tale of poetic justice. In both readings Zheng travels from the mute subalternity of rurality, womanhood, and precarity to the status of a literary celebrity in China whose voice is heard and recognized internationally, resonating with worldwide concern over inequality.

Fourth, Zheng's poetic engagement with precarity speaks to several major themes of our time, in China and elsewhere in the world. First of all there is the theme of precarity itself. But while the individual suffering that comes with precarity makes for hard-hitting writing by other battler poets as well, the insistence and systematicity of Zheng's writing and its big-picture vision invite with particular force the cultural translation of her work through scholarship. Specifically, her poetry contributes to conversations from three key perspectives on precarious (migrant) labor, as exemplified in the work of three scholars who have made key contributions to the study of battler poetry. The first of these perspectives is that of subalternity as represented in mass media, social media, and cultural production, in the work of Sun Wanning. The second is that of gender and the patriarchy, in the work of Justyna Jaguścik. The third is that of ecology and the destruction wrought by global capitalism, in the work of Zhou Xiaojing. I hasten to add that all three authors have engaged with all three themes, and they are not alone. Most

of Zheng's commentators touch on subalternity in one way or another, scholars who have published on gender and ecology in connection with her work also include Amy Dooling and Gong Haomin, and so on. In addition to the category of author studies, the reader is referred to the thematic bibliography on migrant workers and subalternity on the MCLC website.⁵⁴

For my fifth point, I turn to a new article by Sun Wanning.⁵⁵ Sun presents a sociological reading of Zheng's *Stories of Women Workers*.⁵⁶ Advertised on a band around the cover as "the first symphony on women, labor, and capital in the history of Chinese poetry," *Stories* is the literary record of a nonacademic type of fieldwork in which Zheng documents the ordeal of women migrant workers she encountered when she was a factory worker in Dongguan.⁵⁷ She continued work on this project after she had written her way out of subalternity herself, still living among the migrant worker community as she commuted to her job at *Artworks* in Guangzhou. The book is a critical engagement with issues of social justice, and its appearance required a "brave—if somewhat risky—decision of a senior editor" after the local government advised against publication.⁵⁸ *Stories* contains a hundred poems of several dozen lines in length, interspersed with fourteen "notes" (*shouji* 手記) of a few pages each. Most of the poems are named after the historical persons they are about (such as "Hu Zhimin," mentioned above). The notes are frequently linked to such individual histories as well. They address their protagonists' suffering in a memoir-like expository mode, touching on issues such as the strain migration can put on marriage and the many abnormal causes of death in women workers.

Sun proposes to read *Stories*, first, to assess what sociological knowledge can be extrapolated from this text. Second, taking her cue from Judith Farquhar, she sees Zheng as an "ethnographic partner" whose work crucially complements academic research. Third, she questions Zheng's political agenda on issues of (female) precarious labor vis-à-vis the state, transnational capital, the middle class, and scholars. Sun presents her article as a methodological intervention, a claim that certainly holds for the first two of these points and is bolstered by her reflection on the need for scholarship to "strengthen itself by drawing on nourishment from genres other than academic research publications" in order to forge "a productive partnership between academic and subaltern writers."⁵⁹

Sun ponders the development of Zheng's relationship with the rural migrant community as Zheng morphs from a regular, inside member of the community into an outsider who retains access of a type that would be unthinkable if she could not partake of a vast shared experience. In a fitting expression, she calls this relationship "amphibian." One might add that this amphibianism also defines relationships that operate in another direction, between the poet as ethnographer, on the one hand, and scholars such as Jaguścik, Sun, and Zhou, on the other. Thus, for

battler poetry and especially for Zheng Xiaoqiong, Sun's article is an eye-catching instance of cultural translation in Pym's definition as communication between cultural groups, emerging in various constellations of these groups in China and elsewhere: precarious (migrant) workers, the most successful poets among them, government cultural officials, those working in activism and advocacy, journalists and other media makers, scholars, interlingual translators, and various audiences. Single bodies can straddle these categories, with Zheng herself as a shining example. Her exceptional ability to do so may serve as a capstone on the explanation I have offered for her hypertranslatability, alongside her exceptional skill in navigating the complex force field in which battler poetry operates.⁶⁰

On the latter point, the state has an uneasy relationship with the new underclass, as "the worker" has come to carry starkly different connotations following the transformation of the high-socialist proletariat into the postsocialist precariat: from dignified political subject to second-class citizen, to put it crudely. Thus, one can see how the state might have an interest in encouraging and cultivating the emergence of a single poetic "face" of this underclass, in order to squeeze out directly oppositional voices of explicit political protest. Notably, this by no means suggests that Zheng Xiaoqiong has been co-opted by the state, an assertion one occasionally hears in China ever since her breakthrough in the mid-2000s.⁶¹ This would be turning a blind eye to the complexity of the Chinese literary field, specifically the interpenetration and the entanglement of official and unofficial literary scenes and of grassroots and state cultural practices.

I end this section with the first poem in *Stories of Women Workers*. The poem's narrative unfurls on the assembly line, which eats away at Time and the woman worker's youth and health as she mechanically wears herself out. It echoes the poem that opens the present article in many ways, but with a telling difference. The speaker is no longer a first-person woman worker who suffers⁶² but an empathetic observer who sees a third-person woman worker suffer and offers testimony of this observation. Otherwise, the poem features several situations and stage props that recur throughout Zheng's oeuvre. There is "moonlight on the machine," easily associated with night shifts and overtime. The worker struggles with "exhaustion and occupational disease," and her lungs are damaged. The image of "a store shelf in the US" links global capitalism back to the factory workshop and from there to the hollowed-out Chinese countryside. The violence of this connection is embodied in the overburdened worker, as "the rivers surging in a woman's body" are clogged and her menstrual cycle is disrupted. The destruction of the natural environment is visible in "the tide in disarray" and the "development zone" where "the lychee trees are felled." The woman worker's alienation, disintegration, and dehumanization are complete when "she takes her self / and sticks it in between the products flowing by."

I noted above that battler poetry invites debate on translational poetics with regard to matters such as literalness, paraphrase, and ennoblement, but I have not discussed translation at the levels of the line and the word. For battler poetry, unlike poetry that demands the closest of close reading, this may not be where translatability plays out in the most interesting ways. That said, the interlingual translation of battler poetry is by no means a straightforward affair. In this case, in choosing which rules to break I have chosen to err on the side of literalness. I have translated each of four occurrences of *liudong* 流動 as “flow,” to highlight an insistent, urgent kind of lexical repetition that happens often in battler poetry, and I have rendered *jiang ziji* 將自己 in the penultimate line as “takes her self” to drive home the sense of alienation that runs through the poem from start to finish.

WOMAN WORKER: YOUTH FIXED IN A SEAT

Time's giant beak yawns moonlight on the machine
 turns to rust exhausted dim turbid the peril in her heart
 gurgling flowing by the body's cliffs collapse mud and crushed stone
 shards of time clog up the rivers surging in a woman's body
 the tide in disarray out of sync with the season she sits in her seat
 the products flowing by interlock with time swallow it down so
 quickly
 grown old ten years have flowed by like water . . . a giant wariness
 wells up in her mind . . . for many years she has stood guard
 over the screws one screw two screws turn to the left to
 the right
 fixing her dreams and her youth to a product watching
 her pallid youth running always from the rural backland
 to a city on the seaboard then to a store shelf in the US
 exhaustion and occupational disease accumulate in her lungs
 stick in her throat her period no longer on time
 her coughing fierce in the development zone beyond the factory
 the lychee trees are felled the machines around her
 are shaking . . . she kneads her eyes red and swollen then takes her self
 and sticks it in between the products flowing by

〈女工：被固定在卡座上的青春〉

時間張開巨大的喙 明月在機臺上
 生鏽 它疲倦 發暗 混濁 內心的兇險
 汨汨流動 身體的峭壁在崩潰 泥土與碎石
 時間的碎片 塞滿了女性體內洶湧的河流
 混亂的潮水不跟隨季節漲落 她坐於卡座

流動的製品與時間交錯 吞噬 這麼快
老了 十年像水樣流動 巨大的厭倦
在腦海中漂浮 多年來 她守著
螺絲 一顆 兩顆 轉動 向左 向右
將夢想與青春固定在某個製品 看著
蒼白的青春 一路奔跑 從內陸鄉村
到沿海工廠 一直到美國某個貨架
疲倦與職業的疾病在肺部積蓄
卡在喉間 不再按時到來的月經
猛烈的咳嗽 工廠遠處的開發區
綠色荔枝樹被砍伐 身邊的機器
顫抖 她揉了揉紅腫的眼窩 將自己
插在某個流動的製品間⁶³

Coda

Asking “Why is everyone translating Zheng Xiaogong?” might sound skeptical if the question were taken out of context. Also, in what is perhaps a suspiciously recursive move, this article tries to explain a phenomenon to which I have contributed myself, by flagging Zheng’s high visibility more than once in earlier publications and now dedicating this article to it in full. I believe this move is justified by the need to step back and consider the emergence of this instance of Chinese poetry and/in the world, meaning both battler poetry at large and the phenomenon called Zheng Xiaogong. As for the question, it is of course anything but skeptical. Rather, it kicks off my attempt to understand how Zheng contributes to a dynamic that sees battler poetry speaking to a range of foreign readers beyond scholarship in the humanities and literary translation, from social scientists to labor activists and mainstream journalists.

Translatability works differently for battler poetry than for the Chinese avant-garde and other high-culture types of poetry (and we should take hypertranslatability to Homer and Celan at the first opportunity). But this is precisely why we need to rethink translatability, as part of an ongoing engagement with subaltern cultural production that compels us to revisit perennial questions of aesthetics and social experience. This engagement raises equally perennial questions of structure and agency, such as in the force field surrounding battler poetry and its translation at large *and* in Zheng’s individual trajectory. That this article has remarked on the importance of an individual author’s agency should not make us lose sight of the structural factors I have outlined above. Nor should it keep us from exploring how they play out for battler poets whose voices remain unheard to date.

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Notes

- 1 Zheng, *Huangmaling*, 23. Translations are mine. Others have gone before, and my renditions inevitably echo theirs in some places.
- 2 I have previously called it “battlers poetry,” but I have since become convinced that the final *s* needs to go. This article borrows the occasional turn of phrase from my other work on battler poetry.
- 3 Most commentators (tacitly) use similar definitions, but some take the position that battler literature can also be written by those who have no experience of precarious (migrant) labor themselves. The discussion is especially interesting in light of successive incarnations of workers’ literature in modern China. See Iovene and Picerni, “Chinese Workers’ Literature.”
- 4 There are other source terms for both the demographic and its literature, e.g., *diceng xiezu* 底層寫作 (subaltern writing) and *xin gongren wenxue* 新工人文學 (new worker literature), the latter closely associated with the Migrant Workers Home (*Gongyou zhi jia* 工友之家) in Picun.
- 5 See Wikipedia, “Battler”; van Crevel, “Walk on the Wild Side,” par. 99.
- 6 van Crevel, “Cultural Translation of Battlers Poetry,” 258–66.
- 7 Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, 138.
- 8 Qiu and Lin, “Foxconn.”
- 9 This section draws on a more extensive discussion elsewhere. See van Crevel, “Migrant Worker Poetry.”
- 10 As outlined in Iovene and Picerni, “Chinese Workers’ Literature.”
- 11 Nord, “Functionalist Approaches.”
- 12 Qin, *Iron Moon*, 200.
- 13 Zheng, *In the Roar of the Machine*.
- 14 *China Labour Bulletin*, “I Speak of Blood.”
- 15 Rauhala, “Poet Who Died for Your Phone.”
- 16 Klein, “Mediation Is Our Authenticity,” 214–15; Nào, “Poetry and Brief Life of a Foxconn Worker.”
- 17 Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories*, chap. 4.
- 18 Goodman, “Translating Migrant Worker Poetry.”
- 19 van Crevel, “Misfit.” Subalternity and gender also offer interfaces with foreign work on Yu Xiuhua 余秀華. See Xu, “Yu Xiuhua (1976–).” But Yu’s work is different from battler poetry in that it is less entangled with China’s socioeconomic transformation.

- 20 Inwood, "Between License and Responsibility," 53.
- 21 Jaguścick, "Representation of *Dagongmei*," 127.
- 22 Zheng and Stalling, "Zheng Xiaoqiong," 56.
- 23 I have only seen the covers and colophon pages of the Indonesian and Vietnamese translations, of which Zheng Xiaoqiong was kind enough to send me photographs. Both are translations of, and have the same cover as, Zheng, *Huangmaling*. Coupled with colophon information, this suggests the translations may have been (co)funded by the Chinese publisher and/or Chinese government institutions.
- 24 Zhou, *Migrant Ecologies*, 334.
- 25 Zhang, "Who Touches the Iron of the Age." One of the English-language items is the translation by Jonathan Stalling and Yao Benbiao of a Chinese-language essay by Zhang Qinghua 張清華.
- 26 Zhou, "Zheng Xiaoqiong (1980-)."
- 27 And religious scripture, whose translation may be prohibited by religious authorities because the texts are sacred to their constituency. Such institutional untranslatability lies outside the scope of my discussion.
- 28 A recent example being Admussen, "Embodiment in the Translation of Chinese Poetry."
- 29 Asimakoulas, "Rewriting."
- 30 See Hermans, "Translatability." Also see Large et al., *Untranslatability*, 3–9, for summaries of the debate.
- 31 As paraphrased in Hermans, "Translatability," 303.
- 32 Cassin, *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, xvii.
- 33 Large et al., *Untranslatability*, 4. The French source text reads "ce qu'on ne cesse pas de (ne pas) traduire."
- 34 van Crevel, "Walk on the Wild Side," pars. 114–21; van Crevel, "Transgression as Rule," 265.
- 35 Krenz, "Celan's 'Deathfugue' in Chinese."
- 36 Bassnett, *Translation*, 11–13.
- 37 Tadd, "Global Laozegetics."
- 38 Jones, "Poetry Translation."
- 39 Mazanec, "Jiǎ Dǎo's Rhythm," on how to translate the tones of medieval Chinese.
- 40 Che, *No Poetry*, xi.
- 41 Goodman, "Translating Migrant Worker Poetry," 113–16.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Tatlow, "'The Storm of Reality.'"
- 44 Wang, "Deep Underground."
- 45 Sun, "Indoctrination, Fetishization, and Compassion."
- 46 Florence, "Cultural Politics of Labour in China."
- 47 van Staaldue, "Chinese fabrieksarbeider vangt leed van zware werk in poëzie."
- 48 Global Migrant Festival, "Zheng Xiaoqiong and Her Life."
- 49 Zhou, "Zheng Xiaoqiong (1980-)."
- 50 Hillenbrand, *On the Edge*.
- 51 Zheng, *Nūgong ji*, 167.
- 52 Sun, "Worker-Poet as the Ethnographic Partner."
- 53 Sun, "Sex, City, and the Maid," 56–61.
- 54 MCLC, "Theme 1."
- 55 Sun, "Worker-Poet as the Ethnographic Partner."
- 56 Zhou and Sun render the title as *Women Migrant Workers* and *Stories of Women Migrant Workers*, respectively.

- 57 Zhou, *Migrant Ecologies*. Not incidentally, *Stories* is also the subject of Zhou Xiaojing's research monograph on Zheng, which touches on Zheng's fieldwork as well. But Sun's approach explicitly foregrounds the interaction of Zheng's writing and other types of writing on precarious migrant labor in China, which aligns well with my argument on cultural translation.
- 58 Sun, "Worker-Poet as the Ethnographic Partner," 420.
- 59 Sun, "Worker-Poet as the Ethnographic Partner," 405–6.
- 60 van Crevel, "No One in Control?," 176.
- 61 van Crevel, "Cultural Translation of Battlers Poetry," 255–56.
- 62 "Life" does not mark the gender of the speaker, but most battler poetry can safely be taken as autobiographical, if not because of historical detail then minimally for the range of human experience involved. This is reaffirmed by the reference to memories of Sichuan, Zheng's home province.
- 63 Zheng, *Nü Gong ji*, 1–2.

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