

Translation as Weapons in the War of Ideas: English, Russian and Chinese Translation of *Li Sao* in the 1950s

MA Xiaolu 馬筱璐

Chinese and East Asian Studies, Kalamazoo College

During the Cold War, both the Eastern and Western blocs turned book publication, especially translation of literature of the third world, into a battle field, through which they redefined the value of world literature under the guidance of their respective ideological norms. This paper examines the translation of *Li Sao* (*Encountering Sorrow*) from *Chu Ci* (*Verses of Chu*), one of the masterpieces in classical Chinese literature, by the Eastern and Western blocs to tease out the dynamics and complications of translation process in the war of ideas.

Russian poet Anna Akhmatova's (1889–1966) translation of *Li Sao* in 1954 and British sinologist David Hawkes's (1923–2009) translation in 1959 have enjoyed tremendous popularity in English and Russian speaking world. These two translations were products of the Second World War and the subsequent Cold War, without which a great amount of Chinese literature, especially classical Chinese literature, would not have been circulated worldwide. Moreover, modern Chinese intellectuals Guo Moruo (1892–1978) and Wen Yiduo (1899–1946) also directly or indirectly participated in the translation of this Chinese canon. By exploring the function of patrons in different cultures—UNESCO, Russian and Chinese politicians and cultural departments—in the translation of *Li Sao*, this paper interrogates individual translators' struggle between sovereignty and subjectivity and reveals the blurring boundary between translators and patrons.