

HIMALAYAS

Contemporary Indian & Chinese Poetry

SAMPLER

featuring

Indian Poets

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Chinese Poets

ZANG DI 臧棣

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YAN RONG 晏榕

DAI WEINA 戴潍娜

YANG XIAOBIN 杨小滨

WANG ZILIANG 王自亮

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HIMALAYAS

Contemporary Indian & Chinese Poetry

a bilingual translation edition | curated & edited by

SUDEEP SEN | YANG LIAN

SAMPLE

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for
SIMI
e'
Yo Yo

SAMPLER

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translated from English to Chinese by Chinese Poets

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PREFACE 1

SUDEEP SEN

one word has written a world
— Yo Yo, 'Crocodile'
(trans. Brian Holton)

1. INTRODUCTION & EARLY READING

My earliest introduction to the constellation of Chinese poetry was in the 1970s — through the classical poetry tradition of China, particularly of the Tang Dynasty. I had access to the early Penguin edition translations, which were part of the family library. I was fascinated by the poetry's formal nature, its verse structure with distinct local allusions, its imagery and cadence, its strict metrical norms and forms.

During my graduate/post-graduate days, and later in New York, London and New Delhi — *Brocade River Poems: Selected Works of the Tang Dynasty Courtesan Xue Tao* by Jeanne Larsen (Princeton University Press, 1987); *Three Chinese Poets* by Vikram Seth (Faber, 1992), and a few other books of literary translations led me to study, in greater depth, the poetry of Xue Tao, Wang Wei, Li Bai and Du Fu, in particular. Over time there have been many other Chinese poets — both classical and contemporary — I have followed and read with keen interest.

*In sunshine, Censer Peak breathes purple mist.
A jutting stream, the cataract hangs in spray
Far off, then plunges down three thousand feet —
As if the sky had dropped the Milky Way.*
— LI BAI, 'The Waterfall at Lu Shan'
(trans. Vikram Seth)

As a professional writer and translator — through my international literary and work travels, I have met and read the work of several contemporary Chinese poets — this includes those living in China, and those in exile in other parts of the world: Duo Duo, Bei Dao, Yang Lian, Li Li, Zhao Lihong, Lien Chao, Yi Sha, Liu Hongbin, Cai Tianxin, Ming Di, Zhang Er, Arthur Sze and others. With some poets I have kept in touch, and others I have continued to read on the page.

2. CHINA SOJOURN

In 2011, I was awarded the Shanghai International Writers Fellowship (along with five other foreign writers). I was based in Shanghai for two months, under the aegis of the Shanghai Writers' Association. As an invited author, I participated in an international poetry festival in Inner Mongolia. I also travelled to Hangzhou and Beijing and some smaller cities.

During this period, I met Chinese writers, scholars, academics, critics and artists. It was a fertile period — I wrote new work responding to my time there, and a fair body of my English poetry and prose was translated into Chinese by various poets, editors and translators. I recall writing about a variety of spaces — abandoned buildings near Zhongshan Park Metro Station and pieces inspired by contemporary Chinese artists at The International Art Fair in Shanghai; Helan Mountains in inner Mongolia; a mosque in Yin Chuan; The Great Wall trek near Jinshanling; Summer Palace in Beijing; and others. Here is one of the many poems I wrote then:

HELAN MOUNTAIN, INNER MONGOLIA
Yin Chuan, October 2011

Helan Shan's rugged power
halts even The Great Wall

at its crumbling layered plinth —
nature dwarfing human spirit.

Here, goats stand statuesque
on cliff-face precipices

balanced at impossible angles —
their sure-footed balletic hooves

transforming danger into dance —
their spring quenching

the parched dusty earth
sucking The Yellow River dry.

There are clues hidden
in ancient petroglyphs —

stick-drawings prance blithely
creating new geometries

defying the simplest of logic.
There is unheard music —

wild water and wind
eroding large granite

ground to desert granules
in deliberate slow motion

over millennia — hard-edged,
haunting, phosphorescent.

*

Additionally, I even wrote about my childish excitement at encountering a faded black-and-white photograph of the Nobel-laureate Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore with Puyi, the Last Emperor of China, in one of the dusty outer rooms within the Forbidden City. Towards the end of my sojourn, I was commissioned to write a two-part essay on Tagore's Chinese connection, which was carried over two subsequent weekend editions of a leading newspaper, *The Shanghai Daily*.

I returned back to Delhi laden with books, artefacts, and the customary chess set to add to my collection. I assembled them artfully in a special soft-lit niche of my home library — and this became my 'China Section' — a homage, a living "frozen memory". Besides books and the bone-china chess set, there were silk scrolls, paintings, pottery, calligraphy materials, and a bespoke jade-stone red-ink stamp with my name etched in Chinese characters.

3. *HIMALAYAS: Contemporary Indian & Chinese Poetry*

In 2019, at 'Vak: The Raza Biennale of Asian Poetry' (curated by the Hindi poet, Ashok Vajpeyi) in New Delhi — I crossed paths with

my friend, Yang Lian, once again. It was during that festival that the idea of putting together an English-Chinese bilingual edition of six Indian and Chinese contemporary poets, took root.

Both Lian and I decided to choose 6 poets from China and India, respectively — with a fair representation of established and younger writers of both genders. Each poet received 6 poems from the 6 counterpart-poets for the act of translation. A total of 72 poems from a dozen poets are showcased in this anthology in both Chinese and English.

The poets included in *Himalayas: Contemporary Indian & Chinese Poetry* (a bilingual edition) from India are — Ranjit Hoskote 兰吉特·霍斯科特, Jennifer Robertson 詹妮弗·罗伯逊, Sudeep Sen 苏迪普·森, Ravi Shankar 拉维·尚卡, Arundhati Subramaniam 阿伦达蒂·萨博曼宁, C P Surendran C. P. 苏伦德. And from China — Zang Di 臧棣, Yang Lian 杨炼, Yan Rong 晏榕, Dai Weina 戴潍娜, Yang Xiaobin 杨小滨 and Wang Ziliang 王自亮.

Every individual poet has translated one poem each of their 6 counterpart poets. This process allowed for a constructive discussion, a collaborative dialogue among all the poets in the book. Since most Chinese poets represented here spoke fair or good English, they made the base Chinese translation themselves to begin with. Then these were discussed at length with the Indian poet-counterparts — eventually settling on the final versions.

Since most or all Indian poets did not speak Chinese, an experimental method was adopted by them: a) Using online translation tools, the Indian poets made two rough draft-versions of the poems. b) After cross-checking with Chinese colleagues who worked in universities in India and elsewhere, we built up the third version — our own — at the same time, making extensive notes of all the queries we might have had. c) Finally, through mutual exchange with Chinese poets, the Indian poets made the corrections and guided the poems towards their final versions.

Thereafter started the process of gathering the work for publication. Since all 72 poems were now available in both languages, this bilingual book features 144 poems. 'Part 1' features 'Indian Poets' translated by the Chinese poets from English to Chinese; and 'Part 2' features 'Chinese Poets' translated by the Indian poets from Chinese to English. These 'two parts' of the book are anchored and contextualized by two prefaces — written by Yang Lian and me.

4. "ONE WORD HAS WRITTEN A WORLD"

Spread over many months over two years, this enriching cultural exchange has held a very special meaning for us — especially given the fractured global context in which it has been conducted. Despite the two countries' tensions and standoffs at a political-diplomatic level — this book is an example of a successful artistic collaboration upholding mutual respect for each other's peoples.

India and China have had rich ancient ties through trade and culture. This book affirms that value, as well as the contemporary continuity of those ancient links. This anthology is an attempt to connect the two modern powers that reside on either side of the Himalayas — the world's highest mountain ranges that physically separates the two ancient civilizations, and yet continues to culturally link them both. I hope the readers will enjoy the diverse and engaging poetry buffet in *Himalayas*, as "one word" becomes the voice for not just India and China, but for a collective humanity.

— SUDEEP SEN
New Delhi | November 7, 2024

FURTHER READING

- 
- Chinese Love Lyrics: From Most Ancient to Modern Times* (New York: The Peter Pauper Press, 1964);
Cold Mountain: 100 Poems by the Tang Poet, Han-shan, Tr. & Intro. Burton Watson (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970);
Mao Tse-tung: Poems (Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1976);
The Silk Dragon: Translations from the Chinese by Arthur Sze (Copper Canyon Press, 2001);
Poetry Possibility by Yan Li (U S Digest, 2005);
How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology, Ed. Zong-qi Cai (Columbia University Press, 2008);
The Anchor Book of Chinese Poetry: From Ancient to Contemporary, The Full 5000-Year Tradition, Eds. Tony Barnstone & Chou Ping (Knopf/Doubleday, 2010);
Jade Ladder: Contemporary Chinese Poetry, Eds. Brian Holton, Yang Lian, W N Herbert & Xiaoyu Qin (Bloodaxe Books, 2012);
New Cathay: Contemporary Chinese Poetry by Ming Di (Tupelo, 2013);
Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry: Cathay, Translation, and Imagism by Ming Kie (Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2015);
Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei (with More Ways) by Eliot Weinberger (New Directions, 2016);
An Introduction to Chinese Poetry: From the Canon of Poetry to the Lyrics of the Song Dynasty by Michael Fuller, (Brill, 2020);
In the Same Light: 200 Tang Poems for Our Century by Wong May (Carcenet, 2022).

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PART 1

INDIAN POETRY

*translated from English to Chinese
by Chinese Poets*

RANJIT HOSKOTE | 兰吉特·霍斯科特

Ranjit Hoskote's [b.1969] seven collections of poetry include *Vanishing Acts: New & Selected Poems* (Penguin, 2006), *Central Time* (Penguin, 2014), *Jonahwhale* (Penguin, 2018; published by Arc in the UK as *The Atlas of Lost Beliefs*, 2020), *Hunchprose* (Penguin, 2021), and most recently, *Icelight* (Penguin, 2023). His translation of a celebrated 14th-century Kashmiri woman saint's poetry has appeared as *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Deḍ* (Penguin Classics, 2011). He is the editor of *Dom Moraes: Selected Poems* (Penguin Modern Classics, 2012). Hoskote curated India's first-ever national pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2011) and was co-curator, with Okwui Enwezor and Hyunjin Kim, of the 7th Gwangju Biennale (2008). Hoskote has received the Sahitya Akademi Golden Jubilee Award, the Sahitya Akademi Translation Award, and the SH Raza Literature Award. He has been a Fellow of the International Writing Program (IWP), University of Iowa; writer-in-residence at Villa Waldberta, Munich, Theater der Welt, Essen-Mülheim, and the Polish Institute, Berlin; and researcher-in-residence at BAK / basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht. His poems have been translated into German, Hindi, Bangla, Irish, Marathi, Swedish, Spanish, and Arabic.

兰吉特·霍斯科特 (Ranjit Hoskote, 1969-) 创作了包括《消失的行为：新诗和精选诗》(2016)、《中央时间》(2014)、《约拿鲸》(2018; 英国Arc出版社出版名为《失落信仰地图集》，2020)、《预感散文》(2021)，以及最新的《冰之光》(2023)等七本诗集。他翻译了14世纪克什米尔著名女圣徒诗人拉尔·戴德的诗集《我，拉尔：拉尔·戴德的诗》(2011)。此外，他担任了《多姆·莫莱斯：精选诗集》(2012)的编辑。霍斯科特在威尼斯双年展(2011)上策划了印度第一个国家馆，并与奥奎·恩威佐和金炫进共同策展了第七届光州双年展(2008)。他曾获得印度国家文学院金禧奖、翻译奖及SH·拉扎文学奖。他曾是爱荷华大学国际写作项目(IWP)的研究员；慕尼黑瓦尔德贝塔、埃森米尔海姆世界剧院和柏林波兰学院的驻地作家，以及荷兰乌特勒支BAK的驻地研究员。他的诗作被翻译成德语、印地语、孟加拉语、爱尔兰语、马拉地语、瑞典语、西班牙语和阿拉伯语。

NOOR

i. m. Zarina Hashmi (1957–2020)

Pinpricks of light
in the sky's black yurt

Looking up from a rutted road
our clay-spattered boots

making common cause with shovels
and burst tyres

our eyes narrow and widen
to grasp the incoming code

But that light is both marrow and bone
It defeats the gaze

*What we've lost
reclaims us*

Who can translate
its pulse?

*

努尔

光的针孔
遍布黑色蒙古包般的天穹

自车辙处仰望
我们的靴子已溅满泥浆

共同的目标显身在
铁铲和爆裂的轮胎处

我们的眼睛时而眯起时而瞪大
以捕捉隐秘的宇宙信息

SAMPLE

而那光既是骨髓又是骨头
它拒绝被凝视

我们丧失的东西
会将我们回收

何人能破译
这节奏？

译者：臧棣 (Tr. by Zang Di)

✱

圣光*

——追忆扎丽娜·哈希米 (1937-2020)

光的针尖
在天空的黑色蒙古包里

从道路辙印仰望
我们溅满粘土的靴子

铲子和爆胎的
老同事

我们的眼睛眯起又睁开
捕捉输入的代码

但那光即是髓又是骨
它击溃凝视

我们失去者
回收我们

谁能翻译
它的脉搏？

*圣光：原文为Noor，原诗作者注释：Noor为阿拉伯语，本义为“光”，同时在可兰经中，有神圣之光含义，如“众光之光”。此诗为追忆女艺术家扎丽娜·哈希米之作，故我将其翻译为“圣光”。

译者：杨炼 (Tr. by Yang Lian)

SENTENCE

This sentence of rushing water swirls
 around the silent hill where I first met snow
Let me take you by the hand she said
 let me show you where rock meets melt
how May's spasms get December's skulls
to break into flower and currents swell
 feeding the dry field where I fill
fossil fern with stolen sap
 This field is where
 I thaw into a thread and sew
these stacked pages of crystal and coal
 written over by scorch and snap
 these signatures you turn
believing they were willed to you
 blank
waiting for your script to spell itself
 with detonator and backhoe

*

句子

这个激流铿锵的句子
喧嚣于我第一次邂逅雪的
那山的寂静
她说 让我牵着你的手
告诉你岩石相遇而融化的地方
五月的痉挛如何俘获十二月的智慧
溅起水花 汹涌澎湃
喂养我干涸的田野
田野 满是我用异域树液喂养的蕨类化石
田野 融化为一根根针线
缝制因烧焦而堆积如山的
水晶和煤炭的诗页
逐一拍下上面的签名
深信这是遗赠给你的空白脚本

等你用雷管和反铲
亲自完成

译者: 王自亮 桂清扬 (Tr. by Wang Ziliang & Gui Qingyang)

✱

ECLIPSE

You waited all night for the eclipse.
A panther loped down to the lake
and swallowed the moon.

Another night you thought the wind
had called for truce. The moon
never crossed the laterite border.

A third night, searching in this field
where the sky had rained stars,
you found the moon

buried in a furrow that a yoked bull
had measured in loops from left
to right to left, turning

and returning. Speak, lunatic angel,
which was the right way?
Was I implement or impediment?

All night the eclipse waited for you.

月蚀

你彻夜等待月食。
一只黑豹俯冲到湖边
吞下了月亮。