

Book Review

Zhang Haihui 張海惠, Zeng Yingzi 曾英姿,
and Zhou Luo 周珞. *Zhongguo gudian shige
Yingwen ji qita xiwen yuzhong yizuo ji suoyin*
[Classical Chinese Poems and Their Western
Translations: Extensive Indexes to Recent
Renderings] 中國古典詩歌英文及其他西文語
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chubanshe, 2009. 275 pp. (ISBN: 978-7-5013-
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Classical Chinese Poems and Their Western Translations: Extensive Indexes to Recent Renderings, compiled by three librarians working in China and America, covers *shi* poems, including tetrasyllabic, pentasyllabic, *yuefu*, regulated and quatrain poetry, and several *ci* lyrics from the provenance of Chinese poems, extending from the *Shijing* 詩經 to the end of the Five Dynasties [including Li Yu 李煜 (937-78)]. The book features an index of English translations, with some coverage of French, German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish translations, as well.

Previous poetry translation indexes covering this era include Kai-Chee Wong, Pung Ho and Shu-leung Dang's *A Research Guide to English Translation of Chinese Verse (Han Dynasty to T'ang Dynasty)* and Sydney S. K. Fung and S. T. Lai's *25 T'ang Poets: Index to English Translations*, both published by the same Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1977 and 1984, respectively. *Classical Chinese Poems and Their Western Translations* fills a lacuna and provides a useful reference

through bringing together translations from ninety different sources. As the editors note, “These indexed translation collections and research works on classical Chinese poems were largely published after 1990 in Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, North America or Europe” (15). Another important contribution this book makes is to include many Chinese scholars’ English translations of classical poems, which deserve much attention and investigation.

The book is chronologically ordered. The first section is from the pre-Qin to the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589), and mainly discusses the *Shijing*, *Chuci* 楚辭, *gushi shijiu shou* 古詩十九首, *yuefu* 樂府, and individual poet’s writings. The editors cite the whole poems when the complete translations appear in books. If there is more than one translation available, the editors typically list two of them. The second section covers the Sui (589-618) through the end of the Five Dynasties, and the index is arranged by dates of birth and death of the poets. For example, under Li Bai’s (701-62) “Du zuo jing ting shan” 獨坐敬亭山, one finds Stephen Owen’s translation:

Sitting Alone by Ching-t’ing Mountain
The flocks of birds have flown high and away,
A solitary cloud goes off calmly alone.
We look at each other and never get bored—
Just me and Ching-t’ing Mountain (95).

This is followed by Xu Yuanchong’s 許淵衝 translation:
Sitting Alone in Face of Peak Jingting
All birds have flown away, so high;
A lonely cloud drifts on, so free;
Gazing on Mount Jingting, nor I
Am tired of him, nor he of me (95).

Following Owen and Xu's translations are twenty-two other available renderings in English, French, German, Spanish and Russian, listed by their abbreviations. The diverse translations offer multiple perspectives on a single poem due to the translators' various educational, teaching and research environments and backgrounds. This also serves as a communication platform between Chinese and Western scholars in terms of translating skills and practices. One sees, for example, modern scholars adopting different approaches to make sense of the past and carry on Chinese tradition. The editors collected the available translations and thereby provide readers more freedom and space to choose and compare. Readers need to carefully select translations fitting their own agenda, as the styles and purposes of the translations vary from translator to translator. Most of the poems listed in this index are popular ones in both China and North America, since they are used for teaching Chinese language, literature and East Asian culture. The editors also offer two useful indexes: one is of the poets arranged by *pinyin* listed with their poetry number; the other by the first couplet in Chinese, also listed with the poets' names.

Although most of these poems were composed a few millennia ago, they continue to draw the attention of scholars in the twenty-first century and continue to prove their lasting literary and aesthetic value. The editors, Zhang Haihui, Zeng Yingzi and Zhou Luo, have opened a new field for scholars and librarians to further their endeavours. One possible way of doing this would be through also collecting English translations from major journals published in North America and Europe. Many prominent journals in this field also provide a myriad of research articles, which include excellent translation of the poems from the Pre-Qin to the Five Dynasties, such as *Early China*, *Early Medieval China*, *T'ang Studies*, *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, and Reviews*, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, and *T'oung Pao*. Another way of further expanding the index might be to cover other literary genres, such as *fu* rhapsodies, narratives, and literary criticisms. The philological work of compiling indexes and

bibliographies takes time and dedication, and the task itself may be tedious, but the outcome is tremendously beneficial to the field and other scholars who want to conduct research in classical Chinese poetry. Another difficulty of accomplishing this task is that editors or compilers have to deal with many copyright issues with publishers and authors all over the world. Hopefully, more reference or index books will be published to cover either journal articles or other literary genres in the future. To complement this book, there is also a good website developed by Zeb Raft, “Chinese Poetry in Translation: A Bibliography,” which collects selected English and European translations of Chinese poetry, and one can easily search the entries by poem title, translation title, poet, dynasty, source title, or translator.

Reviewed by

Yue Zhang,

Ph.D. candidate, Department of East Asian Studies,
University of Toronto