

Three Poems From the Tang and Song Dynasties Translated From the Chinese by Lee Liyi



Happy National Translation Month!

In this installment, we're delighted to share three poems from the Tang and Song Dynasties translated by Lee Liyi. Accompanying the poems are lovely Chinese illustrations and notes about the poets and their historic context.

And remember, in September and beyond: read and share the translated poems you love using #NTM2017. Open your heart to new experiences and the beauty of the world, and celebrate its cultures and new voices. We hope our picks will become your new favorites. Let us know how you like them #TranslationMonth @TranslateMonth.

—*Claudia Serea & Loren Kleinman*

1. A poem from the Tang Dynasty by Anonymous



The Gold Embroidered Dress

Cherish not the gold embroidered dress;
 Treasure ye your youth.
 Cut the branch while the flowers bloom,
 Least the empty branch regret unloose.

About the poet

No one really knows who the author of this poem is. This poem was first mentioned by Du Mu, a Tang Dynasty poet, where he wrote that Du Qiu Niang sang this poem at a banquet. Du Qiu Niang's name later appeared as the author of this poem in a compilation of Tang poems, and subsequently, many similar compilations followed suit and accredited Du Qiu Niang as the poet. Only recently was this rectified, and it is still common to see Du Qiu Niang as the poet, and not Anonymous.

2. A poem from the Song Dynasty by poet Su Shi



Writing for Xilin Temple's Wall

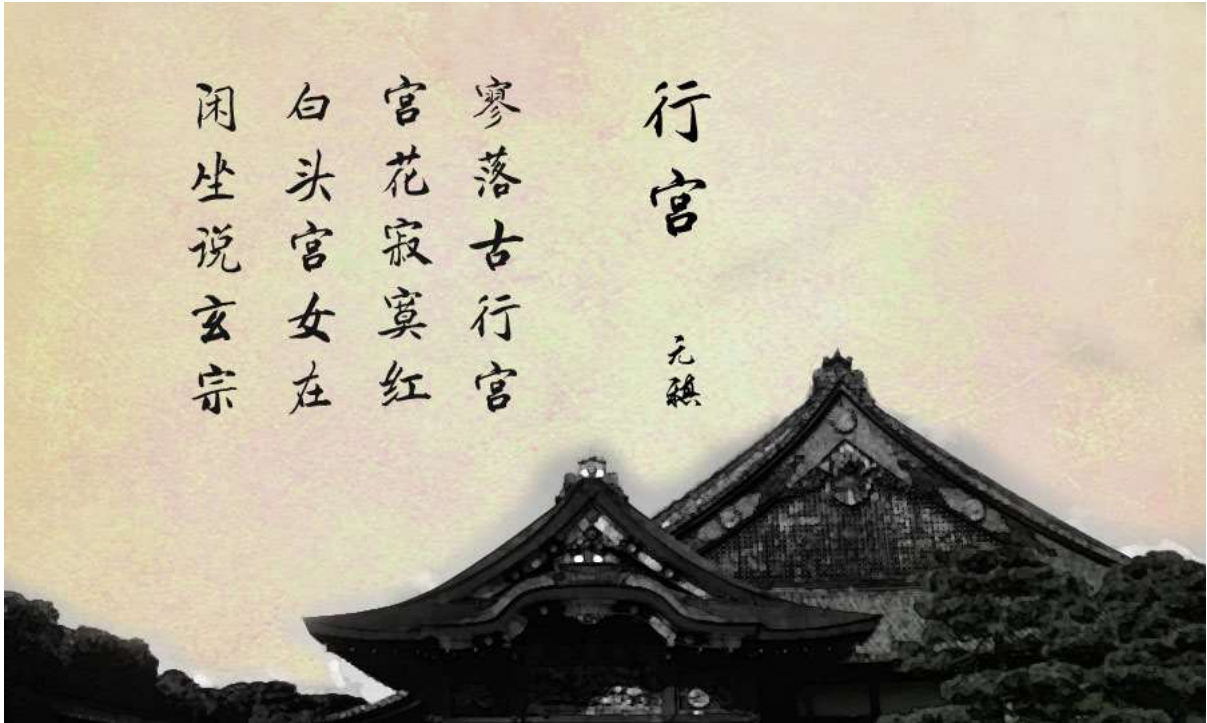
Ridges in front and peaks to the side,
Mountains in different shapes far and wide.
Of Lushan's true facade one can never know,
If one stays within the mountains so.

About the poet



Su Shi (January 8, 1037 – August 24, 1101), also known as Su Tungpo, was a Chinese writer, poet, painter, calligrapher, pharmacologist, gastronome, and a statesman of the Song dynasty. Su Shi was famed as an essayist, and his prose writings lucidly contribute to the understanding of topics such as 11th-century Chinese travel literature or detailed information on the contemporary Chinese iron industry. He passed away at the age of 64 in Changzhou in 1101.

3. A poem from the Tang Dynasty by poet Yuan Zhen



The Temporary Imperial Palace

Desolate is the palace old,
Where red flowers bloom in loneliness untold.
While white-haired palace maids,
Reminisce the emperor of old.

About the poet



Yuan Zhen (779 – September 2, 831), was a politician of the middle Tang Dynasty, but is more known as an important Chinese writer and poet. In prose literature, Yuan Zhen is particularly known for his work *Yingying's Biography* (鶯鶯傳), which has often been adapted for other treatments, including operatic and musical ones. In poetry, he is remembered for the inclusion of some of his poems by popular anthologies, his verses on exotic topics, and for being part of the group of "New Yuefu" poets, which often used poetry as a form of expression and protest, but one potentially subtle enough to avoid the likely repercussions of more direct criticism. He passed away due to a sudden illness in 831 and left a collection of 100 volumes of poems, draft edicts, commemorative texts, and essays.

Translator's Note

A poem that expresses the poet's feelings on the rise and decline of the world, the poet brilliantly used four short and simple lines to create an image complete with a place, time, characters, and action to illustrate the contrast of the past and the present, and the passing of time. The challenge here was to try to translate the somber mood in similar short lines, especially for the second line - but I am glad I managed to retain the rhyme scheme of the original poem.

—*Lee Liyi, translator*

About the translator



Lee Liyi is a born and bred Singaporean who wishes she lived in a library. When she's not daydreaming, she dabbles in designing POD (print-on-demand) products online and helps to translate subtitles for Hokkien Opera performances. In her free time, she loves to snuggle on the sofa to read, tortures her family by playing the violin, and finds fun in translating Chinese poems.