

**Han Bo**

## **A FLASH OF THE WORLD: TRAVEL IN THE CHINESE POETIC TRADITION**

In China, travel literature has a long history. Chinese poets in ancient times were fond of traveling and used it as a way to broaden their perspective, build their own characters, meet friends and spread their thoughts. They always wrote poems during a trip and passed them on to new friends. This helped to inspire new poems and made for language that was more vivid and exciting. It's one of the reasons many excellent poems were created during that period and were spread all over China. The poets went to different places and experienced different cultural conflicts, collisions, mixtures and communications. Their poems turned out fresher, sharper and more experienced. These poems have become a valuable legacy for the traditional Chinese poem.

China is a big, geographically varied country. For centuries it has housed many different minorities. The formation of Chinese civilization is based on the contributions of its entire population, which always absorbs fresh blood instead of enforcing a uniform culture. So it's very easy for anyone who is traveling to find new creative energy, especially poets.

Throughout the course of its long history, traditional Chinese mainstream culture has been strongly influenced by Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, especially Zen. This influence formed the character of Chinese poets because it changed their understanding of the world and their judgment of values. Varied ways of thinking resulted in varied ways to reflect the world.

For instance, more than a thousand years ago, in the Tang Dynasty, poets were mostly influenced by Confucianism and Daoism, which are actually two interlinked systems of thought. Poetry written during this period is different from that of all other dynasties. Reading this work, we can tell that the travels of Tang era poets mainly include: exciting travel when they are promoted in their careers; sad travel when they meet problems, especially in their careers; risky travel when they are leaving for frontier fortresses; and casual travel when they quietly retire into oblivion. The most famous poets of the period, Li Bai, Du Fu and Men Haoran all produced lots of excellent work during their travels. These reflect their fantasies, face reality or eulogize nature. All the travels and creative work not only widen the poets' viewpoints, but also contribute to the formation and enrich the character of traditional Chinese culture. In the Song Dynasty, right after the Tang Dynasty, Buddhism, especially Zen, became the most important philosophy. Poetry written then became even more unconventional. Themes changed from the narration of official travel to the freer travel of the heart. Poetry focused on the essence of nature, both geographically and psychologically. Song Dynasty poems also focused on the essence of Zen, and became more vivid. One of the most famous Song Dynasty poets is called Su Shi. His poems became vivid and varied after he was influenced by Zen teachings. Another famous poet called Wang Anshi worked in different styles for his early and late poems. His early poems were concerned with reality and society. But his later poems reflected deeply upon Zen teachings.

He understood the essence of the non-target of space and human life by appreciating the essential non-target of natural scenery and objects. For instance, he writes, “月入千江体不分”——“*The moonlight was divided into thousands of rivers but kept one shape*” and “云从无心来，还向□□□”——“*thoughtless Cloud as free as it should be*”. This understanding does not provide any kind of argument or analysis. Wang Anshi is just trying to present concrete things using concrete language, to look at things with things, so human beings can finally attain *moksha*, or release, from worldly life.

The poem is a very advanced form of literature. Traditional poetry is a resource that is a precious legacy for contemporary Chinese poets. Nowadays, travel is still the most important way for Chinese poets to know the world. For example, travel is very important to me. My travels inspired much of my writing. For in the present, both modern and ancient society exist at the same time. Travel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is both travel in space and travel in time.

The significance of poetry is its ability to gaze at the universe while resting on a base of abundant historical legacy. We develop an understanding of the world by reading poems. Although the outlook of human society is varied, the essence of the human being is constant. The relationship between human beings and the universe is constant, too. The knowledge gained from travel is just a flash of the world. It might be interesting. But we don't have to obsess about it. Otherwise, we will be constricted in our worldly life. The traditional Chinese poets influenced by Zen understood how to maintain a detachment from real life. Travel always brings us fresh experiences, and these experiences are very important to poets. But at the same time, they're not that important. The only thing that enshrouds the poets who experience a flash of the world is the constant sky instead of the dissentious earth.