This summer, Willie, Sylvia and Feroz embarked on a Travel Fellowship that took them through China, Kyrgyzstan and India. Their rationale was to retrace the route traversed by the protagonists in the seminal Chinese novel, Journey to The West (a text they encountered in Literature and the Humanities), and then transmute their travel experiences into inspired writing that simultaneously incorporates the themes of the novel such as impermanence, enlightenment, illusion versus reality, language, pilgrimage, stillness, and violence.

The following is a set of poems taken from their amateur anthology, titled The Further Shore:
The Further Shore
One Of Those Days
BY WILLIE KHOO

In a bed choking with ticks
Outside, a summer sky
not yet fully dark
You will say to yourself
Things are okay. Okay is good.

On an overnight train heaping with sleeping bodies
Under your feet, the chest of a man
next to wife and baby
unstirring

In a diner in China
Stare at your eight-hundredth bowl of noodles
Taste and the rust of language flaking
from tongue

On the back of a bus
A lover's note tearing you up
while the others sleep-nod in sympathy

Atop a mountain
The clearing beyond the pines
Sickle moon
in peerless dark, your hands pressed
in mine
in my jacket pocket
Intimacy to die for
A cold to die in
Like nothing you know,
could ever know,
what can anyone when wrapped in
incommunicado? When all living is vagrancy, ordinary
fantastical?
Big Dipper scooped in your palm
Us pointing at that one shooting star
shooting in different directions
Your word against mine.
Prayer Call in the Muslim Quarter of Xi’an

BY WILLIE KHOO

Hands on your cheeks
you silence the excess of the day
with your plangent obedience,
at first inaudible:
a trickle of voice
Air attempting to co-opt new sound.
Soon, an anthem of stoic inflections
Rising above
The squawks and heels of the bazaar
as evening light swells in silver.
Lone pillar in the courtyard, under
the jade-lustre of temple tiles,
you become center, convergence
the lilting songbird
beguiling even I,
feral visitor of no fealty
leaping from roof to roof
to you.
In the coldness of Kirghizia,
Waves slide back into acedia,
receding from feet to reveal
the rocky isthmus, this slick plank I walk,
Funambulist monk on a filament,
teetering toward the further shore aglow
with the bonfire's irreverence.
In sleep
I have spat and raged at the rising smoke,
Burned my fingers, ripped my robes,
Tossed into the embers the empty scrolls:
For this? I trotted all of the Steppes for this?
The beasts around the bonfire do not harm me,
for tonight I am one of them,
howling at the measled moon.
Walled in by cliffs on all sides,
the sky spun in grey
- black yarn,
surely this land is a giant yurt
and we are the naked dwellers
dwelling in some rounded corner of measureless Time,
squinting up at slashes of light in the needlework?

From behind the twisting junipers
my disciples cower and plot.
The fools, they fear for my sanity, my changed form.
What is form if not emptiness?
and what is emptiness if not the truest of forms?
Your words, on Vulture Peak.
Thousand-armed in lotus stance, you asked if I understood,
Took my hand in all of yours, a glint
in your statue's eye (or was it in mine?)
reminding me that even
in the coldness of Kirghizia,
when scrolls are wordless, when speech
fumbles like palms down
a dim stairway, I need only read
the lines of your jaw,
Those scarped features
the only scripture I need
To understand,
To reawaken in that garden of golden plums,
a wind of calm mounting in my chest,
a glaze of skin thickening
on my burned fingers.
爱乌及屋
BY WILLIE KHOO

I love the crows of this sleepy mansion,
sweeping down heartless hallways
roosting up there
in an attic undiscoverable.
I love their koww-kekows of play, intelligent banter
The rain they bring in the heat of Turpan.
Plumage black as black, absorbing
all colour, radiating auspices:
Hypnotic crow, compassionate crow
Fortune-telling crow
—of bearded husbands and mid-life surgeries—
People come and go, but the crows
Raven Magpie Jackdaw
I love them all
up there—a murder
The reason I never left this sleepy mansion
in the heat of Turpan.
Lake Issyk Kul
BY WILLIE KHOO

Yours is a soul unencumbered
unseething. Blue-beaked oddity,
the indecipherable
cursive of waves.

Across, the snow-capped peaks of Tianshan—
a litter of broken eggshells
gleaned at that distance
of no accurate exposure
Where neither the eye
nor the imagination governs.

Mountains
consummate as celestial flesh
yet fragile as moments
Like the hush that falls on the shore
when a passing cloud blots out the sun.

Afterward, light returning,
that sense of something forever changed—
A love cast away, an object misplaced.
Some Bodhi Tree I Used To Know

BY WILLIE KHOO

You were already in bloom
when I first coiled under
the arch of your arms.
You wore your hearts
on your leaves, a hundred thousand charms
rustling on a chain.
Drip tips sway
even in the absence of wind and rain.

Eyes closed
Body afield, insensate
I felt all of you: breath and planet
and root.
Enlightenment in the shade—who would have thought?
Who would have thought that your fame
would one day spread beyond mine, beyond
the stretch of your foliage
That the ground around you would teethe with beams and barriers
to break the waves of pilgrims?

Stiffly you watched
as I gathered my things, retreated
into another's awning.
I was never yours anyway—
Neither were you.
Remote
BY WILLIE KHOO

Heart of the Gobi, feel for a pulse.
Plastic tumbleweeding across blood moss
over salt floor riven
with scars. A once-river, now severed lake
Swashing not with liquid
but with black waves of wifi.
Brackets lengthen, diminish
Lengthen, tiding in
the sawdust shoes of travellers, deadweight eyes,
parched lips the shape of memes
lapping Desert’s crotch.
No food, no water,
No problem.

A dust storm picks itself up.
Folds of arabesques in the air
abrating the whites of distant caravans.
Nature once, nature ceasing.
What comes after, anyhow?
What slips, subducts, what
sands away
in that moment of connection?
What is the password?
向日葵
BY GAN SYLVIA

春天
早晨吞咽光明 深夜累积露水
黑暗里也会发光

夏天
夕阳西下 若面容纯情的女人
在紫山前起舞 供奉太阳

秋天
阳光织的花瓣 落在渠沟里
还有白莲之出污泥而不染

冬天
慈悲的花朵 融化了冷酷的白雪
今日雪葬花 来季花又开
在野外里，我坚决隐藏所有踪迹
我不想被发现
我选择下落不明
我不想被察觉
我喜欢来去无踪
与其刻上记号的成就感
不如学风悄悄来而去的神秘感

我愿来世
当恒久奥秘的大野
不再当平凡短暂的世人
菩提树
BY GAN SYLVIA

叶尾细如喙 西沙西沙
唱着佛经

树干曲如谜 纠纠缠缠
画着一生

悉达多静如山 七天七夜
修着登佛

树叶之间的空隙 是他的解脱
静晨
BY GAN SYLVIA

灰晨 红砖上的歇客
像古迹上插着的彩色旗
零零星星地在空中摇荡
看着常景
谁能想象那烂陀千年前的壮观?

前方 嫩草一片
独匹瘦马在放牧
马车里小睡的马夫
这个小景
若从未时间打扰过

隔着生锈的篱笆 一条泥路
电动车卷起沙尘暴
小贩对着离去的背影喊价：100！50！30！

就是佛教的茂盛地，
所以不会繁荣长久
望新疆
BY GAN SYLVIA

赛里木湖水是我的汗珠
天池的涟漪雕在我的脸上
饥饿如大峡谷
手和嘴隔着的距离
却
如戈壁漠
肚子里烧着的燃火
却
需芭蕉扇镇压

新疆青山碧水
却
真的吃不下面了
Paxmat (or: Rakhmat)
BY FEROZ KHAN

THERE you stand,
Eternal as a Celestial Mountain
Brow snowcapped with glistening sweat
Collecting, trickling, pooling into
Our evening meal.

THERE you remain,
Jaw-jut defiant against eternity
Against age, crow’s feet, raven’s summons
Into a world your limbs-ache says
You belong in.

THERE you lean,
Haggard breaths, stolen between plates
Marched out by twin rivers to
Your deltas and distributaries
Succour for the starving.

HERE we sit,
The monkey, the monk, the pig
On a march inexorable
But for the pangs and the parch
From which you deliver us, but

HERE you lie
Eyes milky with the impending thaw
Winter’s sheen stealing into your hair,
A reminder to those who forget—
From the mountains were we made,
And to them we shall return.
In the Dragonmosque
BY FEROZ KHAN

BACK-cracking releases bubbles
Of air, of unbelief, of my apostasy
As we kneel, in tandem, in
Surrender.

AT least, that is what I am told it means.
I have no opinion
Of my own.
Forehead sore from feverish worship,
I rise, ready for another bout.
(with my conscience)

ONCE I could not speak,
Only expound, proselytise, wax lyrical—
But I have allowed Him to strip
My vocal chords of their apostate’s hymn
Bereft my sacrilegious tune,
The only way to go is down.

DOWN, forehead, down.
Lest He find your newfound company
The Amitabhas, the Sakyamunis, the Gautamas
To feast his idol-starved company.
Wizard
BY FEROZ KHAN

UNDER the Bodhi tree
He stands, immovable as rock,
Gnarled fingers tight around his
Heavenly sceptre.

ANCIENT he is, and terrible,
Fierce as the waterfall’s crash,
Eyes shut but not unseeing:
His penance sustains the Sustainer.

SOFTLY he begins his recitation
A throaty rumble, earthquake-song,
Buddham, Saranam, Gacchami:
Ten thousand ears crane to hear
One man bring forth, with only his lips,

EVEN now, far away, I see him still
In a splinter of my mind’s eye:
A vision of Maitreya come among us,
Nagas straining to hear his song
Like lianas to sunlight, as he turns
Thrice the wheel of Law.
IN the public square by the train station
There is a conglomeration of souls.
Marked for death, they are, to the very last,
A bumper crop of souls doomed to rebirth

BUT!

YOU would never know it from their faces
Brows furrowed with dancer’s concentration
One-step, two-step, three; bounce, bounce, spin around
Guzheng and pipa lacing the dusk air.

ARTHritic limbs find regeneration
Amidst the melodies of the masses.
Forgotten fathers and forgetful sons
Recall old joys and sorrows between breaths.

THE dragon fears no wraith, no spectral shade,
For she has danced away her fear of death.
Ah! Would that my tribe could dance unprodded,
Unbidden, with nary a shepherd’s call—
In the public square by the train station.
Bishkek Boiling
BY FEROZ KHAN

THIS summer will never end
Why should it?
Wave after wave of heat cleanses,
Burns away the taint of corruption
Of maggots and black blood
Oozing through the mind’s eye.

THIS winter will never end
How can it?
The sun-snows slough off,
Flake by dermal flake,
Into the welcoming Earth
Bituminous and blistering,
Fissuring tarmac and dermis alike.

SPRING water clear as acid,
Crisp, sweet as sin,
Nourish, hydrate, corrupt
These youthful visages
That they may glimpse once again
Mafia come among us.
Guanyin
BY FEROZ KHAN

A God’s name is not to be taken in
Vain. Of this I am guilty, in my
Apostate’s arrogance, my feeble critique.
Let no man say I did not mourn;
On the Mountains of Suleiman, alone.

KINGS and queens will knock on her door,
Illiquid treasuries, labyrinthine and empty
To ask, to entreat, to endear, safe passage from
Eschatological demise.

SULEIMAN alone she welcomed, she aided, giving his
Vassals the strength to bear him across
Arid wastes. Thus did he, djinn-borne,
Return to the Mountain from whence I felt
All the world’s weight slip between sunbeams.
THESE fucking tourists are everywhere
“Shit! I wasn’t supposed to swear –
I mean, Astaghfirullah!”
Hypocrisy caught, self checked, I turn to find:

A legion armed with DSLRs,
Armoured head to toe:
Sunhat, fanny pack, TEVA sandal,
Opening fire, volley after volley,
Salvo after flashing salvo.

INDIGNANT, the “No Photo” sign watches on,
Appealing to me like a
Long-lost cousin fallen on hard times
To intercede, to push back, to defend holy ground
From the silent, unknowing desecration visited upon it.

BUT I am silent, unmoving
Sensing the smouldering bridge between us
Its embers still cracking with the heat
Of my shame.