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TRANSLATION REVIEW

诗歌精选 *Poesie scelte (Selected Poems)* by Ai Qing 艾青

Translated by Federico Picerni

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“There have been writers who embodied the journey of a society and a people through an entire historical era,” writes Federico Picerni in the introduction to *Poesie scelte* (Selected Poems); “Ai Qing is undoubtedly one of them” (Picerni in Ai Qing 2024, 7). The poetry of Ai Qing 艾青 is inseparable from his life, and the lyrical collection *Poesie scelte* offers clear testimony to this. Edited by the poet’s son, the renowned artist Ai Weiwei 艾未未 (b. 1954), the volume reflects a deliberate curatorial intervention: Ai Weiwei personally selected the poems included in this edition, boldly drawing from a vast corpus of over twenty lyrical and narrative poems as well as around one thousand short poems spanning six decades of the Twentieth century. Published by Damocle Edizioni, a small independent press based in Venice, the book presents the original Chinese texts followed by Federico Picerni’s Italian translations. The result is a rare and valuable opportunity for Italian readers to engage directly with the richness and complexity of Ai Qing’s work (see Ai Qing 1991).

Né Jiang Haicheng, Ai Qing (1910–1996) remains one of modern China’s most emblematic literary voices — a poet whose life, marked by revolution, imprisonment, exile, and ideological struggle, mirrors the turbulent trajectory of 20th-century China, as literature has powerfully illustrated over the decades. The forty-six poems collected in this edition — slightly different from the selections in English by Dorsett (2021) and Eoyang (1982) — are arranged chronologically, neatly tracing the arc of a life and a nation in transformation. In doing so, they construct a narrative that is both individual and collective, foregrounding poetry at once as testimony and as agent of historical experience.

One of the most refined aspects of this collection lies in its engagement with temporality. The renderings of Federico Picerni — a tenured scholar of Chinese language and literature at the University of Bologna, an expert on contemporary Sinophone poetry, and an experienced translator — carefully reflect the distinctions between the poet’s stylistic and ideological phases: the roaring, impassioned irregular rhythms of the 1930s and early 1940s gradually give way, following the Yan’an Rectification Movement and Ai Qing’s political compromises, to a more restrained and formal mode in the 1950s, and finally to the meditative desolation of his exile period (1957–1978). Yet, as Edward Soja points out in *Postmodern Geographies*, “so unbudgeably hegemonic has been this historicism of theoretical consciousness that it has tended to occlude a comparable critical sensibility to the spatiality of social life” (1989, 10–11). Then why not consider the “social being actively emplaced in space *and* time in an explicit historical *and* geographical contextualization” (ibid.) of poetry, instead? “Space has temporal meaning in the reflections of a poet, in the mystique of exploration, and in the drama of migration”, as the Sinophone geographer Yi-Fu Tuan observed (1977).

Poetry, in fact, is *also* a matter of space, and Ai Qing’s work powerfully attests to this dimension. Would his aesthetics have taken the same shape without the formative light, atmosphere, and visual geometries of Paris, where he studied painting in 1929? Would his political consciousness have found such resonance without the revolutionary milieu of Yan’an, where he

settled in 1941? And would his poetic voice have carried the same gravity had he not been exiled to the vast, desolate expanses of Xinjiang, where he was banished as a “Rightist” until his rehabilitation in 1979?

Poesie scelte naturally invites a spatial reading, as it charts the many geographies Ai Qing inhabited, traversed, or endured throughout his life. This spatial dimension is keenly supported by Picerni’s meticulous attention to paratextual elements — notably the place and date of composition at the end of the poems which are scarce in other collections. In most cases, these elements function as thresholds (*seuils*, in Genette’s terms) through which readers access Ai Qing’s physical positioning — or displacement. They operate as discursive coordinates that anchor the poems within a historically and geographically grounded framework. In this sense, the collection lends itself to a geopoetical reading (Westphal 2007), one where space is not just a backdrop, but a constitutive dimension of poetic meaning and experience.

Poesie scelte opens with a poem written during Ai Qing’s return to a politically fragile China via the Suez Canal in 1932, after a three-year stay in France. In Paris, where he studied painting and exhibited at the Salon des Indépendants, Ai Qing was already active in leftist circles, and soon turned to poetry, influenced by Symbolism and French modernism (Vuillemier 2018, 235). “阳光在远处”/“Lontano è il sole” (Distant Sunlight), sets the tone for the entire volume: composed in free verse and infused with a symbolist sensibility — clearly influenced by his readings of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and especially Apollinaire — it evokes the contrast between the darkness of the traveller’s mind and the distant and sneering sunlight.

阳光在远处

阳光在沙漠的远处，
船在暗云遮着的河上驰去，
暗的风，
暗的沙土，
暗的
旅客的心啊。
——阳光嘻笑地
射在沙漠的远处。
1932年2月3日 苏伊士河上

Lontano è il sole

Il sole splende nella lontananza del deserto,
 barche navigano sul fiume avvolto da nubi buie,
 buio il vento,
 buia la sabbia,
 oh, bui
 i cuori dei viaggiatori.
 - ridendo beffardo, il sole
 proietta i suoi raggi nella lontananza del deserto.

3 febbraio 1932, sul canale di Suez

(Ai Qing 2024, 30-31)

The Italian translation remains structurally faithful, visually accurate, and extremely respectful of the poem's rhythmic features — preserving, for instance, the anaphoric repetition of *an* 暗 (buio/buia/bui) and the enjambement preceding “旅客的心啊.” Yet it tends to introduce a slightly heightened emotional tone, especially in the final image. The rendering of *xixiao de* 嘻笑地 as “ridendo beffardo” (laughing in mockery) adds a layer of moral irony absent from the original, shifting the poem from understated ambiguity toward a more interpretive and ethically inflected reading — a choice that is not accidental but rather consistent with Picerni's broader translation strategy throughout the volume, where emotionally charged or symbolically pivotal images are often amplified to facilitate resonance within an Italian poetic horizon.

The imagistic dichotomy of “阳光在远处”/ “Lontano è il sole” is further developed in the second poem of the collection, which shifts from introspective symbolism to stark realism. Written from the French Concession in Shanghai, it transports the reader into a bustling village tavern and a slaughterhouse at night, where the kerosene lamplight, like a prairie fire, ignites people's anger, bitterness, hatred, and resentment.

After this surge of fierce intensity, the tone slows, finding rest in the emotional and familiar terrain of “大堰河 — 我的保姆”/ “Dayanhe: la mia nutrice” (Dayanhe: My Wet Nurse) — arguably Ai Qing's first major poem, *unarguably* the one that secured his reputation as a rising literary voice. Written while in prison — he had spent three years behind bars (until 1935) on charges of political subversion — and published in his 1936 debut pamphlet (see Crespi in Denton, 444), the poem transforms the figure of his childhood nanny into a symbol of China's anonymous peasantry. It functions as a spatial and emotional synecdoche, where

the Chinese countryside emerges as both a concrete landscape and a mythic point of origin, condensing the tension between inner and outer worlds, between physical constraint and spiritual yearning, between homelessness and the search for belonging. The poem recounts the unusual circumstances of Ai Qing's childhood: born into a landowning family that initially disowned him following a prophecy that he would violate Confucian ideals of filial piety (Batt and Zitner 2016, 273), he was lovingly raised by a local peasant woman named Dayanhe, whom he regarded as his true mother. From a mountain village in Zhejiang to the confines of a prison cell, from the warmth of a peasant's home to the cold distance of his biological family's house, "Dayanhe" offers both a lyrical homage and a reflection on displacement — spatial, emotional, and ideological.

The thread of travel through memory and place continues in the next poem of the collection, "芦笛 — 纪念故诗人阿波里内尔" / "Il mirliton — in memoria del poeta Apollinaire" which opens with a direct quotation from the French poet and transports the reader to a European psychic and emotional landscape — an image of conflicting intensities, nostalgia, and estrangement. Picerni's Italian translation reinforces this intertextual dimension, and his more sensorial rendering of certain images — such as the tale murmured by Marguerite — heightens the poem's decadent undertones without departing from its emotional core. This layering of Apollinairean imagery, however, also sharpens the tension between poetic imagination and lived reality, setting up the abrupt return to Ai Qing's actual circumstances.

Yet this imagined Europe stands in stark contrast to Ai Qing's material confinement in the French Concession of Shanghai — where he was put under arrest by the Nationalist Government on charges of "endangering the Republic of China" (*weihai Minguo* 危害民国), a place he evocatively likened to "the Bastille." In the poem, he pointedly evokes this condition by declaring: "Oggi / sono prigioniero nella Bastiglia. / No, non la Bastiglia di Parigi" — a metaphor that the translation preserves with notable clarity, retaining both the political irony and the emotional dissonance of the original. From prison, he composes several other verses included in *Poesie scelte*, fusing personal stasis with imaginative flight.

These early works often revolve around personal yearning and aesthetic experimentation, marked by a distinctly modernist sensibility. However, the tone undergoes a clear transformation following Ai Qing's release from prison, as he joins the literary front during the War of Resistance against Japan.

In 1937, as the Japanese army advanced southward through Shanghai and Nanjing, Ai Qing entered a period of relentless displacement across the country. It is during this time that his voice shifts toward a more explicitly collective register. On his way to Hangzhou, having fully embraced leftist ideals and an increasingly strong commitment to China's liberation, Ai Qing began to write also on behalf of others, thus earning national recognition. On his route to the remote Northwest, probably somewhere between Henan and Shaanxi, he gave poetic form

to the anguish of a besieged, wounded, and humiliated China, and particularly to the lives of the poor and dispossessed peasants, as in “乞丐”/ “Elemosina” (The Beggar):

在北方
乞丐徘徊在黄河的两岸
徘徊在铁道的两旁

Nel Nord
vagano i mendicanti sulle sponde del fiume Giallo
vagano ai lati delle ferrovie
(Ai Qing 2024, 86-87)

The title “Elemosina” shifts the focus from the individual to the abstract act of giving alms, thereby softening the immediacy and corporeality of the original, thus subtly reorienting the reader’s perspective – from the lived experience of marginality to a more reflective, moralised register – and touching upon the socio-realist emphasis that runs through Ai Qing’s early poetry. Ai Qing indeed composed this poem aboard a train travelling along the Longhai 陇海 railway – a route that cuts horizontally across the heart of China. At the time, he still described himself as a traveler: a man from the South who had left behind the remote mountains in search of the city. Over these years, he traversed diverse landscapes – Wuhan, Linfen, Guilin, Chongqing – in a state of political and personal uncertainty, still in search of ideological grounding.

A poem from this same period, “秋晨”/ “Mattina d’autunno” (Autumn Morning), illustrates how this mobility deepened his introspective engagement with rural China. Written during his stay in the countryside around Guilin in 1939, the poem juxtaposes the freshness of an autumn morning with the stark poverty of the village landscape, revealing a growing emotional entanglement with the country’s most vulnerable communities.

秋晨
凉爽的早晨
太阳升起来的早晨
可怜的乡村的早晨
一只白色眼圈的小鸟

站在低矮的房子的黑瓦上，
现在想着什么似的
看着彩云满布的高空
秋天了，
我来南方已一年了，
此地没有热带的呼吸，
看不见春天的椰子林，
心中已有难言的结郁
但今天，当我要离去时
我的心竟如此不安
——中国的乡村
虽然到处都一样贫穷、污秽、灰暗，
但到处都一样的使我留恋
1939年9月，在桂林乡间

Mattina d'autunno

Fresco mattino
mattino sollevato dal sole
mattino d'un miserabile villaggio
un uccellino dalle orbite bianche
sta sulle tegole nere della minuta casupola,
come assorto in qualche pensiero
osserva il cielo ammantato di rosee nuvole
è autunno,
sono a Sud già da un anno,
qui non v'è il respiro dei tropici,
nessuna traccia di primaverili palmeti,
nel mio cuore alberga ormai un'indicibile tristezza
eppure tanta inquietudine provo

oggi, mentre sto per partire- campagne cinesi:
 benché ovunque regni povertà, sporcizia, grigiore,
 tutto mi rende restio alla partenza.

Settembre 1939, campagne di Guilin

(Ai Qing 2024, 132-133)

Picerni's translation captures the poem's gentle anaphoric rhythm but slightly intensifies its affective tone: “可怜的乡村的早晨” becomes “mattino d'un miserabile villaggio,” a choice that adds a moral inflection, and, likewise, the line describing the white-eyed bird ultimately enriches the atmospheric detail while softening the original's delicate ambiguity. A similar shift occurs in the rendering of “春天的椰子林” as the inverted “primaverili palmeti”, which produces a more lyrical, idealised image that departs from the diaristic simplicity of the original. In the closing stanza, Ai Qing confesses his reluctance to leave the countryside – a sentiment Picerni conveys fully. The translation indeed preserves the emotional ambivalence, while subtly heightening its lyrical register, emphasizing the quiet attachment that underlies Ai Qing's evolving identification with the rural masses. This search ultimately led him to the Communist stronghold of Yan'an in 1941, a pivotal destination that marked the end of his sense of rootlessness and the beginning of a more stable ideological and poetic identity. It was there that Ai Qing was expected to subordinate his self (*zìwǒ* 自我) to the collective goals of the revolution.

The poetry of the early 1940s reflects this shift in tone and purpose. A new sense of rootedness often emerges through a declamatory and rhythmically assertive voice, crafted for public recitation and political mobilisation. Yet, as Picerni notes, Ai Qing never relinquishes poetic nuance. His work during this period continues to deploy a rich figurative repertoire, marked by intense and occasionally hallucinatory imagery. Symbols such as fiery torches, steel-forged words, and Promethean figures – evocative of Guo Moruo's early verse – come to dominate his poetic landscape, as poems like “火把”/ “La fiaccola” (The Torch), “黎明的通知”/ “Notifica di alba” (Dawn Notice), and “时代”/ “L'epoca” (The Times) – from which the following closing lines are quoted – demonstrate:

没有一个人的痛苦会比我更甚
 我忠实于时代，献身于时代，而我却沉默着
 不甘心地，像一个被俘虏的囚徒
 在押送到刑场之前沉默着
 我沉默着，为了没有足够响亮的语言

像初夏的雷霆滚过阴云密布的天空
抒发我的激情于我的狂暴的呼喊
奉献给那使我如此兴奋，如此惊喜的东西
我爱它胜过我曾经爱过的一切
为了它的到来，我愿意交付出我的生命
交付给它从我的肉体直到我的灵魂
我在它的前面显得如此卑微
甚至想仰卧在地面上
让它的脚像马蹄一样踩过我的胸膛
1941年12月16日晨

Nessuno prova un dolore più acuto del mio
all'epoca sono io fedele e devoto, eppur taciturno
nolente taciturno, come un detenuto in catene
appena prima di esser mandato al patibolo
taciturno, perché non ha parole abbastanza forti
come il tuono d'inizio estate romba attraverso cieli ammantati di nubi
esprimo la mia passione nel mio grido furioso
concesso in tributo a ciò che mi rende così entusiasta e meravigliato
l'amore che provo per esso vince ogni amore provato prima
per la sua venuta sono pronto a dare la mia vita
dare tutto di me dal corpo all'anima
così umile e minuto appaio al suo cospetto
tanto che desidero giacere supino a terra
lasciando che i suoi piedi come zoccoli mi calpestino il torace
16 dicembre 1941, alba
(Ai Qing 2024, 226-227)

His verse remains deeply attuned to sound, employing repetition, internal rhyme, and cadence to powerful effect. Federico Picerni's translation captures these nuances with sensitivity, focusing not on reproducing rhyme at all costs, but on preserving the poem's sonic paradigms. In the Chinese text, this sonority emerges through the recurrence of initial consonants (e.g., 沉默 *chenmo*, 抒发 *shufa*), the insistent parallelism of short clauses and by the acoustic weight of recurring syllables — especially in the cluster of “我沉默着,” whose rhythm shapes the poem's breath. Picerni's Italian mirrors this effect through patterned repetition and controlled pacing, allowing the poem's cumulative resonance to emerge even without replicating its original prosody. In fact, his rendering of Ai Qing's quasi-prophetic tone is particularly notable: expressions such as “没有一个人的痛苦会比我更甚,” literally “no one's suffering could surpass mine,” become the more measured “Nessuno prova un dolore più acuto del mio,” a choice that moderates the hyperbolic absolutism of the original while preserving its emotional charge. Likewise, the anaphoric sequence “我沉默着” is maintained through repeated occurrences of “taciturno,” though the Italian reorders the phrasing to achieve smoother prosody, thereby slightly reducing the abrupt, breath-like cadence present in the Chinese. His rendering of the poem's violent devotional imagery remains faithful, though less starkly corporeal than the original simile of horse hooves (*ma ti* 马蹄), which more forcefully conveys the extremity of submission. Yet these modulations do not diminish the poem's overall impact. Rather, they reflect a translational strategy aimed at balancing semantic fidelity with the rhythmic and idiomatic demands of Italian. The result is a version that preserves the poem's intensity and devotional fervor while offering Italian readers a text that remains both powerful and linguistically natural.

Thanks to the inclusion of paratextual notes, the reader is made aware that the four compositions from 1954 were written across a range of globally dispersed locations — a spatial dimension that might otherwise risk being flattened in translation. That year, Ai Qing writes “这是一个晴朗的早晨”/ “Questo è un limpido mattino” (This Clear, Radiant Morning...) from the sky over the Pacific Ocean, where, in a tone marked by clarity and emotional restraint, he reflects on the quiet lucidity of morning light:

这是一个晴朗的早晨
 飞机在高空中飞翔
 一朵朵白云像在微笑
 我的心是阳光满照的海洋
 我写过无数痛苦的诗
 一边写，一边悲伤
 如今灾难总算过去了

我要为新的日子唱歌

1954年7月16日，太平洋上空

Questo è un limpido mattino

l'aereo solca l'alto cielo

tra nuvole disposte come in sorriso

il mio cuore è un oceano irradiato dal sole

Infinite poesie di sofferenza

ho scritto, dolente,

ma sono infine passati i lutti

canterò inni per i nuovi giorni

16 luglio 1954, in volo sull'oceano Pacifico

(Ai Qing 2024, 236, 237)

Picerni's translation follows this tonal register closely, rendering the poem with a fluid idiom that conveys both its brightness and its sense of renewed openness. His version foregrounds the poem's linearity and transparency, allowing its visual clarity and emotional composure to emerge without strain. The overall effect is a text that remains faithful to the poem's essential movement — from long-endured suffering toward a quietly affirming sense of possibility — while presenting it in an Italian lyrical voice that is cohesive and unobtrusive.

In Rio de Janeiro, Ai Qing offers a critique of the social hierarchies produced by white colonialism, and from Santiago de Chile, he meditates — through a subdued and allusive tone — on the disillusionment that can follow the achievement of political liberty.

This marked geographical dispersion invites a reassessment of the role of travel in Ai Qing's poetics. One may ask whether such displacement functioned as a form of caesura, enabling a re-evaluation of questions of freedom, belonging, and subjectivity. Did the exposure to global perspectives contribute to a relocation of the poet's voice, not only in ideological terms, but also in terms of aesthetic orientation?

It is during this phase that Ai Qing advances an implicit yet incisive critique of the normative constraints imposed by socialist realism. At this point, he begins to reclaim a quieter, more elusive form of subjectivity that distances itself from the declamatory and collectivist tones of his earlier work, invoking instead silence and evoking the subtle sounds and gentle touch of nature — which, having once served as an active ideological agent embodying violent and

vibrant struggle, now returns as a metonym for contemplative wisdom and a gentle, inward renewal.

The deafening sounds and blinding colours of nature that marked the poetry of Ai Qing's ideological awakening are not abandoned, but rather undergo transformation. This evolution does not dissolve the core dialectic between interiority and exteriority; instead, it enriches it – echoing Gaston Bachelard's insight in *The Poetics of Space* that the imagination does not replicate the world but “augments the values of reality”, turning external space into a projection of inner being (Bachelard 1994, 5). In this light, nature remains both mirror and catalyst of subjectivity, a site where perception and reverie converge in the poetic image.

Another significant hiatus in Ai Qing's trajectory inserts itself between the two decades of his political exile, spent in the northern regions of Heilongjiang and Xinjiang. This prolonged marginalisation marks not only a rupture in Ai Qing's public life but also a crucial moment of interior recalibration in his poetic vision. The enforced silence of these years reinforces a shift already in motion – away from overt ideological proclamation and toward a more introspective, ambivalent, and metaphorically charged language. Exile, then, becomes both a literal and figurative space of retreat, mirroring an inward withdrawal while also preparing the ground for a re-emergence of poetry as a space of resilience, solitude, and reflection.

Ai Qing's lyrical “silence” in *Poesie scelte* is eventually broken by “鱼化石”/“Fossile di pesce” (Fish Fossil) – a poem dated 1978 and written in the capital, where he was allowed to return in 1975, that also marks a return to the page, and testifies to a sensibility reshaped by physical hardship, philosophical distance, and a renewed lyrical economy. Formally composed of seven quatrains, it weaves together phonetic rhymes, syntactic parallelism, and rhythmic balance – elements preserved by Picerni in his Italian translation.

你绝对的静止，
 对外界毫无反应，
 看不见天和水，
 听不见浪花的声音。

ti volgi indifferente al mondo esterno,
 il corpo immobile in paralisi assoluta,
 per te sono invisibili il cielo e i mari,
 a riva l'onda si frange oramai muta.

(Ai Qing 2024, 254-255)

In these lines, Ai Qing uses a stark, declarative structure to express total sensory withdrawal, stating simply that the subject is motionless, unresponsive, and unable to see or hear. Picerni's translation rearticulates this austerity in a more openly lyrical and interpretive register, and preserves the thematic core of immobility and detachment while presenting it through a more expressive and imagistically enriched Italian idiom.

If rhythm used to form a vehicle for incantation, persuasion, and emotional resonance, in this poem, it becomes almost sculptural — a formal expression of Ai Qing's inward turn and retreat from more expansive ideological terrains. The metaphor that underpins the poem is powerful, yet not quite violent, shaped by sedimentation, echo, and the silent persistence of memory. This metaphor also lends the poem a remarkable sense of temporal depth, layering geological and existential time in a single image, a strategy that resurfaces in the 1979 work “盆景”/ “Bonsai”, written from Canton:

都有铁丝的缠绕和刀剪的折磨

任人摆布，不能自由伸展

一部分发育，一部分萎缩

prigionia di fil di ferro e tormento delle cesoie

rassegnati all'impotenza, non possono espandersi in libertà

una parte cresce, l'altra avvizzisce

(256-257)

In “Bonsai”, Ai Qing extends the motif of constrained growth to probe the tension between vitality and imposed limitation. The Chinese lines rely on precise, tactile imagery — iron wire twisting, blades cutting, partial flourishing and partial decay — to articulate a compact meditation on deformation and curtailed development. Picerni's translation offers a compact, rhythmically balanced rendering that retains the poem's layered meditation on thwarted development while introducing a subtly more interiorized tone. Viewed alongside “Fossile di pesce,” the poem reveals a shared strategy: in both texts, temporality is rendered through miniaturized scale and layered imagery, offering a remarkable perspectival depth that spans geological, historical, and personal time, thus mirroring their introspective substance.

The depth of philosophical reflection continues in the final two poems of the collection, both of which turn their gaze toward open space and the traces of history inscribed within it. Dated 1979, “墙”/ “Il Muro” (The Wall) is one of the most poignant late poems. Composed in

Germany, as Picerni notes in the preface (23–25), it stands as a veiled yet firm critique of the Berlin Wall — portrayed as a cowardly attempt to arrest the natural flow of things and suppress their silent, universal energies. The wall becomes an emblem of artificial division and existential stagnation, a motif that contrasts starkly with the mobility and permeability that characterise Ai Qing’s earlier poetics of space.

Poesie scelte concludes with “交河故城的遗址”/ “Le rovine dell’antica Jiaohe” (The Ruins of Ancient Jiaohe), which Picerni describes as carrying an “existentialist” reflection on the transience of time:

仿佛有驼队穿城而过
 人声喧嚷里夹着驼铃
 依然是热闹的街市
 车如流水马如龙
 不，豪华的宫阙
 已化为一片废墟
 千年的悲欢离合
 找不到一丝痕迹
 活着的人好好地活着吧
 别指望大地会留下记忆
 1980年

Sembra di vedere file di cammelli attraversare la città
 sentire il vociare di uomini mischiarsi ai loro campanelli
 il mercato ancora vivace e affollato
 lussureggiare di carri e cavalli
 No, il sontuoso palazzo reale
 è ormai mutato in cumulo di rovine
 nemmeno una flebile traccia
 di millenarie glorie e intemperie
 Chi vive, in felicità e pienezza viva!
 Non speri che la terra ne tenga traccia.

1980

(Ai Qing 2024, 262-263)

In a few stark lines written in 1980, Ai Qing evokes the remnants of the ancient city of Jiaohe in Xinjiang, once a glorious city and a major stop on the Silk Road during the Tang dynasty, later abandoned, between the 13th and 14th centuries, due to Mongol invasions and the redirection of trade routes (Westphal 2007; Ai Qing 2024). Ai Qing does not mythologise the site – now reduced to spectral remains – but highlights the magnitude of historical erasure. From a geopoetical perspective (Westphal 2007), the ruins become metaphors for temporal rupture, epistemic silence, and symbolic displacement. Once a site of movement and exchange, Jiaohe now embodies interruption – a palimpsest of sedimented time. These ruins are neither reclaimed nor romanticised; they are observed in their inaccessibility, mirroring Ai Qing’s late poetic mode of restraint and detachment. Viewed through Bachelard’s lens (1994), the ruin – precisely in its discontinuity – becomes a resonant poetic space, charged with absence, memory, and latent meaning. In Picerni’s translation, this movement from reconstructed vitality to erasure is not simply transferred but reframed through an Italian idiom that smooths the poem’s tonal shifts while maintaining its structural arc. The evoked bustle of the ancient city – camel caravans, market noise, the flow of carts and horses – is rendered not through the tight, idiomatic similes of the Chinese, but through more expansive impressions of splendour and motion, such as “lussureggiare di carri e cavalli” (the luxuriant bustle of carts and horses) for “车如流水马如龙,” which generalises the image while preserving its atmospheric energy. This recalibration gives the poem’s reconstructed past a slightly more lyrical contour, which heightens the impact of the sharp negation that follows, aligning the Italian rendering with the poem’s structural logic of sudden rupture.

Ultimately, *Poesie scelte* is more than a collection; it is a biography in verse, a historical and geographical record, and a testament to poetry’s endurance. Federico Picerni’s translation brings Ai Qing’s voice into Italian with both poetic sensitivity and historical awareness. And this is no small feat. His work captures the evolution of Ai Qing’s verse – from the irregular, impassioned rhythms of the 1930s and ’40s, through the restrained tone of the 1950s, to the meditative desolation of his exile years – and strikes an effective balance between fidelity and interpretation, preserving the emotional and rhythmic texture of the original. At the same time, some stylistic choices tend toward a classicizing tone, which may feel slightly anachronistic to contemporary Italian usage, and a few minor typographical slips are present, without significantly detracting from the overall quality of the edition.

In the end, *Poesie scelte* offers a compelling and timely portrait of one of modern China’s most emblematic poets. Through Picerni’s attentive translation and editorial insight, Ai Qing’s voice – at once intimate and political, lyrical and historical – resonates with renewed clarity. This volume not only invites Italian readers to discover a seminal figure of global

modernism but also encourages reflection on poetry's enduring role in mapping, resisting, and reimagining the boundaries of collective and individual experience across time, and just as crucially, across space.

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