

## **My East**

The East

The East of the world

My East!

I am the brown bear in the mountain streams of the east.

A boy looking searching within the cave of crimson thorns.

Ask the writers in my dream about my name

My surname can trace back to the era of Peking Man

East, oh East!

How pure and cold your sweet spring flows

In the east, there is no mountain I have not climbed

The brow of the ape still bears my likeness.

Who comes in woven bamboo, seeking for me

Who has not stood naked, in the season of childhood?

I am a poet of the East

I think for the East

My words rise from the warm layers of its native lands.

History is folding in my hands.

Nizami and Navoi once sought it

Innocent and pure, the soul of Asia

With that same innocence, I too gaze upon the world—

and at the same time, I brim with confidence.

My body is a speck of Asia,

a crystal from the Himalayas,

a fallen leaf,

hidden in the oil beneath the land of Arabia

the Kṣitigarbha of Tibetan myth,

The Ishtar Gate of Babylon.

East, my sky and my dust

I love you.

I love you with a voice the weep.

I love you— like the smooth brow of a mountain doe

I love the droopings of gulls upon the sea

The debris of your ridgeline

I love

The heat stored for millennia in the earth's crust

I love my heroic ancestors

I love

And I embrace

The cracking sound of insects and ants gnawing

Someone whispers to me.

This is my sacred poem

That I will not forget

I will not forget my brothers  
I will not forget the furious sky over Africa

My east, my East—  
I will not stain the white hat of the sons of your mountains  
I bathe on the banks of your clear river  
Put tiger skin over my body  
And return  
To the meadows of Fergana

I will not defile the clarity  
In its purity, I wash away the dirt from my face  
My East  
I embrace you.  
It is in embracing you that I entered the world

East  
East of the World  
East of my ancestors  
Come  
Let my forehead touch the soil that birth your poetry  
Where is your quill, the feather pen?  
May you often fly across my sky  
Beautiful birds with wings of white

Where have you gone?  
Each day, I wander through my dreams  
My ancestor, named Akhboz  
Drew his bow with his mighty arms  
The whole coastline seems to be on fire

I am longing  
For the youth of Ferdowsi  
For Fuzuli.  
For you, I will bind my poetry to Egypt  
I am the brilliance of the East  
These are my thoughts  
Carried from the East

East  
East of the world  
My brown East  
I am proud to share your skin  
I am Asian  
With the gender of Asia  
I weep for Asia  
And I cheer for Asia

Asia  
Golden Asia

Thorough this place once passed the caravan of Middle Age  
Cranes flew by, like string of pearls.  
calling out, calling out, then gone.

Where are the fairies of Mā Warā' al-Nahr (Transoxiana)?  
The veiled beauties of Baghdad, Egypt, and Qin  
They veil their faces.  
And I gaze at them, as if through the night.  
They were born within the veil  
And died beneath it

East, O East—  
Sorrowful East  
A cruel dagger, blood spraying wide  
The karakalpaks  
Reciting verses to the saxaul shrub

Bows and arrows  
The shepherd's chest heaves with breath  
Upon the sacred mountain, my body  
Returning with my father's coffin on my shoulders

How many years  
Has the Kipchak steppe been drenched in blood?  
Bodies wrapped in shrouds  
How many years has the whip of night  
Ridden the sky above the East  
Smearing it with the fire of hell

What day was it  
What ship heavy with gold  
Sailed down the Yangtze River  
Opium smoke rose into the sky.  
In the palace, wine was fermenting  
And in those years  
In the fields, the lives of peasants  
were paid for in blood.

Time, O time –  
White-headed in March  
Winter's palm slowly opens.  
When will the turquoise of Samarkand melt?  
The East is the grave of spring  
Countless sprits flood the page of angels  
The earth now is a lump of rotting flesh  
The wind carries the scent of blood and music

East  
My mighty East

I exist upon the petroglyphs of the continent (Материк)  
The Earth spins toward the East  
I will write history as a part of the East  
I build domes for the departed spirits  
Upon my sacred threshold,  
Let there not be the twin stone lions side by side.

Listen, my mighty captain  
Tell me – do you still remember  
From which mountain came  
The first drop of blood on your sword?  
English maiden  
French gentlemen  
Tell me –  
Whose hands had put that silk  
Upon your shoulders?

I, who walked through the Thousand Buddha Cave, says  
It came from fine marble carvings above  
From the towering Buddhist temple in Hangzhou (Leifeng Pagoda)  
From Burma, Tehran, and Singapore  
Plundered from the chessboard of Calcutta  
Bored of the Ganges' great descent

Listen, my friend in New York  
I arrived this world a thousand years  
Before your Statue of the Liberty  
A thousand years is a thousand years  
In those thousand years  
From the pyramids of Egypt  
I hurled down my stones.

I know the world holds a unified culture  
It has its own voice, melody, and rhythm.  
All great voices echo in my ears  
I will not let this world be so easily divided  
Let all dreams converge  
Toward the golden spring on Phae's peak.

I know the world's last trumpet  
Will sound beyond the ear of the earth.  
Pythagoras's theorem  
I learned from the West  
But never forget: algebra was born in the East.  
The words of sages are not sweet wine—  
But bitter medicine, slow to ferment  
The church must not be consumed by rot

I know, O Europe  
I will not forget.

Your hot blood has flowed through my frozen veins  
I will not forget.  
With you gentle palm  
You once caressed my brow.

Who will join me –  
To embrace the East with open arms  
To raise a cup and drink deep of sorrow,  
Fading and aging through the years.  
The limping old man  
Coughs in a winter with no way out.

The enemy, like a venomous serpent,  
Once slithered into my sweetest dreams.  
My enemy is within arm's reach  
My enemy is far beyond the horizon  
My enemy is all around me.

My dearest friend is in the West.  
My dearest friend is in the East.  
My companions  
What kind of era echoes my lament?  
Napoleon's sword in the chest of the Carpathians.  
Ah, the era –  
My bones too were broken in that time.

I will not forget.  
I too held a gun, standing among the ranks.  
Son of the West  
Son of the East  
I was among them too.  
Five years, fourteen years.

East,  
My golden East  
Lay down all your burden  
Let me raise them to my chest  
I am your final, aging disciple  
Let me repay you with a poem.  
Asia is awakening,  
Soaring on the wings of dreams,  
Following its own songs and rhythms.  
Honoring wisdom and the teachings of the ancestors,  
Cleansing the soul with the mercy of the wise.

Where are Adam's footprints?  
Upon the soil I will roll –  
Formed of earth,  
Kin to both mankind and the planet.  
I will bind myself to the pillar.

What is flame? What is water?  
Nature shall not change on your hand.  
The East is a feast of poetry  
Agates and gems  
Scattered pearls rolling afar.

Come, my noble guest,  
Travel far with me.  
Let us behold Asia's mighty peaks.  
Towering fortresses, relic of old —  
Forever open to those who understand.

Come, drifting Robinson,  
Marco Polo, Mister Christopher Columbus,  
All you wanderers who have roamed the world —  
Come to my East.  
Behold the Sphinx of Romanticism.  
Pushkin, Lermontov —  
Come, honored guests, take your seats  
In the halls of Abai and Nava'i.

Come,  
All sages of realism—  
Come, Heinrich Heine, to my Kashgar,  
Dressed in floral robes.  
Byron, come swiftly to Almaty,  
Let Zhambyl kiss your brow.

Honoré de Balzac,  
Let the eastern breeze dry the sweat upon your brow—  
Come.  
I invite you with sincerity,  
And this is the message I offer to you all.

Come, Juliet, my dear sister,  
I'll take you dancing in the theaters of Shanghai.  
I am the wave of the waltz,  
I will hold your hands—  
And leave your poetic heart behind.

Where are my kindred spirits of this era?  
I am the humblest listener in this sacred age.  
And our descendants, too,  
Will continue to make their own choices  
Mother of Noah—and my mother too.  
Earth, O Earth—  
The Earth has my East,  
And the Earth has my West.  
Both hemispheres in my arms,  
Bound parallel upon my belt.

Let us not shatter the sacred cauldron (kazan) of the Earth,  
Let us not melt the gold and the silver.

East  
My mystical East.  
I live within your magic.  
I come from the Earth,  
I am of the Earth.  
I will carry this glory for another thousand years.

East,  
East of the world—  
The East is my mother.  
Who could forget their cradle?  
I am history, and I am that one—  
The one who asks the writer of dreams for their name.

Where are you, ancients of the East?  
My distant ancestors, sages of verse—  
Where is the quill? It rests in your hands.  
My kin, my brothers and sisters.

A sonata of Nazım Hikmet's poetry—  
Guo Moruo, raise your voice and recite your vow.  
Samed Vurgun chants toward the crane-like spring,  
Mukhtar calls Abai his elder brother.  
Moonlight glows upon the snow-white beard,  
Ghafur Ghulam, read of your East,  
Read of my Omarkhazy Aytan's verses.

## Author's Biography

**Omarghazy Aitan** was a Kazakh poet born on November 20, 1931, in Tore County, Tarbagatay Prefecture, Xinjiang, China. After graduating from high school, he worked as a teacher and later earned a degree in literature from Xinjiang University in 1957. He became an editor at *Shugyla* magazine. In 1959, amid political repression, he was imprisoned along with many other young intellectuals, enduring over two decades of hardship before being exonerated in 1978. He was a member of the Chinese Writers' Association, served as an executive member of the Xinjiang Writers' Association and the Xinjiang Folklore Society, and held the titles of national-level editor and first-class writer. He passed away in Ürümqi on April 26, 1997.

## Translator's Note

I chose to translate the works of Omarghazy Aitany into Chinese and English because I believe his artistic contributions have been severely underestimated—despite being widely

loved among the Kazakh people. This poem was written during his student years at Xinjiang University, and already reveals a deep and expansive vision.

The "East" in this poem is not the objectified "Orient" of Orientalist discourse. Rather, it is a source of identity and pride. Aitan speaks as the East, not about it, and addresses the West in a voice of equal standing. He invokes Central Asian and Arab writers, classical Greek mythology, and European literary figures with ease. He invites Heinrich Heine to Kashgar, Byron to Almaty, and hosts them in the halls of Abai and Navoi.

This poem must be read in the context of minority literature in 1950s China. What is striking is Aitany's profound knowledge of the outside world—especially considering he had limited proficiency in Chinese. This challenges the dominant center-periphery model through which minorities are often viewed in China. Aitan was born in Tarbagatay, a commercial hub where Tatar and Russian influences were strong. His knowledge likely came through the Russian language and contact with Tatar intellectuals. In this light, a Kazakh writer from China's remote northwest might well have had a worldview just as rich as that of a Han Chinese writer from the center.