



FOOTPRINTS OF MY LIFE
Selected Poems of Tomur Dawamat

THE ETHNIC PUBLISHING HOUSE



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Tomur Dawamat and His Spouse



Tomur Dawamat and His Friends



Tomur Dawamat Chatting with the Peasants



Tomur Dawamat Visiting Huaxia Electronic Equipments
General Factory



Tomur Dawamat With Workers



Tomur Dawamat With Children



Tomur Dawamat Visiting Algerian Countryside

Preface

I have been well informed of Tomur Dawamat's poetical works and his persona for quite a long time. His sixth collection of poems *Footprints of My Life* in the Chinese edition has stunned the domestic cultural circles since its publication by the Writers Press in February 2000. Now, I am extremely pleased to see this translation of his masterpieces come forth to face an even larger readership, I think the readers in the world will be as pleased as I am.

Mr. Tomur Dawamat is one of my most beloved and respected elders. He has taken various leading posts in the Xingjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, and has come to be vice – president of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress since the mid – 1980s. In spite of tiresome daily work, he managed to find time to compose so many charming and wholesome poems, revealing his true passion spurred by his poesy.

His poetry is characterized by a wide range of themes, the profound yearning for patriotism, national unity and human progress, and the Uygur custom – ways of aestheticism. His nostalgic, patriotic and humanistic enthusiasm is not confined

to a narrowly specified place, but open to an enlightened ideal and spiritual world. Only by cherishing such a broad – minded outlook, can he view with the same aesthetic empathy the snowflakes or cloud – like livestock in Tianshan and the gorgeous flowers or green bamboo in Kwangchow, the black fossil oil from Karamay in Xingjiang and those from Abu Zaby in the United Arab Emirates, the ancient camel fleets across the desert and the woman Meng Jiang weeping over the Great Wall! **The poet has traveled extensively, both at home and abroad, for getting to know the people, for national and international co – operation, and for world eternal peace and friendship.** These are all vividly described and freely expressed in his poems.

Mr. Tomur Dawamat was born in Toksun, Turpan Basin. He experienced great historical changes in China in his early years, and started his revolutionary work on the very basis of his hometown, wherein he was rooted, nurtured and brought up. With perseverance, diligence and keen sensibility, he learnt eagerly from both life and literary books. Though he displayed an indisputable poetic talent early in the 1960s, his achievement as a poet is significantly related to the cause of Reform in our country.

The first and foremost important thing for his being a successful poet lies in his wholesome knowledge of poetic essence

and its social function. For a long time, in our country as well as in the West, people have been inclined to think that poetry has nothing to do with knowledge, i. e. in prevailing Chinese usage, “shi bu guan xue”. However, Tomur Dawamat is well aware that he was not born to be poet, but learnt to be poet; he is ready to admit that heroes come out of the young while poets not wholly therefrom, as he himself was in no favourable condition that would make him a poet in his early days. After a long apprenticeship, now he has not only got into the thresholds of Nine Muses or various disciplines of knowledge, but also become an established guest of honour there.

One may consider his paying sincere homage to knowledge as the most important guarantee both for his personal fulfillment and for our national modernization. Who can pass by the following stanzas without a thrill:

The ignorant fellows set mental labour at naught,
Thinking you ought to bear all such hardships.
Forsooth, is anything easier than truth – searching?!
Only the chimney knows how awkward to
smoulder.

The shameless persons profanely said:

“Mental labour is the shortcut to fame”,

Not knowing delving into any discipline of
knowledge

Equals dredging a well with an embroidery needle.

These two stanzas are taken from his poem *Engineers*, in *Songs of Karamay*, where we can find that he calls the petroleum black gold, or the true love dedicated to our Motherland by the workers' heart – blood. Then, why not look into Tomur Dawamat's poetry in the same way?

Zhai Taifeng, vice – president,

The Association of Writers, P.R. China

Translators' Note

Tomur Dawamat is one of the most distinguished statesmen from the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, P. R. China, as well as a poet. In 1963, he published his first poem, *Cedars*, which delighted poetry-lovers with fresh imagery, touching sincerity and poetic dexterity. From the early 1980s onwards, he has written many poems, which have been published in six collections. This English edition consists of poems selected and translated from those in Chinese.

We seem to be accustomed to hearing the assertion that poetry is dying, or the question: What has gone wrong with poetry? After reading Tomur Dawamat's poems, we would have to admit that the allegation is only true of some modernistic or postmodernistic poetry, which went so far as to alienate all literary traditions and most general rules of appreciation. We once again feel assured by Tomur Dawamat that nothing has gone wrong with poetry except the modernist poetics. He has come to be a celebrated poet wholly by the light of nature: he doesn't follow any arbitrarily defined poetics, so he can write such lines as

Here no empty nor big words are allowed,
Only down – to – earth personae are adored.

No doubt, Dawamat has learned from, and sung praises of, poets, both past and present, both his predecessors and contemporaries, but their works must be as intelligible and successful as his, or more so than his, i.e., they have at least expressed themselves or presented their life as maturely as the poet himself. At the same time, he has created something new, for he has experienced and assimilated much more than others. He sincerely put down in prosody how he felt in the great historical process of contemporary China, without imagining any other workable poetics than this. In a way, many of his masterpieces, especially of those presented here, mirror this poetic view.

It may be somewhat presumptuous for us to compare his major works to Lord Gordon Byron's lyrics, particularly those of *Child Harold's Pilgrimage*, as the situation of Europe in Byronian time is quite different from that of today's China, at least from a Westerner's point of view. However, we do find qualities of universal appeal among all genuinely great poets, such as sincerity and the sense of justice. And, between Byron and Dawamat, there are even more similarities: their ardent political enthusiasm, their love of nature, their empathy with

the working people, their interest in sports, classical literature and arts, their embrace of simplicity and primitivity, etc. . Moreover, Dawamat's footprints have covered almost the whole world, except the Oceania. And, he has travelled even more in his own vast country, especially along the famed Silk Road in Xinjiang, so he has a most intimate knowledge of the people and customs there. More noteworthy is the fact that Dawamat excels in expressing his deep feelings on various occasions of social life. For example, in the poem, *At Marx's Graveyard*, in *A Visit to Britain*, he wrote:

Unwittingly, tears run down my cheeks,
While others looked on, puzzled. . . .

What simplicity and sincerity he is possessed of, even in dealing with political matters! Besides, there is a precious single-mindedness and perseverance in his sentiments, which is vividly revealed in several of the poems describing his matrimonial love. On the other hand, we also see that the educational or philosophical elements play an important role in his poetry. This didactic nature may have stemmed from a mid-Asian tradition of literature, which is full of wits of human life. For instance, in *Wisdom*, we come across lines like:

Only the brains knows a brainy enemy
Is so much better than a brainless friend.
Learn from your enemy
And you will outsmart all of them!

In ancient China, many statesmen and officials cultivated an excellent taste in poetry, wrote numerous superb poems and even became famous poets, such as Qu Yuan, Cao Cao, his son Cao Zhi, Han Yu, Liu Zongyuan, Bai Juyi, Su Dongpo, Xin Qiji, Lu You, etc. However, in modern times, people seldom sought spiritual pleasure and educated themselves and others by reading and writing poetry, resulting from and in humanity as a whole being eclipsed by technical civilization and material desires. It is precisely for this reason that Mr. Tomur Dawamat is especially appreciated by readers for his conscience and love of humanity, and his earnest dedication to modern (not modernistic!) poetic writing. His creative motive manifests itself in the epigram of his latest collection, *The Footprints of My Life* :

I'm obsessed with poetic creation all my life.
Every footprint that I've left behind me
Reflects the glittering of my sweat of labour.
May it add a streak of loving splendour

To the garden of arts.
If it casts a drop of sweet dew
Upon your soul, surely I'll have no regret whatsoever
For the whole of my life.

So, *we can call his poetic work a "greening" project in our spiritual desert*, and it indeed gives us immense pleasure to have translated it into English so that our friends in other parts of the earth can share the poetic fruits with us. As the work of translation was done in a hurry, we do look forward to an opportunity to improve it soon, hoping that Tomur Dawamat's earnest voice is heard and echoed.

Finally, we have to express our heartfelt gratitude to Professors Akebar Gulamu, Sha Qiuzhen, Zhou Xiefan, Wang Jianping, Zhou Ying and other friends, without whose warm encouragement and valuable support, this translation can never have come to such delightful fruition.

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