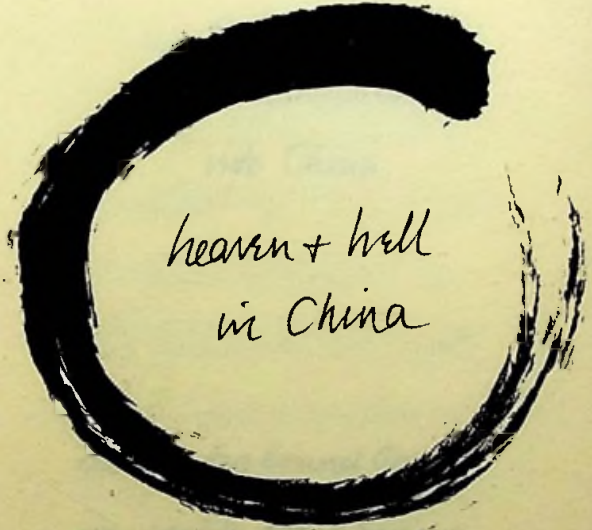
a sequence of haiku + tanka
by Suzan Aitkins



a sequence of haiku + tanka
by Suezan Aikins

sinking
thru thunderclouds
into China

circling fog bound Guilin
we gamble our chinese

pushing all she owns
then a herd of tourists,
the shrivelled woman's
tiny feet swimming in
someone's gold lamé heels

sampan fisher
in late afternoon haze
impassive
to excited cameras
gathering to snap him up

thru monsoon rain
a torrent of people
in sunglasses

we're the only ones obeying
the "DON'T SPIT FOR HEALTH" sign

squeezing thru
the market's cacophony
to the wormseller

tongue between broken teeth
fingers deep among his worms

a long valley
in the snake cutter's
old log table

from under a big belly
comes a lace hankie

jangling bell !
twin pig carcasses bounce,
dripping onto
the delivery boy's
delicate pink socks

unbearably hot -
a buckett of mudsuckers
frenetically alive

garbage and diesel fumes
in Harmony Temple

convulsing
into a fetid toilet
my rage
eased by the maid's gift
of tiger balm

plum branch
undulating into
dawn light

listless canary's head
squeezed between cage bars

back alley skinhead
lifts his songbird
into a sunray

with dozens of kids
the Hello! Hello! duet
climbing Moon Hill

in coats and ties
father and son haul onions
in a primitive cart

for my shy smile
the seal carver's big grin

as I slip into
an antique black jacket
the salesgirl smirks –
her dazzling clothes a mirror
of years starved for color

at the banquet
family all talking at once
while grandmother
quietly concentrates on
licking up everyone's plates

charged way too much
I ask the stern comrade if
this little green bug
riding my sweaty arm
is a "capitalist roader" too

thruout the folkdance
our guide fiddles
with his fake Rollex

in backstage gloom
the platespinner's moons

in satin acetate
mountain men beat jungle deums

thier women's smiles
under whirling dervishes
of long black hair

curled up together
under flapping plastic
a young family

a candle burns fitfully
by Kwan Yin's statue

cold dawn -
intricate homemade sweaters
on cycling workers

meeting a wildman's eyes -
we wink at the same time

thru clouds
of falling pollen
tai chi

yellow rivulets
on riverside waves

someone's taught
this persistant hawker to yell
" be my cash cow !! "

city crazed - we order
" Young Coconut Happiness "

no stamps
until the clerk finishes
her newspaper

the city's rubbish
caught in a fish weir

darkening sky -
no-one allowed
into the peace monument

under the bride's nylons
wrinkled long johns

holliday howls –
a young couple coddle
thier prince

above love sprawled bodies
generations of graffiti

senile woman's cane
emphasizes each point
in the same old story

thru stainless steel bars
selling Good Luck Jade

coal soot drifts
onto a line of frilly dresses
and ancient underwear

shrunken lady's
solid gold grin

scent of dung
in an empty dance hall
the strobelit D.J.

in leopard print leggings
sweeping at the dustcloud

offering us tea
the once famous calligrapher
says it's safe to talk
here in this roadside dustcloud
where they're digging up sewers

from his chest pocket,
in the hand Red Guards smashed,
a faded picture
cradling the son who grew up
to hound his parents

his brushes and
two centuries of family seals
lined up in the dust

a handfull of salt
into the darkness

at first light
raspy Big Band music
for silent couples
waltzing without smiles
in ordered rows

behind high walls
the indefinable color
of mist

the Humble Administrator's
exotic garden

cool entry hall
bamboo shadows dance
at the far end

each season's flower window
in the circling corridor

thin pensioners
settle thier cushions for a day
of playing cards
on the old carved balcony
floating undee the willows

barely aware
of the concrete uproar
among
constantly changing views
honed centuries ago

sauntering
along the lily pond's
unfolding

in this land of only one child
hundreds of mating dragonflies

zig zag bridge
to a legendary teahouse
where I write,
as generations have,
in the latticed breeze

the dragon urn
refloats chrysanthemum petals
in our glasses

a flash of bluejays
in deep green shadows

worn curves
in the lacquer bench
fitting mine

thru the archway
sunlit ginko

an angry voice
in LION ROAR Alcove -

the husband
directs his simpering wife
onto contorted Rocks

after the crowds
the cries of swallow chicks
under the bridge

a decrepit man's soft voice:
"the spirits live in our stones"

crowded train -
a conductor unlocks
the window
to toss all our garbage
into the scenic view

our lunch
an ornate chrysanthemum
made of spam

watching me pull up my socks
seems to be fascinating

at the pagoda
barred from the masters' concert
until we realize
we've been insisting they take
our train tickets to Suzhou

under carved eaves
the old teacher warbles
thru cigarette haze

a sightless man's serenade
to the view from these hills

sip of dragon tea
before arthritic fingers pluck
a maiden's tune

a ballad for the stranger
with a new, happy, ending

a song of other times -
howling winds and pestilence
from his throat
skull shining under sinews
stretching each note's bitterness

Li River ferry
snaking thru rainbow mists
and green rain

with enthusiastic smiles
we decode each other's gibberish

between pauses
in the long explanation
the crow's comments

the pulse of her handclasp
crossing the language barrier

blue stepping stones
thru a sea of young lettuce
to her front door

Mao stickers on both eyes
of the stone dragon

the neighbors gather
to chat by the only light
at doctor Yin's booth
where I lay behind the curtain
under his magic hands

squatting side by side
chattering toddlers
manure the lane

ragged feather offered
with a dazzling smile

among laborers
climbing to high terraces
a baby's grin
- both hands grip the hoe
tied to his basket

humming
into spring green
the shreds
of each rag washed
and hung on the bush

into floating cheesy petals
her family's night soil

off to the fields
with bright red lipstick
and ragged clothes

Ching Ming moon
from all sides firecrackers
call the ancestors

raindrops constelate
the seedling pool

pointing to tombs
circling the paddys
he explains
"the grandfathers tell us
when to begin planting"

swinging
from a budding branch
patched jacket

a bent back moves
thru greening rice

high noon -
only the rooster struts
down this hot street

a tiny crop of mustard
blooms on the family tomb

river melt crossing –
under a huge bundle of sticks
the same size legs

stony foothills
veined with teaplants

raincrows
black wings carving
brushstrokes
in harmony
with the tempest

windswept pilgrims –
the Capital of Heaven
in a sea of clouds

the immortal's pinnacles
in and out of mist

rock still crisp
where a fleeing general
carved "Loyal heart"
into Yellow Mountain
pine resin's piercing scent

rest stop -
the scrawny porter looks
at his twitching legs

so much easyer
for the butterfly

from the summit
lightning and thunder
thru my courage

struggling out of the ice storm
cold chicken feet for dinner

pyramid of prayer stones
by the precipice
my shadow
stretches over
the edge

monkey screams -
we squeeze down the darkness
of granite cleft

into wild magnolias
our trembling legs

two squirrels
ricochet up and down
the twisted pine

sweat trickles in the pause
to share a dusty mint

on the lip
over the abyss
no mind
the granite underhand
suddenly smooth

from a dusty shoe
on Ten Thousand Step Peak
ant into mist

Also by Suezan Aikins :

Tanka, 1995
Bluer Sky, 1995
Outstretched Hand, 1992
Sundazed, 1992
Morning Breeze, 1987
Petals on the stream, 1985

Included in the following:

Windfire Folded, AHA Books, 1994
Haiku Moment, Tuttle Books, 1993
Tanka Splendor, AHA, 1991; 1992; 1993; 1994
Four Seasons Anthology, Kō, 1990
Round Renga Round, AHA, 1990
Narrow Road to Renga, AHA, 1989

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