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Pushkin, Ji Yun, and the Torghuts: Poetry, Migration and Banishment in an Era of Jostling Frontiers

In 1771, the historian, short-story author and occasional poet Ji Yun was summoned by the Qianlong Emperor to compose an extempore ode on the return of the Torghuts. The Torghuts were a Mongol lineage that had wandered west, settled on the banks of the Don, and eventually migrated back to China in order to occupy the frontier areas of Xinjiang depopulated by Qianlong's campaign against the Zunghars. Ji Yun knew the area, having been banished there for two years. Some sixty years later, on his journey to Erzurum in Anatolia, Alexander Pushkin encountered Kalmyks – Torghuts left behind in Russia. Taken together, these examples of “frontier poetry” stage a quasi-encounter in verse between the imaginations of the expanding Russian and Qing empires.



Haun Saussy is the 17th person named to a University Professorship at the University of Chicago, serving in the departments of Comparative Literature and East Asian Languages & Civilizations as well as in the Committee on Social Thought. His work attempts to bring the lessons of classical and modern rhetoric to bear on several periods, languages, disciplines and cultures. Among his books are *The Problem of a Chinese Aesthetic* (1994), *Great Walls of Discourse* (2001), *The Ethnography of Rhythm* (2016), *Translation as Citation* (2017), and the edited collections *Sinographies* (2007), *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization* (2008), and *Partner to the Poor: A Paul Farmer Reader* (2010). As translator, he has produced versions of works by Li Zhi, Jean Métellus and Tino Caspanello, among others. A collective blog he animates with several others is accessible at printculture.com.