

# Translation pulled for sexual embellishment

BEIJING - A new Chinese translation of Indian Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's poetry collection *Stray Birds* has been pulled from bookshop shelves, the publisher said, after controversy erupted over its unusually sexual content.



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The work, originally in Bengali, was first published in 1916, three years after Tagore won the Nobel literature prize for "his profoundly sensitive, fresh and beautiful verse", the first non-European to do so.

The new translation, by Chinese novelist Feng Tang, known for his racy depictions of Beijing youth in the 90s, was released earlier this year, but its content raised eyebrows.

According to the official news agency Xinhua, in Feng's version the original line "The world puts off its mask of vastness to its lover" became: "The world unzipped his pants in front of his lover."

In recent days online posters have been scornfully comparing Feng's translation to English and previous Chinese versions.

"He can write however he likes in his own books, but when he's dealing with other people's work, he must have basic respect!!!" said one user on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform.

The publisher announced on Monday that it will pull the book from bookshops and scrub it from the internet.

"Due to the great controversy surrounding Feng Tang's translation of *Stray Birds*, we have decided to recall this volume from all bookstores and online platforms," the Zhejiang Literature and Arts Press said in a statement on its verified microblog.

"We will make further decisions after consulting a team of experts who will provide a detailed assessment of the Chinese version."

Feng is not known to speak or read Bengali, the state-run *China Daily* said, but according to Xinhua he worked from English versions of Tagore's poems.

He translated "hospitable" as "horny", the *China Daily* said, citing "translation buffs" and Tagore fans as saying that Feng's version "infused the original poems with hormonal flavour" and "mixed words of disparate styles".

But despite the critical response to the translation itself, the recall was condemned online.

"Are you crazy?! If the translation's bad, readers can just choose not to buy it - why recall it, what law has been broken?!" wrote one expletive-prone Weibo user.

"This is no longer a discussion of the translation's merits - this is now about freedom of speech and freedom of the press."

Source: AFP

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