



CLASSICAL CHINESE POETRY AND PROSE

LOVE IN LONG-LIFE HALL

HONG SHENG

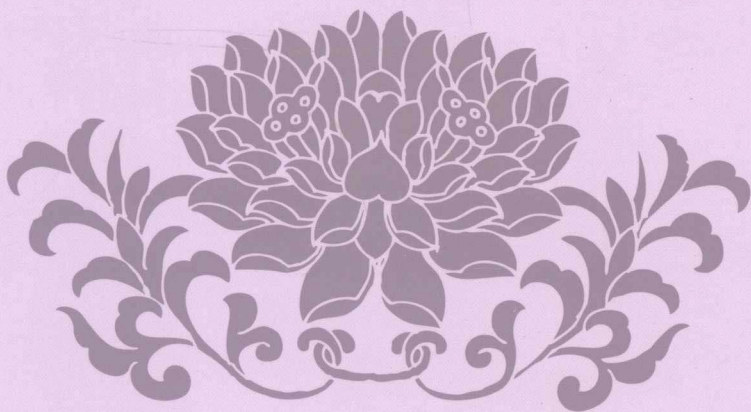
TRANSLATED BY XU YUANCHONG

& FRANK M. XU



许译中国经典诗文集

长生殿 | 【清】洪升 著
许渊冲 许明 译



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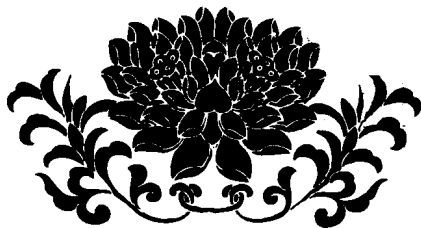
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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Ancient Chinese classic poems are exquisite works of art. As far as 2,000 years ago, Chinese poets composed the beautiful work *Book of Poetry* and *Elegies of the South*. Later, they created more splendid Tang poetry and Song lyrics. Such classic works as *Thus Spoke the Master* and *Laws Divine and Human* were extremely significant in building and shaping the culture of the Chinese nation. These works are both a cultural bond linking the thoughts and affections of Chinese people and an important bridge for Chinese culture and the world.

Mr. Xu Yuanchong has been engaged in translation for 70 years. In December 2010, he won the Lifetime Achievement Award in Translation conferred by the Translators Association of China (TAC). He is honored as the only expert who translates Chinese poems into both English and French. After his excellent interpretation, many Chinese classic poems have been further refined into perfect English and French rhymes. This collection of Classical Chinese Poetry and Prose gathers his most representative English translations. It includes the classic works *Thus Spoke the Master*, *Laws Divine and Human* and dramas such as *Romance of the Western Bower*, *Dream in Peony Pavilion*, *Love in Long-life Hall* and *Peach Blooms Painted with Blood*. The largest part of the collection includes the translation of selected poems from different dynasties. The selection includes various types of poetry. The selected works start from the pre-Qin era to the Qing Dynasty, covering almost the entire history of classic poems in China. Reading these works is like tasting "living water from the source" of Chinese culture.

We hope this collection will help English readers "understand, enjoy and delight in" Chinese classic poems, share the intelligence of Confucius and Lao Tzu (the Older Master), share the gracefulness of Tang poems, Song lyrics and classic operas and songs and promote exchanges between Eastern and Western culture. We also sincerely invite precious suggestions from our readers.

Oct. 2011

出版前言

中国古代经典诗文是中国传统文化的奇葩。早在两千多年前，中国诗人就写出了美丽的《诗经》和《楚辞》；以后，他们又创造了更加灿烂的唐诗和宋词。《论语》《老子》这样的经典著作，则在塑造、构成中华民族文化精神方面具有极其重要的意义。这些作品既是联接所有中国人思想、情感的文化纽带，也是中国文化走向世界的重要桥梁。

许渊冲先生从事翻译工作70年，2010年12月荣获“中国翻译文化终身成就奖”。他被称为将中国诗词译成英法韵文的唯一专家，经他的妙手，许多中国经典诗文被译成出色的英文和法文韵语。这套“许译中国经典诗文集”荟萃许先生最具代表性的英文译作，既包括《论语》《老子》这样的经典著作，又包括《西厢记》《牡丹亭》《长生殿》《桃花扇》等戏曲剧本，数量最多的则是历代诗歌选集。这些诗歌选集包括诗、词、散曲等多种体裁，所选作品上起先秦，下至清代，几乎涵盖了中国古典诗歌的整个历史。阅读和了解这些作品，即可尽览中国文化的“源头活水”。

我们希望这套许氏译本能使英语读者对中国经典诗文也“知之，好之，乐之”，能够分享孔子、老子的智慧，分享唐诗、宋词、中国古典戏曲的优美，并以此促进东西文化的交流。也敬请读者朋友提出宝贵意见。

2011年10月

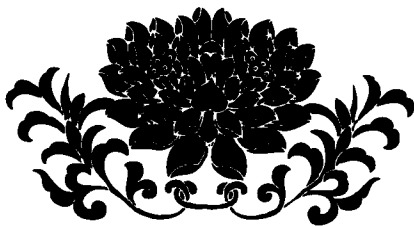


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PREFACE

*On seventh day of seventh moon when none was near,
At midnight in Long-life Hall he whispered in her ear:
“On high we would be two birds flying wing to wing;
On earth two trees with branches twined from spring to
spring.”*

Such is the love story of Emperor Xuan Zong of the Tang Dynasty and his favorite Lady Yang, as told by Bai Juyi in his *Song of Everlasting Regret*. Such is also the theme of the tragedy of *Love in Long-life Hall* written by Hong Sheng of Qing dynasty. The emperor's love for his Lady which ends in the army's revolt and in her tragic death is considered as a turning point of Tang dynasty's decline and fall. Since olden days the rise and fall of dynasties hinge more or less on the fate of a beauty. It is true not only in the East but also in the West; for instance, the fate of Roman Empire might have been altered by the life or death of the Queen of Egypt. As Pascal said, if the nose of Cleopatra, Egyptian Queen, had been an inch longer, the history of Roman Empire might have been rewritten, for if she were not so bewitching, the Roman General might not have fallen in love with her and lost the empire.

Cleopatra was hundreds of years earlier than Lady Yang of the Tang dynasty. Her contemporary was Lady Li, favorite of the Martial Emperor of the Han dynasty, whose beauty is glorified in the following poem:

*There is a beauty in the northern lands,
Unequaled, high above the world she stands.*

*At her first glance, soldiers would lose their town;
At her second, the monarch would lose his crown.
How could monarch and soldiers neglect their duty?
For crown and town are overshadowed by her beauty.*

But the Martial Emperor did not neglect his duty. Instead, he sacrificed the beauty for his empire, and after her death he wrote an elegy, in which he said how lonely and dreary he felt on seeing her robe without finding her person, and on walking along the marble steps without seeing her foot print. Even when he found a fallen leaf on the threshold of her bedroom deserted and empty, he would think it transformed by her soul unwilling to tear herself away from her former abode. Her bedroom, her silk robe, the marble steps belong to the external world, while the emperor's grief and loneliness to his internal world. Here we see the external world is described to reveal the internal world. In other words, scenic expressions are used as lyric expressions. Such is the method used in poetry.

In the *Book of Poetry* compiled in the 5th Century B. C., poetry may be divided into three kinds: songs, odes (including feastal and epical odes) and hymns. As for the art of versification, three methods are used, that is, narration, comparison and association. This tradition has been inherited and developed, in scenical as well as lyrical expressions. For instance, we may read Li Bai's description of the beauty of Lady Yang:

*Her face is seen in flowers and her dress in cloud,
A beauty by the rails caressed by vernal breeze.
If not a fairy queen from Jade Mountain proud,
She's Goddess of the Moon in crystal hall one sees.*

In the first two lines we see the poet compares the lady to a flower, and in the second she is associated with a fairy queen and the Moon Goddess. That is to say, comparison and association are used. In Bai Juyi's *Song of Everlasting Regret*, we find verses describing Lady Yang:

*Turning her head, she smiled so sweet and full of grace
That she outshone in six palaces the fairest face.*

In the first line narration is used, while in the second the lady is compared with or contrasted against the fairest face to emphasize her beauty.

In Hong Sheng's *Love in Long-life Hall*, we see the three methods inherited and developed. For instance, we may read the dialogue between the two maids about Lady Yang in the Scene of *Spring Siesta*:

*She keeps straight her waist slender
Like willow trees;
Her skin's so tender
We fear it might be ruffled by the breeze.
Behold her headdress quiver
And her skirts softly spread!
Her feet are light enough to tread
On ripples of the river.*

We may say the first line is narration, the second comparison, the fourth association, but the rest is three methods used together, and we can hardly say whether it is narration, comparison or association. The same is true in the Scene of *the Bath*. Let us read their dialogue about the Emperor's love for his lady:

Hand in hand by day, cheek to cheek by night,

LOVE IN LONG-LIFE HALL

*They have enjoyed love's all delight.
She follows him like a shadow true;
They can't be parted as water can't be cut in two.*

Here we see the double comparison of shadow and water.

*No tongue can tell with how much love they're fed,
No word can describe their lovebirds' bed,
Where they'd enjoy their fill,
And their love blazes still.
See her private vernal bower!
Spring hides there where our lord would bring fresh shower
For thirsting flower.*

Here we see comparison and association developed into metaphor. How does the English poet describe Antony's love for Cleopatra? Let us read their dialogue in Act One:

*Cleo. If it be love indeed, tell me how much.
Ant. There is beggary in the love that can be reckoned.
Cleo. I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.
Ant. Then must thou needs find up new heaven, new earth.*

Shakespeare uses concrete words to describe abstract thing, and visible heaven and earth as bourn for the invisible feeling. We may say that he is more direct than the Chinese playwright. How does Shakespeare describe the inner world of his character? Let us hear what Cleopatra says to her maid sent to find Antony.

*See where he is, who's with him, what he does.
I did not send you. If you find him sad, say I am dancing;
If in mirth, report that I am sudden sick. Quick and return!*

Lady Yang and her maid say what they believe, but the Egyptian queen tells her maid to say what they do not believe

in order to deceive Antony. Here we see Shakespeare's characters more complicate than the Chinese. We may compare the dialogues between the Emperor and Lady Yang with that between Antony and Cleopatra before their death:

*Lady: Dry sorrow gnaws my heart.
 How can I from you part?
 Like a pair of lovebirds in stormy turbulence,
 How can we suffer such violence?
 My soul has fled
 While tears are shed.*

*Emp.: High as Imperial Majesty,
 From grief I am not free.
 How can I forget
 The first night we met?
 Without you by my side,
 To live is worse than to have died.*

We see the Chinese Characters just say what lovers think and feel in elaborate language. But what do Antony and Cleopatra say before their death?

*Ant. Not Ceasar's valour hath overthrown Antony,
 But Antony's hath triumphed on itself.*

*Cleo. I am fire and air, my other elements I give to baser
 life.*

*Maid: Dissolve, thick cloud, and rain, that I may say
 The Gods themselves do weep!*

Here we see only blood of Lady Yang and sympathetic tears of the Tang emperor in the *Long-life Hall*, while in Shakespeare we see the blood of a heroic Roman general and tears of an

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unconquered queen of Egypt: That is one of the differences between Chinese and Western civilization, and one of the reasons why the East may learn from the West just as the West may learn from the East. Such is the importance of G2, ChinAmerica or AmeriChina.

Frank M. Xu at OKC, USA.

February 2009



Scene 1 Prologue

Tune: The River All Red

Since olden days how few
Lovers have remained ever true!
If they love each other heart and soul,
They'd be united from pole to pole.
A thousand miles could not keep them apart,
Nor even death could sever heart from heart.
If o'er your hapless fate you wail and weep,
In love you are not deep.
What could move earth and sky,
Melt stone and gold,
Shine like the sun on high
In history of old
But affectionate deeds done
By loyal and filial son?
The ancient sage did not undervalue love song,
The modern playwright should make music of
The story of beautiful Lady Yang
To glorify true love.

Tune: Spring in Pleasure Garden

The Emperor Bright and Lady Jade Ring
Were at the height of their love in Hot Spring,