

英汉对照

唐诗三百首新译



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唐诗三百首新译
300 TANG POEMS
A New Translation

许渊冲 陆佩弦 吴钧陶编

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本书是由许渊冲教授、陆佩弦教授和吴钧陶先生编辑的，共收入唐诗317首。有39位译者参加了翻译工作。

此书是以中华书局香港分局出版、喻守真编辑的中文版集子（1982年再版）为蓝本的。商务（香港）版根据诗人诞生的年代和作品问世的时间，在作品的排列顺序上重新作了调整。由于考证不足而只能按估计年代编排者，则仍沿用喻守真版本的排列顺序。

On Tang Poetry and English Poetry

Tang poetry is a gem of traditional Chinese literature and the three hundred poems translated and collected here are gems of Tang poetry. As early as 1898, Herbert A. Giles published his translation of Tang poems, of which Lytton Strachey said, "the poetry in it is the best that this generation has known," and that it holds a unique place in the literature of the world "through its mastery of the tones and depths of affection".

Thirty years later, Witter Bynner published his *Jade Mountain*, in which he said of the Tang poems that "they bring the true, the beautiful, the everlasting, into simple, easy touch with the human, the homely and the immediate." And he predicted "that future western poets will go to school with the masters of the Tang Dynasty as well as with the masters of the golden age of Greece or with the Hebrew prophets, or with the English dramatists or romanticists – to learn how best may be expressed, for, themselves and for others, that passionate patience which is the core of life."

Read Wang Bo's (649-676) well-known couplet on friendship:

"If you've a friend who knows your heart,
Distance can't keep you two apart."

So true and so human, everlasting and immediate, it was even cited by U.S. President Reagan on his visit to China in 1984. In a similar way Lord Byron sang 1200 years after Wang Bo:

"But that which keepeth us apart is not
Distance, nor depth of wave, nor space of earth,"...

(Stanzas to the Po)

Wang Wei (701-761) was known as a poet in his painting and a painter in his poetry. Read the following verse of his:

"Over gray stones a blue stream glides,

Red leaves are strewn on jade hillsides.
Along the path it rains unseen,
My gown grows moist with drizzling green."
and you will not fail to see the beautiful picture formed by these concrete words. About 1100 years later Rossetti was also called a poet in his painting.

Wang Zhihuan (688-742) was no less a painter in words. Read the following couplet:

"The sun beyond the mountains glows;
The Yellow River seawards flows."

and compare it with Byron's

"The rounded
Red sun sinks down behind the azure hill"

(*Don Juan* II, 183)

and with Tennyson's

"They saw the gleaming river seaward flow"

(*The Lotos-Eaters*)

and you will see two picturesque scenes of sunset eastern and western, separated by more than one thousand years, yet the one as beautiful as the other.

Every sinologue knows Li Bai's (701-762) famous poem "Before my bed a pool of light". In Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H.* 67, you will find the following verse:

"When on my bed the moonlight falls"...

Once Li Bai drank alone beneath the moon with his own shadow. And 1100 years later, Keats alone addressed his own heart:

"Heart! thou and I are here sad and alone."

(*Why Did I Laugh Tonight?*)

Du Fu (712-770) was as famous a realist as Li Bai was a romanticist. His well-known couplet

"The boundless forest sheds its leaves shower by shower;
The endless River rolls its waves hour after hour"

may remind the English reader of Shelley's

"Loose clouds like Earth's decaying leaves are shed".

(Ode to the West Wind)

Read another couplet of his:

“Such music can be heard but in celestial spheres.

How many times has it been played for human ears?”

Eight hundred years later, Shakespeare wrote in *The Tempest*:

“Where should this music be? i' the air, or the earth?”

Is it not true that poetic minds think alike?

Wei Yingwu (737-789) was well-known for his poem on the secluded western brook:

“Alone I like the riverside where green grass grows

And golden orioles sing amid the leafy trees.”

Compare these two lines with Keats' verse:

“In deepest grass, beneath the whisp'ring roof

Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran

A brooklet, scarce espied.”

(Ode to Psyche)

Could you fail to picture the two poets in a similar place and in a similar state of mind?

On the other hand, Liu Yuxi (772-842) sang of the capital of the Six Dynasties that had passed away like dreams:

“The hills surrounding ancient kingdoms still remain,

But waves beating on ruined walls silently roll away.”

“By the Bridge of Red Birds rank grasses overgrow;

O'er the Street of Mansions the setting sun hangs low.”

Compare these two couplets with Tennyson's poem:

“There rolls the deep where grew the tree.

O earth, what changes hast thou seen!

There where the long street roars hath been

The stillness of the central sea.”

(In Memoriam A.H.H. 123)

and you will see the two poets, one in the ninth and the other in the nineteenth century, both contemplating the waves and the street with the same feeling.

Bai Juyi (772-846) was more popular than Liu Yuxi. He wrote of a guitar player:

“Still we heard hidden grief and vague regret concealed,
Then music expressed far less than silence revealed.”

Does this couplet not remind you of Keats' famous verse:

“Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on”.

(*Ode to the Grecian Urn*)

Li Shangyin (813-858) was as obscure as Bai Juyi was simple and clear. Read his representative poem *The Sad*

Zither:

“Why should the zither sad have fifty strings?
Each string, each strain evokes but vanished springs:
Dim morning dream to be a butterfly;
Amorous heart poured out in cuckoo's cry.
In moonlit pearls see tears in mermaid's eyes;
From sunburnt jade in Blue Field let smoke rise.
Such feeling cannot be recalled again,
It seemed long lost e'en when it was felt then.”

This poem is considered to be the sphinx of classical Chinese poetry. It might make us think of Byron's second *Stanza for Music*:

“And all that Memory loves the most
Was once our only Hope to be
And all that Hope adored and lost
Hath melted into Memory.”

But Li Shangyin's poem is far more obscure and it is no wonder that he might be considered as a forerunner of modern obscure poetry.

Every student of Tang poetry knows the *Golden Dress Song* sung by Du Quniang:

“Love not your golden dress, I pray,
More than your youthful golden hours.
Gather sweet flowers while you may
And not the twig devoid of flowers!”

Does it not express the same feeling as Herrick's *Counsel to Girls*:

“Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,

Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying."

One of the late Tang poets Zhang Bi wrote a quatrain to his love:

"When you're gone, in my dream I linger you know
where,
The court still seems the same with zigzag rails around.
Only the sympathetic moon is shining there
For me alone on flowers fallen on the ground."

Compare it with Fitzgerald's translation of *The Rubaiyat*:

"Yon rising Moon that looks for us again –
How oft hereafter will she wax and wane;
How oft hereafter rising look for us
Through this same Garden – and for one in vain!"

Although one sang of the past and the other of the future, would you not wonder whether Fitzgerald was translating the Persian or the Chinese poet?

After comparing the verses cited above, I think we may come to the same conclusion as Lytton Strachey and Witter Bynner. Poetry knows no boundary, for beauty knows no boundary. Poetry is timeless for beauty is timeless. The point is how to make what is beautiful in one language appear as beautiful in another.

"Poetry," said Robert Frost, "is what gets lost in translation." Can it be true? Even the paradise lost could be regained. Why not the lost poetry? I think the best way to regain poetry is to recreate it. In order to illustrate my theory, I beg to show you two different versions of the same poem, one more faithful and the other more creative:

- (1) Since, ah! you went away,
What grief my mind can sway?
I yearn like the moon at full:
Am duller day by day!

(Tr. Fletcher)

- (2) Since my lord left — ah me, unhappy hour! —
The half-spun web hangs idly in my bower;
My heart is like the full moon, full of pains,
Save that 'tis always full and never wanes.

(Tr. Giles)

Some critics say that the original image of a waning moon is distorted in the second version into a full moon which never wanes, and that sense is sacrificed to sound so that the poetry is lost in translation. To a literal translator, it is true that the original image is lost. But what does the waning moon symbolize? Is it not a sorrowful heart? If so, does the moon full of pains not symbolize sorrow? Then the loss of the waning moon is well made up by the image of a heart full of pains. So, it cannot be said that sense is sacrificed to sound. On the contrary, we can say that the literal is transformed into the literary, and such transformation or translation may be said to be creative.

As Dryden wrote, "a good poet is no more like himself in a dull translation than his carcass would be to his living body." So I think a verse translation should be faithful to the original, less in form than in sense. Or in other words, a poetic translation should be as beautiful as the original in sense, in sound and, if possible, in form.

Xu Yuan-zhong
Peking University
May 5, 1985

A Survey of Tang Poetry and *300 Tang Poems*

Like the Yangtze River, the history of Chinese poetry traces a long course from a distant source. The very first anthology, *The Book of Songs*, containing three hundred and five ancient poems, and compiled in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 B.C.), laid the foundation for Chinese poetry. The stream has been running on ever since. As if to facilitate classification, there emerged almost in every historical period a special poetical form representative of the time, such as *Chu Ci* (songs of the Chu district) of the Warring States (475-221 B.C.), *Yue Fu* (folk songs) of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) and five-character-ancient-style-verse of Wei-Jin-Southern-and-Northern dynasties (A.D. 220-589). Coming down to the Tang dynasty (618-907), this long stream converged, as it were, with abundant tributary currents and surged with extraordinary grandeur and beauty. The magnificent vista all along the way is so breathtaking that none can take it all in at once. It may be compared to the Three Gorges of the Yangtze which are deemed the most scenic reaches of the river. Streaming down, it still presents picturesque scenes all along its course, with broad waves surging one after another, such as *ci* (metrical verse of uneven lengths) of the Song dynasty (960-1279) and *qu* (metrical dramatic poetry) of the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), but Tang poetry assuredly marks the zenith in the history of Chinese classical poetry.

By the imperial edict of Emperor Kangxi (1654-1722), ten officials of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), including Peng Dingqiu, Cao Yin and others, compiled and completed in 1706 a voluminous work, *A Complete Collection of Tang Poetry*, which contains some 48,900 poems by more than 2,200 poets. Recently, in the year 1982, a supplementary book to the collection, compiled by Wang Chongmin and two

others, embodying about 1,800 poems, has been published. From these two books alone we can read in our days more than 50,000 poems of the Tang dynasty, and it is many times more than the total amount of poems produced before the Tang dynasty that have been handed down. In some thousand years after Tang, poetry collections as voluminous as that of Tang were never published either.

In the whole history of Chinese classical poetry, Tang poetry is not only unique in quantity, but also remarkably extensive in the range of subjects, ingenious in artistry and various metrical forms with consummate versification. Since there was a constellation of poets with such a variety of works, naturally the subjects have ranged widely over and delved deeply into the field of life and society. Since the poets strove so sedulously for perfection of art, (as may be seen from the following verse: "Raking for three years I write these two lines. Whenever I croon tears trickle down from my eyes" (Jia Dao) and "I'll not let go a commonplace saying unless I die" (Du Fu)), the creation of styles, images and atmospheres have reached a new and splendid summit. Many lines from Tang poetry have been absorbed into the Chinese language as proverbs; there are, for example, "When we are bosom friends this many a day, We are neighbours e'en though we'll be far away"; "A prairie fire cannot destroy the grass; It grows again when the spring breeze blows"; "Few people lived to be seventy, from of old"; "An inch of time, an inch of gold", etc. As to the metrical forms and rules, in addition to inheriting those created by their foregoers, the Tang poets formed something new that became established as the classical metrical forms which were observed by the poets of later centuries and are still used by the people who write classical poems.

Apart from other reasons, the extraordinary flourishing of the Tang poetry was chiefly due to the energetic encouragement of the rulers. Taizong, Li Shimin (599-649) by name,

the second emperor of the Tang dynasty, owing to his love of literature and art, was a patron of the poets and he treated them with special favour. He himself wrote poems and proses and was skillful in calligraphy. Sixty nine of his poems were included in *A Complete Collection of Tang Poetry*. Later emperors Gaozong, Zhongzong, Xuanzong, Empress Wu and many others carried on the tradition and gave awards to poetry. The very particular system "electing officials by their poems" was begun in the reign of Gaozong (628-683) and was not abolished completely until the last years of the Song dynasty. In the long period of feudal society, for intellectuals there was no rosier prospect than to become a government official. The "imperial examination system" for selecting officials was established in the reign of Emperor Yang (569-618) of the Sui dynasty (581-618). When it came to the reign of Gaozong, poetry was added as a supplementary subject in the examination for *Jinshi* (a kind of academic degree) Department, and later on in the days of Xuanzong (685-762), poetry was the obligatory subject for all departments. Writing poems became henceforth a necessary talent for intellectuals who aimed at an official career, and poetry learning was one of the essential lessons even for children. Enthusiasm for poetry therefore prevailed in the society, and on account of the popularization of poetry there were inevitably large numbers of poets and excellent poems. Most of the Tang poets had passed the imperial examination and obtained, in general, the *Jinshi* degree, while the depressed poets were more often than not the results of "failure in the imperial examination" or "frustration in the official career" We can see, therefore, how close the relation between the examination and the exuberance of the Tang poetry was.

The progress of science and technology may also have provided additional conditions for the exuberance. In the earliest times, people noted down and disseminated their ideas by means of carving scripts on stones, jade plates, or engraving

on bronzes. Gradually, people developed the method of writing hieroglyphics on bamboo or wooden plates, silk and paper. But these methods were neither easy to operate, nor suitable for mass production. The technique of carved-plate-printing which made the appearance of books in the proper sense possible was invented in the early years of the Tang dynasty. Undoubtedly, it was a great advance and has given an enormous impetus to the prosperity and development of our culture. As poems, being on the whole shorter in length, were easier to be carved on plates, it might be one of the reasons why it was poetry and not other literary forms that flourished in particular.

The earliest anthology of Tang poetry, apart from the fragmentary scrolls found in Dunhuang Grottoes, is probably *The Gems of the Country* which was published in the middle of the Tang dynasty, containing 200 poems by 90 poets. There are altogether ten or more anthologies, including this one, of Tang poetry compiled by the Tang redactors. In the successive dynasties, there were still some hundreds of anthologies of Tang poetry compiled and published by famous scholars, high officials and even the emperor. New selected and annotated editions of Tang poetry have come out in our days one after another. It is thus clear that the charm of Tang poetry did not diminish in the long process of a thousand years, and will certainly not diminish in the future.

The first edition of *An Anthology of Tang Poetry* (or *Three Hundred Poems of the Tang Dynasty*) was compiled in 1764, by Sun Zhu (1711-1778), a *Jinshi* of the Qing dynasty, under the name of Hengtang Tuishi (Hermit of Wild Ginger Pond). He had been a county magistrate, and author of a miscellanea, but was unknown to the literary circles. Allegedly based on the book *A Novel Guide to Tang Poetry*, containing some 2,000 poems compiled by Shen Deqian

(1673-1769), a well-known critic of poetry, which might possibly be selected from 50,000 poems of *A Complete Collection of Tang Poetry*, Sun Zhu's anthology can probably be taken as a selection of *A Complete Collection of Tang Poetry*. Evidently, it was modelled on the layout of *The Book of Songs*, so Sun Zhu compiled three hundred pieces for the volume.

The purport with which Sun Zhu compiled his book was set out in the short preface which reads in full as follows:

"Whenever children are sent to school, they are taught *Poems by Myriad Poets*, since the poems in it are easy to learn by rote, and so, instead of being outdated, the book is widely circulated. But the compiler of that book, seeming not to discriminate between beauty and dullness, just picked up whatever came to hand. Besides, there are only two metrical forms in the book: Five-or-seven-character-regular-verse and five-or-seven-character-quatrain, and it is so different from the general layout that the works by Tang poets are mingled inordinately with those by Song poets. Thus I have chosen these three hundred odd Tang poems, with several decades of poems to each metrical form, and have chosen the most popular, those that were oft-quoted and widely loved. If this anthology is used as a text book for the private schools, and if people learn it in their juvenile years and keep it even in their grey-headed days, will it not be far better than *Poems by Myriad Poets*? As the proverb has it: 'Learning Tang poems three hundred by heart, and you can chant poems though you know not the art.' Please test the old saw with my book."

Poems by Myriad Poets exists in various editions, and the standard one is compiled by Liu Kezhuan (1187-1269), a well-known poet of the Song dynasty in its last years. Judging from the preface by Sun Zhu, one may realize that when he worked at his book he had no plan to advocate any literary theory or poetical genre, as other compilers did, but wanted

only to make a text book of poetry for children and aimed only at vying with the book abovementioned. The imperial examination system was abolished entirely in 1903, in the last years of the Qing dynasty; but by that time the system of "electing officials by their poems" was no longer practised, and other subjects were emphasized. However, such anthologies were still needed since poetry was always one of the main courses in education and the means to discern whether a man was highly educated or not.

Unexpectedly, when *An Anthology of Tang Poetry* was published, it spread like wildfire, and was "so widely circulated that almost every family has a copy," as someone commented. In the past two hundred years and more, the book has been re-edited and reprinted repeatedly and there have been many editions different in some way or other from the original. Even in recent years some ten editions of the book with new commentaries and annotations have been published. Not only has the influence of the book far surpassed that of *Poems by Myriad Poets*, but also it has eclipsed or replaced the hundreds of anthologies of Tang poetry published before it. None of the new selections of Tang poetry can compare with it in importance either. The book is not merely a text book now; it has become a most popular model for people who learn to appreciate Tang poetry.

It is not by chance that the book has met with such success. Its chief merit is the refined and appropriate selection. Sun Zhu, living some thousand years after the Tang dynasty, seemed to have picked up those truly golden verses under the sieve of time, instead of selecting them according to some prescribed rules, as other editors had done, and therefore most of the three hundred odd poems are masterpieces that have been recited by the people for centuries. Sun Zhu selected many excellent poems from outstanding poets; for example, fifteen by Meng Haoran, twenty-nine by Wang Wei, twenty-nine by Li Bai and thirty-nine by Du Fu. But he did not

ignore the obscure poets at the same time, so long as there were brilliant poems written by them. For example, included in his exclusive selection are one or two pieces by the obscure Jin Changxu, a Buddhist monk, and also pieces by a songstress and by two anonymous authors.

Secondly, it seems that Sun Zhu has paid due attention to the wide range of subjects in Tang poetry, so in his selection one can find all kinds of themes, such as parting, lamenting, love, nostalgia, thinking of others, expressing one's emotions, reaction to historical events, pastoral life, landscape, borderland scenes, the woes of war, the fatigue of travelling, the pleasures of the hermitage, the themes in examination halls or in the imperial orders, or consoling a friend who failed in an imperial examination, etc. Opening a book with such varied, kaleidoscopic contents, the reader is able to catch a glimpse of the life and society of the Tang dynasty, while at the same time, owing to the lasting artistic power of the poems, the reader may find in them beauties, consolations and mental contentments under circumstances different from his own.

Finally, there is also a merit in it which has little meaning to most of the readers today, but was, and is still, very useful to the learners of the classical poetry, and that is, with the exception of the form of long-regular-verse, all the forms of Tang poetry can be found in this book, that is, folk-song-styled-verse, five-or-seven-characters-ancient-verse, five-or-seven-characters-regular-verse and five-or-seven-character-quatrain, and the book was originally organised according to form. The convenience of this method helped the book to win more popularity.

Of course, just as there is no really pure gold in the world, a book cannot be a perfect selection. It has been suggested that the poem *Sacrificing to Confucius and Mourning Him When Passing Through Lu* by Emperor Xuanzong lacks poetical flavour, while *An Ode to the Stone Drums* by Han Yu

is too recondite to be understood, and that these poems should therefore not have been selected. On the other hand, the book cannot be considered complete when it contains none of the works by such celebrated poets as Li He (790-816). Despite these criticisms, the book has remained a most popular anthology of Tang poetry and may possibly be the best way to gain a preliminary conception of ancient Chinese literature.

Written by Wu Juntao
Translated by Yang Liyi
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