



The Evolution of Chinese *Tz'u* Poetry

FROM LATE T'ANG
TO NORTHERN
SUNG

*Kang-i Sun
Chang*

The Evolution of
CHINESE *TZ'U* POETRY:
From Late T'ang to
Northern Sung

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

Copyright © 1980 by Princeton University Press
Published by Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, Guildford, Surrey

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data will be
found on the last printed page of this book

Publication of this book has been aided by a grant from the
Paul Mellon Fund of Princeton University Press

Clothbound editions of Princeton University Press books
are printed on acid-free paper, and binding materials are
chosen for strength and durability

Composed in Hong Kong by
Asco Trade Typesetting Limited

Printed in the United States of America by
Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey

Preface

THE conceptual framework of this book rests on the notion of generic development in literature. Every important age in literary history has its own special forms and styles, closely reflecting its particular taste. Thus, studying the development of an emergent genre or genres is indispensable to our understanding of a literary period. A genre does not remain static: it emerges, is developed, is widely employed, then falls from favor. Its essential qualities depend on the conventions followed by individual poets, critics, and readers over the centuries. When we contemplate the slow formation and gradual changes of a genre, with all its formalistic and thematic variations, we can see that it is through such developments that the correlation between genres and literary history can be properly perceived. For these reasons, the genre study in this book is based on two assumptions; first, that a genre evolves in response to new aesthetic and cultural values of an age, and second, that its ultimate significance rests on its dynamic evolution.

The genre of Chinese poetry known as *tz'u* first emerged in the High T'ang (ca.713–755), and became a prominent literary form during the Sung (960–1279). On the one hand, *tz'u* was basically a song form, taking shape at a time when Chinese music was undergoing radical changes. However, as a literary genre, *tz'u* shows a pattern of evolution that represents a departure from and a continuation of certain principles characteristic of established genres. Within its tradition we find gradual developments of subgenres (i.e., the earlier *hsiao-ling* and the later *man-tz'u*), and widely different stylistic possibilities that in turn condition the nature of the genre as a whole. The present study attempts to bring to light the unique structural principles of *tz'u* poetry by focusing on a few representative poets during the 250-year history of the early *tz'u* (from approximately 850 to 1100).

All literary civilizations share a common concern with

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genres in literature, but it is important to note that each culture has its particular approach to perceiving the value of genre study. The Chinese tradition offers one kind of literary judgment, and the Western tradition another. As in the West, the Chinese generic kinds were chiefly distinguished by form and purpose (see Appendix I). Unique to traditional Chinese criticism, however, was its unusual attention to the classification of “styles” and the mutual dependence of genres and styles. For example, Liu Hsieh (ca.465–ca.522) perceived eight different styles in *shih* poetry. Chung Hung (fl. 502–519) distinguished poets whose style followed the *Ch'u-tz'u* tradition from those who followed the *Kuo-feng* tradition. The *tz'u* criticism (*tz'u-hua*) also classified poets according to two basic styles: “delicate restraint” (*wan-yüeh*) and “heroic abandon” (*hao-fang*).

This Chinese notion of styles was grounded in a particular traditional perspective in Chinese thought. To the Chinese critic, style was the manifestation of a person's inner self, and thus was a measure of his life's achievement. Therefore, a distinction of style was not simply a literary accomplishment, but rather a direct expression of the poet's level of self-cultivation. The classification of styles was not considered to be arbitrary, but came from a firm conviction that a qualitative assessment of individuals had an ultimate value—a belief rooted in Chinese literary tradition and made explicit as early as the Eastern Han (25–220).

This concern with detailed classification of styles was so important to the traditional critics that it sometimes caused them to confuse the notion of genre with that of style, as can be seen from the fact that they often used the term *t'i* to refer to both concepts. For example, in Yen Yü's (fl. 1200) *Ts'ang-lang shih-hua*, the 110 *t'i* include such genres as *ku-shih* (Ancient Style poetry), *chin-t'i shih* (Recent Style poetry), and such styles as Tung-p'o *t'i* (Su Shih's style) and Wang Ching-kung *t'i* (Wang An-shih's style). To the modern student of literature this confusion between generic and stylistic conceptions on the part of traditional critics can be very perplexing. However, this problem provides us with a key to understanding the

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nature of Chinese genre criticism and reveals what a major role stylistic distinction has played in that tradition. It is clear that, without considering the particular styles within the framework of genres, we can never do full justice to the significance of generic development in China.

One of the difficulties confronting us today is that traditional Chinese critics tended to be impressionistic rather than analytical in their approach. The metaphorical expressions used in their critical comments sometimes seem vague and arbitrary. It is true that they often called attention to generic distinctions and stylistic differences, but they rarely specified what factors underlie the differences. The fact is that the critics generally attempted to suggest rather than to argue. Like the lyric poet, they valued the concentrated and profound moments of self-expression. As a result, critical comments generally take the form of fairly short remarks, approximating the expression of a momentary feeling. In other words, the critical statements are often expressed in such a way that they resemble the lyrical situation and effect.

The fact that the Chinese critical approach is sharply determined by its cultural context assists, rather than hinders, our study of its literature. Our task today is to work out a method by which we can simultaneously draw inspiration from the traditional Chinese criticism and take advantage of the analytical approach available to modern students of literature. In studying *tz'u* poetry I have attempted to follow two basic procedures: first, to look into the verbal meaning of the text through using some technique of philological analysis, and second, to judge each poem's importance with respect to the generic development as a whole. The former stage concerns the elucidation of textual meaning; the latter touches upon the function of interpretation. It is in the second stage of interpreting the significance of the text that traditional *tz'u* criticism will come to the aid of our analytical approach, and help clarify some of the aesthetic values cherished by the Chinese poets and critics. Thus, what may seem impressionistic or elusive in the traditional commentaries may be crystallized into clear analytical language.

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Certainly there is no problem in using modern critical terms to interpret traditional Chinese poetry. Terms do not have absolute values; they are significant only when they are useful for explaining the ideas behind them. For example, readers will find that the concept of "rhetoric" plays an important part in the methodology of the present study. In this context, "rhetoric" is taken to mean a poet's manner of expression, through which he establishes a proper relationship between himself and an imagined audience, even when he himself is the audience. But, while "rhetoric" is employed here as a convenient means of locating the important devices by which the poet expresses his inner world, the term does not imply that devices are the very stuff of poetry itself. It is assumed that there is something about the power of creative energy that cannot always be analyzed, for great poetry is an organic unification of individual genius and technical devices.

The backbone of the present study will be an analysis of *tz'u* on two levels. First, *tz'u* poetry as a whole must be defined in terms of its unique form (i.e., meter, stanzaic division), structure (i.e., methods of organization), and function (i.e., subject and audience). Second, the diachronic dimension of the generic development must be traced and analyzed—in other words, we must attempt to find the links that connect significant poets in chronological order. In each individual case stylistic analysis will form the basis of inquiry: that is, the style of each poet will be examined according to both formal and non-formal considerations. Beginning with the linguistic and the structural dimensions of poems, we shall move on to study the scope of the poet's vision embodied in his expression of feelings. This last point corresponds to our earlier statement on the basic approach to studying poetry: the formal considerations include an inquiry into the textual meaning, and the non-formal study of individual poetic vision requires an act of interpretation.

Of particular significance is the fact that the emergence of the *tz'u* genre was closely related to the impact of popular literature. Long before it became a literary genre, *tz'u* was written in the form of popular songs or entertainment songs.

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The poets' continual attempt to absorb popular songs into literati poetry is evident throughout the development of the *tz'u* genre, and the introductory chapter of the present study deals mainly with this topic.

The five *tz'u* poets to be studied in the present work, Wen T'ing-yün (ca.812-ca.870), Wei Chuang (ca.836-910), Li Yü (937-978), Liu Yung (987-1053), and Su Shih (1036-1101) represent milestones in the early development of *tz'u*. Like most Chinese literary genres, *tz'u* poetry evolved from a simpler to a more complex form. The shorter form, *hsiao-ling*, which came to define the scope of late T'ang and Five Dynasties *tz'u* poetry, will be covered in Chapters II and III. The importance of Wen T'ing-yün and Wei Chuang lies mainly in their establishing the two distinct stylistic modes that were to become the two major schools of *tz'u* writing. Li Yü then synthesized these modes and exploited new poetic devices, marking the turning point of the development of *hsiao-ling*.

In Chapter IV, Liu Yung's achievement will be evaluated with respect to his innovations in the longer form called *man-tz'u*. Both his new conception of lyrical exploration and his extended experiment with sequential structure are crucial to the development of Sung *tz'u*. In this chapter we will see that a creative poet can change the direction of a literary genre by boldly seeking inspiration from popular literature.

Chapter V examines how, in the hands of Su Shih, the *tz'u* genre finally entered the inner circle of Sung poetics. Su Shih's enlargement of poetic vision was directly responsible for this significant achievement. This chapter is the culmination of the present study, because, in the view of the traditional Chinese, a new genre was considered mature only after it had become a literary form through which a poet could express the full range of his ideas and feelings. We shall also see that the transformation of a lesser genre into a major genre often occurs when a literary genius extends the possibilities of his medium by combining old poetic devices in a new way.

Acknowledgments

IN preparing this book I have received help from many people. I am most indebted to Professor Yu-kung Kao, who, with his tremendous scope of knowledge, provided me with an inexhaustible source from which I constantly drew new inspiration. I am immensely grateful to Professor Andrew H. Plaks, who patiently read through all my earlier drafts, suggested changes, and encouraged me to consider the impact of popular songs. Special thanks also go to Professor Frederick W. Mote, who led me to view poetic developments in a much larger perspective than I would formerly have envisioned. I am grateful to Professors James R. Hightower, Shuen-fu Lin, and Earl Miner for their valuable comments on my work. I should also like to thank some other individuals whose assistance has been invaluable to me: Professors H. T. Tang and Ta-tuan Ch'en for their help in Chinese linguistics, Professor Ralph Freedman for providing me with a background in literary theory, Professor Seiichi Nakada for elucidating problems in Japanese sources, and Professor James T. C. Liu for discussing issues in Sung history. I owe a great debt to the library staff of Gest Oriental Library at Princeton University, especially to the past curators James S. K. Tung and David Tsai for their encouragement. Thanks also go to Ernest Tsai, Librarian of East Asian Library at Washington University in St. Louis, who gave me access to books there. In addition, I wish to express my thanks to Professor Denis Twitchett, who directed me to important materials on the T'ang, to Professor Kun Chang, who gave valuable comments on a section of the present work, and to Professors Chia-ying Yeh Chao, Chung-wen Shih, Tsu-lin Mei, and J. Thomas Rimer, who all encouraged me at an early stage of my research. I am grateful to the members of the Chinese Poetry Group of the East Coast, and particularly to Professors Hans H. Frankel,

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Nathan Sivin, Marsha L. Wagner, Stephen Owen, Adele Rickett, C. T. Hsia, and Jonathan Chaves for their faith and interest in my work. Thanks are due to James and Lucy Lo who generously provided me with a picture of Tun-huang Caves, and to some other friends who offered help in various ways: Maureen Bartholomew, Jeannette Mirsky, Frances Mochida, Dore Levy, Lucy T. H. Loh, I-han Chiang, and Maxwell K. Hearn. To Professor James J. Y. Liu of Stanford University I would like to express my indebtedness to his book on *tz'u* poetry, *Major Lyricists of the Northern Sung* (1974). His excellent translations of Liu Yung's and Su Shih's poems are especially helpful to me, although I have found it necessary to do my own translations in order to convey the linguistic peculiarity pertinent to my argument. The names of many other authors—too numerous to mention—to whom I owe an intellectual debt will appear in the bibliography and footnotes. I wish to give thanks to the Whiting Foundation for the award of a Whiting Fellowship in the Humanities, through which the completion of this book was made possible, and to the Paul Mellon Foundation for a grant in support of publication. To the readers of my manuscript for Princeton University Press I am much indebted for their suggestions concerning revisions of the work. I am particularly grateful to R. Miriam Brokaw, Associate Director of the Press, for her continuous encouragement and advice, and to Joanna Ajdukiewicz, the editor, for her indispensable professional assistance.

November, 1979

K. S. C.

Abbreviations

- CHSK *Ch'üan Han San-kuo Chin Nan-pei-ch'ao shih* 全漢三國晉南北朝詩. Ed. Ting Fu-pao 丁福保. 3 vols. Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1969.
- CST *Ch'üan Sung-tz'ü* 全宋詞. Ed. T'ang Kuei-chang 唐圭璋. 5 vols. Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1965.
- CTS *Ch'üan T'ang-shih* 全唐詩. Ed. P'eng Ting-ch'iu 彭定求 (1645–1719), et al. 1907. Rpt. in 12 vols. Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1960.
- CTWT *Ch'üan T'ang Wu-tai tz'u hui-pien* 全唐五代詞彙編. 2 vols. Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1967. Rpt. of Lin Ta-ch'un 林大椿, ed. *T'ang Wu-tai tz'u* 唐五代詞. Peking: Wen-hsüeh ku-chi k'an-hsing-she, 1956.
- SHTK *Shih-hua ts'ung-k'an* 詩話叢刊 (original title: *Keisetsuken sōsho* 螢雪軒叢書). Ed. Kondō Gensui 近藤元粹. 2 vols. 1892. Rpt. Taipei: Hung-tao wen-hua shih-yeh yu-hsien kung-ssu 弘道文化事業有限公司, 1971.
- STP *Su Tung-p'ao ch'üan-chi* 蘇東坡全集. 2 vols. Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1974.
- THC *Tun-huang ch'ü chiao-lu* 敦煌曲校錄. Ed. Jen Erh-pei 任二北. Shanghai: Wen-i lien-ho ch'u-pan-she, 1955.
- THTP *Tz'u-hua ts'ung-pien* 詞話叢編. Ed. T'ang Kuei-chang 唐圭璋. 1935. Rpt. Taipei: Kuang-wen shu-chü, 1967.

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I. Introduction

SOME modern readers of Western lyric odes may forget that lyric as a genre originally referred to poems to be sung to the lyre. Likewise, today's readers of Chinese *tz'u* often overlook the primary importance of the musical element in early *tz'u* poetry. At first the genre was known as *ch'ü-tzu-tz'u*, meaning simply "song words" or "words accompanying tunes." *Tz'u* as a literary term did not become popular until late in the Sung.

As new music came in from Central Asia, and as the old *yüeh-fu* ballads during the Sui (581–618) and the T'ang (618–907) ceased to be sung, *tz'u* gradually appeared as a new song form.¹ In terms of musical function, *tz'u* was often viewed as a continuation of the *yüeh-fu* songs, and thus many critics and poets throughout the Sung continued to place *tz'u* under the category of *yüeh-fu*.² Although the music of *yüeh-fu* and *tz'u* has long been lost,³ it is worth noting that these two poetic forms shared a common affinity with musical presentation.

Tz'u, however, did not emerge merely as an extended form of *yüeh-fu* songs. It initiated a special tradition of composition. Whereas the *yüeh-fu* titles do not point to fixed metric patterns, the *tz'u* titles specify particular tune patterns (*tz'u-p'ai*) to which the poems are composed.⁴ During the T'ang and Five Dynasties period, the subject of a *tz'u* poem often corresponded

¹Wang Cho, *Pi-chi man-chih*, in THTP, I, 20. See also James J. Y. Liu, *Major Lyricists of the Northern Sung* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 3–4.

²For example, Shen I-fu's criticism on *tz'u* was entitled *Yüeh-fu chih-mi*, and Ho Chu's collection of *tz'u* was named *Tung-shan yüeh-fu*.

³Except for a few *tz'u* songs reconstructed by L. E. R. Picken. See Picken's "Secular Chinese Songs of the Twelfth Century," *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 8 (1966), 125–172.

⁴Hans H. Frankel, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), p. 217.

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to the meaning of its tune title.⁵ After the Sung the subject of the poem gradually lost its thematic connection with the tune pattern. "Filling in words" (*t'ien-tz'u*) was the term used to describe this unique practice of *tz'u* writing. These tune patterns were of great variety: according to the prosodic manual *Tz'u-lü* and its supplement, there were 825 tunes in total (i.e., more than 1,670 forms when the variants of each pattern were taken into consideration).⁶ It was the use of these tune patterns and the new music which first marked *tz'u* as an independent genre, distinct from the earlier poetic forms which belonged to the larger category *shih*.

It is often noted that *tz'u* is distinguished by its use of lines of unequal length, and that it was this particular feature which led traditional scholars to give *tz'u* an alternative name: the "long-and-short line" verse (*ch'ang-tuan-chü*). Upon closer scrutiny, however, one realizes that this is by no means the most crucial structural principle in *tz'u*. The practice of using lines of unequal length is as old as the *Book of Songs* (800 B.C.—600 B.C.). Besides, a few *tz'u* tunes requiring regular lines, such as *Yü-lou ch'un* (i.e., *Mu-lan hua*) and *Huan hsi sha* remained current through Sung times, and in fact *Yü-lou ch'un* bears a particularly striking resemblance to the 7-character line *lü-shih*.⁷ Thus, it is quite clear that the length of poetic lines should not be viewed as the only criterion upon which to distinguish between *tz'u* and other forms.

⁵Edward H. Schafer has dealt with this subject with insight. For example, he discusses how poems to the tune *Nan-hsiang tzu* express the true tropical flavor typical of the "warm, amorous south." (See *The Vermilion Bird*, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1967, p. 84).

⁶Wan Shu, [*So-yin pen*] *Tz'u-lü*, rpt. with supplements by Hsü Pen-li (Taipei: Kuang-wen shu-chü, 1971).

⁷However, in prosodic terms one can still distinguish a *tz'u* poem to the *Yü-lou ch'un* tune from a 7-character line *lü-shih*: first of all, a *Yü-lou ch'un tz'u* poem must use oblique tone rhymes, while a *lü-shih* poem usually employs level tone rhymes. Moreover, a *tz'u* poem lacks the linking device called *nien*, an absolute requirement in the structure of *lü-shih*. The use of *nien* in *lü-shih* reflects an attempt to stress the sense of recurrence and regularity, for *nien* is a technical device which prescribes that the second syllable in lines 3, 5, 7 should repeat the tone of the second syllable in the previous line.

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Yet it is undeniable that, viewed historically, no poetic form previous to *tz'u* ever employed lines of unequal length on such a large scale. This very fact is of great importance to our understanding of the *tz'u* aesthetics. But the question remains: how can this seemingly minor point be important in Chinese poetics?

Before this question is answered, we should briefly review the development of the various forms in *shih* poetry which preceded the *tz'u* tradition. Two of the most notable phenomena in the development of *shih* poetry during the Han (206 B.C.—A.D. 220) were the preference for lines of equal length and the tendency to employ lines composed of an odd number of characters. This started with the emergence and the increasing popularity of the 5-character lines, followed by the poems of 7-character lines in a later period. Although admixtures of irregular lines were by no means absent during Han times, the 5-character line poems stood out as the most popular poetic form. What was most striking was that when admixtures of irregular lines were found in a poem, the combinations were in most cases made up of odd-numbered lines (i.e., 5 and 7-character lines, 3 and 7-character lines, or 3, 5 and 7-character lines).⁸ In contrast with the poetic sensibility of the *Book of Songs*, where a standard 4-character line form was employed, the practice of using odd-numbered lines created a new kind of poetic rhythm.

The gradual rise of 8-line *lü-shih* (Regulated Verse) at the end of the Six Dynasties (222–589), and its consequent popularity throughout the T'ang, brought to the Chinese tradition a whole new spectrum of poetic experience. The insistence of *lü-shih* on a rigid tonal system and a structure of parallelism was believed to represent the perfect form of poetry. In this period the long-established *chüeh-chü* quatrain in lines of equal length, which has been found to constitute a major portion of the popular *yüeh-fu* songs during the Six Dynasties period, also began to be written in a similar manner. Thus, "Recent Style poetry" (*chin-t'i shih*) became a term to refer to this "new"

⁸Wang Li, *Han-yü shih-lü hsüeh* (1958; rpt. Hong Kong: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1973), p. 304.