

Poetry and Prose of the Tang and Song

◎ 唐宋诗文选 ◎

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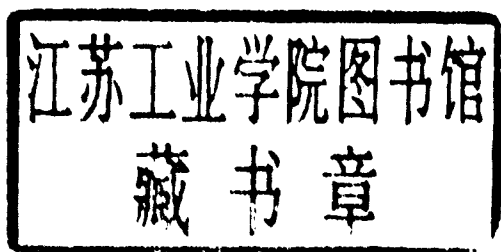
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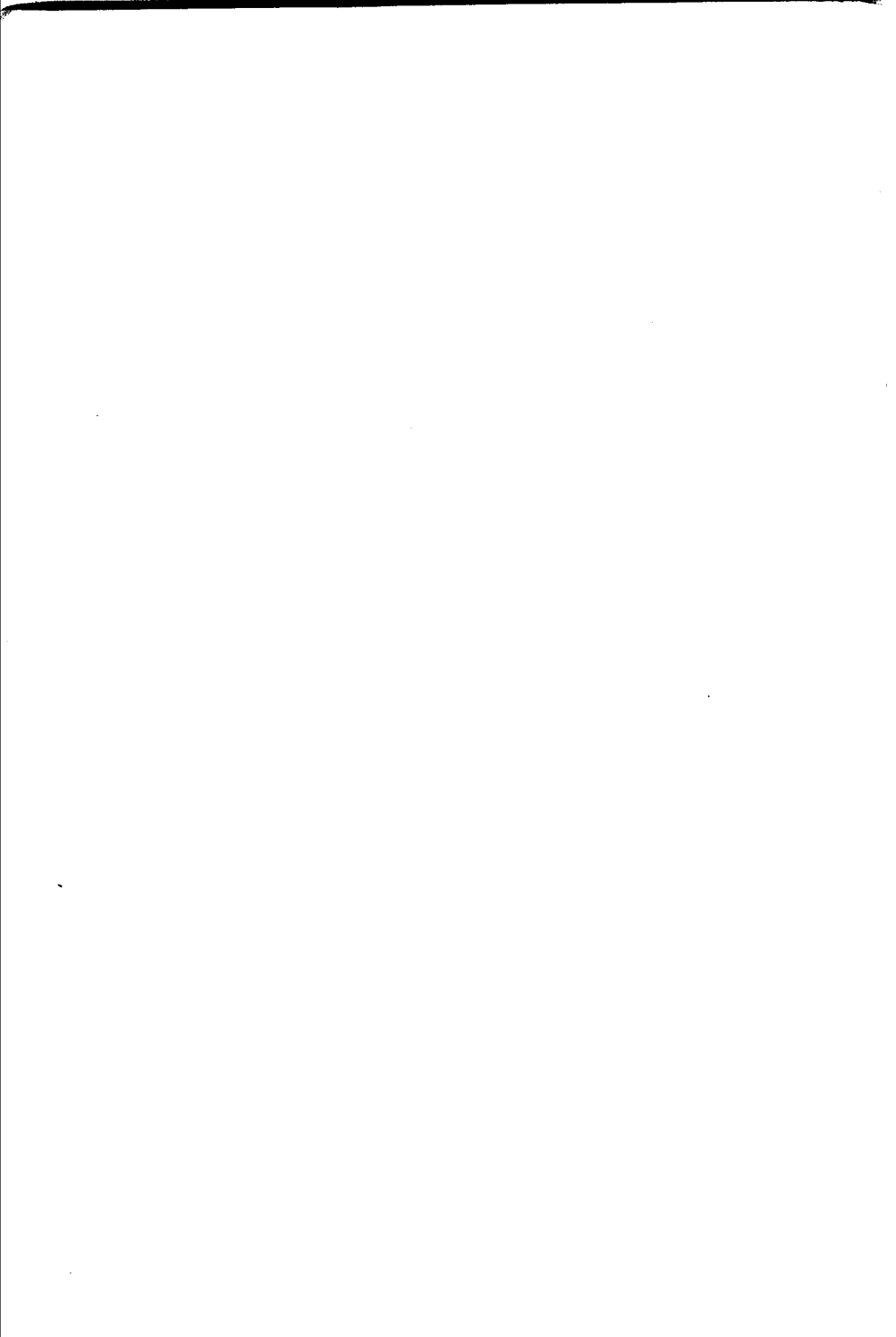
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Publisher's Note

THE Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties, spanning more than 600 years, saw a period of great economic and cultural development in Chinese society. During this golden age of classical literature, numerous masterpieces were written which have exerted a profound influence ever since.

Tang-dynasty poetry can be divided into three periods, early, middle and late Tang, which correspond to the rise and decline of the dynasty.

In the early period from 618-712, classical poetry began to change from the euphuistic, formalistic style into a more vigorous one. Wang Bo, Yang Jiong, Lu Zhaolin and Luo Binwang were the four greatest poets of the period. They were not limited to the forms of court poetry but also commented on society. They played an influential role in changing the poetical trend.

The middle Tang period was from 713-770, when many great Tang poets emerged, finally establishing the new form of classical poetry. Social life was reflected in all its aspects by these poets, and this period is considered the peak of Tang poetic achievement. Famous poets of this period are Meng Haoran and Wang Wei who described country life and Gao Shi and Cen Shen who dealt with life at the frontier. But it is the appearance of immortal poets like Li Bai and Du Fu that made Tang poetry of this period significant. With their genius, passionate love for their country and the people and their deep understanding of life, they developed their own styles and created poems which reflected this great period in Chinese history. They are considered as the greatest of all Chinese classical poets.

A new upsurge in Tang poetry began with the movement to write critical poems as advocated by Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen. They called these "new *yuefu* songs." Seeing the rottenness of the society, the corruption in politics and the miseries of the masses, these poets

wished to develop the realist tradition in poetry so that literature dealt with topical subjects and served society. They were opposed to empty laments merely expressing personal feelings. As in the case of Du Fu, the titles of his poems expressed the content, which was a break with traditional *yuefu* song titles. The efforts of Bai Juyi and Yuan Zhen established the foundation of this new movement.

Late Tang poetry can be divided into two periods. In the early period the most famous poets were Li Shangyin and Du Mu. After the two poets, Tang poetry declined, becoming imitative and less original.

Besides poetry, prose writing in the Tang Dynasty was also noteworthy. The famous Tang-dynasty classicist movement was both an important ideological reform and a literary reform. It advocated learning from classical prose and was opposed to the ornate and euphuistic style predominant in the early Tang period. Representative writers of the classicist movement are Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan, whose major works are selected into this book.

The classicist movement continued in the Song Dynasty to fight against the revived euphuistic style. The most famous prose writers of this period include Ouyang Xiu, Su Shi, Su Xun, Su Che, Wang Anshi and Zeng Gong. Together with Han Yu and Liu Zongyuan of the Tang Dynasty, they were called the Eight Great Masters of the Tang and Song Dynasties.

Song Dynasty also enjoyed the flourishing of the *ci* poetry, which first appeared in the late Tang Dynasty. *Among the Flowers* was a famous early tenth-century collection of *ci* poems written by the literati on the theme of love and sorrow of departing. Later poets in the Song Dynasty enlarged the themes to describe scenery, expound certain philosophies and introduce classical lore. Famous Song-dynasty *ci* poets include Xin Qiji, Su Shi, Zhou Bangyan, and Jiang Kui, who each has left several hundred *ci* poems.

This collection of *Poetry and Prose of the Tang and Song* is only a small sample of the voluminous literature of the Tang and Song dynasties. However, in its variety, it should prove informative and interesting for specialist and general readers alike.

WANG WEI

Wang Wei (701-761 or 698-759) was from Qixian County in Shanxi. He embarked upon an official career at an early age and in his later years retired to his country home in Lantian County, southeast of present-day Xi'an. A great painter and an accomplished musician, Wang for many represents the classical ideal of the cultured scholar-official. The majority of his poems are about nature and are written in a restrained, exquisite and deeply symbolic style.

Wei River Farm

A village in the setting sun;
 Down humble lanes the cows and sheep wind home;
 An old man, waiting for a shepherd boy,
 Leans on his staff beside his wicker gate.
 Pheasants are crying, wheat is in the ear;
 Silkworms are dormant, sparse the mulberry leaves;
 Up come two farmers shouldering their hoes
 And meeting fall to talking. . .
 Till, envying their carefree life,
 I chant the sad old song *Longing for Home*. *

The Countryside After Rain

FRESH washed by rain the rolling plain,
 No mist or dust as far as eye can see;
 A gate in the stockade gives on the ford,
 The village trees verge on the valley's head;
 White water gleams beyond the fields
 And green peaks loom behind the hills;
 A busy season, this, for farming folk;
 Whole families are tilling the southern fields.

* From the *Book of Songs*.

Passing the Monastery of Gathered Fragrance

WHERE is it, the Monastery of Gathered Fragrance?
Mile after mile I climb the cloudy peaks;
Here are old trees, a path that no man treads
And deep in the hills the sound of a temple bell;
A fountain chokes on jagged rocks,
Among these dark green pines the sun seems chill;
I come at twilight to a deep pool —
Can the monk at his devotions curb the evil dragon?

An Autumn Evening in the Hills

THROUGH empty hills new washed by rain
As dusk descends the autumn comes;
Bright moonlight falls through pines,
Clear springs flow over stones;
The bamboos rustle as girls return from washing,
Lotus flowers stir as a fishing boat casts off;
Faded the fragrance of spring,
Yet, friend, there is enough to keep you here.

My Retreat by the Zhongnan Mountains

MIDWAY through life I set my heart on Truth
And have come to end my days by the Southern Hills;
When the mood takes me I stroll out alone,
My pleasure shared by none.
I walk to where streams rise,
Sit watching as the clouds drift up the sky,
And meeting with an old man in the woods
Talk and laugh with him, forgetting to return.

Living in the Hills

IN solitude I close my wooden gate,
As shadows fall I watch the setting sun;
The cranes have made their nests among the pines,
And to my rustic door few callers come;
Fresh powder dusts the young bamboo,
Its faded petals the red lotus sheds;
At the ferry landing lights spring up
And girls laden with water-chestnuts come flocking home.

The Zhongnan Mountains

NEAR the celestial capital, Taiyi*
Marches range after range to meet the sea;
Far off I glimpse it shrouded in white clouds,
And a blue haze, fading as soon as seen;
Its central peak divides the regions round,
Shadow and sunlight sunder its far valleys;
Seeking some lodging for the night,
I hail the woodcutter across the stream.

Watching the Hunt

A gusty wind, twang of horn-backed bows:
The general is hunting at Weicheng;
Hawks' eyes are keen above the withered grass,
Horse-hooves fall lightly where the snow has melted;
They wheel past Xinfeng Market
And head home to the camp at Xiliu,
Turning once to mark where the vulture fell:
The plain sweeps far off to the evening clouds.

* The highest peak of the Zhongnan Mountains.

A View of the Han River

THE three rivers of Xiang meet in the land of Chu;
Through the gateway of Jing the nine tributaries flow;
The river sweeps beyond the earth and sky,
Half visible the hills and half unseen;
Towns seem afloat upon the bank ahead,
Waves are rocking the distant sky;
A fine day like this in Xiangyang
And the old hermit will get happily drunk!

My Mission to the Frontier

A single carriage sets off for the border,
Journeying past the subject state of Juyan;
On we jolt, leaving Han fortresses behind,
A wild goose winging back to the Hunnish sky.
In the great desert one straight plume of smoke,
By the long river at sunset a ball of flame;
Before Xiao Pass we meet a mounted patrol
And learn that our forces have taken Mount Yanran.

The Deer Enclosure

EMPTY the hills, no man in sight,
Yet voices echo here;
Deep in the woods slanting sunlight
Falls on the jade-green moss.

The Magnolia Enclosure

THE autumn hills glean the last light of day
As winged birds chase their mates,
Their vivid colours flash across the green,
Through drifting evening mist.

The Luan Family Rapids

IN spattering autumn rain
Over the rocks the swirling rapids plunge;
The leaping water sprinkles all around,
Startled into flight, the white egret alights again.

The Bamboo Lodge

SEATED alone by shadowy bamboos
I strum my lyre and laugh aloud;
None knows that I am here, deep in the woods;
Only the bright moon comes to shine on me.

Hibiscus Valley

HIBISCUS high on the trees
Flaunt red in the hills;
To this secluded valley no man comes,
Yet the flowers bloom and fall year after year.

The Gully of Twittering Birds

IDLY I watch the cassia petals fall;
Silent the night and empty the spring hills;
The rising moon startles the mountain birds
Which twitter fitfully in the spring gully.