PEARL *from the* DRAGON'S MOUTH

Evocation of Feeling and Scene in Chinese Poetry

中诗探骊

Cecile Chu-chin Sun

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Chinese Historical Periods

SHANG (YIN)商 (殷)	1751–1112 B.C.
CHOU 周	1111–256 B.C.
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Chan-kuo (Warring States) period 戰國	403–221 B.C.
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* Of the Six Dynasties

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FIVE DYNASTIES 五代	907–959
SUNG 宋	960–1279
YÜAN (MONGOL) 元 (蒙古)	1280–1368
MING 明	1368–1644
CH'ING (MANCHU) 清 (滿)	1644–1911
REPUBLIC 民國	1911–

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Preface

This book is written to provide readers with a better grasp of what goes on at the heart of Chinese poetry and poetics. Specifically, it is about what Chinese poets and critics themselves have perceived poetry to be throughout the entire Chinese critical tradition.

Virtually all poets and critics, for over two millennia, have agreed that the intrinsic nature of Chinese poetry lies in two distinct but inseparable elements. One of these refers to the poets' thoughts and feelings, to their memory as well as their imagination, expressed in the poetic medium. The other refers to the physical context depicted in a poem, including not only what the poet captures in his immediate reality, but the landscape and locale that the poet remembers and imagines. These two elements have been generally known as *ch'ing* 情 (feeling) and *ching* 景 (scene) since the mid-thirteenth century. The integration of "feeling" and "scene" is fundamental to the subtlety and, more importantly, to what I would describe as the living sensuousness of Chinese poetry. A well-prepared scene usually fulfills two functions: it expresses the feeling by providing a concrete correlative to the abstract sentiments; it also evokes such sentiments by setting them astir not only in the poetic medium but beyond it in the mind of the reader. Fundamentally speaking, the importance that traditional Chinese poets and critics have attached to

these two elements derives from the recognition that poetry is meant to express one's elusive thoughts and feelings through concrete and tangible reality in the physical world.

What these traditional poets and critics have grasped is something close to what I would call a poetic axiom, applicable, perhaps, to many other traditions. Virtually all poetry, whether it be Chinese or Western, involves a search for vivid and palpable means to articulate what is felt within. Outer reality—tangible, easily identifiable and inexhaustible—has since antiquity been regarded in China as the source and inspiration for the poet's expression. In the West, the employment of figures of speech, such as imagery, simile, metaphor, and symbol, is dictated by a similar quest. Its purpose is mainly to express in concrete terms the otherwise inexpressible thoughts and sentiments of the poet.

While this quest to anchor the elusive is as old and universal as poetry itself, it is at the same time intensely personal and culture-specific. One might want to ask how, for example, this quest is executed by an individual poet at a given moment of lyrical inspiration. More particularly, how does each tradition precondition the way poets perceive their relationships with reality? As one might expect, the answers vary from person to person, from tradition to tradition.

In the Chinese tradition, the common practice of expressing "feeling" through "scene" is ultimately premised on an inner rapport between man and nature. While "scene" is not to be simplistically equated with "nature," there is no denying the fact that the notion of "scene" in Chinese poetry does entail a large number of elements from nature. From early on, this is not only borne out by the poetic works themselves where nature features prominently, but is also evidenced by the repeated critical discussions of the important role of nature in the writing of poetry. This phenomenon ranges from the stirring of the *ch'i* (vital breath in the cosmos) that accompanies the seasonal changes, to the various sights and sounds in the physical world. The ease and sophistication with which "scene" relates to

"feeling," and vice versa, in so many Chinese poems demonstrate that they are connected in some unspoken and mysterious union deeply rooted in Chinese thinking. It is this intimate relationship between "feeling" and "scene" that is at the heart of Chinese poetry and gives it a special quality distinct from other traditions of poetry. To understand the soul of Chinese poetry, one must be attuned to what is inspired and evoked in their secret and spontaneous interchange.

This book seeks to find out how the critical perception of this essential phenomenon has evolved throughout the Chinese tradition. Despite its central importance in Chinese criticism, this evolution has never been systematically treated. Naturally it is not possible to document all that is involved in this long, complex process. What I propose to do is to locate its most crucial phases, that is, to identify and discuss those key stages that have made an important difference in the knowledge of this issue. In this way, we can learn how Chinese poets and critics themselves have come to a comprehensive and profound understanding of the inner collaborations of "feeling" and "scene." Such an exploration has ramifications both for poetry and beyond it, in the broader context of man's relationship with external reality; and it is in this broader context that the interchange on the poetic level acquires its full significance.

In order to give a historical framework to this evolution, I shall present my material chronologically, beginning with the second century B.C. Han commentators' interpretation of the *Book of Songs (Shih-ching)* anthology, and continuing up to the discussion of this issue by the last of the traditional critics in the early twentieth century. This approach reveals that for more than two thousand years Chinese poets and critics have pondered this phenomenon.

During this long period, the perception of the critics evolved from a rather crude and misleading view to an increasingly sophisticated comprehension of the issue's entire spectrum as well as its transpoetic implications. Aside from the poetic trends, instrumental in the evolution of this critical perception was the interweaving of various strands of metaphysical thinking into poetry criticism, in-

cluding Confucianism, Taoism, Ch'an Buddhism, and the *Book of Changes (I-ching).*

As we try to understand Chinese poetry from within—both in its intrinsic makeup and with respect to the traditional Chinese view of it—it is especially worth noting that many of the critics discussed here were also respectable poets in their own right. Precisely because they were not mere outsiders looking in, as it were, what these poet-critics have to say about poetry is seldom idle speculation; when they are at their best, they are very much on target and penetrating. Given the tendency in some literary circles to distance and even to separate critical theory from literature itself, it is refreshing to discover that the double role of poet and critic is embodied in one person and that this has been the rule rather than the exception in traditional Chinese literary criticism.

In writing this book, I have naturally relied heavily on what these traditional critics have said on the subject. The critical materials selected in the text belong to the well-known classics of Chinese poetics; the arrangement of these materials as well as my comments on them is organized primarily from the perspective of how they reflect and help shape the evolution of the critical perception under study. In addition, wherever possible, I selected pertinent poems for detailed explication. I have always believed that, in the final analysis, the best proof of a critical idea is to be found in the literary works themselves. Obviously, I am on the side of those who believe that theories exist for the sake of literature, not the other way around. The selection of poems in the book, I might add, is fairly extensive but limited to those which I consider representative; there is no intention on my part to survey the entire canon of Chinese poetry.

Since I am trying to communicate a sense of Chinese poetry and poetics in the medium of English, accuracy of translation is crucial in this book. I have done my best to give readers of English as close an idea of the original as I am capable of delivering. In cases where a choice has to be made between elegance and accuracy, I have always

opted for the latter. Unless otherwise noted, all the translations in this book are my own.

Chinese characters for all important Chinese expressions will be found in the Glossary, arranged alphabetically according to their transcription. In the body of my text, I include only characters of paramount importance. A few critical terms (e.g., *ching* 景 and *ching* 境) are identical in their English transcriptions and thus easily confused, so I distinguish them by supplying the different Chinese characters in the text whenever necessary. Chinese terms for which there are English equivalents or near equivalents will be referred to initially in both their transcribed forms and English translations; subsequently, the English translations are usually used. For those Chinese critical terms that are simply untranslatable, I will provide an initial explanation but thereafter refer to them in their transcribed form. There is also an Appendix where I give all the original texts of the poems and critical passages cited in this book. For easy cross-reference, the same numbering system (e.g., 2.7 [chapter 2, passage no. 7]) is used for both the English translations in the body of my text and the original Chinese texts that appear in the Appendix. The Wade-Giles transcription system is used throughout and Chinese personal names follow the Chinese order with the surname first, except for a few names where I follow the individual's preference.

Finally, I want to thank all those who have contributed to my research. A book of this nature owes its existence to numerous writers, both past and contemporary, who have commented on and studied this subject. Although most of my primary and secondary sources are taken from Chinese originals, among scholars in the West writing in English I should like to single out for special mention Chen Shih-hsiang, Eugene Chen Eoyang, Hans Frankel, Kao Yu-kung, Shuen-fu Lin, James J. Y. Liu, Stephen Owen, Adele A. Rickett, K'ang-i Sun Chang, Wang Ching-hsien, Wong Siu-kit, and Pauline Yü. They have rendered my present task considerably easier through their publications on Chinese poetry and poetics for Western readers. In addition to my specific references in the notes, I will simply let my

bibliography be a small indication of my indebtedness to all the scholars I have consulted.

More particularly, I want also to express my gratitude to the Wang-An Institute for a generous grant, which relieved me from my teaching responsibilites at the University of Pittsburgh during 1987–1988 in order to do much of my research. I am also very much indebted to my colleagues at the University for their support and encouragement.

On a personal note, I want to thank Hans Frankel and C. T. Hsia for their longstanding interest in my work and their confidence in me. Their helpful suggestions have enhanced the manuscript in both content and form. I am also grateful to Shuen-fu Lin and Anthony Yü for their useful comments. My colleague Andrew Miller deserves a special note of thanks for improving the text with his fine sense of style. John J. Deeney's unswerving support and common-sensical advice have always made the tedious moments of research and writing easier to endure. And special thanks go to David Rolston and his dedicated staff at the University of Michigan's Center for Chinese Studies Publications, particularly to Walter Michener and Terre Fisher, for their meticulous attention to all the details that went into the production of this book.

This book is dedicated to my father, Professor Sun Kang-tseng, whose calligraphy graces the frontispiece, and to my mother, Lu Wei-ju. They have instilled in me a deep affection and respect for Chinese poetry since early childhood by their own passion for learning. Without their loving encouragement and invaluable advice during the course of my writing, this book would not have been written.

Lastly, a word about the title. According to a Chuang Tzu fable, the pearl of the black dragon can only be obtained by plumbing the sea's depths to the dragon's lair. This fabulous pearl has since become a symbol of the much sought after qualities, or essence, of a work of literature.

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Introduction

The depiction of external reality and of nature in particular has occupied a very important position in Chinese poetry since its earliest beginnings. In the oldest anthology of Chinese poems, the *Book of Songs* or *Shih-ching* (composed between 1100 and 600 B.C.), one finds that human feelings are rarely expressed in isolation from their immediate environment. In these rural and pristinely natural surroundings, the flowers, plants, and creatures of the animal kingdom, together with the seasonal changes, help to weave a natural background against which human dramas of love, separation, war, and injustice are enacted.

Nothing seems more natural for the early poets than to express their thoughts and feelings by referring to what they see and hear immediately around them. The presence of nature so permeates these poems that one reason to study the *Book of Songs*, according to Confucius, is to learn the names of the birds, beasts, plants, and trees.[1]

The susceptibility of human feelings to natural surroundings is, admittedly, not unique to Chinese culture. Frederic W. Moorman, for instance, has observed that the earliest appreciation of nature in Western

poetry is related to simple pleasure called forth by genial sunshine and refreshing showers, and to equally simple pain in the presence of chilling wind and driving snow.[2] For the Chinese, however, this intimate relationship with nature is reflected not only throughout the entire poetic tradition but in a qualitatively different way.

The pervasive presence of nature or of external reality in general does not mean that the majority of Chinese poems are nature poems as understood in the Western tradition. It means, rather, that description of the natural world is a habitual mode of expressing human feeling in Chinese poetry. No thorough understanding of Chinese poetry is possible without a knowledge of the subtle yet dynamic interplay between the physical world and the emotional world, despite the variations and innovations that have occurred within this central mode of expression over time. Serious discussion of Chinese poetic theory must address the relationship between these two fundamental elements.

From early on, this phenomenon caught the attention of Chinese critics and interpreters of poetry. As mentioned in the Preface, critical perception of this central issue gradually evolved from a crude and, in fact, distorted view to a comprehensive understanding of its nature and metaphysical implications. This book does not undertake the task of tracing this entire complex history, but of identifying some of its most significant and important phases and the predominant critical trends that have influenced the evolution of this quintessential phenomenon.

Generally speaking, Chinese tradition exhibits two very different attitudes toward literature. One is more practically oriented, drawing on Confucian teaching for its main intellectual and moral sustenance. It regards literature primarily as a means of transmitting the sociopolitical and socioethical principles of an ideal society. The other is more artistically oriented, taking as its main concern the intrinsic nature of literature. The metaphysical underpinning of this rival view stems mainly from Taoism and Buddhism. The *Book of Changes (I-ching)*, the transcendental classic about the interaction between the cosmic forces of *yin* and *yang*, has also exerted considerable influence on this view of literature.

Historically, the practical attitude of Confucianism was the first to dominate Chinese literary criticism, but starting in the Wei-Chin period, the pragmatic view began to lose ground as the only measure of literature in the face of the rising influence of Taoist thinking. This is not to say, however, that after the Wei-Chin period the earlier Confucian view was everywhere superseded by the more artistic view. The pragmatic approach has continued to exercise varying degrees of influence throughout the history of Chinese literary criticism.[3] The most glaring evidence of the persistence of the pragmatic view is found in the interpretation of the *Book of Songs* which, for almost two millennia since the Han period, has not broken free from the impact of Confucian scholarship. I am referring, in particular, to the interpretation of the well-known triad of critical terms: *fu* (straightforward presentation), *pi* (comparison), and *hsing* (evocation). Each is a different poetic method of employing physical nature to express human feeling; yet all have been considered by the pragmatic school mainly as means of conveying sociopolitical and socioethical messages. More will be said about this later.

After the Wei-Chin period, the coexistence of both the pragmatic and the artistic views was common. They coexisted not only in the same period but, in many cases, in the same person. A good example is Liu Hsieh (465–523), an eclectic scholar who is arguably the most important critic in the Chinese tradition. While his notion of literature was informed mainly by the Confucian pragmatic view, he attached a great deal of importance to the artistic dimension. For instance, in his magnum opus, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons (Wen-hsin tiao-lung)*, Liu insists on the necessity of giving recognition to the innate beauty of all literary forms.

Another important critic and poet, Lu Chi (261–303), likewise exhibited a double view of literature. In his influential critical treatise, *Essay on Literature (Wen-fu)*, he alludes to the importance of classical learning as the basis of fine writing, but at the same time recognizes that poetry must express personal emotion in beautiful language. Lu's emphasis on quiet observation and on merging with the object of contemplation during the creative process testifies to the influence of Taoist teaching.[4]

Both the pragmatic and artistic views of literature were frequently embodied in one person in later periods as well, for example, in the late Ming and early Ch'ing scholar and critic Wang Fu-chih (1619–1692), whose exploration of the relationship between "feeling" and "scene" will be discussed in detail in chapter 5. An erudite Confucian scholar, Wang on the one hand subscribes to the pragmatic view that poetry does and should have a sociopolitical and socioethical function to perform, as in his interpretation of the *Book of Songs, Broad Commentary on Shih (Shih kuang-chuan).* On the other hand, in his *Ginger Studio Poetical Notebook (Chiang-chai shih-hua)* and various other comments on poetry, he transcends the pragmatic view in his insightful discussion of the inner dynamics between "feeling" and "scene."

The reality of the Chinese critical tradition is complex, as these examples indicate, comprehending a dualistic relationship between the pragmatic and the artistic tendencies. This book is concerned exclusively with the critical perception of the *nature* of poetry as reflected in the relationship between "feeling" and "scene," and not with the *function* of poetry or the interpretation of its *meaning*. It will therefore focus attention on the artistically oriented strand in the critical tradition.

The reader is reminded that the terms "feeling" and "scene" are used to translate the original Chinese expressions, *ch'ing* and *ching*. This pair of terms, however, did not become established until the latter part of the thirteenth century.[5] Terminology used to refer to these two concepts prior to that period thus varies, depending on the context. Equivalent pairs of terms such as *hsin* (mind) and *wu* (object), *i* (meaning) and *wu* (object), or *jen-hsin* (human mind) and *wu-se* (physical world), are also employed for *ch'ing* and *ching*.

Four major phases in the evolution of the critical perception of this issue can be identified, beginning with the Han interpreters of the *Book of Songs* (around the second century B.C.) and continuing up to the early decades of the twentieth century.[6] Briefly, they can be outlined as follows:

1) The *pragmatic phase*, typified in the Confucian scholars' interpretation of the *Book of Songs*, took place during the Han dynasty. In this phase,

poetry was regarded primarily as a means of education *(shih-chiao)*, an instrument to realize the Confucian notion of a properly regulated hierarchy of human relationships in an ideal society.[7] Unhappily, these scholars, in their effort to read morally edifying meaning into this ancient collection, distorted many of the poems. As a result, the pairing of human feeling and physical world, which is a recurrent feature of the *Book of Songs*, was often burdened with misleading socioethical or sociopolitical messages. This phase is described in chapter 1.

2) The *affective phase* can be identified in the period of the Wei-Chin and the Southern and Northern Dynasties. It was then that critics first began to probe this central relationship in poetry, particularly the affective interaction between the poet's feeling and the physical world during the creative process. Aside from the rising influence of Taoism, which directly fed into the increasing attention to the intimate relationship between man and nature, the poetic developments of the period also played a crucial role. The emergence of various subgenres, including, in particular, that of landscape poetry during the fifth century, both manifested and reinforced this new critical sensibility. The growing awareness of physical nature as an object of aesthetic appreciation and the ultimate means of expressing human emotion is one of the most prominent poetic legacies of this period. It directly contributed to the wonderful fusion of "feeling" and "scene" later on in T'ang poetry. A close analysis of these poetic developments will be the subject of chapter 2, followed by a study of the critical achievements of this affective phase in chapter 3.

3) The *aesthetic phase* refers to a critical sensibility that developed during the T'ang period, when attention began to be focused on a dimension that had not been explored before. I call it the "aesthetic" dimension because it deals with the effect that poetry ultimately exerts in the mind of the reader. The increasing consciousness of what poetry is capable of producing in the wide open space between the written text and the boundless realm of the reader's imagination was a distinct achievement of this period. It brought the critical perception of the relationship between "feeling" and "scene" to a suprasensory dimension. Chapter 4 will

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