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# SUNFLOWER SPLENDOR

*Three Thousand  
Years of  
Chinese Poetry*

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*Co-edited by  
Wu-chi Liu and Irving Yucheng Lo*



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*and*

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*Irving Yucheng Lo* received his B.A. from St. John's University, Shanghai, China; his M.A. in English literature from Harvard; and his Ph.D. in English literature (with a minor in comparative literature) from the University of Wisconsin. He taught English and world literature for a number of years in America, at Stillman College and Western Michigan University, before he joined the Oriental Studies faculty of the University of Iowa. Since 1967, he has taught at Indiana University where he is currently Professor and Chairman of the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures. He has also taught as visiting faculty at the University of Wisconsin, Department of Comparative Literature, and at Stanford University, Department of Asian Languages. He is the author of *Hsin Ch'i-chi* and of many reviews and articles which have appeared in scholarly journals, encyclopedias, and the *New York Times Book Review*.

“Exiled are we. Were exiles born. The ‘far away,’  
language of desert, language of ocean, language of sky,  
as of the unfathomable worlds that lie  
between the apple and the eye,  
these are the only words we learn to say.  
Each morning we devour the unknown. Each day  
we find, and take, and spill, or spend, or lose,  
a sunflower splendor of which none knows the source.”

—Conrad Aiken, “A Letter from Li Po”

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## Preface

This volume, which involves the effort of many individuals, aims to present new translations of Chinese poetry written in classical meters from the earliest time down to the mid-twentieth century. In execution and design, the book represents an unprecedented dimension of collaboration among scholars, a new venture in solving old problems.

First, this anthology is comprised of translations done by over fifty contributors. With rare exceptions (which are noted in the text) in the case of translations that have appeared originally in scholarly journals, all the translations have been specially prepared for this volume. A few of them, subsequent to the submission of the manuscripts to us, have appeared in books published within the last few months. In some instances, a popular poem has elicited several different translations, and it became the hard task of the co-editors to use what is considered the most successful version. Our contributors are mostly East Asian specialists on the faculty of American or Canadian colleges and universities, or younger scholars who have received many years of graduate training in the language. Each contributor, of course, has his or her own style. This variety of approach, in itself desirable and fitting, is also intentional: it helps to enliven a very long tradition which has produced many styles too often stifled in a book of translation done by one person.

Secondly, in the matter of selection, we have aimed, within the limitation of space, at inclusiveness by giving balanced representation to all major genres and periods and, within each, the chief exponents of major schools of Chinese poetry. It is our contention that the richness and variety of the poetic tradition in China cannot adequately be conveyed by a period anthology or by the work of one individual poet. This seemingly trite observation calls attention to a fact, lamented by many students of Chinese literature, that the general public has been ill-served for too long by having access only to a fragment of Chinese poetry, such as the *Three Hundred Poems of T'ang* (618-907), which alone has more than one English translation and which, in real-

ity, is an eighteenth-century Chinese compilation culled from the extant works of close to 49,000 poems by 2,300 poets!

Finally, with respect to the process of translation, we recognize the inherent difficulties, especially in view of the fact that Chinese is an allusive and non-inflectional language. But we do not subscribe entirely to the theory that poetry is untranslatable from one language to another. We have paid, therefore, the most scrupulous attention to the original texts and insisted upon accuracy as well as readability. The translation aims at preserving, in idiomatic English, the identity of the original, including most of its grammatical and stylistic features (parts of speech, word order, line length and enjambment, the use of parallelism, and sometimes even auditory devices); however, no attempt has been made, except in the rarest instances, to reproduce the rhyme scheme.

Each translation in this volume has been checked against the Chinese source by at least three different readers; and, in most cases, the translation has been tested before a larger select audience. As a mode of accommodation between two languages, translation is an art that is bound to improve with each generation as more and more problems are grasped and understood. For such a task, it is not enough that a person must be fluent in both the target and the host languages; fidelity in translating poetry presupposes a thorough understanding of the original as a poem: its meaning, its structure, and its nuances. This is the process observed by all our contributors. We do not recognize as legitimate the use of informants, which was so often resorted to by missionaries and amateurs even in the not so distant past.

In compiling this anthology, we have constantly kept in mind these three principles of operation which, we hope, will save us from committing errors knowingly. In general, we prefer to include in it poems that have not been translated before, and we accept new renderings of previously translated poems only when we are convinced of either the significance of the original as great poetry or the merit of the present version. But a man's reach is one thing, his grasp another. Someone's favorite poet, or poem, will be found missing from our volume; others may question our "taste" in preferring one poet, or one poem, to another. For all our errors of omission or commission, we ask for the understanding of our readers.

We are grateful to all our contributors for making this anthology possible, for giving us unstintingly of their time and sharing with us the benefits of their research. Special thanks are due to three of our



respected colleagues for reading certain portions of our manuscript, after they have been completely assembled, and offering us invaluable suggestions for improvement: Professors William Hung, now retired from Harvard University (on Tu Fu); James J. Y. Liu of Stanford University (on Li Po and Li Shang-yin); and F. W. Mote of Princeton University (on Kao Ch'i). And to our younger colleague at Indiana University, Professor Eugene Eoyang, whose contribution to our anthology goes far beyond his own translations in this volume.

We wish to express our regret to our contributors for the failure to print all the translations which we originally intended to use. During the final stage of editing we made the disconcerting discovery that the material being assembled had exceeded by a third the generous space allotted by our publisher. Consequently, we felt compelled to reduce the number of poems selected for this volume from over 1,300 to about a thousand—a process made rather difficult by the abundance of good translations. To all our contributors, we offer our apologies for having to effect this change.

For generous financial assistance to our project, we are grateful to The Asia Society, New York, especially to our friend Ms. Bonnie Crown, Director of the Asian Literature Program of The Asia Society. We are also indebted to the Office of Research and Advanced Studies and to the East Asian Studies Program at Indiana University for grants-in-aid in the preparation of the manuscript, and to the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures which has brought the two of us together, as exiles to this new land, and made possible our pleasurable association. We derive equal pleasure from our contact with our present and former students in the department, many of whom have contributed to this volume. One final word of appreciation is due to our wives for their patience and understanding, in particular to Lena Dunn Lo for her help in reading through the typescript and improving the quality of the manuscript with her experience and insight as an editor.

Wu-chi Liu and Irving Y. Lo

*Bloomington, Indiana*  
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## Introduction

### I

In what ways does Chinese poetry differ from Western poetry? First, it enjoys an unbroken three-thousand-year-old tradition out of which have evolved many forms, meters, and styles. The word *shih*, for example, is used by the Chinese as a generic label for poetry in a rather broad sense, excluding only the *tz'u* ("poems in the lyric meter") and the *ch'ü* ("song-poems"), or to refer specifically to the earliest anthology of Chinese poetry known as the *Shih Ching*. Chinese verse compositions of the *shih* form are often called by their subgeneric names such as *ssu-yen shih* ("four-word poems"), *lü-shih* ("regulated verse poems"), etc.<sup>1</sup> Even when one form is no longer in vogue, it is never completely supplanted, and often continues to appeal to contemporary poets for its archaic flavor.

Secondly, from the very beginning, Chinese poetry has been intimately related to music. The *Shih Ching* is made up of (1) folk songs and ballads; (2) festive songs sung at court banquets; and (3) temple hymns performed to the accompaniment of music and dance. With only a few exceptions, these songs were compiled by unknown poets in the Yellow River region in North China. The *sao* tradition, which developed quite independently in the South, and which crystallized in the works of the poetic genius Ch'ü Yüan (343?-278 B.C.), may have originated from shamanistic chants performed as part of folk religion practiced by the people of the Yangtze region in what is now Hunan and Hupeh. Ancient music, not having been transcribed on bamboo tablets or stone monuments, proved more ephemeral than ancient verse, and has been, for the most part, lost. But new musical in-

<sup>1</sup> For other forms see Explanations, No. 7: "Subgeneric Names of Poetry: *Shih*, *Tz'u*, and *Ch'ü*." While *tz'u* and *ch'ü* are composed according to the prescribed prosody of the tune pattern used, every one of the *shih* forms can be in the four-syllabic meter, the five-syllabic meter, or the seven-syllabic meter and are called the "four-word," "five-word," or "seven-word" poems. The four-syllabic line, the most common meter in the *Shih Ching*, was not popular in later times; but Tao Ch'ien's (365-427) "The Seasons Come and Go" and Kung Tzu-ch'en's (1792-1841) "The Lute Song" were composed in this meter.

struments and tunes were introduced into the Middle Kingdom from the border peoples of the West and the Northwest and helped to revitalize folk poetry at different times.<sup>2</sup> Even when the musical context for lyrics had been forgotten, poems were still written to be chanted, not just read aloud.

Thirdly, underlining the affinity of poetry with music is the nature of the Chinese language itself, which dictates that each written graph, or character, has a monosyllabic pronunciation. Hence, the rhythmic quality of Chinese verse is based not on a system of stressed and unstressed syllables, but (except for ancient poetry) on a patterned alternation of words of different tone, or pitch.<sup>3</sup> The use of tonal meter has been the most distinctive character of Chinese verse since the seventh century; other auditory devices used by Chinese poets include those familiar to students of Western poetry—such as end rhyme, internal rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia.

A fourth difference, and another characteristic of the language that has imparted a special flavor to Chinese poetry, is the frequent omission of the subject of a sentence in classical Chinese. In Chinese grammar, there are also no explicit distinctions made in tense for verbs, number for nouns, or case and gender for pronouns. Thus, a line of Chinese poetry tends to be more compact, almost telegraphic. Sometimes this grammatical sparseness contributes to deliberate ambiguity as, for instance, in a line by Li Shang-yin (813?–858):

*tso ying tang chiu chung*  
sit oriole like wine heavy

<sup>2</sup> This took place at least twice in Chinese history: once during the early Han, when the Music Bureau (*Yüeh-fu*) was reactivated around 120 B.C. to supervise the collecting of court music and folk tunes, as well as of songs and music of nomadic Tartar tribes, thus contributing to the birth of a genre of balladry known as the *yüeh-fu*. Another instance was during the eighth and ninth centuries, when new music was brought to the T'ang capital by traders and soldiers from Persia and other parts of Central Asia, exerting decisive influence on the tunes and melodies of the *tz'u*.

<sup>3</sup> The two contrasting groups of tones used for poetry are called "level" or "even" (*p'ing*, meaning the "high-level" or "high-rising" pitch) and "deflected" (*tse*) tones, the latter referring to the three "low-rising" (*shang*), "high-falling-to-low" (*ch'ü*), and "entering" (*ju*) tones. The "entering" tone, though no longer present in modern Chinese (except in some dialects), is still used in the writing of classical poetry; in ancient Chinese it had a consonantal ending of *p*, *t*, or *k*. For paradigms of major verse forms of the "modern-style poetry" (*chin-t'i shih*) of T'ang and some of the tune patterns of *tz'u*, readers may consult James J. Y. Liu's *The Art of Chinese Poetry* (University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 26–27, 32–33 and Liu's *Major Lyricists of the Northern Sung* (Princeton University Press, 1974).

A perch for orioles, as if weighed down with wine  
 ("Little Peach Blossoms in the Garden")

But, more often, the context of a poem indicates very precisely both the implied subject and tense of verbs, as in the following line by Shen Yüeh (441-512):

yi	lai	shih	cho-	cho	shang
(I) remember	(she) come	time	bright	bright	(she) climb-up
chieh-	ch'ih				
steps-in-	courtyard				

I recall the time she came,  
 Radiantly treading up the steps.  
 ("Four Recollections")

The non-inflectional nature of Chinese and the terseness it permits are matters of linguistic convention rather than poetics: readers should not assume that poetry lies in brevity alone.<sup>4</sup>

Fifthly, on the social provenance of Chinese poetry, one must conclude that, despite the exalted status enjoyed by poetry as a literary form, there is no special class of people, or profession, in traditional Chinese society designated as poets. Chinese poetry has, from the earliest days, drawn its inspiration from two distinct groups; namely, the common people, with their colloquial idiom and plain style of speech, and the literati, with their vast erudition and sophisticated sensibilities. From time to time, there are interactions between the two groups (cf. "Bamboo Branch Song" or other village ditties, which attracted many a literary poet and were imitated by them). The patronage of literature before the seventh century, however, was generally confined to the nobility and the courtiers (cf. the Chien-an poets). When poetry emerged, under the T'ang, as an important, if not the chief, criterion in the selection of officials, many scholars—by means of imperial exami-

<sup>4</sup> It is this quality that endeared Chinese poetry to many imagist poets in America during the twenties, and may have fostered a style of translation which dispenses with prepositions and articles, akin to pidgin English. Conceivably, when carried to an extreme, the translation of Li Shang-yin's line quoted above might read as "Sit oriole like wine-heavy." We believe in preserving the structure of the original, but within the control of the target language, and not at the expense of intelligibility. Chinese grammar must be understood in terms of English grammar. For example, stative verbs in Chinese may occur as adjectives. Hence, to supply a verb in the translation in this instance, or a subject when it is implied, need not necessarily detract from a line of poetry as poetry.

nations (or, in special cases, private audience)—achieved the coveted *chin-shih* (a term meaning “presented scholar”) degree and appointment to official posts. Therefore, a number of poets, especially during the T’ang and early Sung eras, were primarily high officials; and the writing of poetry was considered among the literati as an avocation, a personal accomplishment, or a means of self-expression. The broad class of people trained in the writing of poetry included many women, either from good families or from the courtesan profession; some Taoist and Buddhist monks were also noted for their poetic talent. This tradition has continued to the present time.

There were, to be sure, disaffected intellectuals such as the T’ang poet Meng Chiao (751–814), or banished officials like Ch’ü Yüan. But they were not *poètes maudits*; the training they had received in the Confucian classics had imbued them with a sense of duty and service. When literary excellence was no longer valued by the rulers, as under the Yüan (Mongol) dynasty, artistic talents of the time were channeled into other art forms such as drama and painting. Or, when the road to officialdom was beset with insurmountable obstacles and dangers, as under the autocratic rule of the Ming emperors, poets earned their living by selling calligraphy and painting in which they excelled. Even in the modern era, a fighter for social and political reform, Lu Hsün (1881–1936), who was also a giant of modern (*pai-hua*, or colloquial) literature, chose to express his innermost thoughts in traditional verse. Chinese poets see as their primary mission in life not the writing of poetry, but the fulfillment of their ambition and aspirations for a successful career. And this includes the business of governing the empire, as in the case of the founder of the Han dynasty, Liu Pang, and the leader of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Tse-tung.

Finally, with respect to themes in Chinese poetry, perhaps a few explanations are needed to account for the high incidence of certain topics. Chinese poetry has traditionally been closely related to the life and activities of the people. For the last three thousand years, China has been an agricultural country; hence, the importance attached to the change of seasons, the observance of rituals, or the concern for the lot of the farmers is readily apparent in the poetry of any period. The use of poetry as a form of social intercourse has also been a pronounced feature. As early as during the Spring and Autumn period (770–466 B.C.), verses were recited from memory at state functions by officials in the course of diplomatic receptions; as recently as February 26, 1974, Premier Chou En-lai of the People’s Republic of China,

in welcoming President Boumediene of Algeria at a banquet in Peking, quoted a line, "Flowers fall off, do what one may,"<sup>5</sup> from Yen Shu's (991-1055) lyric, to prove a point. Another popular practice is the exchange of poems between friends, written by using either the same rhyme-words as the original poem or words from the same rhyme-category.<sup>6</sup>

The particular fondness of the Chinese poets for the theme of parting should be understood in the real-life context of the difficulties of travel in pre-modern China. In addition, a monarch with absolute power could decree the banishment of any of his subjects to a remote, often uninhabitable part of the empire, and such separation usually meant lifetime exile, or even death. By the traditional way of thinking, to live far away from one's native district (except in the capital or while serving as officials in the provinces) was considered undesirable since it would mean that one could not care properly for one's ancestral tombs, nor fulfill one's duties to the family. In conformity with the Confucian teaching, the concept of friendship is also viewed with special reverence: regarded as one of the five basic "human relationships," it closely follows in importance the relationship between the emperor and subject, father and son, husband and wife, elder brother and younger brother.

Compared to friendship, sex seems to be a theme of minor importance in Chinese poetry. When women's position was generally cast in a subservient role, and the institution of the pleasure houses existed, women were rarely the objects of adoration. Hence, Chinese love poems are seldom endowed with the same spiritual intensity as one finds in the love poems of the West. Still, there are disarmingly charming love songs of folk origin, subtle and ironic "impersonations" of boudoir feelings, and touching apostrophes between lovers. There are also love poems addressed to one's wife (during a period of forced separation and travel); elegies written for one's wife (a Chinese scholar is reticent to show in public his feeling for his wife while she is living) or concubines; and passionate poems and lyrics inspired by unrequited love. A jaundiced view that Chinese poetry does not treat

<sup>5</sup> *Peking Review* 17:10 (March 8, 1974), 6 and *Renmin Ribao* (February 28, 1974). For a translation of this lyric, see James J. Y. Liu, *Major Lyricists of the Northern Sung*, pp. 18-20.

<sup>6</sup> The terms used for this kind of poetry are either *tz'u-yün*, or *ho* (sometimes translated as "harmonizing"); they are rendered as "Following the Rhyme of" or "Replying to" in this volume.

romantic love is very much mistaken: rather, the manners of expressing love are different and reflect different social conventions.

## II

How is this assortment of themes treated and accommodated in Chinese poetry during the different periods of its long history? It must be said that Chinese poems will be found to show different levels of technical accomplishment: from the simplest and the least adorned to the most allusive and sophisticated. Compare these two poems, one a love song written before the sixth century B.C., and the second a lyric by the highly stylized poet of the ninth century A.D., Wen T'ing-yün:

Lovely is the modest girl,  
She awaits me at the corner of the wall—  
I love her, but do not see her;  
I scratch my head, not knowing what to do.  
(“Lovely Is the Modest Girl”)

Frozen in flight, two butterflies adorn  
A blue pin, gold-stemmed, in her hair.  
Who knows the inmost secrets of her heart?  
Only the bright moon and the flowering branches.  
(Tune: “Deva-like Barbarian”)

The differences in verbal texture and emotional intensity are unmistakable. Or, take the following statement of the familiar *sic transit gloria mundi* theme made by T'ao Ch'ien (365–427), a poet noted for the spontaneity of his style:

Bright blossoms seldom last long;  
Life's ups-and-downs can't be charted.  
What was a lotus flower in spring,  
Is now the seed-husk of autumn.  
(“Miscellaneous Poems, No. 3”)

And compare these lines with those of Han Yü (768–824), a difficult and allusive poet:

The cosmos turns in endless periods  
And the essence given every thing differs

yet each, attuned to time, attains its place—  
no need to treasure the evergreen  
(“Sentiments at Autumn, No. 2”)

It becomes immediately clear, as Thomas De Quincey once said, in comparing “things of immortal beauty” with “works of nature,” that “they never absolutely repeat each other, never approach so near as not to differ; and they differ not as better or worse, or simply by more and less; they differ by undecipherable and incommunicable differences . . .” (“The Poetry of Pope,” 1848).

The complexity of a Chinese poem, both technical and intellectual, results from a confluence of several intellectual sources—chiefly Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. While Confucianism inculcates the ideals of order and stability and of human brotherhood, the teachings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu expound the theory that the world is governed by impermanence and flux, maintaining also that to live in harmony with nature is the only way to assure man’s survival. Philosophical Taoism is reinforced by the teachings of Buddha introduced in China during the Han dynasty. The breakup of the first stable, universal empire ushered in an age of great creativity in many areas: in philosophical debate, in studies of phonology (influenced by the study of Sanskrit), in literary criticism, in landscape appreciation, in calligraphy and painting. Poetry, heir to all these intellectual pursuits, spoke for the first time with a multiple voice.

The poets of the T’ang era<sup>7</sup> devoted their exclusive energy and talent to the refinement of the various forms of *shih*, culminating in the artistry seen in the works of Li Po (701–62) and Tu Fu (712–70). The break from the elegant tradition of the Six Dynasties’ verse occurred at the beginning of the dynasty in the poetry of Lu Chao-lin (c. 641–80), among others, and especially Ch’ên Tzu-ang (661–702); while even more individualistic voices began to be heard in the works of Wang Wei (701–61) and the Buddhist monk Han Shan, who probably lived during the eighth century.

Following the great chaos of the An Lu-shan rebellion in the middle of the eighth century, there emerged more loudly the voices of satire and realism, such as exemplified in the works of Po Chü-yi

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<sup>7</sup> The T’ang dynasty produced so many poets and poetic styles that Chinese literary historians, since the Ming, often speak of them in terms of four periods: the Early T’ang (618–712), the Flourishing, or High, T’ang (713–65), the Mid-T’ang (766–846), and the Late T’ang (847–907).



(772–846) and Yüan Chen (779–831). In the works of the best T'ang poets, a concern for craftsmanship goes hand in hand with the attempt to broaden the scope of poetry. The two strains of realism and lyricism are combined in the frontier poems, the earlier exponents of which style were Kao Shih (702?–65) and Ts'en Shen (715–70), and in the narrative poems which are found in such great numbers. (Attempts have been made in this anthology to include those titles less well known to English readers, like Yüan Chen's "On Lien-ch'ang Palace" and Wei Chuang's [836–910] "The Lament of the Lady of Ch'in" rather than the more familiar poems.)

With the decline of the material culture, extraordinary geniuses who were poetic rebels—like Han Yü, Meng Chiao, or P'i Jih-hsiu (c. 833–83)—manipulated the traditional themes even more boldly; and some turned more and more inwardly to the abyss of their soul. (Except for Han Yü, their poetry was often neglected by scholars of later times and by anthologists, accounting for their relative obscurity among Western readers; hence, they are given substantial representation in this volume). While philosophical poetry had its champions in Han Yü and, to a lesser extent, in Liu Tsung-yüan (773–819)—becoming more and more Buddhist toward the end of the era (cf. Ssu-k'ung T'u, 837–908)—there also occurred the exuberant, aesthetic poetry of Tu Mu (803–52), Li Shang-yin, and Wen T'ing-yün (813?–70) toward the end of the dynasty.

During the second period of division (the Five Dynasties era, 907–60), the new vogue of the "lyric meter," which started in Ch'ang-an and spread as far as the remote frontier town of Tun-huang, miraculously flourished in two centers of civilization far apart from each other: in the kingdoms of Shu (Szechwan) and Southern T'ang (with its capital in what is now Nanking). The sophisticated artistry of the *tz'u* reached a new level in the works of Li Yü, the Last Ruler of Southern T'ang (937–78), and of the many poets represented in the *Hua-chien chi* (the earliest *tz'u* anthology, compiled in Shu, preface dated 960).

With the unification of the empire under the Sung, the early Sung poets continued for a time to imitate the technical aspects of late T'ang poetry, resulting in the so-called Hsi-k'un style of verse. But the genius of such poets as Mei Yao-ch'en (1002–60), Ou-yang Hsiu (1007–72), and Su Shih (1037–1101) succeeded in arresting this trend and brought poetry into closer contact with the life of the prosperous Northern Sung society in all its aspects—secular, intellectual,