

Chinese Poems

Arthur Waley



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CHINESE POEMS

Other translations by Arthur Waley

THE BOOK OF SONGS

MONKEY

THE NINE SONGS

THE NO PLAYS OF JAPAN

THE PILLOW-BOOK OF SEI-SHONAGON

THE POETRY AND CAREER OF LI PO

THE REAL TRIPITAKA

THE TALE OF GENJI

THE WAY AND ITS POWER

YUAN MEI

To
Edith Sitwell

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This book contains a selection of poems from *The Book of Songs* (1937) and most of the poems from *170 Chinese Poems* (1918), *More Translations* (1919) and *The Temple* (1923). The poems have been arranged as far as possible in chronological order. All the translations have been thoroughly revised.

The present order of the poems has of course no reference to the dates at which they were translated, and as my methods have changed a good deal in the last thirty years, the reader will find very literal, almost pidgin-English versions side by side with more finished work. I have made very few merely stylistic alterations; but the *Hymn to the Fallen* struck me as definitely bad, and I have, I think, greatly improved it.

Out of the Chinese five-word line I developed between 1916 and 1923 a metre, based on what Gerard Manley Hopkins called 'sprung rhythm', which I believe to be just as much an English metre as blank verse. The Chinese seven-word line is much more difficult to handle and I have not attempted any long poems in this metre.

This brings me to the question of selection. My book is not a balanced anthology of Chinese poetry, but merely a collection of poems that happen to work out well in a literal but at the same time literary translation. This of course excludes poems of a highly allusive nature, requiring an undue amount of annotation. The fact that I have translated ten times more poems by Po Chu-i than by any other writer does not mean that I think him ten times as good as any of the rest, but merely that I find him by far the most remarkable of the major Chinese poets. Nor

does it mean that I am unfamiliar with the works of other great T'ang and Sung poets. I have indeed made many attempts to translate Li Po, Tu Fu and Su Shih; but the results have not satisfied me.

This book is intended to be essentially a book of poetry, and I have excluded the biographical and historical essays that formed part, for example, of *170 Chinese Poems*.

1946

PREFACE TO THE FIRST PAPERBACK EDITION

This is a reprint of *Chinese Poems* (1946), except that the Additional Notes have been omitted, and a few translations made since 1946 have been included – a series of poems by Han-shan and a love poem by Fêng Mêng-lung. The Hanshan poems originally appeared in *Encounter* and the love-poem in the *Evergreen Review*. My book is not a balanced and representative anthology of Chinese poetry through the ages, but merely a collection of poems that I like particularly and that happen to work out well in translation. The translations were made over a long period – between 1916 and 1959. I have corrected some mistakes in those made long ago, but in two or three cases I have not altered inaccuracies because I found that I could not do so without spoiling the general effect of the poem. For example on page 53, line 18, lush verdure rather than wetness is implied, but I find it hard to express this satisfactorily.

1960

CONTENTS

Preface	page 9
From THE BOOK OF SONGS	15-31
<i>Origin-Legend of the Chou Tribe</i>	15
<i>Sixteen Songs of Courtship</i>	17
<i>Wedding Song</i>	24
<i>Widow's Lament</i>	25
<i>Soldiers' Song (1) and (2)</i>	25
<i>Return from Battle</i>	27
<i>Herdsmen's Song</i>	28
<i>Dynastic Hymn</i>	29
<i>Two Laments</i>	30
<i>The Big Chariot</i>	31
<i>Dance Song</i>	31
 <i>Hymn to the Fallen</i>	 32
<i>The Great Summons</i>	32
<i>The Autumn Wind</i>	38
<i>Li Fu-jên</i>	38
<i>Lament of Hsi-chün</i>	39
<i>To His Wife</i>	39
<i>Parting from Su Wu</i>	40
<i>Poverty</i>	40
<i>The Golden Palace</i>	43
<i>The Orphan</i>	44

<i>'Old Poem'</i>	45
<i>Meeting in the Road</i>	46
<i>Fighting South of the Ramparts</i>	46
<i>The Eastern Gate</i>	47
<i>Old and New</i>	47
<i>South of the Great Sea</i>	48
<i>The Other Side of the Valley</i>	48
<i>Oaths of Friendship</i>	49
<i>Burial Songs</i>	49
<i>Seventeen Old Poems</i>	50
<i>Song of the Snow-white Heads</i>	57
<i>The Song of Lo-fu</i>	58
<i>The Bones of Chuang Tzu</i>	59
<i>The Dancers of Huai-nan</i>	62
<i>The Lychee-tree</i>	63
<i>The Wangsun</i>	64
<i>The Nightmare</i>	65
<i>To His Wife</i>	68
<i>Ch'in Chia's Wife's Reply</i>	68
<i>On the Death of his Father</i>	69
<i>The Ruins of Lo-yang</i>	70
<i>The Cock-fight</i>	70
<i>A Vision</i>	71
<i>The Liberator</i>	72
<i>The Curtain of the Wedding Bed</i>	72
<i>Bearer's Song</i>	72
<i>Regret</i>	73
<i>Taoist Song</i>	73

<i>A Gentle Wind</i>	74
<i>Woman</i>	74
<i>Satire on Paying Calls in August</i>	75
<i>Hot Cake</i>	75
<i>The Desecration of the Han Tombs</i>	76
<i>Day Dreams</i>	77
<i>The Scholar in the Narrow Street</i>	77
<i>The Valley Wind</i>	78
<i>A Peacock Flew . . .</i>	78
<i>Poems by T'ao Ch'ien</i>	87
<i>Sailing Homeward</i>	94
<i>Six Folk-Songs</i>	94
<i>The Little Lady of Ch'ing-ch'i</i>	95
<i>Plucking the Rushes</i>	95
<i>Ballad of the Western Island</i>	96
<i>Song of the Men of Chin-ling</i>	97
<i>Dreaming of a Dead Lady</i>	97
<i>People Hide Their Love</i>	97
<i>Summer Song</i>	98
<i>Lo-yang</i>	98
<i>Winter Night</i>	98
<i>The Waters of Lung-t'ou</i>	99
<i>Teleg Song</i>	99
<i>The Ballad of Mulan</i>	99
<i>Flowers and Moonlight . . .</i>	101
<i>Cock-crow Song</i>	101
<i>Tell me now</i>	102
<i>Business Men</i>	102

<i>In the Mountains . . .</i>	102
<i>Self-abandonment</i>	103
<i>To Tan-ch'iu</i>	103
<i>Clearing at Dawn</i>	103
<i>Stone Fish Lake</i>	103
<i>Civilization</i>	104
<i>Hearing that his Friend . . .</i>	104
<i>The South</i>	105

POEMS BY HAN-SHAN	105
-------------------	-----

POEMS BY PO CHÜ-I	III-74
-------------------	--------

<i>After Passing the Examination</i>	III
<i>Escorting Candidates</i>	III2
<i>In Early Summer</i>	III2
<i>Being on Duty all Night . . .</i>	III3
<i>Watching the Reapers</i>	III3
<i>Sick Leave</i>	III4
<i>Going Alone to Spend the Night . . .</i>	III5
<i>Planting Bamboos</i>	III5
<i>Passing T'ien-mên Street</i>	III5
<i>To Li Chien</i>	III6
<i>The Old Lute</i>	III6
<i>The Prisoner</i>	III7
<i>The Old Man with the Broken Arm</i>	III9
<i>The Five-string</i>	III1
<i>The Flower Market</i>	III1
<i>At the End of Spring</i>	III2
<i>The Poem on the Wall</i>	III2

<i>An Early Levée</i>	123
<i>The Letter</i>	123
<i>Golden Bells</i>	124
<i>Chu Ch'ên Village</i>	125
<i>Fishing in the Wei River</i>	127
<i>Lazy Man's Song</i>	127
<i>Winter Night</i>	128
<i>The Chrysanthemums</i>	128
<i>The Temple</i>	129
<i>Illness and Idleness</i>	136
<i>Poems written in Depression (1) and (2)</i>	137
<i>Illness</i>	137
<i>Hermit and Politician</i>	138
<i>Rejoicing at the Arrival of Ch'ên Hsiung</i>	138
<i>Remembering Golden Bells</i>	139
<i>Kept Waiting in the Boat</i>	139
<i>On Board Ship</i>	140
<i>Starting Early</i>	140
<i>Arriving at Hsün-yang (1) and (2)</i>	141
<i>To his Brother</i>	141
<i>Rain</i>	142
<i>Releasing a Migrant 'yen'</i>	142
<i>The Beginning of Summer</i>	143
<i>Hearing the Early Oriole</i>	144
<i>Dreaming that I went with Li and Yü . . .</i>	144
<i>Madly Singing in the Mountains</i>	145
<i>After Lunch</i>	145
<i>Visiting the Hsi-lin Temple</i>	146

<i>Eating Bamboo-shoots</i>	146
<i>To a Portrait Painter</i>	147
<i>Separation</i>	147
<i>Having Climbed to the Topmost Peak . . .</i>	148
<i>The Fifteenth Volume</i>	148
<i>Alarm at First Entering the Gorges</i>	149
<i>On being Removed to Chung-chou</i>	150
<i>Planting Flowers</i>	150
<i>Invitation to Hsiao Ch'u-Shih</i>	151
<i>To Li Chien</i>	151
<i>The Red Cockatoo</i>	152
<i>The Spring River</i>	152
<i>After Collecting the Autumn Taxes</i>	153
<i>Lodging with the Old Man of the Stream</i>	153
<i>To his Brother Hsing-chien</i>	154
<i>Children</i>	154
<i>Pruning trees</i>	155
<i>Being Visited by a Friend</i>	155
<i>The Pine-trees in the Courtyard</i>	156
<i>On the Way to Hangchow</i>	157
<i>Sleeping on Horseback</i>	157
<i>Parting from the Winter Stove</i>	158
<i>The Silver Spoon</i>	158
<i>The Hat</i>	158
<i>Good-bye to the People of Hang-chow</i>	159
<i>After Getting Drunk . . .</i>	159
<i>Written when Governor of Soochow</i>	160
<i>Getting Up Early</i>	160

<i>Stopping at Night at Jung-yang</i>	160
<i>Resignation</i>	161
<i>Climbing the Terrace of Kuan-yin</i>	161
<i>Climbing the Ling-ying Terrace</i>	162
<i>Realizing the Futility of Life . . .</i>	162
<i>The Grand Houses</i>	162
<i>The Half-recluse</i>	163
<i>The Cranes</i>	164
<i>Rising Late</i>	164
<i>On Being Sixty</i>	165
<i>On his Baldness</i>	165
<i>Losing a Slave-Girl</i>	166
<i>Thinking of the Past</i>	166
<i>On a Box containing his Own Works</i>	167
<i>A Mad Poem</i>	168
<i>Old Age</i>	168
<i>Ease</i>	169
<i>To a Talkative Guest</i>	169
<i>Going to the Mountains</i>	170
<i>To Liu Yü-hsi</i>	170
<i>Dreaming of Yüan Chên</i>	171
<i>My Servant Wakes Me</i>	171
<i>Since I Lay Ill</i>	171
<i>On Hearing Someone Sing . . .</i>	172
<i>A Dream of Mountaineering</i>	172
<i>Illness</i>	173
<i>The Philosophers</i>	173
<i>Chuang Tzu, The Monist</i>	173

<i>Taoism and Buddhism</i>	173
<i>Last Poem</i>	174
<i>The Pitcher</i>	174
<i>The Lady and the Magpie</i>	175
<i>Protest in the Sixth Year . . .</i>	176
<i>Immeasurable Pain</i>	176
<i>The Cicada</i>	177
<i>The Pedlar of Spells</i>	179
<i>Boating in Autumn</i>	179
<i>The Herd-Boy</i>	180
<i>How I Sailed on the Lake</i>	180
<i>Love Poem</i>	181
<i>The Little Cart</i>	181