



THE PEOPLE SPEAK OUT

TRANSLATIONS OF POEMS AND
SONGS OF THE PEOPLE OF CHINA
BY REWI ALLEY

THE PEOPLE SPEAK OUT

TRANSLATIONS OF
POEMS AND SONGS OF
THE PEOPLE OF CHINA

Translated and Published

by Rewi Alley

Peking 1954

PREFACE

From the earliest times in China, the chief medium for protest against oppression and social injustice, has been the poetic forms and songs in which the people have been able to express themselves.

Poems had accumulated since the beginning of history, right down through the ages until the liberation. Since this great people have been released from the thralldom of the old society, poems of the people sing not only of the joy in entering the new day, but also of the desire for those things which will ensure the right to continue with peaceful construction; of things like the resistance against imperialist aggression, defence of national independence, protest against Japanese remilitarization and support for the cause of world peace.

At no time in their long history, have the Chinese people suffered meekly. Always has there been rebellion, always outspoken criticism. Although there have been periods of fierce oppression during which much of the written word has been destroyed or lost, yet there does still exist a vast reservoir of material which can be drawn on. The small selection which is here presented and which contains some historical, some pre-liberation, and some post-liberation poetry, it is hoped, will enable the English-speaking reader to understand more fully the new China that has emerged and which is rapidly establishing itself again as one of the main stabilizing forces in our world.

Translations have been made from the original manuscripts, with the help of friends, and the translator

is especially grateful for the final reading and corrections by Chu Kwang-t sien and Yang Hsien-yi. He is also in debt to Shirley Barton, for her work of editing.

The main purpose of these translations is to try and carry through the poet's idea into that kind of language which would enable the ordinary people of the English-speaking world to receive much of impact of the message given—whether or not they are in the habit of reading poetry, and whether or not they are familiar with the long history of China. The usual devices of the poet to help him to give appeal to his song—rhyme and rhythm—have been abandoned in favour of clarity and simplicity.

Rewi Alley

Peking, November 17, 1953

CONTENTS

PREFACE	iii
-------------------	-----

PART ONE

Book of Odes

<i>Peasant and Lord</i>	1
<i>Government Rats</i>	2
<i>Officials</i>	4
<i>The Courtiers and the People</i>	5
<i>Chaos</i>	6

Tu Fu

<i>Song of the Autumn Wind and the Straw Hut</i>	7
<i>Feudal Militarists</i>	8
<i>The Cypress</i>	9
<i>Famine</i>	10
<i>Pearls</i>	10

Yuan Chieh

<i>On Taxes</i>	11
---------------------------	----

Pai Chu-i

<i>Harvest</i>	13
<i>On Staying in the Mountain Village</i>	14
<i>Famine</i>	15
<i>Cold Spell in the Village</i>	16
<i>Two Alternatives</i>	17
<i>The Old Man of Tu Ling</i>	18

<i>The Old Charcoal Seller</i>	20
<i>The Smiles of Li Yi-fu</i>	21
<i>Too Brilliant</i>	22
Fan Cheng-ta	
<i>The Silk Weavers</i>	23
<i>The Landless Peasant</i>	23
<i>The Bribe</i>	24
Li Yen	
<i>Before the Uprising</i>	24
Huang Tsun-yao	
<i>Protest</i>	25
Kuo Mo-jo	
<i>Friends Suffering in Jail</i>	27
<i>The Sound of Battle</i>	28
Emi Siao	
<i>I Remember</i>	29
Tien Chien	
<i>If We Do Not Go to Fight</i>	30
Ai Ching	
<i>Beggars</i>	30
<i>The Street</i>	32
<i>Stretcher Bearers</i>	33
Ma Fan-to	
<i>Winter in Shanghai</i>	35
<i>Nursery Rhyme</i>	36
Anonymous	
<i>Cleaning the Jaws of a Dog</i>	36
<i>Revenge</i>	38

Li Tuan-cheng	
<i>Blood</i>	40
<i>The Last Bit of Bran</i>	41
Chant from Nanchang, Kiangsi	
<i>The Hired Man</i>	42
Kao Chia-so	
<i>Harvest Song</i>	46
<i>The Yoke of the Landlord</i>	47
Ho Chi-fang	
<i>Foxes and Wolves</i>	48
Ni Hai-shu	
<i>Mother and Son</i>	49
<i>Kuomintang Power</i>	50
<i>Rice</i>	51
Liu Chia	
<i>Wheat for Yen Hsi-shan</i>	52
Tien Chien	
<i>Grain for Guerrillas</i>	55
Ke Chung-ping	
<i>Killing Thieves</i>	56

PART TWO

Huang Yu-teh	
<i>People's Hope</i>	57
Ho Chi-fang	
<i>New Day</i>	58
<i>Widening Horizons</i>	59

Tien Chien	
<i>Prophecy</i>	60
Anonymous	
<i>The Communist Party Brings Change</i>	61
Ke Chung-ping	
<i>Group Song</i>	62
Liu Su-ying	
<i>Committee Members</i>	63
Chou Ching	
<i>The Difference</i>	64
Liu Yi-ting	
<i>The Lathe Worker</i>	66
Kang Ying-fu	
<i>The Shipbuilders</i>	67
Chang Yang	
<i>The Coalminers</i>	69
Tsai Hen-san	
<i>Salt Workers</i>	70
Shih Hsin-min	
<i>A New Thing in Our Land</i>	71
Wu Chen-pao	
<i>The Little Carrying Pole</i>	73
Village Wall Newspapers	
<i>Poor and Rich</i>	75
<i>The Landlord's Accounts</i>	75

<i>One Word</i>	76
<i>On Meals</i>	76
<i>The Old Feudalism</i>	77
<i>The Land Divided</i>	77
<i>Rightful Owners</i>	78
<i>No Need to Submit</i>	78
Hsiao Yu	
<i>Now Have I Land!</i>	79
Post-Liberation Chant	
<i>Now</i>	81
<i>Peasant Gratitude</i>	82
Chang Ming-chuan	
<i>On the Wish for Grain Stacked High</i>	82
Ching Tien	
<i>Busy in the New Village</i>	84
Chang Hung-tao	
<i>Different Times</i>	87
Hsi Chien	
<i>The Harvest Comes to the Threshing Floor</i>	88
Anonymous	
<i>The Mutual-Aid Team</i>	90
Chang Ming-chuan	
<i>Return of the Labour Hero</i>	91
<i>The Marriage</i>	93
Songs of Minority Peoples	
<i>Mongol Liberation</i>	95
<i>Mongol Women</i>	96

<i>The Barefooted</i>	97
<i>On Rivers</i>	99
<i>Liberated!</i>	99
Su Fan	
<i>On Signing the Peace Petition</i>	100
Sa Chin	
<i>On Japanese Re-armament</i>	101
Ai Ching	
<i>Welcome to 1953</i>	103
Wei Yang	
<i>Return to My Country</i>	105
Ching Tien	
<i>Back in the New Village</i>	104
Chang Hsiang-tao	
<i>Different Times</i>	107
Hsi Chien	
<i>The Hardest Comes to the Threshing Floor</i>	108
Anonymous	
<i>The Student-Aid Team</i>	109
Chang Ming-chuan	
<i>Return of the Labour Hero</i>	111
<i>The Marriage</i>	113
Songs of Minority Peoples	
<i>Mongol Liberation</i>	117
<i>Mongol Women</i>	119

PEASANT AND LORD
From the "Book of Odes"

Anonymous

From the woods came sounds
of chopping, of trees falling,
of peasants dragging the timber
to the banks of the river where
cool waters went rippling by.

In the great home of their lord,
who neither sowed nor reaped,
was stored the produce
of three hundred families; their lord
who shared not the hardships of the hunt
yet had wild game hanging in his kitchens.

Surely
the men we should respect are those
who work, and thus
earn their livelihood.

The sound of axe on wood
continues; and now it is
timber for wheel spokes
they are hauling to the waters' edge;

while the grain from countless
sheaves — whose sowing and whose
reaping, we ask? — brings wealth

to their lord; who caught the wild pig
hanging from his hooks?

Surely
the men we should respect are those
who work, and thus
earn their livelihood.

And now the ringing of axes
means hardwood for wheel rims
carried to lay beside the rising
river.

Our lord who takes but does not
work has three hundred grain bins
filled; he does not hunt but
strings of quail hang in his home
waiting for him to eat.

Surely
the men we should respect are those
who work, and thus
earn their livelihood.

GOVERNMENT RATS*

From the "Book of Odes"

Anonymous

Great rats, great rats,
keep away from our wheat!

* This poem expresses the sentiments of the peasants who are forced to emigrate to another county through the depredations of the officials.

These three years we have worked for you
but you have spurned us;
now we shall leave this land
for a happier one —
that happy land, that happy land,
there we shall find all that we need.

Great rats, great rats,
keep away from our wheat!
These three years we have worked for you
but you have not done one good thing for us;
now we shall leave this land
for a happier one —
happy land, happy land,
where our rights shall be secure.

Great rats, great rats,
keep off the shoots
of our growing wheat!
These three years we have worked for you
but you have not shown gratitude for service rendered;
so now we leave this land
for the broad plains of another —
broad plains, broad plains,
where we shall sing
for joy.

OFFICIALS
From the "Book of Odes"

Anonymous

Even the dung beetles are arrayed
with beautiful wings of gauze; so
think I sadly when I see
our officials decked out in such splendour;
the country is in imminent danger
where shall we seek refuge?

How those dung beetles do
dress themselves up! Yet are they
living on decay
like our officials;
the country is in imminent danger
where shall we seek refuge?

When the dung beetle first emerges
its covering is as white as snow;
I grieve when I think of officials
who understand nothing;
the country is in imminent danger
where shall we seek refuge?

THE COURTIER AND THE PEOPLE
From the "Book of Odes"

Anonymous

There are those who do the work
of the court, humbly equipped
as befits their rank; then the grand lords
with retinues of noble born, all wearing
scarlet.

The pelicans beside
the waters' edge collect
food, but do not wet their wings;
the best-dressed people often
give the least service, are the most
worthless;

and pelicans like to make
their catch, without even
wetting a beak; officials
enjoying the highest favour
simply receive, giving
nothing.

Each morning the clouds rise up
covering the hills like rank grass
but no rain falls; so in the villages
even lovely young women
are stricken with famine.

CHAOS
From the "Book of Odes"

Anonymous

All-powerful Heaven,
now we are stricken with your displeasure;
for famine has come, so that everywhere
the people die, everywhere land
turns to waste;

traitors, like poisonous creeping things,
start civil war; eunuchs exceed their office,
corrupting society with their rottenness; surely
it is these who are ruining
our country;

arrogant manipulators
of petty intrigues at court, the King
can see no wrong in them; and we
are kept in anxiety, subject
to their oppression.

Life, like the plants in a land
stricken with drought, withers;
like the growth on a useless tree
we become stunted, sickly; with
our land in chaos, who shall rise
and save it?

SONG OF THE AUTUMN WIND
AND THE STRAW HUT

*Tu Fu**

The eighth month and an autumn gale
tore from my hut three layers of thatch
spreading it everywhere — over the river,
along the river banks, into the marsh,
high up in tall trees;

and from the neighbourhood came
a crowd of small kids seeing me
old and feeble, took the thatch away
in front of my face, stealing and hauling it
away to their bamboo grove. I tried to stop them
but my voice was not strong enough,

so I came back to the hut with a sigh; the gale
stopped, but black clouds gathered and the sky
was dark, with no sign of light — truly
a forbidding night.

My old bedding quilt was as cold as iron,
my delicate son beside me complained of all the holes
in it; rain streamed through the roof
like unbroken strings of hemp, drenching all.

After all the disasters of war, this wretchedness
seemed too much to be borne;
so no rest came in sleep

* Tu Fu (712-770 A.D.) was a great patriotic realist poet of the Tang dynasty. His poems are filled with love for the people and for his country, and give a faithful picture of political corruption, social disorder and the suffering of the people. Thus his works are poignant, tragic and great, and have been loved and admired by the Chinese people through the ages.