

# Style and Substance

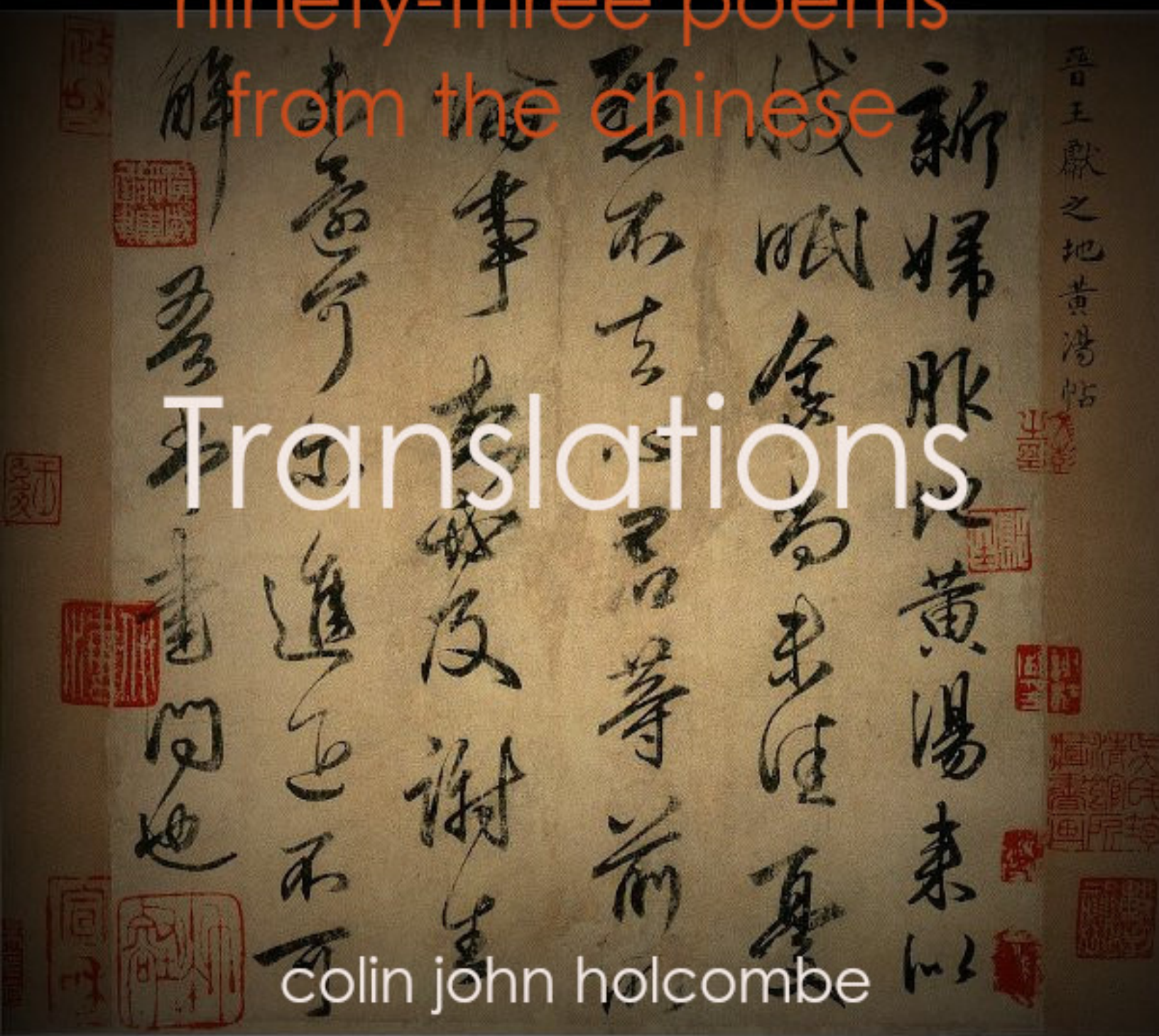
ninety-three poems

from the chinese

Translations

colin john holcombe

ocaso press



Style and Substance:  
Ninety-three Poems  
from the Chinese

Volume One: Translations

by

Colin John Holcombe

Ocaso Press 2021

# Style and Substance: Ninety-three Poems from the Chinese

Volume One: Translations by Colin John Holcombe

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Last Revised: March 2022

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# Contents

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Nature of Chinese Poetry: Form and Spirit
- 1.2 Chinese Poetry: Genres and Themes
- 1.3 Translation Aims

## 2. Poetry of the Shijing

- 2.1 Social Background: Pre-Han
- 2.2 Shijing Poetry
- 2.3 Translations
  - 1. Mao 6: Tender is the Peach
  - 2. Mao 15: Where Is Duckweed Got
  - 3. Mao 35: Ripening Blows the Valley Wind
  - 4. Mao 39: Spring Water
  - 5. Mao 76: Zhong Zi
  - 6. Mao 82: Cock's A-Crow
  - 7. Mao 237: Greater Odes
  - 8. Mao 300: Hymn to the State of Lu

## 3. Poetry of the Han

- 3.1 Sao Poetry
- 3.2 Translation
  - 9. Qu Yuan: Lord of the Liang River (excerpt)
- 3.3 Nine Songs
- 3.4 Translation
  - 10. Hymn to the Nation's War Dead
- 3.5 Fu Poetry
- 3.6 Translation
  - 11. Sima Xiangru: Shanglin Fu (excerpt)

### 3.7 Yuefu: Music Bureau Poems

#### 3.8 Translations

12. Temple Ode: Inside the Palace No.3
13. Drum and Pipe Songs: I was to love you
14. Chengnan South
15. Cai Yong: Watering Horses at the Great Wall
16. Cao Cao: Though the Tortoise Lives Long

## 4. Approaches to the Tang

### 4.1 Overview

### 4.2 Early Pentasyllabic Verse

### 4.3 Translations

17. Nineteen Poems: I see the dark sky
18. Bai Jiezu: Song of Resentment

### 4.4 Unregulated Shi Poetry: Six Dynasties

### 4.5 Translations

19. Tao Qian: Returning to Live on the Farm No.1
20. Tao Qian: Drinking Wine No.5
21. Xie Lingyun: Climbing Green Crag Mountain
22. Xie Lingyun: Climbing the Lakeside Tower

## 5. Unregulated Shi

### 5.1 Unregulated Shi Characteristics

### 5.2 Social Background: Tang Dynasty

### 5.3 China's Civil Service

### 5.4 Translations

23. Li Bai: A Lu Mountain Tune
24. Li Bai : Chengnan South
25. Li Bai : Drinking Alone by Moonlight
26. Li Bai: Merchant River's Wife
27. Li Bai: Questioning the Moon

28. Wang Wei: Peach Blossom Journey
29. Du Fu: Official at Stone Moat Village
30. Du Fu: War Wagons
31. Du Fu: Song of the Beautiful Ladies
32. Bai Juyi: A Flower is Not a Flower
33. Bai Juyi: Planting Flowers No.2
34. Zhang Ruoxu: Spring Night on the Yangtze
- 5.5 Social Background: Song Dynasty
- 5.6 Translations
  35. Mei Yaochen: Playing the Zither
  36. Su Dongpo: Seeing Off Canliao
- 5.7 Social Background: Yuan to Qing Dynasties
- 5.8 Translation
  37. Wan Duanshu: Song of the Suffering Calamity

## 6. Regulated Shi

- 6.1 Characteristics of Regulated Shi
- 6.2. Translations
  38. Meng Haoran: Cold Morning Memories
  39. Meng Haoran: By the Dongting Lake
  40. Wang Bo: Seeing Off Prefect Du Tang
  41. Du Fu: Spring Prospect
  42. Du Fu: Restless Night
  43. Du Fu: Night Thoughts when Travelling
  44. Li Bai: Leave Taking
  45. Wang Wei: Zhongnan Mountain
  46. Mei Yaochen: Lament for the Deceased
  47. Li Shangyin: Brocaded Zither
  48. Li Shangyin: Sui Palace
  49. Li He : Dreaming Heaven
  50. Qin Taoyu: The Poor Girl

51. Liu Changqing: Bidding Farewell in Jiangzhou
52. Lin Bu: Small Plum Tree in a Garden No.1
53. Lu You: An Outing to West of Mountains
54. Xie Tiao: Jade Stairs Lament
55. Li Bai : Quiet Night Thoughts
56. Li Bai: Jade Stairs Lament
57. Wang Wei: Deer Stockade
58. Wang Zhihuan: Climbing Crane Tower
59. Du Mu: Dispelling Sorrow
60. Li Bai: Sending Off Meng Haoran to Guangling
61. Bai Juyi: Spending Time with Laozi
62. Cheng Hao: Autumn Moon
63. Lu You: As Dawn Approached
64. Fan Chengda: Season's Reflections
65. Yan Liu: On a Summer Day
66. Gan Lirou: Night in the Boudoir
67. Li Mengyang: Autumn Gaze
68. Gan Lirou: Idle Song
69. Widow Mengyue: Recited While Sick
70. Lin Zexu: To My Family
71. Gao Qi: Looking for Hermit Hu
72. Gan Lirou: On the Full Moon
73. Wang Shizhen: Qinhuai: Miscellaneous
74. Yuan Mei: Travelling in the Mountains

## 7. Qu Poetry

### 7.1 Qu Poetry Characteristics

### 7.2 Translations

75. Guan Hanqing: On Love
76. Guan Hanqing: Refusing Old Age: (excerpts)
77. Ma Zhiyuan: Autumn Thoughts

78. Zhang Yanghao: Meditations at Tong Pass

79. Guan Yunshi: On Separation No. 4

## 8. Ci Poetry

### 8.1 Ci Poetry Characteristics

### 8.2 Translations

80. Li Yu : 'Crows Call at Night'

81. Li Yu: 'Beautiful Lady Yu'

82. Wen Tingyun: 'Water Clock at Night'

83. Wen Tingyuan: 'Southern Tune'

84. Yan Shu: 'Silk Washing Stream'

85. Chen Weisong: 'Congratulating Bridegroom'

86. Xin Qiji: 'Eight Beats of a Ganzhou Song'

87. Su Dongpo: 'Prelude to the River Tune'

88. Su Dongpo: Dreaming of My Deceased Wife

89. Li Qingzhao: 'One Beat'

90. Xin Qiji: 'Groping for Fish'

91. Xin Qiji: 'Congratulating Bridegroom'

92. Yue Fe: 'River of Blossoms'

93. Wu Wenying: 'Prelude to the Oriole's Song'

## 9. Summary Tables

### 9.1 Poetry Genre Characteristics

### 9.2 Translation Keywords

## 10. Biographies of the Poets



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Nature of Chinese Poetry: Form and Spirit

In keeping with the country's social norms, the poetry of imperial China was exceptionally refined and rule-governed. Indeed, with its stress on ritual and custom, that literary nature permeated China so thoroughly that many commentators have seen poetry as an abiding presence, an attitude of mind that cleansed man's soul, gave an awareness of the mystery and beauty of the universe, and evoked a feeling of tenderness and compassion for one's fellow-men and the humbler creatures of life.

There is none of the sweep or splendour of early European or Indian poetry in Chinese poetry, but only a varying growth in sophistication from the simple odes, hymns and airs that make up the *Shijing* to the celebrated *Shi* poetry of the Tang and then to the various styles of 'singing poetry' that followed in the Song and Yuan dynasties. In general, there was a stress on the exquisite, of saying a great deal with a few, precisely chosen words. Excepting the *Qu* poetry of the Yuan, which was written in the vernacular, those words were in the literary tongue, moreover, a highly refined and evocative language, but also vague and ill defined where necessary.

Such matters need to be remembered in translation, where word-for-word renderings will only give the prose meaning. Chinese poetry employed a semantic metre,

rhyme, tone patterns and a host of craft devices to make the poem into a work of art, and similar verse skills are needed to achieve a comparable effect in English. Poetry depends not only on what is said, of course, but *how* it is said, and here the American free verse model is at a marked disadvantage. Chinese poems were not conversational at all, but highly formal, employing a literary language that was usually highly stylized and somewhat artificial. In contrast, today's preference for everyday thoughts in everyday language tends to flatten all Chinese periods, poets and genres into the one fractured style.

Very often the subject was somewhat conventional, but acceptable because the main focus was on the language, which connoisseurs expected to be deployed in ever more refined ways, reflecting the manner in which poets added their own personal gloss to long communalities of word usage. Continuity with the past was implicit in a Chinese poem, which therefore released its meaning slowly, on reflection, when the reader entered into the literary genesis of the poem and met its creator halfway. Even in Chinese painting, and many poets were also superlative painters, scenes were only hinted at, so that in seeing the roof of a distant monastery lightly touched in, for example, the connoisseur would imagine the sound of temple bells.

From this impressionistic technique of suggestion arose what might be called symbolic thinking. The poet suggests ideas, not by concrete statements, but by evoking a mood which puts the reader in that particular train of thought. The thoughts are often indefinable, much as are the

opening bars of an opera, and the connection between the outside scene and man's inner thoughts is not logical but symbolic and emotional, in fact called *hsing* in Chinese and employed from earliest times. That pantheism is achieved by paralleling nature and human action in the poetry, and by investing natural objects with human actions, qualities and emotions through pointed metaphors, like 'idle flowers', 'the sad wind', the 'the chaffing parrot', etc. Old palaces may be called 'heartless' because they do not feel the sense of fallen grandeur or register the poet's poignant regret.

## 1.2 Chinese Poetry: Genres and Themes

Examples selected for translation are generally well-known pieces and cover all styles and genres, both the easy to translate poems and the much less so. The ancient poems from the Zhou dynasty (1027-256 BC) were simple constructions, generally written with four characters to the line, but ranging over a wide field of subject matter, commonly grouped as religious hymns, ceremonial odes and airs. The last have a folk-song-like nature, though they were probably polished up for court performance.

Gradually that four-character poetry gave way to five and then seven characters to the line, so enabling more varied rhythms and emotive subtlety. This so-called *Unregulated Shi* poetry was written throughout later dynasties, but was preceded by two forms specific to the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD): *Fu* and *Sao* poetry, of which more later. Unregulated poetry still had specific rules governing rhyme, word usage, tone patterns and theme

development, and was therefore quite unlike today's free verse renderings.

Tones are important in Chinese. They give very different meanings to words that would be otherwise indistinguishable. Adding a tone — rising, level, falling-rising, short falling — creates profound sound changes, and it is those changes that Chinese poets exploited from the Tang onwards to add further aural patterning to their lines.

The *Regulated* poetry was particularly bound by rules: strict rhyme patterns, tone patterns repeated and inverted, no word used twice. The intricate nature of those rules and the use of literary language gave great refinement and musicality but also increased artificiality. At its best, generally in the Tang, *Regulated* poetry had a grandeur, clarity and refinement that was greatly admired and imitated in later times, though with limited success. The *Regulated Shi* of the succeeding Song dynasty (960-1279) was more discursive and personal, sometimes intellectual, reflecting the interests and attitudes of a very different, more mercantile and pleasure-seeking society, as was the *Regulated Shi* of later dynasties. These later varieties are less well known, and sometimes overlooked in anthologies, but reward the open-minded reader.

Both *Shi* genres were joined in the Song dynasty by the so-called 'singing poetry', or *Ci* poetry. Whereas *Shi* generally employed five or seven characters to the line, *Ci* poetry was much more varied. Indeed its governing principle was not character count but melody, popular

tunes on which the lines were based, with a little contrivance sometimes. Where *Shi* verse is boxed into couplets, *Ci* verse flows across the lines in strophes. The originating songs have generally been lost, but *Ci* poems exist in their hundreds of thousands. *Ci* is still Chinese poetry, however, governed by rules and expectations. Rhyme is just as prevalent. Tone patterns are less restrictive than in *Regulated Shi*, but are again used to give shape and polish, and effective emotive expression.

In the succeeding Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), when China was ruled by the Mongols, the country became more open to foreign influences, and the scholar class temporarily lost its influence, Chinese poetry gained a new genre: *Qu* poetry. Like the plays of the time, which were popular and catered for the common people, *Qu* used the everyday vernacular language. It is the one Chinese poetry genre that is *not* refined and allusive. Indeed its language was often too coarse, or bawdy even, for the taste of the xenophobic Ming dynasty (1368-1644) that followed. But again, *Qu* is still Chinese poetry, however — carefully constructed, often intricately rhymed, with tone patterns playing an important role. The better *Qu* poets were also playwrights, and *Qu* poems read as good theatre scripts.

The many popular translations of the great Tang poets may give the impression that they were all sages tipping at their wine and seeing off friends on long, heart-breaking journeys. In fact, Chinese poems are a good deal more varied, and are commonly grouped under these themes: love and courtship, the beautiful woman, the abandoned woman, eulogy and admonition, hardship and injustice, the wandering man, landscape, farming and

reclusion, an imagined journey to the Celestial World, shamanist and Buddhist depiction of things, and remembrances.

### 1.3 Aims of the Translations

Chinese poetry rhymed, scanned and followed a host of demanding rules. To bring over that character, and aided by books now available to the general reader, \* I have endeavoured to do four things in these translations. The first is to create faithful renderings that stand on their own as acceptable poems, in the way most current translations do not. The second to give some indication of the different Chinese poetry styles and genres, as different as Elizabethan sonnets, didactic Augustan verse, etc. are to us. The third is to convey the characters and personalities of the individual poets, which are quite distinct in the Chinese. And the fourth, which explains the bulky prose sections, is to provide the social background to Chinese poetry, the context in which poetry was written and understood.

In place of the usual American free verse model, I have devised combinations of modified traditional styles, as these correspond more closely to the real nature of Chinese poetry. Modern free verse is easy to read, but it generally lacks the devices and refinements needed to bring out the characteristic Chinese genres and voices. It may well be that the structure of Chinese poetry cannot be fully duplicated in English, but the styles employed in this volume do let us write things that create effects in English similar to those in the Chinese. We can suggest

the archaic verse of the early *Shijing* by making translations stoutly workman-like, for example, and echo the crystalline musicality of *Regulated Shi* by emphasizing assonance and insisting on tight end-rhyme.

Except by historical accident, through the pioneering translations of Ezra Pound, Chinese poetry has little to do with the free verse aims of Modernism.

Volume One presents the poetry as simply as possible, stressing genres and social context but excluding scholarly references. Volume Two, in contrast, explains the translation approaches at some length: the historical context, relevant aspects of the Chinese language, contemporary and older views on translation, their value and difficulties, matters theoretical and practical, all properly referenced. Volumes Three and Four provide detailed notes on all the poems, with word-for-word renderings, text sources, other translations, audio recordings, the odd literary criticism and general references.

\* Notably illustrated by Zong-Qi Cai's most useful compilation *How To Read Chinese Poetry: a Guided Anthology* (Columbia University Press, 2008), many of whose poems also feature here, though translations are my own.

## 2. POETRY OF THE SHIJING

### 2.1 Social Background: Pre-Han

Readers wanting only the translations can skip the next sections, but to understand Chinese poetry properly we need to see it in its cultural context.

From Neolithic roots, a complex bronze age civilisation arose on the north China plain soon after 2000 BC, one characterized by writing, metal-working, domestication of the horse, class stratification and a political-religious hierarchy ruling a large area from a cult centre. Of the earlier Xia dynasty there is no certain archaeological evidence, but the Shang dynasty (c.1700-1046 BC) may have ruled from five successive capitals, and certainly employed religion and ritual to support its military supremacy. Around 1050 BC, the Shang was overthrown by the Zhou dynasty (1045-256 BC), which progressively fragmented through the Spring and Autumn period (771 to 476 BC) into rival states.

The elaborate chivalry with which Zhou warfare was first conducted descended into blood-soaked barbarism in the following period of the Warring States (403-221 BC), only ending when the Qin finally overcame its rivals and created China's first empire in 221 BC. The emperor Shih huangdi imposed a centralised uniformity, in currency, writing and administration, but is remembered less as a statesman than as a ruthless tyrant who met criticism with summary execution, moved hundreds of thousands of



prominent families from the provinces to his capital at Xianyang, burnt books that were not simply practical manuals on agriculture, medicine or divination, and subjected millions to hard labour in constructing his palaces and the Great Wall.

The first empire fell apart on the death of its founder but was followed by the joyous Han dynasty (206 BC- 220 AD). The arts flourished, Chinese suzerainty was extended to central Asia, and the examination system introduced to select and train administrators. The Han dynasty was founded by Liu Bang (temple name Gaozu), who assumed the title of emperor in 202 BC. Eleven members of the Liu family followed in his place as effective emperors until the dynastic line was challenged by Wang Mang, who established his own, brief regime under the title of Xin until AD 25. The Eastern Han dynasty continued with Liu Xiu (posthumous name Guangwudi), and thirteen descendants who ruled until 220, when the country split into three separate kingdoms. Chang'an (modern Xi'an) was the capital of the Western Han empire, and Luoyang of the Eastern Han.

## 2.2 Shijing Characteristics

It was probably in the Shang dynasty of the second millennium BC that the most characteristic element of the Chinese civilisation first appeared — the representation of the Chinese language in logographic characters. All actions of the brush, in poetry, painting and calligraphy, thus became associated with the refinement, ritual and

strict conventions that characterised social life in east Asia.

Odd lines of poetry appear on Shang bronzes, and fragments on bamboo strips are still being unearthed from excavated tombs, but our real knowledge of the first millennium of Chinese poetry in fact comes from a single anthology. A certain master Mao collected some 305 ancient poems as the *Shijing*, which in time joined the material studied by all Chinese entering the civil service. The *Shijing* is a collection of sacred hymns, state odes and songs. It is difficult to find much poetry in the hymns and odes, which probably served court and temple ceremonies. Certainly there is nothing to match the splendid epics of contemporary Mediterranean peoples, or the Sanskrit classics of India, but many of the songs have a fresh and folk-song air, and are therefore popular with translators. I provide samples of all three genres. Much has to be conjectured about the *Shijing* pieces, but they did set the course of all Chinese poetry that followed.

Indeed the *Shijing* is one of the Six Classics, approved of and perhaps selected by Confucius, and so greatly influencing thought and literature throughout imperial times. The *Shijing* is not a seamless and coherent document, however, but a Han collection of texts that had become so archaic as to be intelligible in places. Odd words had changed their meanings, moreover, sometimes quite radically, so that Han and subsequent scholars had to add explanations in glosses or commentaries, explaining why *Shijing* scholars sometimes give variant readings and renderings well beyond what the plain text

says. I have tried to hint at those fuller meanings in my own renderings, but not stray too far from what the actual characters per line could possibly encompass, i.e. strive more for literary quality than scholarly explication.

Odd hymns and odes apart, which can be quite long, most early Chinese poems are brief, tightly rhymed, and employ an archaic Chinese in four-character lines. The poems are far from primitive, however. They employ neat stanzas, a general 2 + 2 rhythm, end-rhyme on even lines, and a great deal of assonance and internal slant rhyme. The various tropes include metaphor, simile, synecdoche, puns, onomatopoeia, rhyming and reduplicative compounds, alliteration, and puns. Parallelism is common and effective. Poems of the *Shijing* echo the dawn-like freshness of the early Chinese world, less sophisticated than imperial times but still frank, heart-felt and engaging.

For all genres I have created characteristic models, and that for the *Shijing* employs a simple verse regimented by clear end-rhymes. Being based on the four-character line, their rhythms are also rather primitive and unvaried, lacking the subtleties that the later five- and seven-character lines accomplished.



## 1. SHIJING: Mao 6 (8-7<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC)

桃夭 TAO YAO

桃之夭夭 灼灼其華  
之子于歸 宜其室家

桃之夭夭 有蕢其實  
之子于歸 宜其家室

桃之夭夭 其葉蓁蓁  
之子于歸 宜其家人

In their present form, the *Shijing* poems fall into three groups. Mao numbers 1-160 are airs or songs. Mao numbers 161-265 are odes (lesser 161-234, greater 235-265). And Mao numbers 266-305 are hymns. The airs is a diverse group, half of them referring to battles, court rituals, hunts and feasts, and half to personal matters like love affairs, homesickness and marital harmony; they date to the 8-7<sup>th</sup> century BC. The lesser odes refer to the regional courts under Zhou control (9-8<sup>th</sup> century BC). The greater odes refer to the Zhou Dynasty and its conquest of the Shang (10-9<sup>th</sup> century BC). And the hymns include pieces from various periods of the Zhou (11-10<sup>th</sup> century plus 7<sup>th</sup> century BC).

Life in a new family was doubtless difficult in pre-Han China, but one that most brides would accept: it was simply part of life at the times, as it was right through to the Communist takeover. Even today, many marriages in China are still arranged through a matchmaker, and the wife will be expected to obey and look after her husband's parents. The original of Poem rhymes abcb accx adcd, and the translation as xaxa, xbx bxcxc, etc.

## 1. SHIJING: Tender Is the Peach

Tender, tender is the peach,  
and all consuming are her powers:  
the girl who makes her marriage vows  
is fit for chamber and the house.

Tender, tender is the peach,  
and genuine her flourishing:  
the girl who makes her marriage vows  
is fit for home in everything.

Tender, tender is the peach,  
and rich the leaves' prosperity:  
the girl who makes her marriage vows  
is fit for her new family.

## 2. SHIJING: Mao 15 (8-7<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC)

### 采蘋 CAI PING

于以采蘋 南澗之濱  
于以采藻 于彼行潦  
于以盛之 維筐及筥  
于以湘之 維錡及釜  
于以奠之 宗室牖下  
誰其尸之 有齊季女

The poem refers to marriage rituals, where, for the three months leading up to the wedding, the bride was trained at her family's ancestral shrine in the appropriate practices and duties to her new family. At their culmination, the girl had to make sacrifices of fish, duckweed and water grasses.

Though in archaic Chinese, these poems are still sophisticated, employing rhyme and a wide variety of tropes. There are not the strict rules on tone arrangements, however, though some form of parallelism is common. As this is a lyrical piece, rhymed aabb cdcd cxcd, we may catch some of the melody and form with comparable rhymes and slant rhymes.

## 2. SHIJING: Collecting Duckweed

Tell me, where is duckweed got?  
In southern valleys, is it not?  
Are not water-grasses found  
on pathways close to flooded ground?

Where to lay the offerings out  
but in baskets square and round?  
or in pans and cauldrons with  
a mingled, dark metallic sound.

And at the great ancestral hall,  
beneath the gaze of ancestors,  
on whose spirit do they call?  
This unwed girl would offer hers.



### 3. SHIJING: Mao 35 (8-7<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC)

#### 谷風 GU FENG

習習谷風、以陰以雨。  
黽勉同心、不宜有怒。

采芣采菲、無以下體。  
德音莫違、及爾同死。

行道遲遲、中心有違。  
不遠伊邇、薄送我畿。

誰謂荼苦、其甘如薺。  
宴爾新昏、如兄如弟。

涇以渭濁、湜湜其沚。  
宴爾新昏、不我屑以。

毋逝我梁、毋發我笱。  
我躬不閱、遑恤我後。

The poem is an early example of the abandoned woman theme, a popular category of Chinese poetry. The previous wife is complaining that not only is her husband neglecting her for the new wife, but has quite forgotten the many services she loyally afforded him: indeed he has induced her own family to forget her. Wealthy men in pre-modern China were allowed only one wife, but commonly took concubines, as many as they could afford. The one exception were men like merchants living away from home, who could cohabit with another woman in a separate household: the woman would regard herself as a full wife, but would legally be regarded only as a concubine. Marriages were arranged through a matchmaker and followed strict customs. Matters in the sexually relaxed Zhou times are not so clear.

### 3. SHIJING: The Ripening Wind

Ripening blows the valley wind  
though rain will come and cloudy skies.  
A man and wife should get along  
through each and all adversities.

With mustard and the melon plant  
it's not the roots that satisfy.  
Let's speak the kindly words that make  
us cling together till we die.

How slowly on the road I went,  
against what heart was telling me.  
He did not go that far at all  
but thrust me from his territory.

Who will call the thistle bitter,  
and not as shepherd's purse is sweet?  
Some new marriage that you feast  
have young and elder brothers eat.

The Wei beside the river Jin  
has not its splashy purity.  
In that new marriage, which you feast,  
I'm treated as poor company.

Do not approach my water-dams,  
or interfere with fishing traps.  
If you detest my person, how  
can it matter standards lapse?

### 3. Continued

就其深矣、方之舟之。

就其淺矣、泳之游之。

何有何亡、黽勉求之。

凡民有喪、匍匐救之。

不我能惱、反以我為讎。

既阻我德、賈用不售。

昔育恐育鞫、及爾顛覆。

既生既育、比予于毒。

我有旨蓄、亦以御冬。

宴爾新昏、以我御窮。

有洸有潰 既詒我肆

不念昔者 伊余來暨

The poem is set in traditional Zhou territories: the Jing flows into the Wei to the east of the old Zhou capital in Shaanxi. Lines 18 and 24 appear in other *Shijing* poems, and may be proverbs or a quotation. The imagery is of rural agriculture and fishing, openly sexual, but alluding in stanzas 6-9 to matters not fully spelt out. The one difficult word is zhǐ (汜), which means 'islet', which I have read as 'bifurcation': i.e. the waters of the incoming Jin only look fresher because they're shallower. The original is closely rhymed on eight rhyme sounds, which I have simplified in the translation to xaxa xbx, etc.

### 3 (Continued)

Though the water's deep already,  
it's not for boat you're at a loss.  
Here the water's short and shallow,  
a swimming man would get across.

For anything I've always gone  
that want of it should not condemn.  
And if for something good folk died,  
I went on knees to rescue them.

Yet I'm the one you cannot bear.  
You treat me as the worst as well,  
contest my virtue, making me  
the wares a peddler cannot sell.

All too weighty, what I bear  
is overturned or given up.  
I've borne you children, borne you heirs:  
you treat me as some poison cup.

I gathered in the greatest store  
against what winter storms will do.  
But some new marriage that you feast  
exhausts the goods afforded you.

Water sparkles or goes dark.  
Must I be left in this deep pain?  
When you remember all I've done,  
can this contempt of me remain?

#### 4. SHIJING: Mao 39 (8-7<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC)

##### 泉水 QUAN SHUI

崧彼泉水、亦流于淇。  
有懷于衛、靡日不思。  
變彼諸姬、聊與之謀。  
出宿于泂、飲餞于禰。  
女子有行、遠父母兄弟。  
問我諸姑、遂及伯姊。  
出宿于干、飲餞于言。  
載脂載牽、還車言邁。  
遄臻于衛、不瑕有害。  
我思肥泉、茲之永歎。  
思須與漕、我心悠悠。  
駕言出游、以寫我憂。

The airs served a variety of social and educational purposes that had nothing to do with their original intention. Arthur Waley recognized the following topics in the songs: courtship, marriage, warriors and battles, agriculture, blessings on gentle folk, welcome, feasting, the clan feast, sacrifice, music and dancing, dynastic songs, dynastic legends, building, hunting, friendship, moral pieces and lamentations. 'The Shi Jing is thus an extensive storehouse of cultural and social practice as well as literary and popular art, with many scenes vividly evoked in detailed and decorative language, while other songs are filled with specific details of names, places and events.'

Maps of China during the Zhou and Period of the Warring States will show many of the places listed: they extend from Shandong west to Shaanxi, i.e. in the lower courses of the Wei and Yellow Rivers. The original is complexly rhymed on five rhyme sounds, but I have used a xaxaxa xbx bxb, etc. scheme.

#### 4. SHIJING: Spring Water

As careful waters of the spring  
but bubble back to join the Qi,  
so my heart is with the Wei.  
A day from which I'd never be,  
where female members of the Ji  
would surely come to counsel me.

I lodged at Ji the journey out,  
and drank the parting cup at Ni.  
The girl that takes the marriage path  
must leave behind her family,  
but I would ask to see my aunts,  
and elder sister presently.

But still I went and lodged at Gan  
and drank the parting cup at Yan.  
Myself, I'd grease the axle pin  
to help the journey back again,  
the one that took me back to Wei  
and to the world that I had then.

And so to think of Feiquan  
in springtime brings this wistful air.  
I think of Xu and think of Cao,  
I think my heart's forever there.  
Come, yoke the horses, let me go  
unburdened by the grief I bear.

## 5. SHIJING: Mao 76 (8-7<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC)

將仲子 ZHONG ZI

將仲子兮 無踰我里  
無折我樹杞 豈敢愛之  
畏我父母 仲可懷也  
父母之言 亦可畏也

將仲子兮 無踰我牆  
無折我樹桑 豈敢愛之  
畏我諸兄 仲可懷也  
諸兄之言 亦可畏也

This popular and much-translated piece has been interpreted in many ways.

According to its Mao Poetry preface, the poem satirizes Duke Zhuang of Zheng who in 722 BCE had failed to rein in his mother and younger brother, bringing strife and chaos into his state. According to the Zuo Tradition, the poem was recited in 547 BCE in order to have the Marquis of Wei released from imprisonment in the state of Jin; and according to the "Kongzi's Discussion of the Poetry" manuscript, one must be fearful of the words of "Qiang Zhong[zi]." In the "Five Modes of Conduct" manuscript from Mawangdui, the poem is invoked in a discussion of the rhetorical device of "using sexual allure to illustrate ritual propriety," where it is paraphrased through a series of rhetorical questions asking whether someone would copulate in front of his parents, brothers, or neighbors. Much later readings by Zheng Qiao (1104-1162) and Zhu Xi (1130-1200) take the received poem as "the words of a licentious eloper," while modern readers may see it more as the words of a young woman who fears her lover's impetuosity will compromise her reputation.

## 5. SHIJING: Zhong Zi

And so I ask of you, Zhong Zi:  
you leave the village to my care,  
and not destroy my willow lair.  
These I love wholeheartedly,  
and fear my parents, both of them.  
Zhong, to you my heart is swayed,  
but father and my mother talk,  
and of them both I'm much afraid.

And so I ask of you, Zhong Zi:  
you do not scale my garden wall;  
nor you make my mulberries fall.  
These I love wholeheartedly,  
and fear my older brothers too.  
Zhong, to you my heart is swayed,  
but older brothers, how they talk!  
And of my kin I'm much afraid.



## 5. (Continued)

將仲子兮 無踰我園  
無折我樹檀 豈敢愛之  
畏人之多言 仲可懷也  
人之多言 亦可畏也

The original is rhymed aeea xbx b acca xbx b adda dbdb: the translation uses the simpler abbaxcxc, etc. throughout.

More than the major philosophical or historical works of the pre-Qin period, the *Shijing* offers a vision of the range of Chinese society, and the practices and situations of its people. By the late fourth century BCE, and possibly for quite some time before that, the *Shijing* was not an isolated body of literature but part of the larger set of moral, pedagogical, ritual, and socio-political precepts and practices of the "Six Arts" that had gained currency across the Chinese cultural realm.

Indeed its licence caused problems in later dynasties. Fifteen hundred years later, in the Confucian revival of Song times, scholars had to write commentaries bringing the sexually and other explicit divergences into the fold of accepted behaviour.

5. (Continued)

And so I ask of you, Zhong Zi:  
you leave my gardens trim and sound,  
and do not enter hardwood ground.  
These I love wholeheartedly,  
and fear the penalties I pay.  
Zhong, to you my heart is swayed,  
but think of people, what they'd say:  
of all of them I'm much afraid.

## 6. SHIJING: Mao82 (8-7<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC)

女曰雞鳴 NU YUE JI MING

女曰雞鳴、士曰昧旦。  
子興視夜、明星有爛。  
將翱將翔、弋鳧與雁。  
弋言加之、與子宜之。  
宜言飲酒、與子偕老。  
琴瑟在御、莫不靜好。  
知子之來之、雜佩以贈之。  
知子之順之、雜佩以問之。  
知子之好之、雜佩以報之。

The original is rhymed xaxa xabb cdcd bbbbbb: the translation rhymes xaxa xbx**b** cxxc xdx**xd**. Such 'albas' or dawn songs can be found in many literatures. 'Shoot' refers to fowling using a dart attached to a thin string. The wild goose is a symbol of marital separation. 'Girdle ornaments' is more perplexing: is it an invitation to sexual congress or simply dressing appropriately for an honoured guest? It is probably both, within accepted codes of propriety.

From Zhou times, girdle ornaments in men and women have been important, not only for decoration and securing clothes, but as indicators of the wearer's rank and wealth. Status in imperial China was indicated by headwear, the colour of the garment, and by the girdle ornament, matters important to remember when later poets were travelling 'incognito' as private individuals through the countryside. Poems in the *Shijing* are each prefaced by a short introduction, which suggests how they would be interpreted in Han times. The 'airs' were not simply to be seen rustic love songs, but guides to social communication, most particularly in the flexible and refined speech needed to make appropriate criticism of superiors.

## 6. SHIJING: Cock's A-Crow

Says the wife, the cock's a-crow.  
Says the man, not break of day.  
Get up, good sir, and view the night:  
is not the day star burning bright?

Bestir yourself and move about,  
shoot the goose and shoot the duck.  
Shoot the word, and in addition,  
do what is appropriate.

So let us drink and let us say,  
we afterwards grow old together,  
for marriages need harmony,  
will not the zither point the way?

When I know just who will come  
I'll give my girdle ornaments.  
When I know that all's arranged  
I'll mingle girdle ornaments.  
When I know that all's done well  
I'll speak with girdle ornaments.

## 7. SHIJING: Mao 237 (11<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> Centuries BC)

### 綿 MIAN

綿綿瓜瓞 民之初生  
自土沮漆 古公亶父  
陶復陶穴 未有家室  
古公亶父 來朝走馬  
率西水滸 至于岐下  
10. 爰及姜女 聿來胥宇  
周原膠膠 堇荼如飴  
爰始爰謀 爰契我龜  
曰止曰時 築室于茲  
迺慰迺止 20. 迺左迺右  
迺疆迺理 迺宣迺畝  
自西徂東 周爰執事  
乃召司空 乃召司徒  
俾立室家 其繩則直  
縮版以載 30. 作廟翼翼

The ode commemorates the founding of the Zhou dynasty, when the legendary king Wu overthrew the previous Shang dynasty at the battle of Muye in or around 1046 BC. Several periods of Zhou history and mythology are being conflated here, so that the poem is more a veneration of ancestors than strict history. It is a carefully constructed poem, however, tightly and intelligently rhymed (with nine rhyme sounds), where words alluding to the new capital are rhymed on the same category of rhyme. I have used a simple xaxaxa xbx bxb etc. throughout.

## 7. SHIJING: GREATER ODES

More connected grow the gourds,  
so seen by folk of earlier birth,  
where, from the Du as far as Qi,  
Dan Fu to people of the earth  
afforded caves and pottery,  
if not true homes of proper worth.

Ancient, honourable Dan Fu,  
the morning after had his horse  
go west along the river bank.  
10. The Qi itself was then his course,  
and with the Jiang woman he  
traced our homeland to its source.

And on the swelling plain of Zhou  
a bitter plant is sweet as well.  
In this began the plan of things,  
the carving on the turtle shell.  
It's time to stop and time to stay,  
and at this place we here may dwell.

Content he was, and so he stayed,  
20. appointing thus the left and right.  
And, in those borders, fields were laid  
and obligations bound up tight,  
when from the east and to the east  
he governed well in plain good sight.

## 7. (Continued)

掾之陧陧 度之薨薨  
築之登登 削履馮馮  
百堵皆興 鼙鼓弗勝  
迺立皋門 皋門有伉  
迺立應門 40. 應門將將  
迺立冢土 戎醜攸行  
肆不殄厥愠 亦不隕厥問  
柞棫拔矣 行道兌矣  
混夷駉矣 維其喙矣  
虞芮質厥成 50. 文王蹶厥生  
予曰有疏附 予曰有先後  
予曰有奔奏 予曰有禦侮

According to Chinese mythology, the Zhou lineage was begun by Jiang Yuan, a consort of the legendary Emperor Ku. The Du and Qi in line 3 of the poem, are rivers, the area being referred to is that around the confluence of the Wei and Yellow rivers, now southeast Shaanxi, but the Qi of line 10 is Mount Qi or Qishan.

Dan Fu (literally 'generous man') was the grandfather of King Wen (1099-1050), who in turn was father to King Wu (1049-1053). Dan Fu moved his people away from the Rong-Di tribes to the area being referred to, termed the plain of Zhou in the poem. The Yu and Rui tribes are termed barbarians, i.e. tribal pastoralists rather than sedentary agriculturists, but, like the Zhou, Shang and other peoples, probably spoke a dialect of archaic Chinese.

7. (Continued)

He summoned those who managed space  
and those on whom the workers wait  
and charged them there to build their homes  
upright and to a plumb-line straight.  
With carried wood and carried earth  
30. he had a solemn temple built.

They heard the mason hammer hard,  
and workmen clambering all around,  
the buildings ever mounting high  
and worker's footsteps on the ground:  
a hundred walls on every hand  
rose faster than the drum can pound.

And through the walls was built a gate,  
a gate high soaring, ever tall:  
a high stone gate it was, and more  
40. than any man could then recall,  
enabling burial mound contain  
the Rong defeated as they fall.

He could not terminate their wrath,  
nor have their wrongful mouths abstain.  
He cut down oak shrubs, pulled them up,  
to have clear highways through the plain:  
how much the Kun barbarians  
calumniated there in vain.



## 7. (Continued)

虞芮質厥成 50. 文王蹶厥生

予曰有疏附 予曰有先後

予曰有奔奏 予曰有禦侮

This first or western Zhou dynasty (c. 1045 BC – 771 BC) was a feudal and hierarchical society, and one that introduced the Mandate of Heaven applying to the just ruler. Beneath the 'Son of Heaven' were successively the great lords, the ministers, the knights and court attendants. Finally came the common people, farmers, who may have been tied to the land in a serf-like manner. Grave goods indicate a rich culture, with silk weaving, bronze casting, and elaborate court and temple ceremonies. The practice of human sacrifice gradually declined, as did the oracle reading of heat-cracked turtle-shells and the casting of ornamental bronzes with their helpful inscriptions.

By 800 BC, there were some 200 lords, but only 25 had domains large enough to count for much. As is often the case in feudal societies, the lords gradually grew more powerful, overshadowing the king's authority. By the beginning of the eastern Zhou dynasty, also called the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 BC) the kings enjoyed only nominal authority. The turning point was an alliance of Zhou vassals and Rong tribesmen, which overthrew and killed the reigning Zhou monarch in 721 BC. A son of the king was nonetheless put on the throne, and the capital moved for safety reasons eastwards out of the Wei valley to present day Luoyang.

Most Chinese were farmers living in small villages. The higher social orders lived in cities that were protected by thick walls made by tamping earth between wooden planks lashed together by ropes.

7. (Continued)

The Yu and Rui broke the pledge.

50. King Wen then moved to humble them.

I say he forced them follow him,

that first were last to haw and hem,

and in that letter of the law,

defended where they would condemn.

## 8. SHIJING: Mao 300 (7th Centuries BC)

### 闕宮 BI GONG

闕宮有恤、實實枚枚。赫赫姜嫄、其德不回。

上帝是依、無災無害。

彌月不遲、是生后稷、降之百福。

黍稷重穰、植稚菽麥。奄有下國、俾民稼穡、

有稷有黍、有稻有秬。奄有下土、纘禹之緒。

后稷之孫、實維大王。居岐之陽、實始翦商。

21. 至于文武、纘大王之緒。

致天之屆、于牧之野

The hymn celebrates the exploits of the three rulers who did most to create a stable Zhou kingdom. King Wen (the 'Cultured King') formed alliances with surrounding states and tribes to attack and overthrow the Shang dynasty. His son, King Wu (the 'Martial King') built a capital further east and launched a military expedition that captured the Shang capital and royal house. He left one son as nominal ruler to give sacrifice to powerful ancestors. King Wu died young, and his brother, the Duke of Zhou acted as regent for Wu's son. The Duke of Zhou extended rule over the whole Wei valley, overcoming and destroying, it is said, some fifty states. He built a new city at present day Loyang, and moved former Shang nobles to its court.

Shang-di was the supreme deity of the Shang dynasty, but probably here refers to the Zhou lineage as Jiang Yuan is also mentioned, a consort of the legendary (Zhao) Emperor Ku. Hou Ji also goes back to mythological past, to the Xia dynasty (before 1600 BC) and is credited to introducing millet into northern China. He was miraculously conceived by Jian Yuan when she stepped on a footprint left by Shangdi, the supreme sky god of the early Chinese pantheon.

## 8. SHIJING: Hymn to the State of Lu

The temple, silent and withdrawn,  
commemorates fidelity,  
celebrating one Jiang Yuan  
whose virtue now we rarely see.

So Shang-di listened and decreed  
no hurt or mishap come her way,  
she was delivered in due course  
of one Hou-ji, who would convey

a hundred blessings to a people  
10. planting pulse and slower wheat.  
And thus in one inferior state  
were people taught to sow and reap.

And so they sowed and got in harvest:  
millet in its various strains,  
black millet here, in places rice:  
theirs the earth that made the plains.

Hard work it was, from Yu beginning,  
but soon the descendents of How-ji  
were governed by a mighty king  
20. residing to the south of Qi.

The realms of Shang began to shrink,  
when came the kings of Wen and Wu  
furthering the great king's task:  
as heaven wanted, they would do.

## 8. (Continued)

無貳無虞、上帝臨女。敦商之旅、克咸厥功。  
王曰叔父、30. 建爾元子、俾侯于魯。  
大啟爾宇、為周室輔。乃命魯公、俾侯于東。  
錫之山川、土田附庸。周公職孫、莊公之子。  
40. 龍旂承祀、六轡耳耳。春秋匪解、享祀不忒。  
皇皇后帝、皇祖后稷。享以騂犧、是饗是宜。  
降福既多、

The original is rhymed on complex variations of thirteen sounds: see Volume Three for details. I have used a simple xaxa xbx throughout. Many of the names and places can be identified:

'Elder uncle' was the Duke of Zhou

'Duke of Zuang' was Duke Xi 659-627 B.C.

'Horn yoke' was a bar placed on horns to mark animals as sacrificial.

The Rong tribes raided the Zhou capital in 649 B.C.; the Di attacked central China towards the middle of the seventh century.

'Orion's three-fold friends', the stars in Orion's belt are the gods of fortune, prosperity and longevity.

Jing were better known later as the Chu. The Xu of southwest Shandong and Anhui were non-Chinese but often fought in alliance with them.

Gui and Meng are hills near the Tai-shan.

Greater East refers to the central part of Shandong.

Fu and Xi are hills in south-central Shandong

Chang and Xu is western Shandong.

Mount Chu-lai are near present day Dai'an.

Xin-fu is also near Dai'an.

## 8. (Continued)

They met there on the plain of Mu  
without betrayal or much fear  
from those who were of Shang-di's birth.  
So the host of Shang appear

but win but passing victory.

30. Then Wang to elder uncle spoke,  
I would have your first son here  
be Marquis Lu of our good folk.

That he may aid the House of Zhou,  
his territories are much increased.  
Thus so decreed the Duke of Lu,  
who made him Marquis of the East.

Then given him were hills and rivers,  
the fields and lands and fiefs thereof:  
the Duke of Zhou, so through his son,  
40. the Duke of Zhuang, made fly above

the sacrifice the dragon flag,  
with harness too, and six-fold reins,  
that spring and autumn never cease  
from honouring such blessed remains.

At which the spirit of Wang-di,  
as much as ancestor Hou-ji,  
had offerings of white and red:  
what was asked for, so would be.

## 8. (Continued)

周公皇祖、50. 亦其福女。  
秋而載嘗、夏而福衡。白牡騂剛、犧尊將將。  
毛魚載羹、籩豆大房。萬舞洋洋、孝孫有慶。  
俾爾熾而昌、60。  
俾爾壽而藏。保彼東方、魯邦是常。  
不虧不崩、不震不騰。三壽作朋、如岡如陵。  
公車千乘、朱英綠騰、二矛重弓。70。  
公徒三萬、  
貝冑朱紱。烝徒增增、

Zhao history, and the *Shijing* to some extent, are specialist areas of research where scholars naturally disagree on details. Nonetheless, the background to these poems is a late bronze age culture of great sophistication. The buildings — courts, temples, forts and cities— being largely made of wood, have naturally disappeared, and we are left with objects excavated from the few graves that have escaped tomb-robbers. Jade objects, scraps of woven silk, carved wood and ivory, sometimes inlaid with turquoise and lacquered, suggest that the kings and nobles of the Shang and Zhou dynasties were surrounded by objects of great beauty and luxury.

Historical documents also throw out clues, but even here the record is not unambiguous. The *Shijing* poems were put together in the Han, but we do not know in many cases how much they were 'improved', i.e. rewritten, amended and/or corrupted, in Han times and earlier. Even the bamboo fragments unearthed from graves cannot always be taken at their face value. There are textual variations in the *Shijing* fragments, and Zhou rulers had their own reasons for rewriting history.

## 8. (Continued)

And thus the heavens shower their blessings  
50. on Emperor Zu and Duke of Zhou,  
on descendants of Hou-ji  
that the autumn riches show.

So summer's horn-yoke to the ox,  
the bulls of white and reddish skin  
are sacrificed to yield a meat  
that's roasted, boiled or minced to thin.

And in those ample offerings  
with dancers too, a thousand strong,  
descendents paid their just receipts  
60. in all-embracing blaze and song.

And through those rites they looked ahead  
who were a bulwark of the east:  
the State of Lu will always be  
firmly standing, undecreased

by any tumult of events.  
So are Orion's three-fold friends,  
so are the hills, so is the tomb,  
or power a thousand chariot sends.

Vermillion flowers fast bound in green:  
70. each had the strong bow, double spear:  
so seen were thirty-thousand men  
on whom the Zhu's rich crests appear.



8. (Continued)

戎狄是膺。荆舒適懲、則莫我敢承。  
俾爾昌而熾、俾爾壽而富、  
黃髮台背、壽胥與試。  
80. 俾爾昌而大、俾爾耆而艾、  
萬有千歲、眉壽無有害。  
泰山巖巖、魯邦所詹。  
奄有龜蒙、遂荒大東、貝冑朱綬。  
至于海邦、淮夷來同。  
莫不率從、90. 魯侯之功。  
保有鳧繹、遂荒徐宅。

The battle of Muye involved large masses of troops: chronicles speak of 300 chariots, 3000 warriors and an army of 45,000 in the Zhou army, later joined by allies providing another 4,000 chariots, that met a Shang force of 70,000. Numbers have to be treated with caution, and even the odd confirmatory bronze excavated in recent years has inscriptions that can be variously interpreted. Dates are particularly controversial, many coinciding with astrological events, part of the ritual and magic that co-existed with orderly government in pre-Qin China. The lands of the defeated Shang do seem to have been divided into fiefdoms and statelets, however, perhaps some forty in all, and ruled by blood relations. The Zhou, continually at war with barbarian tribes, seems to have maintained some 14 standing armies, with each division numbering 2,500 men. The barbarians themselves often migrated over hundreds if not thousands of miles, of course, so that the westward conquests of the Tang, lamented so often in poetry, were preceded by equally costly campaigns a millenium earlier.

8. (Continued)

Still that soldiery increases;  
it is the Rong and Di they meet,  
and the ancient Chu they punish,  
from none of them will they retreat.

The causes carry, blazing through  
the length of life and wealth they give:  
when hair is grey and backs are bent  
80. it is in future ease they live.

Successes are what settle out,  
and such that old men find redress,  
and turmoil of ten thousand years  
the length of eyebrow will repress.

85. Tai Shan is peaceful, towering rock,  
and Lu's rich bounty is increased,  
but suddenly, at Gui and Meng,  
trouble from the Greater East

as far as countries of the coast.  
90. For peace the Huai people sue,  
for none will dare to disobey  
the exploits of the Duke of Lu.

## 8. (Continued)

至于海邦、淮夷蠻貊。及彼南夷、莫不率從。  
莫敢不諾、魯侯是若。天錫公純嘏、100. 眉壽保魯。  
居常與許、復周公之宇。魯侯燕喜、令妻壽母。  
宜大夫庶士、邦國是有。既多受祉、黃髮兒齒。  
110. 徂來之松、新甫之柏。

Later Zhou campaigns, often to the south and north, were less successful, however, and the western Zhou dynasty effectively ended when the Zhou capital of Haojing was captured and sacked by a barbarian confederation.

The fiefdoms set the pattern for later times, particularly the blood-soaked Period of Warring States. The Qi principality occupied the Shandong peninsula. The Jin lay in Sanxi. The Chu principality lay in the south. The Wu lay in the Yantgtze delta., as did the Yue.

The 'barbarians' were not only marginal threats but also made up 'statelets' within the Zhou lands, sometimes peacefully coexisting with Zhou fiefdoms and sometimes at war with them. Occasionally, as the Han histories relate, the 'barbarian' united and became a serious force. The Shan-rong and Guzhu in present day Manchuria had to be defeated in 664 BC, and Bai-di barbarians of central Shanxi in 651 BC. Throughout much of the 6th century BC there were battles against the Di tribes at Taiyuan. It was clearly an unsettled time.

## 8. (Continued)

The Fu and Yi were thus protected,  
as indeed the lands of Xu  
95. as far as countries of the coast,  
the Man, the Mo and Huai too.

The non-Han people of the south  
did not dare to disobey.  
Nor would any contradict  
100. what the Lord of Lu would say.

And so the sky bestowed its blessings  
on one who has protected so,  
and in the settlements of Chang and Xu  
restored to them the realms of Zhou.

105. So let the Duke of Lu rejoice,  
with aged mother, virtuous wife,  
with ministers and commoners  
who gave his country greater life.

Many blessings he received  
110. that serene old age has children's teeth  
Accordingly they turn to pine,  
to cedars Xin-fu hills bequeath.

## 8. (Continued)

是斷是度、是尋是尺。

松桷有舄、路寢孔碩。新廟奕奕、奚斯所作。

120. 孔曼且碩、萬民是若。

Many of these events were noted by Sima Qian (145-c.85 BC) in his Historical Records (*Shiji*), an immense 130-chapter compilation of political narratives, treatises on key institutions and biographies of important individuals. The last were not only kings, great officials and generals, but philosophers, poets, merchants, merchants and assassins. Movements of non-Han peoples along the borders were also recorded in narratives. Sima Qian did not spare the guilty, but perhaps favoured those whose courage, chivalry and loyalty had gone unrecognised in their day.

The *Shiji* became the model for later histories, and helped shape the Chinese world-view. Very different, the mirror-image as it were of the settled Chinese, were the tribal peoples grouped together as the Xiongnu. They sought only booty, excelling at warfare, but had no cities or permanent dwellings, no agriculture or written language, no family names, and no respect for the elderly. China for most of its history lay on the fluctuating border between settled and nomadic steppe life, open to new influences but also at risk of conquest and annihilation.

## 8. (Continued)

All were measured out and cut  
into units as appropriate,  
a well-extended, floated length  
of beams encompassing a state

deemed then as proper for a shrine.  
So the place of Xi-si fame  
created such majestic space  
120. in homage full ten thousand came.

### 3. POETRY OF THE HAN

#### 3.1. Social Background: Han Dynasty

The first emperor of the Qin dynasty drew up laws that were sternly imposed to create a centralized state. Everything was encoded, planned, checked and brutally enforced, often by the emperor in person. When the emperor died in 210 BC, the legitimate heir was murdered by his younger brother, and a civil war followed. In 209 BC, a group of peasants conscripted for frontier duty were delayed by rain. Rather than face the inevitable execution, they became outlaws, starting a movement that rapidly swelled as nobles and peasants fought each other. Many generals defected to lead the peasant armies. Lui Bang, a man of modest birth, defeated his main rival in 202 BC, and became known to history as Gaozu, the first emperor of the 206 BC-200 AD Han dynasty.

Given the unpopularity of the Qin dynasty, Gaozu first determined on a federal, Zhou form of government, but soon realized that rewarding his army comrades by grants of land was a recipe for further war. He therefore reversed the policy and returned to the previous centralized state, keeping the military strength (*wu*) but combining it with beneficent, morally centered governance (*wen*). That policy became the principle underlying all Chinese government for the next 2000 years, though each dynasty faced slightly different problems and solved them in their own particular way. Gaozu governed through officials appointed by the court for their merit, and kept them loyal by promotion and the threat of transfer, dismissal and/or punishment. The later emperor Wudi (r. 141-87 BC)

enforced these measures, continually curbing the power of the nobles and gaining revenues through state monopolies and taxes. Outstanding scholars were lured to court, and rival centres were slowly shut down.

The Han emperor was all-powerful but submitted to guidance in the Confucian notion of an extended family bound by loyalty and responsibilities. Members of the imperial family were kept out of court politics by being sent to govern domains, and the empire was aggressively expansive, remembered in poetry by the many frontier soldier's laments. At great cost to men, supplies and horses, vast armies were sent far into Xiongnu territories in 133, 124, 123 and 119 BC, and officials were dispatched to Bactria, Fergana and Parthia to set up profitable trade centres. Histories were also compiled, as official policy generally, and these were not always flattering to emperors and their governments.

The Han empire, like all those afterwards, was agrarian-based. Improved irrigation, plowing and planting techniques led to prosperity and an increasing population. The AD 2 census records 58 million people, making the Han more populous than the Roman Empire. Land was taxed, and that land was divided between sons on its owner's death, leading to much social mobility as farmers struggled to feed their families, pay taxes and repay the loans of merchants and money-lenders. Merchants were not well regarded in imperial China, and the Han indeed took over many of their activities, setting up government monopolies on grain, iron, salt, coinage and liquors.

Whereas the Qin dynasty was legalistic (men were seen as intrinsically evil and could only be governed by savage



laws rigorously enforced), the Han was Confucian (government through self-restraint, concern for others, love of ritual, loyalty to superiors and respect for education and for the five classics: *Book of Changes*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Songs*, *Book of Rites* and *Spring and Autumn Annals*). In practice there could be many admixtures of legalism, Daoism and even magic in the official Confucianism. The Mandate of Heaven was removed from emperors who governed unwisely, and failures here were announced by floods, earthquakes and famines — for all that Han and later governments took measures to prevent and alleviate such natural disasters.

The earlier Han was overthrown by the short-lived Xin dynasty of Wang Mang (AD 7-23), but reinstated in the later Han. The new dynasty governed well for the next 70 years, but the court was gradually corrupted by eunuchs. Their coup in AD 124 placed a malleable infant on the throne, and protests in AD 166 and 169 were savagely put down. Tax revenues decreased as local magnates took over from smallholders, and AD 153 saw flooding of the Yellow River and locust swarms. In AD 184, a widespread Daoist-inspired rebellion was eventually suppressed, but the government generals then retained their powers to create a smouldering civil war. In AD 189 a local warlord captured the capital, slaughtered 2,000 eunuchs, and made the emperor his pawn. Luoyang was sacked and burned to the ground, with the total loss of government libraries and archives. The Han was over, and there followed nearly 400 years of various kingdoms and short-lived dynasties, exceptionally complex in detail but commonly lumped together as the AD 280-589 Six Dynasties period.

In literature, the Han dynasty was a complex period of compilation, experiment and consolidation. The *Shijing* poetry illustrated above was collated and studied. Poetry written during the preceding period of the Warring States, plus that immediately before and during the Han was also collected, including three genres that are not found later, namely Hymns, *Sao* and *Fu* poetry. Given the terminology, with Han literature itself available only through later compilations — plus the usual scholarly disagreements — it may be helpful to hold these categories in mind during the next sections:

|                                 |                    |             |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| <i>Shijing</i> : archaic poetry | pre-Warring States | Poems 1-8   |
| <i>Sao</i> : shamanist chants   | Warring States     | Poem 9      |
| Nine Songs: <i>Ode to Dead</i>  | Warring States     | Poem 10     |
| <i>Fu</i> : rhapsodic verse     | Han                | Poem 11     |
| <i>Yuefu</i> : Hymns            | Han                | Poem 12     |
| <i>Yuefu</i> : Music Bureau     | Han                | Poems 13-16 |

## 3.2 Sao Poetry

We are also dependent on Han anthologies for the poems that followed the *Shijing*. The *Chuci zhangju* is a collection of pre- to late- Han poems in markedly different styles. The *Sao* allude to shamanistic practices, the *Fu* are rhapsodic verse-prose without a close parallel in western literature, and the *Jui Ge*, or Ode to the Fallen, is one of the included *Nine Songs*. Also dating from Han times, in fact collected by the Music Bureau re-established by emperor Wudi, are the ritual-like folk ballads called *Yuefu*, possibly contemporary court pieces, possibly slightly earlier. And finally, also from Han times are the *Nineteen Old Poems*, though they are once again a composite collection, with pieces from perhaps the earlier Han and certainly from the later Han.

*Sao* poetry, also called *Chuci*, or the lyrics of Chu, flourished in a particularly bloody period of Chinese history, that of the Warring States (403-227 BC). The poems, which number nearly 60, have many textural and authorship problems, but were probably put together by Wang Yi in the later Han dynasty, around 114-119 AD. They fall into two groups. The first was apparently assembled by the statesman Qu Yuan (c 340-278 BC). The second group imitates the earlier, but was written by later poets, including Wang himself. Both groups differ from contemporary *Shi* poetry: they have longer lines, commonly of six or seven characters. The lines also feature xi (兮), which was probably a relationship or musical device, since the word doesn't mean anything by itself.

Poets of the Han dynasty were greatly interested in the *Chuci*, as were its statesmen and rulers, who often poetry themselves. Most approved of the form, seeing it as continuing the *Shijing* traditions, but there were also doubters criticising Qu Yuan for being arrogant and inflating his lines with empty words. Qu Yuan was indeed driven to commit suicide by opponents jealous of his imperial favour, but was later resurrected as a literary hero, the first real poet of China, who widened the possibilities of its verse.

The poem below is an excerpt from *The Lord of the Xiang River*, and comes from a section of the *Chuci* entitled *Nine Songs*. There are some ambiguities and uncertainties in the text, which seems to be dialogue between two deities of the Xiang River, the largest river in the shamanistic Chu state. Since *jūn* is ambivalent in gender, scholars are divided as to whether the deities are male or female, though I have accepted Fusheng Wu's views in what follows. The speaker is a poetic persona that amalgamates shamanism, ancient history and philosophic ideas of the time in a symbolism through which the poet expresses himself. The various fragrant flowers denote inward qualities of purity and moral cultivation, and are thus comparable with the 'compare and evoke' (*bi-xing*) of Chinese poetry, in which the above-mentioned *xi* also plays a part.

## 9. SAO POETRY: Qu Yuan (c 340-278 BC)

### 湘君 XIANG JUN

君不行兮夷猶 蹇誰留兮中洲  
美要眇兮宜修 沛吾乘兮桂舟  
令沅湘兮無波 使江水兮安流  
望夫君兮未來 吹參差兮誰思  
駕飛龍兮北征 10. 邅吾道兮洞庭  
薜荔柏兮蕙綯 蓀橈兮蘭旌  
望涔陽兮極浦 橫大江兮揚靈  
揚靈兮未極 女嬋媛兮為余太息  
橫流涕兮潺湲 隱思君兮陴側  
桂櫂兮蘭枻 20. 斲冰兮積雪

When the Zhou empire decayed into princely states, that of Chu was particularly prosperous, encouraged religious pieces that were afterwards collected under the title *Nine Songs*, becoming in time the model for a new genre. The following century saw Qu Yuan's *Li sao* (Encountering Sorrows), when an unmistakably personal element enters Chinese poetry. Born in 340 BC, Qu Yuan was a poet and statesman of the Chu state (in the south, along the Yangtze river), who advocated alignment with other states as protection against the threatening Qin. Unfortunately, the man was slandered by rival officials, who turned the king against this sound advice. When by trickery the Chu fell to the Qin, the much-loved Qu Yuan drowned himself, an event remembered by the annual Chinese custom of rowing dragon boats and eating *zongzi*. The *Lord of the Xiang River* belongs to the *Nine Songs*, but was probably polished up and popularised by Qu Yuan.

## 9. SAO POETRY: Lord of the Xiang River

My lord, who does not come, is hesitant,  
and loath to leave — but why? — this island haunt.  
So beautiful my lady, delicate,  
that instantly I launch my cassia boat.

It's calm the Yuan and the Xiang should know:  
I tell the Yangtze then to ease its flow.

I look for him, my lord: he is not there.  
Why do I play — for whom — this panpipe air?  
I ride my flying dragons northwards; on  
10. to Dongting Lake my quest has gone.

My sail has melilot and fig-tree leaves,  
the flagpole, orchids and these irises,  
I scan the prospect northward to the Cen  
I cross the mighty river once again.

He can't, for all my magic, meet my eyes:  
my women, saddened by it, breathe long sighs.  
For me, my tears stream down, there's no relief  
when all remembering must bring me grief.

With cassia oars, and orchids, still I go  
20. towards the hard, cold knock of ice and snow.

9. (Continued)

采薜荔兮水中 攀芙蓉兮木末 心不同兮媒勞  
恩不甚兮輕絕 石瀨兮淺淺 飛龍兮翩翩  
交不忠兮怨長 期不信兮告余以不閒 鼉騁驚兮江臯  
30. 夕弭節兮北渚 鳥次兮屋上 水周兮堂下  
捐余玦兮江中 遺余佩兮醴浦 采芳洲兮杜若  
將以遺兮下女 豈不可兮再得 聊逍遙兮容與

Similar to *The Lord of the Xiang River* is the *Li sao*, an exceptionally long poem of 350 lines and 2,400 characters, where the poet recounted his life, his beliefs and misfortunes. Riding on a rainbow chariot driven by dragons as white as jade, guarded by the god of wind, the god of sun, and the god of moon, he soared to heaven in search of his ideals, before being forced to leave his Chu State. The poem is clearly allegorical. Fine birds and fragrant flowers equate to loyalty and steadfastness. Their opposite, slanderous and villainous people, are denoted by foul and ugly objects. Godly creatures speak for the monarch. Dragons, heavenly birds and phoenixes denote gentlemen. Clouds and whirlwinds refer to villains. The *Li sao* and the *Nine Songs* employ long lines of six or seven characters, and the character *xi* (兮), is either centrally placed as here, or moves to the line end.

The *Nine Songs* probably originated as shamanistic rituals, and were accepted as such, but over *Li sao* there was much more controversy. I've emphasized the echo of couplets in the original's rhyme scheme (in this section aaba xbxx xcac fcgg edxd xxxx eexe xfx xfx xf) by rhyming aa bb, etc. throughout, but the original is in fact more varied. A caesura after the third stress in each line of the translation echoes the original structure: I scan the prospect northward | **to** the **Cen.** / I cross the mighty river | **once again.**

9. (Continued)

I scour the waters where the fig leaves float  
and pluck from treetops there the lotus growth.

When hearts are different-made, they will not meet,  
and love quick broken must be incomplete.  
If like a bouldery stream is showy love,  
the dragon, stern and graceful, hangs above.

Love unfaithful makes for bitterness —  
he has no time for meeting, nonetheless —  
my chariot hastes along the river's length,  
30. on evening's north bank rests its strength.

The homing birds in branches make their nest,  
but waters round the hall can scarcely rest.  
Into their depths I toss my ring of jade,  
in Li's wide river mouth is pendant laid.

Lavender I'll pick. The fragrant isle  
will have my women scented all this while.  
Again the moment lost we'll never see  
but we can talk at length here openly.



10. NINE SONGS: Anonymous: 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC to 1st Century AD

國殤 GUO SHANG

操吳戈兮被犀甲，車錯轂兮短兵接。  
旌蔽日兮敵若雲，矢交墜兮士爭先。  
凌余陣兮躐余行，左驂殪兮右刃傷。  
霾兩輪兮繫四馬，援玉枹兮擊鳴鼓。  
天時懟兮威靈怒，嚴殺盡兮棄原野。  
出不入兮往不反，平原忽兮路超遠。  
帶長劍兮挾秦弓，首身離兮心不懲。  
誠既勇兮又以武，終剛強兮不可凌。  
身既死兮神以靈，魂魄毅兮為鬼雄。

There are many popular tales of martial heroes, but Chinese literature does not glorify war, nor usually celebrate its generals in the way we think of Caesar or Napoleon. One exception is the poem here, which comes from the 'Nine Songs' collection, possibly dating from the end of the Period of Warring States. The piece is well known to western readers, and has been widely translated.

Again this features the internal placing of the character *xi* (兮), but is clearly an altogether different poem from the delicate and melancholic 2A, and requires a different treatment. I have split the seven character lines into two tetrameters, rhyming both for shaping purposes. The original is probably rhymed aa bb etc., at least in broad terms, and employs much assonance and internal rhyme. The rendering is also free in places, going beyond the terse Chinese text, but rendering, I hope, the spirit more fully.

## 10. NINE SONGS: To the Nation's War Dead

We warriors move as one great tide  
of battering shield and toughened hide.  
The clash of chariot wheels afford  
no quarter from the jabbing sword.  
Above, the unfurled banners run  
as fume and clouds crowd out sun.  
And thick the air with arrows still:  
all move, relentless, to the kill.

Our battle order breaks, is lost  
and troops, disordered, count the cost.  
Our left horse whinnies and is dead,  
the right one flounders on instead.  
The shattered chariot mass now reels,  
each locked and tangled in the wheels,  
and with the jade sticks beating comes  
the somber sound of battle drums.

The War God has an angry eye,  
on combatants here brought to die.  
Sober killing is the yield  
on this exhausting battle field.  
So went young hearts that hope and yearn  
but are not fated to return:  
beneath a mute, unfriendly sky  
in scattered, far-off fields they lie.

## 10. (Continued)

帶長劍兮挾秦弓，首身離兮心不懲。  
誠既勇兮又以武，終剛強兮不可凌。  
身既死兮神以靈，魂魄毅兮為鬼雄。

It is difficult to grasp the violence of these times, aptly called the Period of the Warring States, when all inhabitants of enemy towns and cities, women and children included, were commonly massacred. Shi Huangdi, the ruler of the successful Qin state, waded through horrific bloodshed to create the first Chinese empire. In 293 BC he defeated the Han and Wei kingdoms, taking 240,000 heads in the process, and then another 150,000 in a subsequent campaign. In 260 BC he defeated the Chao, taking as bounty another 400,000 heads. Those same methods he used to centralise the empire he had created, but the peasant founder of the subsequent Han dynasty, who took the title of Gaozu (r.202-195 BC) also kept power firmly in his own hands. Most Chinese were simple farmers, unconcerned by power struggles, but poets were often attached to courts, and these could be perilous positions.

The strong-willed Empress Lu took control when her husband Gaozu died, for example, promoting her relatives to positions of power, but, when in time the Empress died, wide swathes of those relatives and their families were executed. Wang Mang usurped the throne in 9 BC, imposed policies that displaced peasants and landlords, and was himself overthrown in AD 25, with the bloodshed of civil war. The bureaucratic machinery of government, which served China for two millennia, was not always benign, therefore, and poets who graced one administration could find themselves exiled to the far provinces in the next. Many left voluntarily, disheartened by the incessant struggles for wealth and influence.

10. (Continued)

Across dropped swords the battle flows,  
    abandoned, too, the fine Qin bows.  
Though heads are from their bodies gone,  
    how bravely has that spirit shone.  
The God of Wu himself approves  
    how animating courage moves  
that none thereafter will condemn  
    the honour that was gained by them.

Though dead the bodies, fiercer still  
    is that indomitable fighting will,  
when soul on soul, by valour led,  
    exults among the hallowed dead.

### 3.5 Fu Poetry

*Fu* poetry, which is variously translated as 'rhapsody', 'rhyme-prose' or 'poetic description', has no counterpart in English. *Gufu*, or ancient style *Fu*, is poetry in a splendidly ornate style, with lines of unequal length, a mixture of rhymed and unrhymed passages, much parallelism and antithesis, elaborate description, hyperbole, repetition in synonyms, often ending in a moral precept. Its mature form became important in the former Han dynasty (206BC-8AD), from which it branched into various types in the later Han (25-220 AD), from something more personal when scholar-officials felt unappreciated by their contemporaries into forms like *yongwu*, which are short, descriptive poems on plants, animals, household objects and the like.

The piece translated below is part of a poem entitled *Fu on the Imperial Park* by Sima Xiangru, an official charged by the Emperor Wudi (r.140-87 AD) to provide such poetry to his court. The poem is a long one, and takes the form of a debate between three personages. Sir Vacuous represents the Chou as an emissary to Qi. Master Improbable represents the Qi. Both describe their hunting parks in lavish terms. Lord-Such, the third protagonist, describes the wonders of the Emperor's Shanglin Park, and it is section three of that description which is translated here.



## 11. FU POETRY: Sima Xiangru (179-117 BC)

### 上林賦 SHANGLIN FU

於是乎崇山巖巖 龍嵒崔巍

110. 深林巨木 嶄巖參差

九嶷巖嶸 南山峨峨

巖池甌錡 摧峯崛崎

振溪通谷 蹇產溝瀆

谿呀豁閭 阜陵別隴

120. 崑崙岩塊 丘虛堀礪

隱鱗鬱鷗 登降施靡

陂池獬豸 允溶淫鬻

散渙夷陸 亭皋千里

Like most things Chinese, the term *Fu* is used rather variously, and though best known in the Han as the ancient style *Fu*, the style was written right through imperial times when something in the nature of a tribute was intended. Some poems of the *Shijing* are even termed *Fu*. Designed to celebrate the wealth and prestige of the emperor Wudi, this poem is probably as close to the epic as Chinese poetry comes. Shanglin Park was one of many notable accomplishments by Wudi, a place filled with exotic plants, creatures and precious objects, which also served for imperial hunts and military displays.

It was indeed in the early Han dynasty that *Fu* achieved its greatest effects and popularity. It was written, for example, by Jia Yi, on his way to exile when he composed 'Lament for Qu Yuan', and again prior to recall in 'Owl'. When Emperor Wu came to the throne in 141 BC, he summoned the greatest *Fu* writers, and among many pieces presented to court were the *Seven Stimuli*, admonitions against over-indulgence, and Sima Xiangru's *Fu on the Imperial Park*. Later reigns saw Yang Xiong's more moralistic poems.

11. FU POETRY: Fu on the Imperial Park: Extract III

The mountains soar, high towering hence  
from rims of over-bearing cliffs,  
110. below are forests, dark, immense,  
athwart the rock falls, savage rifts.

The Juizong reaches to the skies,  
and Southern Mountains rise and rise,  
hill slopes as sheer as cauldron sides  
115. show mountainous and steep divides.

.  
Rivulets thin-tremble here, collect  
to run through valleys, and elect  
to take the course that opens wide  
past hillocks islanded, and cliffs  
120. ascending into clouded peaks.  
By hillocks and by secret caves  
the river rumbles, shouts and raves,  
and bursts out into rocky wastes.

Vast lakes it fills and levels out,  
125. submerging banks at every hand  
and thus effacing all the land  
till one great marsh lies miles about.



## 11. (Continued)

靡不被築 揜以綠蕙

130. 被以江離 糝以薜蘿

雜以留夷 布結縷

攢戾莎 揭車衡蘭

橐本射干 芷薑蘘荷

歲持若蓀 鮮支黃礫

140. 蔣茅青蘋

布濩閔澤 延曼太原

離靡廣衍 應風披靡

吐芳揚烈 郁郁菲菲

眾香發越 肸鬻布寫 晻薹唳莠

於是乎周覽汎觀， 緝紛軋芴， 芒芒怳忽。

At their most characteristic, *Fu* poems fused entertainment and oral instruction in exuberant demonstrations of poetic licence. Later poets toned down the excesses, believing that the extended rhetorical arguments and complex vocabulary of the grand style only intoxicated their audiences, losing them in the beauty of the language to the marked detriment of the message.

In this excerpt from *Fu on the Imperial Park*, I have only broadly replicated the rhyme scheme and substituted 'miles' for li, though the latter measured a third of a mile.

Much of the beauty of original Chinese evades any English rendering, of course, and there are always celebrated lines, of great resonance to the Chinese, which become the mundane or downright ugly in literal translation, a consideration which I hope explains my quest throughout for literary quality rather than scholarly exactness, though this particular rendering is close, as all are unless otherwise designated.

11. (Continued)

The hillocky remains unsmoothed  
but green the ground with patchouli.  
130. Or carpeted with louvage leaves  
and millet too, whose tufted heads  
will bristle round the peonies,  
and here are spreading knot-weed threads.

The galingale here also grows,  
135. and cart-halt, asarum, bugleweed.  
Wild blackberry lilies and lovage seed  
with purple and mioga ginger,  
and pollia, cherries, scented flag,  
rich spinach and the virgin's bower,  
140. water bamboo, tubers and green sedge  
and marshy places interfinger.

While all around, a vast expanse  
of lush and green extravagance,  
is bent and blown back by the wind  
145 that's filled with fragrance, wafting there  
such heavy perfumes, strong and sweet  
that, permeating everything,  
impart a sensuous longing to the air,  
encouraging luxuriant growth.

And so bewilderment, an overwhelming rich profusion, all  
so pressed together of the senses, of smell and sight and  
touch.

## 11. (Continued)

150. 視之無端 察之無涯

日出東沼 入虜西陂

其南則 隆冬生長

涌水躍波 其獸則

庸旄獬犛 沈牛麈麋

160. 赤首圜題 窮奇象犀

其北則 盛夏含凍裂地

涉冰揭河 其獸則

麒麟角端 騶駼橐駝

馱馱驢羸 馱馱驢羸

The main points to be noticed are the richness of description coupled with exact terminology. Chinese flower paintings, of which most surviving examples are no earlier than the Qing, also show this rich exactitude. Everything is faithfully depicted — leaf, stalk, veins, flower head, associated butterflies, leaves in decay and half-eaten by insects — but the spatial design is superb and whole effect exceptionally refined. The Chinese, said Bertram Russell, aim to be reasonable in life and exquisite in their art, a maxim worth remembering in translating their poetry.

Today we prize novelty in art and audacious theory, but the Chinese did not, and indeed were rather contemptuous of foreign notions of 'progress', unwisely so in the face of gunboat policy and the subsequent 'century of humiliation'. But that more cyclical view of history, where the arts continually return to extract greater depth and richness from earlier models, is surely one alternative to today's obsessive preoccupation with novelty, with change for the sake of change. Art need not be science, but more an ever more extended refinement in our search for understanding and expression of man's fundamental nature.

11. (Continued)

150. Look at it, it has no start;  
examine it: it has no end.

The sun that lights the eastern pool  
will set upon the western bank.

And in the furthest south

155 the deepest winter shows some growth  
and water bubbles, is alive.

Here the animals

are zebu, yak, the tapir, ox,

the plunging bull and various deer,

160. the red-head, round-hoof, heavy boss  
of elephant, rhinoceros.

and north, at intervals,

where summer is but freezing cold:  
and water's sunk in icy ground.

165. these animals are found:

the horn-snout and the unicorn.

The camel and the wild horse rule,

Tibetan and Mongolian ass,

the hinny and domestic mule.

### 3.7 YueFu: Music Bureau Poems

As mentioned above, the poetry of the Han Dynasty was rather diverse. In addition to the official *Sao* and *Fu* poems, there were poems termed *Yuefu* or Music Bureau Poems.

*Yuefu* means folk ballads, and from the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD was a term applied to all poetry of this style, Han or later. The Music Bureau itself was different, however, being a government department charged with collecting popular songs from the countryside, perhaps to keep an eye on what was being said, and/or to entertain the court.

Music Bureau Poems form two distinct groups. The first are ceremonial and sacrificial hymns, generally written in four-character lines and certainly dating from the Han, probably the Eastern (earlier) Han. The language was somewhat archaic, and specialists can differ on interpretation. These poems are similar to the *Shijing* Odes and Hymns, and did not much influence later poetry. I have translated only one (Poem 12) to illustrate their form.

The second group is much more varied, in style, themes and language. They were probably collected or written in the Western Han, but may include a few later pieces. The themes tend to be more personal, often narratives, and pentasyllabic lines gradually became more prevalent, though many poems have lines of unequal length, a feature (confusingly) also of the much later *Ci* poetry.



## 12. YUE FU: Anonymous: Eastern Han

我定曆數 人告其心

敕身齊戒 施教申申

乃立祖廟 敬明尊親

大矣孝熙 四極爰臻

The poem is the tail end of a long tradition of temple odes in the Shijing: four-character lines, not generally continued after the Han. The original rhymes xaxx xaxa, and the translation runs xaxa xaax.

Chinese temples were quite unlike mosques or churches, incidentally, and often consisted of several buildings set in the middle of towns or in auspicious locations on mountains and hills, tucked in among the trees. There can be shrines, rooms and/or large halls, often orientated on north-south axes. Many have beautifully decorated walls. Pagodas can be adjuncts to temples, or temples in their own right, open to access or closed. Traditional temples had characteristically-shaped roofs, tiled in green or yellow, and sat atop eaves decorated with religious figures and good luck symbols. The roofs are often supported on magnificently carved and decorated beams, which in turn are supported by intricately carved stone dragon pillars.

Being so often a blend of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and folk traditions, Chinese religion involves many different practices and associated paraphernalia: spirit tablets, shrine and altars with inscriptions honouring ancestors, gods, and other important figures. Often two tablets are made, one of paper and one of wood, a ceremony transferring the ancestor's spirit from one to another. There can be ceremonies, where prayers are said, but joss sticks are commonly left burning for days. Less formal are the many spirit tablets devoted to the host of deities that preside over the cosmos, which were placed in temples or wayside shrines.

12. YUE FU: Songs to Pacify the World: For Inside the Palace: No. 3.

We who set the calendar  
inform our subjects what will be:  
imperial orders that together  
inculcate humility.

This temple to our parents stands,  
respectful of our ancestry,  
and great the filial piety  
from all corners gathered here.



### 13. YUE FU: Anonymous

有所思 YOU SUO SI

有所思 乃在大海南  
何用問遺君 雙珠璫瑁簪  
用玉紹繚之 聞君有它心  
拉雜摧燒之 摧燒之  
當風揚其灰 從今以往  
勿復相思 相思與君絕  
雞鳴狗吠 兄嫂當知之  
妃呼豨 秋風肅肅晨風颯  
東方須臾高知之

The poem comes from the *Guchui qu ci* (Lyrics for Drum and Pipe Songs) and is exceptionally outspoken for fifth century China: it may have started life as a folk song which was then polished up by court officials. Not until line 3, which uses the *jūn* denoting male in classical Chinese, is the speaker identified as a woman. The line is traditionally read as 'What shall I send you?' but I have transferred forwards the indignation with which the woman learns that she's been jilted for another into heavy sarcasm. The Chinese of line 13 is particularly rustic, though *gǒu* for dog is not used until the Han. The last two characters of line 16 are commonly read as 'sparrow-hawk shrieks', but 'news cool autumn breeze' would be the more conventional interpretation. Whatever the correct reading, it's clear that this is not a casual affair lightly broken off, but a betrayal of trust and convention, with ominous consequences. The allusions to imperial concubines suggest that the speaker enjoys some status, and is not someone to be trifled with.

The original is rhymed abxb axaa axax xaaxa, rather than the abba abcd dcex effgg of the translation: English is not so well endowed with rhyme words.

### 13. YUE FU: There's One I Think About

I was to love you, live as well  
a long way south of that great sea,  
accept your gifts most happily —  
that hairpin with the two white pearls,  
    and fashioned out of tortoiseshell,  
5. a jade to sheave my hair, to show it well —  
but heard your heart had changed to me.

At which I break the hairpin, have it cast  
to bits and bits of scattered ash:  
I stamp it under foot, and dash  
10. all memory of what is past.

Let's together make our mark,  
and have all yearning cut off short,  
chickens cackle, dogs to bark.

And elder brother will be told  
    inlaws also and their daughters:  
15. outrage in the women's quarters.

That news is on the autumn wind,  
    by morning's solemn breezes blown,  
when speedily the eastern dawn  
    illuminates, makes all things known.

## 14. YUE FU: Anonymous.

### 战城南 ZHAN CHENG NAN

去年征战，桑干之源；  
今年转战，葱河之畔。

条支海中，兵器洗刷；  
天山草原，牧放战马。

不远万里，来此征战；  
三军将士，辛苦万端。

耗尽青春，心衰力竭；  
杀戮掠夺，匈奴大业。

古今将士，数量巨大；  
战死荒漠，白骨黄沙。

秦筑长城，防御胡人；  
延至汉代，烽火仍焚。

烽火一起，燃无尽时，  
战事同样，结束无期。

One of many poems lamenting the hardship of a frontier soldier's life, its unending pointlessness and danger of dying in far-off places where no descendants would show their veneration. The Sanggan River lies 60 miles south of present-day Datong in Shanxi province. The Conghe is in Xinjiang. Conghe, Tiaozhi and Tianshan were frontier posts.

#### 14. YUE FU: Chengnan South

We soldiers last year were to trace  
the San Gang River to its source,  
we soldiers this year fought on banks  
across the River Cong's long course.

By the sea of Tiaozhi  
we scoured our swords and armoured hide:  
We fed our horses on the grass  
the plains of Tienshan provide.

No thousand li were journeyings  
but prompt to battle once again:  
all ranks of soldiers were inured  
to long exhaustion and to pain.

Lost was youth's inherent joy  
in hurts no bodies long sustain:  
bloodshed, massacre, and plundering:  
against the Huns, a hard campaign.

Uncounted officers and men,  
immense the numbers in these lands  
of deserts and of barren wastes  
where bones are lost in yellow sands.

It was the Qin with their great wall  
against invaders from the north,  
and from the dynasty of Han  
would the beacon fires go forth

## 14. (Continued)

荒野战斗，残酷无穷；  
战败马匹，战场悲鸣。

主人早被，喂了鸦鹜；  
肠子挂上，枯树枝头。

士卒惨烈，无谓牺牲；  
将军到头，一无所能。

战争绝非，好事一桩；  
德君被迫，用其攻防。

These frontier wars were unfortunately necessary, to keep the western trade routes open to the Kushan and Parthian Empires with their ready supplies of horses, and, more particularly, to bring the fight to the enemy, those steppeland peoples continually threatening China's northern and western borders. The Qin emperor built the Great Wall, and sent 100,000 soldiers against them in 213 BC. The early Han emperors tried to buy them off with generous gifts and even princesses as barbarian brides, but appeasement rarely worked for long. In 166 BC, some 160,000 horsemen raided deep into China, coming within 100 miles of the capital. Wu Di, the energetic and long-lived Han emperor took the offensive, sending 300,000 troops far into Xiongnu territory in 133 BC, and over 100,000 men in 124, 123 and 119 BC, securing territories as far west as Kashgar and Yarkand. The Xiongnu threat retreated after their confederation broke up in 55 BC, but these central Asia territories were lost in the An Lushan Rebellion.

The original is variously rhymed (abaa xxbx cacb xxxx cxxx fdx d cgeg xxcx xxexxf) using seven rhyme sounds, a complex scheme I have replaced by xaxa xbx b, etc.

14. (Continued)

And all at once and everywhere  
the warnings seem as half-begun:  
inexhaustible the greed of war,  
and fighting that is never done.

Always battle, wilderness  
of new barbarities unloosed,  
where, on far battlefields, the horse  
whinny they are badly used.

As for masters, they are fed  
to crows and vultures: here one sees  
intestines, carcasses and head  
on dried-up branches of the trees.

All soldiers here die miserably,  
their sacrifices are in vain,  
and generals' best abilities  
will not secure a lasting gain.

War's perpetual, absolute;  
it has no limits, has no end,  
and even the most virtuous emperor  
attacks when he should more defend.

15. YUE FU: Cai Yong (132-192)

青青河畔草，綿綿思遠道。  
出自兩漢的《飲馬長城窟行》  
青青河畔草，綿綿思遠道。  
遠道不可思，夙昔夢見之。(夙昔 一作：宿昔)  
夢見在我傍，忽覺在他鄉。  
他鄉各異縣，展轉不相見。  
枯桑知天風，海水知天寒。  
入門各自媚，誰肯相為言？  
客從遠方來，遺我雙鯉魚。  
呼兒烹鯉魚，中有尺素書。  
長跪讀素書，書中竟何如？  
上言加餐食，下言長相憶。

Cai Yong (132-92) was an official and scholar of the Eastern (later) Han dynasty, who also wrote pieces in the four-character line or metre, and in the *Fu* style.

The long and complex literary developments of the Han show two important developments. The first is the growing importance of the five-character line, which gives greater semantic depth and emotive subtlety. The second is the personal element, the manner in which the straightforward narrative is giving way to the emotive importance of the subject matter to the speaker. Narrative poems would continue to be written, throughout imperial times, but the evocative distillation of emotions would now be the more essential feature of Chinese poetry. Note here also how the poem proceeds through repetition, a defining feature being established in one line and repeated in the next. The rhyme scheme is aabb xxcc xdx dxee eebx rather than the xaxa xbx etc. of the translation.

15. YUE FU: Watering Horses at the Great Wall Gap

How green and green there grows the river grass,  
how long forever goes that distant road,  
the distant road that edges past the mind,  
as meeting in that morning's dream had showed.

For in that morning's dream I saw approach  
one unaware it was a foreign place,  
a foreign place that is a different country:  
I turned and turned but could not see the face.

Heaven's winds may hurt the dried-up mulberry tree,  
and water knows how cold the wind is off the sea:  
the words that travellers at the door exchange,  
although companionable, were not for me.

But then one came, and from a distant country,  
who, leaving, laid two silver carp aside.  
I asked my son prepare and cook the fish:  
he found a raw silk letter wrapped inside.

I knelt and that silk letter read at length,  
which put my startled wits more out of sorts.  
The first ran, 'Please to eat these two fine carp'  
and then, 'remember you are in our thoughts.'



## 16. YUE FU POETRY: Cao Cao (155-220 AD)

### 龜雖壽 GUI SUI SHOU

神龜雖壽， 猶有竟時。  
騰蛇乘霧， 終為土灰。  
老驥伏櫪， 志在千里；  
烈士暮年， 壯心不已。  
盈縮之期， 不但在天；  
養怡之福， 可得永年。  
幸甚至哉！ 歌以詠志

Cao Cao's work was in the traditional four-character metre, but he also, with his two sons, created the *Jian'an* style that was to greatly influence Tang poetry, turning poetry away from narrative, towards the personal expression of sentiment. His poetry, outwardly simple but evocative, revitalized poetry by replacing archaic words with contemporary diction.

The poem is making the sensible recommendation that man should learn to live within his natural capacities, accepting what heaven wills but making his own efforts towards advancement, as do the three animals mentioned. As in the west, the tortoise signifies longevity, but was also thought by the Chinese to hold the secrets of heaven and earth within its body — hence its use of its shell for divination in Zhou and Shang times. And whereas the dragon is a wise and beneficent animal, the serpent is much less so, although people born under its influence are thought to possess the gifts of divination. Fine horses from central Asia were eagerly sought by the Chinese, and the animal represents courage, integrity, diligence and power. The original is rhymed xaxa bbcb acxcxb, i.e. tighter than the translation's xaxax, xbx, etc.

## 16. YUE FU POETRY: Though the Tortoise Lives Long

The tortoise must, though long it lives,  
accept the roles in which it's cast.  
The soaring serpent floats through mists  
but comes to earth and ash at last.

The old war-horse, though led to stall,  
will ride in thought a thousand li.  
The noble man advanced in years  
still holds his hopes and constantly.

Life's rich fullness to its ends  
is not alone as heaven sends.

One brought up well, in harmony  
with all, can live both well and long.  
Good fortune may indeed arrive,  
for which I'll simply hum this song

## 4. APPROACHES TO THE TANG

### 4.1 Overview

The era of rapidly changing states and empires that led to the glorious Tang and the triumph of Chinese pentasyllabic verse — a period often termed the Six Dynasties (222–589 AD) — was also complicated in its cultural affairs. Genres developed at different rates at different places, and the terminology can again be confusing. The point to remember is that Chinese genres of poetry are not chronologically bound by dynasties, but are fluid, sometimes anticipating and sometimes harking back in features. Imperial China had little of the relatively straightforward ‘progress’ of European civilisations, therefore, but was much more cyclical, as indeed were the Indian empires. A brief overview:

|                |               |             |
|----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Nineteen Poems | Han           | Poem 17     |
| Ban Jiezu      | Han           | Poem 18     |
| Tao Qian       | Six Dynasties | Poems 19-20 |
| Xie Lingyun    | Six Dynasties | Poems 21-22 |

## 4.2 Early Pentasyllabic Verse

The earliest coherent group of pentasyllabic verses are found in the *Wen xuan*, compiled by the crown prince of Liang, Xiao Tong (501-31). Their date of composition is disputed; however, some perhaps were written in the former Han dynasty, and some in the later Han.

Increasingly these poems become less songs, however, and more the polished reflections of the literati. In official compilations, the oral tradition was being left behind. Moreover, while *Yuefu* verse was often a narrative, telling a story, verse in this group of poems drew on or evoked a definite mood or sentiment.

The most characteristic of the poems, the so-called 'Nineteen Old Poems' have five characters to the line, if only in general. The lines are usually organised into couplets, however, and rhymed at the conclusion of each couplet, i.e. on even-numbered lines. The lines also possess a characteristic structure: an opening disyllable is followed by a trisyllable, the last usually appearing as disyllable then monosyllable, i.e. the line is 2.2.1. With their structured pauses (caesura), the lines had a more varied and fluid structure, a development important for later poetry.

Throughout this interval, from the Han to the Tang dynasties, Chinese poetry can be seen slowly finding its way. Odd successes apart, much of the poetry is still hesitant and experimental, absorbing to the specialist but with little of the obvious grandeur of the Tang. The limitations should be apparent in the translations: however much one tries, the renderings always seem a little awkward and unfinished.

## 17. EARLY PENTASYLLABIC POETRY

### Nineteen Poems (Late Han)

明月皎夜光 MING YUE JIAO YE GUANG

明月皎夜光 促織鳴東壁  
玉衡指孟冬 衆星何歷歷  
白露沾野草 時節忽復易  
秋蟬鳴樹間 玄鳥逝安適

昔我同門友 高舉振六翮  
不念攜手好 棄我如遺跡  
南箕有北斗 牽牛不負軛  
良無磐石固 虛名復何益

The Dipper, the Southern Winnower, the Northern Dipper, and the Draft Ox are constellations, but serve to remind us that the stars are eternal forms forever on the move, to whose configuration we give names, but which are indifferent to our lives on earth. Equally important in the poem above is what is known as *shiyán* (literally 'verse eyes') where nouns or adjectives — closer seeming, unkempt grass, buzzing myriads of crickets — serve to animate descriptions of nature and prefigure the intended emotion. The tenth line here is a metaphor for unscrupulous self-advancement, the 'beating wings' image being echoed by the cicadas, the departing swallows and the whirling constellations. Like the stars themselves, our achievements are insubstantial though part of the unchanging pageant of human aspirations. The original rhymes xaxa baxa cxbx caxa; the translation rhymes abab xcxc xdx d xexe.

## 17. EARLY PENTASYLLABIC POETRY

I see the dark sky lit up by the moon:  
and eastwards, seeming closer, crickets sound.  
The Dipper indicates that winter's soon,  
when other luminaries may gather round.  
The unkempt grass is white with dew, the seasons,  
interrupted, pause from flooding on.  
Cicadas with their buzzing fill the trees,  
and where have dark-tailed, flitting swallows gone?

And when we studied then as friends, you soared,  
remember, on such strongly beating wings,  
but that's some other matter now, and I  
am left a footprint of forgotten things.  
The Southern Winnower, the Northern Dipper,  
the Draft Ox, even, have but empty claims.  
My friend, there's nothing there, no rocky base:  
what good can come to you from these mere names?

## 18. EARLY PENTASYLLABIC POETRY: Ban Jiezu (c.48-6 BC)

新裂齊紈素，鮮潔如霜雪  
裁為合歡扇，團團似明月  
出入君懷袖 動搖微風發  
常恐秋節至 涼飆奪炎熱  
棄捐篋笥中 恩情中道絕

Consort Ban, real name unknown, was a concubine of Emperor Chengdi, bearing him two sons who unfortunately died in infancy. Later in life, the emperor became infatuated with a dancing girl Zhao Feiyan and her sister Zhao Hede, who were favoured over the Empress Xu and Consort Ban. In 18 BC, both empress and consort Ban were accused of witchcraft, but consort Ban, being an accomplished poet and scholar, was able to argue for and obtain their acquittal. Consort Ban then chose to become a lady in waiting to the empress dowager, and was eventually buried in the emperor's funeral park.

Consort Ban wrote two *Fu* poems, but is best known for her *Song of Resentment*, much admired by Li Bai and later poets, although doubts remain over its authorship. It is refined court poetry, with the reproach only implied as lingering regret. The tone is reserved, refined and indirect.

The original rhymes lines 2 and 4 together, and lines 8 and 10 together, the last approximately, with lines 5 and six forming a key but unrhymed couplet. The poem, though written some 700 years earlier, is close to the Regulated *Shi* of the Tang, but does not have its characteristic rhyme or tone patterns. The rhyme scheme is xaxa bb xaxa; the translation is xaxa xbx, etc.

## 18. EARLY PENTASYLLABIC POETRY Song of Resentment

Cut full and fresh from clear Qi silk,  
as snow or frost, in sheerest white,  
this fan of 'conjoined happiness'  
is round as moon is, full and bright.  
With fan retrieved from breast or sleeve  
my lord can make a welcome breeze,  
but still I fear that autumn comes  
when cool winds quench the summer's heat,  
and in a box is locked away  
our love, before it is complete.



## 4.4 Unregulated Shi Poetry of the Six Dynasties

Two poets of the Six Dynasties period set Chinese poetry on new tracks. One was Tao Qian, who called himself Tao Yuanming (365-427). He retired from office early in life and devoted himself to writing about a simple rural existence. The second was Xie Lingyun (385-433), who created a landscape verse that recorded his treks through beautiful and untamed mountainous regions. Both used a simple pentasyllabic *Shi* poetry that aimed to make each word count.

Tao Qian in particular wrote effective poetry in a spare style that was personal, blunt and clear. He often takes pride in having created and maintained a simple farm, not something that would occur to the official, administrating classes, but which the changing winds of politics could not undo.

Looking at the literati elsewhere, from around the end of the fifth century, Chinese poets began balancing the tones of the Chinese language to achieve more melodious effects. The full effect wasn't achieved until the Regulated *Shi* verse of the Tang dynasty, but there were many individual poets striving to that end. Some of the best known are Xiao Gang (r549-551), Xie Lingyun (385-433) and Yu Xin (513-581).



19. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: SIX DYNASTIES: Tao Qian: (AD 365-427)

歸園田居 其一 QUI YUAN TIAN JU QI YI

少無適俗韻 性本愛丘山  
誤落塵網中 一去三十年  
羈鳥戀舊林 池魚思故淵  
開荒南野際 守拙歸園田  
方宅十餘畝 草屋八九間

榆柳蔭後簷 桃李羅堂前  
曖曖遠人村 依依墟里煙  
狗吠深巷中 雞鳴桑樹顛  
戶庭無塵雜 虛室有餘閒  
久在樊籠裡 復得返自然

Tao Qian, also known as Tao Yuanming, retired from a short and unsuccessful career in officialdom to live the life of a small farmer and write strongly individual poems that became important later, creating indeed a new genre: 'farmstead poetry': *shanshui*.

Tao's poems are very plain and to the point, celebrating the simple pleasures of the recluse — reading books, playing the zither, writing poetry for his own pleasure — but do not gloss over cold, hunger and the sheer hardship of rural life. His early years were in fact quite hard, and Tao was never the hands-off gentleman farmer or the bucolic poet celebrating an imagined simple life from comforts of the town.

The text reads thirty years rather than thirteen (i.e. 三十 rather than 十三) but most scholars think thirteen is meant, as the period corresponds to Tao's distasteful years in office. Lines 15-16 are lifted almost verbatim from a Han ancient-style poem. The original is rhymed xaba xaxa xaaa xaba xaxa.

19. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: SIX DYNASTIES:  
Returning to live on the Farm: No. 1

In youth I did not wander with the crowd,  
but was of hills and mountains thinking on,  
an error dropped me in a dusty net:  
and all at once those thirteen years were gone.

As birds when caged recall the ancient wood,  
and fish for weedy depths of ponds have yearned,  
so I, in clearing fields on south's rough border,  
to former plainness and my farm returned.

The simple holding comes to ten odd mu;  
thatched hut with sections, eight or nine in all:  
while elm and willow shade the rearward eves,  
the gathered plum and peach trees face the hall.

Far away are people, lost in haze  
the villages and village smoke one sees,  
as dog are barking in some alleyway  
so chickens cluck from tops of mulberry trees.

The hall is always clean, swept free of dust,  
and empty rooms have leisure's peace to ask.  
With life for all too long a wicker cage,  
it's time I went back to my self's true task.

20. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: SIX DYNASTIES: Tao  
Qian: (AD 365-427)

飲酒 其五 YIN JIU QI WU

結廬在人境 而無車馬喧

問君何能爾 心遠地自偏

採菊東籬下 悠然見南山

山氣日夕佳 飛鳥相與還

此中有真意 欲辨已忘言

Tao achieved a local standing, but his reputation was made in the Tang dynasty, when poets like Du Fu and Li Bai, unhappy with court life, came to admire his rugged independence. Han poetry, *Jian'an* poetry, the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, and the other earlier Six dynasties poetry all foreshadowed Tao's symbolism and return to the country theme, but Tao's poems broke new ground, and his pentasyllabic verse forms became a staple of the *Guti*, or old-style, Unregulated *Shi* poetry. The poem is rhymed xaxaxa xaxa.

The difficulty in translation is conveying Tao's honesty and simple elegance without the diction becoming too pedestrian. I have rhymed this piece on alternate lines and used two rhymes, as does the original, but made something more of the last two lines. These are commonly rendered as something like: *In this return there is a fundamental truth, / I am going to explain it, but have already forgotten the words.* The reference may be to the Daoist saying: *The Tao can be explained is not the eternal Tao (or truth),* but I suspect Tao Qian is saying something more, that poetry is not a painless juggling with words but expressing the essence of an experience that has been actually lived, often painfully so. The chrysanthemums alluded to were grown by Tao in his garden, but also refer to extended life. The Southern Mountains are a symbol of immutability.

20. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: SIX DYNASTIES: On  
Drinking Wine No. 5

It is a home I've built, a human place,  
a long way off from noisy cart or horse.  
You ask of me: good sir, how can that be?  
I say the heart will find its natural course.  
Chrysanthemums I pick, and have plain sight  
at easy leisure of the Southern Hills.  
The mountain air brings beauty, day and night,  
and pairs of birds can nest as each one wills  
with something deeper that I would explain  
if words mistreated had not lost their force.

21. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: SIX DYNASTIES: Xie  
Lingyun (385-433)

登永嘉綠嶂山 DENG YONG JIA LU ZHAN SHAN

裹糧杖輕策 懷遲上幽室

行源逕轉遠 距陸情未畢

澹澹結寒姿 團欒潤霜質

澗委水屢迷 林迴巖逾密

眷西謂初月 顧東疑落日

踐夕奄昏曙 蔽翳皆周悉

蠱上貴不事 履二美貞吉

幽人常坦步 高尚邈難匹

頤阿竟何端 寂寂寄抱一

恬如既已交 繕性自此出

Xie Lingyun was born into a family of great wealth and political influence, but unfortunately backed the wrong faction, which led to his demotion and subsequent execution. His biography paints him as an outlandish and temperamental character, who, on the disappointment of his political hopes, turned towards the spiritual quest for enlightenment. He was one of the first poets to employ natural scenery, not only as expressions of his inner thoughts and feelings, but also as something worth contemplating in its own right. Being dense with meaning, the lines are difficult to fully understand in Chinese, and impossible to properly convey in English. The poem combines, narration, scene description, stirred emotion, meditation, and political satire, with lines 13-14 alluding to the hexagrams of the *Yijing* (I-ching). *He does not serve kings and princes / Sets himself high goals, and The path to tread is smooth and level. / Practise constancy here to have good fortune.* The original is rhymed aaxa aaaa aaxa aaxa xaxx, the translation is xaxa xbx, etc.

21. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: SIX DYNASTIES:  
Climbing Yongjia's Green Crag Mountain

Light staff in hand, and with provisions packed  
I climbed the heart's high, hidden place,  
but as I walked the path more wound away,  
nor were my feelings emptied at their base.

All things were calm and filled with water's beauty:  
flowering, wind-thinned trees in frosted white,  
with falling rivulets repeatedly bewildered,  
far crags and forests thickly rose to sight.

I looked out west and saw the rising moon,  
I looked out east: how odd — the setting sun.  
I walked until the evening merged with dawn,  
the unfamiliar known to everyone.

Serve none when states start rotting at the head:  
it is to second place the wise should keep,  
recluses learn to walk with level step  
with ways to high preferment all too steep.

Avoid the flatterers, the wanted end  
is what an inwardness in truth will earn.  
That silent calmness will in time deliver,  
and what's inherent to you will return.



22. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: SIX DYNASTIES: Xie  
Lingyun (385-433)

登池上樓 DENG CHI SHANG LOU

潛虯媚幽姿 飛鴻響遠音  
薄霄愧雲浮 棲川怍淵沉  
進德智所拙 退耕力不任  
徇祿反窮海 臥痾對空林  
衾枕昧節候 褰開暫窺臨  
傾耳聆波瀾 舉目眺嶇嶽  
初景革緒風 新陽改故陰  
池塘生春草 園柳變鳴禽  
祁祁傷幽歌 萋萋感楚吟  
索居易永久 離群難處心  
持操豈獨古 無悶徵在今

This is a difficult poem with many allusions to the *Shijing* and the hexagrams of the 'Book of Changes'. Two landscapes feature here: the symbolic one of lines 1-6, and the more tangible of lines 11-16. The song of Bin (*Shijing*, Mao 154) refers to a girl hoping to return home, just as Xie Lingyun hopes to return to court, here expressed in lines 17-20. The song of Chou summoned the recluse from the mountains. Three allusions to the 'Book of Changes' develop the poem. The submerged dragon refers to the superior man who has yet to act. The goose cries refers to the gradual progress of the successful man. Those two lines, success at court and retirement, set up the binary oppositions for the next four lines. (3-6). The last line again refers to the submerged dragon: one who has the dragon's virtue remains hidden: he does not change to fit in with the world, nor does he regret not winning approval: 無悶 (*wú mèn*) he is not sad. Lines 11-16 are typical of Xie's poetry: the pairing of sight and sounds, of mountains and water. Lines 15-16 are a particularly celebrated evocation of spring. The rhyme is a fairly regular xaxa xaxa xaxa xaxa xaxaxa; the translation runs xaxa xbx xcx xdx xex

22. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: SIX DYNASTIES:  
Climbing the Lakeside Tower:

A dragon underwater hides its charms.  
A goose in flight will echo distant cries.  
The heavens balk me with a floating cloud,  
and river by the depth in which it lies.

My goodness, virtue, wisdom: all proved false,  
nor was my taking up the plough much good.  
Employment brought me to the sea's wide edge,  
and ill I lie and face an empty wood.

The quilt and pillow served to hide festivities,  
and from the passing moment peered a face.  
I turned to hear the swelling water waves  
and gazed towards a distant, lofty place.

Spring winds will no doubt grow from slight beginnings,  
and sun, new-risen, changes clouded sky.  
and by the pond will brighten thick new grasses,  
from sun-clad garden willows, birds will cry.

How wide and wounding is the song of Bin,  
but rich and lavish sound the songs of Chu.  
Here isolated, one can feel the time,  
and far from crowds the mind will settle too.  
No grasp of principles is out of date,  
nor forced repentances be ever true.

## 5. UNREGULATED SHI

### 5.1 Unregulated Shi Characteristics

The pentasyllabic line, and later the heptasyllabic line, was finally established in the Tang dynasty (618-97 AD). Both lines, pentasyllabic and heptasyllabic can be regulated or unregulated. Regulated poems have eight lines or four lines. Unregulated can have any number of lines.

The character of the poems, its themes and nature also change, and again not always 'logically': some late poetry harks back to the Tang, and some earlier poetry anticipates the more personal nature of Yuan and Qing poetry.

It's difficult to present these changes intuitively, but I have adopted these categories, where 8 / 5 indicates a poem with 8 lines of five characters to the line, etc.

|             |                 |             |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Unregulated | Tang-Song       | Poems 23-36 |
| Unregulated | Ming-Qing       | Poem 37     |
| Regulated   | Tang-Song 8 / 5 | Poem 38-46  |
| Regulated   | Tang-Song 8 / 7 | Poems 47-53 |
| Regulated   | Tang-Song 4 / 5 | Poems 54-58 |
| Regulated   | Tang-Song 4 / 7 | Poems 59-64 |
| Regulated   | Ming-Qing 8 / 5 | Poems 65-67 |
| Regulated   | Ming-Qing 8 / 7 | Poems 68-70 |
| Regulated   | Ming-Qing 4 / 5 | Poems 71-72 |
| Regulated   | Ming-Qing 4 / 7 | Poems 73-74 |

In the Tang, the old-style unregulated pentasyllabic poetry comes of age. It was written by all the great names of the time, and allows freedom and musicality in rich-textured verse that can be on personal or more traditional themes. This *Guti* poetry consciously avoided the confining requirements of regulated verse, i.e. the prescribed tone and rhyme patterns, the central parallel couplets, and the eight-line length. It has freed itself from the homely workmanship of the pre-Tang poets, but not succumbed to the refinements of regulated verse, which is exquisite but can sometimes have a rather artificial air.

The keywords for translation purposes are a certain amplitude, i.e. variety in theme and treatment, a noticeable vigour in verse that is rich textured, melodious and accomplished. Rhyme varies: it can be dense or lightly patterning.

## 5.2 Social Background: Tang Dynasty

From the disorders and many rival states and kingdoms that followed the collapse of the Han dynasty, there rose the splendid Tang dynasty (AD 618-907), renown for the arts, the opening of the Grand Canal linking the north and south, and the growth of Chang'an, its capital, as the largest city in the world at the time. Its one million-odd inhabitants drew traders, students and pilgrims from all parts of the globe. The early Tang was also noted for strengthening, standardising and codifying its political institutions. The civil service was expanded and increasing numbers of young men from all classes sat the necessary examinations. Taxes were made uniform and extensive, but fairly acceptable. The code of 653 AD had more than 500 articles specifying crimes and their punishment, from a token beating to penal servitude and execution. The Tang was significantly expansive, creating divisional militia and sending armies into central Asia. Confucianism flourished, but there was also an increasing interest in Buddhism, with travels to India for original manuscripts.

The high point of Tang culture came with the reign of Xuanzong (r.712-56), an able administrator and great patron of the arts. Unfortunately, in his sixties, he became enamoured with Yang Guifei, a great beauty who shared his interest in music and dance. Her dalliance with An Lushan, a governor of non-Chinese origin, encouraged Xuanzong to entrust 160,000 troops to his command. In 755, An Lushan rebelled and, marching on Loyang and Chang'an, compelled the emperor to flee. An appalling civil war followed, and the Tang was never the same

again, becoming dependent on the support of Turkish tribes. Disgruntled troops indeed compelled Xuanzong to have Yang Guifei strangled, an event remembered in Chinese literature as the 'everlasting sorrow'.

The Tang was less centralised after the An Lushan revolt. Rebel leaders had to be eventually pardoned, and activities once regarded as government monopolies opened to private enterprise. Government no longer controlled land sales, but still taxed holdings, either directly, or by adding a surcharge to the salt it sold through licensed distributors. Merchants gradually became increasingly powerful, and overcame cash shortages by circulating silver bullion and notes of exchange. The population also shifted south, into the more productive areas of the lower Yangtze basin. The Uighur Turks, who had helped put down the An Lushan rebellion, had to be paid off with large quantities of silk, thus setting the pattern for the more pacific Song dynasty that followed.

### 5.3 The Civil Service

Since so many poets were government officials, it may help to understand the Chinese civil service. Throughout its imperial history, from the Qin (221-206 BC) to the Qing (AD 1644-1911) dynasties, China was governed as a centralized bureaucracy. Everything — public works, irrigation, roads, canals, security, administration of the towns and cities, law and justice, and frontier security — was supervised by various grades of officials who reported to ministers and thence to the emperor holding the 'Mandate of Heaven'. Until 700 AD, the more important

officials were generally nobles or relatives of the emperor, but from Tang times the bulk were selected by the imperial examination system theoretically open to all, i.e. appointment was on merit. Most emperors took their duties seriously, particularly those of the early Qing dynasty (1662-1796) who were exceptionally sensible, hard-working and long-lived rulers. The Chinese civil-service system gave the Chinese empire stability for more than 2,000 years and provided one of the major outlets for social mobility, serving as a model for the later civil-service systems in other Asian and western countries.

The Qin dynasty (221-207 BC) established the first centralized Chinese bureaucratic empire. Recruitment was based on recommendations by local officials, a system initially adopted by the succeeding Han dynasty. But in 124 BC, under the reign of the Han emperor Wudi, an imperial university was established to train and test officials in the techniques of Confucian government. The Sui dynasty (581-618 AD) adopted this Han system, but applied it much more systematically, adding rules that officials of a prefecture must be appointees of the central government rather than local aristocrats, and that the local militia were to be subject to officials of the central government. The Tang dynasty (618-907) created a system of local schools where scholars could pursue their studies, and this system gradually became the major method of recruitment into the bureaucracy.

By the end of the Tang dynasty, the old aristocracy had largely disappeared, and their position was taken by the scholar-gentry. This nonhereditary elite would eventually

become known to the west as 'mandarins', a reference to Mandarin, the dialect of Chinese they spoke. The civil-service system expanded to its highest point during the Song dynasty (960-1279). Public schools were established throughout the country to help the talented but indigent, business contact was barred among officials related by blood or marriage, relatives of the imperial family were not permitted to hold high positions, and promotions were based on a merit system in which a person who nominated another for advancement was deemed entirely responsible for that person's conduct. The higher levels of the bureaucracy required passing the *jinshi* degree, and after 1065 the examinations were held every three years for those who had passed qualifying tests on the local level.

Under the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the civil-service system reached its final form, and the succeeding Qing dynasty (1644-1911) virtually copied the Ming system wholesale. No man was allowed to serve in his home district, and official's positions were rotated every three years. The recruitment exam was divided into three stages, but only achieving the *jinshi* made one eligible for high office. Other degrees gave one certain privileges, such as exemption from labour service and corporal punishment, grant of a government stipends, and admission to upper-gentry status (*juren*). Elaborate precautions were taken to prevent cheating, different districts in the country were given quotas for recruitment into the service to prevent the dominance of any one region, and the knowledge tested became limited to the 'Nine Classics' of Confucianism. As such, it bore no



relation to the candidate's ability to govern and was often criticized for setting a command of style above thought. The examination system was finally abolished in 1905 by the Qing dynasty, which was itself overthrown in 1911-12.



23. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Li Bai (701-62)

廬山謠寄廬侍御虛舟

LU SHAN YAO JI LU SHI YU XU ZHOU

我本楚狂人 鳳歌笑孔丘

手持綠玉杖 朝別黃鶴樓

五嶽尋仙不辭遠 一生好入名山遊

廬山秀出南斗傍 屏風九疊雲錦張

影落明湖青黛光 10. 金闕前開二峰長

銀河倒挂三石梁 香爐瀑布遙相望

迴崖沓嶂凌蒼蒼 翠影紅霞映朝日

鳥飛不到吳天長 登高壯觀天地間

In this poem, which combines elements of regulated *Shi*, *Fu* and *Sao* poetry, Li Bai is at his egotistical best, posing as the follower of Chen Zi'ang in his search for the Immortals and elixir of life. The Chu reference is to the 'Analects' (18.5) and the *Zhuangzi*, where a madman mocked Confucius for his efforts to restore the Way in an age that had lost interest in such things. Here the story serves to place the poem in context. In the usual fashion of Chinese poetry, where many interpretations are possible, the 'original' (本, bĕn: also stem, root, source, inherent, etc.) of line 1 may mean 'I descend from the madman of Chu', 'I have changed from being originally the madman of Chu' or 'I am at heart the madman of Chu', but probably all three at once — thus conflating the present and past, reality and unreality.

In the next couplet, lines 3-4, Li Bai has become the famous Immortal Zi An, who left the pavilion on the back of a yellow crane, never to return to this mundane world. In lines 5-6, which now have seven characters, where the Immortal would have soared into the heavens, Li Bai has descended to become the earth-bound seeker of Immortals.

23. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: A Lu Mountain  
Tune, sent to Minister Lu Xuzhou

I am the mad and elemental Chu  
who'd sing the Phoenix and confound Confucius.  
I too, with green jade staff in hand, at dawn  
will leave the Yellow Crane Pavilion.

5. I laugh at distance, through Five Mountains  
stride to find the great Immortals.  
All my life I've loved to wander  
through the mountains, wild and free.  
The Lu Hills now are filled with blossom  
beneath the Southern Dipper star.  
The nine folds of the Windscreen Mountains  
are clothed in cloud embroidery.  
The shadows on the Shining Lake  
fall thick with green and inky light.

10. In front, the Golden Portico  
is opening into two far peaks.  
And there the Silver River falls  
inverted from the Three-Stone Bridge,  
and in the distance, rimmed in mist,  
the Incense Burner Waterfall.  
The hazy cliff and precipice  
are far-off rising into blue.  
The clouds are green and iridescent,  
crimson-touched by morning sun,

## 23. (Continued)

大江茫茫去不還 黃雲萬里動風色  
白波九道流雪山 20. 好為廬山謠  
興因廬山發 閑窺石鏡清我心  
謝公行處蒼苔沒 早服還丹無世情  
琴心三疊道初成 遙見仙人彩雲裡  
手把芙蓉朝玉京 先期汗漫九垓上  
願接盧敖遊太清

As such, Li Bai sees vistas of the mountain peaks (lines 7-9, all rhymed in the original), and the varied landscape around (lines 10-14), closed off by line 15 that notes that even 'birds cannot traverse the lands of Wu. In the next couplet, lines 3-4, Li Bai has become the famous Immortal Zi An, who left the pavilion on the back of a yellow crane, never to return to this mundane world. In lines 5-6, which now have seven characters, where the immortal would have soared into the heavens, Li Bai has descended to become the earth-bound seeker of immortals. As such, he sees vistas of the mountain peaks (lines 7-9, all rhymed in the original), and the varied landscape around (lines 10-14), closed off by line 15 that notes that even 'birds cannot traverse the lands of Wu.' At line 16, announced by a new rhyme, a poem within a poem appears, Li Bai in the traditional role of climbing high. Lines 18-19 are the one truly parallel couplet in the poem, where a new rhyme appears, can be read as two variations, depending on how we think the verbs 動 (dòng, to fly) and 流 (liú, to flow) are applying. I have left matters open by omitting both verbs.

I have also used some assonance in this piece, incidentally, but avoided rhyme: it can be done, but the many proper names are not easily incorporated, and the many work-arounds needed make the translation look laboured and contrived.

23. (Continued)

birds that flit the length of sky  
cannot traverse the lands of Wu.  
I climb on higher, view the sight  
of earth commingling with the heavens,  
the Yangtze River, long and boundless,  
unreturning, flowing on.  
The saffron clouds, ten thousand li,  
are interfolded with the wind.  
Nine Rivers with their white-curled waves  
beneath eternal snowy peaks.  
20. I love to sing of Lu Shan Mountains,  
the sight of Lushan lifts my thoughts.

To stare, if idly, where Stone River  
cleanses to the very heart.  
The places Master Xie would walk  
are marked by prints of sunken moss.  
The alchemy of cinnabar  
relieves me of my worldly cares.  
And in the lute-strings of the heart  
I find the three-fold Dao done.  
25. Far off, I view the sought Transcendents  
at home within their coloured mists.

With lotus bloom in hand, at their  
Jade Capital I'll pay my court.  
But first I'd meet the Man of Han  
beyond the fabled Ninefold Lands,  
and greet Lu Ao as well, and roam  
the regions of Great Purity.

## 24. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Li Bai (701-62)

战城南 ZHAN CHENG NAN

去年战桑干源，今年战葱河道。

洗兵条支海上波，放马天山雪中草。

万里长征战，三军尽衰老。

匈奴以杀戮为耕作，古来唯见白骨黄沙田。

秦家筑城避胡处，汉家还有烽火然。

烽火然不息，征战无已时。

野战格斗死，败马号鸣向天悲。

乌鸢啄人肠，衔飞上挂枯树枝。

士卒涂草莽，将军空尔为。

乃知兵者是凶器，圣人不得已而用之。

### Poem 23 continued

In lines 20-21, we return to plain reality in 5-character lines, where Li Bai makes simple declarations. In line 22 comes the reference to Xie Lingyun, (Poems 21 and 22), here introduced as Master Xie. By the moss-grown footsteps, Li Bai is noting the inexorable passage of time, and possibly — he was not a modest man — his likewise future greatness. In the last four lines the scene changes once more to the timeless world of the Immortals.

Five Mountains refers to the Five Sacred Mountains of China or their Daoist equivalents. Silver River is the Milky Way. Incense Burner Waterfall is so named for the cloud-like mists that rise above it. Three-fold is a complex reference, to divisions of the body and the world. Cinnabar (in fact poisonous) served as an elixir of life. Lu Ao is the legendary figure sent by the First Emperor to ask the Immortals to return.

## 24. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Chengnan South

Last year, fighting, to the source  
    of Sang Ganyuan, we had to go;  
this year fighting through its course,  
    the River Cong we got to know.  
We scoured our swords and armour where  
    the salt Tiaozi waters flow.  
Our horses grazed the high Tianshan  
    where grasses come up through the snow.

Ten thousand li we went, both to and fro:  
how tired and worn our troops would grow.

The Xiongnu burned our homesteads where  
    we cared for fields not long ago:  
still fights from ancient times leave bones  
    where endless yellow sand-storms blow.

The Qin that built the Great North Wall  
    to keep the northern hordes at bay  
are not so different from the Han  
    that had the beacons pour their endless  
    warning plumes of smoke to say:  
how brutal are the long campaigns: they prey  
on men, on battlefields, where death's delay  
is never long, where to the sky  
    the pitiful, scared horses bray.



## 24. (Continued)

士卒涂草莽，将军空尔为。  
乃知兵者是凶器，圣人不得已而用之。  
烽火然不息，征战无已时。  
野战格斗死，败马号鸣向天悲。  
乌鸢啄人肠，衔飞上挂枯树枝。  
士卒涂草莽，将军空尔为。  
乃知兵者是凶器，圣人不得已而用之。

### Poem 24

Li Bai could turn his hand to most poetry genres, and is here producing his own version of Poem 14. But now the lines are five characters long, allowing Li Bai to generate greater effect and — being Li Bai — be more outspoken in his criticism of imperial policies. The poem is rhymed abxb xbxaxacc dxac xxdc. To show that extended rhyming is also possible in English on occasion, the translation is aaaa aaaa bbbb abbbbb.

Du Fu documented the suffering of the common people during the An Lushan Rebellion without being overly moralistic. Li Bai was more self-centered, and less respectful of authority. The common soldier is lumped together with the general, and both are deluded in their search for final victory. Where Du Fu will soften criticism by transporting the setting to the Han dynasty, Li Bai makes no bones about attacking the moral emptiness of contemporary policy.

As noted before, the Sanggan river lies 60 miles south of present-day Datong in Shanxi province. The Conghe is in Xinjiang. Conghe, Tiaozhi and Tianshan were frontier posts. Qin is the first Chinese empire, and Xiongnu is the general name given to barbarians: they were in fact several distinct races of steppe peoples, but all given to raiding the settled Chinese lands.

24. (Continued)

Their owner's innards feed the kite and crow,  
as, with a gibleet-laden beak,  
to dried-up trees each takes its way.

With soldier's blood bedaubed, the grasses may  
betoken generals no less lost than they.

All parties to this emptiness  
are soldiers mortal to the fray,  
and men, if wise, avoid these ills  
and seek to find some other way.

25. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Li Bai (701-62)

花間一壺酒 HUA JIAN YI HU JI

花間一壺酒 獨酌無相親

舉杯邀明月 對影成三人

月既不解飲 影徒隨我身

暫伴月將影 行樂須及春

我歌月徘徊 我舞影零亂

醒時同交歡 醉後各分散

永結無情遊 相期邈雲漢

Of an independent and bohemian nature, and well-off, Li Bai never sat the official examinations, nor bothered much about finding a position, but by impressing the many scholars who befriended him with his poetry, he was brought to court notice, and in 742 appeared before Emperor Xuanzong. He became a member of the Hanlin Academy, an appointment that lasted only two years. The association between China's most gifted literary magician and its dilettante emperor was not a happy one, and Li Bai was exiled from court on several occasions, the result of dubious political connections and the poet's distaste for tradition and authority.

Li Bai continued his wanderings, and in this poem is indulging in his favourite occupation: wine tipping. There are many such poems from Li Bai, often with the moon for company and indulging in wild fantasy. Silver River is the Milky Way. The original is rhymed xaxa xaxa xaxaxa, where *a* is a slant or approximate rhyme. The translation is xaxb abxa bx bxb.

25. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Drinking Alone by  
Moonlight

With flowers, I'm tipping at this pot of wine,  
companionless, bereft of everything.  
I raise a glass and ask the round bright moon  
to mingle shadows with me, make up three.  
But moon dislikes such antics, and my own  
disciple follows me quite shamelessly.  
But still I'll settle here for self and shadow,  
and in this happy shape at least make spring.

The moon goes up and down, but if I dance  
my addled self and shadow can't agree.  
Although when sober we're the best of friends,  
when drunk we make our rounds more separately.  
But let us wander nonetheless and meet  
our shape in Silver River: moon and me.

26. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Li Bai (701-62)

长干行 CHANG GAN XING

妾发初覆额 折花门前剧  
郎骑竹马来 绕床弄青梅  
同居长干里 两小无嫌猜  
十四为君妇 羞颜未尝开  
低头向暗壁 10. 千唤不一回  
十五始展眉 愿同尘与灰  
常存抱柱信 岂上望夫台?  
十六君远行 瞿塘滟滪堆  
五月不可触 猿声天上哀

Some 1,100 of Li Bai's poems survive, and are noted for rich fantasy, brilliant improvisation, unmatched technical felicity, and for Taoist and alchemical leanings — the Tao, unknown and unfathomable, lying behind the flow of pattern and process in the universe, which we can abstract into concepts but not fully comprehend. Li Bai made few innovations but seemed effortlessly to seize what was available to poets at the time.

He was often at his best when speaking in other voices, here in the person of the River Merchant's wife. This is a poem made famous in the west by Ezra Pound, and like his translation, my rendering is rather free, especially towards the end. In fact, there have been many translations, often more faithful to the original text, but not over-successful as poetry.

26. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: River Merchants'  
Wife

How simple it was, and my hair too,  
picking at flowers as the spring comes;  
and you riding about on a bamboo  
horse; playing together, eating plums.

Two small people: nothing to contend  
with, in quiet Chang Gan to day's end.

All this at fourteen made one with you.  
Married to my lord: it was not the same.  
Who was your concubine answering to  
10. the thousand times you called her name?

I turned to the wall, and a whole year passed  
before my being would be wholly yours —  
dust of your dust while all things last,  
hope of your happiness, with never cause

to seek for another. Then one short year:  
at sixteen I sat in the marriage bed  
alone as the water. I could hear  
the sorrowing of gibbons overhead.

26. (Continued)

门前迟行迹 20. 一一生绿苔  
苔深不能扫 落叶秋风早  
八月蝴蝶来 双飞西园草  
感此伤妾心 坐愁红颜老  
早晚下三巴 预将书报家  
相迎不道远 30. 直至长风沙

I have employed an abab rhyme scheme where the original is much less regular. The original is rhymed xabc dbab dece xbxe abdb ffbf xfggxg: the translation is abab ccadad efef ghgh ijij klkl mnmn, a similar pattern but using more rhyme sounds. I have also rearranged the last four lines, with the three gorges of San Ba rendered as 'San Ba walls', 'the 'looks entreat /and hurt' added, and the endless distance to Chang-feng Sha has been transposed to water, though it would have been by river travel that the wife would have reached her husband.

San Ban is of the three gorges stretch of the Yangtze River, where the dangerous Qutang reefs were also located. Chang-feng Sha is far downstream, a township now administered by Hefie, the capital of Anhui.

26. (Continued)

How long your prints on the path stayed bare!  
20. I looked out forever from the lookout tower,  
but could not imagine you travelling there,  
past the Qutang reefs, in the torrent's power.

Now thick are the mosses; the gate stays shut.  
I sit in the sunshine as the wind grieves.  
In their dallying couples the butterflies cut  
the deeper in me than yellowing leaves.

Send word of your coming and I will meet  
you at Chang-feng Sha, past San Ba walls.  
Endless the water and your looks entreat  
30. and hurt me still as each evening falls.



## 27. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG Li Bai (701-62)

### 把酒問月 BA JIU WEN YUE

青天有月來幾時？ 我今停盃一問之  
人攀明月不可得 月行却與人相隨。  
皎如飛鏡臨丹闕, 綠煙滅盡清輝發  
但見宵從海上來, 寧知曉向雲間沒  
玉兔搗藥秋復春 10. 姮娥孤栖與誰憐？  
今人不見古時月 今月曾經照古人

Another of Li Bai's drinking songs, again widely known and translated, but here with a stronger emotive message: all things on the earth pass away, though the same moon looks down on us. The hare or moon rabbit is fancifully seen in the dark patches of the moon. The Chinese also recognise a beautiful goddess in the moon, who is remembered for stealing an elixir of immortality from her husband, Hou Yi. As told in the Mid-Autumn Festival, Hou Yi's pursuit was prevented by the rabbit, which would not let the irate husband pass until he made up with his wife. The original is rhymed axaa bxcc ddbd eeae: the translation is the more conventional scheme of English verse: abab cdcd efef ghgh.

Li Bai was born in the Gang Xiao Sheng territory of China, and, when five years old, followed his merchant father to Sichuan. He may well have been of central Asian stock, or a descendent of an unsuccessful rival for the dragon throne. Li Bai seems to have had a happy childhood: he read the classics, composed poetry, dabbled in astrological and metaphysical writings, and learnt to ride, hunt and fence. By his swordsmanship he claimed to have killed several men in chivalrous escapades.

27. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Questioning the moon with a cup of wine in my hand

In the deep blue sky there hangs the moon,  
and what it's doing there, I ask.  
I'll down my cup and will not drink  
until it says how it's inclined.  
If those who'd pull the bright moon down  
and find such things elude their grasp,  
should let it have its peaceful way:  
the light will follow on behind.

It's like a floating mirror, gazes  
on vermilion palace gates.  
When greenish mists have cleared away  
it blazes out with all its fire.  
But from the sea at night you'll see  
most splendidly its sovereign states.  
For all that curiously at dawn  
the clouds can force it to retire.

The white hare's pounding at his drugs,  
and autumn turns to spring again.  
10. The moon's a hermit, lives alone,  
with solitude for company.  
Today, in fact, no one can see  
the ancient moon as it was then.  
But that same moon shone down on them,  
on mundane, plain reality.

## 27. (Continued)

古人今人若流水， 共看明月皆如此  
唯願當歌對酒時 月光常照金樽裡

Li Bai was married four times, first to the granddaughter of a former government minister, with whom he stayed in Anlu (Hubei) for some ten years. In 744, wandering again, he was married a second time, to a fellow poet in what now is the Liangyuan District of Henan. The two other marriages seem to have been less respectable, to a Mingyue slave and to a woman into whose house Li Bai moved (rather than the other way round, which was usual in China). Children were born, but Li Bai continued his itinerant ways: drinking, exchanging poems, maintaining his independence until swept up in events of the An Lushan Rebellion.

Du Fu is often seen as the greater poet: a more humane man, who also made innovations in diction and line control that were useful later. Many Chinese prefer Li Bai, however — for his astonishing technical gifts and mercurial spirit. Even in translation those qualities should come over. Indeed it is one of the curiosities of translation, that while bad work can ruin a good original, good translations generally come from good originals. In that light, the studied correctness of Du Fu's work often seems a little wooden, whereas Li Bai is never so.

In 755, Li joined the force led by the emperor's sixteenth son, Prince Lin, just surviving subsequent capture and a death sentence when the old emperor died. There are many legends surrounding Li Bai's death, but he probably died at Dangtu, possibly of cirrhosis of the liver or mercury poisoning, in Anhui province in 762

27. (Continued)

The modern and the ancient folk  
are both like water, flow away.  
And we who walk this way with moon,  
intoxicated with its shine,  
need only ask that wine and song  
be not long absent, and behave  
as moonlight does, that pours on down  
to shimmer in our golden wine.

28. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Wang Wei (701-61)

桃源行 TAO YUAN XING

漁舟逐水愛山春，兩岸桃花夾古津。  
坐看紅樹不知遠，行盡青溪不見人。  
山口潛行始隈隩，山開曠望旋平陸。  
遙看一處攢雲樹，近入千家散花竹。  
樵客初傳漢姓名，居人未改秦衣服。  
居人共住武陵源，還從物外起田園。

Modest, supremely gifted but detached from life, Wang Wei was the model scholar official, and his 400 poems are in many anthologies. Wang was a man of outstanding talents — courtier, administrator, poet, calligrapher, musician and painter — enjoying a long and successful career in service, though he was happiest in monasteries and at his country home in the Changnan hills. Buddhist attitudes colour his poetry, but Wang never preaches or illustrates points of doctrine.

The poem featured here is an early one, developing a theme of Tao Yuanming's, an imagined journey to the Celestial World ('Peach Blossom Spring'), and is Buddhist only in the suggestion of worlds within worlds, i.e. that the apprehensions of our everyday senses are passing illusions. Wang probably belonged to the Chan persuasion of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which believed that a Buddha-like openness could be reached by the enlightened mind simply as it was, without intervening concepts or laborious devotional practices — a view with some parallels to Rimbaud's derangement of the senses and the French Symbolists generally. The original is rhymed axei bbbx xxcc xcgd xbcc dcee hfgf ixha: the translation is xaxa xbx b etc.

## 28. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: Peach Blossom Journey

To springtime in the mountains gladly  
    press the boats of fisher-folk,  
on both the ancient ferry banks  
    there bloom rich flowerings of the peach  
but, sat, beguiled by those red trees,  
    they never know how far they go:  
and to the end of that green stream  
    will find no person on its reach.

Yet one will thread the mountain pass  
    and enter through a secret cove.  
And thereupon the mountain walls  
    fall back to give a wider view,  
and at one place and distantly  
    the trees are gathered in with clouds,  
and near the entrance are a thousand  
    homes, with flowers and bamboo.

And here he meets a forester  
    who takes his surname from the Han,  
a resident and dressed in clothes  
    here plain unaltered from the Qin.  
They live together, still are found  
    about the Wuling river source:  
for having come from far beyond  
    they tend the country more within.

28. (Continued)

月明松下房櫳靜，日出雲中雞犬喧。  
驚聞俗客爭來集，競引還家問都邑。  
平明閭巷掃花開，薄暮漁樵乘水入。  
初因避地去人間，及至成仙遂不還。  
峽裏誰知有人事，世中遙望空雲山。  
不疑靈境難聞見，塵心未盡思鄉縣。

The peach carries special significance for the Chinese, symbolising a young women's cheeks, marriage and the springtime. Indeed the head of the Eight Immortals is often portrayed holding the fruit. The poem is self-explanatory when Tao Yuanming's poem is known, but we should note that this hidden world, secure from the political turmoil of Tao Yuanming's time, and which Wang Wei would fondly look back on in the terrible years of the An Lushan Rebellion, is one where time stands still ('free of any opening flowers') and which the inhabitants wish to keep from general knowledge. The hidden world is not a blueprint for social change, resembling all Chinese villages ('the dog and chicken hubbub just the same') but only a personal refuge where the reference to 'unaltered from the Qin' suggests escape from the manifest cruelties of the first Chinese emperor. The traveler returns and betrays the secret, but the hidden world is never found again because this Shangri-la exists only on the spiritual plane, by looking on the world with the right attitudes. As Daoists insist, awareness can only be attained without intention: those who search deliberately will not find the way. In this sense, all paradises are lost paradises.

28. (Continued)

Bright the moon and pines: beneath  
are house and windows breathing calm.  
With cloudy sunrise came the dog  
and chicken cluckings just the same:  
and then the people, at first wary,  
compete to draw him to their house:  
congregating, all of them, to ask  
the home and county whence he came.

The village streets are cleanly swept,  
and free of any opening flowers.  
The river brought the woods- and fisher-men  
back with evening on the turn,  
avoiding from the first the earth  
and all its fretful people there:  
indeed they had become Immortals  
and saw no reason to return.

And, deep within that gorge, who knew  
that there existed other folk  
who, in that far-off world, would gaze  
on empty cloud and mountain air?  
No doubt the borders of the spirit  
world are hard to ascertain or hear  
and in that world it was enough  
to think of village homestead there.



## 28. (Continued)

出洞無論隔山水，辭家終擬長遊衍。  
自謂經過舊不迷，安知峯壑今來變。  
當時只記入山深，青溪幾度到雲林。  
春來遍是桃花水，不辨仙源何處尋。

The journey to an enchanted world is not limited to Chinese poetry, of course: it crops up frequently in children's stories, and in literature from Homer's *Odyssey* to Alain Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*.

Wang Wei was also a noted painter, and painters in China were more concerned with portraying essences of places than topographic exactitudes. Behind the wind-stunted pines and soaring limestone cliffs were both magnificence and nothingness, that Buddhist dichotomy we shall meet again in Wang's *The Deer Park Enclosure*, poem 57. None of Wang Wei's paintings survive, but the nostalgia that pervades this present poem, 28, is also a feature of the backward-looking Ming dynasty, from which come most of the early landscape paintings that we possess. The arts in China are interrelated, and themes are often picked up centuries later, which to western eyes are no more than essences, inclinations, shared trains of thought. Suggestion, allusion, and vague evocations: these aspects have to be present for our renderings to be valid translations.

Wang's poem is irregularly rhymed, sometimes tightly and in places quite loosely, and, in keeping with the 'quietness' of all his poetry, I have kept rhyming in the translation to a bare minimum.

28. (Continued)

He left the place, did not disclose  
    what river and the mountain held,  
returning home had journeys planned  
    that proved bewilderment and more.  
Although he could, and well, remember  
    that earlier route he'd have to take,  
he found the mountain and the river  
    discretely other than before.

That interlude he long recalls,  
    the cove that led to mountain depths.  
How many blue-green streams he passes  
    beneath the clouds and forest rise.  
The spring arrives, and everywhere  
    are peach blooms scattered on the stream,  
but path to those immortals lies  
    beyond what man can recognize.

## 29. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Du Fu (712-70)

陕县有石壕镇)

XIA XIAN YOU SHI HAO ZHEN

|       |       |       |       |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 暮投石壕村 | 有吏夜捉人 | 老翁逾墙走 | 老妇出门看 |
| 吏呼一何怒 | 妇啼一何苦 | 听妇前致词 | 三男郾城戍 |
| 一男附书至 | 二男新战死 | 存者且偷生 | 死者长已矣 |
| 室中更无人 | 惟有乳下孙 | 孙母未去  | 出入无完裙 |
| 老妪力虽衰 | 请从吏夜归 | 急应河阳役 | 犹得备晨炊 |
| 夜久语声绝 | 如闻泣幽咽 | 天明登前途 | 独与老翁别 |

Du Fu, often seen in the west as China's greatest poet, had an outwardly unsuccessful career, one cursed by the An Lushan Rebellion, imperial disfavour, ill health and bouts of poverty. Though Du Fu found his vocation in brooding on the sufferings of the common people, he too led an itinerant life, at the mercy of famine and the hazards of war. Here he is drawing parallels: faced with conscription, the old man abandons his wife, and is abandoned by Du Fu in turn. These were desperate times.

Du Fu wrote from life, on whatever came into his thoughts, and his language, as I've represented here, could be direct and down-to-earth. The poetry lies not in rhetorical flourishes or leaps of imagination, but in the exact placing of words, a subtlety that is difficult to convey in English, and which escaped the understanding of his contemporaries. The original is rhymed abxx ccxc ddx d bxcaxece fxxf: the translation is xaxa xbx b, etc.

29. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Official at Stone Moat Village

At Stone Moat village I'd put up for the night.  
Officials came from the recruiting corps.  
At once the old man dropped behind a wall,  
but left his woman stood there at the door.

Peremptory, the sergeant barked out orders.  
The woman answered they had all gone hence.  
Conscripted everyone, she wailed, my three  
good sons have garrisoned your Ye's defence.

And only one is left to sometimes write  
of brothers' deaths that seem but yesterday.  
The living have a short-term hold on life,  
but, once they're dead, are apt to stay that way.

So look around, good sir: there's no one left,  
except my grandson, suckling at the breast.  
His mother is not placed to go, has not  
a decent skirt to see her proper dressed.

Given what strength I had is mostly gone,  
I will, conscripted, go with you tonight  
to help out variously at Heyang base.  
I'll see the morning's meal is got out right.

All night I seemed to hear her wailing on  
till distance swallowed up each sob and groan.  
And on that road, when morning brightness came,  
I left an old man stood there on his own.

### 30. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: War Wagons

#### 兵車行 BING JU XING

車麟麟 馬蕭蕭  
行人弓箭各在腰  
爺孃妻子走相送  
塵埃不見咸陽橋  
牽衣頓足攔道哭  
哭聲直上干雲霄  
道旁過者問行人  
行人但云點行頻  
或從十五北防河  
便至四十西營田  
去時里正與裏頭  
歸來頭白還戍邊  
邊亭流血成海水

Du Fu has been canonized as China's greatest poet, and the embodiment of true Confucian values: notably his loyalty to the empire, his repeated and unwelcome attempts to point out the consequences of unwise political decisions, and his empathy with the poorer classes, particularly those uprooted, conscripted and killed during the terrible An Lushan rebellion of 755-763.

### 30. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Du Fu (712-70)

Loud the army wagons go,  
less the horses, tired and slow.

All watch the ranks of soldiers march  
with bow and quiver clipped to waist,  
whole families to see them off,  
with old, the children, womenfolk.  
with such a violent set about  
that Xianyang bridge lies hid by dust;  
Stamping, howling, tearing clothes  
as though that sheer injustice spoke,  
and cries and lamentations rose  
in indignation to the skies.  
But one there marching by the road  
is stopped and questioned, asked the cause.  
'It's all conscripted men you see,  
increasingly the case these days.

At fifteen we can find ourselves  
despatched to northern river shores.  
and then, till forty, we will guard  
the field-camps stationed in the west.  
The head-scarf, which the chieftain gives  
each one who leaves his village, serves  
to bind white hair if he returns,  
who thence to garrisons is pressed  
at once, post haste, to border forts  
till that great sea of blood extend

30. (Continued)

武皇開邊意未已 君不聞漢家山東二百州  
千村萬落生荊杞 縱有健婦把鋤犁  
禾生隴畝無東西 況復秦兵耐苦戰  
被驅不異犬與雞 長者雖有問  
役夫敢申恨 且如今年冬  
未休關西卒 縣官急索租  
租稅從何出 信知生男惡  
生女猶得嫁比鄰 生男埋沒隨百草

There are many contradictions in Du's life. He was thwarted from gaining office in Xuanzong's reign, but not threatened by later reprisals. The Rebellion brought him close to destitution, but at other times he was comfortable off, owning farms, fields and orchards. Nonetheless, food was a constant preoccupation, in keeping his family alive and in his poetry. His health, as he often reminds us, was never good: from his thirties he suffered from diabetes, inflammation of the lungs, asthma, fevers, and 'the aches and pains of old age'. Few Chinese poets suffered so many changes in life, or written on so many everyday topics: 1400 of his poems survive, exceptionally fortunate given the circumstances.

I have greatly simplified the original's rhyme scheme in this translation (xaaxaxabb xcdceedeffxf ggxhhhxxxddhh), wanting something that represents Du Fu sturdy matter-of-factness.

30. (Continued)

and meet with Emperor Wu's commands:  
from whose concerns there's never rest.

Have you not heard, good sir: the Han now hold  
two hundred mountain districts, so, all told,  
a thousand villages, ten thousand homes  
rough-scattered on the brambled ground,  
where, north to south, their women learn  
to work the plough or drag the hoe,  
where grain that's tossed on Gansu sands  
can never know what's east or west.  
Such is the bitterness of war  
the Qin encountered long ago.  
with soldiers sent as rabid dogs  
on flocks of chickens, cackling on.

Here men must learn to keep their real thoughts in,  
though much the corvee labour they resent.  
Last snow, I saw a Guanxi soldier win  
a tax-collector's suit. Respectfully, he said;  
good sir, please tell me how I might begin  
to pay a settlement with nothing earned.  
Today I'm too ashamed to have a son.

Perhaps a daughter I could wed  
to neighbour or to anyone:  
a son will only earn a grave  
beneath the grass of endless plains.



### 30. (Continued)

君不見青海頭 古來白骨無人收  
新鬼煩冤舊鬼哭 天陰雨濕聲啾啾

Du Fu was reinterpreted in the Song dynasty and again in the Ming-Qing transition, when scholars learned to re-experience the poem through Du Fu's eyes, i.e. see the poems less as autonomous, free-standing works of art and more transcriptions of experience shaped by Du's extraordinary control of diction and line structure.

Behind the best of Du Fu's poems lie ethical convictions, a view of how the world should work, but Du Fu generally lets these considerations rise out of the poem, and doesn't moralise. There can be a good deal of irony in his work, sometimes smiling, sometimes bitter, but Du adopts many moods, not shying away from his own faults.

Du Fu seems to have written from an early age but much of this work has been lost. He was conscientious poet, revising and turning the 'diary jottings' into a many-faceted autobiography. After the An Lushan Rebellion, Du Fu took his family and his scrolls of poems on a long journey, from the region around the capitals to the bleak northwest, then down through the mountains in a harrowing journey to Chengdu, and, later, on down the Yangtze to Kuizhou, Jiangling, and across Lake Dongting down to Changsha in Hu'nan. All these journeys, as the others before them, in prosperity and hardship, left their mark on Du Fu's work, allowing him to be called the most universal of poets.

30. (Continued)

And round Lake Qing are heaped, you've doubtless heard,  
wide tracts of wind-bleached bones, all ways blown,  
    unvisited and uninterred,  
where ghosts of new injustices  
    must join and jostle with the old:  
grey skies and wailing, ever wailing on  
    through rain and wet and endless cold.

### 31. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY. TANG : Du Fu (712-70)

#### 麗人行 LI REN XING

三月三日天氣新 長安水邊多麗人  
態濃意遠淑且真 肌理細膩骨肉勻  
繡羅衣裳照暮春 蹙金孔雀銀麒麟  
頭上何所有 翠微滿葉垂鬢脣  
背後何所見 10. 珠壓腰極穩稱身  
就中雲幕椒房親 賜名大國號與秦

Shangsi is the third month, third day festival referred to, and dates back to the Zhou dynasty. Since the Chinese New Year commonly occurs in February, the festival is already well into spring.

The language is more pointed than normal with Du Fu, probably because the poem is an angry satire on the minister Yang Guozhong, written on the occasion of a visit to Twisting River Park of the emperor accompanied by his favourite Lady Yang (Yang Guifei), and her two sisters, the Duchesses of Guo and Qin. Chang'an was the most splendid city of its time, but Du Fu, attending in only lowly official capacity, is clearly not impressed by this superfluity of material luxury.

Pepper Chambered is a reference to the imperial harem. Bluebirds traditionally carry messages, and there is a strong hint of sexual impropriety. I have added the 'letter' only implied in the text, and been obliged to use four rhyme sounds where Du Fu employs only three. The original is rhymed abbcca xcxbaa xaxcbb bacaxacb: the translation runs xaxaxa xbxbx xxcx dx dx xaxaxa.

31. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: Song of the Beautiful Ladies

The third month, third day festival,  
    which, with the Chang'an weather fine,  
has many beauties by the river  
    walking, lingering everywhere.

If dense-intentioned each appears,  
    they're also distant, virtuous, true.

So well proportioned are the muscles,  
    flesh and bonework flaunted there  
that through the springtime's gathering dusk  
    the gauzy skirts' embroideries  
are rich with silver unicorns,  
    and peacocks in their golden flare.

And on their heads? Blue-green trinkets  
    that, leaf-like tinkling, reach on down  
to play about the spread of lips,  
    for so our etiquettes dictate.

And on their backs they wear? Waistbands  
    but here so thickly packed with pearls  
that, graceful as deportments are,  
    their slender backs scarce bear the weight.

But in the cloud-pavilions sat  
    are Pepper-Chambered Go and Qin:  
both sisters of the favourite  
    and waited on in sumptuous state.

### 31. (Continued)

|         |             |
|---------|-------------|
| 紫駝之峰出翠釜 | 水精之盤行素鱗     |
| 犀箸厭飫久未下 | 鑿刀縷切空紛綸     |
| 黃門飛鞚不動塵 | 御廚絡繹送八珍     |
| 簫鼓哀吟感鬼神 | 20. 賓從雜遝實要津 |
| 後來鞍馬何逡巡 | 當軒下馬入錦茵     |
| 楊花雪落覆白蘋 | 青鳥飛去銜紅巾     |
| 炙手可熱勢絕倫 | 慎莫近前丞相嗔     |

Du Fu had only limited access to the imperial throne, and his advice would not have been welcome. But it was the emperor's infatuation with Yang Guifei, and the latter's dalliance with the treacherous general An Lushan that directly led to the great rebellion destroying the earlier Tang, a disaster from which the empire never fully recovered.

Du Fu was acutely aware of the unreality of court life, how it contrasted with the grinding poverty of the world outside. The richness of costume and the culinary delights have an almost suffocating superfluity, where nature obtrudes only in the wind-spread fall of poplar flowers. The gold (daytime) splendour of (real) peacocks is contrasted with the night-time (lunar) silver of (imaginary) phoenixes. The food is so rich that disorder and lassitude follow. The drums and pipes call up spirits of the ancestors, though it's to the possibilities of preferment that its over-pampered guests are listening. Du Fu could not have seen the scale of impending disasters, but always emphasized the Confucian duties to responsible government: ethical lapses led to social problems and then disharmony.

31. (Continued)

Camel hump in great mauve chunks  
    brims from simmering green-jade ewers,  
on crystal platters, water-clear,  
    accumulate vast heaps of scales,  
but, surfeited, the diners drop  
    the chopsticks wrought of rhino horn,  
and agency of phoenix knives,  
    the thinly slicing, also fails.

From yellow-gated imperial kitchens  
    slowly horse-drawn platters come.  
Eight-fold are the delicacies,  
    with such a solemn hum around  
of panpipes and of muffled drums,  
    that ancestors seem conjured up,  
though guests more salivate to sense  
    a rich preferment in the sound.

And then, at length and leisurely,  
    a saddled horse arrives, from whence  
a haughty personage steps down  
    to his matted silk affair.  
The cotton from the willow catkins  
    is wind-blown white across the ground,  
as bluebird with a red-cloth message  
    briefly flits across the air.  
As heat burns hands, so too much power  
    is ruinous to sound relations.  
Be wise, do not approach this first  
    of minister's most hurtful stare.

## 32. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: Bai Juyi (772–846)

花非花, HUA FEI HUA

花非花, 霧非霧  
夜半來, 天明去  
來如春夢, 不多時  
去似朝雲, 無覓處

Bai Juyi had a long and successful career as a Tang official, eventually serving as governor of three important provinces. He is best known for the empathy with the common people, an empathy that often came close to criticising the Tang administration for its indifference to those whose efforts actually made the empire function.

The poems are usually clear and to the point, but less artless than first appears. There are four elements that compose poetry as a whole, said Bai. Likened to a blossoming fruit tree, the root of poetry is in its emotions, its branches in its wording, its flowers in its rhyme and voice, and lastly its final culmination in the fruits of its meaning.

This poem, which at first appears Regulated *Shi* is in fact irregular, Non-Regulated *Shi*, as a glance at the Chinese shows, with lines of 3,3 and 4,3 characters. The text is straightforward — *flower not-to-be flower, mist not-to-be mist: night midnight come, daybreak go: come as spring, not much time: go seem morning/imperial-court cloud, not seek place* — and is simply lamenting the brevity of life. Since 朝 means both morning (zhāo) and imperial court (cháo), I have devised the phrase *shining courts of morning* to cover both meanings and bring out the imagery. The six and seven character lines I have represented as hexameters, adjusting the phrasing to give variety, and rhymed as aaaa, where the original is in fact aaxa. Those who dislike rhyme in Chinese translation should note how well it will work on occasion.

## 32. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: A Flower Is Not A Flower

Not long can flower be flower, or mist as mist still stay,  
and midnight's hour of darkness fades at break of day.  
Springs, impetuous and brilliant, will not long delay,  
and clouds, from shining courts of morning, take their way.



### 33. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: Bai Juyi (772–846)

#### 東破春向暮 DONG PO CHUN HUA

東破春向暮 樹木今如何  
漠漠花落盡 翳翳葉生初  
每日領僮僕 荷鋤仍決渠  
剗土壅其本 引泉溉其枯  
小樹低數尺 大樹長丈餘  
封植來幾時 高下齊扶疏  
養樹既如此 養民亦何殊  
將欲茂枝葉 必先救根株  
云何救根株 勸農均賦租  
云何茂枝葉 省事寬刑書  
移此為郡政 庶幾甦俗蘇

Among Bai's most famous works are the long narrative poems like *Chang hen ge* (Song of Everlasting Sorrow), which tells the story of Yang Guifei, and *Pipa xing* (Song of the Pipa), but he was best known for his low-key poems in simple words, many of them with political and social criticism. They are written in a plain and direct style, so intended that way that Bai Juyi would rewrite anything that couldn't be immediately understood by his servants. The poems were popular throughout China, but Bai Juyi had them anyway preserved for posterity by being widely copied: today they number some 2,800 poems.

The first 12 lines are the plainest possible, a simple meaning in simple words, a style that recalls Tao Qian. Then comes the social context, the comparison of treating people like gardens needing care and attention. Unfortunately, the 庶 (shù: maybe) in the last line is not too optimistic: Bai Juyi was a realist. The original is rhymed axxa aaxa xaxa xaxa aaxaxa: the translation is xaxa xbx xcx xdx xexexe.

### 33. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: Planting Flowers on the Eastern Slope No. 2

At dusk and springtime on this eastern slope,  
what is it trees and saplings have to show?  
Absently-mindedly, the flowers have gone,  
and dense, thick screens of leaves begun to grow.

Each day I have the weighed-down servant boy  
come, dig a furrow with his hoe,  
and with a shovel heap up round the roots  
dry soil, so guiding where the spring rains go.

The smallest toddlers are a few feet high,  
and barely ten the largest in this plot:  
but each, when nurtured through the same brief space,  
looks similar: a thin but sturdy lot.

And if we're nurturing our trees like this,  
why should we treat our own folk differently?  
If we're expecting the best of branch and leaf,  
we need attend to what supports the tree.

How do we tend to what supports the tree,  
but show equality in tax and rent?  
To breed luxuriance in branch and leaf  
be fair and lenient in punishment.

Perhaps, if local government were that,  
revived, our people would be more content.

34. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: SIX DYNASTIES – EARLY  
TANG: Zhang Ruoxu (7-8<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

春江花月夜 CHUN JIANG HUA YUE YE

|         |             |
|---------|-------------|
| 春江潮水连海平 | 海上明月共潮生     |
| 滟滟随波千万里 | 何处春江无月明     |
| 江流宛转绕芳甸 | 月照花林皆似霰     |
| 空里流霜不觉飞 | 汀上白沙看不见     |
| 江天一色无纤尘 | 10. 皎皎空中孤月轮 |
| 江畔何人初见月 | 江月何年初照人     |

Zhang Ruoxu is really known for only one poem, one long, wonderful and extraordinarily influential poem: *A Night of Blossom and Moonlight on the Yangtze in Springtime*. Described by the twentieth-century poet Wen Yiduo as 'the poem of all poems, the summit of all summits', the piece breaks with Six Dynasty manner and anticipates the content and style of the high Tang. The poem has nine quatrains and three sections. The first section depicts the moonlit Yangtze River in spring. The second and third sections regret the ephemeral nature of life, commenting on the sorrow of travellers and the loved ones they leave behind. Both themes would become important in Tang and later poetry.

34. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: TANG: A Night of Blossom and Moonlight on the Yangtze in Springtime

The tide wells in, this Yangtze spring,  
    and interfingers with the sea:  
the moonlight and the sea itself,  
    are borne together on the tide.  
in wave on wave the waters run  
    a thousand sparkling moonlit miles.  
So is the springtime moon, which lacks  
    a habitat or place to hide.

Throughout, the sinuous Yangtze coils  
    about the fragrant river-lands.  
On flowering trees the moonlight falls  
    in fashionings of frozen rain.  
The intervening air is thin  
    and veiled with hoar-frost's misty haze.  
The scattered islets, sandy white,  
    are indistinct in mist again.

The sky above the river seems  
    but one great whole, and clear of dust,  
10. and brilliant in the void, the moon  
    is slowly wheeling on alone.  
What man was first to see the moon  
    from this same stretch of river bank?  
What year was first that on mankind  
    this river's flood of light was thrown?

### 34. (Continued)

|         |             |
|---------|-------------|
| 人生代代无穷已 | 江月年年望相似     |
| 不知江月待何人 | 但见长江送流水     |
| 白云一片去悠悠 | 青枫浦上不胜愁     |
| 谁家今夜扁舟子 | 20. 何处相思明月楼 |
| 可怜楼上月徘徊 | 应照离人妆镜台     |
| 玉户帘中卷不去 | 捣衣砧上拂还来     |

China's two great rivers, both the 3395 mile long Yellow River and the 3915 mile long Yangtze rise in the highlands of Tibet and flow by circuitous routes eastwards, providing rich irrigated soils for farming and settlement in their middle and lower stretches. The Yellow River was the cradle of Chinese civilizations, and still held the greater wealth of population in Tang times, especially around the capitals of Chang'an and Loyang. The south was not an empty wilderness, though, but an area of thriving settlement, with many towns on the Yangtze and in what today is Guizhou, Hunan, Jiangxi, Fujian and Guangdong being separately governed and casting their own coins.

The Yangtze crosses the mountains encircling the Sichuan basin, flows through magnificent gorges and then continues eastwards for a thousand miles, delivering an average of half a cubic mile of water daily into the Pacific Ocean. And while the Yellow River areas have rich loess soils, they are colder and drier, supporting crops like wheat and millet, the Yangtze area are wetter and warmer, ideal for rice, hemp, cotton and tea.

34. (Continued)

Our human life goes on, unending  
generation to generation.

The moon but follows on a course,  
no year will ever see it stay.

I do not know for whom the moon  
is waiting or is seeing off.

I only find the Yangtze flow  
brimming, silent on its way.

That white cloud, the travelling man,  
is small and dwindles till he's gone.

And on the bank, the maples find  
his sadness near unbearable.

On what frail craft must this one man  
be housed tonight so far from home?

20. On what far house and woman there  
must moon exert its wistful pull?

And in that curtained window space  
the brilliant moon will linger on,

and on that separated one  
and on her dressing table stay.

On loveliness it stamps its mark,  
nor can the curtain close it off.

And when on fulling-block it falls  
and not for long is brushed away.

34. (Continued)

此时相望不相闻, 愿逐月华流照君  
鸿雁长飞光不度 鱼龙潜跃水成文  
昨夜闲潭梦落花 30. 可怜春半不还家  
江水流春去欲尽 江潭落月复西斜  
斜月沉沉藏海雾, 碣石潇湘无限路。  
不知乘月几人归, 落月摇情满江

Note that this is not a topographic poem like those of Fang Chengda (Poem 64) but an idealized scene of moonlight flooding the river area. In Chinese minds, the moon is associated with gentleness and brightness, expressing beautiful if vague yearnings. On the 15th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar, the moon is full, and marks the Moon or the Mid-Autumn Festival. The round shape symbolizes family reunion, and the day is thus a chance for family members to get together and enjoy what the full moon signifies: abundance, harmony, and good luck. Many other matters are associated with the moon. The moon rabbit is fancifully seen in the dark patches of the moon. Chang'e (嫦娥) is the beautiful Chinese goddess of the moon, who is remembered for stealing an elixir of immortality from her husband, Hou Yi. As told in the Mid-Autumn Festival, Hou Yi's pursuit was prevented by the Hare, who would not let the irate husband pass until he made up with his wife.

I have used a simple xaxa xbx etc. rhyme scheme, but the original is axxa bxxb cxxc dxxd eexe fxff gxig hxix iix.

34. (Continued)

We both are gazing with the same  
    togetherness that is no news.  
Would that I could answer with the light  
    the radiant moon-beams give to her:  
the wild geese fly, but never far,  
    nor do they reach to moonlight's end:  
the fish and dragons dive and play  
    but neither's good as messenger.

Last night and by a quiet pool  
    I dreamt the springtime flowers fell,  
30. and grievously, and far from home  
    when we're but half-way through the spring:  
the water swelling with the spring  
    has reached its end and ebbs away;  
on Yangtze pools the low-hung moon  
    continues in its westering.

How heavily the moonlight slants  
    until dissolved in coastal mists.  
From north to south an endless road  
    where all our journeyings must start.  
So many going home tonight  
    are travelling by this self-same moon,  
which now, and settling in the trees,  
    gives thoughts that must disturb the heart.



## 5.5 Social Background: Song Dynasty

In that succeeding Song Dynasty (960-1279) — shrinking to the Southern Song in 1127 when the north was lost to Jurchen tribesmen — Chinese society reached its apogee of wealth and refinement. Its founder, Taizu, stressed the Confucian spirit of humane administration and the reunification of the whole country. He took power from the military governors, consolidating it at court, and delegated the supervision of military affairs to able civilians. A pragmatic civil service system was the result, with a flexible distribution of power and elaborate checks and balances.

Song China was incomparably the richest, most diversified and best governed economy of its time. Trade stretched across the world: to islands in the southeast Pacific, to India, to the Middle East and to east Africa. The ships were large, stoutly constructed and employed maps and compasses. Wealthy merchants and landowners strove to educate their sons for entry into government service, the upper echelons of which were lavishly rewarded. Industry was equally dynamic. All mining, smelting and fabrication of iron, steel, copper, lead, tin and mercury were government monopolies, though some competition was later allowed the private sector, with beneficial results. Coal replaced charcoal as the country was stripped of its forests. Steel was used for armour, swords, spears and arrowheads, but most went into agricultural implements, notably the plough. Cotton was grown in central China, tea and sugarcane plantations increased, and Suzhou became famous for its silk production.

Towns and cities saw a bustling commercial life. There were 50 theatres alone in Kaifeng, four of which could entertain audiences of several thousand each. The pleasure districts — where stunts, games, theatrical stage performances, taverns and singsong girl houses were located — were packed with food stalls that stayed open virtually all night, and there were also traders selling eagles and hawks, precious paintings, bolts of silk and cloth, jewellery of pearls, jade, rhinoceros horn, gold and silver, hair ornaments, combs, caps, scarves, and aromatic incense.

The government set social norms by defining crimes and their punishment; it anticipated crop failures and provided relief measures; it encouraged hygiene, public medicine and associated philanthropies; it recruited and tested public officials; it constructed and maintained roads, canals, bridges, dikes, ports, walls and palaces; it manufactured materiel and armaments; it managed state monopolies and mines and supervised trade. The numbers were large. In a population reaching 120 million in Song times, over 1 million belonged to the army and some 200-300,000 registered as civil employees (of whom 20,000 were ranked as officials). Most taxes were paid in kind, but payment by money increased throughout the dynasty, probably reaching a quarter to a third of the government's revenues. Larger transactions employed silver ingots and bolts of common silk cloth, and merchants issued notes of credit, at first privately but soon taken up the government. Factories were set up to print banknotes in the cities of Huizhou, Chengdu, Hangzhou, and Anqi, and were often large: that at Hangzhou employed more than a

thousand workers. Issues were initially for local use, and were valid only for 3-year period. That changed in late Southern Song times when the government produced a nationwide standard currency of paper money backed by gold or silver. Denominations probably ranged from one string of cash to one hundred strings (each of a thousand coins odd).

The Song was not a military state, but the army was large and well trained, generally in the latest techniques. The Song could also put to sea a formidable navy. Nonetheless, it was diplomacy that China traditionally preferred, binding surrounding powers by treaty and tribute systems. That statesmanship went sorely amiss when the Northern Song allied themselves with the Jurchen tribesmen to conquer the threatening Tibetan Liao dynasty in 1125. When the Song quarrelled over the division of spoil, the Jurchen promptly invaded northern China, and took the young emperor, his father Huizong and most of the court into captivity. Though they were never released, ending their days staring at forests and wild tribesmen, a scion of the family did evade capture to found the smaller Southern Song state. The Jurchen occupied northern China as the Jin regime, which gradually became Sinicized. The reduced Song made Hangzhou its capital, when court life regained its old splendour and sophistication. All three kingdoms — the Liao, the Jin and the Song itself — were eventually overrun by the Mongols, who founded their own Chinese dynasty, the Yuan, in 1279.

It is against this background that we must view Chinese poets. They were not visionary outcasts or Romantic rebels in the main, but ordinary men (with a few women) enjoying much the same life as their neighbours: cautious 'petit bourgeois' one writer called them, though the best were rather more. The most richly rewarded were high officials, generally in employment only half of their working lives, who thus had the opportunity and education to distil their everyday thoughts on everyday occurrences. Indeed it is thanks to the Song poet Lu You (1125-1210), who wrote over 9,000 surviving poems, that we have thumbnail sketches of the great mass of Chinese society, about which the official records are largely silent. He was one of the best half-dozen Song poets, prized for his patriotism, whose first official posting was in Sichuan. He kept a travel journal of the 160 days it took to reach Kuizhou from Hangzhou, but was for the next nine years much occupied with his official duties: repairing dykes, building bridges, preparing for the annual review of the military, supervising prefectural examinations, and the like. He retired from official duties in his sixties and settled in a small village near Shanyin, which was his family's old home in northern Zhejiang.

From here, for the last 20 years of his life, on a small and diminishing pension, he travelled around, recording his impressions in copious poems. He noted the effects of warfare and famine. He described the bustling marketplaces, the resourceful peddlers, the countless boats of merchants on the central Yangtze in what is now Wuhan, comparing them to those at Hangzhou and

Nanjing. He watched crowds ten thousand strong flocking to see naval displays involving 700 vessels, and described the many town and village festivals throughout the year. It is a picture of general contentment, where officialdom worked quietly in the background, and government's only feared impact were the sub-official tax collectors whose demands were not easily ignored. The wandering and boastful Li Bai, and the self-driven and often destitute Du Fu were exceptions: most poets lived very ordinary lives, where their small hopes and happinesses are reflected in their superficially undemanding poems.



35. UNREGULATED SHI: SONG: Mei Yaochen (1002-1060)

次韵和永叔夜坐鼓琴有感二首

CI YUN HE YONG SHU YE ZUO GU QIN YOU GAN ER  
SHOU

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| 夜坐彈玉琴 | 琴韻與指隨 |
| 不辭再三彈 | 但恨世少知 |
| 知公愛陶潛 | 全身衰弊時 |
| 有琴不安弦 | 與俗異所為 |
| 寂然得真趣 | 乃至無言期 |

Mei Yaochen passed the *jinshi* examination too late in life to have a successful government career, but he was a prolific poet, with some 3000 works still extant. His greatest friend was Ouyang Xiu, the outstanding polymath: poet, statesman, essayist, historian and epigrapher. Ouyang held high government positions, twice, in the Northern Song, and also wrote, unaided, in his spare time, the *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties*.

This piece is one of two poems by Mei Yaochen entitled *Seated at Night Playing the Qin*, sent in response to two poems received from Ouyang Xiu. As is evident from the poem, both enjoyed playing the Qin (lute), and, as always, the poem says a little more than the prose sense, which makes translation a matter of degree. The word-for-word rendering of the last two lines is *silent correct have true interest / therefore most not words phase*, which Jonathan Chavez wisely renders as *In silence, you get the truest essence, / And end where there are simply no words to say*. I have taken interpretation a little further: *but silence, intuitions, things unsaid, / when truths unhindered will disclose the rest*. Rhyming is as follows: original is xaxab abxxa, translation is xaxax axaxa.

35. UNREGULATED SHI: SONG: Sitting at Night and  
Playing the Zither

Tonight you sit and play your zither — well,  
I think, in playing as the chords suggest.  
How willingly you'd play a third time too,  
regretting only that so few are blest  
to know Tao Qian as you do, all the more  
important now your health is not the best.

In fact, it's not the calming strings that count,  
or even skills as common folk attest;  
but silence, intuitions, things unsaid,  
when truths unhindered will disclose the rest.



36. UNREGULATED SHI: SONG: Su Shi / Su Dongpo  
(1037-1101) Seeing Off Canliao

送參寥詩 SONG CAN LIAO SHI

上人學苦空 百念已灰冷  
劍頭惟一吷 焦穀無新穎  
胡為逐吾輩 文字爭蔚炳  
新詩如玉屑 出語便清警  
退之論草書 萬事未嘗屏  
憂愁不平氣 一寓筆所騁  
頗怪浮屠人 視身如丘井

頽然寄淡泊 誰與發豪猛  
細思乃不然 真巧非幻影  
欲令詩語妙 無厭空且靜  
靜故了羣動 空故納萬境  
閱世走人間 觀身臥雲嶺

Su Shi was one of China's most accomplished literary figures, leaving behind a great mass of still-read letters, essays and poems, plus some paintings and calligraphy. He Some 2,700 poems survive today. Most are in the Shi genre, but Su Shi is best remembered for his 350 Ci genre poems. He founded the Haofang School, which combined spontaneity, objectivity and vivid descriptions of natural phenomena, often on historical events or Buddhist themes.

The poem needs a little explanation. Lines 3-4 are emphasizing that the student/monk should clear his mind of thoughts that serve no purpose. Lines 9-16 summarize an essay by Tang monk Han Yu (788-824) who held that good calligraphy originated in strong emotions. How could the two be reconciled? Su's answer is that the Buddhist's 'emptiness and quietude' is helpful because it allows outside matters to be absorbed in self-reflection.

36. UNREGULATED SHI: SONG: Seeing Off Canliao

The student monk knows want and emptiness,  
like chilling ash the worries on his mind.  
He knows the sword's sharp tip won't heal the blood,  
and seed, when roasted, gets a sterile rind.

What odd tradition does your school pursue  
with this too strikingly good writing here?  
Your latest poems seem blessed with bits of jade  
with all their phrasing plain, alert and clear.

Tuizhi thought the cursive grass-script best  
to cope with this much-troubled world of ours;  
its cares, annoyances, injustices  
within the capable, thick brush's powers.

But for the Buddhist monk, who tends to think  
of his own body as a grave or well,  
how can he summon from a placid life  
the raging force of words that really tell?

But with more delicate, reflective thought,  
originality seems not deceit.  
To find the evocative and wanted phrase  
more think where calmness and the empty meet.

With inbred calmness you can join each group,  
with emptiness be part of every sight,  
can mingle with the generations, see  
your clouded mass along the mountain height.

36. (Continued)

鹹酸雜衆好 中有至味永  
詩法不相妨 此語更當請

Such is Song poetry, less powerful than the Tang but often intellectual and personal, posing and answering philosophical issues.

The last stanza is discussing the mind in contemplation, that flavourless flavour that makes others seem partial and unbalanced. The last line is often rendered as *I submit this view to your consideration*, but as the word-for-word translation is *this language more manage/act/during request*, I have opted for a larger meaning: *but ways that words might yield you, on request*.

The original is rhymed xabc xcbc xcxa xcxa xcxc dcxc dxdc; the translation runs xaxa xbxb, etc.

36. (Continued)

The sour and salt are part of normal taste,  
and this is sane, endures, is ever blessed.

Poetry is not opposed to contemplation,  
but ways that words will serve you, on request.

## 5.7 Social Background: Yuan to Qing Dynasties

The Yuan, or Mongol dynasty (1279-1368) was a great humiliation for China, and many of its poets no longer thronged the imperial courts but retired to the countryside to keep alive their customs and literary practices. Plays became popular, however, and these catered for the larger populace, not merely the literati and scholar class. The earlier poetry styles did survive, however, and were joined by a new style, the *Sanqu*, which was freer in form and based on popular songs and dramatic arias.

All genres continued to be written in the succeeding Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), which was otherwise a xenophobic and intensely conservative dynasty, with repressive internal government and rejection of things non-Chinese. Printed books became cheap and plentiful, however, giving poets a wide audience. Poets also formed themselves into societies and academies, as they had in previous dynasties, but the emphasis now alternated between recapturing old ground of the Tang and exploring the more easy-going styles of the Song.

In the succeeding Qing dynasty (1644-1911), China was again conquered by barbarians, the Manchus, but these new rulers rapidly became as Chinese as their subjects. The first emperors were long-lived and hard working, moreover, giving China a prosperity unequalled in the contemporary world. All reigns compiled records of their own and previous dynasties, but the Qing were particularly meticulous. Today the imperial records contain some 48,000 poems from the Tang, 200,000 poems from

the Song, and a million or more from the following Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. The last group have only recently been properly documented, making generalizations somewhat provisional. Nonetheless, though there were revivals of Confucianism in Song and Ming times, and important developments in literary theory, the elevated splendour of Tang poetry at its best was not recaptured.

37. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: MING-QING: Wang Duanshu:  
(1621-1680)

難行 NAN XING

|         |             |
|---------|-------------|
| 甲申以前民庶豐 | 億昔猶在花錦叢     |
| 鶯囀簾櫳日影橫 | 慵粧倦起香幃中     |
| 一自西陵渡兵馬 | 書史飄零千金捨     |
| 髻髻蓬鬆青素裳 | 悞逐宗兄走村埜     |
| 武寧軍令甚嚴肅 | 10. 部兵不許民家宿 |
| 此際余心萬斛愁 | 江風括面焉敢哭     |
| 半夜江潮若電入 | 呼兒不醒勢偏急     |
| 宿在沙灘水汲身 | 輕紗衣袂層層濕     |
| 聽傳軍令束隊行 | 冷露薄身鷄未鳴     |
| 是此長隨不知止 | 20. 馬嘶疑為画角聲 |

The woman poet and critic Wang Duanshu was a native of Shaoxing, who wrote of her harrowing experiences in fleeing the advancing Qing troops in 1644-5. The original is in the heptasyllabic Unregulated *Shi* genre and fairly closely rhymed (abab xcxc ddx d dehe ffe f ggfg xih jkj kexe llx mmnn). I have echoed this feature in representing each heptasyllable line by two pentameters in stanzas rhymed abab. Lines 20 and 26 are rather free. The references are:

Jiashen year: year of the monkey, i.e. 1644.

Xiling Hills: on the border with Manchuria.

Wuning: northwest Jiangsi province, bordering Hubei

Dinghai: on the northeast coast of China.

Jiang crossing: on the upper waters of the Yangtze.

37. UNREGULATED SHI POETRY: MING-QING: Song of  
Suffering Calamity

Before the Jiashen year, as I recall,  
the common people had enough to eat,  
Soft, wooded shades protected us, with all  
the flowers rich-brocaded, fresh and neat.

We heard the oriole's plump tenderness,  
as curtained sun glowed softly overhead.  
There was no haste to rise and dress:  
long hours I'd linger by the scented bed.

Then suddenly, with horses, soldiers spilled  
across the boundary of the Xiling Hills,  
at once were books and histories filled  
with lust for gold and thousand threatened ills.

Though plainly dressed and with my hair unkempt,  
I missed my chance when elder sister went  
to hide in villages. From none exempt,  
calamities are what my fortune sent.

The orders for the Wuning army were  
for us civilians severe and right:  
10. no troops would help us or indeed transfer  
to billeting and keep us safe at night.



37. (Continued)

此際余心萬斛愁 江風括面焉敢哭  
半夜江潮若電入 呼兒不醒勢偏急  
宿在沙灘水汲身 輕紗衣袂層層濕  
聽傳軍令束隊行 冷露薄身鷄未鳴  
是此長隨不知止 20. 馬嘶疑為画角聲

The dangers recorded were real. Wang's father starved himself to death following Manchu victories, but many Han were simply massacred. Some 800,000 soldiers and civilians were killed over ten days in Yangzhou, for example, and similar carnage occurred in Jiading, Jiaxing, Kunshan, and Haining. It is against this background that Wang had to express her lived experiences, deeply felt emotions, desires, anxieties, and pleasures, thereby defining herself beyond the normative role of women in a Confucian society.

Wang Duanshu belonged to the gentry class. Before her extended flight she would have known little of her countrymen, ninety percent of whom lived as farmers in small villages built of local materials and housing around fifty families. The larger villages would have a market every other day and at least one street lined with shops selling local and non-local products, plus booths where doctors, fortune-tellers, barbers and letter writers offered their services. The gentry lived in towns, often as extended families, in houses set as extensive rooms off a central garden, with servants to do the menial chores. All classes celebrated the many festivals, though the New Year was the most important, where the whole family collected under one roof and made offerings to heaven and earth, to the god or goddess belonging to the family tradition, to departed ancestors, to living parents and grandparents. They also exchanged gifts and invitations with neighbours and business associates. The house would be specially decorated, there would also be feasts and fireworks, plus entertainments organised by the wealthier for their community: the dragon dance, music and opera.

37. (Continued)

And so I fled, my female heart beset  
by myriads of mounting fears. I  
felt the river wind blow in my face, but yet  
could take no issue with it, nor dared cry.

Then midnight, I remember, and the tide  
was dark, and rising swiftly, I would find.  
I called my boy. Who would not stir. I tried  
to put these urgent dangers out of mind.

So went the whole night there, on that bare beach  
as water lapped and threatened, ever close:  
through sleeves of gauze I felt the wetness reach,  
then through the body's thin, deep underclothes.

At length we woke, and with the troops again  
trudged on and with and as the orders came.  
Dew-damp on that hard ground we bedded down,  
got up at cockcrow, soaked, went on the same.

And that whole days together: we never stayed  
at one place long, or had that hard pace slowed.  
20. It was a bugle sound when horses neighed,  
an endless column on an endless road.

### 37. (Continued)

|         |             |
|---------|-------------|
| 汗下成斑淚成血 | 蒼天困人梁河竭     |
| 病質何堪受此情 | 鞋跟踏綻肌膚裂     |
| 定海波濤轟巨雷 | 貪生至此念已灰     |
| 思親猶在心似焚 | 願飡鋒刃冒死回     |
| 步步心驚天將暮 | 30. 敗舟錯打姜家渡 |
| 行資遇劫食不敷 | 淒風泣雨悲前路     |

Town life had many amenities, not least an abundance of printed material: reference books, religious tracts, school primers, Confucian literature and civil service examination aids. Poetry could be published. There was also a sizeable market for fiction, often short stories in the colloquial tongue featuring palace inhabitants and ghosts, which sold well with women and the merchant classes. Full-length novels also appeared, sometimes under a pseudonym, as was the erotic work *Jin Ping Mei*, translated as both *The Plum in the Golden Vase* and *The Golden Lotus*. Wood block printing allowed for illustration, often used to distinguish books with similar content.

Many houses were richly furnished and decorated. Arts and handicrafts flourished, and the Ming was particularly celebrated for its porcelain, which was shipped by sea to Europe and across the land routes to the Middle East, greatly influencing the ceramic art of Persia and Turkey in subsequent centuries.

The Ming was a xenophobic dynasty, however, and life at court could be distinctly perilous. The two founding emperors of the Ming were markedly paranoid, and the first alone instigated an internal investigation that lasted 14 years and brought about 30,000 executions. Two more investigations followed, resulting in another 70,000 executions of government workers, from high officials to guards and servants.

37. (Continued)

In perspiration drenched, with flooding tears,  
    which seemed to mingle with our very blood,  
buffeted by Heaven we were, beset by fears  
    as roads and bridges showed a waste of mud.

More close to death we came, and pressed by fate,  
    yet still the orders came, both prompt and curt:  
my shoes were shredded: in that desperate state  
    my skin was sorely cracked, my bound feet hurt.

We went to Dinghai in the driving rain,  
    the waves were loud and fell as thunderclaps.  
I clung to life and effort, hurt and pain,  
    when all turned ashes, to a large perhaps.

I'd fled to what? Had left my parents too  
    as prey to illness, hunger and attack,  
and so, despite my fears, what blade could do,  
    at last, if wearily, I turned on back.

At dusk the sky seemed darker overhead,  
    my heart in every fearful step I'd take.  
30. Our boat, much patched and leaky, was misled:  
    we came to Jiang Crossing by mistake.

There robbed of valuables, what things we had,  
    we lacked the cash for travel, even bread.  
Through wind and rain we went, and, more than sad,  
    surveyed and earnestly the road ahead.

37. (Continued)

|         |             |
|---------|-------------|
| 暗喜生從關上歸 | 抱赧羞顏何所倚     |
| 牆延蔓草扉半開 | 吾姊出家老父死     |
| 骨肉自此情意疏 | 僑寓暫且池東居     |
| 幸得詩書潤茅屋 | 40. 曉來梨雨幽窗洒 |
| 暮借殘星補破瓦 | 偶聽雲聲送落鴻     |
| 哀其悽惻如象同 |             |

To add to supposed internal threats were the Mongols, who had been chased out of China but were anything but docile. Indeed they managed to capture and hold prisoner for some years one of the Ming emperors, though, rather than pay the demanded ransome, the court promptly raised a half-brother to the dragon throne.

The Ming fell to invading Manchu tribesmen in extended campaigns: the conquest was not completed till 1683, and cost 25 million lives. Treachery, warlord banditry and fierce resistance were frequent features, but the Ming dynasty was itself ailing. Support of the extended royal families had eaten into state revenues. Large armies had to be maintained on extended borders. The Little Ice Age shortened the growing season and depleted crops: in the ensuing famines troops were apt to leave their posts, and to roving gangs of the discontented were added floods, locusts, droughts and outbreaks of disease. In 1642, a group of rebels destroyed the dikes of the Yellow River and unleashed flooding that led to hundreds of thousands of deaths. As the social order broke down and smallpox spread, two competing rebel leaders, Li Zicheng and Zhang, took control of separate parts of the country and declared new dynasties. The Mandate of Heaven was clearly being withdrawn, and in 1644 the last of the Ming emperors took his own life.

37. (Continued)

All last, all hardships overcome, we came  
to our once home, relieved to find the place.  
But in the gladness there was also shame:  
where could I put this much-dishonoured face?

We saw our house, with creepers overrun,  
the door not locked but broken in instead.  
My poor dear sister gone to be a nun,  
our father nowhere, but a long time dead.

And so was kinship weakened, from this time on,  
not close to those of whom we had been fond.  
That sense of fitting place was also gone:  
I lodge now on the east side of the pond.

The *Odes* and *History* — I still have those  
to read within my all-too modest home.  
40. I seek no carriages or splendid clothes  
nor from this sanctuary expect to roam.

I have the rain for company, and flowers,  
the dawn, the plum tree blossoms' quiet truth.  
At night I ask the stars' own kindly powers  
to cover tiles still missing from my roof.

Sometimes I hear the trails of wild geese call  
as from the clouds descending they have flown,  
and then am saddened by them, those and all  
who feel a sorrow kindred to my own.

## 6. REGULATED SHI POETRY

### 6.1. Characteristics of Regulated Shi

The so-called 'recent-style' *Shi* poetry (*Jintishi*) was a more musical but heavily regulated poetry that reached its highest development in Tang times, but was also written in later dynasties. *Jintishi* took two forms: a full *Lushi* (eight lines) form and a so-called curtailed *Jueju* (four lines) form. These two forms were subdivided further. *Lushi* poetry was either pentasyllabic (*Wulu*: five characters to the line), or heptasyllabic (*Qilu*: seven characters to the line). *Jueju* poetry could also adopt two forms. *Wujue* had five characters to the line, and *Qijue* had seven characters to the line. Strict rules of organisation, metre, rhyme and tonal patterns applied to all four forms of *Jintishi* poems.

Regulated *Shi* is the most refined and artificial of Chinese poetry genres. The keywords for translation purposes are a rather studied air of refinement, melodious but also somewhat dissociated from reality, tight rhyming and much assonance to mimic the tone rules: in short, a highly-finished and self-conscious style of writing.

I have used different rhyme schemes here to suggest what is still possible in so constrained a style.





### 38. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Meng Haoran (689-740)

早寒有懷 ZAO HAN YOU HUA

木落雁南渡 北風江上寒  
我家襄水曲 遙隔楚雲端

鄉淚客中盡 孤帆天際看  
迷津欲有問 平海夕漫漫

Most of Meng's poetry is set in the present-day Hubei province where he was born and raised. He was a nature poet, popular in later compilations of Tang poetry, where his work is thoughtful and reflective, but simpler and more open than the Buddhist-influenced poetry of his friend Wang Wei.

The poem here is typical of Meng's work, but has two lines that need explication. Line 4 is literally *distant separate Chu cloud origin/end* and is commonly translated as *hidden by the clouds of Chou*. Line 8 is literally *level sea evening long long* and is commonly translated as *the level sea and evening stretch far away*. No one would want to quarrel with such interpretations, but what are they signifying?

The clue is the Xiang river, which drains into Lake Dongting, situated in the middle stretches of the Yangtze: it is classic Chu country, where Meng was born and raised. The poem is thus a simple piece of nostalgia, where the poet is remembering his childhood haunts. It is also a little sentimental, as, apart from a stay at Chang'an, Meng was never long separated from these haunts. I have made a little more the last line, however, adding a pathos and repetition of clouds in 'hold the eye'. The original is rhymed abab abab rather than my aaaa bbbb.

38. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Cold Morning Memories

Leaves fall. The geese fly south. The north wind blows  
cold ripples on the water flats below.

My home is where the Xiang River flows  
in one wide arc beneath the clouds of Chou.

A traveller's tears are spent: why should he sigh  
to see a lonely sail against the sky?

But, at that long-lost crossing, tell me why  
the level sea and evening still can hold the eye.

39. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Meng Haoran (689-740)

望洞庭湖贈張丞相

WANG DONG TING HU ZENG

八月湖水平 涵虛混太清  
氣蒸雲夢澤 波撼岳陽城  
欲濟無舟楫 端居恥聖明  
坐觀垂釣者 徒有羨魚情

The addressee of the poem, Zhang Juiling held important posts under Emperor Xuanzong, including head of the imperial library, minister of public works, and commandant of various prefectures, but eventually fell from favour and was dismissed. He was also a noted poet, with five of works included in the anthology of 'Three Hundred Tang Poems'. Yueyang is a city on the eastern shore of the Yangtze River near Lake Dongting in Hunan province.

The poem is generally clear, but line 8 is open to various interpretations. The word-for-word rendering is *only have envy fish emotion*, suggesting that Meng is really envying those who are content with a placid existence, not only the fishermen, therefore, but the fish themselves.

The original is rhymed *aaba baba*, the translation *abab cdcd*.

39. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: To Prime Minister Zhang by the  
Dongting Lake

The eighth month lakeside levels brim  
with sky's vast emptiness. The clear light falls  
in dreaming pools, and at the eddies' whim  
are waves that lap on Yueyang city walls.

I'd cross, but for a boat will have to wait,  
though idleness undoes the soundest mind.  
I sit and watch an angler dangle bait  
and envy those to fish-like thoughts confined.

.

40. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Wang Bo (650-76)

送杜少府之任蜀州 SONG DU SHAO FU ZHI REN  
SHU ZHOU

城阙辅三秦 风烟望五津  
与君离别意 同是宦游人  
海内存知己 天涯若比邻  
无为在歧路 儿女共沾巾

Wang Bo wrote poetry from an early age but killing a servant ended his precocious career, and threatened that of his father, who was banished to Jiaozhi. It was returning from a visit to his father in 676 that Wang Bo was drowned at sea.

Wang Bo's brief output nonetheless influenced Tang poetry. He advocated 'self display' of the emotions, though these had to be appropriate, i.e. express the ideal of service to the state. By some commentators, he was thought frivolous, or even conceited, but his stress on content and sense were a valuable antidote to poetry that aimed simply for formal perfection.

Shaanxi in the poem's text is given as 'Three Qin' and Sichuan as 'Five Fords'. Chengdu is in central Sichuan. The original is rhymed aaba baxa, the translation as abbb aaba.

40. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Seeing Off Assistant Prefect Du  
Tang

Seen from Chengdu walls it's Shaanxi nears,  
while you, past mist and snow, on Sichuan gaze.

For all the sadness, in our spirit stays  
the faith that through the endless travelling days  
our country furthers its true friends' careers:  
at the earth's far doors, we stay as neighbours.

So at this new-come parting of the ways  
let's not be children now who'd show their tears.

#### 41. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Du Fu (712-70)

春望 CHUN WANG

国破山河在 城春草木深

感时花溅泪 恨别鸟惊心

烽火连三月 家书抵万金

白头搔更短 浑欲不胜簪

One of Du Fu's most famous pieces, the poem shows the typical progression of regulated verse. The required opening (*qi*) sets the time, place and theme. What is human (land) is set against what is natural (hill and water months (a long time) is paralleled by much gold — which is linked to catastrophic events and so to a terribly long time. The final couplet rounds off (*he*) the poem by paralleling the poet's careworn appearance, ravaged by time and grief, with a country equally affected. It's part of the Confucian vision. What is rendered bare by man is set against what is unbroken in nature. The contrast between human destruction and nature's luxuriance is again implied by the second line. The required second couplet (*sheng*) is more complicated. By turning away from the exterior world and omitting obvious subjects, Du Fu allows several interpretations, all equally valid. The third couplet exhibits the required turning away (*zhua*), here from nature to the human world. The beacon fire (warning of nomad invasions) is contrasted with the wished-for message from home. The three of unity in man, country and universe.

Volume Two provides a detailed analysis, but readers unfamiliar with traditional verse in this context may like to note how simple rhyme can echo, shape and deepen the themes. The original is rhymed xaxaxaxa, rather than the abcd cdab of the translation

41. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Spring Prospect

But hills and streams of this bare land remain,  
spring floods with grass and trees in thoroughfares.  
The flowers, the time in prospect: both have tears,  
and heart is homeless, like a startled bird.

Three months of warning beacons, distant fears:  
much gold for news of home, but nothing's heard.  
How can this scratched-at head of mine retain  
that pin of office with these thinned white hairs?



## 42. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Du Fu (712-770)

倦夜 JUAN YE  
竹凉侵卧内 野月满庭隅  
重露成涓滴 稀星乍有无  
暗飞萤自照 水宿鸟相呼  
万事干戈里 空悲清夜徂

The poem was written in a small house on the outskirts of Chengdu, to which Du Fu had fled from the all-consuming An Lushan Rebellion. The moon is described as 野 (yě: field or outland), which I have transposed as 'outside are fields', emphasizing the implied contrast between inside and outside, with the latter invading the room in the cold smell of bamboo noted in the previous line. The second couplet is again paralleling aspects of the scene. The heavy dewdrops with the twinkling stars: one forms as the others go out. The last is given by 有无 (yǒu wú: tangible, intangible) so that Du Fu is saying a little more than this. The stars are tangible in the sense they can be seen, but of course are far beyond means of grasping them. That approach and then distancing, of being given and eluding us, is repeated in the next couplet: the fireflies emit their light (towards us) and the birds call to each other (i.e. away from us). The final couplet is Du Fu's tour de force, where the simple bird calls seem threatening as though filled with thoughts of war, which in turn are lost in the unfathomable sadness of life. Such is Du Fu's control of diction. {3}

Just as these matters are given to the thoughtful reader of the Chinese, so, I hope, will this English rendering, if readers remember that poetry gives more than the plain prose sense in *lights up, goes out, strike strewn, fire dark, thoughts pass night's clear tune*. The original is rhymed xaxa xaxaxa, the translation abab abab.

42. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Restless Night

A smell invades my room of cold bamboo.  
Outside are fields, half courtyard that the moon  
lights up. I watch the drops collect from the clear dew,  
and stars, still faintly glimmering, that soon

go out. The fireflies also flit from view.  
Odd birdcalls strike the water as though they're strewn  
with countless thoughts of war: they pass on through  
to sorrows emptying in the night's clear tune.

#### 43. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Du Fu (712-770)

旅夜書懷 LU YE SHU HUAI

細草微風岸 危檣獨夜舟

星垂平野闊 月湧大江流

名豈文章著？ 官應老病休

飄飄何所似？ 天地一沙鷗

Another well-known poem of Du Fu's, which has the usual structure of regulated verse, with *qi* to start, *cheng* to elaborate, *zhuan* to make a turn, and *he* to conclude. Lines 1 and 2 are clearly non-parallel: 1 goes from small to large; 2 has no such direction. The two interior couplets are parallel, though in contrary directions, in both cases. The concluding couplets are non-parallel.

Several points follow. First, the 危 (*wēi*) of line two, which is strictly translated as 'danger' refers to the mast, which is either perilous to the observer or at the mercy of the river. Second, the 湧 (*yǒng*) in line 4, which can mean 'bubble up' or 'rush forth', must mean 'bubble up' here, simply to preserve the mirror balance of lines 3 and 4. Third, the concluding line must have sense of upward movement, again to mirror the preceding line. Thus, though the sand-gull is blown about by the winds of fortune, it stays imperially aloft. The poem is not entirely about dejection, therefore, but depicts Du Fu's intention to stay alone and untroubled by the An Lushan Rebellion. The moon bubbles up or floats bobbing on the water, stationary as the current swirls on past.

In contrast to the original *xaab* rhyme scheme, the translation is *aaaa bbbb*, i.e. tightened to emphasize Regulated shi.

43. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Night Thoughts When Travelling

The shore's light wind is in the thin-stemmed grass,  
and from the darkness looms the boat's one mast.  
Around are stars, a stretch of river, smooth and vast,  
and the moon, afloat on water flooding past.

How can the art of letters make one known?  
I should retire: so ill and worn I've grown.  
Forever drifting, our earthbound flights are blown  
into the heavens, the sand-gull on its own.

#### 44. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Li Bai (701-62)

送友人 SONG YOU REN

青山橫北郭 白水遶東城 此地一為別， 孤蓬萬里征  
浮雲遊子意 落日故人情 揮手自茲去 蕭蕭斑馬鳴

Another of Li Bai's poems made famous by Ezra Pound's translation, but closely studied by Chinese scholars, who note that by following the *Lushi* composition rule of harmony between 景 (the outside landscape) and correspondent 情 (the inside feelings and emotions) Li Bai evokes the poetic mood with perfect imagery. In the first four lines, Li Bai describes the setting, which are 山, 水 地 and 萬里, and the second four lines expresses correspondent feelings, which are 意 and 情. Moreover, he weaves each line correspondent to the next line for the aesthetics of balance: he arranges the blue (青), mountain (山), stagnant (橫), north (北)), and outer wall (郭) correspondent to the white (白), river (水), moving (繞), east (東), and inner wall (城), respectively, in the subsequent line.

Li uses a number, once (一為) in the third line, and then uses another number, one person (孤蓬) in the fourth line. He also employs a Yin-symbol of a cloud (浮雲) in the fifth line, and then introduces a correspondent Yan-symbol of the sun (落) in the sixth line. He also describes a movement of a waving hand (揮) in the seventh line, and then fills the empty space with a sound of hsiao (蕭). Finally, he builds up a flowing cadence by utilizing four tonal accents in each line and, simultaneously, makes the sound of the last letter in every even line (城, 征, 情, 鳴) to form an exact rhyme. Through perfect manoeuvring of the formal rules of *Lushi* verse, Li conveys an unusually deep range of feelings, including sorrow, loneliness, emptiness and mourning. The original is rhymed xaxa xbxb, and the translation abcad bcd.

44. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Leave Taking

Blue mountains, stagnant: north, the outer wall:  
the river, winding eastward: an inward blaze of white.

Here, at this place, we make one final parting.

Like tumbleweed whirling ten thousand li, a fall  
bewildering as the thoughts like clouds go scattered on.

So sets the sun on long acquaintance: light  
and then darkness. We wave our farewells, horses starting  
to neigh to each other, distantly, till each is gone.

#### 45. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Wang Wei (701-761)

終南山 ZHONG NAN SHAN

太乙近天都 連山到海隅

白雲迴望合 青靄入看無

分野中峰變 陰晴眾壑殊

欲投人處宿 隔水問樵夫

Wang Wei's poetry is one of exceptional quietness and of shifting perspectives — which can be material or mental, but are commonly both. Wang is here presenting himself as the enlightened traveller who has been walking the cloud wrapped slopes of Mount Taiyu (Zhongnan) but has now descended into the forests to ask for overnight shelter. The contrast is between the high point of the sky (literally capital 隅), which he has been observing as a high official and a request to the most humble and down-to-earth of commoners, a woodcutter: a contrast too of the peripatetic narrator and the woodcutter lodged in the area. There is a similar contrast between the mountain ranges that extend as from shore to shore, i.e. far as the eye can see, and Mount Taiyu that mounts to the sky, i.e. movement upwards and in horizontal directions. That movement is repeated in the second stanza: down from the peak and across the stream.

Whether the journey is an actual one, or made in thought only, is open to conjecture. 'Middle peak' is probably an allusion to the middle way, which is either a variant of Buddhism that sees nothingness at all levels of perception, and/or the path taken by most Buddhists, who practise their devotions but, like Wang Wei himself, do not withdraw from the world to do so. As lines 5-6 indicate, what we see of the world depends on our viewpoint. Lines 3-4 illustrate the same thought: clouds opaque at distance dissolve into mists when we enter them.

The original is closely rhymed, but in keeping with Wang Wei's quietness I've used slant rhymes across the stanzas: abcd *abcd*. The original is aaxa xaxa.

45. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Zhongnan Mountain

Taiyu can touch the high point of the sky:  
from shore to shore encircle mountain chains.  
White clouds are wavering but still enclose  
green-bluish mists, which, entered, fade away.

What middle peak subtends is what we see  
from sun and to sunless change the deep ravines.  
In seeking quarters for the night, I cross  
the stream and ask of woodsman lodging there.



46. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Mei Yaochen (1002-69) Lament  
for the Deceased

悼亡 其一 DAO WANG QI YI

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| 結髮為夫婦 | 於今十七年 |
| 相看猶不足 | 何況是長捐 |
| 我鬢已多白 | 此身寧久全 |
| 終當與同穴 | 未死淚漣漣 |

It was common for Chinese poets to write sequences of poems on a common theme, each from a slightly different perspective. Mei Yaochen wrote such a sequence for his wife, who died aboard a boat when the family was travelling back from a provincial posting. She was 37, and, as the poem tells us, had been married to Mei for 17 years.

Unlike well-known sequences by Pan Yue (247-300) and Yuan Zhen (779-831), which are rather formal and highly polished laments, with references to their renown virtue and social accomplishments, this poem is simple and direct, though not less powerful for the plain exposition.

In traditional weddings, still practised today, the bride and the groom each cut a lock of their hair, which is then tied in a knot and formally kept in a bag. The original is rhymed abab xbx, the translation abab cdcd.

46. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: Lament for the Deceased

Since knots of hair pronounced us man and wife  
a total now of seventeen years has passed:  
I could not hold enough of her in life  
but now, in losing her, have seen her last.

With hair that's all too white about the head,  
this body would be peaceful through the years  
and share a tomb with her, but, not yet dead,  
succumbs already to this flood of tears.

47. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: Li Shangyin (813-58)

錦瑟 JIN SE

|         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 錦瑟無端五十絃 | 一絃一柱思華年 |
| 莊生曉夢迷蝴蝶 | 望帝春心託杜鵑 |
| 蒼海月明珠有淚 | 藍田日暖玉生煙 |
| 此情可待成追憶 | 只是當時已惘然 |

Li Shangyin was a Chinese poet and politician of the late Tang Dynasty, writing in the difficult years following the An Lushan Rebellion.

This, his best-known poem, can be read as lament for the poet's wife, a veiled comment on an illicit affair, or complaint about a patron's neglect. The myths and legends involved are these: White-silk maiden played a fifty-string zither so mournfully that the sage-ruler Fuxi broke the zither into today's twenty-five-string instrument. The poet Zhuanzi (369-286 BC) dreamt himself a butterfly, and couldn't decide on waking whether he was truly the poet or the butterfly. So that he could enjoy the favours of the official's wife, the emperor Wang sent an official to work on flood control, but was so mortified on the official's return that he left the kingdom and was changed into a cuckoo: the bird now symbolises regret and sadness. Pearls were supposedly responsive to the waxing and waning of the moon, and ocean-dwelling maidens wept tears of pearl. The indigo fields were famous for their jade.

The original is rhymed aaba *baba* whereas the translation is aabc *baba*.

47. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU:  
BROCADED ZITHER

My rich brocaded zither flaunts,  
for some odd reason, fifty strings  
Each string a bridge: one thinks of rich  
luxuriance the season brings.  
Zhuangzi's body, in a dream,  
beheld itself a butterfly's:  
in emperor Wang a fervent heart  
departed on the cuckoo's wings.

In the grey-blue sea the moon is bright  
but like a pearl in tears it lies.  
The sun is warm in indigo  
but jade dissolves to misty things.  
Though feelings linger to become  
the things that thoughts memorialise,  
it was already at the time  
mixed with more bewilderings.

#### 48. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: Li Shangyin (813-58)

#### 隋宮 SUI GONG

紫泉宮殿鎖湮霞 欲取蕪城作帝家  
玉璽不緣歸日角 錦帆應是到天涯  
於今腐草無螢火 終古垂楊有暮鴉  
地下若逢陳後主 豈宜重問後庭花

The historical meditation was initiated by Li Shangyin, and this is one of his most celebrated, though somewhat complex. The emperor alluded to is the Sui Emperor Yang, who is famous for uniting China immediately preceding the Tang, but also for his material extravagances and vast expenditures on palaces and public works. Purple Spring is a river near Chang'an that gave its name to Sui palaces that Wang would leave on his frequent excursions. The 'overgrown' refers to an earlier event, the Southern Dynasties prince who began an ill-fated rebellion in the Guangling area, commemorated by the poet Bao Zhao (414-466). Yang thus failed to learn from history. Brocaded silk is an allusion to Yang's sumptuous voyages on newly opened waterways. By legend, Yang also levied a tax of fireflies on his subjects, to be released as nighttime illumination, and ordered willows to be planted along the banks of waterways as a monument to his industry. Fireflies traditionally bred in grass. The last couplet refers to Yang's apocryphal visit to the former emperor of Chen, the last of the Southern Dynasties rulers, and his request to hear his favourite consort sing *Flowers of the Rear Courtyard*, another extravagance leading to Yang's and the Chen emperor's downfall. A rather sardonic poem, rhymed aaba *baba* in the original (aabb aacc in the translation.)

48. REGULATED SHI POETRY:  
JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: Sui Palace

The Purple Spring has palace halls  
    now left behind in mist and haze.  
Our emperor, though, would have those walls,  
    though overgrown, still serve his days.  
Should indications not prevail,  
    nor seal of office prove its worth,  
brocaded silks would onward sail  
    to the very ends of earth.

The former had the fireflies glow,  
    where grass returns the sunset's blaze:  
and clumps of drooping willows show  
    the scattered crow's malignant gaze.  
But if he met that Chen's last lord,  
    returned to earth with all he'd got,  
he'd have the flower song restored  
    that was his favourite's, would he not?

49. (UN)REGULATED SHI POETRY: CLOSE TO  
JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: Li He ( 791-817)

夢天 MENG TIAN

老兔寒蟾泣天色 雲樓半開壁斜白

玉輪軋露濕團光 鸞珮相逢桂香陌

黃塵清水三山下 更變千年如走馬

遙望齊州九點煙 一泓海水杯中瀉

Strictly, this is unregulated Shi, but with many affinities with *Qilu*, though thinly rhymed (axxx bbxa). Explication is difficult: the whole piece is purposefully nebulous. We cannot tell if this is heaven in a dream or a dream in heaven. That ambiguity continues through the poem: is the tower of line 2 surrounded by clouds as hills would be in a Chinese painting, or built of clouds themselves? What is this whiteness that slants the walls? Jade wheel is the moon, which I have made clear by adding 'moon', as I have with 'phoenix girdle ornaments': they were found on carriages, and I have added 'carriage' to the translation.

The importance of such riddling verse is two-fold. The poem gives a remarkably vivid and immediate experience that defamiliarizes the natural world. And, secondly, this density of meaning was useful to poets like Li Shangyin (813-858) and others of the Tang. Poems didn't have to yield their meaning immediately but needed imaginative effort from the reader. To compensate for Chinese verse features that do not come across, and to pull the translation together, I have broken the seven character lines into tetrameters tightly rhymed aa bb etc.

49. (UN)REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: Dreaming Heaven

The hare is old, the toad is cold:  
the sky is by its colour told.

The cloud-encumbered tower falls  
half-open: whiteness slants the walls.

The jade-wheel moon is as the dew,  
in rolling incandescent hue.

The phoenix carriage pendants meet  
each other in the scented street.

Golden dust in water speaks  
of three Immortal Mountain peaks.

Changes that in centuries sigh  
are like a horse that gallops by.

Gazing from the distance spoke  
of Qi's nine spots of misty smoke.

What ocean stream is taken up  
and drained within a single cup?



## 50. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: Qin Taoyu: Late Tang

### 貧女 PIN NU

蓬門未識綺羅香 擬託良媒益自傷  
誰愛風流高格調 共憐時世儉梳妝  
敢將十指誇鍼巧 不把雙眉鬥畫長  
苦恨年年壓金線 為他人作嫁衣裳

Qin Taoyu was a poet of the late Tang Dynasty, whose birth and death dates are unknown. He was born to a family of martial arts enthusiast, and his father was an army general. He was taken up by the powerful eunuch Tian Linz, and served as a staff member, a minister and a judge of salt and iron. After Huang Chao's rebellion took Chang'an, Qin went to Shu from Emperor Xi Zong, and was awarded a scholarship in the second year of Zhonghe (882). Tian Linz also promoted him to be a minister of the Ministry of Public Works and a judge of the Divine Strategy Army. His marital status is not known but he was called "Qiao eunuch" by contemporaries. He is best known for *The Poor Girl* poem here.

The Chinese read character in the face, and eyebrows are an 'organ of longevity' indicating health and vigour. Long eyebrows, for example, show the capacity for lots of friends. The poem is otherwise clear and needs no commentary.

The translation is rhymed abaa baaa, reasonably close to the aaba baxa of the original, though I have again split the seven-character lines into tetrameters.

50. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: The Poor Girl

The girl from this poor, threadbare home,  
    has never owned a fragrant dress,  
but hastes to marriage go-between  
    although the match will make her grieve.  
She loves good things, and has acquired  
    an eye for fashion's plumed excess.  
But she, alas, will share hard times,  
    and, frugally, make do with less.

She'd thought that her ten-finger skill  
    would earn what talent should receive,  
and hereabouts there's not a soul  
    who has what those fine brows profess,  
yet she goes stitching year on year  
    the threads of gold in bitterness,  
fashioning the sumptuous things  
    that others marry in and bless.

51. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: Liu Changqing (709-785)

薛六柳八二员外

LUI CHANG QING JIANG ZHOU ZHONG BIE

|         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 生涯岂料承优诏 | 世事空知学醉歌 |
| 江上月明胡雁过 | 淮南木落楚山多 |
| 寄身且喜沧洲近 | 顾影无如白发何 |
| 今日龙钟人共弃 | 媿君犹遣慎风波 |

Liu Changqing, courtesy name Wenfang, was a Chinese poet and politician whose life is not well documented. He was born in the city of Xuancheng, though the family came from Hejian. Most of his youth was spent in the city of Luoyang. Liu obtained his *jinshi* title in the 750s, and he became governor of Suizhou in Henan province in 780.

Liu's poems were not much praised in his lifetime, but were recognised as representative of the period by later generations. He excelled in 5-character lines, and 11 of his poems were collected in the popular anthology 'Three Hundred Tang Poems'.

Hai is the river now connecting Beijing to Tianjin and the Bohai Sea, i.e. northern China. Chu probably means south somewhere: the ancient lands of Chu occupied the lower Yangtze basin. Jiangzhou is in present-day Guangxi Province. The original is rhymed xaab xaxb. I have here been able to render the seven-character lines as hexameters, and rhyme them simply abab cdcd.

51. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: Bidding Farewell Again in  
Jiangzhou

It comes a little late, I think, in my career  
to hope preferment comes, or probe the reasons why.  
I'll drink a bit and sing, will hope to find the year  
with high Chu hills, and moonlight, how the wild geese fly.

Besides, there is the sea, Hai River, autumn leaves  
that fall, a friend to one whose hair is largely gone.  
I have that futile peace, for which no stranger grieves,  
and am ashamed this prudence aids my travelling on.

52. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU Lin Bu (967-1028)

山園小梅 SHANG YUAN XIAO MEI

|         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 衆芳搖落獨暄妍 | 占盡風情向小園 |
| 疏影橫斜水清淺 | 暗香浮動月黃昏 |
| 霜禽欲下先偷眼 | 粉蝶如知合斷魂 |
| 幸有微吟可相狎 | 不須檀板共金樽 |

Lin Bu was a minor poet of the Northern Song dynasty who spent the later part of his life as a recluse by the West Lake in Hangzhou. His mastery of verse and solitude won him nationwide fame, for which no prestigious and well-paid government post was sufficient recompense.

Lin Bu created a new genre in poems (*yongwu shi*: poems on things) that not only described the outward appearance of things but also looked at their inner essence and significance. The plum tree, with its early white blossoms flowering among the snow, became a very popular theme, especially among the scholarly class that admired austerity and self-restraint. Plum blossom became a staple of the so-called bird-and-flower division of Chinese painting. The attitude is also typical of the Song dynasty, which shied away from the overt expression of highly wrought emotion in favour of the mundane and everyday aspects of life, which could accommodate a good deal of personal thought and reflection.

The original is rhymed aaab abxb, and the translation is abab cdcd.

52. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU Small Plum Tree in a Garden in  
the Hills No.1

With warmth and beauty it alone  
survives the other flowers' fall.  
It fills the lapsing wind with thoughts  
throughout the modest garden ways.  
Sparse shadows on a water  
clear and with no depth at all:  
there's fragrance, darkness and the moon  
here muddled in a golden haze.

The frost-afflicted bird approves  
but first looks down and warily,  
a truth for which the pollen-dusted  
butterflies would mope and pine.  
But happily it's chanted words  
that make for mutual harmony:  
no need to close up shutters, nor  
to share a gold-rimmed glass of wine.

53. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU Lu  
You (1125-1209)

遊山西村 YOU SHAN XI CUN

莫笑農家臘酒渾 豐年留客足鷄豚  
山重水複疑無路 柳暗花明又一村

簫鼓追隨春社近 衣冠簡朴古風存  
從今若許閑乘月 拄杖無時夜扣門

Lu You was deeply involved in the Jurchen-Song Wars. He was born on a riverboat in 1125, a year before the northern capital fell to the Jurchen, and China became divided between the Jin Empire and the Southern Song. Lu's family fled south to safety, and Lu was brought up with his cousin Tang Wan, who was quiet but loved literature. The two married when Lu was 20, and lived very happily, but when no children arrived, Lu was compelled by his mother find someone else. Though Wan married a nobleman, and Lu someone from the Wang clan, the heartbreak was obvious to both parties and forms a love story famous in China.

The poem was written in 1167, when Lu, dismissed from office for supporting the war against the Jurchen, which had not gone well, returned to the country. It's a simple poem, but well known, with lines 2-4 being particularly celebrated. Lines 3-4 are often taken in a wider sense, i.e. not only to find villages tucked away in the mountains, but a path through life generally. The original is rhymed aaxa xaxx, and the translation aaaa bcbc.

Lu is not a poet whose character and outlook comes over immediately in each piece, but someone much more discursive and non-committal, who was simply observing the world around him in the nearly 10,000 poems he wrote. The original is rhymed aaxa xaxx; the translation runs aaaa bcbc.

53. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: LUSHI: An  
Outing to Villages West of the Mountains

Do not demean the farmer's murky,  
all-too-homely winter brew.  
In good years pigs and chicken give  
enough to serve the guest his due.  
Though hills and cutback rivers show  
it's hard to find a clear way though,  
with shady willows, vivid flowers  
another village comes in view.

Pipes and drummers follow on  
and springtime's festival is soon.  
Their clothes and caps are redolent  
of styles in long-gone times before,  
and if you grant me leave I'll take  
advantage of the leisured moon:  
and, leant on staff, will gladly come  
at all hours knocking on your door.



## 54. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU: WUJUE: Xie Tiao (464-99)

玉階怨 YU JIE YUAN

夕殿下珠簾      流螢飛復息  
長夜縫羅衣      思君此何極

Xie Tiao was born in Yangxia County, Henan, into the Southern Qi kingdom in the Northern and Southern Dynasties period. The family was nobility; his father was an assistant minister and his mother was a princess of the Songwen Empire. Xie seems to have been energetic and hard working as an official, but was eventually slandered, arrested and died in prison.

Nearly 200 of his poems survive. Most are pentasyllabic, and extol the beauties of nature, being famous for their details and vivid description. Poets of this *Yongmang* reign (483-493) of the Qi dynasty devoted themselves to creating euphony by balancing tones, devising rules that formed the basis of Regulated *Shi* poetry of the Tang dynasty.

This is a famous piece, written well before the Tang dynasty, but already showing that refined elegance we have met previously in Ban Jiezu's Song of Resentment (Poem 18). Xie Tiao's style in fact became the model for court poetry in the Liang dynasty (502-557).

The original is rhymed xaaa, but I here used assonance more and slant rhyme: aaaa.

54. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU : WUJUE: Jade Stairs Lament

At evening, beaded curtains in the hall  
are drawn. The fireflies, having flown, then fall.  
I'm sewing at this flimsy dress till dawn,  
with not forgotten hopes of you, my lord.

55. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU: WUJUE: Li Bai (701-62)

静夜思 JING YE SI

床前明月光      疑是地上霜  
舉頭望明月      低頭思故鄉

Li Bai had the ability to make the most difficult things seem easy, as translators know to their cost with this little piece. It has proved refractory for many who naturally want to carry over the parallelism, between the moon in the sky and the earth down here, the present and the past, the chill of hoarfrost and the warmth of home remembered.

The poem is outwardly simple, and is taught schoolchildren across China. The original rhyme scheme is aaxa. If we want to preserve that parallelism, we can write:

Before my bed the moonlight shines, although  
it may be frost on ground for all I know.  
I raise my eyes to see the brilliant moon,  
but lower them to home lost long ago.

But a stronger poem is made by making the last line less facile, as in the version overleaf.

55. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU: WUJUE: Quiet Night Thoughts

Before my bed the moonlight shines, although  
it may be frost on ground for all I know.

I raise my head but flinch from that full moon,  
which speaks of home as heart was long ago.

56. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU: WUJUE: Li Bai (701-62)

玉階怨 YU JIE YUAN

玉階生白露, 夜久侵羅襪

卻下水晶簾, 玲瓏望秋月

Another of Li Bai's poems that is well known and widely translated. The original is rhymed *aaxa*, rather than my *abab*, and follows the Wujue structure that is so difficult to convey in English, unless at the expense of naturalness and near-impossible rhymes. The word-for-word rendering is:

jade stairs grow white dew  
night time invade gauze stocking  
retreat under water crystal curtain  
tinkle jewel gaze autumn moon

In lines 1 and 4 the sense of movement is down ('grow') and up ('gaze'). In lines 2 and 3 the sense of movement is horizontal ('invade' and 'retreat'). A palace setting is indicated by 'jade' and the subject by 'stocking', i.e. a woman of high status. 'Water' is an allusion to tears, which is picked up the tinkling of the jewel curtain. In China, the autumn moon is a symbol of harmony, abundance and good luck, and a time for family members to reunite — clearly not the case here: the woman, perhaps an imperial consort, has been abandoned. The 'jewel' applies to both the tears and the moon, hence my choice of 'brimming' as an epithet of moon.

56. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU: WUJUE: Jade Stairs Lament

A white dew clothes the palace stairs: the night  
will chill her fine silk stockings all too soon.  
She sees through tear-gemmed curtains, out of sight,  
the spectacle of brimming autumn moon.

## 57. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU: WUJUE: Wang Wei (701-61)

鹿柴 LU CHAI

空山不见人 但闻人语响。

返景入深林, 复照青苔上。

The poem is commonly seen through Buddhist notions of impermanence and emptiness. Interpretations have the first couplet seeing the world as it really is, and the second with the light returning to purposefully illuminate the moss.

I tend to think Wang Wei is again concerned with shifting perspectives in this much-translated piece. The rendering here respects the basic structure (4 lines of five characters), the rhyme scheme, and the extended parallelism of the original Chinese, but discloses these extra features:

Lines 3 and 4 repeat in reverse the meaning in lines 1 and 2: the world of the senses is an illusion. 'Overhead' repeats in reverse 'overheard'.

Presence contrasts with non-presence: clear in the first line, blurred in the second, more so in the third, and then sharply defined in the clear visual image of the fourth — achieved by sound patterning (e.g. diphthongs in line 2, 'e' sounds in line 3).

Ying alternate with yang elements. Permanence of mountain rising from impermanence (emptiness). That definite emptiness (no one) morphing into vague presence (voices). Dissolving again (sense is lost in darkness) and then regrouped in a definite image (suncast in mosses). Vertical movement (looking up at mountain) pass to horizontal (voices heard followed by re-entering) and thence back to vertical (overhead).

Rhyme in the original is *abab*, and *abab* in the translation.

57. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU : WUJUE: Deer Stockade

Emptiness. Mountains. No one unless  
in these low voices overheard.  
Sense falling into forest depths,  
green in sun-cast mosses overhead.



58. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU: WUJUE: Wang Zhihuan (688-742)

登鶴雀樓 DENG GUAN QUE LOU

白日依山盡 黃河入海流  
欲窮千里目 更上一層樓

Wang Zhihuan was a poet of the early Tang, famous for his *Jueju* quatrains describing the frontier country. Only six poems survive, but all are minor classics.

Wang was born in Jingyang in Bingzhou (now Taiyuan in Shanxi) and is described as talented and generous. While in office, he married the third daughter of the magistrate of Hengshui County, but was later slandered and left government service. Nonetheless, he was appointed as lieutenant of Wen'an County in the last year of his life. He died at Wen'an, and was buried in his ancestral tomb at Beimang Mountain in Luoyang County.

The poems are deceptively simple, but commonly employ Buddhist concepts of impermanence, balance and enlightenment. Crane Tower, located in what is now Yongji in Shanxi Province, commanded a wide view of a bend in the Yangtze River. The first couplet sets the scene in the physical world. The second, which ostensibly says that further distances can be seen by climbing higher in the pagoda, is of course alluding to the Buddhist view of enlightenment. I have rhymed this poem as aaaa: the original is xaxa.

58. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU: WUJUE: Climbing Crane Tower

White sun behind the mountain, sets, is gone.  
Yellow River joins the ocean, flowing on.  
To gaze the further thousand miles beyond  
needs gain what one more floor looks down upon.

## 59. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU : QJJUE : Du Mu (803-52)

遣懷 QIAN HUAI

落魄江南載酒行 楚腰腸斷掌中輕

十年一覺揚州夢 贏得青樓薄倖名

Du Mu was born in Chang'an into an elite family of declining fortunes. He passed the *jinshi* examinations at the age of 25, and held a succession of minor posts associated with literature and censorship. To avoid the factional disputes between Li Gan and Zheng Zhu, he asked to be moved to Loyang in 835, so avoiding the purge that followed the Sweet Dew Incident later in the year. Many positions in various places followed, but the Sweet Dew Incident (a failed attempt to limit the power of eunuchs) seems to have prevented anything very senior. The disappointment showed in Du Mu's work.

Du Mu, a major poet writing in the golden age of Tang poetry was skilled in many styles. He is best known for of sensual, lyrical quatrains featuring historical sites or romantic situations, and often on themes of separation, decadence, or impermanence. The style blends classical imagery and diction with striking juxtapositions, colloquialisms, or other wordplay. Du Mu also wrote long narrative poems. *Dancing careless on my hands* is an allusion to the great beauty Zhao Feiyan, who was so light that she could dance on the emperor's palm. *Yangzhou* in the poem is a euphemism for the courtesan quarters.

I have rhymed the translation as *aaaa*: the original is *aaaa*.

59. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU : QJJUE : Dispelling Sorrow

In wine I sunk my soul: went south through river lands,  
broke hearts of Chu girls dancing careless on my hands.  
Now, ten years on, I wake from Yangzhou dreams: it stands  
not well to be a heartless name with courtesans.

60. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: JEJU: QIJUE: Li Bai:  
(701-762)

黄鹤楼送孟浩然之广陵

HUANG HE LOU SONG MENG HAO RAN ZHI  
GUANG LING

故人西辞黄鹤楼 烟花三月下扬州  
孤帆远影碧空尽 唯见长江天际流。

A celebrated little piece by Li Bai on taking leave of his great friend Meng Haoran (Poems 10A 10B) on his 400 mile journey down the Yangtze to Yangzhou. Meng was some ten years older than Li, and in some ways a mentor to poets of the high Tang period.

Mist and flowers is an allusion to peach and cherry flowers, i.e. springtime. The Yellow Crane Tower (dating from 223 AD but rebuilt in 1981) stands in the present-day city of Wuhan, Hubei Province, and gives a splendid view of the river. It was one of the four great towers or pagodas of China, at a site seen as sacred by Daoists. Yangzhou is located in Jiangsu Province on the northern banks of the Yangtze river (called Changjiang in the poem). It was a wealthy area adjoining the earlier capital city of Nanjing.

The poem has seen many translations, some departing rather far from the text to make a decent poem: a practice that is no doubt contentious but should be judged by results. In this rendering, where the Yangtze also stands for the flood of tears, the poetry is obtained by matching pause and thought in the flexible hexameter used to represent the seven-character lines. The original is rhymed aaxa: the translation is abba.

60. REGULATED SHI POETRY:

JINTISHI: JEJU: QIJUE : Sending Off Meng Haoran to  
Guangling at Yellow Crane Tower

Old friend: from Yellow Crane Pagoda you have gone  
by way of three-month's mists and flowers, to far Yangzhou.  
The one sail fades and dwindles to a dot below  
the heavens of nothing but the long Jiang, flowing on.

61. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: JEJU: QJJUE: Bai Juyi (772–846)

读老子 DU LAO ZI

言者不如知者默 此语吾闻于老君  
若道老君是知者 缘何自著五千文

Bai Juyi had a long and successful career as a Tang official, eventually serving as governor of three important provinces. His family was poor but scholarly, and Bai Juyi passed the *jinshi* examinations in 800. After some minor appointments, and demotions, he was made governor of Hangzhou, then of Sizhou, and finally of Henan, in which Luoyang is situated. The remaining thirteen years of his life saw various appointments, but most were nominal: he had effectively retired.

Bai wrote extended narratives but was best known for his low-key poems written in an easy style, many of them with political and social criticism. Such was the emphasis on ready comprehension that Bai would rewrite anything that couldn't be immediately understood by his servants.

This is a mischievous little piece poking fun at Laozi, Lao Tzu (etc., the name is spelled variously), the 'old man', who was a Chinese philosopher and writer, reputedly the author of the *Dao De Ching*, the founder of philosophical Daoism, and indeed a deity in religious Daoism. Until recently he was seen as a contemporary of Confucius, but western scholarship has brought his dates forward to the 4th century BC, and even doubted that the work comes from a single hand. It hardly matters for this poem, which is wondering why the master who distrusted lengthy expositions, and often preferred paradoxes, conundrums and pithy sayings, got around to writing so much. The original is rhymed *abab*.

61. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: JEJU: QJJUE:  
Spending Time with Laozi

The unaware will speak: the knowing stay  
more silent — so the old man would convey.  
Yet surely if Laozi really knew the way  
why would he have five thousand words to say?



62. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: JEJU: QJJUE:  
Cheng Hao (1032-85)

秋月 QUI YUE

清溪流过碧山头，空水澄鲜一色秋；  
隔断红尘三十里，白云红叶两悠悠。

Cheng Hao is better known as philosopher and politician than poet, but, like all educated Chinese, could turn out charming pieces when required. Hao was born into a family of magistrates, passed the imperial examinations in 1057, and was successively appointed administrative clerk in Hu County, Shaanxi, administrative clerk in Shangyuan County (now in Nanjing), administrative director in Zezhou, minister of ceremony, Censor, tax and tariff official, ceremony minister to the military, and to various other positions.

But Hao was a good deal more than successful bureaucrat, and, with his younger brother, pioneered the Song revival of Neo-Confucian cosmology. This was a dualistic philosophy, dividing everything between the tangible and intangible. It was also a pantheistic philosophy, seeing everything intangible (god, human nature, feelings, actions, movement and even chance) as of a common unified and inwardly related nature. One well-known quote is: 'Outside dao there are no things and outside things there is no dao. . . Dao is the ruler of events we call god to emphasize the wonderful mystery of principle in ten thousand things. . . Dao is function, human nature and human destiny.'

A beautifully observed vignette of an autumn day. The translation is rhymed abab, the original is aaxa.

62. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: JEJU: QJJUE:  
Autumn Moon

Blue mountain tops and little rivulets. The sky  
and water clear: one colour all this autumn day.  
The dust of thirty li now looks like pinkish dye.  
White cloud and tawny leaf: both distant, far away.

63. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: JEJU: QJJUE: Lu  
You (1125-1209)

秋夜將曉, 出籬門迎涼有感

QIU YE JIANG XIAO, CHU LI MEN YING LIANG  
YOU GAN

三萬里河東入海      五千仞嶽上摩天  
遺民淚盡胡塵裏      南望王師又一年

Lu You learned swordplay, became immersed in war strategy and pledged his literary talents to the defence of the country from the Jurchen. He passed the imperial examinations on his second attempt, at the age of 29, but was prevented by nobleman privilege from immediately assuming office. An honorary *jinshi* degree was conferred on him by the Xiaozong emperor in 1163, but his opposition to Jurchen appeasement seriously impeded his career. After several promotions and demotions, Lu retired in 1190 to live in his hometown Shaoxing (now in Zhejiang province). From here he traveled extensively, making observations on local events and customs that feature in his voluminous poems. He became friendly with Fan Chengda and adopted a rather bohemian life style.

Lu wrote some ten thousand poems, including those in the *Shi* and *Ci* genres. This piece is lamenting the failure of the Southern Song to rid the northern provinces of the Jurchen. The river referred to is the Yellow River, which drains the heartlands of Chinese civilization, lost to the Jurchen in 1127. The mountain, again unspecified, is the sacred Hua Mountain. In fact, after a good deal of bloodshed, these fierce tribesmen rapidly became Sinicised, forming the Jin dynasty (1115–1234) that ruled an extensive area until overthrown by the even more formidable Mongols.

The original is rhymed abab: the translation is abab.

63. REGULATED SHI POETRY: JINTISHI: JEJU: QJJUE: As  
Dawn Approached on an Autumn Night.

For thirty thousand li, the river  
flows on eastward to the sea.  
The sacred mountain rises five  
thousand ren to reach the sky.  
Our people ever drop their tears  
in dusts of foreign tyranny:  
they for our army gaze on south,  
and yet another year goes by.

64. REGULATED SHI POETRY: SONG: Fan Chengda (AD 1126-1193)

四時田園雜興 SI SHI TIAN YUAN ZA XING

采菱辛苦廢犁鋤 血指流丹鬼質枯  
無力買田聊種水 近來湖面亦收租

Fan Chengda was born into poverty, but, passing the *jinshi* degree in 1154, began a long career in officialdom, becoming particularly known for his geographical treatises on southern China's topography and commercial products.

Fan wrote in both the Regulated *Shi* quatrains and the *Ci* genres, but is best known for a series of sixty quatrains which he wrote in 1186, following retirement from high office at the Southern Song Court. The poems show a great love of the rural life, à la Tian Qian, but also keen eye for detail that does not overlook the peasant's hard toil to meet the tax-collector's demands.

Unlike Lu You's poems, which sometimes sentimentalised rural life, Fan saw matters clearly: this poem is one of a series on the peasants' hardships. I have had to represent the original 7 character line by two tetrameters, end-rhymed on the second tetrameter as aaaa. The original is rhymed aaaa.

64. REGULATED SHI POETRY: SONG: Reflections through  
the Seasons: Summer

Picking water chestnuts is hard work,  
    where plow and hoe are left behind.  
Our bloodstained fingers hurt so much  
    we scarce belong to humankind.  
But having swapped the land for what  
    we might at last afford, we find  
the issue from the nearby lake  
    will now be taxed in equal kind.

65. JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: MING-QING: Yan Liu (17-18th Century).

夏日山居 XIA RI SHAN JU

山靜偏宜暑 松風入夢清  
危岩飛雨色 古樹咽蟬聲

刺繡年來課 看雲物外情  
不知塵市遠 聊為證無生

Little is known of the Yan Liu, but she belonged to the gentry class and lived in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, i.e. in the middle Qing dynasty. Her poems are simple reflections on everyday life, and many are styled on Buddhist themes reminiscent of Wang Wei (701-61). In this poem the speaker is sat at her embroidery, looking out at the scene around her, but is not troubled by notions of impermanence or rebirth that would have concerned the Buddhist poets of the Tang.

The poem is a reasonable stab at *Wulu* verse. It has the required rhymes (xaba baxa: abbb bbab in the translation) and tonal patterns. Also parallelism on the second and third couplets, in syntax at least. Yan has indeed borrowed Wang phrases: 松風入 (pine wind enter: the wind through groves of pine trees in the translation), 看雲 (watch cloud: watching clouds in the translation), 咽 (choke or sob: assail in the translation). It's a simple poem reflecting the ease and somnolence of summer days away from the dust and turmoil of city life.

65. JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: MING-QING: On a Summer  
Day: Dwelling in the Mountains.

A mountain calm appropriate to summer heat.  
The wind through groves of pine trees kindles dreams: one sees  
the rain clothe dangerous cliffs in various, far-off hues;  
and then the dry cicada sound assails old trees.

For years embroidery has been my fond excuse  
for watching clouds form distant patterns, as they please,  
beyond all feeling. Far are dust and markets, in retreat  
the proofs of our rebirth disputing mind's own ease.



66. JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: MING-QING : Gan Lirou  
(1743-1819).

閨夜 GUI YE

|       |            |
|-------|------------|
| 芳情傳翰墨 | 良友擅詩詞 (拜璜) |
| 琴瑟鳴香韻 | 琳琅捧玉姿 (如玉) |
| 鐘聲敲竹靜 | 月影上簾遲 (拜璜) |
| 欲竟千秋業 | 深宵未寐時 (如玉) |

Gan Lirou was a gentry woman living in present-day Jiangxi province in the high Qing, a period of peace and prosperity. She wrote an autobiography in poetry, arranging her carefully selected sequence of over 1,000 poems ('Drafts from the Pavilion for Chanting About Snow') is arranged in four chapters. The first, entitled 'Drafts After Embroidering', covers the period before marriage when she learnt the skills that would be expected of her. It was a happy period but interrupted by the deaths of her elder brother, and then of her only sister. After the three-year mourning period for her mother, Gan was married to Xu Yuelu, a match her parents had made. The second, entitled 'Drafts After Cooking', covers the ten years of a companionate marriage, when she served her parents-in-law in an exemplary fashion and gave birth to two sons and two daughters.

The poem follows the prescribed form for *Wulu* verse in the semantic sense. The first couplet is non-parallel. The second and third couplets are parallel. The final couplet is non-parallel. The tone patterns are pleasantly varied, but do not follow strict Tang rules that insist on patterns of level and oblique tones forming mirror reflections. Couplets 1-2 and 5-6 were written by husband 'Baihuang' and the others by his wife 'Ruyu'. The original is rhymed xaxa xaxa; the translation is abab cdcd.

66. JINTISHI: LUSHI: WULU: MING-QING : Night in the  
Boudoir.

The ink transmits such fragrant sentiments  
when my good friend is skilled in every word. (*Baihuang*)  
And marriage harmonies are instruments  
when jade-like are the tinkling phrases heard. (*Ruyu*)

A temple bell among the hushed bamboos:  
how slow the moon on shutters seems to creep. (*Baihuang*)  
Desire: a thousand years should have their dues.  
How deep the night is now but not for sleep. (*Ruyu*)

67. JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: WULU: MING-QING: Li  
Mengyang (1475-1531)

秋望 QIU WANG

|         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 黃河水繞漢邊牆 | 河上秋風雁幾行 |
| 客子過壕追野馬 | 將軍弰箭射天狼 |
| 黃塵古渡迷飛輓 | 白月橫空冷戰場 |
| 聞道朔方多勇略 | 只今誰是郭汾陽 |

Li Mengyang was the leader of an important group of poets, the so-called 'Archaist school of Former Seven and Latter Seven Masters', who dominated sixteenth-century poetry at the Ming capital of Beijing. They looked to the past for style and inspiration. One famously remarked 'prose must be that of the Qin and Han, and poetry must be of the high Tang.' The demotic styles of the Yuan poetry were anathema, of course, and even the Song was thought too personal and discursive. What they sought was the grand, expansive vision, affective intensity and powerful imagery of the Tang, most particularly that of Du Fu. The revival was not generally successful, however, and 17<sup>th</sup> century poets aimed once more at personal expression in simple language.

This poem follows the prescribed rules of Regulated Shi, though the rhyming is a little loose: axaxxa (ababcdcd in the translation). The opening couplet conjures up the border distances in their historic setting, one emphasized by the flights of migrating geese. In the second couplet we picture the attack of steppe peoples, and the answering shot at the sky wolf (Sirius) leading them. The third couplet emphasizes the timelessness of these events and the fourth brings us to the present, with some doubts as to whether the inspiring Guo Ziyi (697-781) of the Shuofang commandery is to be found today. As expected of 'revival' work, the rules extend to the lines in detail. The two central couplets, lines 3-6, for example, are parallel but show syntactic, semantic and tonal contrasts.

67. JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: WULU: MING-QING: Li  
Autumn Gaze

The Yellow River winds along  
the stout-walled limits of the Han.  
Above the autumn wind and river  
scattered lines of wild geese fly.  
Pursued, invaders cross the moats  
as only steppe-born ponies can,  
The general with his bow and arrow  
shoots the wild wolf in the sky.

To yellow dust at ancient fords  
go chariots and warriors.  
The moon stares down on battlefields  
where all is cold and void again.  
Shuofang has many plans  
that brilliant victory confers,  
but who is Guo Fenyang now  
among our generals, that man then?

68. JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: WULU: MING-QING Gan Lirou (1743-1819).

偶吟 OU YIN

閑披牙軸啟窗扉      捧卷臨風對夕暉  
放眼看來天地小      回頭認到昨今非

理禪始覺心無垢      書葉方知筆有機  
萬籟寂時人意靜      月移清影上屏幃

Gan Lirou was a gentry woman living in present-day Jiangxi province in the high Qing. Wife and husband both wrote poems to each other (and gave themselves courtesy names: Tuyu (Gan) and Baihuang (Xu). Her husband then died when away from home and studying, and Gan was left to bring up her children and care for her mother-in-law. This third chapter is entitled 'Drafts by the One Who Has Not Died'. The fourth chapter, entitled 'Drafts by One Who Lives in Retirement with Her Son' when she was able to enjoy a leisurely old age with a son who was appointed to an official post after passing the *jinshi* examinations.

Whereas men's poetry was a normal expression of the educated classes, indeed expected, woman's poetry was not encouraged. Women poets therefore wrote privately, to describe their personal thoughts and situations, a field of study that is now being researched in some depth.

As is usually necessary with longer lines, I have broken the seven characters into two tetrameters, and rhymed the tetrameters: an approach that has its dangers but here produces an evocative little piece that is practically word for word nonetheless. The original is rhymed aaxa xaxa. The rules governing parallel and non-parallel sense in the lines are followed by Gan's poem, but the tone patterns only very approximately in this late Qing piece.

68. JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: WULU: Idle Song

Idly, with an ivory scroll,  
I let the window leaf unroll.  
And with the work in hand I turn  
where wind and sunset colours burn.  
And find that eye that wanders free  
will show how small the world we see.  
And looking backwards all too plain  
the errors past we make again.

Through meditating we may find  
the undefiled and tranquil mind.  
In this the brush will hold a wealth  
of poise in pausing on itself,  
and in ten thousand sounds is sought  
the quietness that is one's thought,  
and so in absence moon has been  
a shadowed presence on the screen.

69. JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: WULU: MING-QING: Widow  
Mengyue. Late Qing

病中詠 BING ZHONG YONG

不覺指纖嫌塵重      那知肩瘦訝衣長  
心虛淡嚼詩書味      室靜頻聞翰墨香

琴怪出弦音自古      詩清下筆句多狂  
病中滋味得真趣      物外幽閑細細嘗

Widow Mengyue was another Manchu poet who apparently lost her husband early. Her poems comment over a long life thereafter about a woman's everyday thoughts and duties.

A charming and thoughtful little poem that evokes the quiet domesticity of Mengyue's world, where, far from feeling abandoned, she is content to muse (literally 'chew': 嚼 jiáo) on the Book of Odes (詩: shī) and the Book of History (書: shū). That intellectual discernment fuses with the smell of ink and the motion of the brush as she claims that her uninhibited poems are akin to zither music of ancient times — an attitude that leads her to savour the finer things (細嘗: xì xì cháng: literally 'fine fine taste').

I have again replaced the seven-character line by tetrameters, but here used end rhymes in an abab cccc scheme. The original is rhymed aaxa baba.

69. JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: WULU: MING-QING: Recited  
While Sick

So frail my fingers are, the dust  
    itself seems heavy on the skin  
Surprised at length of clothes  
    I hadn't known my limbs would shrink  
Mind clear, I'll muse on *Odes* and *History*,  
    quietly let the thoughts sink in.  
and in a tranquil chamber I  
    will often sense the smell of ink.

From ancient times the zither's made  
    unusual music with its strings.  
and from the brush in poetry  
    so much of truth's wild candour springs.  
Such is the mind's own nourishing  
    the flavor of this illness brings,  
that in secluded idleness  
    I savour more the finer things.



70. JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: WULU: MING-QING: Lin Zexu  
(1785-1850)

示家人 SHI JIA REN

力微任重久神疲， 再竭衰庸定不支；  
苟利国家生死以， 岂因祸福避趋之；  
謫居正是君恩厚， 养拙刚于戍卒宜。  
戏于山妻谈故事， 试吟“断送老头皮。”

Lin was born in Houguan in present-day Fuzhou, and proved a brilliant student. He was awarded the advanced *jinshi* grade in the official examinations in 1811, gained admission to the Hanlin Academy, and then rose rapidly through grades of the provincial service. He became Governor-General of Hunan and Hubei in 1837, where he opposed the introduction of opium by the western powers, indeed writing to Queen Victoria on the matter.

Lin was an energetic opponent of the opium trade, and initially had the emperor's full backing. He arrested dealers, confiscated opium pipes and in 1839 obliged merchants to surrender nearly 1.2 million kg of the drug. When the First Opium War followed, and China was defeated by British naval forces, Lin was made the scapegoat and exiled to remote Xinjiang, where he made a study of Muslim customs. Rehabilitated, Lin was appointed Governor-General of Shaan-Gan (Shaanxi-Gansu) in 1845 and of Yun-Gui (Yunnan-Guizhou) in 1847. These postings were less prestigious than his previous Canton one, however, and Lin's career never fully recovered from his moral stance. Lin was not primarily a poet, and the piece featured simply illustrates the wry dexterity with which Lin celebrated his dismissal. As usual, I have represented the seven-character line by a double tetrameter, but generally followed the original rhyme scheme: aaaa xaaa is shown as aaaa aaaa.

70. JINTISHI: LUSHI: QILU: WULU: MING-QING: Lin Zexu  
(1785-1850): To My Family

I've long been tired of such a heavy  
burden on this spirit's frame:  
Another task would bring exhaustion,  
an end to things in all but name.  
And if it helped I'd give the life  
on which my country has its claim,  
immediately, avoiding nothing,  
or be the very much to blame.

The imperial word I see as kind;  
I'm pleased that my demotion came.  
More clumsiness is surely not  
so hard as play the soldier's game:  
My wife was given some wild story  
about this mountainous fall from fame,  
that to the chancellery I gave  
a head now venerable but tame.

71. REGULATED SHI POETRY: MING-QING: Gao Qi  
(1336-1374)

寻胡隐君 XUN HU YIN JUN

渡水复渡水， 看花还看花。  
春风江上路， 不觉到君家。

Gao Qi, courtesy name Jidi, pseudonym Qingqiuzi, was an early Ming poet, born and raised on the shores of Wusong River, north of the town of Puli near Suzhou.

The first Ming emperor, uncultivated but by no means unintelligent, was paranoid from the first, quick to suspect disloyalty when none was intended. He scrutinised his court's correspondence, and punished supposed transgressions severely. One on whom his disfavour fell was Gao Qi, who had edited a history of the preceding Yuan dynasty, produced as was customary with a change of dynasty, if only to show how the Yuan rulers had forfeited the Mandate of Heaven. Gao survived this test (as most didn't) and was promoted to the post of Deputy Finance Minister, a post he unwisely declined, remarking that he had no competence in such matters. He retired from service in the time-honoured way of poets, to the Blue Hill of Puli, where he chose to teach students for a living. Such an affront to imperial wishes was not long overlooked. In 1374, Gao was accused of 'conspiracy in rebellion' and executed in the manner of traitors, his body being sliced into eight parts.

Though he came to an unfortunate end — as did many of the Yuan-Ming poets — Gao was recognised as one of the great Ming poets, a master of Regulated *Shi* poetry. In the translation I have adopted a pentameter for the five character lines, and followed the original rhyme scheme: abab as abab.

71. REGULATED SHI POETRY: MING-QING: Looking for  
Hermit Hu

I cross the water, still the water flows.  
I see the flower, and yet the flower is shown.  
Along, above the road, the spring wind goes,  
and, unaware, I reach the hermit's home.

## 72. REGULATED SHI POETRY: Gan Lirou (1743-1819)

### 咏圓月七歲作 YONG YUAN YUE QI SUI ZUO

誰使吳剛斧 分明削正圓  
如何望未久 缺處又成弦

An unpretentious little piece (rhymed abab in original and translation) that illustrates what was expected of the educated classes. It was written by a young woman of high status in the long and prosperous reign of the Qian Long emperor (1736-95), when China was at the height of its powers. The original is rhymed abab, which I have followed in the translation.

Careers were made outside the home, but court preferment brought its dangers. We noted Gao Qi's troubles in poem 71, but matters were hardly better in the early years of the succeeding Qing dynasty. An example is the case of Zihuang Tinglong. He was a rich merchant who, on his own initiative, hired scholars to prepare an unofficial but by no means flattering history of the Ming. It was presented to the first Qing emperor, who unfortunately found odd mistakes, minor and unintentional, often no more than the careless carrying over of Ming forms of address, but enough to initiate a witch-hunt. On authors, printers, those who had purchased copies of the work, officials who had not reported the matter, anyone vaguely connected, fell the imperial disfavour. All male members of the extended families concerned were executed and the female made slaves of Manchu households.

Even the much lauded *Complete Library* of 1792, a compilation of 3,470 works and more than 360 million words, which preserved much poetry that would otherwise have been lost, also repressed and destroyed anything inimical to Manchu rule. Some 7,000 works are noted only by title, and all copies of some 10,000 works are estimated to have been destroyed.

72. REGULATED SHI POETRY: On the Full Moon, Written  
at Age Seven.

Who saw to it that getting Wu Gang's axe  
ensured the moon would make a perfect round?  
Or soon from fullness that the moon backtracks,  
and then is in the thinnest crescent found?

73. REGULATED SHI POETRY: Wang Shizhen (1634-1711)

秦淮雜詩 QIN HUAI ZA SHI

年來腸斷秣陵舟 夢繞秦淮水上樓  
十日雨絲風片裏 濃春煙景似殘秋

Wang Shizhen called himself many names but is probably best known as Wen Jian. He was a native of Xincheng (now Huantai County in Shandong Province) but claimed himself as coming from Jinan. Wang was a distinguished poet and literary scholar in the early Qing Dynasty. He was also an antiquarian, knowledgeable on old books and engravings. His calligraphy resembled that of the Jin Dynasty. During the period of the Kangxi emperor, Wang succeeded Qian Qinyi as the leader of the literary scene, and created the 'theory of divine rhyme in poetry'.

His early poems were clear and lucid, but from middle age grew more expressive. Many poems show such a respect for previous forms that he was called 'Qingxiu Li Yulin'. This poem was written in 1661, when the author, then a magistrate at Yangzhou, went to Wu County on official business. He visited Nanjing on his way back. The Qinhuai River runs through the south of Nanjing, which was the southern Ming capital, destroyed by the Manchus. The elegiac poem, the first of a group of some twenty (later reduced to fourteen) that have long been famous.

This work was inspired by Tang poetry, but employs the concept of *shenyun* (spirit and resonance). Intuitive percept is combined with a personal tone and quiet imagery. The original is rhymed aaba, the translation as aaaa.

73. REGULATED SHI POETRY: Qinhuai: Miscellaneous

It's only memories the years revive  
about us on this Moling boat,  
where on the Qinhuai River here  
the dream-wrapped buildings seem to float.  
For ten days now a silk-soft rain  
and flakes of wind, that might denote  
the rich, lush mists of springtime, but  
with autumn's ending clearly don't.



74. REGULATED SHI POETRY: MING-QING: Yuan Mei (1716-98)

山行雜咏 SHAN XING ZA YONG

十里崎嶇半里平 一峰才送一峰迎  
青山似繭將人裹 不信前頭有路行

Yuan was a prolific poet, writing more than 4,400 poems during his long life, and advocated naturalness and personal express more those who, like Shen Dequin (1673-1769), stressed the didactic function of poetry and the importance of Tang models. Yuan Mei was born in Qiantang in modern Hangzhou to a cultivated family that had not previously held high office. He passed the *jinshi* in 1739, at the age of 23, and was immediately appointed to the Hanlin Academy. From 1742 to 1748, Yuan served as a magistrate in four different provinces, but in 1748, shortly after being assigned to administer a part of Nanjing, he resigned his post and returned home to pursue his literary interests.

Yuan Mei produced a large body of poetry, essays and paintings. His works reflect an interest in Chan Buddhism and the supernatural, and not in the more traditional Daoism and institutional Buddhism. Yuan is most famous for his poetry, described as of 'unusually clear and elegant language', which stressed both personal feeling and technical perfection. This poem is rhymed aaxa, and the translation aaaa.

Yuan was an extensive traveller, gastronome and advocate for women's literacy, creating the Sui Garden where women would gather to compose and recite poetry.

74. REGULATED SHI POETRY: MING-QING: Travelling in  
the Mountains

The first ten li are hard and steep;  
                  for half a li the way is flat.  
I leave a mountain peak behind  
                  the next unrolls its welcome mat.  
Round me like a thick cocoon  
                  the verdant mountains wind and wrap.  
And now I find no path at all,  
                  and so am rather floored at that.

## 7. QU POETRY

### 7.1. Qu Poetry Characteristics

*Qu*, or 'singing poetry' flourished in the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), and, like *Ci* poetry, began as folk songs, as verse set to various tunes. The form seems to have originated in north China, specifically in the areas conquered by the Jurchen, which became the rapidly Sinicised Jin empire. The tunes of *Qu* poetry are rather different from those of *Ci* poetry, however, and, most importantly, the language is colloquial, the living everyday speech of the Chinese and not the literary language. That said, the literati were usually the authors all the same, and indeed commonly wrote for the theatre, which was immensely popular in Yuan times. Guan Hanqing was one of the best and most productive of Yuan dramatists, in fact, and almost as well known were Wang Heqing and Ma Zhiyuan.

Terminology can be confusing. *Qu* poems can be a single song (*Xiaoling*) or part of a song suite (*Santao*). The single song can be repeated or combined with others, sometimes making several dozen songs written to the same tune throughout. Being modelled to dramatic needs, the lines are of various lengths (commonly 3, 4 and 7 characters long) but all tend to be firmly end-rhymed. There are also tonal patterns, sometimes — like *Ci* poetry — deriving from regulated verse, and sometimes being quite novel, not found outside *Qu* poetry. These patterns adapt to the expression of the poem, rather than exist as a predetermined pattern into which the poem must fit, as is the case with regulated verse.

The essential keywords are thus everyday language, lines of varying length and the same end rhyme throughout the poem. Though the poems seem artless, and indeed must have the tang of everyday speech — brimming over with rough humour, pungent wit and a shameless raciness — they are in fact well ordered, like all things in pre-modern China. Even the tune may be maintained with 'padding words' or extrametrical syllables called *chenzi*.

## 75. QU POETRY

Guan Hanqing (1220-1307)

仙呂 一半兒 題情 XIANLU YI BAN TI QING

碧紗窗外靜無人 跪在床前忙要親  
罵了箇負心回轉身 雖是我話兒嗔  
一半兒推辭一半兒肯

Guan Hanqing, with the sobriquet 'The Old Man of the Studio', spent much of his time in Dadu (present-day Beijing). He was a poet and a notable playwright, often described as among the most prolific and highly regarded dramatists of the Yuan period. Fourteen of the 65-odd plays he wrote are still extant. The language is convincingly idiomatic and often subtly reveals his character's feelings and motivations.

*Qu* poetry takes its metre from various song tunes, some of which define the poetry's theme and tone, but very often do not. Here the song requires any piece written to its tune end with 'half' . . . 'half', i.e. what is half set up in the first lines is half contradicted in the concluding section. Of the 43 *Qu* poems employing this tune that have survived, all show this feature, and some 39 are on love and boudoir themes, where 'love' or 'springtime' or 'fallen flowers' feature.

*Qu* poetry employed the everyday tongue rather than the literary language, which will, I hope, be apparent in the non-literary diction employed in this section. The poem here is tightly rhymed *aaaaa*, as is the translation: *aaaaa*.

75. QU POETRY: In Xianlu Key: Tune 'One Half' On Love

Not a soul outside, but in the cool  
    the gauze-green window curtains lent,  
he knelt beside the bed, with you-  
    know-what this fool's intent.  
At that I called him what a jerk,  
    and with my dander up I went  
to turn my back on him, but felt  
    uneasy, as if ill-content.  
Though half of me would put him off,  
    the other half more breathed consent.

76. QU POETRY: Guan Hanqing (1220-1307): from Not Giving in to Old Age.

[南呂宮] 一枝花 不服老 YI ZHI HUA BU FU LAO [South Tune One]

攀出牆朵朵花 折臨路枝枝柳  
花攀紅蕊嫩 柳折翠條柔  
浪子風流 憑著我折柳攀花手  
直煞得花殘柳敗休 半生來折柳攀花  
一世裡眠花臥柳

梁州 Tune: LIANG ZHOU

我是箇普天下郎君領袖 蓋世界浪子班頭

...

你道我老也 暫休  
占排場風月功名首

隔尾 Tune: GEWEI

子弟每是箇茅草崗沙土窩初生兒的兔羔兒乍向圍場上走

我是箇經籠罩受索網蒼翎毛老野雞踏踏的陣馬兒熟

These are fragments of *Qu* verse to show its character: the racy language, the close rhyme but still refinement and delicate allusion. The whole song suite is a libertine's monologue. Rhymes in originals and (translations) are *xaxbbbxa* (*xabbbabxa*) and *babaab* (*bbxba*).

76. QU POETRY: Guan Hanqing: *from* Not Giving in to Old Age.

1. Me, I've snapped a bloom from every wall,  
and roadside busted willows show my powers:  
my pistil in the plumpest red  
would make the greenest willow yield,  
5. and like the wind across the field  
how coyly come the dewy showers:  
a little pressure: all is sealed:  
so half my life's already spent  
9. in foreign willows, bedded flowers.

1. I am the world's undoubted rogue,  
its first of playboys, royally heeled,  
I am the ne'er do well, and truly pleased  
my showcase talents stand revealed.  
I am too old, you say,  
and decency says stop and yield,  
4. but mine's what wind and moon empowers.

. . . . .

1. Where you are little bunnies running  
mound to hole in sogon grass,  
dithering for hours and hours,  
  
2. I am the rooster, caged, aware  
what cords would hold his dark plumes down  
but dandy on the battlefield.



## 77. QU POETRY: Ma Zhiyuan: (1250-1321)

秋思 QUI SI

枯藤老樹昏鴉

小橋流水人家

古道西風瘦馬

夕陽西下，斷腸人在天涯

Ma Zhiyuan, courtesy name Dongli, was both poet and celebrated playwright. He was a native of Dadu (present-day Beijing) during the Yuan dynasty.

Among his achievements is the development and popularising of the *Qu* genre, of which his poem 'Autumn Thoughts' is among the best known. It is written to tune or metrical pattern of *Tianjingsha* and uses ten images in twenty-two monosyllables to the melancholy of late autumn. The translation replicates the original's aaaa rhyme scheme, and shows how flexible the *Qu* genre can be: rumbustuous monologues in Poem 76, and melancholy reflections here. The rendering of the last line is a little free: literally the Chinese reads 'the heartbroken one'.

77. QU POETRY: Autumn Thoughts: Tune Tianjingsha.

The dried-up vines, long-standing trees and evening crows,  
a cottage, bridge that's small, where water flows:  
along the ancient road the west wind blows,  
and so the evening sun goes down  
    on people saddened, far, where no one knows.

78. QU POETRY: Zhang Yanghao (1206-1329)

中呂】山坡羊 潼關懷古 SHAN PO YANG TONG GUAN HUAI  
GU. Tune ZHONG LU

峰巒如聚 波濤如怒  
山河表裡潼關路 望西都  
意躊躇 傷心秦漢經行處  
宮闕萬間都做了土  
興  
百姓苦  
亡  
百姓苦  
嬴 都變做了土 輸 都變做了土  
疾 也是天氣差 遲 也是天氣差

君 乾送了 民 乾送了  
功 也是不長久 名 也是不長久

Zhang Yanghao hailed from Shandong and was a prolific writer of essays, *Ci* and *Qu* poetry. Recommended to office, he was demoted and subsequently dismissed after angering superiors with his criticism of government policies. He was later reappointed to important posts like the Ministry of Rites, but worked himself to death in 1329 when put in charge of relief work for the drought-stricken central Yellow River basin.

The poetry shows a high order of artistry and an abiding concern for the common people's welfare. He is famous for both, but is probably best known for his 'Meditation on the Past at Tong Pass'.

With a little slant rhyme, the translation replicates the aabbaaxaxa axxa rhyme scheme of the original.

78. QU POETRY: Meditation on the Past at Tong Pass  
Tune: Sheep on Mountain Slope

Together ridge and mountains thrust,  
in time are all to wave and tempest lost.  
Between the hills and river runs  
the road across the high Tong pass  
and on that western capital of late

5. I gaze and hesitate:

The Qin and Han: they both are past:  
the towers, ten thousand rooms and palaces:

they are as dust.

Kingdoms rise:

the people suffer, first to last.

10. Kingdoms fall:

the people suffer, first to last.

Great realms are won,

but all achievements turn to dust:

Sicknesses the very sky will sow:

that destiny is heaven's too.

What emperors strive for, all is vain:

deliverance but ends in naught.

15. Glory too, that soon is past,

and fame as well: it will not last.

79. QU POETRY: Guan Yunshi (1286-1324)

[ 雙調 ]清江引 惜別 Key SHUANG DIAO Tune CLEAR RIVER

若還與他相見時 道個真傳示  
不是不修書 不是無才思  
繞清江買不得天樣紙

Guan Yunshi was a Uyghur poet who attended the Hanlin academy. He later gave up his official position and lived in seclusion, selling medicine in the city of Qiantang. His 79 poems, arranged in 8 sequences, are mostly about poetry, wine, pleasure, and the love of men and women. His mastery of Chinese allowed him to use individual speeches to enliven dramatic scenes, an accomplishment that sets him apart from other *Qu* writers.

The translation reproduces the line lengths and rhyme scheme (abxab) of the original.

79. QU POETRY: On Separation No. 4. (Tune Clear River)

So if we met again in some such place,  
my words would show I'm not his piece of rough.  
I'm not the simpleton who'd flunk a letter  
or lack the guts to read it face to face,  
but for paper,  
    circling on the long Clear River,  
        the sky itself is not enough.

## 19. CI POETRY

From Tang times onwards, new music forms from central Asia flooded into China and became popular at all social levels. The lyrics to this banquet music (*Yanyue*) were often created and sung by women, both ladies of the court and of the entertainment quarters. They were taken up by the literati, becoming short lyrics (*Xiaoling*) or extended pieces (*Manci*). The poems were written to popular tunes, hundreds of them, now largely lost but prescribing the number of characters to the lines, the placement of rhymes and pattern of tones. It was very far from 'free verse', therefore, but looser than regulated verse, and capable of accommodating colloquial elements, 'empty words' and a closer-knit syntax. Moreover, unlike Regulated Verse, which can only move from the present to the universal and back again, *Ci* verse can move more freely between past, present and imagined time, and accommodate snippets of dialogue or actual speech.

For translation purposes, *Ci* poetry is quietly musical, with some ghost of the catchy tunes they were once sung to. Tone patterns linger on, but they are not prescriptive, serving more to emphasize the tunes concerned. Rhyming is universal, often tight. Stanzas usually mark a change in metre, rhyme, setting or mood.

The piece immediately following was written by the last emperor of the southern Tang, one of the small kingdoms that flourished in the Five Dynasties period between the Tang and Song empires. Li Yu was in fact taken prisoner by the Song emperor and murdered, but is credited with broadening the thematic range of *Ci* poetry, and making it

more personal. Note that all lines are rhymed, unlike those in unregulated verse that generally rhymed only on the even-numbered lines. Tone patterns also apply, but are not shown because they cannot be duplicated in English.



80. CI POETRY : XIAOLING. Li Yu (937-78)

烏夜啼 WU YE TI

無言獨上西樓 月如鉤  
寂寞梧桐深院鎖深秋  
剪不斷 理還亂 是離愁  
別是一般滋味在心頭

Li Yu (known before 961 as Li Congjia) was the last emperor of the Southern Tang dynasty, before it was absorbed by the Song. Li Congjia was not the heir apparent and tried to remain inconspicuous by focusing on the arts. He loved poetry, painting and music, and was encouraged in these by his father, who was a noted poet. At the age of 17 he made a happy marriage with the lady Zhou Ehuang, who was also multi-talented in the arts. In 955, a year after Li Congjia's marriage, the Southern Tang was invaded by the Later Zhou dynasty, and lost its territories to the north. Its emperor was demoted to king. Palace coups removed opposition and the king himself abdicated on the grounds of ill health. Li Congjia became emperor, against the wishes of a younger brother and courtiers who regarded Li too dissolute and weak to rule effectively. Li Yu ruled from 961 to 976, but the prognostications were borne out by events. Li spent more time with Zhou Ehuang and then her younger sister than attending to state affairs, placating the Song with tribute and flattery. But the inevitable could not be delayed forever, and in 976 the Song annexed the Southern Tang, imprisoning its ruler and having him poisoned two years later.

The original is rhymed aaabbaa, the translation uses slant rhyme and internal rhyme more: end rhymes are aaxbbcc.

80. CI POETRY: XIAOLING. To the Tune 'Crows Call at Night'

I climb up, quiet and alone;  
                  to linger in the west pavilion.  
A silver hook now hangs the moon,  
  
and in the courtyard round I see,  
                  the ever lonely wutong trees  
                          lock the autumn in their air.

Hurt, the heart, it does not break,  
nor, smothered over, does it take  
on the happiness it wore.  
Grief and parting are new flavours where  
                  the heart feels other than before.

81. CI POETRY: XIAOLING. Li Yu (937-78)

虞美人 YU MEI REN

|         |           |
|---------|-----------|
| 春花秋月何時了 | 往事知多少     |
| 小樓昨夜又東風 | 故國不堪回首月明中 |
| 雕闌玉砌應猶在 | 只是朱顏改     |
| 問君能有幾多愁 | 恰似一江春水向東流 |

Li Yu was a great devotee of *Ci* poetry, though his style is closer the Tang. He had devoted much of his time to pleasure seeking and literature, and this is reflected in the early poems. A sadder tone prevailed after the death of his wife in 964, and the best-known poems were composed when Li was a prisoner of the Song, reflecting on past glories. He was poisoned by the Song emperor Taizong, in 978, after writing a poem lamented the destruction of his empire and the rape of his second wife Empress Zhou the Younger by the Song emperor.

Li Yu broadened the scope of *Ci* poetry to include history and philosophy, and introduced the two-stanza form that made great use of contrasts between longer lines of nine characters and shorter ones of three and five. Only 45 of his *Ci* poems survive, but his story remains popular in Cantonese opera.

The original is rhymed *aa bb aa cc*. The translation follows this scheme and reflects the character length of lines.

81. CI POETRY : XIAOLING: To the Tune 'Beautiful Lady Yu'

Spring flowers and the autumn moon  
    when won't their hours be added to?  
Matters past, how many, few?  
Last night in the small pavilion  
    it was the east wind came again,  
I could not bear to turn my head,  
    towards the moon-lit lands of then.  
Carved balustrade and fine jade stairs  
    will still be there, the ones we knew,  
and only youth's warm colours lose their hue.  
I ask my lord how there could be  
    this load of sorrow so increased,  
already heavy as the spring's  
    vast, headlong waters, flooding east.

## 82. CI POETRY: XIAOLING: Wen Tingyun (813-870)

### 更漏子 GENG LOU ZI

玉鑪香 紅蠟淚  
偏照畫堂秋思  
眉翠薄 鬢雲殘  
夜長衾枕寒 梧桐樹  
不道離情正苦  
一葉葉 一聲聲  
空階滴到明

Wen Tingyun was born in Taiyuan around 812, a descendant of a prime minister in the early Tang Dynasty. He was interested in literature, but the death of his father brought hard times. Eventually, Wen spent more time in the women's quarters, often helping others to cheat the examinations. Belatedly, with the change of emperor, Wen was recommended in 866 for the post of Instructor of the State Sons' University. Unfortunately, to prevent the unfair treatment he had suffered, Wen began to reform the examination system, making assessments fairer and more open, a move that damaged the interests of the powerful and caused Wen to be demoted. He died shortly afterwards.

The poem's abandoned woman theme is depicted first by the interior scene and then the exterior, both rather bleak. The 'tears' are an example of 'verse eyes': imputing human qualities to inanimate objects, and the 偏照 (piān : contrary or unbidden) in line 3, and 正 (zhèng: just or straight) in line 9 are empty words (*xuzi*) that lack referents but add to the emotional impact. The rhyme scheme of the translation is similar to that of original, but not exact: abbaxx cxcddd in the translation and xaaxbb cccxddd in the original.

82. CI POETRY: XIAOLING: To the Tune 'On the Water  
Clock at Night'

From incense burner, worthy jade,  
these tears of bright red tallow fall:  
unwelcome comes  
    the painted autumn in the hall.

In time the brightest eyebrows fade,  
and thin as clouds the crop of hair:  
unwarmed the quilt is left the long night through.

For all that Wutong trees will pay their court,  
and hard, unpausing is the third-watch rain,  
there's worse, the bitterness of which I speak, the thought

of being lost to you, to gaze on ground  
hear leaf on leaf, soft sound on sound,  
till, emptily, the dawn comes round.

83. CI POETRY : XIAOLING: Wen Tingyun: (813-870)

南歌子 其二 NAN GE ZI QI ER

自從君去後 無心戀別人  
夢中面上指痕新 羅帶同心自縮  
被蠻兒踏破裙 蟬鬢朱簾亂  
金釵舊股分 紅妝垂淚哭郎君  
妾是南山松柏 無心戀別人

Wen did more than anyone to make Ci poetry popular in Tang times, and later generations saw him as the founder of the genre. The so-called 'Flowery School of Ci' concentrated on matters of the heart, boldly evoking love affairs between men and women, and was no doubt an escape from the troubled times.

The first line sets the theme and the implied reproaches. The 'boy' of line 5 is just someone mischievous: other manuscripts have 'monkey'. It's an intimate address, as shown by 郎君 (láng jūn: young-woman lord) used by a woman to her husband. Cosmetics were popular in all classes of wealthy women. Cypressess (plus pines trees in the text) were emblems of integrity and faithfulness.

The original is tied together with close rhyming: xaaxa xaaxa. The translation is similar: xaaaa xaaxa.

83. CI POETRY : XIAOLING: To the Tune "Southern  
Tune"

Since my lord has gone away  
I have no heart to love another.  
If nail marks on my face appear  
    they're only as such dreams uncover.  
I thought the sashes tied  
    would serve to bind us close together.  
5. A boy that on my dress has stood  
    has wrecked the bounty of my lover.

My hair's disordered, out of place,  
    the hair-pin broken,  
and much confusion that  
    vermilion screens are made to cover,  
and tears, such running tears,  
    the which cosmetics have to smother.  
Your concubine is faithful as  
    the cypresses on Southern Hills.  
10. She has no heart, my lord, to love another.



84. CI POETRY: XIAOLING: Yan Shu: (991-1055)

浣溪沙 HUAN XI SHA

一曲新詞酒一杯      去年天氣舊池臺  
夕陽西下幾時回      無可奈何花落去  
似曾相識燕歸來      小園香徑獨徘徊

Yan Shu was an infant prodigy, able to compose poems at five and passing the imperial examinations at fourteen. He became a noted poet, calligrapher and statesman of the Northern Song, rising smoothly in his career to become a member of the Hanlin Academy and prime minister to the emperor Renzong. His son was also a noted poet, and among Yan's pupils was the renowned poet, essayist and statesman Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072)

Of the 10,000 Ci poems Yan reputedly composed, only 136 now remain, but these show a mastery of the *Xiaoling* in the *Wanyue* style, i.e. delicate and restrained. This poem has long been praised for its self-control, where 'not a word verbalizes complaint.' The first three lines are simple statements, not clearly related to each other, even in time: is this the present, or memories of a happier time? Then come the falling blossoms, a reference to time and beauty passing, in the outside world and the speaker's prospects. But the world goes on; the swallows will return, and the speaker will still be pacing the garden pathways thinking of what remains hidden from us.

The poem is rhymed *aaxxaa* in the original and *axaxaa* in the translation.

84. CI POETRY: XIAOLING: To the Tune 'Silk Washing  
Stream'

A glass of wine and one new song, and its refrain,  
the weather of last year upon this old pond terrace,  
When will the westering sun return to warmth again?  
I cannot bear to think how fading blossoms fall,  
but swallows come back, always, to this small plot known  
for fragrant pathways, where I, pacing, pace alone.

## 85. CI POETRY: XIAOLING: Chen Weisong (1626-1682)

### 贺新郎 HE XIN LANG

六年孤馆相偎傍。 最难忘，  
红蕤枕畔， 泪花轻飏。  
了尔一生花烛事， 宛转妇随夫唱。  
只我罗衾寒似铁， 拥桃笙难得纱窗亮。  
休为我， 再惆怅。

Chen Weisong was born to Ming royalty in Yixing, Jiangsu but became a Qing official when the Manchus replaced the Ming administration. He in fact passed the Qing examinations but subsequently became a prolific and noted poet, one of the greatest in Chinese history, mixing with many celebrated names in this Ming-Qing period. Chen wrote some 460 *Shi* poems and 1,629 Ci works.

Though Chen Weisong married and had children by wives and concubines, his deepest relationship was with boy-actor Yun Lang. The relationship was well known, indeed famous among contemporaries, and an artist by the name of Chen Hu painted a portrait of Yun after a bath. The picture inspired a collection of some 160 poems by almost eighty literary celebrities and officials of the period, including Gong Dingzi, Song Wan, and You Tong. The relationship continued after the wedding, and Yun remained Chen's primary partner until his death in 1675.

The poem has three sections. Lines 1-6 are reminiscence, line 7 asks the partner to be faithful to his new wife, and lines 8-12 return to the earlier theme of staying faithful to their memories. The short, broken lines need close rhyming for structure: aaaxx axaxa in the original and xaa aa aa abbaa in the translation.

85. CI POETRY: XIAOLING: To the Tune: 'Congratulating  
the Bridegroom'

Six years we have lived together:  
                  one house, one body, fonder yet  
of things that none forget.

I see the red-fringed pillow side,  
the tears, the reckless tears you shed.

May the tear-bright eyes I saw  
                  candle-light the lives we led,  
that, if she wanders, you will stay  
                  the faithful husband, knowing yet

however cold our quilted bed,  
that now you cannot hear me play  
                  the pipes to welcome in the day:  
still I shan't regret,  
though here left desolate.

86.MANCI POETRY: Xin Qiji (1140-1207)  
八聲甘州 BA SHENG GAN ZHOU

對瀟瀟暮雨灑江天 一番洗清秋  
漸霜風淒慘 關河冷落  
殘照當樓 是處紅衰翠減  
苒苒物華休 惟有長江水  
無語東流 不忍登高臨遠  
望故鄉渺邈 歸思難收  
歎年來蹤跡 何事苦淹留  
想佳人、妝樓顚望  
誤幾回、天際識歸舟  
爭知我、倚闌干處 正恁凝愁

Xin Qiji was a soldier-poet who fought the Jurchen that had occupied China's northern provinces, his actions winning him a place briefly at the Southern Song court.

The poem falls into two parts. The first sets the scene, introduced by 'I face', where the speaker's gaze is progressively deeper into the autumn setting: storm, winds mountain passes, balconies and fading flowers. The section ends with the speaker looking over the Yangtze river, which introduces the silent monologue of the concluding part, where the speaker is wondering if the woman is also gazing out over the same river and thinking of him.

Whereas *Shi* poetry is structured by the couplet, *Ci* poetry is governed by the less definite strophe. The strophe is simply an indefinite number of lines that share a centre of focus, and is therefore a more flexible device. *Ci* poems can thus describe matters from different viewpoints in time and character. The first part of the poem here features one viewpoint, and lines 10-11, 12-13, 14-15 and 16-18 each make up separate viewpoints. Viewpoints are assisted by rhyme, in the original and translation being xaxxaxaxxaxaxaxx.

86. MANCI POETRY: To the Tune 'Eight Beats of a Ganzhou Song'

I turn to face the drench of rain  
    on river and the evening sky  
that, cooling, washes autumn's gloom away,  
but gradually the winds turn thin and chill  
as rivers flowing in steep mountain passes.  
5. The last brief lights on buildings stay,  
but everywhere go reds to greens: the flowers fade.  
All things once beautiful decay,  
and only the waters of the long great river run  
eastward, soundless, on their way.

10. I cannot bear to climb up some great height and see  
the vague illusions of my homeland, though  
recriminations still will make me pay  
for what seems footprints of reproachful years.  
Why linger, why delay?

15. Perhaps there's someone beautiful,  
    who from a window watches boats  
come back from voyages, and thinks  
    mistakenly, that mine arrives today.  
How could she know that in this person,  
    leant on balconies, how much  
is sorrow heavy in his thoughts.

## 87. MANCI POETRY: Su Shi / Su Dongpo (1037-1101)

### 水調歌頭 SHU DIAO GE TOU

明月幾時有 把酒問青天  
不知天上宮闕 今夕是何年  
我欲乘風歸去 又恐瓊樓玉宇  
高處不勝寒 起舞弄清影  
何似在人間 轉朱閣  
低綺戶 照無眠  
不應有恨 何事長向別時圓  
人有悲歡離合 月有陰晴圓缺  
此事古難全 但願人長久  
千里共嬋娟

Su Shi, who called himself Su Dongpo, was one of China's most gifted writers, noted also for essays and calligraphy, but whose relations with the imperial court were problematic. He could write beautifully in all genres, but here he is fusing the *Shi* and *Ci* styles.

*Ci* poetry could be used for matters too intense and personal for *Shi* poetry. This poem starts with a personal voice that securely sets the scene, one that deliberately echoes Li Bai's *Questioning the Moon with a Wineglass in my Hand* (Poem 27) and Qu Yuan's (340-278 BC) *Questions for Heaven*. Like Li Bai, Su would also ride the heavens, but with less confidence, fearing the vertigo and sleeplessness that might ensue, even in the most palatial surroundings (crimson hall, ornate door). Nonetheless, since life down here is difficult, where men and meet in happiness or leave in sorrow, that life has affinities with the moon goddess that can only wax and wane. The original is rhymed xaxabbaxac baxacxaxa, i.e. reasonably closely using only three rhyme words, but the translation, although similarly arranged (axaabax bxbxcxcxcx bxdxd) needs four.

87. CI POETRY : To the Tune 'Prelude to the River Tune'

How many times, bright moon, have you been there?  
I raise a glass and wonder at the deep blue sky,  
enquire of glittering palaces, what year  
the night around can be up there.  
For I would ride the heavenly winds, would come and go,  
were not that jade, ethereal universe I fear  
too elevated and too cold for me.

I'd rise and dance with my clear shadow, which  
is different, surely, than this world below.  
Here in crimson hall,  
beneath the ornate door,  
the moon disturbs our sleep —  
not that I'd begrudge it more  
propensity to steal away,  
and hide when it is shining full.

We humans learn to meet and part, in joy and sorrow,  
when moon, in all conditions, can but wax and wane.  
Down here is difficult, it's never right.  
I wish us both a long companionship across  
a thousand miles of supernatural light.



88. MANCI POETRY: Su Shi / Su Dongpo (1037-1101)

乙卯正月二十日夜记梦

YI MAO ZHENG ER SHI RI YE JI MENG

十年生死两茫茫 不思量自难忘  
千里孤坟无处话凄凉 纵使相逢应不识  
尘满面鬓如霜

夜来幽梦忽还乡 小轩窗正梳妆  
相顾无言唯有泪千行 料得年年肠断处  
明月夜短松冈

Su Shi was one of China's most accomplished literary figures, leaving behind a great mass of still-read letters, essays and poems, plus paintings and calligraphy. Su also wrote essays on politics and governance, which contributed to his periods of imperial disfavour. Su Shi was married three times: to Wang Fu (1039-65), to Wang Runzhi (1048-93) and to Wang Zhaoyu (1062-95), writing for all of them some of China's best known poetry.

Su married his Wang Fu in 1054, when she was fifteen. Unfortunately, she died in 1065, and Su took the body back the following year to his homeland Sichuan and there buried her in the family graveyard, planting pines around the tomb (hence the 'small' in line 10).

Line lengths vary from 6 to 10 characters, but the poem structure is quite simple. Lines 1-3 look back on their marriage. Lines 4-5 suppose they met again. Lines 6-8 continue the dream. Line 9 reflects on the sorrows life brings, and 10 completes the poem by an imaginary journey to Wang Fu's grave. Su uses the same rhyme throughout (aaaxa, aaaxa), which I do, in effect, though converting the unrhymed x's to a second rhyme 'b' — ababa baaba. The 'and happiness' is my addition: it is only implied by the Chinese.

88. MANCI POETRY: Dreaming of My Deceased Wife on the Night of the 20th Day of the First Month. Tune: 'River Town'.

The interval of ten years on  
    in life and death is limitless.  
The past I do no brood on much,  
    but all the same do not forget  
how far your grave: a thousand li,  
    and all too lonely, cold  
        unspoken of, and comfortless.  
But if we met again, perhaps by chance,  
    I think you would not know the fret  
that makes my face so full of earth,  
    or hair seem wisps of frostiness.

At night, in some far dreaming, I'm  
    returned back home, and see you yet  
at some small window making up  
    or trying on a fine new dress.  
And then we'd see each other, would  
    not speak but shed a thousand tears  
        of conjoined grief and happiness.  
So, while the year on year must add  
to what the sadnesses beget,  
I see the darkness, moon, and pines  
    so small, that guard you, nonetheless.

89. MANCI: SONG Li Qingzhao (1084-1151)

聲聲慢 SHENG SHENG MAN

尋尋覓覓 冷冷清清  
悽悽慘慘戚戚 乍暖還寒時候  
最難將息 三杯兩盞淡酒  
怎敵他晚來風急 雁過也  
正傷心 卻是舊時相識  
滿地黃花堆積 憔悴損  
如今有誰堪摘 守著窗兒  
獨自怎生得黑 梧桐更兼細雨  
到黃昏、點點滴滴 這次第  
怎一箇愁字了得

Li Qingzhao was born to a family of scholar-officials in 1084, at Zhangqiu in modern Shandong province. She was unusually outgoing for such a background, and was already well known for her poetry before her marriage to Zhao Mingchen in 1101. From his death she never fully recovered, though continuing to publish his work and write her own in poetry that describes a woman of high society. The later poetry, for which she is known throughout China, was introspective, sincere and deeply personal.

This poem is celebrated for its relentless repetition of sorrow: the word or its equivalent appears six times in line three, is illustrated throughout the poem, and appears again in the final line. Lines 1-10 set the mournful scene. Lines 11-19 ask what she is to do with her time now, or the life left to her.

Only Ci poetry would allow such focus on sorrow and the repetition of imagery associated with sorrow. Greatly assisting the poem is the tight rhyming: *axaxaxaxa axaxaxaxa* in the original, and *axaxaxaxa bcbcbxbxb* in the translation.

89. MANCI: SONG Tune: One Beat Followed by Another, a  
Long Tune

Searching, searching, is to seek  
the clear, the cold, the desolate,  
in mournful, mournful sadness, sadness, grief on grief.  
True, the season has its sudden warmths, but cold  
will overcome what is beneath.  
Two cups, or even three, of thin, insipid wine  
from evenings' coming howl of wind and rain bring scant relief.  
I think the wild geese' flight  
must strike us at the heart  
with drench of old acquaintances, of which they speak.

The yellow blooms accumulate, pile up: each lies  
as though their frailness would increase  
the plaint of sadness. Who will pick them now? Each tries,  
within allowances of window's lease,  
to think of things to do alone before the daylight dies.  
And all the time, on wutong trees, the fine rain falls  
until the drip on drip from yellowing evening skies  
brings sequences, for which  
no single word for sorrow's sadness will suffice.

90. MANCI POETRY: Xin Qiji (1140-1207)

摸魚兒 MO YU-R

更能消、幾番風雨 匆匆春又歸去  
惜春長恨花開早 何況落紅無數  
春且住 見說道、天涯芳草迷歸路  
怨春不語 算只有殷勤  
畫簷蛛網 盡日惹飛絮  
長門事 準擬佳期又誤  
蛾眉曾有人妒 千金縱買相如賦  
脈脈此情誰訴 君莫舞  
君不見、玉環飛燕皆塵土  
閒愁最苦 休去倚危樓  
斜陽正在 煙柳斷腸處

We have noted the military background of Xin Qiji in Poem 20A, but here is something quite different, on the abandoned woman theme, a poem Xin wrote when transferred from Hubei to Hunan in 1179. Lines 1-5 lament the passing of spring. In lines 6-10 the woman urges the spring to delay, and introduces the notion of a response, which again appears in lines 11-13, now with the reason for her complaint: the envy of rivals. Then comes an allusion to the royal consort of the Emperor Wu (140-87 BC), who regained her lord's favour by getting the literati to write a poem on her behalf. But here it appears the ruse has failed: she has been slandered. The 買 (zòng: even if) of line 14, denotes a helplessness. There is nothing more (lines 15-16) she can do. In lines 16 and 17 the tone changes, becomes peremptory: the 'sir' (君: jūn) is not respectful. Lines 17-18 are somewhat threatening. The same may happen to rulers, say lines 19-21: they too may be mourned only by saddened willows. Rhyme is again shaping the poem. The original rhymes *axaxaxxa axaxaaa*, a literary tour de force: the translation only achieves *axaxaxxa bcbcbxb*.

90. MANCI POETRY: To the Tune 'Groping for Fish'

How many more must I outlast  
of buffeting, the wind and rain?  
Yet here, and all too brief, comes spring again.

So what is longed for most, the spring, is soonest lost,  
and countless rich-hued blossoms fall away:  
5. the springtime cannot stay.

The fragrant grass on heaven's rim, they say,  
have urged it to delay.  
So why no word still, pray?

I only see how diligent have been  
the spiders' webs in painted eves,  
10. how catkins pout into the passing breeze.

A Tall Gate matter now  
the erroring stratagems you planned: to envy lost.  
How much has beauty's moth-like lift of eyebrows cost?

A tender letter can be bought with gold, but say  
15. on whom the stricken heart may still advance  
if, sir, you will not dance?

To dust the loveliest have gone,  
the beautiful have lost all face,  
and in unwanted leisure pace.  
So do not trust what high walls crown,  
20. for there it is the sun goes down  
and saddened, musty willows take their place.

91. MANCI POETRY: Xin Qiji (1140-1207)

賀新郎 HE XIN LANG

甚矣吾衰矣 悵平生、交游零落  
只今餘幾 白髮空垂三千丈  
一笑人間萬事 問何物、能令公喜  
我見青山多嫵媚 料青山、見我應如是  
情与貌 略相似  
一尊搔首東窗裡  
想淵明、停雲詩就  
此時風味 江左沉酣求名者  
豈識濁醪妙理  
回首叫、雲飛風起  
不恨古人吾不見  
恨古人、不見吾狂耳  
知我者 二三子

Here Xin is different again, rather less than modest in declaring that he was born too late for the ancients to appreciate his work, and that only two or three among contemporary mediocrities can really know him. That boast (lines 17-18) in fact alludes to a similar one by Zhang Rong (444-497), and Xin simply adds 狂 (kuáng : arrogant) to the quotation. Yes, Xin sees himself as wild and arrogant, but with good reason. Though other folk (lines 14-15) crave fame, they have done nothing to deserve it, and, while lines 11-13 refer to the poem by Tao Qian, Xin has not retired to the obscurity of the countryside, quite the opposite.

The poem is tightly structured by rhyme (axaxaaxaxa axaxaaxaxa in the original, but with more rhymewords in the translation: axabacxaa cxdcdexff: English is not so generous), but the strength of the Ci genre comes in its ability to abruptly change tempo. In line 17 comes Xin's contempt for contemporaries, which carries through, ignoring the break in line 18, to the poem's ending in two brisk lines.

91. MANCI POETRY: To the Tune 'Congratulating the  
Bridegroom'

How much, how very much, I have decayed.

My friends, in life's poor carnival, have passed away:  
how many not in good ground laid?

Ten thousand zhang my white hair falls.

Adrift and shoddy

pass for lives down here. I spurn such things that fade,  
but what exists to leave us happy, free from blame?

I look on long-appealing, fresh green mountains:

how beautifully they're made.

Perhaps they find in me — who knows? —

a charming shade:

at heart and in the body

10. we are much the same.

At wine, I knock my head against the eastern window frame,  
and think of Yuan Ming then,

his Halting Clouds laid out at last.

His mood is somewhat mine.

Unlike the southern Yangtze folk who only drink for fame  
how could they know the essence of such thickened wine?

At this a summoned wind returns me to the ancient lore:  
it's most regrettable I do not know the ancient people more,  
nor they the dancing wildness of my past.

I doubt those knowing me

20. are more than two or three.



92. MANCI POETRY Yue Fe (probably early 16th Century

滿江紅 MAN JIANG HONG

怒髮衝冠，憑欄處，瀟瀟雨歇。  
抬望眼，仰天長嘯，壯懷激烈。  
三十功名塵與土，八千里路雲和月。  
莫等閒白了少年頭，空悲切。  
靖康恥，猶未雪；  
臣子恨，何時滅？  
駕長車踏破賀蘭山缺！  
壯志飢餐胡虜肉，笑談渴飲匈奴血。  
待從頭收拾舊山河，朝天闕。

Yue Fe (1103-1142) was one of the most famous heroes of Chinese history, who showed outstanding bravery and military skill in opposing and sometimes defeating the Jurchen, but who was treacherously imprisoned and poisoned by the pacifist faction under the vacillating Emperor Gaozong. Recent research suggests that the well-known poem above, 'Man Jiang Hong, to the tune River of Blossoms', traditionally attributed to him, in fact dates to the Ming, and was probably written by Zhao Kuan, who had it engraved on a tablet at Yue Fei's tomb in 1502, when patriotic feelings were running high after General Wang Yue's victory over the Oirats near the Helan Pass in Inner Mongolia. The Jingkang incident takes its name from the Jingkang reign period of the Emperor Qinzong, who in 1127 was captured by the Jurchen and, together with his son, hauled off to permanent captivity in Manchuria, thus marking the end of a unified China. Xiongnu was the term given all barbarians, here the Jurchen.

The translation's rhyme scheme of xxa xxa xa xa xa a xa xa is close to the original's xxa xxa xa xa xa xa a xa aa.

92. MANCI POETRY: Tune: River of Blossoms

So livid at the barrier  
was I that my plume of hair  
repelled the very rain's intent.

Against the sky, I roared:  
'Is this what heart-felt serving  
thirty loyal years has meant:  
my name to be as dirt and dust  
eight thousand moonlit miles have sent?'

For youth must seize the hour, or find  
how fast the idle years are spent,  
nor let the Jingjang victory stand  
for shame our country underwent:  
surely there is someone who  
will purge us of this vile event?

Through the Helan pass I'd drive  
my chariot till all assent.  
I'd drink the Xiongnu blood, carouse and feast  
until their bones were four winds sent,  
and so, throughout this land of ours, our emperor  
recover what our honour meant.

93. YONGWU CI POETRY: Wu Wenying (1200-1260)

鶯啼序 YING TI XU

殘寒正欺病酒 掩沉香繡戶  
燕來晚、飛入西城 似說春事遲暮  
畫船載、清明過卻 晴煙冉冉吳宮樹  
念羈情游蕩 隨風化為輕絮  
十載西湖 10. 傍柳繫馬  
趁嬌塵軟霧 溯紅漸、招入仙溪  
錦兒偷寄幽素 倚銀屏、春寬夢窄

Little is known for sure about Wu Wenying's life, suggesting he never passed the imperial examinations. Though adept at poetry and music, he probably remained a commoner employed on the clerical staff of various officials in (present-day) Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, spending long periods in the cultural centers of Suzhou and Hangzhou. What is known from the poetry is not particularly edifying, moreover: references to the 'tears, slippers and delicate hands' of women who had given him their devotion in outings and banquets the poet was expected to commemorate in a subtle and delicate manner.

Chinese marriages were preceded and celebrated by elaborate festivals, but, once married, the wife would see little of her own family: she was virtually interned in her husband's house, where she was expected to be modest, chaste, faithful to her spouse and obedient to her inlaws' wishes. Morals were more lax in the cities, but strictly enforced in rural districts, where erring wives and daughters could find themselves literally put out on the street. Whatever men professed, however, it is to women departing from strict Confucian principles that much of the cultural richness of Song life derives. The translation broadly echoes the line lengths and rhyme schemes of the original. The latter are: original xaxaxaxx axaxaxxaxx axxxaxxxxa xxaxxaxxxa xxxaxxa: translation xaxaxbabxx cxcxdxxdxx exxxexxxxf xxfxgxxgx xxxhxxh.

93. CI POETRY: To the Tune 'Prelude to the Oriole's Song'

This plague of cold still lingers on,  
but I have drunk enough of wine.

Behind me now I close a door  
of finely fashioned aloe wood.

The swallows have come late this year  
about the city's western wards:  
to tell us spring is almost gone,  
or so they would be understood.

5. Our Qingming festival of painted  
boats has also slipped away,  
and mists round Wu's old palace trees  
have thinned until there's nothing there.

I think somehow of travellers  
unsettled, lifting with the wind,  
as catkins do, so ever changing,  
insubstantial as the air.

So went ten years. I tied my horse  
10. at West Lake to the willows there,  
and what I sought was scented dust,  
or yielding vapour, as it were.

I followed petals to their source,  
red petals to a fairy cove,  
in secret one brocaded girl  
would proxy what you felt for her.

A silver screen was your support:  
the spring is vast, the dream but short.

93. (Continued)

斷紅濕、歌紈金縷  
暝隄空 輕把斜陽  
總還鷗鷺 幽蘭旋老  
20. 杜若還生 水鄉尚寄旅  
別後訪、六橋無信  
事往花菱 瘞玉埋香  
幾番風雨 長波妒盼  
遙山羞黛 漁燈分影春江宿  
記當時、 30. 短楫桃根渡  
青樓彷彿 臨分敗壁題詩

The best of Wu's 350-odd *Ci* poems surviving are carefully constructed, with a marked emphasis on musicality, elegant diction and indirect allusion. The *Prelude to the Oriole's Song* is indeed the longest *Ci* poem in existence, and richly orchestrated on several levels of meaning. It may have been Wu's attempt to weave unrelated romantic episodes into a larger narrative, one giving meaning to diverse phases of his life. Though the poem has four sections — lament for spring's passing, joy of union, pain of separation and a remembrance of the dead — the images are not logically arranged but spring up as though from some tangled and melancholy inner state.

The first section is set in the present. The Qingming festival is held on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> of April. The late-come swallows indicate that spring is over. The clearing mists and catkins may allude to another poem, a *Ci* song. The second section consists of flashbacks. On West Lake in Hangzhou there were always pleasure boats, often accompanied by singing girls and cooking galleys. All women used cosmetics extensively in Song times: wives, concubines, courtesans and the many grades of 'singsong' girl. One woman in particular seems to be remembered in this section, however, and is compared to well-known stories of encounters with fairy maidens. The sunset with its departing gulls and egrets rounds off the matter.

93. (Continued)

15. What rouge-red tears your singing fan  
and gold-thread fabric gown would earn.  
The dykes fall empty at the dusk,  
and though the sunlight touched us both,  
but gulls and egrets will return.

Unnoticed, orchids soon grow old,  
20. but pollias are hardier things.

Lingering at the water villages

I settled in the past again.

Six Bridges, which we parted at,

I visited, but nothing stirred.

All flowers wilt when love grows cold,  
as jade and fragrance when interred.

25. How many bouts have wind and rain?

Like the water were your glances,  
your brows light-brushed as distant hills.

Far lights of fishermen recalled

spring's swelling waters where we slept.

How well I see the oars

30. on which our Peach Root boat was rowed across.

In quarters of the courtesans

are poems always, much on parting,

like shadows on unpainted walls.

93. (Continued)

淚墨慘澹塵土 危亭望極  
草色天涯 嘆鬢侵半苧  
暗點檢、離痕歡唾  
尚染鮫綃 鞞鳳迷歸  
40. 破鸞慵舞 殷勤待寫  
書中長恨 藍霞遼海沉過雁  
漫相思、彈入哀箏柱 傷心千里江南  
怨曲重招 斷魂在否

The third section is steeped in nostalgia and the pain of separation. The comparisons to water and hills are conventional epithets, but given a personal resonance here. These and the fishermen's lights recur in Wu's poetry, and have some special significance for him, as do poems written on unpainted or now decaying walls. The fourth section begins, as does the first, where the poet has shut the door to the past. The woman met or entertained in pleasure houses is now somewhere else, though the poet broods of the images of separation: handkerchief, tears and saliva. The last line parallels the last line in the first section: the hopelessness of the inevitable.

Wealthy officials and merchants took concubines, which the wife had to accept and treat on near-equal terms. The larger cities had courtesans, who were often well educated, able to sing, play a musical instrument and compose poetry, and as such were invited to weddings, and to banquets of high officials, rich merchants and the nobility. Some lived in great luxury, and the most celebrated confined themselves to apartments out of bounds to all but the most wealthy and well connected. There were stories of young men squandering fortunes to gain entry, of finding apartments decorated with the most exquisite of paintings and calligraphy, and with vases of jade, gold and silver. Most courtesans were not so independent, however, and needed links to places of entertainment for business and protection.

93. (Continued)

The ink is pale, perhaps with tears  
diluted, or with earth and dross.

From high pavilions I must gaze  
35. on green hills and the far horizons,  
my hair has white the ramie brings.  
I brood in secret on the trace  
of parting tears and spent saliva:  
they stain this handkerchief of silk.  
A phoenix, lost, has drooping wings  
40. nor dances in the shattered glass.  
I need to write a letter full  
of deep and everlasting sorrow,  
but into the blue mists of the sea  
fall flights of the migrating geese:  
and, unrestrained, my longings pass  
into the mournful zither's strings.  
45. A thousand miles away, your soul  
is in the south somewhere. With this  
hurt song I once more summon you:  
is heart not broken by such things?



## 9. SUMMARY TABLES

### 9.1. Genre Characteristics

An overview of the genres, with their rules and features pertaining is:

| Period         | Genre or <i>Source</i> | Substyle or Theme         | Formal Name        | Poem Length | Words per Line | Rhyme | Tonal Patterns |
|----------------|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------|----------------|-------|----------------|
| Pre-Han        | Shijing                | Shi                       | Shijing            | various     | 4              | often | no             |
| Warring States | Chuci zhangju          | Shi                       | Sao                | various     | 3-7            | yes   | no             |
| Han            | Chuci zhangju          | Shi                       | Fu                 | long        | 3-7            | often |                |
| Han            | Music Bureau           | Yuefu                     | Yuefu              | various     | 4-5            | yes   | no             |
| Han            | Wen xuan               | Early Pentasyllabic Verse | Nineteen Old Poems | various     | 5              | yes   | no             |
| Six Dynasties  | Shi                    | Farmstead & Landscape Shi | Tianyuan Shi       | various     | 5              | yes   | no             |
| Tang           | Shi                    | unregulated               | Gutishi            | various     | 5              | yes   | no             |
| Song           | Shi                    | unregulated               | Gutishi            | various     | 7              | yes   | no             |
| Ming - Qing    | Shi                    | unregulated               | Gutishi            | various     | 7              | yes   | no             |
| Tang - Song    | Jintishi               | Lushi                     | Wulu               | 8 lines     | 5              | yes   | yes            |
| Tang - Song    | Jintishi               | Lushi                     | Qilu               | 8 lines     | 7              | yes   | yes            |
| Tang - Song    | Jintishi               | Jeuju                     | Wujue              | 4 lines     | 5              | yes   | yes            |
| Tang - Song    | Jintishi               | Jeuju                     | Qijue              | 4 lines     | 7              | yes   | yes            |
| Ming - Qing    | Jintishi               | Lushi                     | Wulu               | 8 lines     | 5              | yes   | yes            |
| Ming - Qing    | Jintishi               | Lushi                     | Qilu               | 8 lines     | 7              | yes   | yes            |
| Ming - Qing    | Jintishi               | Jeuju                     | Wujue              | 4 lines     | 5              | yes   | yes            |
| Ming - Qing    | Jintishi               | Jeuju                     | Qijue              | 4 lines     | 7              | yes   | yes            |
| Yuan           | Qu                     | unregulated               | -                  | various     | 3-7            | yes   | yes            |
| 6 Dyn. - Qing  | Ci                     | Xiaoling                  |                    | short       | varying, 3-8   | yes   | yes            |
| 6 Dyn. -       | Ci                     | Manci                     |                    | long        | varying,       | yes   | yes            |

|           |    |        |  |      |              |     |     |
|-----------|----|--------|--|------|--------------|-----|-----|
| Qing      |    |        |  |      | 3-8          |     |     |
| Song-Qing | Ci | Yongwu |  | long | varying, 3-8 | yes | yes |

## 9.2 Translation Keywords

The larger 'spirit' or nature of the translations can also be given in 'keywords', where keywords indicate extra features or special emphasis. These keywords are additional to indicating the line length correctly, and rendering the overall spirit of Chinese poetry, which is refined, musical, close-structured, concise and allusive.

| Style               | Formal Name  | Keyword 1       | Keyword 2          | Keyword 3           | Keyword 4          | Rhyme        |
|---------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Shijing             | Hymns        | ceremonial      | reverent           | simple              | repetitive         | basic        |
| Shijing             | Odes         | commemorative   | declamatory        | simple              | repetitive         | basic        |
| Shijing             | Songs        | melodious       | folk-song          | artless             | bucolic            | tight        |
| Sao                 | Chuci        | long            | delicately musical | dream sequences     | allusive           | free         |
| Sao                 | Nine Songs   | martial         | declamatory        | heavy assonance     | basic              | as needed    |
| Fu                  |              | long            | rhapsodic          | luxuriant in detail | descriptive        | free         |
| Yuefu               |              | workmanlike     | -                  | -                   | -                  | basic        |
| Early Pentasyllabic | 19 old songs | mood evocative  | effective          | -                   | -                  | basic        |
| Early Pentasyllabic | Court poetry | mood evocative  | refined            |                     | assonance          | tight        |
| Shi                 | Tianyuan     | effective       | spare              | personal            | blunt              | basic        |
| Shi                 | Gutishi      | rich - textured | melodious          | fresh-struck        | traditional themes | varied       |
| Shi                 | Gutishi      | rich - textured | melodious          | conventional        | more personal      | varied       |
| Jintishi            | Wulu         | studied         | melodious          | dissociated         | assonance          | tight        |
| Jintishi            | Qilu         | studied         | melodious          | dissociated         | assonance          | tight        |
| Jintishi            | Wujue        | studied         | melodious          | dissociated         | assonance          | tight        |
| Jintishi            | Qijue        | studied         | melodious          | dissociated         | assonance          | tight        |
| Qu                  |              | open-textured   | song-like          | living speech       |                    | varied       |
| Ci                  |              | song-like       | catchy             | personal            | focused            | as necessary |

This 'spirit' or nature is not a shaping imposed but generalities gradually elicited from the poetry itself,

academic commentaries and the trial and error of the translation process — i.e. rationalisations from practice. The matter is pursued more in Volume Two. Detailed notes on the individual poems can be found in Volumes Three and Four: word-for-word renderings, text sources, alternative translations, literary criticism, audio recordings and references.

## 10. BIOGRAPHIES OF THE POETS REPRESENTED

### Cai Yong (132-192 AD)

Poems: 15

Style / personality: repetition to enforce sentiment

Cai Yong (132-92) was an official and scholar of the Eastern (later) Han dynasty, well versed in calligraphy, music, mathematics and astronomy, but most famous for his poetry, in which he continued his battle against eunuchs and court extravagance. He wrote pieces in the four-character metre, and in the *Fu* style. Only a few poems of his now remain, but the repetitious style extracts a potent sentiment from intelligible situations.

### Cao Cao (155-220 AD)

Poems: 16

Style / personality: blunt commonsense in contemporary diction.

Cao Cao (155-220) was a complex man: warlord, military genius, penultimate Chancellor of the Eastern Han dynasty, famous for his poetry, his skill in the martial arts and authorship of many war journals. Though in fact an accomplished administrator, he is portrayed in the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* as a cruel and suspicious villain.

Cao Cao's work was in the traditional four-character metre, but he also, with his two sons, created the *Jian'an* style that was to greatly influence Tang poetry, turning poetry away from narrative, towards the personal expression of sentiment. His poetry, outwardly simple but evocative, revitalized poetry by replacing archaic words with contemporary diction.

## Ban Jiezu (c.48-6 BC)

Poems: 18

Style / personality: reserved, refined and indirect.

Consort Ban, real name unknown, was a concubine of Emperor Chengdi, bearing him two sons who unfortunately died in infancy. Later in life, the emperor became infatuated with a dancing girl Zhao Feiyan and her sister Zhao Hede, who were favoured over the Empress Xu and Consort Ban. In 18 BC, both empress and consort Ban were accused of witchcraft, but consort Ban, being an accomplished poet and scholar, was able to argue for and obtain their acquittal. Consort Ban then chose to become a lady in waiting to the empress dowager, and was eventually buried in the emperor's funeral park.

Consort Ban wrote two *Fu* poems but is best known for her *Song of Resentment*, much admired by Li Bai and later poets, although doubts remain over its authorship. It is refined court poetry, with the reproach only implied as lingering regret.

## Tao Qian: (AD 365-427)

Poems: 19 20

Style / personality: homespun integrity in rural setting.

Tao Qian, also known as Tao Yuanming was an influential poet who retired from an unsuccessful career in officialdom to create a new genre of 'farmstead' (*shanshui*) poetry. He came from a family that had lost most of its prestige and wealth when Tao was born, and the man did not achieve official rank until his late twenties. Probably disillusioned by the constraints of office and unrest of the times, Tao retired thirteen years later to become a gentleman farmer. His poems have a sturdy matter-of-factness in their celebration of rustic life — reading books, playing the zither, writing poetry for his own pleasure — but do not gloss over cold, hunger and hard toil of rural life.

Tao's first official appointment was as State Officer of Rites, but he was probably later involved with local warlords and Emperor An's faltering administration. In a fourth stint of duty he worked for general Liu Jingxuan, resigning when the general himself resigned. The fifth stint, as Penze county magistrate, lasted only eighty days.

Tao achieved a local standing, but his reputation was made in the Tang dynasty, when poets like Du Fu and Li Bai, also unhappy with court life, came to admire his rugged independence. Han poetry, *Jian'an* poetry, the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, and the other earlier

Six dynasties poetry all foreshadowed Tao's symbolism and return to the country theme, but Tao's poems broke new ground, and his pentasyllabic verse forms became a staple of the Gushi, or old-style, Unregulated *Shi* poetry. Tao absorbed the essentials of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, but his verse above all shows great perseverance and integrity.

## Xie Lingyun (385-433)

Poems: 21 22

Style / personality: complex and allusive landscapes.

Xie Lingyun had a distinguished ancestry. His paternal grandfather was general Xie Xuan, who played an important role in the fortunes of the Jin and Former Qin dynasties. His maternal grandmother was the only daughter of Wang Xizhi, politician, writer and China's greatest calligrapher. The father died early, leaving Xie Lingyun to be brought up by Buddhist monks. The young Duke returned in 399 to his magnificent parental estates at Shining, where pavilions, lakes, gardens, paths and orchards were set in scenes of outstanding natural beauty, but the family had to take refuge in Jiankang (modern Nanking) for four years when a major rebellion broke out. The family was wealthy, with extensive properties and three thousand household servants alone. As the young man was talented and well educated, a brilliant career beckoned, but Xie unfortunately backed the Eastern Jin, which was overthrown by the Liu Song dynasty. Xie was demoted and posted to the coastal town of Yongjia.

Claiming ill health, Xie returned to his parental estates, which he considerably improved. The poems he wrote at Shining made him famous in the capital, to which he recalled, retained without proper duties, released, recalled, exiled and finally executed on some political pretext.

Xie's poetry is complex and allusive, with Buddhist strains, but he is above all remembered for his landscape poems, which draw on *Fu* poetry but use the pentasyllabic metre. Many are exceptionally compact, even gnomic, and achieve a tonal harmony that would become important in the Regulated *Shi* poetry of the Tang.

## Xie Tiao (464-99)

Poems: 54

Style / personality: vivid naturalness, tonally balanced.

Xie Tiao was born in Yangxia County, Henan, into the Southern Qi kingdom in the Northern and Southern dynasties period. The family was nobility; his father was an assistant minister and his mother was a princess of the Songwen Empire. Xie seems to have been energetic and hard working as an official, but was eventually slandered, arrested and died in prison.

Nearly 200 of his poems survive. Most are pentasyllabic, and extol the beauties of nature, being famous for their details and vivid description. Poets of this Yongmang reign (483-493) of the Qi dynasty devoted themselves to creating euphony by balancing tones, devising rules that



formed the basis of Regulated *Shi* poetry of the Tang dynasty.

## Tang Poets

### Zhang Ruoxu (7-8<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

Poems: 34

Style / personality: lyrical description

Zhang Ruoxu was an early Tang poet from whom only two poems are known today. He was apparently a native of Yangzhou in modern Jiangsu province, and served as a minor military officer in Yanzhou (modern Shandong). Beyond that, little of his life is known, though he is commonly grouped as one of the Four Poets of Central Wu in the Lower Yangtze region.

Zhang Ruoxu is really known for only one poem, one long, wonderful and extraordinarily influential poem: *A Night of Blossom and Moonlight on the Yangtze in Springtime*. Described by the twentieth-century poet Wen Yiduo as 'the poem of all poems, the summit of all summits', the piece breaks with Six Dynasty manner and anticipates the content and style of the high Tang. The poem has nine quatrains and three sections. The first section depicts the moonlit Yangtze River in spring. The second and third sections regret the ephemeral nature of life, commenting on the sorrow of travellers and the loved ones they leave behind. Both themes would become important in Tang and later poetry.

## Wang Bo (650-76)

Poems: 40

Style / personality: self-expressive

Wang Bo was born into a literary family and showed precocious talent. At six he could write poems, and at ten was reading the Classics. Beginning his career under Prince Pei (Prince Zhanghuai), he wrote a call-to-arms in jest, which did not find favour with Gaozong, the first emperor of the Tang. Subsequently he killed a servant, which ended his career and endangered that of his father, who was banished to Jiaozhi. It was returning from a visit to his father in 676 that Wang Bo was drowned at sea.

Wang Bo's brief output nonetheless influenced Tang poetry. He advocated 'self display' of the emotions, though these had to be appropriate, i.e. express the ideal of service to the state. By some commentators, he was thought frivolous, or even conceited, but his stress on content and sense were a valuable antidote to poetry that aimed simply for formal perfection.

## Wang Zhihuan (688-742)

Poems: 58

Style / personality: simple, with Buddhist overtones

Wang Zhihuan was a poet of the early Tang famous for his *Jueju* quatrains describing the frontier country. Only six poems survive, but all are minor classics.

Wang Zhihuan was born in Jingyang in Bingzhou (now Taiyuan in Shanxi) and is described as talented and generous. While in office, he married the third daughter of the magistrate of Hengshui County, but was later slandered and left government service. Nonetheless, he was appointed as lieutenant of Wen'an County in the last year of his life. He died at Wen'an, and was buried in his ancestral tomb at Beimang Mountain in Luoyang County.

The poems are deceptively simple, but commonly employ Buddhist concepts of impermanence, balance and enlightenment.

### Meng Haoran (689-740)

Poems: 38 39

Style / personality: reflective nature poet

Meng Haoran enjoyed only brief success as an official, not indeed passing the *jinshi* examinations till the late age of 39. He received his first and last position three years before his death, and resigned after a year.

Most of Meng Haoran's poetry is set in the present-day Hubei province where he was born and raised. He was a nature poet, popular in later compilations of Tang poetry, but, though his work is thoughtful and reflective, it is simpler and more open than the Buddhist-influenced poetry of his friend Wang Wei.

### Wang Wei (701-761)

Poems: 28 45 57

Style / personality: exceptionally quiet and refined, interested in shifting perspectives, Buddhist influenced.

Wang Wei, one of the three great poets of the earlier Tang Dynasty, was born in Shensi, his father a local official and his mother a member of a distinguished literary family. At 16, Wei and a brother were introduced to society in the Tang capital of Chang'an, then the largest city in the world, and at 23 he passed the *jinshi* that guaranteed entry into the highest literary and official circles (exams which Du Fu failed, and Li Bai never deigned to sit).

A man of outstanding talents — courtier, administrator, poet, calligrapher, musician and painter — Wang was immediately appointed Assistant Secretary for Music, which he seems to have found irksome. After a minor indiscretion, was exiled to the provinces in Shantung, where he remained some years before resigning and returning to Chang'an. He married and set about developing an estate in the Changnan hills south of the capital, to which he returned whenever possible. When Wang was 30 his wife died, and the poet did not remarry but returned to Government service, dividing his time between Changnan and various missions, including three years on the northwest frontier. In 750 AD, when his mother died, Wang retired to write and paint and meditate in his beloved Changnan.

Far more than the mercurial Li Bai or the plain-spoken Du Fu, Wang Wei was a successful official — he amassed

several fortunes and gave lavishly to monasteries — but he too was caught up in the 755-9 An Lushan rebellion. Captured by rebels, Wang was obliged to collaborate, for which he was briefly imprisoned when imperial order was restored. But always valuable, Wang returned to Government service and belonged to the Council of State when he died in 761.

Modest, supremely gifted but detached from life, Wang was the model scholar official, and his 400 poems are in many anthologies. Wang Wei was a Buddhist mystic, viewing the world with a detached compassion. Life is an illusion, and its ensnaring passions and appetites keep us from our better natures — the more so in the sophisticated court life of the Tang where Chinese culture reached its apogee. All three poets were ambivalent towards its refined charms, particularly during the corrupting last years of Taizong's rule, though also bitterly sad at its destruction by the An Lushan rebels

Li Bai (701-62)

Poems: 23 24 25 26 27 44 55 56 60

Style / personality: mercurial, imaginative and self-centred.

Li Bai was born in the Gang Xiao Sheng territory of China, and, when five years old, followed his merchant father to Sichuan. He may well have been of central Asian stock, or a descendent of an unsuccessful rival for the dragon throne. Li Bai seems to have had a happy childhood: he read the classics, composed poetry, dabbled in astrological and metaphysical writings, and learnt to ride, hunt and fence. By his swordsmanship he claimed to have killed several men in chivalrous escapades. He was married four times, first to the granddaughter of a former government minister, with whom he stayed in Anlu (Hubei) for some ten years. In 744, wandering again, he was married a second time, to a fellow poet in what now is the Liangyuan District of Henan. The two other marriages seem to have been less respectable, to a Mingyue slave and to a woman into whose house Li Bai moved (rather than the other way round, which was usual in China). Children were born, but Li Bai continued his itinerant ways: drinking, exchanging poems, maintaining his independence until swept up in events of the An Lushan Rebellion.

When Wei Hao interviewed him, Li Bai was 54 years old. Regarding Li Bai's marriage life before the age of 54, Wei Hao truthfully recorded in the "Preface to Li Hanlin Collection": "Bai Shi married Yu Xu and gave birth to a daughter, and the other was a Mingyue slave. The daughter married and died. Liu, Liu Jue. The second time was in the Luyi woman, and she gave birth to a son called Poli. Finally married Yuzong."

Of an independent and bohemian nature, and well-off, Li Bai never sat the official examinations, nor bothered much about finding a position, but by impressing the many scholars who befriended him with his poetry, he was brought to court notice, and in 742 appeared before Emperor Xuanzong. He became a member of the Hanlin Academy, an appointment that lasted only two years. The association between China's most gifted literary magician and its dilettante emperor was not a happy one, and Li Bai was exiled from court on several occasions, the result of dubious political connections and the poet's distaste for tradition and authority. Li Bai continued his wanderings, and in 755 he joined the force led by the emperor's sixteenth son, Prince Lin, just surviving subsequent capture and a death sentence when the old emperor died. There are many legends surrounding Li Bai's death, but he probably died at Dangtu, possibly of cirrhosis of the liver or mercury poisoning, in Anhui province in 762.

Some 1,100 of Li Bai's poems survive, and are noted for rich fantasy, brilliant improvisation, unmatched technical felicity, and for Taoist and alchemical leanings — the Tao, unknown and unfathomable, lying behind the flow of pattern and process in the universe, which we can abstract into concepts but not fully comprehend. Li Bai made few innovations but seemed effortlessly to seize what was available to poets at the time. He was a strong character, making a vivid impression on everyone he met, but also boastful, callous, dissipated, irresponsible and untruthful. His saving quality is the poetry, whose

brilliance should be apparent even in the short selection here.

## Liu Changqing (709-785)

Poem 51

Style / personality: quietly reflective.

Liu Changqing, courtesy name Wenfang, was a Chinese poet and politician whose life is not well documented. He was born in the city of Xuancheng though the family came from Hejian. Most of his youth was spent in the city of Luoyang. Liu obtained his *jinshi* title in the 750s, and he became governor of Suizhou in Henan province in 780.

Liu's poems were not much praised in his lifetime, but were recognised as representative of the period by later generations. He excelled in 5-character lines, and 11 of his poems were collected in the popular anthology *Three Hundred Tang Poems*.

## Du Fu (712-770)

Poems: 29 30 31 41 42 43

Style / personality: masculine, blunt empathy with common people: can be passionate, probing and visionary.

Du Fu, often seen as China's greatest poet by western readers, had an outwardly unsuccessful career, one cursed by the An Lushan Rebellion, imperial politics, ill



health and frequent poverty. He was not well known in his lifetime, and much has to be conjectured from his poetry.

His paternal grandfather was a noted politician and poet, but Du Fu was born somewhere near Luoyang to a minor scholar-official. His mother died shortly after he was born, and he was partially raised by his aunt. His father died in 740. Du Fu failed the Imperial examinations in 735, and again in 747, and took to travelling around Shandong and Hebe. He first met Li Bai in 744, forming a friendship that introduced him to the independent poet-scholar existence forced on him by examination failures. He petitioned the emperor for appointment in 751, 754 and probably again in 755, being at last appointed to Registrar of the Right Commandant's office of the Crown Prince's Palace, a minor post that was soon swept away by events. Du Fu married around 752, and by 757 the couple had had five children. From 754 he began to have lung problems, the first of many ailments that dogged him for the rest of his life. It was also in 754 that Du Fu had to move his family from turmoil and famine brought on by massive floods in the region.

The eight-year long An Lushan Rebellion killed or displaced some two thirds of China's population, and, though Du Fu found his vocation in brooding on the sufferings of the common people, he too led an itinerant life, at the mercy of famine and imperial displeasure. Emperor Xuanzong had fled the capital in 756 and abdicated. Du Fu left his family in a place of safety, and tried to join the court of the new emperor, Suzong, but he was captured by the rebels and taken to Chang'an. He

escaped the following year, and was appointed Reminder when he rejoined the court in May 757. Though the post gave him access to the emperor, it was largely ceremonial. Du Fu's conscientiousness only caused trouble, and in the summer of 758 Du Fu was demoted to a post as Commissioner of Education in Huazhou.

Du Fu spent a brief period in Tongqu, and then five years in Chendu (Sichuan), where he was accommodated by the local Prefect and fellow poet. Despite financial troubles, this was probably the happiest period of his life. He left the city in 762 to escape the rebellion but returned in the summer of 764, when he was appointed an advisor to Yan and involved in campaigns against the Tibetan Empire.

Luoyang, the region of his birthplace, was recovered by government forces in the winter of 762, and in the spring of 765 Du Fu and his family attempted to make their way there, sailing slowly down the Yangtze, often held up by bouts of poor eyesight, deafness and general old age. At Kuizhuo, at the entrance to the Three Gorges, Du Fu stayed nearly two years and wrote some 400 poems in his dense, late style. Bo Maolin became governor of the region and supported the poet financially, employing him as his unofficial secretary. Du Fu resumed his journey in March 768, but only got as far as Tanzhou (now Changsha), where he died. He left a wife and two sons, who remained in the area for some years.

Du Fu's work is noted for its range of subject matter, his compassion for fellow human beings and its technical excellence. He mastered all genres, in a wide range of

social registers, and turned what can be only word play, just formal exercises in other poets, into something passionate, probing and visionary. As commentators stress, his compressed language uses words and phrases in overtones that no translation can do justice to, or even reveal.

Recognition came very slowly. Later Tang poets began to reflect Du Fu achievements — in Bai Juyi's concern for the poor, Lu You's patriotism, and Mei Yaochen's naturalness — but it was in the Northern Song dynasty that the three great poets of the Tang, Wang Wei, Li Bai and Du Fu came to be seen as representing the Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian strands respectively of Chinese culture.

## Bai Juyi (772–846)

Poems: 32 33 61

Style / personality: plain and simple, often with some social comment.

Bai Juyi had a long and successful career as a Tang official, eventually serving as governor of three important provinces. His family was poor but scholarly, and Bai Juyi passed the *jinshi* examinations in 800. He served in minor appointments until 815, when various offences brought three years of exile: exceeding his authority, criticising greedy officials and the Tatar war, and showing insufficient filial respect for his late mother. He was then sent as governor to a remote Sichuan posting. But in 819, Bai Juyi was recalled to the capital and given the post of second-class Assistant Secretary. Shortly afterwards,

under the new emperor Muzong, Bai Juyi was made governor of Hangzhou, where he made important irrigation improvements. Bai Juyi then retired to Loyang, but in 825, at the age of 53, he was appointed governor of Sizhou. Two years later, ill health forced another retirement to the capital, but Bai Juyi was then given a third governorship, that of Henan, in which Luoyang is situated. The remaining thirteen years of his life saw various appointments, but most were nominal: he had effectively retired.

Among most famous works are the long narrative poems like *Chang hen ge* (Song of Everlasting Sorrow), which tells the story of Yang Guifei, and *Pipa xing* (Song of the Pipa), but he was best known for his low-key poems written in the everyday language, many of them with political and social criticism. They are written in a plain and direct style, so readily comprehended that Bai Juyi would rewrite anything that couldn't be immediately understood by his servants. They were popular throughout China, but Bai Juyi had them copied nonetheless, and today they number some 2,800 poems.

## Li He (791-817)

Poems: 49

Style / personality: morbid and strange, often difficult.

Li's ancestry is contested: if they were descended from the imperial family of the Tang dynasty, they were nonetheless of low rank when the poet was born. Li was a native of Fuchang county (west of modern-day Yiyang

county in Henan Province). He was precocious, composing poems by the age of seven, and being thought a *Yuefu* master by the age of fifteen. He was not successful at the imperial examinations and served only three years as a minor official in Fengililan before returning home. He was generally described as of a sickly appearance, thin and in poor health.

Some 240 poems of his survive and are often called strange and /or morbid. Li He would compose by jotting down lines on paper as they came to him, putting the papers in a bag, and then trying to make a poem by taking the lines at random from the bag. Li Shangyin wrote a short biography of Li, and Du Mu wrote a preface to Li's collected poems in 831. His poetry is difficult but is taken as typical of the middle Tang: he was admired by Mao Zedong.

## Du Mu (803-52)

Poems: 59

Style / personality: sensual and lyrical, with striking word play.

Du Mu was born in Chang'an into an elite family of declining fortunes. He passed the *jinshi* examinations at the age of 25, and held a succession of minor posts associated with literature and censorship. To avoid the factional disputes between Li Gan and Zheng Zhu, asked to be moved to Loyang in 835, so avoiding the purge that followed the Sweet Dew Incident later in the year. Many positions in various places followed, but the Sweet Dew

Incident (a failed attempt to limit the power of eunuchs) seems to have prevented anything very senior. Du Mu was Senior Compiler of the History Office (838), Vice Director of the Catering Bureau (840), governor of small poor rural prefectures, first Huangzhou, then Chizhou and Muzhou 842), Vice Director of Merit Titles (848) Governor of Huzhou (850) Director of the Bureau of Evaluation and Drafter (851). All these seemed a disappointment, which showed in Du Mu's work.

Du Mu was a major poet writing in the golden age of Tang poetry skilled in many styles. He is best known for of sensual, lyrical quatrains featuring historical sites or romantic situations, and often on themes of separation, decadence, or impermanence. The style blends classical imagery and diction with striking juxtapositions, colloquialisms, or other wordplay. Du Mu also wrote long narrative poems.

## Li Shangyin (813-58)

Poems: 47 48

Style / personality: dense, allusive and difficult.

Li Shangyin was a Chinese poet and politician of the late Tang Dynasty, born in Henei (now Qinyang, Henan), and 'rediscovered' by young Chinese writers intrigued by the imagist quality of his work and his tantalizing 'no title' poems.

Li Shangyin wrote in the difficult years following the An Lushan Rebellion. The previous rebels had to be pardoned

and bought off, which made them warlords only nominally obedient to the central government. The imperial court and army were also under the control of eunuch factions. Both warlords and eunuchs contributed to the unrest, uncertainty and frequent bloodshed of the period, which also saw threats from the Tibetan empire to the northwest

Li wrote in many styles, and could be satirical, humorous or sentimental: contemporary critics noted a masculine quality approaching that of Du Fu. The poems are typically sensuous, dense and allusive, the last making for many difficulties in interpretation, particularly when the poem is untitled.

## Wen Tingyun (813-870)

Poems: 82 83

Style / personality: much involved in affairs of the heart.

Wen Tingyun was born in Taiyuan around 812, a descendant of a prime minister in the early Tang Dynasty. He was interested in literature, but the death of his father brought hard times. Happily, Wen was taken up by the nobility, but soon found himself involved in power struggles and efforts to claim his work by the prime minister of the time, Linghu Tao. Promotion was difficult after such incidents, and Wen repeatedly failed the civil service examinations. Eventually, Wen spent more time in the women's quarters while helping others to cheat the examinations. Belatedly, with the change of emperor Wen was recommended in 866 for the post of Instructor of the

State Sons' University. Unfortunately, to prevent the unfair treatment he had suffered, Wen began to reform the examination system, making assessments fairer and more open, a move that damaged the interests of the powerful and cause Wen to be demoted. He died shortly afterwards.

Wen did more than anyone to make *Ci* poetry popular in Tang times, and later generations saw him as the founder of the genre. The so-called 'Flowery School of Ci' concentrated on matters of the heart, boldly evoking love affairs between men and women, and was clearly an escape from the troubled times.

## Qin Taoyu (Late Tang)

Poems: 50

Style / personality: Piquant social comment.

Qin Toayu was a poet of the late Tang Dynasty, whose birth and death dates are unknown. He was born to a family of martial arts enthusiast, and his father was an army general. He was taken up by the powerful eunuch Tian Linz, and served as a staff member, a minister and a judge of salt and iron. After Huang Chao's rebellion took Chang'an, Qin went to Shu from Emperor Xi Zong, and was awarded a scholarship in the second year of Zhonghe (882). Tian Linz also promoted him to be a minister of the Ministry of Public Works and a judge of the Divine Strategy Army. His marital status is not known but he was



called "Qiao eunuch" by contemporaries. He is best known for *The Poor Girl* poem of Volume One.

## Song Poets

### Li Yu (937-78)

Poems: 53 63

Style / personality: Innovative, later with a sadder tone.

Li Yu (known before 961 as Li Congjia) was the last emperor of the Southern Tang dynasty before it was absorbed by the Song. Li Congjia was not the heir apparent and tried to remain inconspicuous by focusing on the arts. He loved poetry, painting and music, and was encouraged in these by his father, who was a noted poet. At the age of 17 he made a happy marriage with the lady Zhou Ehuang, who was also multi-talented in the arts. In 955, a year after Li Congjia's marriage, the Southern Tang was invaded by the Later Zhou dynasty, and lost its territories to the north. Its emperor was demoted to king. Palace coups removed opposition and the king himself abnegated on the grounds of ill health. Li Congjia became emperor, against a younger brother and courtiers who regarded Li too dissolute and weak to rule effectively. Li Yu ruled from 961 to 976, but the prognostications were borne out by events. Li spent more time with Zhou Ehuang and then her younger sister than attending to state affairs, placating the Song with tribute and flattery. But the inevitable could not be delayed forever, and in

976 the Song annexed the Southern Tang, imprisoning its ruler and having him poisoned two years later.

Li Yu was a great devotee of *Ci* poetry, though his style is closer the Tang. He had devoted much of his time to pleasure seeking and literature, and this is reflected in the early poems. A sadder tone prevailed after the death of his wife in 964, and the best-known poems were composed when Li was a prisoner of the Song, reflecting on past glories. He was poisoned by the Song emperor Taizong, in 978, after writing a poem lamented the destruction of his empire and the rape of his second wife Empress Zhou the Younger by the Song emperor.

Li Yu broadened the scope of *Ci* poetry to include history and philosophy, and introduced the two-stanza form that made great use of contrasts between longer lines of nine characters and shorter ones of three and five. Only 45 of his *Ci* poems survive, but his story remains popular in Cantonese opera.

## Lin Bu (967-1028)

Poems: 52

Style / personality: Created new style balancing inner and outward aspects of subject matter.

Lin Bu was a minor poet of the Northern Song dynasty who spent the later part of his life as a recluse by the West Lake in Hangzhou. His mastery of verse and solitude

won him nationwide fame, and he steadfastly refused prestigious government posts to pursue his poetry.

Lin Bu created a new genre in poems (*Yongwu Shi*: poems on things) that not only described the outward appearance of things but also looked at their inner essence and significance. The plum tree, with its early white blossoms flowering among the snow, became a very popular theme, especially among the scholarly class that admired austerity and self-restraint. Plum blossom became a staple of the so-called bird-and-flower division of Chinese painting. The attitude is also typical of the Song dynasty, which shied away from the overt expression of highly wrought emotion in favour of the mundane and everyday aspects of life, which could accommodate a good deal of personal thought and reflection.

## Yan Shu (991-1055)

Poems: 84

Style / personality: Delicate and restrained.

Yan Shu was an infant prodigy, able to compose poems at five and passing the imperial examinations at fourteen. He became a noted poet, calligrapher and statesman of the Northern Song, rising smoothly in his career to become a member of the Hanlin Academy and prime minister to the emperor Renzong. His son was also a noted poet, and among Yan's pupils was the renowned poet, essayist and statesman Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072)

Of the 10,000 *Ci* poems Yan reputedly composed, only 136 now remain, but these show a mastery of the *Xiaoling* in the *Wanyue* style, i.e. delicate and restrained.

## Mei Yaochen (1002-1060)

Poems: 35 46

Style / personality: Disarmingly simple language

Mei Yaochen was born in Xuancheng in present-day Anhui Province, and passed the *jinshi* examination rather late in life, in 1051. His was not a successful career, therefore, but he was a prolific poet, with some 3000 works still extant. His poetry was popularized by the statesman Ouyang Xiu, and the early poems contained much social criticism, advocating reform along Neo-Confucian lines.

Most of Mei's work is Unregulated *Shi* poetry, but the poems are freer than the Tang forms and employ an everyday language to describe everyday events. The language is generally direct and disarmingly simple, not highly literary even when dealing with poignant matters like the death of his wife, on which Mei composed long sequences of poems.

## Cheng Hao (1032-85)

Poems: 62

Style / personality: More a philosopher than poet.

Cheng Hao is better known as philosopher and politician than poet, but, like all educated Chinese, could turn out charming pieces when required. Hao was born into a family of magistrates, passed the imperial examinations in 1057, and was successively appointed administrative clerk in Hu County, Shaanxi, administrative clerk in Shangyuan County (now in Nanjing), administrative director in Zezhou, minister of ceremony, Censor, tax and tariff official, ceremony minister to the military, and to various other positions.

But Hao was a good deal more than successful bureaucrat, and, with his younger brother, pioneered the Song revival of Neo-Confucian cosmology. This was a dualistic philosophy, dividing everything between the tangible and intangible. It was also a pantheistic philosophy, seeing everything intangible (god, human nature, feelings, actions, movement and even chance) as of a common unified and inwardly related nature. One well-known quote is: 'Outside Dao there are no things and outside things there is no Dao. . . Dao is the ruler of events we call god to emphasize the wonderful mystery of principle in ten thousand things. . . Dao is function, human nature and human destiny.'

Su Dongpo (1037-1101)

Poems: 36 87 88

Style / personality: Greatly accomplished in all genres.

Su Shi, who called himself Su Dongpo, came from an illustrious literati family, and at 17 passed the *jinshi* examination that opened the way to highest government office. For twenty years, 1060-80, Su Shi held various posts across China, often being commended for local improvements, but the reforming faction headed by Wang Anshi then contrived to have him exiled to Huagzhou in Hubei. Out of employment for the period 1080-86, Su Shi lived on a farm called Dongpo ('eastern slope'), meditated on Buddhist themes, wrote poetry and practised the calligraphy for which was famous. With the change of government, Su Shi was recalled to the capital, but then exiled again, 1094-1100, to Huizhou and Hainan island. A pardon came and a reassignment to Chengdu, but Su Shi died en route. Su Shi was married three times: to Wang Fu (1039-65), to Wang Runzhi (1048-93) and to Wang Zhaoyu (1062-95), writing for all them some of China's best known poetry.

Su Shi was one of China's most accomplished literary figures, leaving behind a great mass of still-read letters, essays and poems, plus some paintings and calligraphy. Some 2,700 poems survive today. Most are in the Shi genre, but Su Shi is best remembered for his 350 *Ci* genre poems. He founded the Haofang School, which combined spontaneity, objectivity and vivid descriptions of natural phenomena, often on historical events or Buddhist themes. Su Shi wrote also wrote essays on politics and governance, which contributed to his periods of imperial disfavour.

## Li Qingzhao (1084-1151)

Poems: 89

Style / personality: Later introspective, sincere and deeply personal.

Li Qingzhao was born to a family of scholar-officials in 1084, at Zhangqiu in modern Shandong province. She was unusually outgoing for such a background, and was already well known for her poetry before her marriage to Zhao Mingchen in 1101. Her husband shared her interests: both collected books and works of art, and wrote poetry to each other. Kaifeng fell to the Jurchens in 1127, and in the fighting that took place in Shandong their house was looted and burned to the ground. The couple took what possessions they could with them in their flight to Nanjing, where they lived for a year, but Zhao died in 1129 en route to another posting.

Li never fully recovered from the death of her husband, but she published his work and described her previous life in poetry that describes a woman of high society, and which is known for its marked elegance. Her earlier poetry was often critical of government policies, as indeed was the work published after the flight to Nanking, when she briefly married an 'abusive, gold-digging and worthless shyster'. The later poetry, for which she is known throughout China, was introspective, sincere and deeply personal.

## Xin Qiji (1140-1207)

Poems: 86 90 91

Style / personality: Prolific and versatile.

Xin Qiji was a soldier-poet who fought the Jurchen that had occupied China's northern provinces, where, in fact, he was born. His patriotism was inspired by his grandfather, and though he failed the imperial examinations twice at the capital (Jin capital: the Jurchens were rapidly sinicized), he raised a small force to fight alongside the Southern Song led by Geng Jing. Some battles were won, but Geng Jin was betrayed by the traitor Zhang Anguo, and executed. With fifty men, Xin fought his way into the Jurchen camp, and brought Zhang Anguo back for punishment to the Southern Song emperor. The action won Xi a place at the Song court, but his aggressive approach to the Jurchen was at odds with the court's appeasement, and his 1161-81 appointments never came to much. He then improved the peasants' lot in the area he was administering, and attempted to raise his own army, for which he was promptly dismissed. He retired to Jiangxi, and perfected the *Ci* poetry for which he became famous.

Xin was recalled to court in 1192, but soon dismissed, for the same reason, and retired once more to seclusion in Jiangxi Province. Eleven years later, in 1203, when the Jurchen were seriously threatening the Song's border, Xi was befriended by Han Tuo Zhou, the consul of the Southern Song court. But Han did not heed Xin's advice, and in fact removed him from office. Finally, in 1207, when Han's head was demanded by the Jurchen as part of a peace treaty with the Song, Xi was recalled, but the



northern provinces were by then beyond recapture, and Xin died shortly afterwards. Eventually, in 1257, Xin was vindicated and awarded the posthumous title of 'Zhong Min'.

Xin Qiji was the most prolific writer of *Ci* poetry in the Song Dynasty, largely in the *Haofang* style, but in a very free-ranging and sometimes confrontational manner. Some poems reflect on the dreams of youth, but his poems on the 'abandoned woman' theme are long, delicate and exceptionally restrained.

## Lu You (1125-1209)

Poems: 53 63

Style / personality: Prolific reportage.

Lu You was a strong patriotic poet who urged China to take a more aggressive stance in Jurchen-Song Wars. He was born on a riverboat in 1125, a year before the northern capital fell to the Jurchen, and China became divided between the Jin Empire and the Southern Song. Lu's family fled south to safety, and Lu was brought up with his cousin Tang Wan, who was quiet but loved literature. The two married when Lu was 20, and lived very happily, but when no children arrived, Lu was compelled by his mother find someone else. Though Wan married a nobleman, and Lu someone from the Wang clan, the heartbreak was obvious to both parties and forms a love story famous in China.

Lu learned swordplay, became immersed in war strategy and pledged his literary talents to the defence of the

country from the Jurchen. He passed the imperial examinations on his second attempt, at the age of 29, but was prevented nobleman privilege from immediately assuming office. An honorary *jinshi* degree was conferred on him by the Xiaozong emperor in 1163, but his opposition to Jurchen appeasement seriously impeded his career. After several promotions and demotions, Li retired in 1190 to live in his hometown Shaoxing (now in Zhejiang province). From here he traveled extensively, making observations on local events and customs that feature in his voluminous poems. He became friendly with Fan Chengda and adopted a rather bohemian attitude. Lu's wife died in 1197. Lu himself died in 1209.

Lu wrote some eleven thousand poems, in the *Shi* and *Ci* genres. Scholars generally recognize three periods. Only some 200 derive from the first period, from teenage to maturity at 46, because Lu destroyed most of them. The 2400 poems from second period, when Lu was between 46 and 54 years of age, have military themes. The 6500 poems of the third period, though as patriotic as the others, are more varied: local scenes, images both pastoral and of desolating bleakness.

## Fan Chengda (AD 1126-1193)

Poems: 64

Style / personality: Keen and unsentimental view of local scenery.

Fan Chengda was born into poverty, but, passing the *jinshi* degree in 1154, began a long career in service to the Southern Song state, becoming particularly known for his geographical treatises on southern China's topography and commercial products

Fan wrote in both the Regulated *Shi* quatrains and the *Ci* genres, but is best known for a series of sixty quatrains which he wrote in 1186, following retirement from a high official at the Southern Song Court. The poems show a great love of the rural life, à la Tian Qian, but also keen eye for detail that does not sentimentalise the peasant's hard toil to meet the tax-collector's demands.

## Wu Wenying (1200-1260)

Poems: 93

Style / personality: Particularly adept at sentimental and nostalgic pieces.

Little is known for sure about Wu Wenying's life, suggesting he never passed the imperial examinations. Though adept at poetry and music, he probably remained a commoner employed on the clerical staff of various officials in (present-day) Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, spending long periods in the cultural centers of Suzhou and Hangzhou. What is known from the poetry is not particularly edifying, moreover: references to the 'tears, slippers and delicate hands' of women who had given him their devotion in outings and banquets the poet was

expected to commemorate in a subtle and delicate manner.

But the best of the 350-odd *Ci* poems that have survived are nonetheless carefully constructed, with a marked emphasis on musicality, elegant diction and indirect allusion. The Prelude to the Oriole's Song is indeed the longest *Ci* poem in existence, and richly orchestrated on several levels of meaning.

## Yuan and Later Poets

### Zhang Yanghao (1270-1329)

Poems: 78

Style / personality: Prolific: high artistry with social conscience.

Zhang Yanghao hailed from Shandong and was a prolific writer essays, *Ci* and *Qu* poetry. Recommended to office, he was demoted and subsequently dismissed after angering superiors with his criticism of government policies. He was later reappointed to important posts like the Ministry of Rites, but worked himself to death in 1329 when put in charge of relief work for the drought stricken central Yellow River basin.

The poetry shows a high order of artistry and an abiding concern for the common people's welfare. He is famous for both, but is probably best known for his 'Meditation on the Past at Tong Pass'.

## Guan Hanqing (1220-1307)

Poems: 75 76

Style / personality: Prolific command of idiomatic language.

Guan Hanqing, with the sobriquet 'The Old Man of the Studio', spent much of his time in Dadu (present-day Beijing). He was a poet and a notable playwright, often described as among the most prolific and highly regarded dramatists of the Yuan period. Fourteen of the 65-odd plays he wrote are still extant. The language is convincingly idiomatic and often subtly reveals his character's feelings and motivations.

## Ma Zhiyuan (1250-1321)

Poems: 77

Style / personality: *Qu* poet, also playwright.

Ma Zhiyuan, courtesy name Dongli, was both poet and celebrated playwright. He was a native of Dadu (present-day Beijing) during the Yuan dynasty.

Among his achievements is the development and popularising of the *Qu* genre, of which his poem 'Autumn Thoughts' is among the best known. It is written to tune or metrical pattern of Tianjingsha and uses ten images in twenty-two monosyllables to the melancholy of late autumn.

## Guan Yunshi (1286-1324)

Poems: 79

Style / personality: Convincing command of everyday speech.

Guan Yunshi was a Uyghur poet who attended the Hanlin academy. He later gave up his official position and lived in seclusion, selling medicine in the city of Qiantang. His 79 poems, arranged in 8 sequences, are mostly about poetry, wine, pleasure, and the love of men and women. His mastery of Chinese allowed him to use individual speeches to enliven dramatic scenes, an accomplishment that sets him apart from other *Qu* writers.

## Gao Qi (1336-1374)

Poems: 71

Style / personality: Master of Regulated *Shi* poetry.

Gao Qi, courtesy name Jidi, pseudonym Qingqiuzi, was an early Ming poet, born and raised on the shores of Wusong River, north of the town of Puli near Suzhou.

The first Ming emperor, uncultivated but by no means unintelligent, was paranoid from the first, quick to suspect disloyalty when none was intended. He scrutinised his court's correspondence, and punished transgressions severely. One on whom his disfavour fell was Gao Qi, who had edited a history of the preceding Yuan dynasty, written as was customary with a change of dynasty to show how the Yuan rulers had forfeited the Mandate of Heaven. Gao survived this test (as most didn't) and was

promoted to the post of Deputy Finance Minister, a post he unfortunately declined, remarking that he had no competence in such matters. He retired from service in the time-honoured way of poets, to Blue Hill of Puli, and chose to teach students for a living. Such an affront to imperial wishes was not, of course, permitted. In 1374, Gao was accused of 'conspiracy in rebellion' and executed in the manner of traitors, his body being sliced into eight parts.

Though he came to an unfortunate end — as did most of the Yuan-Ming poets — Gao was recognised as one of the great Ming poets, a master of Regulated *Shi* poetry.

### Li Mengyang (1475-1531)

Poems: 67

Style / personality: Cultivated a neo-Tang style.

Li Mengyang was the leader of an important group of poets, the so-called 'Archaist school of Former Seven and Latter Seven Masters', who dominated sixteenth-century poetry at the Ming capital of Beijing. They looked to the past for style and inspiration. One famously remarked 'prose must be that of the Qin and Han, and poetry must be of the high Tang.' The demotic styles of the Yuan poetry were anathema, of course, and even the Song was thought too personal and discursive. What they sought was the grand, expansive vision, affective intensity and powerful imagery of the Tang, most particularly that of Du Fu.

## Yue Fe (but probably Zhao Kuan)

Poems: 92

Style / personality: Patriotic poetry.

Yue Fe (1103-1142) was one of the most famous heroes of Chinese history, who showed outstanding bravery and military skill in opposing and sometimes defeating the Jurchen, but who was treacherously imprisoned and poisoned by the pacifist faction under the vacillating Emperor Gaozong. Recent research suggests that the well-known poem 'Man Jiang Hong, to the tune River of Blossoms' attributed to him in fact dates to the Ming, and was probably written by Zhao Kuan, who had it engraved on a tablet at Yue Fei's tomb in 1502, when patriotic feelings were running high after General Wang Yue's victory over the Oirats near the Helan Pass in Inner Mongolia.

## Wang Duanshu: (1621-1680)

Poems: 37

Style / personality: Vivid feminine experience.

The woman poet and critic Wang Duanshu, was a native of Shaoxing, who wrote of her harrowing experiences in fleeing the advancing Qing troops in 1645. The long poem was in the heptasyllabic Non-Regulated *Shi* genre. The dangers were real. Wang's father starved himself to death following Manchu victories, but many Han were simply



massacred. Some 800,000 soldiers and civilians were killed over ten days in Yangzhou, for example, and similar carnage occurred in Jiading, Jiaxing, Kunshan, and Haining. Through her poetry, Wang was able to express lived experiences, deeply felt emotions, desires, anxieties, and pleasures, thereby defining herself beyond the normative role of women in Confucian society.

## Chen Weisong (1626-1682)

Poems: 85

Style / personality: Frank expression of homosexual sentiments

Chen Weisong was born to Ming royalty in Yixing, Jiangsu but became a Qing official when the Manchus replaced the Ming administration. He in fact passed the Qing examinations but subsequently became a prolific and noted poet, one of the greatest in Chinese history, mixing with many celebrated names in this Ming-Qing period. Chen wrote some 460 *Shi* poems and 1,629 *Ci* works.

Though Chen Weisong married and had children by wives and concubines, his deepest relationship was with boy-actor Yun Lang. The relationship was well known, indeed famous among their contemporaries, and an artist by the name of Chen Hu painted a portrait of Yun after a bath. The picture inspired a collection of some 160 poems by almost eighty literary celebrities and officials of the period, including Gong Dingzi, Song Wan, and You Tong. The relationship continued after the wedding, and Yun

remained Chen's primary partner until his death in death in 1675.

## Wang Shizhen (1634-1711)

Poems: 73

Style / personality: Lucid and personal

Wang Shizhen called himself many names but is probably best known as Wen Jian. He was a native of Xincheng (now Huantai County in Shandong Province) but claimed himself as coming from Jinan. Wang was a distinguished poet, scholar and literary scholar in the early Qing Dynasty. He was also an antiquarian, knowledgeable on old books and engravings. His calligraphy resembled that of the Jin Dynasty. During the period of the Kangxi emperor, Wang succeeded Qian Qinyi as the leader of the literary scene, and created the 'theory of divine rhyme in poetry'.

His early poems were clear and lucid, but from middle age grew more expressive. Many poems show such a respect for previous forms that he was called 'Qingxiu Li Yulin'. This poem was written in 1661, when the author, a magistrate of Yangzhou, went to Wu County on official business. He visited Nanjing on his way back. The Qinhuai River runs through the south of Nanjing. The elegiac poem, the first of a group of some twenty (later reduced to fourteen) have long been famous.

## Yuan Mei (1716-98)

Poems: 74

Style / personality: Urbane, affable and charming

Yuan was a prolific poet, writing more than 4,400 poems during his long life, and advocated naturalness and personal express more those who, like Shern Dequin (1673-1769), stressed the didactic function of poetry and the importance of Tang models. Yuan Mei was born in Qiantang in modern Hangzhou to a cultivated family that had not previously held high office. He passed the *jinshi* in 1739, at the age of 23, and was immediately appointed to the Hanlin Academy. From 1742 to 1748, Yuan served as a magistrate in four different provinces, but in 1748, shortly after being assigned to administer a part of Nanjing, he resigned his post and returned home to pursue his literary interests.

Yuan Mei produced a large body of poetry, essays and paintings. His works reflect an interest in Chan Buddhism and the supernatural, and not in the more traditional Daoism and institutional Buddhism. Yuan is most famous for his poetry, described as of 'unusually clear and elegant language', which stressed both personal feeling and technical perfection.

Yuan was an extensive traveller, gastronome and advocate for women's literacy, creating the Sui Garden where women would gather to compose and recite poetry.

Gan Lirou (1743-1819)

Poems: 66 68 72

Style / personality: Personal expression of feminine sentiments.

Gan Lirou was a gentry woman living in present-day Jiangxi province in the high Qing, which was a period of peace and prosperity. She wrote an autobiography in poetry, arranging her carefully selected sequence of over 1,000 poems ('Drafts from the Pavilion for Chanting About Snow') in four chapters. The first, entitled 'Drafts After Embroidering', covers the period before marriage when she learnt the skills that would be expected of her. It was a happy period but interrupted by the deaths of her elder brother, and then her only sister. After the three-year mourning period for her mother, Gan was married to Xu Yuelu, a match her parents had made. The second, entitled 'Drafts After Cooking' covers the ten years of a companionate marriage, when she served her parents-in-law in an exemplary fashion and gave birth to two sons and two daughters.

Husband and wife both wrote poems to each other (and gave themselves courtesy names: Baihuang (Xu) and Tuyu (Gan)). Her husband then died when away from home and studying, and Gan was left to bring up her children and care for her mother-in-law. This third chapter is entitled 'Drafts by the One Who Has Not Died'. The fourth chapter, entitled 'Drafts by One Who Lives in Retirement with Her Son' when she was able to enjoy a leisurely old age with a son who was appointed to an official post after passing the *jinshi* examinations.

Whereas men's poetry was a normal expression of the educated classes, indeed expected, woman's poetry was not encouraged. Women poets therefore wrote privately, to describe their personal thoughts and situations, a field of study that is now being researched in some depth.

## Lin Zexu (1785-1850)

Poems: 70

Style / personality: More statesman than poet.

Lin was born in Houguan in present-day Fuzhou, Fujian Province near the end of the Qianlong Emperor's reign. His father was an official of the Qing government, and Lin proved a brilliant student. He was awarded the advanced *jinshi* grade in the official examinations in 1811, gained admission to the Hanlin Academy, and then rose rapidly through grades of the provincial service. He became Governor-General of Hunan and Hubei in 1837, where he opposed the introduction of opium by the western powers, indeed writing to Queen Victoria on the matter.

Lin was an energetic opponent of the opium trade, and initially had the emperor's full backing. He arrested dealers, confiscated opium pipes and in 1839 obliged merchants to surrender nearly 1.2 million kg of the drug. When the First Opium War followed, and China was defeated by British Naval Forces, Lin was made the scapegoat and exiled to remote Xinjiang, where he made a study of Muslim customs. In 1843, believing China should nonetheless understand the outside world better, Lin compiled a geography of the world, an 'Illustrated

Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms'. Rehabilitated, Lin was appointed Governor-General of Shaan-Gan (Shaanxi-Gansu) in 1845 and of Yun-Gui (Yunnan-Guizhou) in 1847. These postings were less prestigious than his previous Canton one, however, and Lin's career never fully recovered from his moral if rather rigid stance.

Lin was not primarily a poet, and the piece featured simply illustrates the wry dexterity with which Lin celebrated his dismissal.

### Yan Liu (17-18th Century)

Poems: 65

Style / personality: Natural expression of women's life.

Little is known of the Yan Liu, but she belonged to the gentry class and lived in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, i.e. in the middle Qing dynasty. Her poems are simple reflections on everyday life, and many are styled on Buddhist themes reminiscent of Wang Wei (701-61).

### Widow Mengyue. Late Qing

Poems: 69

Style / personality: Everyday thoughts and duties of wives.

Widow Menyue was another Manchu poet who apparently lost her husband early. Her poems comment over a long life thereafter about a woman's everyday thoughts and duties.