

# CHINESE LITERATURE - ANCIENT PERIOD

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## I. THE ORIGIN OF CHINESE LITERATURE

Literature is the form of art which reflects life through verbal images. An author in his writing inevitably reflects his view of life and the world around him; thus good writing encourages us to advance, while bad writing drags us back. Hence the social significance of literature.

China's long and glorious history boasts many writers who were pioneers in the realm of ideas, and many works which move readers deeply and have a profound educational significance. Some of these have won universal recognition. Indeed, the socialist realist literature of New China is growing out of this outstanding heritage.

It is both rewarding and necessary to look back on the history of this centuries-old literature, for this enables us to understand more clearly the achievements of past writers, the gradual development of China's literary tradition, and the extent to which it was influenced by the life and struggles of the times. This will also help us to see how for thousands of years the Chinese people have fought for a better life, and from the goodly heritage they have left their descendants are drawing sustenance to strengthen them in their work today.

All primitive literature grew out of labour. As Lu Hsun says:

The primitive men who were our ancestors had no language at the start, but to work together, they had to exchange ideas, and so they gradually learned to make different sounds. If they did not know how to express their weariness when carrying logs, for instance, one of them might cry: "Ho-yo! Ho-yo!" and this was a kind of literary creation. If the others approved of it and took it up, the thing was "published." Once such sounds were recorded by means of symbols, you had literature; so the originator was a writer, a man of letters of the "Ho-yo school". . . . Even today we can find many folk-songs by illiterate poets and folk stories by illiterate novelists. These are all illiterate authors.

This points out that the earliest authors were the labouring people, who composed the first — unwritten — literature during the course of their work.

To lighten the burden of their toil and express the joy of achievement, the ancient Chinese, like the first men in every country, created rhythmic sounds and language which became the earliest poetry; while, as the centuries went by, labour heightened their perceptive powers and their aesthetic sense developed.

In the early vernacular literature, myths and legends had a special significance.

As the life of primitive men was hard and their knowledge was limited, they had no scientific explanation for natural or social phenomena: heaven and earth, the sun and the moon, mountains and rivers, wind and rain, thunder and lightning, birds, beasts and plants, the origin of human life, the invention of tools, or men's struggle for a happier existence. Instead they tried to understand and explain these things on the basis of their own experience, thus creating many beautiful myths and legends.

The story of the flood is a case in point. This myth is widely known, different versions existing in different parts of China. But the best known of all the heroes alleged to have pacified the flood is Yu the Great.

Yu's father, Kun, undertook the arduous task of curbing the flood. He consulted two wise creatures that lived in the water and constructed dykes to prevent inundations, but the flood only became worse until Heaven grew angry and killed him, and his corpse was left three years without burial. In these three years, however, his body remained unrotted and Yu was born from it to go on with his work. Yu struggled against many monsters and evil spirits who obstructed him; he raised great earthworks to stop the flood's advance and cut channels to let it pass. After toiling for eight years, he finally pacified the flood and enabled the people to live in peace and happiness.

This myth tells of the courage and perseverance of our ancestors in their battle with nature, and how undaunted they were by death and difficulties — when one fell another stepped into his place. Though this myth may strike modern readers as fantastic, it reflects men's determination to build themselves a better life. Stories with a deep significance like this can educate successive generations and become a force to impel society forward. They remain, too, an inspiration for later writers leaving their mark on the nation's poetry, fiction and drama.

Early Chinese literature was also rich in songs and riddles, but after the lapse of so many centuries the majority of these are lost, while some were so modified when recorded by later scribes that we no longer know their original form.

As mankind advanced, a written language was invented. In China a distinctive ideographic script was developed, starting with pictographs or simplified drawings, such as 人 for man, 鸟 for bird, 月 for moon, or 山 for mountain. Gradually these pictograms became stylized, and indirect symbols, associate compounds, phonetic loan words and other types of characters were added. The special nature of the Chinese language, which is remarkably laconic and evocative if sometimes ambiguous, has helped to give classical Chinese literature certain of its distinctive features: succinctness and vigour. And relatively few changes have taken place in the written language over the last three thousand years.

Of the earliest writings left to us, some are genuine and some are spurious. In other words, we have records attributed to the time of the three sage emperors, or Hsia and Shang dynasties, which were actually written during or after the Chou dynasty, sometimes based on earlier materials. Our earliest genuine writings are the oracles of the Shang dynasty inscribed on the shoulder-blades of mammals or the shells of turtles. The answers of the gods to various questions were indicated by the shape of the cracks produced when the bones were heated, and inscriptions on the bones recorded the results. Records of important events were also inscribed on bronze vessels.

By the Shang dynasty China had a slave society. Agriculture, husbandry and handi-crafts were already of slaves and slave-owners was established with a fairly high level of civilization.

The inscriptions on oracle bones and bronze vessels are usually short, though certain bronze inscriptions number more than thirty words and some of those on oracle bones more than a hundred. In the main these recorded the activities of the rulers, but they also reflect conditions of work at that time. Since these records are mostly in prose, we can consider them as our earliest prose literature. Some, however, resemble songs, as in the following case:

*We ask the oracle on kuei-sze day:*

*Is there going to be any rain?*

*Rain from the east?*

*Rain from the west?*

*Rain from the north?*

*Rain from the south?*

This seems to be an incantation for rain, reflecting those early husbandmen's desire for a bountiful harvest.

Most of these ancient incantations in prose and verse date from before the eleventh century B.C. This can be considered as the beginning of Chinese literature, the first chapter in our classical literature.

## II. CHOU DYNASTY LITERATURE

### 1. Western Chou and Spring and Autumn Period

By the eleventh century B.C., King Wu of Chou had destroyed the Shang dynasty and the slave-owning form of society was beginning to disintegrate. A feudal society was gradually evolved which persisted for several thousand years. The second period in the history of classical Chinese literature is the eight hundred years from the founding of the Western Chou dynasty to the end of the third century B.C. when the First Emperor of Chin, also known as Chin Shih Huang Ti, united all China.

Let us first look at early Chou literature, for after the Spring and Autumn Period some important changes took place. The masterpieces of this age are *The Book of Songs*, and certain sections of *The Book of History* as well as of *The Book of Change*.

*The Book of Songs* is the earliest anthology of poetry in China and one of her greatest treasures. It contains more than three hundred songs composed before the sixth century B.C., most of them with four characters to a line. Some are ancient songs for dances and sacrifices, others narrative poetry and satire belonging to a later period, yet others folk-songs from different districts, reflecting the life and thoughts of the common people.

Like the early poetry of other countries, most of these songs were associated with dances representing different forms of work or fertility rites. The section called "Hymns of Chou" in *The Book of Songs* includes several poems dealing with agriculture, the best of these being "They Clear Away the Grass, the Trees," and "Very Sharp, the Good Shares." These are probably folk-songs which were taken over by the rulers as sacrificial odes and may well have been changed or distorted in the process, for certain lines appear not altogether consistent. They conjure up for us a vivid picture of how the early Chinese serfs wrested a living from the soil three thousand years ago in the Yellow Kiver Valley.

The ancients enjoyed narrative poems about the heroic deeds of their predecessors, and such poems can also be found in *The Book of Songs*. Some praise ancestors of the royal house, while others describe the exploits of earlier heroes or the resistance to invading northern tribes. Ancient Chinese literature has no great epic, yet from these narrative poems we can see how the Chou people worked, administered the land and fought.

There are numerous satires too in this anthology. Though the husbandmen toiled hard and often went hungry and cold, they had to pay heavy taxes and levies, and also give free conscript labour or serve as soldiers. Some of the songs therefore criticize social injustice, contrasting the carefree and extravagant life of the rulers with the labourers' hard lot.

But the most important section of *The Book of Songs* is that comprising folk-songs of different localities. As the rulers collected these for their own purposes, certain alterations were inevitably made; yet even so these lyrics remain perennially lovely. "In the Seventh Month," which describes the occupations belonging to different seasons of the year, gives us an authentic glimpse of country life in autumn and winter:

*In the ninth month we make ready the stackyards,  
In the tenth month we bring in the harvest,  
Millet for wine, millet for cooking, the early and the late,  
Paddy and hemp, beans and wheat.  
Come, my husbandmen,  
My harvesting is over,  
Go up and begin your work in the house,  
In the morning gather thatch-reeds,  
In the evening twist rope;  
Go quickly on to the roofs.  
Soon you will be beginning to sow your many grains.<sup>1</sup>*

The serfs not only worked hard for the lord of the manor, but endured humiliating treatment too — especially the womenfolk:

*The spring days are drawing out;*

*They gather the white aster in crowds.  
A girl's heart is sick and sad,  
Forced to go home with the lord.*

Hatred for their masters is expressed in such songs as "Chop, Chop, They Cut the Hardwood":

*You do not sow, you do not reap,  
Yet you have com, three hundred stackyards!  
You do not hunt, you do not chase,  
Yet see all those badgers hanging in your courtyard!*

The poem "Great Rats, Great Rats" voices similar resentment and the longing for a better future:

*Great rats, great rats,  
Keep away from our wheat!  
Three years we have worked for you,  
But you have spurned us;  
Now we shall leave this land  
For a happier one —  
That happy land, that happy land,  
There we shall find all that we need.<sup>2</sup>*

There are many beautiful love poems in *The Book of Songs*. Some describe honest courtship and lasting devotion, others unhappy love affairs and marriages, and the sorrows peculiar to women in feudal times. Thus in the poem "We Thought You Were a Simple Peasant," at first we find two lovers devoted to each other.

*I climbed that high wall  
To catch a glimpse of Fu-kuan,  
And when I could not see Fu-kuan,  
My tears fell on the flood.  
At last I caught sight of Fu-kuan,  
And how gaily I laughed and talked!  
You consulted your yarrow-stalks  
And their patterns showed nothing unlucky.  
You came with your cart  
And moved me and my dowry.*

But later the man proved untrue.

*The mulberry leaves have fallen,  
All yellow and seared,  
Since I came to you,  
Three years I have eaten poverty.  
The waters of the Chi were in flood;  
They wetted the curtains of the carriage.  
It was not I who was at fault;  
It is you who have altered your ways,  
It is you who are unfaithful,  
Whose favours are cast this way and that.<sup>3</sup>*

*The Book of Songs*, especially its section of folk-songs, holds a very high position in Chinese literature. Though feudal commentators distorted the meaning of many of the poems, for over two thousand years this collection has been dear to innumerable Chinese readers. These beautiful lyrics with their graphic images and simple evocative language give a true picture of life in the Chou dynasty and laid the foundations of the fine tradition of realism in Chinese poetry.

Roughly contemporaneous with *The Book of Songs* are the historical records in *The Book of History* and the explanations of hexagrams used for divination in *The Book of Change*.

As Chou dynasty prose developed from the Shang oracle bones and bronze inscriptions, *The Book of History* shows resemblances to the bronze inscriptions while *The Book of Change* is reminiscent of the earlier oracles. Much of *The Book of History* dates from a later period, but a few of the sections on the Western Chou and early Eastern Chou period were actually written at this time. Although most of these record the statements and actions of rulers, they give us a picture of the serfs' conditions. And as the explanations of the sixty-four hexagrams in *The Book*

*of Change* have a folk origin, they too supply us with much general information about life in those days. Thus there are references to fishing and hunting, husbandry and agriculture, war, sacrifice and marriage, food and drink, housing and clothing. If we disregard the many mystical commentaries and false interpretations of these books written in the past, they remain important prose works of the early Chou dynasty.

## 2. Warring States Period

The works of the Warring States Period are entirely unlike the earlier Chou literature.

After the Spring and Autumn Period, there was a change in the system of landownership and gradually a new landlord class appeared. In the course of the struggle between these new landowners and the old feudal chiefs, the literati emerged as a prominent group and began to dominate all cultural activities. More important still, after the Chou people advanced eastwards from the Wei River to the Yellow River Valley, even the Yangtse Valley changed. And when the kingdom of Chu with its distinctive traditions came within the economic orbit of the Chou empire, this greatly hastened the spread of culture.

The most outstanding literature of this period is *Chu Tzu*, the poetry of the kingdom of Chu.

These poems were written in the dialect of Chu and set to Chu music. The earliest are the *Nine Odes* — actually eleven in number — used in sacrifices in the kingdom of Chu at the end of the Spring and Autumn Period and the beginning of the Warring States Period. The deities and spirits to whom sacrifices were made were for the most part gods and goddesses related to agriculture: the sun god, the cloud god, or mountain and water goddesses. As the ancients believed that gods were like men and could fall in love with mortals, the *Nine Odes* also speak of love. Through the love of shamans for gods and goddesses, they expressed men's longing for richer gifts from nature: if the gods were pleased they would surely send better harvests, if angry they would destroy the crops. The "Ode to the Fallen" was used in sacrifices to the warriors who had fallen in battle, and shows the people's profound love for their country. It is possible that the great poet Chu Yuan may have rewritten these odes, but they are generally considered as the work, in the main, of anonymous poets.

Soon after the *Nine Odes* were composed lived the brilliant poet Chu Yuan, a noble of the kingdom of Chu. The date of his birth is uncertain, but it was probably between 343 and 339 B.C. At about the age of twenty he began to take part in affairs of state. At home he advocated the promotion of able ministers, and in foreign policy an alliance with the state of Chi against the growing power of Chin. Such a policy was in the best interests of his kingdom, but as it was detrimental to certain nobles of Chu and to the state of Chin, wicked men, in league with the envoys sent by Chin, slandered Chu Yuan and succeeded in having him banished. First he was exiled to north of the Han River, then — when he was nearing fifty — to south of the Yangtse. When he saw that his country was approaching ruin yet he could do nothing to save it, he felt great despair and drowned himself in the Milo River near Lake Tungting. Tradition has it that he died on the fifth day of the fifth month, and he is commemorated on the Dragon-Boat Festival which falls on that day, but the year of his death is unknown. It was probably about 280 B.C., for in 278 B.C. the Chin army stormed the capital of Chu, and it is certain that Chu Yuan would not have lived on after this disgrace.

His masterpiece is the *Li Sao*,<sup>iv</sup> a poem of more than three hundred and seventy lines, which sets forth his aspirations and emotions. It is beautifully constructed, with considerable variety in the sentence structure and magnificent imagery. The theme of the poem is clear. Chu Yuan expresses his sincere love for his country and concern for his countrymen, ruthlessly exposing the king's folly and the treachery of evil ministers. He uses fragrant herbs to symbolize his own aspiring spirit.

*With lavished innate qualities indued,  
By art and sicili my talents I renewed;  
Angelic herbs and sweet selineas too,  
And orchids late that by the water grew,  
I wove for ornament, till fleeting time  
Like water flowing stole away my prime.*

Though he met with many setbacks and occasionally was on the verge of despair, his fervent patriotism made him fight on resolutely:

*In exile rather would I meet my end  
Than to the baseness of their ways descend.  
Remote the eagle spurns the common range,  
Nor deigris since time began its way to change;  
A circle fits not with a square design:  
Their different ways could not be merged with mine.  
Yet stili my heart I checked and curbed my pride  
Their blame endured and their reproach beside.  
To die for righteousness alone I sought,  
For this was what the ancient sages taught.*

He has left us an incomparably moving picture of a patriot of ancient times.

Chu Yuan also wrote the *Nine Elegies* and the *Riddles*, another long poem in which he poses more than a hundred questions. Some of these are concerned with natural phenomena such as the creation of heaven and earth, or the rising and setting of the sun and moon; some deal with ancient myths and legends; some relate to historical figures. Chu Yuan's approach is sceptical and realistic for a man of his day, and this poem has preserved many ancient myths and leg-ends for us. The *Nine Elegies* are short lyrics about the poet's own experiences and difficulties. His feelings are strong and his language passionate. The same love for his country and anguish over its fate expressed in the *Li Sao* can be found in these poems.

*Now, the phoenix dispossessed,  
In the shrine crows make their nest.  
Withered is the jasmine rare,  
Fair is foul, and foul is fair,  
Light is darkness, darkness day,  
Sad at heart I haste away.  
(“Crossing the River.”)*

Though he was hounded to his death, his immortal poems will always live on to inspire fresh generations of patriots.

Chu Yuan was succeeded by the poets Tang Leh, Ching Chai and Sung Yu; but only Sung Yu's work remains today. Sung Yu is said to have been Chu Yuan's student and to have served in the court of Chu. Judging by his *Nine Arguments*, he started life as a poverty-stricken scholar, who was slandered after he became an official so that he lost his position. The *Nine Arguments* is a long poem written after he fell from favour, and in it he made it clear that he would not compromise with evil. A long poem, *Requiem*, attributed to either Sung Yu or Chu Yuan, was written to call back the spirit of the king after his death. It contrasts the sufferings of the people in neighbouring states with the prosperity of his own.

*Among the damsels sit the guests all down;  
Abandons each his belt and tasseled crown;  
In wanton wise the damsels make display;  
The girl disguised as warrior wins the day.  
Then draughts they play, and chess with ivory wrought,  
Divided all in pairs the games are fought;  
The die is cast, they call the gods for aid;  
They revel long until the day doth fade.  
Some strike the urn and knock the wood frame o'er,  
Some play the slanting lyre and sing once more;  
Still wine they urge, forgetting night or day;  
Within the bright lamp burns the orchid grey.  
With skill and aptness, as with fragrance sweet,  
They chant the songs for such occasion meet;  
They drink to crown their joy and praise the past.  
Return, O soul, homeward return at last!*

In addition, Sung Yu is believed by certain scholars to have written some narrative poetry; but here again the authenticity is dubious. The *Nine Arguments* shows that Sung Yu followed the tradition of Chu Yuan, and these two men are the greatest poets of the later Chou period.

During this time China also had many prose writers who have left us two main categories of work: historical records and philosophical writing.

The four chief historical works are *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, *Tso Chuan*, *Kuo Yu* and *Kuo Tseh*. *The Spring and Autumn Annals* is a brief chronological record made by official historians of the state of Lu, dealing with the chief events of the early Eastern Chou period. Confucius used this book to teach his pupils but was probably not its author. Since these records are very brief, their literary value is slight.

The *Tso Chuan* and the *Kuo Yu*, which record the history of the same period, are more detailed. As literature, the *Tso Chuan* surpasses the others. It gives vivid and truthful accounts of the extravagance and cruelty of certain tyrants, convincing sketches of heroes and famous statesmen, and sympathetic descriptions of the life of the common man. The accounts of battle scenes are famous for the brilliant economy of language with which the author presents complex situations. For instance, when the States of Chin and Tsin were about to join battle at Yao, the Chin army decided to make a surprise attack on the state of Cheng. Passing the north gate of Eastern Chou, they behaved so insolently that even children prophesied their defeat; and before they reached Cheng their purpose was discovered:

At Hua they were met by a merchant of Cheng named Hsuan Kao, who was travelling on business to the city of Chou. He presented them with four hides and twelve oxen. "Our prince has heard that your forces mean to pass our humble city and respectfully offers these to your men," said the merchant. "Our humble state is not rich, but for your entertainment we shall prepare one day's food if you stay, or provide one night's sentry service if you are moving on." And he sent a swift messenger to the city of Cheng.

Since Cheng was now prepared, the Chin army turned back to be defeated by the forces of Tsin, and three of their generals were captured. This narrative not only gives a detailed account of the campaign, but a picture of the merchant's ready wit and patriotism. The *Kuo Yu* is less graphic. Both these works, traditionally attributed to Tsochiu Ming, are in fact from the hand of unknown writers of the Warring States Period.

The *Kuo Tseh* is a later work. It records events during the Warring States Period, the various alliances, the struggles between the old and new landowners, the **activities** of the literati, the economic prosperity of the states and the sufferings of the labouring people. The *Kuo Tseh* includes a number of fables, like the one related by Su Tai to King Hui of Chao, who was about to attack the state of Yen, not realizing that the king of Chin hoped to take advantage of their quarrel:

A mussel was opening its shell to bask in the sun when a snipe pecked at it. The mussel clamped down on the bird's beak, and held it fast. "If it doesn't rain tomorrow," said the snipe, "there will be a dead mussel lying here." "If you can't prize loose today or tomorrow," retorted the mussel, "there will be a dead snipe here too." As neither of them would give way, a passing fisherman caught them both.

Even today in China allusion is often made to this fight between the mussel and the snipe. "Drawing a Snake with Legs" and "The Fox Who Profited by the Tiger's Might" are among the other colourful and compact fables with a pointed moral taken from the *Kuo Tseh*.

Another important branch of prose was that written by philosophers of the period to propagate their ideas. These thinkers represented different class interests. The group headed by Confucius was called the Ju school. Confucius came from the nobility which was declining, and in the realm of ideas tried to retain many features of the old system, though he had to make certain concessions in view of the changing circumstances and the rise of new landowners. Some of his proposals, therefore, hastened the destruction of the old. In the feudal society which lasted for more than two thousand years in China, the Confucian philosophy formed the ideological basis of the ruling class, justifying its control of the people. Confucius had many disciples, and their propagation of knowledge played a positive role in the formation and development of Chinese culture. His chief successors were Mencius and Hsun Tzu. The sayings of Confucius were recorded by his disciples in the *Analects*. Two other books have preserved the teachings of Mencius and Hsun Tzu. The *Analects* consists of short sayings only, and the style is simple and straightforward, but there are some lively discussions between Confucius and his disciples. Here is a typical passage from the beginning of the second book:

The Master said: He who rules by moral force is like the pole-star, which remains in its place while all the lesser stars do homage to it.

The Master said: If out of the three hundred *Songs* I had to take one phrase to cover all my teaching, I would say, "Let there be no evil in your thoughts."

The Master said: Govern the people by regulations, keep order among them by chastisements, and they will flee from you, and lose all self-respect. Govern them by moral force, keep order among them by ritual and they will keep their self-respect and come to you of their own accord.

The Master said: At fifteen I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I had planted my feet firm upon the ground. At forty, I no longer suffered from perplexities. At fifty, I knew what were the biddings of Heaven. At sixty, I heard them with docile ear. At seventy, I could follow the dictates of my own heart; for what I desired no longer overstepped the boundaries of right.<sup>v</sup>

*The Book of Mencius* is written in more varied and eloquent prose, and some of the arguments there are carefully reasoned. The story of the man of Chi and his two wives is well known. This man boasted that every day he feasted with rich men or nobles, but the women did not believe him.

The wife said to the concubine: "Each time our good man goes out he comes back replete with wine and meat, and when we ask where he has feasted he says with rich men and nobles. But not a single gentleman of quality has been here. I mean to find out where he goes." The next morning, accordingly, she followed her husband when he left the house; but not a soul in the city spoke to him. At last he approached some mourners who were sacri-ficing at a grave in the east suburb, to beg for what remained of their offerings. Not satisfied with this, he accosted some other mourners until he had filled his belly. The wife went home and told the concubine: "We looked to our husband to provide for us all our life, but this is the sort of fellow he is!" Then they abused him roundly and wept in the courtyard till the husband, all unaware of this, swaggered home and started boasting to them again.

This is a satire on those who stoop to base deeds in order to secure wealth and comfort, and later writers used this story in plays or ballads to attack different social abuses. Though Mencius supported the feudal system, his contention that "the people come first" had a positive sig-nificance.

Hsun Tzu advocated the use of ceremony and punishment, and attacked fatalism and superstition. His philosophy, further developed by his disciples, provided the theoretical basis of the political centralism of the Chin and Han dynasties. His prose is succinct and logical compared with that of Mencius, as can be seen from this passage:

The nature of man is evil — his goodness is only acquired by training. The original nature of man today is to seek for gain. If this desire is followed, strife and rapacity result and courtesy dies. Man originally is envious and naturally hates others. If these tendencies are followed, injury and destruction result, loyalty and faithfulness are destroyed. Man originally possessed the desires of the ear and the eye; he likes praise and is lustful. If these are followed, impurity and disorder result, and the rules of proper conduct, justice and refined culture are done away with. Therefore to give rein to man's original nature, to follow man's feelings, inevitably results in strife and rapacity, together with violations of good customs and confusion in the proper way of doing things: there is reversion to a state of violence. Hence the civilizing influence of teachers and laws, the guidance of the rites and justice, is absolutely necessary. Thereupon courtesy appears, cultured behaviour is observed, and good government is the consequence. By this line of argument is evident that the nature of man is evil and his goodness is acquired.<sup>vi</sup>

There were many schools of thought in addition to the Confucian, chief of them the Mohist, Taoist and Legalist. Their writings include *Mo Tzu* by Mo Ti and his disciples, the *Tao Teh Ching* by Li Erh, *Chuang Tzu* by Chuang Chou and his disciples, *Han Fei Tzu* by Han Fei and

others. The Mohists, who opposed the Confucians, were closer to the common people, and the prose of *MoTzu* is simple and unadorned.

Li Erh and Chuang Chou were Taoists, who attacked the feudal system but looked back to a primitive agrarian collectivism. Their teachings contain the roots of Chinese scientific thought and concepts of democracy. Thus Li Erh had some understanding of the contradictions in the ob-jective world. The *Tao Teh Ching* is written in succinct and beautiful language, with graphic images to illustrate profound ideas. Here, for instance, is a vivid description of the dialectics of Nature:

*Among the creatures of the world some go in front, some follow;  
Some blow hot tvhen others would be blowing cold;  
Some are feeling vigorous just when others are worn out,  
Some are loading just when others are delivering,  
Therefore the sage discards the "absolute," the "all-inclusive," the "extreme."<sup>vii</sup>*

Chuang Chou's prose is swift and lively, sometimes sublime. Instead of direct statements of fact, he often uses anecdotes. Daring imagination and acute observation make all his work superbly alive. The tale of the cook who cut up bullocks is a good example of his style.

Lord Wen Hui's cook was cutting up a bullock. Each blow of his hands, each heave of his shoulders, each tread of his feet, each thrust of his knees, each wish of sliced flesh, each swish of the cleaver was in perfect harmony. . . . "Admirable!" cried Lord Wen Hui. "Yours is skill indeed!" The cook laid down his cleaver and replied: "Your servant loves the Way, which is better than skill. When I first began to cut up bullocks, I saw simply the whole carcass; but after three years' practice, I saw no more whole animals. Now I work with my brain, not my eyes. . . .At a touch of my cleaver the flesh comes away from the bone like earth crumbling to the ground. Then standing with cleaver in hand I gaze round in triumph before wiping my cleaver and putting it away." "Bravo!" cried Lord Wen Hui. "From the words of this cook I have learned how to preserve life."/

This delightful anecdote illustrates the need to grasp the objective laws of Nature. Because the cook understood the bullock's anatomy, after nineteen years of use his cleaver was as good as new. The descriptions in *Chuang Tzu* are always graphic and convincing.

Han Fei, the chief exponent of the Legalists, was a disciple of Hsun Tzu, who opposed the old nobility and supported the new landowners. His style is precise and he shows penetrating powers of analysis. His writings embody many persuasive fables and parables like "Buying the Casket Without the Pearl," "The Shield and the Spear," and "Waiting for the Hare."

This period also saw the beginning of stories and drama.

The origin of fiction is closely linked with myths and legends which, at first handed down by word of mouth, were gradually recorded as written literature. Some of these have been preserved in *The Book of Songs* and the *Chu Tzu*, and many more in *The Book of Motintains and*

*Seas*. Although the old literati attributed this work to the legendary Yu or Yi, it was actually written during the Warring States Period, some sections being added during the Chin and Han dynasties. While intended as a geographical record, it contains less fact than fiction, and its accounts of different mountains and streams embody beautiful legends, some with a deep meaning like the story of the bird called *ching-wei*.

Two hundred *li* to the north stands Fachiu Mountain, its sides covered with *ch eh* trees. There is a bird there like a crow with white beak and red feet, called *ching-wei* from the sound it makes when it cries. This bird was Nu Wa, the young daughter of Yen Ti, who was drowned while swimming in the Eastern Ocean and transformed into a bird. All day it carries wood and stones from the Western Hill to fill up the sea. The Chang River rises here, flowing eastwards to the Yellow River.

This myth also reflects our forbears' determination to conquer nature, and their courage in the face of obstacles.

Another work of this period is *The Travels of King Mu* by an unknown writer. A mixture of history and fancy, this is based on the legend that King Mu of the Chou dynasty travelled all over the world. The different places he visited are listed, and the king is described as a monarch who would listen to advice and have his subjects' welfare at heart. The real King Mu was probably not such a good ruler, but by writing in this way the author showed his longing to better the lot of the people.

The fables imbedded in so many of these historical and philosophical writings, some of which have been quoted, also gave great impetus to the rise of fiction.

Drama arose from ritual dances miming certain stories. These dances, often closely connected with production and fertility, formed the main part of many sacrificial ceremonies. As these ancient rites frequently took the form of primitive dramas, it is to them that we must look for the origin of Chinese drama. *The Book of Songs* and the *Chu Tzu* shed some light on this question. At first the performers were witches or shamans whose purpose it was to please the gods, and they were succeeded by clowns who performed dramatic dances to entertain men. Clowns appeared very early in China, but did not become generally popular till the Warring States Period. They were proficient dancers, musicians, jesters and acrobats, whose influence on later drama was considerable.

From this brief survey of the literature of the Chou dynasty, it can be seen that poetry was pre-eminent—this age produced immortal poems and poets. Prose developed too, mainly in the form of philosophical or historical writing of a markedly didactic and humanistic character, while fiction and drama were only just beginning. But the fine tradition of classical Chinese literature had already emerged, and conditions were favourable for its development.

### III. LITERATURE OF THE CHIN, HAN, WEI AND TSIN DYNASTIES AND SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DYNASTIES

#### 1. Chin and Han Dynasties

After the Spring and Autumn Period the old economy was gradually superseded by the new landlord economy, and in the third century B.C. Chin Shih Huang Ti, First Emperor of Chin, United all China and set up the first autocratic feudal empire in Chinese history. The next eight hundred years, from this time till the end of the sixth century, may be considered as the third stage in the development of classical Chinese literature.

The unification of China marked a great historical advance. During this period the borders of the empire were extended and the population increased. Agriculture improved, and handicrafts and commerce developed. Many scientific discoveries were made, including the invention of paper and the compass. The landowners, who held the political power generation after generation, had a virtual monopoly of culture; and the elite of this class lived in considerable luxury. But the peasants, burdened by heavy taxation and military conscription, led such a hard life that these eight hundred years saw a succession of peasant revolts.

The Chin dynasty lasted a mere fifteen years, and its only well-known writer was Li Sze, but his work is not of the first order. The Han dynasty produced the famous historian Ssuma Chien, a master of classical Chinese prose.

Ssuma Chien was a native of Lungmen in present-day Shensi, who was born in about 140 B.C. and died at the beginning of the first century B.C. His father was the court astrologer and historian, and Ssuma Chien succeeded him to this post. To gather historical material, he travelled all over China and visited the descendants or friends of famous men. Later he was punished for defending a general in disgrace, but in order to complete his great work he endured this indignity patiently. That immortal classic, *The Historical Records*, is the result of his painstaking work and brilliant powers of observation and analysis.

*The Historical Records* is the first general Chinese history, and in it Ssuma Chien has given us a graphic and systematic account of many historical occurrences and social changes. His inspired pen brings complex historical events to life, and has presented us with a gallery of unsurpassed portraits of the highest and the lowest in the land. Thus the story of how Lin Hsiang-ju saved the State of Chao is known throughout China today thanks to Ssuma Chien. Lin Hsiang-ju was a minor official during the Warring States Period, whose king possessed a precious jade emblem which the king of Chin coveted. The king of Chin offered fifteen cities for this jade; but though this was clearly a trick, Chin was so powerful that the king of Chao did not know how to refuse. Then Lin Hsiang-ju volunteered to go to Chin to negotiate, promising to bring back either fifteen cities or the jade. This is how Ssuma Chien describes his behaviour in the Chin court:

Seeing that the king did not mean to give Chao the cities, Hsiang-ju stepped forward and said: "There is a flaw in this jade. Let me show it to Your Majesty." When the king handed him the jade, he took his stand with his back against a pillar. His hair bristled with rage and he cried: ". . . As Your Majesty has no intention of giving these cities to Chao, I have taken back the jade. Try to get it from me by force, and I shall break both my head

and the jade against this pillar!" With a glance at the pillar he held up the jade, and made ready to smash it.

The characterization here is magnificent. Lin Hsiang-ju's courage, ingenuity and patriotism are strongly presented with great economy of language. And his outstanding ability as an envoy explains how this low-ranking functionary came to be appointed chief minister of Chao. But Lien Po, a famous general of Chao, had no respect for him and tried to humiliate him. When Lin Hsiang-ju knew of this, he did his best to keep out of Lien Po's way. And when his followers protested, he explained:

Though the king of Chin is mighty, I bellowed at him in his court and made free with his ministers. Weak though I am, why should I fear General Lien? But the two of us are the sole reason why powerful Chin dare not invade Chao. If two tigers fight, one must perish. I take this stand because I put our country first and private grudges second.

These magnanimous words moved the general, who went to Lin Hsiang-ju to apologize, and after that the two men became firm friends. Ssuma Chien has not only given a vivid and convincing picture of two patriots, but by the masterly realism of his descriptions has brought these old heroes to life. Because he chooses the events of the greatest consequence in his recording of history, all his characters have a broad significance. Moreover, his strong views and clear sense of right and wrong give great depth of feeling to his writing and make the scenes he portrays unforgettable. This is why we prize *The Historical Records* as a literary masterpiece as well as a great history.

A successor to Ssuma Chien was Pan Ku, who wrote the *Han Dynasty History*. Pan Ku was a native of Anling in present-day Shensi, who lived from A.D. 32 to 92. His father, Pan Piao, and his younger sister, Pan Chao, helped him to collect the materials for this history, but he did most of the actual writing himself. He had a more conservative outlook than Ssuma Chien; but his prose, while not so brilliant, is concise and iluent. He too has left us authentic and affecting character sketches of historical figures. For example, there is Su Wu who would not let Wei Lu prevail on him to surrender to the Huns.

When Su Wu made no answer, Wei Lu said; "If you take my advice and surrender, we shall become sworn brothers. If you turn a deaf ear, you shall never see me again." Then Su Wu swore at him: "I never want to set eyes on you again — a subject who has forgotten his sovereign's kindness and betrayed him by going over to the barbarians. . . ." When Wei Lu saw that he could not be persuaded, he reported this to the khan, who became more eager than ever to master Su. Thereupon they imprisoned him in a great dungeon, without food or drink. It snowed, and by swallowing snow and chewing felt as he lay there, Su Wu did not die for some days, to all the Huns' amazement.

A gifted contemporary of Pan Ku was the outstanding thinker Wang Chung, a native of Shangyu in present-day Chekiang. He was born in A.D. 27 and died at the end of the first century. As his family was relatively poor, it was not easy for him to study, but he served as a minor official and taught in a school. His sceptical, rationalist philosophy is largely embodied in *Discourses Weighed in the Balance* which he wrote to combat current superstitions and the schools of thought which served the interests of the landowning class. He had the courage to attack Confucius and Mencius, the sages of feudal society, and to oppose corrupt and evil officials. There are elements of materialism in his thinking, and his approach to literature is an enlightened one, as we see from this passage in his writing:

Jade within a rock or a pearl hidden in the belly of a fish cannot be seen; but when the jade glitters from the heart of the rock or the pearl gleams through the belly of the fish,

their radiance cannot be hidden. So my thoughts, when not recorded but kept in my heart, are like hidden jade and pearls. Appearing, they are like jade and pearls revealing their brightness. . . . Literature should be hard to write but easy to grasp: there is no merit in facile writing which is obscure. Arguments should settle problems and be persuasive: they serve no purpose if involved and unintelligible.

Wang Chung put this theory into practice. Because his language is clear and fluent and his syntax concise, his arguments are persuasive. At a time when a euphuistic style of writing was coming into favour, his prose had a distinctive simplicity.

Many writers in the Han dynasty wrote *fu*, a descriptive poetic prose interspersed with verse. This literary form arose among the people and was then taken up by scholars, who cultivated a euphuistic style. There was much competent writing of this sort, but little of it is genuine literature. The folk-songs known as *yueh fu*, most of which have five words to a line, are much more outstanding than the *fu* of this period.

*Yueh fu* originally meant the Office in charge of music during the Han dynasty. Since the folk-songs collected by this office had a great influence on writers, by degrees all such songs came to be known as *yueh fu*, and these folk-songs of the Han and the Southern and Northern Dynasties are an important part of China's cultural heritage.

Many of the Han folk-songs describe the life of humble folk and their problems. "East Gate" tells the story of a poor couple who can not make a living and decide to become brigands. "The Sick Wife" describes how a man whose wife has died of illness tries to care for his motherless children. "Song of the Orphan" recounts the sufferings of a boy at the hands of his elder brother and sister-in-law:

*Sent to draw water at dawn,  
I don't get home till dusk;  
Hands chapped and bleeding,  
Feet bare,  
I walk the frosty earth,  
Plucking out thorns by the thousand —  
But still the pain throbs on.  
In bitterness  
My tears fall  
Pearl after pearl.  
In winter I have no coat,  
In summer no shirt. . . .*

Other songs tell of the horrors of war. Thus "Fighting South of the Castle" begins:

*They fought south of the Castle;  
They died north of the Wall.  
They died in the moors and were not buried.  
Their flesh was the food of crows.<sup>viii</sup>*

"I Fought for My Lord at Fifteen" is the song of a man who has served as a soldier for sixty-five years, who finds all his relatives dead when he goes home. These poignant, haunting lyrics are among the finest work of the Han dynasty. They appeal to men's finest sympathies, and their natural yet beautiful form was an inspiration to countless later writers.

This period saw further developments in fiction and drama.

Some of the fiction attributed to Han dynasty authors is actually of a later date. There are, however, some genuine Han works of fiction which have not traditionally been classified as such. Thus *Anecdotes on the Book of Songs* by Han Ying, and *The Garden of Anecdotes* and *New Discourses* by Liu Hsiang contain many short tales which point a moral and are good stories into the bargain. Similarly *The Lost History of Yueh* by Yuan Kang and Wu Ping and *Annals of Wu and Yueh* by Chao Yeh may be considered as historical romances. They show a further development from *The Travels of King Mu*.

The advance of the drama was not so marked. During the Han dynasty there were acrobatic and puppet shows performed by jesters. The acrobatic shows had a popular origin and were combined with stories, songs and dances. The puppet shows are believed to have started as rites to exorcize demons, but they took shape as plays and became a form of popular entertainment, continuing to be a favourite amusement after the Han dynasty.

## 2. Wei, Tsin and Southern and Northern Dynasties

During the Wei and Tsin dynasties, there were further changes in the form and content of Chinese literature. A class of professional writers came into being, more anthologies of poetry and essays were edited, and an increasing volume of literary criticism appeared.

At the same time a decadent tendency was evident. Many writers paid more attention to the choice of words and images and the use of classical allusions and parallelisms than to the content of their work.

Since most of the *yueh fu* of the Han dynasty had five words to the line, this form now came into general use; and the realism of these folk-songs influenced and inspired later poets. The most famous poets of this period are Tsao Chih of the Three Kingdoms, Tao Yuan-ming of the Tsin dynasty, and Pao Chao of the Southern and Northern Dynasties.

Tsao Chih (192-232) was the precocious son of the famous general and statesman Tsao Tsao. His brother, Tsao Pei, was jealous of him, and while Tsao Pei was emperor he treated Tsao Chih badly. Finding it impossible to realize his political ambitions, the poet expressed his frustration in literature, notably in verse.

Tsao Chih was a contemporary of the "Seven Poets of the Chien An Period" headed by Wang Tsan. These men, growing up in the unsettled times at the end of the Han dynasty, captured the spirit of the *yueh fu* and succeeded in writing poems which give a true picture of their day. Of these poets Tsao Chih was the best, yet even his early poems—written while he was still living the life of a young nobleman—lack profundity. In his later years, after he had suffered much, he wrote with deeper feeling. In "To Piao, Prince of Paima," he exposes the factions and strife that split the ruling class:

*Owls hoot before your carriage;  
Wolves and jackals prowl the road;  
Flies change spotlessness into filth,  
And even the hearts of dear ones  
Are poisoned by slander.*

His own afflictions made him aware of the deeper sufferings of the common people. Thus elsewhere we find him writing:

*Pity the coastal dwellers  
In their wild, reedy country;  
Their children and their wives seem scarcely human,  
Lurking in mountain retreats.*

In other poems he expressed his political aspirations and his love for his motherland.

Tao Yuan-ming, or Tao Chien, was a native of Tsai-shang in present-day Kiangsi. He was born between 365 and 372, and died in 427. He came of an impoverished landowning family, was a man of integrity and served in a minor official capacity until 405, when he retired to live on his farm. This brought him close to the peasants, for he tilled the soil himself and often suffered cold and hunger. These experiences made him view life differently from other writers of his class. His profound understanding coupled with his brilliant literary gifts made him the greatest poet of the Tsin dynasty and one of the greatest writers in all Chinese history.

Most of the poets popular during the Tsin dynasty, such as Lu Chi and Pan Yueh, emphasized form at the expense of content. Indeed, this was the way to win fame at that time. Hsieh Ling-yun and Yen Yen-chih, who lived a little later than Tao Yuan-ming, wrote brilliant poems — Hsieh Ling-yun's nature poems are much celebrated — yet sometimes their verses are marred by excessive ornamentation. In this age when florid, artificial language was the fashion, Tao Yuan-ming was the only poet to use simple, everyday speech to write of daily life. An example of this is "Harvesting Early Rice in the West Field in the Ninth Month of the Year Keng-hsu":

*After spring my round of labour begins anew  
And I can look ahead to my yearly harvest.  
Out with the dawn, exerting all my strength,  
Home at sunset bearing my plough on my shoulder . . .  
How can it not be hard, this farmer's life?  
And the hardship is such that no one can avoid,  
So tired is my whole body when I come home,  
That I cannot even think of other troubles. . . .<sup>ix</sup>*

Again in his "Miscellaneous Poems" he writes:

*. . . I never wished to receive an official's pay,  
The fields and mulberry trees are my profession.  
I work myself, taking no rest:  
Sometimes in hunger and cold I have eaten chaff.*

By such descriptions Tao Yuan-ming gives us a truthful picture of the hard conditions of the peasants at the time, who often went cold and hungry to satisfy the greed of the landowners. He also wrote about poverty-stricken scholars, sketching the life of other poor men like him-self. Living in the country, he had friends among the labouring people. Thus he wrote in "Moving Home":

*When work in the fields is done, each one goes home;  
And then at leisure I think again of friends.*

*I think of friends – and fling my cloak on my shoulder;  
For never we tire of talk and laughter together.*

Clearly he was not one of the feudal scholars who viewed things from the standpoint of the landlords and distorted the truth about the peasants.

His poems express different moods and deal with a great variety of topics. Even-tempered and open-minded, he often gave himself up to drinking as if he had no worldly cares or serious interests in life. He has been called a hermit poet because his poems to the snow or the chrysanthemum express his own emotions or his joy at feeling at one with the universe. In fact, however, he followed political events closely and was deeply concerned over the fate of the country. The verses he wrote on the ancient gallant, Ching Ko, or the mythical bird that tried to fill up the ocean show that he was by no means the escapist that he has been made out. Indeed, as Lu Hsun points out, Tao Yuan-ming was a great poet.

Pao Chao was a native of Tunghai in present-day Kiangsu. He was born in about 410 and killed by rebel troops in 466. He came from an impoverished family, and though while little more than a boy he gave evidence of considerable literary talent, he was not highly regarded by the more influential literati. Even after he won fame, the envy of his contemporaries made it difficult for him to develop his gifts; thus his poems often voice indignation:

*At table I cannot eat:  
I strike the pillar with my sword and sigh —  
How long is man's span of life?  
How can I curb my step and fold my wings?  
Far better to give up an official career,  
Go home and live at ease. . . .  
The sages of old were destitute and obscure,  
Much more so candid and honest men today!*

Sometimes he made direct attacks upon the iniquities of the government:

*I bind faggots in the shady bamboo glade,  
Reap millet in the chilly valley;  
The north wind cuts right through me,  
And bird-cries startle me.  
Before the New Year taxes must be paid,  
And at other times different levies:  
The land tax must be sent to Hanku Pass,  
With fodder for the beasts in the royal parks.  
. . . Officers scourge us with rods,  
And bailiffs shout insults at us.*

Unlike most poets of his time, who cultivated a precious style and admired a decadent way of life, Pao Chao learned from folk-songs and was a spokesman of the people, although certain of his poems contain parallelisms and are tainted by euphuism.

After this, strict patterns were gradually introduced for classical poetry, rules were made to govern the use of the four tones, and parallelisms were encouraged. Hsieh Tiao and Yu Hsin did much to popularize this style, but their own work is not of the first order.

During the Wei and Tsin dynasties more fiction was written, of a higher standard than heretofore. It fell into two main categories: stories about the supernatural, and anecdotes about famous men. *Records of Spirits* by Kan Pao is an example of the former, and *New Anecdotes* by Liu Yi-ching of the latter.

Kan Pao was a native of Hsintsai in present-day Honan, who lived approximately from 285 to 360. Some of his tales are based on historical records, others have a folk origin. A number of them reflect man's struggle against Nature or resistance to oppression. His story of the sword-maker's son is well known.

. . . "You are young," the stranger said. "Why do you weep so bitterly?" "I am the son of Kanchiang and Moya," replied the lad. "The king of Chu killed my father. I want revenge." "I hear the king has offered a thousand gold pieces for your head," said the stranger. "Give me your head and your sword, and I will avenge you." "Very well," agreed the boy. Then he killed himself and, standing erect, presented his head and his sword with both hands to the stranger. "I shall not let you down," said the stranger. Then the lad fell dead to the ground.

This tale goes on to describe how the wicked king was killed and the sword-maker avenged.

Liu Yi-ching (403-444) was a native of Pengcheng in present-day Kiangsu. His *New Anecdotes* deal with the conversation and behaviour of historical figures. By means of graphic and truthful descriptions he conjures up these men for us with all their personal idiosyncrasies, and sheds light on the customs of the time and the luxurious mode of life of the rulers.

Some of the best books dealing with the supernatural are *The Garden of Marvels* by Liu Ching-shu and *Supplement to the Tales of Chi* by Wu Chun. *Tales* by Yin Yun and *Merry Stories* by Hou Po are in a similar vein to the *New Anecdotes*.

Most of the prose writers of this period, like the poets, tended to sacrifice content to formal beauty. This was not the case, however, with the two famous writers Fan Chen of the Southern Dynasties and Li Tao-yuan of the Northern Dynasties. Fan Chen was a native of Wuyin in present-day Honan, who was born in about 450 and died early in the sixth century. He inherited and carried forward the materialist tradition of Wang Chung, and his celebrated essay *On the Destructibility of the Soul* caused a sensation. He argued that human life is inseparable from man's physical existence, and that therefore after death all mental activities must cease. "The soul is to the body what sharpness is to a knife," he said. "I have never heard that after the knife is destroyed the sharpness can persist." He lashed out also at the superstition and selfishness rife among ruling circles, and his eloquence, which spread confusion among officials, made common folk rejoice. Li Tao-yuan was a native of Chuolu in present-day Hopei. The date of his birth is uncertain, but he died in 527. In his masterpiece, *The Commentary to the Canon of Rivers*, he conjures up an enthralling picture of famous mountains and streams and China's magnificent scenery. As he was a northerner, his descriptions of the Yellow River Valley are more detailed than those of the south — a sign that he based his writing on personal observation and verified reports.

During the Southern and Northern Dynasties the best of a number of good works of literary criticism was Liu Hsieh's *Carving a Dragon at the Core of Literature*. Liu Hsieh was a native of Chu in present-day Shantung, who lived from about 465 to 520. Though his ancestors had served as officials he was not rich, and his masterpiece was not highly regarded by his contemporaries. In this out-standing work he makes a comprehensive and systematic study of the literary forms, styles, authors and works of various dynasties. He points out that different ages produce different types of writing, while the divergence of individual personality results in different styles. Again and again he condemns the undue emphasis currently laid

on such embellishments as parallelisms, allusions or rhythm. Thus he writes: "Too many flowers spoil the bough, too much fat is bad for the bone. Writings of this type are vulgar, and neither make good models nor serve any moral purpose." Again: "When the ideas are lean but the language is padded out, a work seems an incongruous farrago, and no main skeleton or outline is visible. . . . These men study and emulate magnificent bombast to the exclusion of all else beside, and are completely carried away by this." He expresses these sound views forcefully and graphically, with great economy of language.

Chung Jung's *Critique of Poetry* and certain sections of Yen Chih-tui's *Family Admonitions* were also valuable contributions to literary criticism.

Finally we come to the folk-songs and dances or early dramas of this period.

During the Southern and Northern Dynasties most songs of the south were love songs, while those of the north dealt mainly with the horrors of war. Here is a southern lyric about silkworms:

*Spring silkworms never weary,  
But spin their longing night and day;  
What matter if they perish  
Since love can never pass away?*

And here is a northern song:

*Ah, man is born to sorrow,  
And leaves his home to die;  
His corpse is lost upon the hill,  
His bones unburied lie!*

The Southern songs are tender and passionate compared with the simpler northern lyrics.

Two long folk-songs deserve special mention. One is *The Bride of Chiao Chung-ching*, otherwise known as *South-east the Peacock Flies*, which describes the tragic love story of a couple who lived at the end of the Han dynasty. Lan-chih was a beautiful and intelligent girl who discharged her household duties admirably, yet her mother-in-law disliked her and forced her son to divorce her; and after Lan-chih returned to her own home her brother compelled her to marry again. Finally she drowned herself and her husband hanged himself. Parting from her husband, she said to him:

*Be your love strong, enduring as the rocks;  
Be mine resistant as the creeping vine.  
For what is tougher than the creeping vine?  
And what more fixed than the eternal rocks?*

These two faithful lovers fell a prey to the feudal marriage system and family system. Indeed this moving tale is a sharp denunciation of the crimes committed in the name of feudal morality, and the husband and wife who resist its cruel conventions to the last are brilliantly and sympathetically drawn. *The Song of Mulan* is another beautiful narrative poem about a girl in the north who disguises herself as a man to take her father's place in the army. When she comes home after a victory poetic licence is used to bring the poem to a dramatic conclusion:

*Taking off her battle dress*

*For a maiden's clothes,  
She pats her cloudy tresses before the window,  
And paints her eyebrows by the mirror.  
Then she goes to greet her comrades  
And all are amazed —  
"Twelve years we were together,  
Yet never knew that Mulan was a maid!"*

In a feudal society in which filial piety was considered the supreme virtue and men superior to women, Mulan was a model for all her sex, and the poet has made her a lovable and thoroughly lifelike heroine. Her story, as well as this poem, has been popular for many centuries in China.

About this time there appeared some dramatic dances accompanied by singing. Two famous examples are *The Dancing Maid* and *Prince of Lanling* of the Northern Chi period. The first dance describes a wastrel who ill-treated his young wife, the second a famous warrior who defended his state and loved his men. Though the songs are lost now, the appearance of these dramatic dances indicates the lines along which the classical drama was developing.

The poetry and prose, fiction and drama of the period with which we have just dealt show greater variety than in any preceding dynasty. They give broader and deeper reflection to the social conflicts of the time, and there is greater variety and maturity in literary form. Many writers pandering to the ruling class took a wrong path and produced work devoid of lasting significance; but those who kept close to the people inherited the fine traditions of earlier Chinese literature and succeeded in carrying them forward.

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<sup>1</sup>From *The Book of Songs*, translated by Arthur Waley.

<sup>2</sup>From *The People Speak Out*, translated by Rewi Alley.

<sup>3</sup>From *The Book of Songs*, translated by Arthur Waley.

<sup>iv</sup>English translation published by the Foreign Languages Press.

<sup>v</sup>From *The Analects of Confucius* translated by Arthur Waley.

<sup>vi</sup>From Chapter XXIII of *The Works of Hsun Tzu*, translated by H. H. Dubs.

<sup>vii</sup>From *The Way and Its Power*, translated by Arthur Waley.

<sup>viii</sup> From 170 Chinese Poems, translated by Arthur Waley.

<sup>ix</sup> Translated by Andrew Boyd.