CHINESE POETRY

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CHOU DYNASTY

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 tok 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 thou-sand 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 northem 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 moming gather thatch-reeds,
In the evening twist rope;
Go quickly on to the roojs.
Soon you toill be beginning to sow your many grains.[i]

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.[ii]

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.[iii]

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 beau-tiful 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 seetions 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 land-owners and the old feudal chiefs, the literati emerged as a prominent group and began to domi-nate all cultural activities. More important stili, after the Chou people advanced eastwards from the Wei River to the Yellow River Valley, even the Yangtse Valley changed. And when the king-dom 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 agri-
culture: 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,*[iv] 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 deigrıs 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 compro-mise with evil. A long poem, *Requiem,* attributed to either Sung Yu or Chu Yuan, was written to cali 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 dowm;
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.

POSTCLASSICAL PERIOD

1. Sui and Early Tang Dynasties

We have seen that some literati of the Southern and Northern Dynasties had false values which resulted in a decadent trend in poetry as well as prose. During the Sui dynasty these unhealthy tendencies were overcome, and the works of Yang Su, Hsueh Tao-heng, Li O and others display a new spirit. Early Tang writers, including Wang Chi, Chen Tzu-ang and Li Hua, also opposed what was artificial in the literature of preceding dynasties and laid the foundation for a new age in writing.

At the same time some good work was done by those writers still under the old influence, such as Wang Po, Yang Chiung, Lu Chao-lin and Lo Pin-wang, commonly known as the “Four Great Poets of Early Tang.” They broadened the subject matter of poetry and contributed to the creation of new forms. Thus the ku shih or “old style,” lu shih or “new style” and chueh chu or “fourlined verse,” generally adopted in later classical poetry, originated in this period. The ku shih is rather free: the number of lines and words in each line are not fixed, and the rhyming schemes are relatively flexible. Verses of this kind had appeared previously, but this now became a generally accepted form. Lu shih consists of eight lines, chueh chu of four. These two forms were not new either, but now strict metrical rules were defined for them. By the early Tang dynasty it was established that the second and third couplet in each eight-line verse must be paral-lelisms. It is generally recognized that the Tang dynasty was the most glorious period in the history of Chinese poetry. By the first half of the eighth century, thanks to the achievements of the early Tang songsters, poetry had reached its full splendour. Among the many outstanding poets of this period the greatest are Tu Fu, Li Po and Wang Wei.

Wang Wei (701-761) was a native of present-day Shansi. A poet of genius, he was also a brilliant painter and musician. His poems and paintings give such superb expres-sion to the beauty of nature that a later poet, Su Tung-po, said of him: “His poetry is painting, his painting poetry.” Here are some examples of his word pictures:

Leaning on my stick by the gate
To enjoy the breeze, I hear cicadas at dusk.
The sun sets beyond the ford,
From the desolate village rises one plume of smoke. . . .
The river flows as if it knew men’s hearts,
The birds, as my companions, fly home at dusk;
A crumbling wall before the ancient ford,
And autumn hills bathed in the setting sun.

His poems on the countryside round Wangchuan are famous.

Alone I sit in the guiet bamboo glade,
Strike my lyre and cry aloud;
None knows I am here in the forest,
But the bright moon shines on me. . . .
Not a soul on the lonely hillside,
Nothing but voices;
Shadows falling in deep forests
Are reflected on green moss.

With his seemingly simple yet highly polished style he paints scenes which all can see but most men miss, and he is supremely skilful in communicating his mood. His poems give us the same satisfaction as a fine painting.

Li Po or Li Tai-po was also born in 701. When he was a child his family moved from the north-west to Szechuan, where he grew up. As a man he travelled widely, going to Changan in his forties to join the Imperial Academy. When An Lu-shan’s revolt broke out,
he became Prinoe Yung’s adviser; but the emperor, fearing this prince might usurp the throne, had him killed and Li Po exiled to the south-west. Later he was pardoned and returned, to die in 762 in present-day Anhwei.

Li Po was perhaps the most versatile of his generation. He wrote in a variety of poetic forms and styles about many different subjects. Sometimes he imparts to his readers a sense of tranquillity and sheer delight in nature:

Gently I stir a white feather fan,
With open shirt sitting in a green wood.
I take off my cap and hang it on a jutting stone;
A wind from the pine trees trickles on my bare head.

Or:

I sat drinking and did not notice the dusk,
Till falling petals filled the folds of my dress.
Drunken I rose and walked to the moonlit stream:
The birds were gone, and men also few.[v]

He shows a contempt for the nobles and officials who had allowed the country to grow so weak that An Lu-shan's rebellion nearly overthrew the dynasty. "I was drunk for a whole month, ignoring princes and lords," he wrote once. Again, "How can I stoop to serve the rich and great?" But in spite of his wish to hold aloof from court schemers and place-seekers, he was so far from indifferent to the country's danger that he wrote:

I look down at the plain of Loyang
Where the Huns have scattered in flight;
Blood stains the grass; jackals and wolves
Are wearing official caps.

That he knew the sufferings of the people is evident from these lines:

Changan under a new moon, and I in the evening
Listen to the sound of many women beating clothes
By the water.
An autumn wind blows and I know well
That many a woman feels its chill, and is anxious for
Her husband, fighting in the far north-west —
Then she thinks, "I wonder when the war
Will end, so that he will no longer need
To fight."[vi]

His poems are often exuberantly romantic, but his love of life, generous spirit and closeness to the people make his romanticism healthy and positive.

Tu Fu was a native of present-day Honan. He was born in 712 and able to write poems at the age of seven, but failed in all the govemment examinations. Not till he was over forty did he obtain a low official post. By this time An Lu-shan's revolt had broken out, and the war and general confusion brought increased hardships to the people. Losing all faith in the government, Tu Fu left his post and went to live in Szechuan. He worked for a few years in Chengtu while his friend Yen Wu was governor there. Early in the winter of 770 he died on a boat near Yuehyang.

Most of his poems date from after An Lu-shan's revolt, when the full weakness of the Tang empire was apparent. Tu Fu, with his deep understanding of life and society, wrote poetry more profound than any by his contemporaries. Even before the rebellion he had composed those memorable lines:

Sour wine and rotting meat
Behind the red gates of the rich,
And the road strewn with frozen corpses.
Great wealth and hunger a few feet apart!

After the rebellion he wrote such immortal poems as “The Hsinan Official” and “The Officer at Tungkuan,” as well as others dealing with families which had been broken up in those troubled times. A moving example is “The Shihhao Official.”

One sunset I came to the village of Shihhao,
And shortly after there followed
An official, seizing conscripts.
In the courtyard of the peasant's house where I stayed,
An old man climbed quickly over the wall, and vanished.
To the door came his old wife to greet the official.
How fiercely he swore at her,
And how bitterly she cried!
“I have had three sons taken
To be soldiers at Yehcheng.
Then came a letter, saying,
Two had been killed, and that the third
Never knew which day he might die.
Now in this hut is left
None but a baby grandson
Whose mother still suckles him. . . .
She cannot go out, as she has no clothes
To cover her nakedness.
All I can do is to go back unth you
T o the battle at Hoyang.
There I can cook for you,
Even though I am weak and old. . . .”

Night wore on.
The sound of voices died away
Until there was left, coming from the hut,
Only the sobbing of the daughter-in-law.
At dawn I rose and left,
With only the old man
To bid me good-bye.[vii]

Tu Fu not only denounced existing evils, but voiced the wish for a better life for all. The following song expresses his profound humanity:

Would I had thousands on thousands
Of spacious mansions,
To shelter and gladden all the poor in the world
And protect them from wind and rain.
Ah, if such a building were to appear before me,
Though my own hut fail and I freeze
I should die content!

His range as a poet is immense. Many of his poems express faith in mankind’s future and ardent patriotism. Others are about his family or friends, some work of art that delights him, or natural beauty. His imagery is strikingly concise:

Now for these three months
The beacon fires have flared
Unceasingly

While a letter from home
Is as precious as gold.
And, when I scratch my head,
I find my grey hair growm so sparse
The pin will hold it no more.[viii]

In his later days Tu Fu often recalled past incidents and great figures from history to contrast China's former splendour with the decadence of his time, in order to spur his contemporaries on to greater efforts.

The Changan of ours today
Becomes like a great
Chessboard, for men
To play with empire; too late
Do we regret the havoc
The ill-spent years have
Wrought; now palaces
And mansions have new lords,
Even the styles of clothing
Change; war drums call
To the northern borders,
Armies are dispatched
To the western regions,
Enemies are everywhere; the
Autumn of decadence has
Truly set in, and I feel the chill
Harking back to other times
When things were different.[ix]

Tu Fu enlarged the scope of classical poetry, giving it new content and forms. He is generally regarded as the greatest poet of China, with whom none but Chu Yuan can compare.

Later Tang and Five Dynasties

From the middle of the eighth century onwards further changes took place in Chinese literature. In prose there was the classical revival, while in poetry there
appeared a body of satirical writing of which Po Chu-yi was the chief exponent. During this period the development of *tzu,* songs with lines of irregular length, and of
the short stories known as *chuan chi* also contributed to the splendour of later Tang literature.

As already indicated, some of the essayists of the Sui and early Tang dynasties modelled their style on the artificial, precious writing of the preceding period, which was condemned by Li O, Li Hua and others. By the time of Han Yu and Liu Tsung-yuan the tide had turned, and a movement was launched for a ‘‘classical revival" in literature.

Han Yu (768-824) was a native of Nanyang in presentday Honan. Liu Tsung-yuan (773-819) was a native of Hotung in present-day Shansi. They held virtually identical views on the reform of prose, and their main aims were: to win greater respect for the Confucian classics, to develop Confucianism, to stress the cultivation of moral qualities, and to learn from the writers of the Warring States Period, Chin and Western Han dynasties. These principles exercised a great influence on Tang essayists and later writers.

Han Yu and Liu Tsung-yuan put their theories into practice in their own work. Han Yu regarded himself as the exponent of orthodox Confucianism, although he was careful to avoid all archaic figures of speech

and expressions dating from the time of Confucius and Mencius. His style is fresh and virile. He once wrote:

> At the start I dared read nothing but works of the Hsia, Shang and Chou dynasties or the Western and Eastern Han dynasties, and dared retain nothing but the precepts of the sages. At rest I seem forgetful and in my actions abstracted, as though lost in thought or bewildered. When I want to express any views, I make a point of dispensing with all outmoded expressions, which is no easy matter.
> (From "A Reply to Li Yu.")

Liu Tsung-yuan had the courage to oppose irrational aspects of feudalism, as we can see by his challenge of the succession from father to son which for centuries had determined the system of political control in China.

> The feudal lords today rule by right of primogeniture. But under this system is it true that all those belonging to the hereditary ruling class govern well, while none of those from lower classes do so? If this is not true, who knows what will become of the people!
> (From "On Feudalism.")

Though Liu Tsung-yuan had perhaps a less bold style than Han Yu, he had greater firmness and integrity. Sometimes he used parables to criticize abuses, in such stories as *The Donkey of Kweichow* or *The Rats of Yungchow.*

In addition to these two great writers, Li Yi, Huang-fu Chih, Shen Ya-chih and other essayists helped to promote the classical revival, until gradually a new style of prose was created.

In the realm of poetry, the influence of Tu Fu made poets adopt a more serious attitude to their work and hold less aloof from politics. The representative poet of this period was Po Chu-yi.

Po Chu-yi (772-846) was a native of Hsiakuei in present-day Shensi, who started writing poems as a boy and became an official in his twenties. He was banished from the capital several times on account of slander, and served in Kiukiang, Hangchow, Soochow and elsewhere, holding fairly important posts towards the end of his life.

A true disciple of Tu Fu, Po Chu-yi was convinced that literature should combat social evils; and he himself acted on this assumption, for many of his poems are satires. His most famous works are his ten *Shensi Songs* and fifty *New Yueh Fu.* One of these, "The Old Man with the Broken Arm," denounces the horrors of war:

> *To the north of my village, to the south of my village the sound of weeping and wailing,*
> *Children parting from fathers and mothers, husbands parting from wives.*
> *Everyone says that in expeditions against the Man tribes*
> *Of a million men who are sent out, not one returns.*[x]

Profound meaning and verbal simplicity characterize these sixty poems, and indeed all Po Chu-yi's work. Other poems, simple and spontaneous, reveal his concern for the common people, as in these lines from "The New Silk Jacket":

> *So many go cold and I am unable to help them —*
> *Why should I alone be warm?*
> *My heart knows the peasants' hardships*
> *On farms and in mulberry groves;*
> *My ears ring with the cries*
> *Of the starving and cold.*

Po Chu-yi wrote many other fine poems which were not didactic. One of these is his long narrative poem, *Everlasting Remorse.* The love of Emperor Ming Huang for Lady Yang was a theme which appealed to feudal writers, and Po Chu-yi's treatment of it in this celebrated poem is superb. He gives a powerful description of the emperor's grief after his favourite's death:

On his return the garden was unaltered
With its lotus and its willows;
The lotus recalled her face,
The willows her eyebrows,
And at sight of these
He could not hold back his tears.

At the same time the poet criticized the emperor's former life of sensual pleasure and luxury:

At leisure she danced and sang
To the music of lyres and flutes,
And not for one day would the emperor
Forgo the pleasure of her company
Till battle drums from Yuyang
Caused the earth to quake
And put an end
To the Dance of Feathered Garments.

The revolt of An Lu-shan in 755 was one of the gravest events in the three hundred years of Tang history and brought untold suffering to the people. In fact, owing to irresponsible govemment, the dynasty was nearly overthrown.

Although Po Chu-yi's sympathies and vision were limited, on the whole he succeeded to a notable degree in expressing his countrymen's inmost thoughts and deepest convic-tions. He was in the best sense a popular poet.

This was also an age of many lesser poets. Yuan Chen, Li Shang-yin, Tu Mu and others, all made their distinctive contribution to Chinese poetry.

In the second half of the Tang dynasty there appeared a new poetic form, the *tzu. Tzu* are lyrics with lines of irregular length set to music. The number of sentences and the number of words in each sentence are governed by definite rules. This form of verse, which had a folk origin, was adopted by poets such as Wen Ting-yun of the later Tang dynasty, and Wei Chuang, Feng Yen-chi and Li Yu of the Five Dynasties. Of these, Li Yu was the most remarkable. The last prince of the Southern Tang kingdom and a native of
Hsuchow in Kiangsu, he lived from 937 to 978. His *tzu* deal with days gone by, his old kingdom, his grief and the transience of human life. Though he was far from sharing the feelings of common folk, his keen mind, brilliant imagination, and the beauty and freshness of his language have won him many admirers.

Northern Sung Dynasty

The writers of the Northern Sung dynasty carried Chinese literature another step forward. At the beginning of the Sung dynasty, the writers known as the Hsikun school sought after formal perfection and took a wrong turning again in their poetry. For a time the *tzu* remained fettered by the old conventions of the Five Dynasties, but during the eleventh century writers recovered a more genuine set of values and wrote another glorious chapter in the history of Chinese literature.

The three most prominent men of letters of the eleventh century were Ouyang Hsiu, Wang An-shih and Su Shih or Su Tung-po, the last ranking highest.

Ouyang Hsiu (1007-1072) was a native of Luling in present-day Kiangsi. Statesman, historian, poet and essayist, he advanced the classical revival initiated during the Tang dynasty. His works are lucid and fluent, his style easy and unaffected. One of his essays contains reminiscences of his father told by his mother:

> When your father was an official he sat up by candlelight once over a verdict and kept stopping work to sigh. I asked what the matter was, and he said: “This man is for the condemned cell. I cannot save him.” I asked: "Is it right to try?” He answered: “If I try and fail, neither the condemned man nor I need have any regret. And what if there is a chance of succeeding?”

Here in plain, unvarnished language is a graphic picture of a kind-hearted official of those long-past days. Ouyang Hsiu also wrote numerous poems in the language of everyday speech and was anxious to act as a spokesman for humble folk, as we see in his “Poem to Tu Mo”:

East of the capital bandits gather;
North of the river new troops are trained;
*Each **day** more hunger and wretchedness*
Stalk the roads.
I beg you to raise your voice
On behalf of the people!

“A Heavy Snowfall” and “Welcome Rain” are among Ouyang Hsiu’s best works. In prose as well as poetry he served as a model for later generations.

Wang An-shih (1021-1086), famous for his political reforms, was a native of Linchuan in present-day Kiangsi. A minister of state, his literary achievements are inseparable from his radical political proposals. His prose works criticizing social abuses and sug-gesting reforms go to the heart of the matter and are supremely logical. His language is succinct, his sentences well constructed, his style incisive and lucid. As an example we may quote a passage from his *Reply to Ssuma Kuang:*

> You accuse me, sir, of infringing upon the authority of other officials, creating trouble, seeking personal profit and refusing advice, thereby causing discontent throughout the empire. To my mind, however, when I receive orders from our sovereign, draw up government statutes and issue them to the authorities, I am not infringing upon the authority of other officials. When I follow the policy of former kings to benefit the people and root out evil, this is not creating trouble. When I regulate the economy of the empire, this is not seeking personal profit. When I combat wrong ideas and refute the sophists, this is not refusing advice. As for the fact that there is much discontent, I knew in advance that this would be the case.

Some of his poetry also is impressive evidence of his concern for the people. Thus “On Contemporary Affairs” is a tragic confirmation of the saying: “Tyranny is worse than a tiger.”

Heart-stricken in the country,
I grieve for the common people:
Good years cannot fill their bellies;
In flood or drought they must starve;
And if brigands come
How many will lose their lives!
But most I am aghast at the officials
Who ruin nine homes out of ten.
The grain rots in the fields,
But the people have no money to go to court;
If they succeed in approaching an official,
They are beaten for their pains.

Wang An-shih is also justly celebrated for such nature poems as “Plum Blossom” and “Written on Mr. Hu-ying’s Wall,” for he was an original thinker with a distinctive style.

Su Shih (1036-1101) was a native of Meishan in present-day Szechuan. He held high office for many years and proved a good, public-spirited official. He was disgraced and demoted several times, being sent on one occasion as far as Hainan Island. His genius was many-sided, for not only was he an immortal poet and prose-writer, but a fine calligrapher and artist.

Su Shih was a careful observer and shrewd judge, who expressed the results of his observation and analysis in clear, flowing language, illumined by brilliant flashes of imagination. Since the end of the Tang dynasty the themes of *tzu* had virtually been confined to love or individual joys or sorrows, but at the beginning of the Sung dynasty a gradual change came about, most evident in the poems of Liu Yung, whose *tzu* are comparatively long and cover a greater range of subjects: the luxury of the capital, the views of townsfolk, the misery and longings of unhappy women, and the experiences of a vagabond life. Su Shih’s poetry marks a further change in style, as can be seen from “Thoughts of the Past at Red Cliff”:

The mighty river flows east,
Sweeping away countless heroes down the ages;
An old fortress on the west
May be Red Cliff where valiant Chou Yu[xi] *fought.*
Jagged rocks scatter foam,
Fierce billows crash on the shore,
Hurling up drifts of snow:
A scene lovely as a painting,
But how many heroes fell here!
I think of Chou Yu that year
Newly wed to Lord Chao’s daughter,
Handsome and bold
With plumed fan and scholar’s cap,
Laughing and joking as his mighty foe
Was turned to dust and ashes.
Do you smile at me for a sentimental fool,
Roaming in spirit through that ancient kingdom
Though my hair is white before its time?
Life is but a dream —
Let me drink a cup to the moon above the river!

This poem pays tribute to an ancient hero and laments the poet’s own fate, linking past and present and giving moving expression to the author’s sense of affinity with Nature. Su Shih’s genius and vast erudition made him deal with a wider range of topics than any other poet, both in his *tzu* and other forms of poetry. He took the hardships of the people to heart, writing for instance in the “Lament of a Peasant Woman”:

One month she sleeps on a straw mat in the fields;
In fine weather she reaps the paddy and carts it home;
Bathed in sweat, her shoulders aching,
She carries it to market —
To get only the price of bran!
She sells her buffalo to pay her taxes,
Pulls dowm her house for fuel,
But what can she do next year
To keep from starving?

The poet voices his sympathy for the poor in many of the verses written to friends; elsewhere he expresses his longing to become one with Nature. He has left many short nature poems, much admired for their apt imagery, economy of language and haunting, evocativequality. “The West Lake After Rain,” only twentyeight characters in the original, may be taken as an example of these short lyrics, although it loses its magic in translation:

The brimming lake is a brave sight in the sunlight;
The misty hills have a special charm in the rain:
I would compare the West Lake to Hsi Shih[xii]*—*
Unpainted or made up she was equally lovely.

Su Shih believed that writing should resemble “floating clouds and flowing water.” Indeed his prose is swift-moving and spontaneous, showing infinite variety. Sometimes he uses ingenious parables to attack incorrect trends of the time, as in *The Sun:*

> One blind from birth has no conception of the sun. If one day he questions someone about the sun, he is told, “The sun is like a brass basin.” Then he knocks against a basin and hears it clang, and later takes a bell for the sun. Another man tells him, “The sunlight is like a candle.” Then he feels a candle to discover its shape, and later takes a flute for the sun. The sim is in fact very different from bells and flutes, but a blind man does not know this because he has never seen it — he goes by hearsay.
>
> Now the Way is more difficult to discern than the sun, and those who do not study are like blind men. So when one who knows the Way speaks of it, even
> though he is skilled in making apt comparisons he can think of nothing better than a basin or candle; but a basin may make his hearers think of a bell, a candle of a flute, until they get further and further from the truth. Thus when men talk of the Way, they attempt to describe it in terms of what they have seen or to imagine it without having seen it, and in both cases they deviate from the Way.

Su Shih also wrote brilliant essays on historical happenings and current events, as well as on his own feelings and on Nature. He was probably the greatest writer of the Sung dynasty, whose works had a lasting influence on later generations.

Li Ching-chao, a poetess who lived towards the end of the Northern Sung dynasty, has a special place in Chinese literature.

Li Ching-chao (1081-1145) was a native of Tsinan in present-day Shantung. An extremely well-read woman who wrote on many subjects, she is best known for her
superb *tzu.* She enjoyed several years of happiness after her marriage, and produced fresh, beautiful work. But after fighting broke out towards the end of the dynasty
and her husband died, she wrote poignant lines like these to express her loneliness:

Faded and withered,
With thinning hair, greying temples,
I have lost the courage to take an evening stroll;
I had best sit by the window
And listen to the laughter and talk
Of others.

Her sympathies were wide and she was capable of deep feeling, as is evident from her poems describing conditions in the north after the fall of the dynasty. She is one of China’s greatest women writers.

Minor poets of this period were Liu Yung, Tseng Kung, Huang Ting-chien and Chou Pang-yen.

Southern Sung and Golden Tartar Period

The fall of the Northern Sung dynasty shook all writers of the time out of their complacency and resulted in an increased variety of subject matter in Southern Sung literature. Few masterpieces were produced in this period, but important advances were made in fiction and drama, and the foundations were laid to a great extent for the best Yuan, Ming and even Ching writing. From this time onwards fiction and drama occupied increasingly important positions in Chinese literature while poetry and essays took second place.

The patriotic standard-bearers of Southern Sung literature were the great writers Lu Yu and Hsin Chi-chi.

Lu Yu (1125-1210) was a native of Shanying in present-day Chekiang. From his boyhood north China's defeat rankled in his heart, and all his life he longed for the recovery of the lost territory. After he became an official he spent ten years in Szechuan, where all the commanders were staunch patriots, and these men encouraged him and influenced his work.

His poems are filled with fervent patriotism. Sometimes he brooded bitterly over China's losses and lashed out at the government for surrendering. He greeted the rare victories with passionate enthusiasm, and even dreamed of the recovery of the north. Thus he wrote:

Towards midnight on the eleventh of the fifth month I dreamed that I accompanied His Majesty on an expedition to reconquer all the territory of the Han and Tang empires. I saw a rich, populous city, and was told this was Hsiliang. In raptures, I wrote a poem in the saddle, but woke before it was finished. Now I am completing it.

A million warriors follow the Son of Heaven;
Before his command goes out our land is retaken.
New cities rise at distant frontier stations,
And travelling in state
The emperor proclaims a general amnesty.

Many of his poems reflect his indomitable spirit, but unfortunately he died without seeing China restored to her former splendour. Thus he left his son the heartfelt injunction:

Though I know when a man is dead that is the end,
My one grief is not to have seen this land united.
As soon as our kingly army recovers the north,
Be sure to tell your old man when you sacrifice![xiii]

Lu Yu's tzu express the same passion. Thus he wrote:

Now, my hair flecked with white,
I am shocked to find my ambitions come to nothing
And my life that of a wanderer.
A jaded thoroughbred,
Little by little I have lost my mettle;
Far, far away, behind folds of mist and water,
I dream of the mountains and streams of my native land.

As an ardent patriot, Lu Yu loved the labourers whose toil supported the country. In his works he prays for good harvests, sighs over the devastation of so many cities, inveighs against the disparity between the rich and the poor, attacks the decadence of the rulers, and shows remarkable respect for the common

people's opinions. He was not only with them in spirit, but lived very much as they did, cultivating his land himself.

In midspring a farmer tills his fields
And tends his mulberry trees.
I plant the Linan mulberry
To feed hundreds of sheets of silkworms. . . .
South of my lodge I sow sesame,
For three days, luckily, there is no rain,
And getting up the fourth morning
I find the earth already clothed mith green.

(From "A Country Cottage.")

In his poems we find detailed descriptions of husbandry and the great satisfaction of those who reap the fruits of their toil. In addition to working himself, Lu Yu brought up his grandchildren to understand the dignity of labour.

My grandsons, late home from school,
With ruffled hair turn to the kitchen garden
I wish you no rank or riches,
But may you till the land!

(From "Farming.")

Lu Yu's works combine profound wisdom with beauty of form. His language is fresh and natural, and sometimes he uses colloquialisms. Unhampered by the strict rules of lu shih, he wrote many fine poems in this metre about love, friendship and the beauties of Nature. He is undoubtedly one of the greatest Sung poets.

Hsin Chi-chi (1140-1207) was a native of Tsinan in present-day Shantung. As a young man he fought with the guerrillas against the Golden Tartars, and like Lu Yu he looked forward all his life to the recapture of China's lost territory. Most of his *tzu* breathe a fervent love for his country:

Wherı drunk, I trim the lamp to gaze at my sword;
In dreams, I hear bugles sounding from camp to camp.
Meat is sent eight hundred li — the whole length of the front —
Luting carries across the lines,
As in the field in autumn we train our troops.

Occasionally in times of great difficulty he fell a prey to despair. He has written poems, too, when intoxicated with the beauty of Nature or the moonlight; but even these are filled with powerful feeling. Indeed his passion for beauty was one expression of his love for his country, which he longed to see powerful and at peace again. His was a versatile genius: he wrote splendid and tragic poems as well as soft, charming lyrics, but his
spirit is pre-eminently virile and heroic.

Lesser poets of the Southern Sung dynasty include Yang Wan-li, Fan Cheng-ta, Chen Liang, Chiang Kuei and Wen Tien-hsiang.

There were not many poets under the Golden Tartars. The most outstanding was Yuan Hao-wen, a native of Hsiujung in present-day Shansi, who lived from 1190 to 1257. He wrote of the rugged scenery of the north, of his bitterness, of the hardships of the peasants under the invaders, and of the fearful massacres and pillage which took place when the Mongols attacked the country. He describes the agony of countless captives:

No cave in the mountain to hide us,

No boat to carry us across the river —
A single enemy horseman
Can take a thousand captives;
And even if we live through this year,
What of the next?

Flight after flight,
Wild geese from south of the river!
Men sing, men weep,
Wild geese lament;
When autumn comes the geese fly back,
But will the captives from the south
Ever see their homes again?

His deeply moving poems bear certain resemblances to those of Su Shih and Hsin Chi-chi.

MING DYNASTY

Some early Ming writers of san chu deserve attention, especially Wang Pan and Feng Wei-min. Wang Pan was **a** native of Kaoyu in Kiangsu, who was probably born in the middle of the fifteenth century and died at the beginning of the sixteenth. He loved to make trips into the country, and wrote enchanting descriptions of the beauties of Nature:

The grazing cattle are dotted over the plain;
The night is as bright as daylight.
We lodge this evening under the vault of heaven,
Wrapped in our fishermen's capes beneath the stars.

Not all his poems are idyllic, however, for he wrote many lines such as these:

Gongs sound for the festival,
But a thousand households are sad,
A thousand lament.
(From "The Lantern Festival.")

In such poems as "A Great Snowfall" we see how he hated the forces of reaction which "sowed suffering throughout the land."

Feng Wei-min (1511-1580?) was a native of Linchu in Shantung. As a young man he endeavoured to be a good official, but since the political conditions would not permit this he was finally forced to resign from his post. He wrote over four hundred san chu, most of them rich in social significance. Thus "Retiring from Office" sheds light on the law courts of the time:

Whoever offends him comes to grief at once,
Whoever angers him is ruined the selfsame day;
Just, law-abiding citizens cannot escape;
Those who love their country and people are struck down —
Where is there any justice?

Corruption revolted him, and in his satire "Heaven and Hell" he describes bribery as something pertaining to hell.

Those with money must bring it quickly;
Those with none need not be alarmed:

There are other ways to have your sentence repealed.
Give me a gold or silver brick for my bridge,
Oil for the vats by my stove,
Or some sticks of wood or charcoal to heat my kang.
If you cannot redeem yourself so,
Give me that coat you have on!

Feng Wei-min took a great interest in rural life and in farming. Once he celebrated the fail of timely rain in a verse:

They're all out, the pea and bean flowers,
And under the trellis golden gourds are swelling.
(From "Seasonable Rain.")

Few writers have identified themselves so completely **with** the peasants as Feng Wei-min, whose language is **also** taken from common speech and is lively, fresh and **concise. His** long poems are well constructed, logically **reasoned** and full of spirit. All these factors contributed **to make** his a distinctively virile style.

19TH CENTURY
LITERATURE FROM THE OPIUM WAR TO THE MAY THE FOURTH MOVEMENT

The years between the Opium War of 1840 and the May the Fourth Movement of 1919 form the sixth and final stage in the history of classical Chinese literature.

In the latter half of the Ching dynasty, the capitalist countries of the West carried out ceaseless economic and military aggression against China. Thus the feudal society which had lasted for so many centuries collapsed, and China became a semi-feudal, semi -colonial country. At the same time changes took place in class relationships.

All this time the Chinese people continued to fight against aggression and tyranny. The Opium War was followed by the Taiping Revolution (1851-1864), the 1898 Refor-mation, the anti-imperialist Boxer rising (1899-1901), and the 1911 Revolution, to name only the largest revolts. So for the eighty years preceding the May the Fourth Movement, the Chinese people persisted in their struggle for democ racy. But owing to the weakness of the Chinese bourgeoisie and the lack of working -class leadership, the revolutionaries failed to gain their objective.

Almost without exception, the best writers of this period were sympathetic to the popular cause. The chief poets of these eighty years were Chang Wei-ping, Wei Yuan, Chu Chi and Huang Tsun-hsien. The first three depicted the truth about the First Opium War, revealing the stupidity and cowardice of the government and the courage of the people. Poems like "San Yuan Li" by Chang Wei-ping, "Recalling History" by Wei Yuan and "Contemporary Affairs" by Chu Chi were thoroughly realistic works. Huang Tsun-hsien was an important writer who aspired to start a "revolution in poetry" and founded the "modern" school. Most of the "modern" poems written at that time were somewhat superficial, yet Huang's work is outstanding for its patriotic feeling and close concern with the political and social realities of the time. His language is rich and natural. His poem "Lamenting Pyongyang" records the Chinese defeat at Pyongyang in Korea in 1894, and bitterly reproaches the generals who disgraced China.

Of thirty-six strategies, the best is to run;

Horses stampeded, men trampled on each other. . . .

One general was taken captive, one was killed,

And fifteen thousand men laid down their arms.

"Tungkou" and "Taiwan" were good poems too, fresh and robust compared with the pseudo-classical verse of that time.

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[i] From ***The Book of Songs,*** translated by Arthur Waley.
[ii] From ***The People Speak Out,*** translated by Rewi Alley.
[iii] From ***The Book of Songs,*** translated by Arthur Waley.

[iv] English translation published by the Foreign Languages Press.
[v] From More Translations from the Chinese by Arthur Waley.
[vi] Translated by Rewi Alley.
[vii] Translated by Rewi Alley.
[viii] Translated by Rewi Alley.
[ix] Translated by Rewi Alley.
[x] From 170 Chinese Poems, translated by Arthur Waley.
[xi] A famous general of the kingdom ol Wu in the Three Kingdoms period.
[xii] Concubine of the king of Wu. in the Spring and Autumn Period. Her beauty is said to have proved her master's undoing.
[xiii] It was the custom, during sacrifice to the ancestors, to announce important family news to their spirits.