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POEMS OF MAO TSE-TUNG

Translated and annotated by Wong Man



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Snow

after the *tsu* 'Chin Yuan Chun'

North country scene:

Miles frozen bound,

More miles snow flakes.

See the Great Wall, in and out,

Just one vast waste,

The Great Ho, up and down,

Had its foam stilled.

Hills danced as silver snakes,

Mountains rampaged like wax elephants,

As if trying to vie with god in stature;

Wait till a fine day,

When sunshine burnished gold upon pure whiteness,

Yet more enchanting it shall grow.

This land with so much beauty aglow

As had caused

Countless heroes striving for homage to her bestow.

Pity Chin Huang and Han Wu

沁園春

雪

北國風光，

千里冰封，

萬里雪飄。

望長城內外，

惟餘莽莽；

大河上下，

頓失滔滔。

山舞銀蛇，

原馳蠟象，

欲與天公試比高。

須晴日，

看紅裝素裹，

分外妖嬈。

Both rather unversed,
Tang Tsung and Sung Tsu
In fine arts lacked:
And that spoiled child of heaven,
Jenghiz Khan,
Knew only shooting eagles with outstretched bow:
All is past!
For great men—none but
This age shall show.

February 1936

For notes see p. 83.

江山如此多嬌，
引無數英雄競折腰。
惜秦皇漢武，
略輸文采；
唐宗宋祖，
稍遜風騷。
一代天驕，
成吉思汗，
只識彎弓射大雕。
俱往矣，
數風流人物，
還看今朝。

一九三六年二月

PREFACE

To appreciate the *lu* and the *tsu* forms of poems favoured by Mao Tse-tung, presented here through the medium of a foreign tongue, it is helpful to know a little of their development and specific characteristics.

Like poetry of other races, the Chinese began as dance and song, handed down by tradition before there was any creation of the written character. Timed to rhythms of percussion on wood or stone from neolithic ages, it gradually took shape in the Western Chou period (11th century to 771 BC), mostly as metres of 4-beats.

Out of a welter of material, Confucius (551-479 BC) edited the first anthology, revered as the *Classic of Songs*, comprising anthems and chants for use on diverse ceremonial occasions together with popular airs, some even romantic in nature; but the tone on the whole was austere and sedate. These percussion metres, some of which rhymed, were as severe as the harsh clime of North China, though the gentler songs from southern regions sounded softer. The *Classic* was certainly moralistic, establishing an attitude which persists to the present day.

A pity that what Confucius excluded has been largely lost. The censored ones could have contained rather piquant material, as the few folk-songs and political satires found scattered in the ancient books testify. These were characterised by long and short lines, often with a particle or 'hsi' (translated 'O') in most lines; some even alleged to have existed from the dim age of the great tribal chieftain Yao (before 21st century BC); certainly easier for singing and perhaps requiring 'stringed' instruments for accompaniment. In fact, Confucius seemed to have been allergic to these, as his own *Analects* record that, during his wanderings, other schools of thought had but to sing some to him, and he and his retinue of disciples

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would at once move on to the next kingdom. Or was he peculiarly sensitive to popular thought?

The Chinese orchestra could already assemble eight kinds of musical instruments, eliciting sounds from silk, bamboo, metal, stone, wood, earthenware, leather and gourd in the form of drum, bell, gong, lute, guitar, pipe, etc., of which many have been lost.

One point to emphasise here is that, from Confucius onwards, there arose an enmity or conflict between the disciplined and intellectual metres of the scholar and the freer folk-songs of the illiterate.

During the Warring States period (475-221 BC), progressive poets in southern regions led by Chu Yuan (340-278 BC), a patriotic individualist, lengthened the lines into the *Chu Tzu*, borrowing the particle 'hsi' from folk-song, evidently meant to be sung to strings, and scholars gradually abandoned the 4-charactered percussion metre.

But scholars were never good songsters. The music of the new longer lines soon yielded to pure words in the new poems; rhythm and an echo of music remained, however, woven into undefined tonal patterns, well adapted to recitation or humming.

A second point of emphasis here is that Chinese verse never for a moment lost tonal music or rhyming. Whatever its form and nature, the auditory emotion had to be catered to first. In other words it is never prose and emphatically never blank verse.

Now it was precisely the failure to keep to these fundamentals in its development that the *Chu Tzu* eventually came to grief. In the first place, the length of the lines did not conduce to rhyming. In the second place, the poets, in an attempt to prove their erudition, went too far, employing difficult words, euphuistic language, allusions and allegories. Then to obtain freedom of expression, much of its poetic character was sacrificed, and it metamorphosed into the *fu* in the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) in attempting to serve

both worlds of poetry and prose. Later it was given up altogether in favour of pure prose. Nevertheless, the *fu* lingered on to the beginning of Tang (618-907), to die in a blaze of glory as the euphonious antithetical couplet.

A longing for classic Chinese poetry with its disciplined metres emanated from the Han reign the so-called ancient 5 and 7 character verse of four to many lines. These were really ancient forms replacing the 'hsi' with a cæsura and finalised into rigid forms in the Three Kingdoms period (220-280), satisfying for the time being the scholar's demand for tonal pattern, strict form, rhyme, euphony, rhythm, alliteration, cæsura, occasional couplets, and a suitable medium for recitation, even accompaniment by music.

These ancient 5 and 7 character verses, however, by their intrinsic harsh tonal structure, still lacked melodious liquid flow and oil-smooth euphony. It was not until after a few centuries that the *lu* poems became perfected by the Tangs.

The *lu* poem, 5 or 7 charactered, 4 or 8 lined, imposed severe disciplines as its very name, *lu* or law, implied. Somehow it struck such a code and order that its tonal and musical patterns (and there were many), with their suggestions of melody and their mirror-image antithetical couplets, have remained the supreme medium of poetic expression up to this day, fulfilling the Chinese idea of how poetry should sound.

How did folk-songs keep step? Short songs with long lines incorporating the 'hsi' were still in vogue in the Western Han period (206 BC-AD 24), whose illiterate founder was even made the accredited author of a few. The founder of Eastern Han (25-220) created the Academy of Music to function as a repository of and intelligence service on what the people were singing, which in his judgment provided an index to popular sentiment. This worked after a fashion as the songs were catalogued into scholarly language, later even into 4 or 5 charactered poems which might not have faithfully reproduced the originals. Many were lost or mutilated, but oral tradition marched on. Between Eastern Han and Tang,

with the opening up of trade routes, much new music was introduced from the west, enriching the common heritage and helping later in the birth of the *tzu*.

The Tang emperors created a New Academy of Music as well as a Dramatic School. At the beginning of the dynasty, poetry and song almost mated again, with the new *lu* poems being sung by high and low, the poet Po Chu-yi (772-846) writing expressly with an eye on the illiterate, and the latest innovation, the *tzus* or poetical songs, groping for patterns.

Divergence came again as scholars pursued the *lu* in their dens, composing exclusively for individual humming. The people reverted to their songs in long and short lines, including the new *tzus*.

The *lu*, as was natural, sank deeper into its own rut and became the preserve and amusement of the literary. Northern Sung (960-1127) tried to inject some rationalistic matter into its content as well as a little new weave without much permanence.

Scholars then turned their attention to the *tzu* with the same expected result, and even more rigid discipline. Needless to say the *tzus* soon lost their musical scores to become songs without music, yet retaining still the meaningless titles of the melody, thus conferring on themselves two titles, that of the melody and that of the subject matter; the former, however, remaining the main title because it imposed the exact pattern and structure of the piece.

From these points, broadly speaking, the *lu* since the Tang dynasty and the *tzu* since the Sung dynasty have, apart from content, remained static to this day.

Even in content, there have been but minor changes; the main themes, mostly lyrical and traditional, just stagnated. The first modern content flowed from the pen of Huang Tsun-hsien (1848-1905), a Cantonese who saw consular service abroad. Later, Lu Hsun (1881-1936) concentrated revolutionary satire into the *lu*.

With the turn of the present century returned students from the West infused new material into Chinese poetry and innovated blank verse in everyday Chinese. The People's Republic of China encouraged free poetry composed in the field of battle, at the side of the plough and within the sound of machines by the soldier, the farmer and the industrial worker, uniting the nation in poesy.

Mao Tse-tung himself definitely discouraged the young from writing poems in the ancient media.

Then are the *lu* and the *tzu* dead? One would not think so when one meets these in the present volume, some of which were hummed into being on horseback.

Here a fresh new world has been opened up to the *lu* and the *tzu*. Here are old bottles filled with new wine. Instead of the usual display of moodiness, secondary and self-centred emotions, degenerate living, escapism, lethargy, nostalgia, romantic rusticity and subjectivity, permeated by strains of passivity, melancholia, self-pity and pessimism, for example, the weakly sentiments that conclude even the most heroic pieces of former poets: Su Shih's (1036-1101) *Memories at Red-Cliff*:

*My mind wanders. I know
My sentiments deserve laughter.
Greying before time and
Believing life is a dream,
To the moon and the Kiang I can but drink my due;*

General Yueh Fei's (1102-1141) *Red-Brimmed River*:

*Time then enough
To dance, to sing, to fiddle, when
My heart is consoled;*

or Hsin Chi-chi's (1140-1207) *Farewell to Twelfth Brother Mao Chia*:

*Such sorrows deep the birds even must know,
Else why shed they
Not tears but red blood with their songs?
Who will with me
Drink in the moon?*

and *Seeing Fan Tsui off at Chu Chow*:

*Haply if friends should ask of me —
Tell them I am
As of old, sad and wine-glutted,
Watching wild geese fade into autumn mists
And twanging the desolate lute when drowséd,*

there burst upon this late scene an outlook and an ethic in total antithesis to all that had gone before.

Here in poems strictly disciplined to ancient patterns there seems to be added an undertone of the severer virtues of more ancient percussion rhythms. A scientific and up-to-the-minute outlook obtrudes into every poem where objectivity, freshness, optimism, vigour, endeavour, patriotism and universal peace are extolled.

Here nature is challenged, the task of reconstruction squarely faced, the urgency of today's problems wrestled with, superstition liberated, yet the whole salted with humour and steeped in historical allusions.

In a few lines, often expending one only, Mao Tse-tung can transport readers into pure poetic realms and as swiftly back to stark realities; how economically and yet exactingly he employs the most exquisite of lyrical lines.

Dissatisfied with all previous heroes of history he calls for new models who shall be as clean and hard as shining steel.

Here indeed is a pioneer of this space age for the *lu* and the *tzü*.

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PLATES

1. The author's photograph on opposite page
2. The manuscript of 'Mount Liupan' facing page 38
in the poet's own handwriting



The War between Chiang and the
Kwangsi Clique after the *tzu* 'Ching Ping Lo'

Sudden veer of wind and rain,
The warlords made war again,
Miseries to shower through the land:
Yet another Golden Millet Dream of the brain.

But red flags leap over the river Ting,
Taking in their stride Lungyen and Shanghang,
Mending a fragment of the Golden Vase,
We are now truly busy sharing out land and holding.

Autumn 1929

For notes see p. 65.

清平樂

蔣桂戰爭

風雲突變，
軍閥重開戰。
灑向人間都是怨，
一枕黃粱再現。

紅旗躍過汀江，
直下龍岩上杭。
收拾金甌一片，
分田分地真忙，

一九二九年秋