

Appreciations of *Tz'u*

By Yü P'ing-po

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From *Tu-tz'u ou-te* 讀詞偶得 (Random Notes on Reading *Tz'u*)

To the Tune of *P'u-sa man*

*Hillock upon hillock
Golden sunlight flickering,
Her cloud-hair about to drift over
Her fragrant snow-white cheeks.
Reluctantly, she paints her moth-eyebrows,
Slowly, she dallies with her make-up;*

*With mirrors front and back
She studies the flowers.
Images of her face and flowers
Set off each other in the mirrors,
On her freshly-ironed silk vest
Golden partridges in pairs.*

菩薩蠻

小山重疊金明滅
鬢雲欲度香腮雪
嬾起畫蛾眉
弄妝梳洗遲

照花前後鏡
花面交相映
新貼繡羅襦
雙雙金鷓鴣

Wen T'ing-yün 溫庭筠 (813?-879)

Exegesis

The phrase "*hsiao-shan*" 小山 (hillock) refers to the golden screen. This interpretation is supported by the line "*chen-shang p'ing-shan yen*" 枕上屏山掩 (above the pillows is the enfolding screen) from another of his poems. The three words "*chin-ming-mieh*" 金明滅 (golden sunlight flickering) depict the morning sunlight reflected on the painted screen. The combined descriptions of sunlight and a beautiful woman had appeared in such ancient poems as "*Tung-fang-chih-jih*" 東方之日 (The Sun of the East) of *Shih-ching* 詩經 (The Book of Songs) and "*Shen-nü fu*" 神女賦 (The Rhyme-rose on the Immortal Lady) of *Ch'u-tz'u* 楚辭 (The Songs of Ch'u) as well as in numerous other later literary works. This line starts with the description of a scene and is saturated with bright colors.

Line 2 describes the heroine's appearance before she has risen. In ancient times, the screen was placed beside the bed. The phrase "pin-yün" 鬢雲 which refers to her disheveled hair generates the descriptions of the various stages in doing her make-up. Although the phrase "yü-tu" 欲度 (about to drift over) appears difficult to explain, it is extraordinary in effect. If this line was changed to "pin-yün yü-yen" 鬢雲欲掩 (cloud-hair about to cover) its meaning would be more straightforward and clear, but the poetic effect would be greatly weakened. This line depicts not just a beautiful lady on a fair day but in a gentle breeze on a fair day. The essence of this line lies in the two words "yü-tu". Though a bit obscure, they are not unintelligible.

The central idea of the poem is in lines 3 and 4. The words "lan" 嬾 (lazy) and "ch'ih" 遲 late are the key words. In describing love, the poet begins with what is intangible, and attains the effect of great clarity and elegance. Here, the theme of love is implied through the heroine's reluctance to rise and begin her make-up. The word "nung" 弄 (to dally with) in the phrase "nung-chuang" 弄妝 (to dally with make-up) is striking because it hints at the twists and turns in her mood and hence heighten the refined and gentle qualities of the poem.

The word "chuang" 妝 in line 4 leads into the second stanza. I have used a semicolon to indicate the stanzaic division instead of a full stop. This poem follows a single linear structure. The focus of the description shifts from the scene to the woman. The actions of the heroine are presented in succession: from lying in bed to getting up, from washing to combing her hair, from putting flowers on her hair to looking into the mirror and finally to changing her clothes. These seem to be random descriptions but in fact they are tightly interwoven.

Wen, by focusing on the descriptions of the heroine's make-up process, actually succeeds in his real aim of describing love. This shows his superb poetic technique. In order to avoid belabouring the process of making herself up and hence losing the sense of proportion, he ends the poem with the line "shuang-shuang chin-che-ku" 雙雙金鷓鴣 (golden partridges in pairs). This line hints at love but on the surface it is still about her appearance. I think this arrangement is similar to the one used in the first half of the first act in the drama "Huan-hun-chi" 還魂記 (The Record of the Returning Soul).

To the Tune of *P'u-sa man*

*Porcelain pillow inside the crystal curtain,
Warm and fragrant mandarin-duck brocade
provokes dreams.
Misty willows line the riverside,
Wild geese flying across the fading-moon sky.

Lotus thread tinted with light autumn hues,
Colorful streamers curvedly trimmed,*

菩薩蠻

水精簾裏頗黎枕
暖香惹夢鴛鴦錦
江上柳如煙
雁飛殘月天

藕絲秋色淺
人勝參差翦
雙鬢隔香紅
玉釵頭上風

*Fragrant flowers separate the locks on her
temples,
Jade pins wavering in the breeze.*

Wen T'ing-yün

Exegesis

This poem begins with the greatest crystalline clarity that one could possibly imagine. The scene described in Li Shang-yin 李商隱 (813-858)'s line "*shui-ching t'an shang hu-p'o chen*" 水精簟上琥珀枕 (On the crystal mattress lies the amber pillow) bears some resemblances. One should, however, not take them too literally. Semantically, the phrase "*yüan-yang-chin*" 鴛鴦錦 (mandarin-duck brocade) apparently refers to the bed covers and the like. In poetry, as a rule however, it is not necessary to mention the object explicitly. The warmth and fragrance cause the heroine to dream, and the verb used here "*je*" 惹 (to provoke) is extraordinary. The third and fourth lines which abruptly unveil a grand vista are much quoted lines. Initially, I was inclined toward following the interpretation formerly proposed which saw "What follows the line '*chiang-shang* . . . ' as a brief description of the dream". But thanks to a friend's suggestion, I realised that such an interpretation left room for dissent. After careful consideration I am now convinced that it is a mistake. Wen T'ing-yün's *tz'u* are characterized by the juxtaposition of congruous images which automatically become assimilated, and the reader is left to provide his own interpretation, without having to search for the relationships between images for these already exist by the mere fact of juxtaposition. . . .

Without doubt, these two lines are marvellous. If cast in the *shih* form they completely conform to the *shih* prosody in term of tonal pattern and syntax. Nonetheless, they would suffer from languorousness, and this example appropriately demonstrates the basic difference in nature between *shih* and *tz'u*. . . .

The second stanza presents a scene of the heroine after she has got dressed. That the phrase "*ou-ssu*" 藕絲 (lotus threads) refers to her garment is borne out by the lines in Wen's poem to the tune *Kuei-kuo yao* 歸國謠 (Song of Returning to the Homeland) which runs,

<i>Dancing skirt hangs limply as breeze ceases,</i>	舞衣無力風斂
<i>Lotus threads tinted with autumn hues.</i>	藕絲秋色染

The phrase "*jen-sheng*" 人勝 refers to her hair ornament. The custom of trimming multi-coloured silk and attaching it to a hairpin on the seventh day of the Chinese new year was recorded in *Ching-Ch'u sui-shih chi* 荆楚歲時記 (The Record of Yearly Observances of the Ching-Ch'u Area). The fact that this image also appears in the lines

*Her jade pin wavering in the breeze,
Her lonely steps moving back and forth.*

玉釵風不定
香步獨裴回

in the poem *Yung ch'un fan* 詠春幡 (On the Spring Streamers) in the third section of his poetry collection shows that it is one of his favorite images. "Fan" and "sheng" 幡勝 refer to the same type of ornament. The line, "Fragrant flowers separate the locks on her temples" is a continuation of the previous line. The word "ke" 隔 (to separate) effectively describes the picturesque beauty of the flowers pinned on her hair. "Hsiang-hung" 香紅 (fragrant red) refers to the flowers. The final line is especially skilful because the word "feng" 風 (breeze) vividly brings out the entire scene. Not only is the flower fragrance drifting around her hair, but also the hairpins and colorful streamers are charmingly wavering in the gentle breeze. . . .

The second stanza ostensibly appears somewhat unconnected to the first, but a close examination shows that they are related: "hsiang-hung" 香紅 (fragrant red) echoes "nuan-hsiang" 暖香 (warm and fragrant) and "feng" (breeze) corresponds to lines 3 and 4. But, these are merely formal connections with which we need not concern ourselves. What is significant is that this rhythmic flow conveys a sense of the passage of time which arouses deeper feelings with its indescribable sorrow. . . . "Jen-sheng" is definitely not a space-filler but matches perfectly the line "yen-fei ts'an-yüeh-t'ien" 雁飛殘月天 (Wild geese flying across the fading-moon sky). The scene portrayed in this line is similar to the one in Hsüeh Tao-heng 薛道衡 (540-609)'s *Jen-jih shih* 人日詩 (Poem on the Seventh day of the New Year) which runs

*He left for home after the departure of the
wild geese,
My thought of him welled up before the
blossoming of the flowers.*

人歸落雁後
思發在花前

Wen's poem not only portrays a sense of the swift passing of youth, but also effortlessly evokes the lament of a woman in her secluded chamber over a distant lover. Like a luxuriant embroidery or a finely orchestrated score, this poem was rich in sensual appeal. This implicit way of describing sorrow is typical of the *tz'u* of the T'ang and the Five Dynasties. After the Southern T'ang, even as *tz'u* became more popular, its old spirit gradually disappeared and the elevated style of Wen T'ing-yün and Wei Chuang 韋莊 (836-910) was not to be seen again.

From Ch'ing-chen *tz'u shih* 清真詞釋 (Notes on Ch'ing-chen Tz'u)

To the Tune of *Tieh lien hua*

蝶戀花

*The moon so bright the alarmed crows
became restless,*

月皎驚鳥栖不定
更漏將殘

*While the night was running out through the
water clock,
A pulley working up and down the golden
well.
Wakened by the sound, she opened a pair of
glittering eyes,
Whose dewy tears had soaked the pillow, wet
and cold.*

轆轤牽金井
喚起兩眸清炯炯
淚花落枕紅綿冷

執手霜風吹鬢影
去意徬徨
別語愁難聽
樓上闌干橫斗柄
露寒人遠雞相應

*Hands locked; frosty winds against shadowy
sideburns.
How reluctant to leave!
How sad the parting words!
But upstairs the Dipper's handle had since
crossed the rail.
A man out in cold dew, and cocks' calls back
and forth.*

Chou Pang-yen, styled name
Ch'ing-chen (1056-1121)

The first three lines in stanza 1 describe what the woman in bed heard, who is about to be separated from her beloved, and through this depict the break of dawn. One must attribute the success of the section to the exclusively auditory nature of the experience. (The bright moon is merely the cause of the crows becoming restless; the emphasis is on the birds' calls, not the moonlight.) What the woman hears in bed also paves the way for the fourth line about "the glittering eyes." The crows' calls, the almost dripped dry water clock and the pulley are all sounds which interrupt the woman's dream. Lines 4 and 5 in fact deal with the sorrows of separation felt by the woman in bed. While line 4 visualizes to the last detail her sadness and apprehension before her man's departure—a line which fully exemplifies Chou Pang-yen's fine artistry in delineating the sorrows of separation. In terms of physical actions, the line describes the woman being unexpectedly awakened by the noises. Theoretically her eyes should be sleepy, but here they are described as glittering which shows how observant the poet is of details. It is a natural physiological phenomenon to wake up with sleepy eyes—if one is unexpectedly awakened after a good night's sleep, that is. But, of course, it would have been a minor flaw on the part of the poet if he had described a woman about to be separated from her lover in the same way. Chou's *Tsao mei fang* 早梅芳 may shed some light on this particular line:

*As I was being disturbed in my dream,
Dawn was already here at the door.*

正魂驚夢怯
門外已知曉

By dealing with the immediate what lies beyond the immediate is also conveyed. Through his concrete description of the woman lying in bed in the early morning, the poet actually captures all shades of sadness throughout the night. In one single line, the sorrow of the woman seems to be on the verge of surfacing with full force. The next line about the dewy tears deals with the separation on a different level and does not deal with the same thing as the previous line. The reader's doubt about this can be expelled by the use of the word "cold". The pillow here actually refers to the cotton stuffing inside. Normally warm tears, however profuse they may be, can at most moisten the pillow case, without saturating the cotton stuffing inside, let alone turning the entire pillow cold. Now that it is said to be cold, the extent of the copious tears and the heart-breaking sorrow at the moment of separation can be imagined. Line 4 therefore describes the scene when the woman abruptly wakes up, while line 5 follows it up by delineating her action before rising. Two distinct phases of narrative progression are implied. The two lines, moreover, are impregnated with all shades of feelings aroused by the forthcoming separation. Anyone treating the two lines as an undifferentiated unit disqualifies himself as a competent reader. At this point the woman and her lover are forced to leave the bed, no matter how reluctant they may be, for the man has to be on his way soon. It is a moment which lends itself to further treatment in stanza 2. Lines 6, 7 and 8 deal with what happens after they have risen by moving the locale from the room to the yard. The last two lines of the stanza deals on the other hand, with what happens after leave-taking, and the locale shifts from the steps to the road outside. Line 9 is in a rather leisurely manner, while line 10 is an extremely swift movement. So the impression we get in the first three lines of the second stanza is the reluctance before the departure, while the last two lines have to do with the hastiness of the separation. The tone and feeling are intertwined, while its content and form are both taken care of. As for the last two lines, one describes the deserted boudoir, the other the vast wilderness. In one sweeping treatment the two worlds are conjoined. There is ingrained in it the longing of the one left behind in the empty room for her beloved abroad, which cannot be fully expressed through language. Wen T'ing-yün's *Keng-lou tzu* 更漏子 concludes with "one cock's call from the village." Here the number of the fowl is multiplied, which shows how skilful Chou Pang-yen can be in applying magic touches to his predecessor's marvellous compositions, and in bringing to the surface the flavour beyond the ordinary flavour. All those discussions on the distinctions between creativity and imitation only serve to reflect the ignorance of the critics.

To the Tune of *So ch'uang han*

*Crows caw amidst the willows in the dark.
In a light gown I linger.
The little curtain at the vermillion door*

瑣窗寒

暗柳啼鴉
單衣竚立
小簾朱戶

*Together with purple t'ung flowers quietly
lock*

The doleful rain in the courtyard.

It splashes on empty stairs incessantly

Throughout the night.

Chatting with my friend by the west window

And trimming the candlewick,

I recall my sojourn on the River Ch'u

In the evening amidst flickering lights

During my youthful travels.

Now I am old,

In the Forbidden City,

Where I have my pleasure trip,

No smoke rises from chimneys of inns,

For it is Cold-food Festival.

In the taverns I order wine,

Offering it to my drinking companions.

*Peaches and plums must be blooming in the
East Garden.*

But, is the fair one

*With her dainty lips and beautiful dimples
still there?*

By the time I return home

There will certainly be withered petals

*Waiting for the visitor who comes with a
bottle of wine.*

桐花半畝
靜鎖一庭愁雨
灑空階夜闌未休
故人剪燭西窗語
似楚江暝宿
風燈零亂
少年羈旅

遲暮
嬉游處
正店舍無煙
禁城百五
旗亭喚酒
付與高陽儔侶
想東園桃李自春
小脣秀靨今在否
到歸時定有殘英
待客攜樽俎

Old Exegesis

Chou Chih-an 周止庵 (Chou Chi 周濟, 1781-1839) praises lines 8, 9 and 10 (The line numbers refer to the original Chinese text) for being "outstanding and extraordinary". Hsia Jun-an 夏閏庵 (Hsia Sun-t'ung 夏孫桐) comments that "emotion being interfused with scenery, these lines are not superficial" (These two comments are correct, though Chou's comment seems to be too brief. Hsia's comment is especially to the point. If we compare this poem to the one set to the tune *Jui-lung yin* 瑞龍吟 (Auspicious Dragon Sings) we will see that in the former the emotion is revealed through scene whereas in the latter, the scene is revealed through emotion.)

Exegesis

Line 1 sets the background for the approaching rain in late spring. Lines 2 and 3 introduce the human setting. Lines 4 and 5 depict the scene when the rain starts. The following lines go from the night rain to future talk about the

rain and then the reminiscence of the poet's sad feelings of his over-extended journeys in Ch'u. Every line unveils an imaginary scene and yet unfolds a deeper level of meaning. Up to line 6, the scene described is still a concrete one but it becomes illusory in line 7 with the allusion to Li Shang-yin's lines,

<i>When shall we be able to trim the candle</i>	何當共剪西窗燭
<i>together beside the west window,</i>	卻話巴山夜雨時
<i>While talking about this rainy night on the</i>	
<i>Pa Mountain?</i>	

Ch'en Yüan-lung 陳元龍 (1652-1736) had completely missed Chou's point when he quoted from Wen T'ing-yün's lines

<i>She turns her head, smiles and talks to the</i>	回鑾笑話西窗客
<i>guest by the west window.</i>	

The scene revealed in Li's poem is a mixture of the illusory and the naturalistic. If we render this line in prose, it becomes, "How I wish I could have my old friend here to trim the candle and talk with me by the west window?" which is not a description of an actual scene. Lines 8, 9 and 10 depict an illusion within an illusion. Is this why Chou Chi praises them for being "outstanding and extraordinary"? At that time the poet was leading a solitary life in his late years; how could it be possible for him to be talking about the past with his love by the west window? As his longing to stay with his love is already an illusion, his thoughts suddenly shift from his love to his earlier over-extended journeys. To elucidate this situation, Ch'en quoted from Tu Fu's lines

<i>As the wind begins to blow, the spring lamp-</i>	風起春燈亂
<i>lights flicker;</i>	江鳴夜雨懸
<i>As the rain starts falling, the river roars.</i>	

Both deal with over-extended journeys, and yet the differences between that undertaken during one's youth and that made in one's old age are obvious. The first stanza, despite its seemingly unrelated lines, smoothly flows into the second. On the surface, the structure appears loose, but, in fact, it is tight and inevitable. Such a divine technique surely deserves appreciative savouring on the part of the reader.

The second stanza is quite straightforward. The parallelism between the phrases "ch'ih-mu" 遲暮 (late years) here and "shao-nien" 少年 (youth) exemplifies Chou's masterful way of opening and ending a stanza. While the poem goes this way and that in the first half, with the appearance of the phrase "ch'ih-mu" the theme of the poem comes to the foreground. The following lines bring up the Han-shih 寒食 (Cold-food) Festival in a natural manner. The unobstructed flow from line 17 to the end of the poem exemplifies Chou's typical style. These lines which constitute the core of the poem comment on something to the effect that during his late years there may be withered

flowers to keep him company while drinking, but where is she, the one with dainty lips and beautiful dimples? The two words "fou" 否 (no) and "ting" 定 (will be) are half intentionally and half unintentionally used in two consecutive lines. The word "ting" has the connotations of "perhaps" or "ought to". It is, however, stronger in implication and lies halfway between the abstract and the concrete. One example can be seen in Tu Fu's lines,

<i>I have heard that you are staying in a monastery by a hill,</i>	聞汝依山寺 杭州定越州
<i>Is it in Hang-chou or Yüeh-chou?</i>	

In commenting on the poem *Jui-lung yin* Chou Chi says, "It is merely a variation on the poem 'Beach Blossom and Human Face' ". This song is a similar case in that Chou Pang-yen borrows from lines used before for re-creations. Those who attack him as "lacking in creativity" simply don't understand him.

The rain scene vividly described in the first stanza is not mentioned again in the second. What follows line 13 focuses on the poet's low spirit and his lack of interest in the approaching festival, thus having nothing to do with descriptions. A further reference to the rain is therefore not called for. The Chiku-ke 汲古閣 edition gives the title "*Han-shih*" (Cold-food Festival). What is described in the first stanza must be an actual scene of rain. According to the *Ching-ch'u sui-shih-chi* (The Records of Yearly Observances of the Ching Ch'u Area) "One hundred and five days after the winter solstice there will be fierce winds and heavy rain. That day is what is called the Cold-food Festival." Hence, the meaning of the tune title still is appropriately rendered in the descriptive passage.
