

宋淇：詩人眼中的歷史

A Poet's-eye View of History

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THE "BIOGRAPHY OF JUAN CHI 阮籍" (210-263) in the *History of Chin* 晉書 records the following episode:

Once Juan Chi ascended a battlement on Mount Kuang-wu. He surveyed the site where Liu Pang 劉邦 (247-195 B.C.) fought against Hsiang Yü 項羽 (232-202 B.C.) and reminisced, "What a pity that the age had not produced a man of greatness, thus an upstart could leave his mark on history!"

On Mount Kuang-wu, which was located in the Ying-yang District in present-day Honan, were two battlements opposite each other. It was on Kuang-wu that the long drawn-out battle between Hsiang Yü of Ch'u and Liu Pang [who later became Emperor Kao-tsu of Han (*regna* 202-195 B.C.)] was fought.

The poet Juan Chi was one of the famous Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove,¹ whose own times were marked by the struggle of power between the Ts'ao 曹 family and the Ssu-ma 司馬 family. Toward the end of the Three Kingdoms period, the Ts'aos had declared themselves successor to the Han Empire in the name of Wei, but even as they began their rule their prime minister, the General Ssu-ma Yi 司馬懿, and his two sons had their eyes on the throne. A contemporary saying had it, "The ambition harbored by Ssu-ma Chao 司馬昭 is known to every man in the street"; it would have been a wonder if it had escaped the notice of a man like Juan Chi.² Living in an age of political turmoil that was fraught

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¹According to the *History of Chin*, Hsi K'ang 嵇康, Juan Chi 阮籍, Shan T'ao 山濤, Hsiang Hsiu 向秀, Liu Ling 劉伶, Juan Hsien 阮咸 and Wang Jung 王戎 were close friends who often wandered in the bamboo groves, and were hence known to the world as the "Seven Sages of the Bamboo

Grove" 竹林七賢. This coterie of poets and intellectuals sought refuge from the political turmoil of the day in wine, drugs and "pure discourse 清談".

²The above passage is not found in the original article but is inserted here for the sake of providing the necessary historical background for those who are not so familiar with this particular period.

with danger for intellectuals like him, Juan Chi took to excessive drinking and deliberately defied all rules of propriety; his words and deeds appeared to be those of a madman. As a result, he managed to escape the sad fate of his good friend Hsi K'ang 嵇康 (224-263), who was executed.

Among the Seven Sages, Juan Chi and Hsi K'ang are the most highly-esteemed, both during their lifetime and in later periods. Juan's eccentricities, which are recorded in various sections of the *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* 世說新語, have been told and retold until this day. Poets and critics of a later age paid him due homage and accorded him a high place in literary history. Yen Yen-chih 顏延之 (384-456), whose poetry ranks with that of his better known contemporary, Hsieh Ling-yün 謝靈運 (385-433), paid Juan Chi a special tribute in his "In Praise of the Five Virtuous Men" 五君詠:

*Though Master Juan lives in seclusion and is little known,
He is a man of profound knowledge and insight
Who stays drunk so his brilliance would remain concealed.
His words carry much deep hidden meaning.
He lets out a cry betraying his feelings for a kindred spirit:
Proudly he shocks when morals he freely spurns.³
He says nothing about the way of the world for the way
is lost;
At the end of the trail he gives vent to heart-rending
sorrow.⁴*

阮公雖淪迹
識密鑿亦洞
沈醉似埋照
寓辭類託諷
長嘯若懷人
越禮自驚衆
物故不可論
途窮能無慟

Chung Yung 鍾嶸 (480-552) places Juan Chi among the best of poets in his *Shih-p'in* 詩品; and it is generally accepted that Juan's sequence of eighty-two poems entitled "An Expression of Thoughts and Feelings" 詠懷詩 are, in their own way, fine poems and quite extraordinary despite their surface obscurity; insofar as the words mean more than meets the eye.

Li Po 李白 (701-762) of the T'ang period (619-907); however, does not think so highly of Juan. After Li Po fell out of favour with the Emperor because of the eunuch Kao Li-shih 高力士 (684-762), he left the capital Ch'angan and went roaming through such places as Tung Lu 東魯 and Liang-yuan 梁園 near the sites of the historic Ch'u-Han battles. He wrote a poem called "Reflections on the Ancient Battle-ground of Kuang-wu." In this poem, Li is full of praise for both Liu Pang and Hsiang Yü and he contends that Juan Chi has been unfair to them:

*The deer of Ch'in⁵ ran wild among the grass—
They started rushing after it, like tumbleweeds in the wind.
King Hsiang's prowess was unsurpassed:*

秦鹿奔野草
逐之若飛蓬
項王氣蓋世

³The eccentricity of Juan Chi, for instance, is borne out by the following anecdote: Juan Chi's sister-in-law was once returning to her parents' home, and Chi went to see her to say good-bye. When someone chided him for this, Chi replied, "Were the rites established for people like me?"

⁴According to the *Shih-shuo Hsin-yü*, Juan Chi often went riding chariot alone at the dictates

of his whims, not following the roads and byways. When he reached the point where carriage tracks would go no further, he always would return weeping bitterly.

⁵"Deer" here refers to the fallen Ch'in Empire which was sought after by every contender of power.

*His double-pupiled eyes flash as lightning,
 In a breath, eight thousand men came
 at his bidding,
 And fearlessly, they raised a revolt south of the Yangtze.
 But the son of the Fiery Emperor had severed
 the giant white snake,
 Triumphantly, he took over the heartland.
 The prancing dragon would not tolerate another of its kind;
 It was ordained in Heaven that the five stars should gather
 in force.
 For want of wise counsel, Hsiang of Ch'u
 came to his downfall;
 Liu of Han, in a sequence of successes,
 rose to power:
 With one hand on the hilt of his sword, he brought peace
 to his land,
 And retruned home in victory; in the feast he sang
 the Song of the Strong Wind.
 It was here that the two men came
 to confront each other,
 Their troops were ready to prove
 who had the greater prowess.
 "Do let me have my share when you have
 killed him for food—
 He who is my father is also your father."⁶
 There are relics left behind from the battle:
 The broken earthworks posed against the deep void.
 Down in the ravine the tiger is roaring;
 A starving hawk squeals as it flies across the autumn sky.
 Among the hovering clouds is an array of soldiers in the
 morning;
 In the fiery rainbow you can sense their rage and fury.
 Only the heroic, the sage, could turn chaos
 into order—
 But this is beyond the understanding
 of an ignorant man.*

紫電明雙瞳
 呼吸八千人
 橫行起江東
 赤精斬白帝
 叱咤入關中
 兩龍不並蹤
 五緯與天同
 楚滅無英圖
 漢興有成功
 按劍清八極
 歸酣歌大風
 伊昔臨廣武
 連兵決雌雄
 分我一杯羹
 太皇乃汝翁
 戰爭有古跡
 壁壘頽層穹
 猛虎嘯洞壑
 飢鷹鳴秋空
 翔雲列曉陣
 殺氣赫長虹
 撥亂屬豪聖
 俗儒安可通

Li Po argues that both Hsiang Yü and Liu Pang were men of unusual qualities, but as it was impossible for them to live in peaceful coexistence, there arose the necessity to determine which of them was the stronger man. As Li stood upon the battlement of Kuang-wu, he could still feel the tension arising from the unresolved situation and could not help feeling that Liu Pang must have been a person of exceptional ability to have been able to overcome his strong foe and restore order and unity. To Li Po, Juan Chi was as knowledgeable as a

⁶ According to the *Records of the Historian*, Hsiang Yü captured Liu Pang's father and put him on a sacrificial altar. He threatened Liu by saying, "If you do not surrender to me, I shall boil your father alive." Liu, remaining unshaken, replied,

"We swore to be brothers. That means my father is also your father. If you now insist on boiling your own father, please be kind enough to give me a bowl of the soup."

poor country bumpkin. The last four lines of the poem serve as a retort to what Juan said about the two ancient heroes:

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|---|-------|
| <i>In his drunken state, he called them "upstarts,"</i> | 沉緬呼賢子 |
| <i>Such words of madness fail to do them justice.</i> | 狂言非至公 |
| <i>Here he stood, near the bend of the Yellow River, clapping</i> | 撫掌黃河曲 |
| <i>his hands—</i> | 嗷嗷阮嗣宗 |
| <i>Tut, tut, Juan Ssu-tsung,⁷ how wrong could he be!</i> | |

Of course, we have to bear in mind that Li Po had a strong, outgoing personality; he was bold, uninhibited and unable to put himself in another's shoes. Moreover, when Li Po wrote this poem, he was preoccupied with his private grievances and was hoping that there would emerge a capable man to set the world in order: thus his yearning for the likes of Hsiang Yü and Liu Pang.

Later, in the Sung dynasty (960-1279), Su Tung-p'o 蘇東坡 (1036-1101) defended Juan Chi in a *Shih-hua* 詩話, *Tung-p'o chih-lin* 東坡志林.

My friend the late Shih Ching-ch'en (courtesy name Yen-fu) once said to me, "Juan Chi, looking down upon the ancient battlefield of Kuang-wu, lamented that the times had failed to produce a man of greatness, thus a mere upstart could leave his mark on history. My goodness, how could he call Liu Pang an 'upstart'?" But I corrected him, saying: "Oh no, Juan was simply saying that in his own time there were no men of such heroic stature as Hsiang and Liu, his 'upstart' refers to those in power in the Wei-Chin period. . . . Recently I read Li Po's poem and came upon the lines "In his drunken state, he called them 'upstarts'/Such words of madness fail to do them justice", I know that Li too had misunderstood Juan Chi. Admittedly, Juan seemed depraved, but he had a mind to serve the state; it was only because he lived in an age of political unrest that he gave himself to drinking and debauchery. How could he have considered Liu Pang an "upstart?"

Su Tung-p'o, being further removed from the time of Juan Chi than Li Po, was in a better position to understand how Juan felt and to determine Juan's intentions. By the Sung period, it was generally felt that Juan Chi's eccentric behaviour was no more than feigned madness.

A number of critics and annotators have written on Juan's remark and Li's poem, but they have not reached any consensus on the issue. Some even go so far as to allege that Li's poem is forged. However, I shall not go into a detailed discussion of their arguments as I intend to confine myself to what the poets themselves have to say on the matter.

During the reign of K'ang Hsi (1662-1722) of the Ch'ing period (1644-1911), P'an Lei 潘耒 (1648-1708) wrote a quatrain entitled "Kuang-wu." The poem was well-received. Shen Te-ch'ien 沈德潛 (1673-1769) includes it in his anthology *Ch'ing-shih pieh-ts'ai* 清詩

⁷Ssu-tsung 嗣宗, the courtesy name of Juan Chi.

別裁 and has the following to say about the poet: "He reveals to us what lies hidden in the bosom of Juan Chi. To understand thoroughly a man and his times, such perceptive power as the poet's is precisely what is needed." "Kuang-wu" is the only poem by P'an Lei which is included in a more recent selection of Ch'ing poems, *Ch'ing-shih hsüan* 清詩選, compiled by Wu Tun-sheng 吳遁生. Here is the poem:

Both Hsiang Yu and Liu Pang were men of rare achievements;

But Ts'ao was mean while Ssu-ma was crafty: they should be ashamed.

*Standing in the west wind, Master Juan came to tears,
Tears that were not shed for Hsiang of Ch'u or Liu of Han.*

蓋世英雄項與劉
曹姦馬譎實堪羞
阮生一掬西風淚
不爲前朝楚漢流

Though P'an Lei's interpretation of Juan's remark is similar to Su Tung-p'o's, he goes one step further—his poem veritably expresses Juan's inner thoughts. Had Juan Chi been able to read this poem, he would have looked upon P'an Lei with approval. That P'an Lei should be so highly-praised for his poem "Kuang-wu" is not without reason: for as Keats says, "A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no identity; he is continually (informing) and filling some other body." In this respect, P'an Lei is a true poet. The voice that comes to us in "Kuang-wu" is not that of P'an Lei, but that of Juan Chi, in other words, it is Juan Chi speaking his mind through P'an Lei. Hsiang Yü and Liu Pang were indeed great men, but the Ts'aos and the Ssu-mas were mean and ruthless; had Juan Chi been frank in his appraisal of his contemporaries, he would have incurred tragic death. Juan had to disguise his criticism by deliberately misreading the past and by means of allusions. 'Yung-shih' 詠史 poems (Poems Written on Historical Personages and Their Actions) are a particular mode of expression whose significance should not be underestimated. 'Yung-shih' poems are not written to impart knowledge or to express personal opinions; they are not words of wisdom, but the embodiment of imagination and sympathy. History as seen through the eyes of the poet is, quite often, more poignant than historical facts.