NEW PERSPECTIVES IN CHINESE LITERATURE

J.D. Frodsham

The twenty-ninth George Ernest Morrison lecture in ethnology 1968
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An Anthology of Chinese Verse: Han Wei Chin and the Northern and Southern Dynasties


The Poems of Li Ho (791-817)
New Perspectives in Chinese Literature

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Australian National University
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More years ago than I care to remember, the then Professor of Chinese at Cambridge used to begin his lectures on Chinese literature with the remark: 'More than half of Chinese literature has been lost—thank heavens!' Coming as it did from a distinguished bibliographer, this seemingly impious statement, uttered with heartfelt conviction, never failed to wake up the audience. It was only later that we realised that what had cast this scholar into despair was not the quality of Chinese literature, but its quantity. For the Chinese, who combine literary creativity with mechanical dexterity, not only possessed 'an inveterate and incurable itch for writing', but also invented printing some 700 years before Gutenberg, thus preserving most of their works from the fate that inevitably befalls manuscripts. Up till the end of the eighteenth century, in fact, more books had been published in China than in all the rest of the world put together.

This primacy of humane letters in the Chinese world-view is something which we Westerners today can scarcely understand: for since the seventeenth century we have increasingly been viewing the world through mathematics, chemical formulae, symbolic logic and other sub-languages. Heirs to a squandered linguistic patrimony, indigent inheritors of semi-literacy, how can we comprehend a culture like that of Classical China, where reality was totally meshed within the reticulations of one of the most subtle and difficult languages the wit of man has yet devised?

Nevertheless, we must make the effort to comprehend this tradition. If only as an indirect result of the increasing political importance of Mainland China—800 million people are difficult to ignore—the day will surely come when at least a nodding acquaintance with Chinese literature will be held to constitute part of the education of every university arts student—perhaps even of the education of those denizens of C.P.
Snow's 'other culture', the scientists. I hope I am not being too sanguine when I say that the departments of English and Modern Languages within our universities could make a start by expecting their students to know something of the Chinese lyric, the drama, the short story and the novel, if only for comparative purposes. But before this can be done, we Sinologists must be prepared to talk the language of the humanities. We must make Chinese literature available to our colleagues and thus to the general, educated public. Before we can do this we must provide two essential requirements: firstly, good translations of all major Chinese dramatists, novelists, essayists, and poets and, secondly, critical studies couched not in traditional Chinese terms but in the language of modern criticism, a discipline which has only evolved during the last few decades and yet ranks with the monumental achievements of nineteenth century positivism in philology and textual analysis.

The last fifty years have witnessed impressive advances in literary criticism. The methods of nineteenth century criticism—historical explanation, impressionistic appreciation, and realistic criticism—have been supplemented by at least half a dozen major trends. Linguistic and stylistic criticism; organismic formalism; criticism through myths; philosophical criticism (mainly existentialist); psychoanalytic criticism and, of course, Marxist criticism of varying degrees of subtlety and crudity, have all come into being since World War I. Taken together, they constitute an impressive body of scholarship. They have brought about a revolution in critical theory comparable in importance to that effected by what R.G. Collingwood called the 'Copernican revolution' in historiography which took place a century earlier.

So far however, with the exception of Marxist critiques, the results of this critical reorientation have been largely confined to European and North American literature. Chinese literature, the only other body of writing in the world which can compare in achievement with the literature of Europe, has been virtually untouched by modern critical analysis. The result is that we are today confronted in the main by only two varieties of Chinese literary history: the traditional—occasionally supplemented by various nineteenth century European techniques—and the more naïve varieties of Marxist exegesis.

In attempting to show how modern critical methods can be applied to the elucidation of Chinese literature, I shall deal with the three main literary types—lyric poetry, narrative
prose, and drama—and examine them from a viewpoint which no Chinese critic has yet adopted.

Lyric poetry is certainly China’s greatest contribution to world literature. Poetry has always been revered by the Chinese, who made the writing of verse one of the most important requisites of the examination system. Some 350,000 or so poems have survived from the period between Han and Sung alone. Further than this no one has been able to count. On this immense corpus of poetry—close on a million poems in all I should guess—a great deal of exegetical energy has been lavished by traditional critics. Yet, curiously enough, no real attempt has been made at imposing any coherent system of periodisation on this verse. Traditional criticism simply divides Chinese poetry into so many job-lots, to which the names of dynasties or year-periods are attached as convenient labels. The result is so scrappy and complicated that one suspects the presence of an extreme critical nominalism, which ‘assumes that period is an arbitrary superimposition on a material which in reality is a continuous directionless flux’. Another more tenable view regards the history of Chinese poetry as the development of various genres. From this oversimplified viewpoint the Han is the age of the *fu* (rime prose), the T’ang the age of the *shih* (lyric), the Sung the age of the *tz’u* (song), the Yuan the age of the *san-ch’ü* (operatic aria) and so on. One or two attempts have been made to rectify this. Recently, Professor James Liu, himself a Chinese with a thorough grounding in Western literary criticism, has attempted to superimpose some sort of order on this mass of heterogeneous material by dividing Chinese poets into four categories which he dubs the Moralists, Individualists, Technicians, and Intuitionalists. But such a scheme, while marking a real advance on previous ones, is still unsatisfactory since it leaves Chinese literature as idiosyncratic and unique as before. In an age when history is fast maturing into comparative history and literature into comparative literature, we should not be prepared to accept any theory which would present either Chinese society or its microcosm, Chinese literature, as closed, unique systems, insusceptible to comparison with other systems.

The first step towards breaking down these artificial barriers and bringing Chinese poetry into the mainstream of world literature must obviously lie in the establishment of broad areas of periodisation. If Chinese writers could be classified into the well-established categories now accepted by all
European critics—Classical, Neo-Classical, Romantic, Realist, Symbolist, Baroque and so on—this would surely constitute the essential preliminary to writing a modern history of Chinese poetry—a history which will be quite distinct from either the history of individual poets and writers or from judgment of individual poems.

To impose Western literary categories on non-Western material in this way may seem presumptuous. But we must take comfort from the fact that historians have not hesitated to pin Western labels like ‘feudal’ or ‘capitalist’ on many non-Western societies, including China. Furthermore, historians of European literature, approaching the problem from the other end, are already beginning to realise that Chinese poetry does bear marked resemblances to European verse. The best practical proof of this has been given by the French literary historian, Etiemble, who in the course of a lecture on eighteenth century pre-Romanticism in Europe gave a large number of quotations to illustrate the main themes of the pre-Romantics—Claudian prospects, wild Salvatorian scenery, landscape as a state of mind, graveyards by moonlight, ruined castles, reflections on the flight of time, night thoughts, sense and sensibility. It was only at the conclusion of his lecture that he revealed to a surprised audience that every quotation with which he had illustrated the first stirrings of Romanticism in Europe had been taken from Chinese poetry from the third century B.C. to the thirteenth century of our era. Etiemble has cited this anecdote to prove that it is the literary historian’s prime task to investigate les grands parallélismes—humanisme, classicisme, romantisme.8

These injunctions bring to mind Max Weber’s insistence that the historian must precisely define the key terms he employs. As Weber puts it:

Hundreds of words in the historian’s vocabulary are ambiguous constructs created to meet the unconsciously felt need for adequate expression and the meaning of which is only concretely felt but not clearly thought out . . . 9

It was not until quite recently that the literary historian showed signs of having understood his Weber. He has now begun to set up the literary equivalents of Weber’s ‘ideal types’: to do for his key terms what the historian and social scientist have done for theirs. Let me now proceed to define four of these terms—Romantic, Symbolist, Baroque, and Neo-
Classical—and attempt to prove that such cultural configurations may be discerned in Chinese poetry as well as in that of Europe.

The criteria by which we may distinguish Romanticism are still the cause of considerable controversy among scholars. Nevertheless, over the past three decades or so, a reasonable consensus of opinion has been reached on this subject. On the basis of recent work, the major criteria for Romanticism may be said to be:

1. The importance attached to the creative Imagination, that faculty which Coleridge called 'the esemplastic power', distinguishing it sharply from the Fancy.
2. A philosophy of dynamic organism, which looks upon the universe as a living, growing and ever-changing entity, in which diversity, not uniformity, marks the pattern of creation.
3. The employment of symbol and myth, rather than direct statement, these being the forms in which the Imagination clothes itself and bodies forth truth.
4. A concern for the reconciliation of subject and object, man and nature, consciousness and the unconsciousness.  

These beliefs, applicable to all European Romantic poets, are strikingly close to those held by the Chinese Taoists. Firstly, Taoism, as Joseph Needham has pointed out, was above all a philosophy of dynamic organism. Secondly, Taoism had a high regard for the creative Imagination, which it saw as manifest in literature also. As Lu Chi wrote in his Rimeprose on Literature (Wen-fu):

> Literature is Being created by tasking the Great Void . . .
> In a sheet of paper the Infinite is contained.

Like other Romantic writers, Lu Chi was here drawing on the Taoist conception of the Great Void as the source of all artistic impulses. This view stands in sharp distinction to the Confucian insistence on the moral and didactic function of literature, with its emphasis on utilitarianism and discipline.

Thirdly, symbol and myth were widely used in Taoist philosophical writings and literature: in Confucian literature they were employed only when they had been historicised, that is to say digested into the Confucian Weltanschauung and made to serve didactic purposes. The immense body of myths and legends which China once possessed was hacked to pieces by Confucianism, so inimical was it to anything it considered non-rational. Taoism on the other hand was as
much disposed to mythologising as Confucianism was hostile to it.

Finally, philosophical Taoism's essential message is that man and nature, subject and object, conscious and unconscious are one and indivisible. All the miseries which man inflicts upon himself have been brought about by his blind insistence on dividing the fundamental unity of Nature. 12

In short, the historian of ideas may readily discern a remarkable similarity between the ideology of Taoism and that of Romanticism.

When we come to the minor criteria, great diversity of choice is possible. However, the following factors, all of which can be found in European Romantic literature, are now generally accepted as essential: (1) an interest in primitivism, (2) the cult of strong emotions, (3) sensualism, (4) individualism, (5) a reverence for wild nature, particularly mountains, (6) an emphasis on religion, (7) mysticism, including an interest in dreams and the occult, (8) Weltschmerz, mal-de-siècle or plain English 'spleen', (9) exoticism, (10) realism, including regionalism and local colour. 13

Many of these qualities are strikingly inherent in the Ch'u Tz'u or Songs of Ch'u which is the fountain-head of Chinese Romanticism. The heart of the Ch'u Tz'u is a collection of shamanistic songs dating from the third century B.C., all of them marked by sensualism, individualism, strong emotions, exoticism, primitivism, and a remarkable feeling for nature.

The Ch'u Tz'u played a part in the development of Chinese Romanticism somewhat similar to that played by medieval literature—especially the ballad and the edda—in the growth of European Romanticism. To trace the development of Chinese Romantic literature over the course of seven centuries would be a task quite beyond the scope of this section of my lecture. I propose instead to limit myself to tracing only a couple of the main themes involved and these only as they manifest themselves in the poetry of the time, leaving aside all other literary genres. Of these themes the most important are the new feeling for wild nature and the cult of sorrow. 14 The quintessential Romantic poem would then be one which combined both themes with that hypertrophy of the imagination and sensibility characteristic of the period.

When in the eighteenth century our own ancestors discovered 'mountain gloom and mountain glory' 15 it was to the Alps they turned, or to the mist-shrouded crags of Wales and Northumberland, not to the tranquil Cotswold hills. So it was
with the Chinese, who fifteen hundred years earlier had also succumbed to the fascination of the mountain wilds.¹⁶ They did this, I suggest, because of the fundamental ambiguity inherent in these landscapes. For mountain scenery is paradoxical: hanging as it does halfway between the human world of the plains and the non-human world of the heavens (in Chinese terms between man and heaven), it partakes of the nature of both. Its beauty is rooted in earth and yet quite unearthly. This generates an interior tension, which at times becomes so strong that it seems as if the landscape itself is in torment. One can notice this quality in the savage rocks of the paintings of Van Gogh, where it is carried to expressionist extremes, but it is also present, though under far stricter control, in many Chinese landscape scrolls and much Chinese verse. It has been observed in the work of Wordsworth, Rousseau and Hölderlin; it is certainly discernible in a good deal of Chinese nature-poetry.¹⁷

The typical Romantic poem then, in China as in Europe, has to do with an ascent: it describes the passage of a terrestrial, material being towards another type of being which is celestial and spiritual.¹⁸ In these early Chinese Romantic poets, the journey is described very factually. These are real rivers and mountains that our poet meets in his Pilgrim's Progress; when

... the vision dies away
And fades into the light of common day,

he is left to console himself with the thought that even if he has not attained the immortality he sought, the landscape itself has exerted a consolatory and healing power. At the height of Chinese Romanticism moreover, the landscape is often completely spiritualised, as the following poem of Li Po (699-762) will bear witness:

Hung on the rock's face, I saw the sun in the sea
And heard the Heaven-cock crowing in the void.
By a thousand crags and countless sheer ravines
Wound my precarious way.
Straying after flowers, I clung to the rocks—
Then suddenly it grew dark.
Bears were growling, dragons singing,
Streams thundered down the fells.
I shuddered in the forest glooms,
Trembled on towering peaks.
Black clouds were lowering, threatening rain,
A mist rose from the spray of rushing waters.
Lightning flashed and thunder roared,
Scarp and ridges crumbled and broke,
The stone gates of the cave of heaven
Sundered with a crash.
I looked into a vast and bottomless abyss,
A blue obscure,
Sun and moon dazzling on terraces of silver and gold.
Clad in rainbows, riding steeds of the wind,
The host of Cloud-lords came and went at will.
Tigers were strumming zithers,
Simurghs harnessed to cars,
Row after row, like fields of hemp, the Immortals were ranged . . . 19

With this magnificent vision, Chinese Romantic poetry reaches its height: for the world of wild nature now reveals itself as the perilous way to Paradise.

For the Chinese Romantics, as for the European, the universe is a hieroglyph of the spirit. The sense of continuity between man, nature, and the presence of God, which has been marked out as the distinguishing feature of European Romanticism, has never been better exemplified than in Chinese nature-poetry. For these poets, the landscape was the Buddha's Body of Truth (Dharmakāya) itself. As Su Tung-p'o (1037-1101) put it:

The murmuring stream is the huge tongue of Buddha,
The colour of the hills is surely His pure body.20

To contemplate the landscape was itself a religious experience, so much so that in T'ang poetry man tends to disappear from the landscape altogether, for he has become one with the object of his contemplation. For the Romantics, the poetic experience was fundamentally this intuition of a cosmic unity and hence itself the highest form of knowledge. This conception of the primacy of the poet's vision is the fount head from which all Romantic thought ultimately springs.

But in China, as in Europe, this vision proved impossible to hold. After the An Lu-shan rebellion (755-63), which laid half the Middle Kingdom waste and reduced the T'ang dynasty to a wavering shadow of its former self, there was a general 'failure of nerve', as Toynbee would say, on the part of the
'creative minority'. One of the ways in which this failure manifests itself is in the disappearance of belief in the numinosity of the landscape. The poets of the Late T'ang are barely concerned at all with landscape. When they do mention it, it is no longer as a ladder to the heavens but only as a gloomy and forbidding setting for their all-consuming melancholy. Here we are confronted with yet another characteristic of Chinese Romantic poetry that offers striking similarities to that of Europe, for the melancholy of European Romanticism is well attested.21

In China the tradition of the sorrowful poet begins as early as the *Ch' u Tz'u*, which is steeped in sorrow. Some time during the upheavals that marked the slow fall of the Chou dynasty, the optimistic, classical view of the universe had faded away. The *Ch' u Tz'u* poets are already deeply concerned with subjects like death and the passing of time. The assured world of the *Classic of Poetry*, a benign universe where man was master, had passed away, to be replaced by a fatalistic conviction that man is helpless and his fate an essentially sorrowful one. After the downfall of the Han, the poet becomes steeped in melancholy under the impetus of Buddhism and the break-up of ordered society. Early Chinese Romantic verse is only too conscious of the skull beneath the skin. It is so much possessed by death that it develops a real, graveyard poetry, much closer to the *danse macabre* of fifteenth century Europe than to Young's *Night Thoughts* and the Gothic elegancies of our eighteenth century. Both Early Romantic and High Romantic poets are obsessed by the contrast between the permanence of nature and the ephemerality of man. Landscape itself becomes ambiguous, since though it may be the gateway to immortality its permanence nevertheless mocks man's transience. This all-pervading sorrow is true of even the relatively optimistic poets of the High T'ang period.22

By the time we reach Li Ho (791-817) the romantic vision of salvation through the visible power of the landscape has faded away. Earth no longer joins heaven. The mountains which once led to heaven, now lead only to the grave. The Chinese triad, heaven, earth, and man are now irrevocably separated.

The melancholy of the Southern Mountain,
Where ghostly rain falls spattering on dead grass!
Back in Ch’ang-an, this autumn midnight,
How many men have withered in this wind?
I lost my way on these paths in the yellow twilight,
Blue chestnut-oaks are tossing by the road.
Moon at her height, tree-shadows dwindled away,
The entire mountain bathed in a white dawn.
Will-o’the-wisps are welcoming new corpses
As fire-flies dance over these lonely tombs.23

Furthermore, not only the healing power of the landscape but the consoling hope of finding the elixir of life have vanished from the world of Li Ho.

But it is only in his finest poems that Ho manages to sustain this ordered vision of another world above our own. When his courage fails him he finds the sensuous beauty he longed for not in heaven but on earth; sometimes in the world of nature, more often in the realm of art. We can observe a similar process at work in Keats, another fugitive from ‘the weariness, the fever and the fret’ of reality, many of whose poems display the same fascination with the rich, the luxurious, the sensuous, as much of Li Ho’s work does.24

Thus the cycle is complete. The poet sets out to climb the hills to reach for Paradise: after four centuries he falls back defeated, to take refuge in Aestheticism. There is a similar decline and fall visible in English verse, from Wordsworth to the early Yeats. Yet in spite of the fact that his verse often breaks through into Symbolism and often verges on the Baroque, Ho was still basically a Romantic.25 He still believed in life, not art; thought the poet should be socially responsible and wrote a good many poems criticising current political abuses. With his successor, Li Shang-yin (812-58), Romanticism is replaced by Symbolism. There are no landscape poems, no search for Immortality (Ch’ang-sheng) equivalent to the European Romantic’s search for Eden, in Li Shang-yin’s poetry. Like the European Symbolists, he is interested not in life but in art and dreams. He ignores society, since it is part of a reality unworthy of his attentions. His is ‘the poetry of the inner world, and of experiences singular and with an uncommunicable core of truth’.26 Li Shang-yin has retreated into an exquisite world of his own, a tower so hermetically sealed that only by the strange glow it emits from its walls of alabaster do we know that there is life within at all. His poems are as abstruse and recondite as those of Mallarmé. He is concerned solely with the anguish of love and the beauty of women, themes on which he embroiders some of the most
exquisite verse in Chinese. The mountains have dwindled, have become no more than delicate, golden paintings upon an ivory screen: we are in the world of the tz'u.27

Twelve winding rails on walls of emerald,
Sea-unicorn's horn repels the dust, a jade repels the cold.
Letters from Mount Lang-yüan have cranes for couriers,
On Lady's Couch a simurgh perches in every tree.
Stars sink down to the bottom of the sea, seen through every window,
Rain sweeps over the River's source, watched from another seat,
If the pearl of dawn should shine and stay unmoving,
All life long we should gaze at the crystal dish.28

This is Symbolist incantation, displaying that cabalistic faith in the Word which we associate with Mallarmé and Rimbaud. The poet now finds himself committed to the exploitation of all the inherent properties of language. Li Shang-yin's verse has about it le goût du mystère, du vague, du délicieux imprécis which Rémy de Gourmont saw in the poetry of Mallarmé.29

The analogy with the development of literature in nineteenth century Europe is striking. Both the European and the Chinese Romantics had tried to project themselves out of the present, to search for a millenary world which was nevertheless based on reality. Disappointed in this, they both turned their backs on reality and created a self-sustaining world of language. In T'ang China, as in nineteenth century Europe, literature moved steadily towards an over-concern with style to the neglect of subject-matter. Ultimately, the phenomenal world wavered and disappeared, leaving only the poetic act. Estranged from a society in which they no longer believed, these poets conceived of their art as an esoteric mystery, to which only the privileged few could ever hope to be admitted.

The modulation from Romantic to Symbolist verse which I have outlined here offers a striking parallel with European literature. However, the course of Chinese literary history was in fact rather more intricate than this, for towards the end of the eighth century a movement developed which can with justification be called Baroque.30 This Baroque school of verse, which was headed by Han Yü (768-824) and Meng Chiao (751-814), was extremely influential at the time, though it later proved to represent a deviation from the main tradition
of Chinese poetry and had comparatively little subsequent influence. Like the European Baroque poets—the names of d'Aubigné, Saint-Amant, Quevedo, Marino, Davies of Hereford, Crashaw, Gryphius and Góngora come to mind—these Chinese poets wilfully distort the universe through their sensibility. These poets are concerned above all with the mutability of things, with Time as a creator and destroyer. The sensory world at once attracts them by its multifariousness and repels them as a shifting, restless simulacrum. I suspect that this attitude in the Chinese poets must ultimately stem from Buddhist metaphysics, just as a similar attitude in Europe springs from the Christian tradition. This may help to account for the tension manifest in Han Yü's verse, since he was a staunch Confucianist violently opposed to Buddhist teachings. In the other poets of this school, notably Meng Chiao and Lu T'ung (d. 835), the tropes and catachreses, metaphors and similes, hyperboles and oxymorons may not arise from an attempt to resolve a psychic tension but simply be 'the decorative over-elaborations of a highly conscious, sceptical craftsman, the pilings-up of calculated surprises and effects'. This is particularly evident in these poets' treatment of landscape, where they are clearly out to shock, as witness the following poem of Meng Chiao:

Trees lock their roots in rotted coffins,
And the twisted skeletons hang tilted upright . . .
When I pour my tears in libation to the ghosts in the stream
The ghosts gather, a shimmer on the waves.

The death-imagery here is typical of the Baroque, which in eighth century China, as in seventeenth century Europe, followed hard on the heels of widespread war and rebellion. Its application to the landscape, the giver of life itself, is disconcerting and unpleasant.

Han Yü's landscapes are just as grotesque: his poem The South Mountains describes the hills south of Ch'ang-an with all the elaborate conceits we associate with a set-piece by Marvell or Góngora.

This poem is a tour de force: but like Meng Chiao's verse it is only superficially concerned with the landscape it professes to depict. Here Nature has been stripped of her veil: the universe itself has lost its awesome magic—Lu T'ung calls the eclipsed moon 'a stye on the eye of Heaven'—and has become a source of cold conceits. In typical Baroque fashion, the
spiritual and the material have become dissociated. These poets had no immediate successors, though certain Sung poets come very close to them in style, but the fictitious and pictorial view of reality stressed in these poems, where nature is described in terms of art, was to exert a lasting influence on Chinese verse.

Paul Valéry (1871-1945) once remarked that ‘the essence of classicism is to come afterwards, for order presupposes a certain disorder which has been brought under control’. I cannot agree with Valéry’s rather facile equation of Romanticism and disorder, but his observation that a period of Romanticism implies a following period of Classicism is remarkably shrewd. The truth of this observation can be tested in Chinese literature, where the Romantic movement, along with its two subsidiaries, the Symbolist and Baroque schools, was ousted from the mainstream of literature by a new type of verse which I can only call Neo-Classical, during the Sung dynasty. The Classical view of man envisages his nature as fixed and constant beneath a veneer of changing customs. Only by traditions, order, organisation, and ritual can anything be made of him. In China such a viewpoint is Confucian: nor does it vary according to whether the school in question holds that man’s nature is inherently good—as Mencius did—or inherently evil, as the repudiated school of Hsün-tzu believed. The Classicist therefore enforces as a code for both public and private behaviour those ways of living that seem to authority most profitable and suitable. The individual is subordinated to the social whole: he is not allowed to be the maker of his own values, for they are rooted not in his fallible judgment but in the very structure of the universe. This leads the Classical artist to shun purely aesthetic considerations; his prime question can never be: ‘Is this work beautiful?’ but rather ‘Is it correct?’ He sees himself as giving individual expression, not to his own emotions, but rather to a body of common sentiments and thoughts which he shares with his audience, thoughts and views which have on them the socially approved seal of universal truths. For the Chinese writer, these truths were to be found in the Confucian classics which formed the very fabric of Chinese society for some two thousand years and which were given their final, unassailable place during the Sung, by the efforts of the Neo-Confucian philosophers.

The originator of this Neo-Classical movement was the Northern Sung poet, Mei Yao-ch’én (1002-60), whose work
exemplifies all the classical virtues of the earlier, formative period of Chinese culture.\textsuperscript{36} The inspiration of Mei's work lies in the \textit{Ta-ya} and \textit{Hsiao-ya} sections of the \textit{Classic of Poetry}, which means that he is above all concerned with writing poetry of social criticism. His avowed aim was to bring poetry back into contact with daily life: to liberate it from its burden of sorrow: to free it from preconceived ideas of the poetic and find subjects for verse in every aspect of everyday life: to make poetry an expression of intellect as well as of feeling and, above all, to ensure that verse once again regained those humanist and philosophical principles which had been lost by the end of T'ang. Mei shunned landscape and the supernatural and wrote of the world of men, especially the world of the cities which the Romantic poets had detested. Like all the Neo-Classical poets, he had the ability to create high poetry out of the material of everyday life, as in the following poem:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{AN ECLIPSE OF THE MOON}

Our maid ran into the sitting-room
To tell us something startling was afoot,
For in a sky like dark-blue glass,
Like a black crystal hung the moon.
Round as a ball it should have been,
Yet we could see only one shining inch.
My wife hurried off to bake some cakes,
The children started banging mirrors.
It's true their reasoning was shallow,
But they merit praise for trying to help.
Cassia and hare came back at deep of night,
The multitude of stars sank to the west.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

Mei's verse was to set the tone for the poetry of the Sung for the next 250 years. Yet the Romantic heritage had not disappeared. Instead, it was confined mainly to the \textit{tzu} (song) form, while the New Classical verse now rode the main current of the \textit{shih} (lyric). This fact is so little recognised that most histories of literature quite wrongly refer to the Sung as the age of the \textit{tzu}, whereas, in fact, this form was generally reserved for minor poems. The Romantic tradition was thus temporarily relegated to second place, a position it held until the downfall of the Sung when it once again emerged, this time to run side by side with the Neo-Classical forms.

In evolving these ideas, I have borne in mind the fact that the trend of modern research is away from those dazzling
theories of dialectical, historical contrasts once put forward by German scholarship. The descriptive method has now succeeded the causal, historical approach; emphasis on gradualism and transition has replaced older theories of dramatic change and clearly delineated epochs. This is especially applicable to China where the weight of tradition and the fundamental stability of social patterns made changes far less dramatic, when they did occur, than in the West. These factors combined with the Chinese reverence for the past and their love of imitation of bygone masters to ensure that one can always find Romantic poets in a Classical era and Classical poets among the Romantics.

So far the theory briefly sketched here has of necessity taken only poetry into account. Obviously any fully satisfactory hypothesis will also have to pay careful attention to prose—especially the novel and the short story—as well as to dramatic art, genres whose development may well prove to proceed at a different pace from that of verse. Yet to say this is not to deny that at certain times widely differing sets of literary norms were predominant. Nor can we overlook the fact that these norms bear remarkable resemblances to those which were to evolve centuries later in European literature. Since there can be no question of cultural diffusion here, we are forced to postulate the existence of what the anthropologists call 'cultural convergence'—the independent evolution of closely similar cultural patterns in widely separated societies. It is axiomatic that a good deal of parallel development must be expected in isolated cultures. The Chinese, after all, evolved their own astronomy, their own mathematics, their own script, quite independently of the West. Hence we should not find it too surprising that cultural configurations of the type I have been describing should evolve in China, without outside influence to account for their inception. Biologists are familiar with the concept of analogous organs which, though resembling each other superficially, have fundamentally different structures. The wings of birds and the wings of insects, the legs of anthropods and the legs of vertebrates, which are widely different in structure though similar in appearance and function, provide examples of such analogues. It would seem likely, on the basis of the evidence at our disposal, that China and Europe over the centuries evolved analogous literary cultures which, though structurally dissimilar, nevertheless resemble each other closely. Nor is this patterning limited to periods: there are also major resemblances discernible between
genres. Thus every major genre produced in Europe, with the notable exception of epic, has its counterpart in China. The short story, the novel, the essay, the drama, the long poem, the lyric, and the ballad, all have their analogues in Chinese literature. I am strongly reminded of the way in which our Australian marsupials, marooned in an isolation far more complete than that of China, proceeded over the years to develop forms which duplicated those of the placentals, thus presenting to the astonished eyes of their discoverers familiar species tricked out in oddly different guise. In years to come, literary historians who have hitherto confined their attentions to Europe will, I feel, be equally astonished to come across Chinese counterparts of the literary fauna which they had assumed could be found only in the West.

I should now like to turn your attention to another great achievement of the Chinese—narrative prose. In China, as in Greece, prose first came to maturity during a period of intense philosophical activity which took place from about the fifth to the third centuries B.C. In the prose of both cultures we witness a prolonged and difficult struggle towards the discovery of intellection and the unfolding of the process of conceptual thought. A great deal of important work has been accomplished in the field of Greek studies recently by scholars who have shown that Greece was making the difficult transition from an oral culture to a literate one during the three centuries that preceded Plato. Professor E.A. Havelock, of Harvard, has argued brilliantly that Plato’s famous attack on poetry is explicable only if we realise that for some three centuries after the introduction of the alphabet in the eighth century B.C., Greek thought was struggling to free itself from the tyranny of the epic tradition. In an oral culture, as the researches of Parry and Lord have shown, civilisation is preserved by being passed down from generation to generation in formulaic form, by word of mouth. Hence the Homeric epics, and later the Attic stage plays, constituted for the Greeks a vast encyclopaedia, ‘a body of invisible writing imprinted on the brain of the community’. Poetry was thus primarily didactic: its aim was the preservation of Greek civilisation, which it transmitted through rhythmically framed directives intended for memorisation. But the ‘enormous powers of poetic memorisation’ this entailed—for the Greek epics were meant to be learnt by heart—‘could be purchased only at the cost of total loss of objectivity’. Experience could not be analysed, but only relived through poetry. Before
conceptual thought could emerge, the authority of the poetic had to be destroyed: hence the violence with which Plato attacked poetry, accusing it among other things of 'crippling the intellects of the listeners'.

There are clearly close parallels between the situation in Greece and that in China about the fifth century B.C. As far as we know, the Chinese never possessed an epic tradition: or, if they did, it has been so thoroughly suppressed by Confucian rationalism that not a trace remains. They did, however, have a semi-formulaic body of verse which played much the same part as epic did in safeguarding the culture language in a society of largely oral preservation. I am referring of course to the *Shih-ching (Classic of Poetry).* No scholar has as yet attempted a study of the *Shih-ching* to decide whether it played the same part in Chinese civilisation as the Homeric epics did in Greece. But that is by the way. What we are concerned with here is the fact that both in China and in Greece the fundamentally poetic cast of mind typical of an oral culture left deep imprints on the literate culture that succeeded it. The 'proto-thinkers' of Greece, the pre-Socratics—Xenophanes, Anaximander, Empedocles, Parmenides, Heraclitus and others—are still demonstrably poets whose compositions were meant to be memorised and recited.41 The same is true of most early Chinese philosophical works. The *Tao-te-ching* is rhymed and rhythmical throughout. Large sections of *Chuang-tzu, Kuan-tzu* and other works are also rhymed. And even when a philosophical work is unrhymed—as the *Analects* or *Mencius*—its prose is nevertheless still highly rhythmical. In short, early Chinese prose bears the unmistakable stamp of an oral culture. It was organised poetically in order that it could be memorised and repeated. This explains why scholars were able to reconstruct the Confucian texts from memory during the Han after the First Emperor of Ch’in had burnt the books. Even after Li Ssu’s simplification of the script in the third century B.C., a step which made writing a much more practicable instrument of communication, Chinese literature continued to be written primarily for memorisation.42

To realise this is to understand why Pan Ku hammered out that 4-6 rhythm for the prose of the *Han Shu* which was later to become the basic rhythm of Classical Chinese: why the long rhymed catalogue of the *fu* or rimeprose was so popular: why the *p’ien-wen* or parallel prose style was predominant from the fall of the Han till the early years of the Sung. Parallel prose, which uses rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, anti-
thesis and tonal patterning, is virtually useless for narration; but it is admirably adapted for rhetoric and for recitation. Its predominance over a period of some 700 years has a great deal to do with the singular paucity of narrative and philosophical prose before the Sung.

The reasons which compelled the Chinese—a people who attach an almost sacred value to the written word—to behave like members of a culture just emerging from the stage of oral preservation are undoubtedly complex. The primary reason, I believe, lies in the analphabetic nature of the Chinese script itself, where pronunciation of each character has to be learnt separately. The text had to be intoned aloud, the rhythm helping the sense. From this it was but a short step to learning the text by heart—a useful accomplishment since the Imperial examinations were very much a test of memory. The writer who refused to frame his sentences rhythmically would not be read by candidates for the civil service.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that the psychic inertia fostered by centuries of oral culture in China undoubtedly left an indelible stamp on the formation of classical prose. Not until the T'ang dynasty and the rise of the \textit{ku-wen} or Ancient Style movement, did classical prose shake off some of its more ornate and restrictive fetters and adapt itself to the demands of narrative. In short, the development of narrative and philosophical prose in China was gravely hampered by the insidious effects of a never entirely forgotten oral culture.

Chinese classical prose was not the only type of prose to be influenced by habits carried over from a pre-literate culture. The Chinese colloquial novel and short story also suffered from this. These two genres developed out of the \textit{p'ien-wen} or 'illustrative texts' of the Buddhist preachers of the T'ang dynasty. From these crudely fashioned stories, written let us note in a mixture of prose and verse, the story-tellers of the Sung dynasty evolved a highly developed art-form which laid the foundations of the colloquial novel. The Chinese novel, which had its inception in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is a remarkable achievement, ranking at its best with the great novels of our own eighteenth century. Unfortunately, it failed to rise to even greater heights precisely because it was unable to shed completely the chrysalis of the oral tradition that had nurtured it.

The Sung dynasty story-teller was accustomed to introduce his story with preamble, designed to allow time for an audience to gather round him. His tale was interspersed with verses and
songs: he would break into the plot to comment on it from time to time: he relied heavily on dialogue to advance the action: he limited each episode of his story to the attention span of his audience, breaking off the tale at a point of suspense so he could then pass the collecting-bowl round. All these devices were retained as literary clichés by the novel and short story even when they had attained an otherwise craftsmanlike form. The cumulative effect of these storytellers’ tricks is ‘to destroy the illusion of veracity which naturalistic plot details attempt to create; and the retention of such conventions has impeded the development of a realistic, narrative technique towards its ultimate goal of producing an effect of actuality’.

In short, there can be no doubt that Chinese prose, whether classical or colloquial, has been adversely affected by the retention of elements from an earlier oral culture. The matter would obviously repay thorough investigation.

Finally, I should like to touch on a subject to which Western critics, ever since Aristotle, have devoted a great deal of attention but which has gone unnoticed by all but one or two Chinese critics who have come into contact with Western scholarship. I am referring to the idea of the tragic—a concept for which Chinese has no exact equivalent. The word ‘tragedy’ can properly be applied only to one form of experience, namely a situation in which a conflict develops between fate—or necessity—and human will. In this conflict the protagonist is always destroyed. Yet out of his downfall he wrests his very greatness: though crushed, he remains sublime in his fall, thus snatching a spiritual victory out of defeat. These three qualities, conflict, the exercise of the human will, and the spiritual greatness of the hero are essential to tragedy, which lacking any one of these will decline into romantic drama.

The Chinese drama which developed during the Yuan dynasty (1260-1368) produced a large number of very good plays, many of which, in accordance with the prevailing pessimistic temper of Chinese literature, had sorrowful endings. In his influential Sung Yuan hsi ch'ü k'ao [Study of the Drama of the Sung and Yuan Dynasties], the great scholar, Wang Kuo-wei (1877-1927), expressed the view that two of these dramas may properly be called tragic. Of one of them, The Wrongs of Maid Tou, by the thirteenth century playwright Kuan Han-ch’ing, he remarks: ‘...Although the calamity is brought about by the machinations of the villains, it is the
heroine's will-power which drives her to go through fire and boiling water for the sake of another. Thus we need not be ashamed to rank this piece among the greatest tragedies of the world'.46

Here we have an instance in which a Chinese critic has been bold enough to apply a Western critical concept to the elucidation of Chinese drama. Unfortunately, Wang Kuo-wei is at fault in believing that the exercise of will-power alone is enough to make a tragic hero. Unless the protagonist is a divided character, struggling between the pull of different moral imperatives or torn between the imperative and impulse, there can be no tragedy. Maid Tou is an admirably virtuous and filial character who refuses to remarry after her husband's death and falsely confesses to a murder in order to save her mother-in-law from being wrongly accused of the crime. In spite of her innocence she is executed; a miscarriage of justice which moves the heavens to send down snow in midsummer and let no rain fall for three years until all is avenged.

This play, though moving and pitiful, is in no sense a tragedy, but rather a drama of disaster. There is no catharsis here, no sense of pity and terror, but only pathos. We are witness not to the death of a tragic heroine but to the immolation of a victim. Maid Tou is certainly noble and pathetic: but she cannot be tragic because she experiences no sense of conflict between duty and desire. Had she been torn between her own desire to live and her duty to protect her mother-in-law, a tragic conflict would have been called into being. But, significantly enough, the dramatist fails to see this opportunity. For him Maid Tou is virtuous precisely because she does not for a moment give way to doubt or weakness, but is absolute for death. Since there is no struggle of irreconcilable imperatives here, but only firm committal to a socially-approved course of conduct, Maid Tou, though an admirable figure, is no more tragic than a Hindu widow who willingly hurls herself upon her husband's funeral pyre.

If a strong-minded protagonist fails to qualify as a tragic figure, how much further away from the tragic is the protagonist who simply yields weakly to circumstances! Yet this is true of the majority of heroes of Chinese drama. Among them we may list the Emperor Hsüan-tsung of the T'ang, one of the most pathetic figures in Chinese history. His loss of his murdered lady, Yang Kuei-fei, for whose love he let an empire slip through his fingers, has been made the subject of several fine dramatic pieces. Perhaps the best of these is the Rain in
the Sterculia Trees (T'ang Ming-huang Ch'iù Yeh Wu-t'ung Yu Tsa-chü) of Po P'u (1226-85).

If the pathos of Maid Tou is brought about by her inflexible determination, the pathos of the emperor's situation is the result of his lack of will. As Ch'ien Chung-shu has pointed out, in the climactic scene where the rebellious soldiery take Yang Kuei-fei away from him and lead her off to execution, he completely fails to rise to those tragic heights we expect. Instead, he simply hands her over to her murderers, saying weakly: 'I cannot help it. Even my own life is in danger'. As she is led away to execution he calls after her, feebly: 'Don't blame me, my dear'. This would perhaps be nearer bathos than pathos if it were not for the musical setting which lends dignity to the scene. We cannot help contrasting the Emperor with Antony,47 who found the world well lost for love, and in a similar situation exclaimed:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay ... 48

And again:

I have lived in such dishonour that the gods
Detest my baseness. I, that with my sword
Quarter'd the world, and o'er green Neptune's back
With ships made cities, condemn myself to lack
The courage of a woman; less noble mind
Than she which by her death our Caesar tells,
I am conqueror of myself.49

Admittedly the two dramas I have cited, which are among the best the Chinese theatre has to offer, are deeply moving. But they are certainly not tragic. The tragic hero must face tremendous conflicts between duty and desire; must make choices for good and for evil; must bow beneath the whirlwind he has sown and yet be brought to a larger awareness of himself and the universe; must grow in stature even as his worldly fortunes diminish, so that though he suffers and dies he has yet acquired a wisdom not sold for a song nor bought in the market-place. Hence the tragic hero cannot be merely pathetic or virtuous. He must be sublime, moving inexorably from purpose through passion to perception. Since I have found none of these qualities in the protagonists of any Chinese drama I have read, I am compelled to conclude that
the Chinese vision of man, for all its many-sidedness, was never a tragic one.50

There are I think two reasons why the sense of tragedy is missing from the Chinese Weltanschauung. Firstly, a tragic hero must be inner-directed, must make his own decisions, choose the path of hubris, pit himself against fate. But the Chinese—like the modern Americans—were and still are largely other-directed. Since the other-directed individual does what his society compels him to do, he cannot hold to that course of obstinate individuality necessary to produce the tragic situation. This tendency is observable throughout Chinese literature, where the writer is almost invariably more concerned with broad social issues than with individuals. Secondly, the Chinese had no sense of that impersonal fate which Alfred North Whitehead has rightly characterised as the essence of both Greek science and Greek tragedy. In Science and the Modern World he points out that

the pilgrim fathers of the scientific imagination as it exists today, are the great tragedians of ancient Athens, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides. Their vision of fate, remorseless and indifferent, urging a tragic accident to its inevitable issue, is the vision possessed by science . . . The laws of physics are the decrees of fate.51

Here I believe we have another explanation for the lack of a tragic sense in the Chinese. It can hardly be a coincidence that the two great ages of tragic drama, that of Athens in the fifth century B.C. and Europe in the seventeenth century, were contemporary with the rise of Greek and European science.52

The world-view of science, like the world-view of the tragic vision, sees nature as an impersonal force whose laws cannot be broken with impunity. The tragic hero, whether wittingly or not, has broken the law and must pay for it with his life. Thus tragic drama, whether in Europe or Greece, gains its peculiar power over us by letting us witness, as with the eyes of the gods, the spectacle of the spirit of man pitted against an inexorable universe.

Such a vision is quite foreign to the Chinese. The Chinese notion of Order (Li) excluded the notion of Law (Fa).53 Where the pre-Socratic philosophers speak of 'necessity' (anankê), the Stoics of 'Universal Law' (Koinos nomos), the Romans of Lex, Newtonian science of Laws, the Chinese speak of the Tao (Way) and Li (Dynamic Pattern or Order). The Chinese conception of fate is that of action and reward,
or action and punishment, rather than that of cause and effect. They were eager for poetic justice and had no eyes for tragic injustice. Gloucester’s cry:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,
They kill us for their sport.

would have been both shocking and inexplicable to a Chinese audience. Nor could the idea of tragic inevitability, operating as inexorably as a mechanism, have meant anything to them. Only in Buddhist thought do we meet with the idea of cause and effect in the doctrine of *Karma*, the operations of which were thought of naturalistically and mechanically. But by the time the drama developed, Buddhism in China had been on the wane for some five hundred years and was no longer a vital influence on Chinese thought, which was strongly Neo-Confucian. Lacking the conception of Law, the Chinese had no philosophical basis for the tragic. Ultimately this people failed to develop tragedy for the same reasons that they failed to develop science. This is not to deny the magnificent achievements of generations of Chinese scholars, whose labours in the fields of scholarship have provided us with those texts without which the critic would find it impossible to work. Criticism, however, must begin its task where textual and historical scholarship leave off: and today the whole apparatus of criticism is not Chinese but Western in origin and development.

The Western-trained specialist in Chinese literature—who may or may not be a native Chinese—must today shoulder a heavier burden than in the past. Since the Cultural Revolution the Chinese themselves seem to have turned their backs completely on their own literature. Even if they should decide to reassert the heritage they now spurn, it is doubtful whether they will for many years to come adopt any other standards besides those of the ‘vulgar Marxist’ interpretations in fashion since 1949. This means that the task of evaluating Chinese literature anew—an undertaking somewhat comparable to that of rebuilding the Great Wall, stone by stone—will have to be carried out by a mere handful of scholars. In the meantime, the historian of Chinese literature has a duty to communicate with others. Firstly, he must keep in touch with his Sinological colleagues working in other areas, from linguistics to epigraphy, for from them he has still much to learn. Secondly, he must be able to communicate meaningfully with his fellows in allied fields of literature. Finally, he
has a responsibility to the general, educated public, to whom he must reveal some of the riches hidden within the oldest literary tradition in the world. In doing so he will discover he is no longer imprisoned within the arcane mysteries of Sinology: instead, he will be down in the literary thoroughfares, playing his part in the revolution that is now taking us above the limitations of traditional Western taste into the realms of a true world literature, a universal art. For literature is a many-voiced chorus, sounding out down the ages, which asserts man's defiance of time and mutability. It is the critic's duty, as custodian of this heritage, to see that none of these tongues of silver should ever be allowed to lapse even temporarily into silence and oblivion.
References

1Gustav Haloun (1898-1951) held the Chair of Chinese at Cambridge from 1938 until his untimely death.


5There are, happily, a slowly increasing number of honourable exceptions to this rule. Among those I should like to single out as especially noteworthy are the following: James J.Y. Liu, ‘Ambiguities in Li Shang-yin’s Poetry’ in Wen-lin, Studies in the Chinese Humanities, ed. Chou Tse-tsun, pp. 65-84; Ch’en Shih-hsiang, ‘To Circumvent “The Design of Eightfold Array’”, pp. 26-51; Tsu-lin Mei and Yu-kung Kao, ‘Tu Fu’s “Autumn Meditations”: an exercise in linguistic criticism’, pp. 1-46; A.C. Graham, Poems of the Late T’ang; C.T. Hsia, The Classic Chinese Novel.

6R. Wellek and A. Warren, Theory of Literature, p. 274.


8René Etiemble, Comparaison n’est pas raison: la crise de la littérature comparée, p.70. Etiemble concludes: ‘Car si je puis éclairer tous les thèmes du prérromantisme européen au XVIIIe par des citations emprun­tées à la poésie chinoise d’avant le christianisme ou des douze premiers siècles de l’ére chrétienne, c’est évidemment qu’il existe des genres, des invariants, bref que l’homme existe et la littérature.’


10See Wellek, ‘The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History’, and ‘Romanticism Re-examined’ in Concepts of Criticism, pp. 128-98 and 199-221. The notion of dynamic organism derives from Arthur O. Lovejoy,


12 Wellek, ‘Romanticism Re-examined’, p.221, defines ‘the essence and nature’ of romanticism as an attempt ‘to identify subject and object, to reconcile man and nature, consciousness and unconsciousness’.


14 Albert S. Gérard, English Romantic Poetry, p. 242, remarks: ‘The romantic revolution began in the eighteenth century with the revaluation of nature and the status of nature remained one of the cruxes of mature romantic thought’. For the cult of sorrow see notes 21 and 22 below.

15 See Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: the development of the aesthetics of the infinite


17 Paul de Man, ‘Structure intentionelle de l’image romantique’, pp. 68-84. ‘On sent l’intensité d’une tension interne qui habite au coeur même des choses terrestres et qui est sur le point de les faire éclater’, p. 81.

18: ‘... le passage d’une certaine nature, terrestre et matérielle, vers une autre nature, céleste et mentale ... ’ p.80.


20 Su Tung-p’o, ‘Tseng Tung-lin tsung ch’ang lao’, Feng Ying-liu, Su Wenchung shih ho chu (1793), No. 2311. This poem was written in 1084. The whole chüeh-chü reads:

The murmuring stream is the huge tongue of Buddha,
The colour of the hills is surely His pure body.
Last night I heard eighty-four thousand gāthās!
But afterwards—how to explain this to others?
A gāthā is a verse of a sutra. The verses were intoned all night by the mountain stream, which ran near the Tung-lin monastery on Mount Lu, Kiangsi.

21 Paul van Tieghem, L’Ère romantique: le romantisme dans la littérature européenne, pp. 70-1, 400-1. Van Tieghem remarks (p. 352): ‘Le poète se montre affligé, parfois désespéré, tantôt languissant, tantôt revolte. Ses amours qui font le principal sujet de ces chants le font souffrir: sa destinée est amère: il est malade, il est mourant ... ’ Howard E. Hugo in his introduction to Romantic Reader, cited in John B. Halsted, ed., Romanticism: problems of definition, explanation and evaluation, p. 31, remarks: ‘The former trait [emotional sensibility] took on many later configurations or names ... spleen, melancholy, the blue devils, Weltschmerz, le mal du siècle. What the Middle Ages had labelled acedia, the grave sin of spiritual sloth and despair, came to be the mark of spiritual distinction—a prerequisite for the genius, a necessity for the man of fashion’. For the Chinese cult of sorrow, especially during the T’ang, see
Yoshikawa Kōjirō, *Sōshi gaisetsu*, pp. 34-6. Yoshikawa remarks: 'During the long years of the Han dynasty (202 B.C.—A.D. 220) and the centuries of political strife that followed it, however, the conviction that human existence is marked by sorrow and despair became the keynote of poetic expression. It was a conviction born of an awareness of the insignificance of man and a belief that he is wholly governed by forces beyond his control. It was further deepened by the view that despair and sorrow are burdens which man is inevitably fated to bear, and that the span of human life is no more than a brief process of decline and decay, terminating in death... the habit of choosing despair rather than hope, unhappiness rather than happiness, sorrow rather than joy as the theme of one's poem, became so ingrained that it was all but unbreakable. Even the poets of the succeeding T'ang dynasty were unable to free themselves from the habit... the temptation to despair continued pertinaciously to entrap even the greatest of the T'ang poets'. Tr. Burton Watson, *An Introduction to Sung Poetry*, p. 25.

22Yoshikawa remarks: '...even a poet like Tu Fu, who tried to free himself from sorrow, could speak of "a whole life of grieving".' (Watson, p. 29).


24See David Y. Chen, 'Li Ho and Keats: a comparative study of two poets'.

25I am now inclined to see far more of the Baroque in Li Ho's verse than I did at the time of this lecture. See notes 30 and 31 below.


27One might also point out that the growth of Symbolist verse in China, and in Europe, was bound up with music. As Chiari (p. 64) puts it: 'Music offered them [the European Symbolist poets] the perfect analogy for the fleetingness and elusiveness of their poetic experiences. Music meant above all a suggestive indefiniteness of vague emotive states favourable to the birth and, for the reader, the rebirth of the poetic experience.' It can be no coincidence that Chinese Symbolist verse is mostly in the *tz'u* form.


29Quoted by A. Thibaudet, *La poésie de Stéphane Mallarmé*, p. 366.

30See Wellek, 'The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 5, 1946, pp. 77-109. Reprinted with a postscript dated 1962 in Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism*, pp. 69-127. Wellek finely remarks (p. 114): 'Whatever the defects of the term baroque... it is a term which prepares for synthesis, draws our mind away from the mere accumulation of observations and facts, and paves the way for a future history of literature as a fine art.' My application of the term 'Baroque' to China was in a sense anticipated by Nietzsche who saw the Baroque not as limited to post-Renaissance Europe but as a constantly recurring historical phenomenon. In Nietzsche the Baroque represents the decline of art into rhetoric. He applies the term to the Greek...
dithyramb ('Griechischer Dithyrambus ist Barockstil der Dichtkunst') and to rhetoric.

31Odette de Mourgues, *Metaphysical, Baroque and Precieux Poetry*, p. 74, conceives of the Baroque as 'poetry in which, although the problems of the age are reflected, the perfect poise between intelligence and sensibility is either destroyed or not achieved or not attempted, with the result that the poet has a distorted vision of life, distorted through imagination and sensibility, without any apparent care for proportions or balance... The baroque poet then depends on his power to carry his reader into his own world which is often a sort of surrealism, and to light up for him those strange vistas which such baroque sensibility can open up both in the concrete world of nature and in the recesses of man's consciousness. Accordingly the stylistic devices used by the baroque poet will work mostly on the imagination and emotions of the reader and as powerfully as possible.'


33Wellek, 'The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship', p. 111. Wellek is protesting against the too facile interpretation of German Baroque poetry as expressing 'a turbulent, torn, convulsed soul, struggling with its language, piling up asyndetons and epithets' (p. 111). Wellek concludes by distinguishing two forms of Baroque: 'that of the mystic and tortured souls' and that 'which must be conceived as a continuation of rhetorical humanism'.

34Ch'üan T'ang-shih, Vol. 6, p. 4274.


36Mei Yao-ch' en's verse is still little known in the West apart from a few loose translations by Kenneth Rexroth (from the French of Georges Soulé de Morant) in *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese*, pp. 35-48. The best translations to date are to be found in the *Antologia kiatiskoi poezii* [An Anthology of Chinese Poetry], Vol. 3, and in the *Poeziia epokhi Sung* [Sung Poetry]. The author's forthcoming *Anthology of Chinese Verse: Sung, Chin and Liao dynasties*, will also contain a representative selection of his poems. Mei's biography is found in *Sung-shih*, 483, pp. 1a-2a. See also James T.C. Liu, Mei Yao-ch'en, *Sung Project*, II, 1, pp. 1-9. For his poetic works see Hsia Ching-kuan, *Mei Yao-ch'en shih*; Kakei Fumio, *Bai Gyo-shin, Chūgoku shijin senshu*, 2.3.

37Hsia Ching-kuan, *Mei Yao-ch'en shih*, p. 44.

38E.A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*. Havelock argues that though 'alphabetic skill was available to a few not later than 700 B.C.' (p.45), Greek culture at the time of Plato was still primarily a culture in which oral communication dominated 'all the important relationships and valid transactions of life' (p. 38). The 'apparatus of civilisation' was preserved through 'a collective, social memory' (p. 42). Since accurate preservation in prose was impossible 'the only possible verbal technology available to guarantee the preservation and fixity of transmission was that of the rhythmic word
organized cunningly in verbal and metrical patterns which were unique enough to maintain their shape' (pp. 42-3). Hence poetry was essentially 'a kind of reference library or ... a vast tractate in ethics and politics and warfare and the like' (p. 43). Havelock concludes that 'if one applies these findings to the history of Greek literature before Plato, one is caught up by the proposition that to call it literature in our sense is a misnomer' (p. 45).


40 Havelock, *Preface to Plato,* p. 45.

41 Ibid., p. 288: The pre-Socratics, to take their case first, began as men who on the one hand composed as poets, or like Heraclitus as poetic epigrammatists, responding to the conditions of an oral situation... Yet obviously they felt repugnance to it the oral tradition and fought it... Havelock goes on to observe, brilliantly, that we feel in the pre-Socratics a 'constant preoccupation with language, and a continual complaint against its limitations' (p. 289). He might have been speaking of Chuang-tzu, Lao-tzu or K'ung-tzu. No Sinologist seems as yet to have considered the possibility that Lao-tzu, for example, like the pre-Socratics may have been primarily engaged in the task of inventing a philosophical language rather than a philosophical system.

42 Havelock, *Preface to Plato,* p. 157: 'The learning process... was not learning in our sense but a continual act of memorisation, repetition and recall. This was made possible by practising a drastic economy of possible linguistic statements, an economy reinforced by rhythmic patterns both verbal and musical.' (My italics.) The lapidary qualities so characteristic of Classical Chinese style may well be explicable largely in these terms.

43 John L. Bishop, 'Some Limitations of Chinese Fiction', p. 240, notes that 'these primitive conventions stem from an earlier period when colloquial fiction was part of an oral tradition of literature'.

44 Ibid., p. 241.

45 Ch'ien Chung-shu, 'Tragedy in Old Chinese Drama', pp. 37-46, was the first critic to compare Chinese drama with Greek tragedy. I am greatly indebted to his brilliant and pioneering article for many of my own insights.

46 'Sung Yulan hsi ch'ü k'ao' in Wang kuo-wei hsi ch'ü lun wen chi, p. 106. For a translation of the *Tou Ngo Yulan* see Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, *Snow in Midsummer* in *Selected Plays of Kuan Han-ching.*

47 Ch'ien Chung-shu, p. 40, also makes this comparison.

48 *Antony and Cleopatra,* 1. 1. 33-5.

49 Ibid., IV. 14. 55-61. Both these passages are quoted by Ch'ien.

50 E. Bruce Brooks, 'The Discovery of Tragedy in Early Chinese Opera'. Brooks argues that 'a literary work is tragic if the course of its action ends unhappily for the protagonist'. This definition seems to me greatly to oversimplify a complex question. To accept such a definition would involve
confounding tragedy with melodrama and romantic drama. Brooks is on much firmer ground when he argues that we must trust the music of the drama rather than the lyrics to set the tone. He asserts that *Wu-t'ung yü* is a true tragedy because of the very long aria-sequence in the 'tragically heroic' key of *Cheng-kung*, which gives the play a lyric ending. This 'musically muted ending' provides 'an ironic comment on the futility of human effort, a lyric lingering over the sadness and injustice of it all'.

While agreeing that we must give due weight to the music of these dramas, I still cannot agree that the continuation of an unhappy ending with a poignant musical mode lifts these plays to the status of tragedy. What the music does, rather, is to deepen our response to dramatic pathos so that what might have been merely bathetic is lent stature and dignity. In short, Chinese romantic drama, being an operatic form, cannot be properly judged shorn of its music. But the music cannot bestow the tragic accolade upon what is essentially a non-tragic genre.

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51 A.N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, pp. 12-13. Whitehead goes on to remark, in words which Professor Brooks (see note 50) might well ponder: 'Let me here remind you that the essence of dramatic tragedy is not unhappiness. It resides in the solemnity of the remorseless working of things'. It is precisely this quality which I find lacking in Chinese drama.


53 Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. II, p. 572: '... We have to conclude that none of the words in ancient and medieval Chinese texts which have tempted translation as "laws of Nature", give us any right so to translate them... The Chinese notion of Order positively excluded the notion of Law.'

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54 *King Lear*, IV. 1. 36-7.

55 H.D.F. Kitto, *Form and Meaning in Drama*, p. 337, remarks that 'Greek tragedy presents sudden and complete disaster, or one disaster linked to another in linear fashion, while Shakespearean tragedy presents the complexive, menacing spread of ruin: and that at least one explanation of this is that the Greek poets thought of the tragic error as the breaking of a divine law... while Shakespeare saw it as an evil quality which, once it has broken loose, will feed on itself and on anything else it can find until it reaches its natural end.' Kitto goes on to speculate as to whether this might be 'a reflection of some profound difference between Greek and Christian thought' (p. 337). Confucian thought provided no basis for either conception of tragedy.
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— *An Introduction to Sung Poetry*. See Yoshikawa Kōjirō.
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The objects of the foundation of the lectureship were to honour for all time the memory of a great Australian who rendered valuable services to China, and to improve cultural relations between China and Australia. The foundation of the lectureship had the official support of the Chinese Consulate-General, and was due in particular to the efforts of Mr William Liu, merchant, of Sydney; Mr William Ah Ket, barrister, of Melbourne; Mr F.J. Quinlan and Sir Colin MacKenzie, of Canberra. From the time of its inception until 1948 the lecture was associated with the Australian Institute of Anatomy, but in the latter year the responsibility for the management of the lectureship was taken over by the Australian National University, and the lectures delivered since that date have been given under the auspices of the University.

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