

ENGLISH SUMMARIES
of
THE JOURNAL OF CHINESE LITERATURE
Volume XXXI
April, 1980
Edited by
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I Allegorical Meaning in Description of
Nature in the Poetry of the Han and
Wei Dynasties: Ts'ao Chih's 曹植 "Yü-
chieh P'ien" 吁嗟篇.

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Ts'ao Chih's (192-232) *Yueh-fu* poem "Yü-chieh P'ien", written in his later years, is an allegorical poem which describes the poet's misfortunes in those years in terms of "drifting tumbleweeds" (轉蓬). As an allegorical poem it belongs to a relatively early period. This essay traces the development of the allegorical mode of expression in poetry in the Han and Wei dynasties culminating in the "Yü-chieh P'ien" and analyzes the characteristics of that mode of expression.

The first thing to be noticed about the allegorical mode is the description of nature at the start of the poem. This description serves the function of leading the reader into following descriptions of human beings, and of giving the reader a hint beforehand of the content of the entire poem. In fact, this is a technique that derives

from the *hsing* 興 mode of the *Shih Ching* 詩經. It must be noted, however, that the *hsing*-like mode in Han and Wei poetry was already a form of rhetoric that clearly was used consciously, a fact that changes its nature. Allegorical poetry is an end-point of that change.

The words "allegorical poetry" are used here to signify poetry in which nature has been artificially reconstructed with the intention of giving expression to a person. That is, "allegorical poetry" operates by means of the intentional anthropomorphizing of nature. This mode of expression, in which nature is drawn close to human beings and interpreted in human terms, occurred surprisingly early; poetry in which nature is depicted as nature (i. e., pure lyric poetry) came considerably later. Until then it was more usual for nature to be depicted in human terms, a process that eventually culminated in allegory.

What are the characteristics of the allegorical mode of expression in poetry? Most importantly, it is a generalized mode, and as such is unsuited to the expression of personal ideas. On the other hand, since it establishes a basis common to poet and audience, its operation guarantees a shared feeling of solidarity. This is related to the fact that poetry that use allegorical description of nature contains by and large very little sense of the individual, but is rather a poetry that can be shared by a group.

Allegorical poetry skilful use is made of this characteristic. That is, in allegorical poetry, the individual being fitted into an already recognized universal framework and generalized, the subtle nuances of individuality cannot but be eliminated. Instead, this universal mode creates a sense of actuality that holds true for the whole "Yü-chieh P'ien". What distinguishes the "Yü-chieh P'ien" from other allegorical poetry is the fact that it carries the allegory to the farthest possible point.

II On Six Dynasties “Imitative Poetry”

(*mo-ni shih* 模擬詩)

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There remain today nearly two hundred “imitative poems” (*mo-ni shih* 模擬詩) in the Six Dynasties period, including the sixty-three poems by ten poets in the *Wen-hsüan* 文選. These poems are significant both in terms of their literary value and in their import for literary history when examined from the point of view of their critical and allegorical meaning.

Mo-ni shih may be described as having the following three characteristics:

1) It arose on the swell of literary criticism that developed from the Wei and Chin periods on.

2) It designates a poetry written in imitating a poem and interpretation of its poet, and is the result of inquiry in a personal mode (i. e., the coherence of the poet's self, as well as the uniqueness of the other).

3) It has a probability of including an allegorical meaning such as hidden satirical or emotive import.

There follows a consideration of the *mo-ni shih* in the *Wen-hsüan* of the poets Lu Chi 陸機, Hsieh Ling-yün 謝靈運, and Chiang Yen 江淹.

A) Lu Chi's “Ni-ku Shih Shih-ssu shou” 擬古詩十四首:

These poems reflect Lu Chi's feelings of loneliness in Lo-yang 洛陽. These poems may also be seen as putting into practice the theories on the *Wen Fu* 文賦 in which Lu Chi discussed his ideas concerning the many aspects of literary creation.

B) Hsieh Ling-yün's “Ni Wei T'ai-tzu Yeh-chung Chi Shih Pa-shou” 擬魏太子鄴中集詩八首:

There is a strong probability that the Yeh-chung Chi Shih that is the object of these poems did not exist, or, even if it did, that Hsieh's *mo-ni shih* are extremely free creations. The emotions expressed in these eight poems agree with the complex contradictions that his life and poetry so of ten contains. As such, these *mo-ni*

shih may be regarded as the poet's projection into a series of poems of the emotions that were moving him.

C) Chiang Yen's "Tsa-t'i-shih San shih Shou" 雜體詩三十首: Chiang Yen may have been writing about the period when he held the post of Historian. In these *mo-ni shih* he creates a history of poetry from the Han to Liu Sung Dynasties with an objective attitude toward literary history. However his investigation of the personal mode is detailed, the poems are in fact merely Chiang Yen's own interpretation of various poets.

In *mo-ni shih* we can see both the continuity of tradition and a scheme of creativity. It is a genre that brought together those who received the poetical tradition with those who created it.

III Ch'ien Ch'ien-yi as a Literary Critic

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It is quite regrettable that everything about Ch'ien Ch'ien-yi 錢謙益 (1582-1644) is still overlooked by scholars on Ch'ing cultural history, even though the ban on his works, imposed by the Ch'ien-lung emperor, was lifted after 1912 and could no longer be considered a deterrent. Only criticism of his personality, particularly his lack of patriotism, which was already being expressed in his lifetime and which he well deserved, has persisted into modern times.

In his own day he was certainly a prominent figure in a number of fields. As a statesman, he was proud of being the last leader of the Tung-lin Party, though in some lists of the Party his name has been eliminated.⁽¹⁾ As a lay Buddhist, he also was a leader.⁽²⁾ As a scholar, or as a philologue, his method was an unconscious foreshadowing of the "Han learning" which prevailed in the next century, even though he applied his method only toward poetical works, Tu Fu in particular, rather than Confucian Canon as the later scholars did.⁽³⁾ And over all, he was esteemed as the eldest, if not the greatest, among contemporary poets and prose writers. Huang Tsung-hsi 黃宗羲 (1610-1695), one of his disciples, fairly said: "Ch'ien held the leadership of the literary world for fifty years." It was he alone who passed the death sentence on the pseudo-classicism of the Seven

Stars, who overwhelmed the later Ming. From his time on, no one showed any appreciation of their literature, at least in China. Only Ogiu Sorai in Tokugawa Japan was free from Ch'ien's influence.

Ch'ien seemed to have a solid system in his theory of literature, though he wrote no special book on it, nor any *shih-hua*, such as his junior colleague, Wu Wei-yeh 吳偉業 (1609-1672) wrote. *Shih-hua*, or "causerie," was not to the taste of this erudite and logical man.

There are two works which constitute the major source of his theory. First, material is to be found in two collected works of this prolific writer: (1) *Mu-chai ch'u-hsüeh-chi* 牧齋初學集, 110 *chüan*, edited by his disciple, Ch'ü Shih-ssu 瞿式耜 (1590-1651) and published in 1644 (1643?) months before the downfall of the Ming government in Peking when Ch'ien was 63; (2) *Mu-chai yü-hsüeh-chi* 牧齋有學集, 50 *chüan*, edited and published by another disciple, Tsou Tz'u 鄒滋, in 1664, just after Ch'ien's death at the age of 71. Both volumes contain rich manifestations of his criticism, especially in the sections containing prefaces to poetical works of his senior and junior colleagues.

The second source for material is the voluminous and painstaking work, *Lieh-ch'ao shih chi* 列朝詩集 [Anthology of Poems of Successive Dynasties]. It is a huge collection of Ming poetry, accompanied by biographies and criticisms of each poet by Ch'ien. Recent scholars on Ming literature seem eager to avail themselves of the material in the "biographies" while paying less attention to the selection of poems, which in itself constitutes the essence of Ch'ien's criteria. Very few poems of the Seven Stars are included in the anthology in contrast to the prominent place accorded Ch'ien's favorite poets, such as Liu Chi, Kao Ch'i, Li Tung-yang, etc. Among the anti-Seven Star schools which antedate Ch'ien, the Yüan brothers of Kung-an are esteemed, while the Ching-ling poets are censured.

In this paper, however, I shall limit myself to excerpts from his two collected works. I would like to start with his esteem of individuality in literature. This must be the first step in his theory, even in his own mind, since he distinguishes himself as the accuser of the Ming Seven Stars, whose way was rather to kill their own individuality. According to them, the method of literature exists in strict imitation of limited classics, not merely in diction but in feeling as well. Their exclusive model in the poetic world was early

eighth century "Sheng-T'ang" poets. Ch'ien often confesses that in his youth he himself was also a serious follower of their ways. This was before he had a sudden awakening under the influence of Kuei Yu-kuang 歸有光 (1506-1571), T'ang Hsien-tsu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616), etc. Ch'ien's work before this awakening is not known since he himself deleted all writing of this period from his collected works.

Excerpt 1 demonstrates that true poetry should be the outpouring of the feeling of the poet himself, i. e., his individuality. In this there is his own feeling, his own features, his own mind. False poetry, on the other hand, lacking feeling, features, and mind, can only depend on frivolous techniques which resemble the buzzing of a fly, murmur of an earthworm, mooing of a cow, or chattering of a barbarian. They "enslave their ears to others and borrow their eyes from others." The last clause, which appears often in other essays, is stated in direct accusation of the Seven Stars.

Excerpt 2 points out that each T'ang poet, not merely the "Sheng-T'ang" poets, whom the Seven Stars admired exclusively, has his individuality to be appreciated on his own merits. "Poetry is the expression of one's intention." The phrase from the ancient Preface to the *Book of Songs* is quoted here.

Excerpt 3 reads: ancient poets did not personalize their verse but did versify their personality.

Excerpt 4 states the individual excellences of ancient literature in a wider circle. In excerpt 5 the circle becomes even wider. Its argument begins with a view that literature is the expression by men of outer Nature. According to ever-changing Nature, literature has indefinite diversity of individualities. Most of the personal names mentioned here might be unfamiliar to previous Ming critics. It was the job of this erudite man to discover forgotten poets and distinguish again their individualities.

Of particular note is the renewed appreciation of poets of the Chin or Jurchen dynasty in the twelfth century, especially of Yüan Hao-wen 元好問 (1190-1257). Connoisseurs may be interested to find that Ch'ien's *Lieh-ch'ao shih chi* follows Yüan's *Chung-chou chi* 中州集, a historical anthology of Jurchen poems, not merely in the method of editing but also in the style of woodblock printing. In the same way, the woodblock style of Ch'ien's *Ch'u-hsüeh chi* resembles a Sung edition of Su Tung-p'o's work. Ch'ien worshipped Su Tung-p'o,

who had been viewed as a criminal in the eyes of the Seven Stars.

How could a man determine his individuality as a poet? At this point we come to another stage in Ch'ien's theory. "A word should have 'thing' in it." The phrase is derived from the *Yi ching*, and has its variant in the *Book of Rites* too. "Thing" might be interpreted as "reality." Another canonical quotation, again from the *Book of Rites*, sums it up succinctly, "No sincerity, no thing." This theory was at first given in excerpt 6, a preface dedicated to the work of T'ang Hsien-tsu. To modern readers, T'ang's name is rather famous as a playwright, but Ch'ien admired his poems and prose as the forerunner of the anti-Seven Stars movement. It is significant that Ch'ien put this preface at the beginning of the "Prefaces" section of his *Ch'u-hsüeh chi*. This suggests that Ch'ien must have been proud to base his theory on the Confucian Canons as an authoritative scholar, while Ming dynasty writers were, according to him, so weak in canonical studies that they had come to base their writing on erroneous classics.⁽⁴⁾

In excerpt 7 we see that the quotation, "No sincerity, no thing" was originally emphasized by Yüan Hao-wen, the forgotten Jurchen master. One may find another forgotten "thing" resurrected by Ch'ien in this excerpt. "Poetry says one's intention." This famous phrase from the *Book of History* is very common among us, especially after Professor Chu Tzu-ch'ing's excellent study.⁽⁵⁾ But curiously enough, Ming scholars rarely seemed to quote it.⁽⁶⁾

In excerpt 8 "to have thing" is combined with another expression "to have foundation." The meaning of both must be the same. In excerpt 9 it is transferred to one more expression: "to have poetry in it." The final meaning of all the expressions can be found in excerpt 10. Kuei Yu-kuang, also an important forerunner of the anti-Seven Stars movement, once asked his disciples, "What is cliché, which the great Han Yü strove to get rid of?" Several replies were presented. "No," said Kuei, "Word without reality, that is cliché."

What then is the "thing" in the "word"? Ch'ien's explanation is that poetry should be the indispensable discharge of enriched energy.

Excerpt 11 says: ancient poets wrote poems only after gathering profound inner feelings and strong impulses from outer encounterings. The result is just like rapids struggling to flow onward, whales

striving to stretch out their bodies, genuine gold or jade in mud hoping to be used by men, or moon or stars in thick clouds eager to reappear. So their poetry could not be bad.

The same theory is repeated in excerpts 12 and 13, both quoting Su Tung-p'o. Excerpt 14 is simpler.

One point is worthy of attention. Poetry does come from enrichment, especially that of the intellect, and not from sudden and bare enlightenment. Su Tung-p'o's original words quoted in excerpt 13 merely says that ancient poetry could not be bad because they were the inevitable results of poets, while Ch'ien's deduction tends to say that the ancient masters elevated everything to poetry after they had enriched their knowledge. In excerpt 15 Ch'ien again says: ancient poets, swimming back to the origin of Nine Schools and reading over a thousand volumes, then wrote poetry when outer occasions conjoined with inner reactions.

I feel that here is the earliest manifestation of Ch'ing poetry, which tended always to be intellectual or even bookish rather than merely pathetic. Logos should be behind Pathos to suffice the former.

It is not strange, therefore, that Ch'ien was highly critical of Yen Yü's *Ts'ang-lang-shih-hua*, which had captivated most Ming writers. This Sung critic asserted that poetry is not synonymous with scholarship, but compared it rather to the enlightenment in Zen Buddhism. And such enlightenment, Yen said, was only possible to some Han and Wei poets and early eighth century "Sheng-T'ang" poets. Ch'ien's most severe attack on Yen's theories is to be found in excerpts 16, 17, and 18. In 16 Ch'ien, proud of his own authority in this field, criticizes as erroneous even the Zen Buddhist classification utilized by Yen.

A more important aspect of Ch'ien's theory reveals itself in this excerpt. According to Yen, logical discussions, philosophical principles, apparent expression, direct indications—these are not the job of poetry, since it is the product of subtle enlightenment. Ch'ien laughs at this and raises a number of lines from the *Book of Songs* by way of refutation.

Then in excerpt 19 Ch'ien discriminates between good and bad poetry, and illustrates his points by using several metaphors, some of which blame the eccentricity of the Ching-ling School as a hidden target. The snobbishness of the Seven Stars is also attacked. The

Ching-ling School was led by Chung Hsing 鍾惺 (d. 1625) and T'an Yüan-ch'un 譚元春 (d. 1631), the former being a *chin-shih* of the same year as Ch'ien. Though they were also against the Seven Stars, Ch'ien estimated them as poor fellows.

There is one more point in Ch'ien's theory which may please us foreigners today. In excerpt 20 Ch'ien declares that poetry is not a thing of commonsense but the discharge of a peculiar, unbalanced, excessive mind. Delight for common men is lament for poets and vice versa. Here is quoted Ou-yang Hsiu's famous words, "Poetry is good only when the poet resides in poverty." The Sung master's word itself is a stimulus no longer, since it is quoted by other critics so often. Stimulus is Ch'ien's idea, i. e., that poetry is the result of unbalanced chaos. I do not think we can find this theory very often among Chinese critics.

In excerpt 21 the theory is repeated with a metaphor, again quoting Ou-yang Hsiu. In an essay on the peony, Ou-yang said, "The extraordinary beauty of this flower is an inauspicious result of unbalanced energy of the world in just the same way that some ugly trees are." Ch'ien, disagreeing with the Sung master, says the peony's beauty is just the expression of the right energy of the world only when it is crystallized to the utmost, as good poetry is. Further evidence is cited from lines in the *Book of Songs*.

A bolder theory is presented in excerpt 22. Among excessive, unbalanced minds the indulgence in sexual love is the best source of literature. This excerpt is found in a preface to the poetic work of a younger brother of an intimate friend. In excerpt 23 esteem of sexual love seeks its excuse in Ssu-ma Ch'ien's words. But Ch'ien's deduction seems to be more extreme than Ssu-ma's original, tending to conclude that sex and wrath are the best, or exclusive, sources of literature.

The final stage in Ch'ien's poetics brings us to the point that since poetry is the spontaneous and inevitable discharge of an enriched, uncommon, often unbalanced mind, it is a thing of metaphysics and not of physics.

Excerpt 24 says that models from various classics, which were necessary even to Ch'ien according to Chinese tradition, are merely puppets by themselves unless you yourself give them spirit to animate them. The relationship is explained in excerpt 25 through

Chinese physiology. Models themselves are *p'o*, the soul which accompanies the body, and can only be accomplished by *hun*, the spirit which accompanies the breath. Though it is not apparent in these two excerpts what Ch'ien would like to say, it seems to me that poetry does not depend on words or images themselves, but on the vapor emerging from them. Excerpt 26 is surely in this direction. Cloud emerges from Earth; literature is the cloud of men.

In his last days Ch'ien presented a "flavor-reading" theory. To evaluate poetry one should read it by the nose and not by the eyes, because it is a thing of fragrance. See excerpts 27 and 28. "Vapor reading" in excerpt 29 is its variant.

Excerpt 30 from a preface given to Wu Wei-yeh, his junior colleague and perhaps a better poet than he, might be qualified to be the conclusion of Ch'ien's theory:

"The principles of poetry are as follows. Some are achieved without learning, as exemplified by the "Great Wind" and "Song at K'ai-hsia"; some by illiterate heroes or in early ballads like "Ts'ang-lang" and "Mountain Tree"; and some are the result of achievement based on more learning, as exemplified by the "Rhyme-prose on the Cosmos" by Liu Chou in the Six Dynasties. Some could be achieved by learning; these are meter, models chosen, images employed, etc. Some could not be achieved by learning; for example, excellency of rhythm, voluptuousness of spirit, brilliancy of shade, etc. Now Mr. Wu's work belongs to the latter type. At the same time it is not an achievement without learning. It is the amalgamated product of his wide knowledge, being the expression of the unbalanced energy of the world."

Ch'ien's theory has not been entirely overlooked by recent scholars. Professor Chu Tung-jun's "On the Literary Criticism of Ch'ien Mu-chai" appeared in *Wu-han University Journal of Literature and Philosophy*, II, 2 (1943). And the late Professor Aoki Masaru devoted a chapter to Ch'ien in his *A History of Literary Criticism of the Ch'ing Dynasty* (Tokyo, 1950). However, neither scholar seems to have covered the points presented in this paper. In fact, it seems to me that Ch'ien himself did not present his own theory very well. He seemed to be an able prose writer than a poet.

However, his theory of literature might have some meaning. His "flavor-reading" is a foreshadowing of the *shen-yün* theory, or

“mysterious echo” of Wang Shin-chen 王士禛 (1634-1711), one of his disciples. His esteem of the amorous would be the ancestor of Yüan Mei 袁枚 (1716-1797). They still remain in the field of Chinese literary history.

Should poetry exclusively deal with pathos and reject logos? Common answers in the past would have been “yes.” Chinese poetry, however, often betrays this definition from her genesis, the *Book of Songs*, as Ch’ien cleverly pointed out. Most Sung poets were other examples. Though the remembrance is swept away by the “Literal Revolution,” Ch’ing poets also, especially at their latest period, often tended to be betrayed, if the definition is true. It is not a problem of Chinese poetry any longer, but seems to be a question which poets and critics nowadays in other districts are also requested to answer.

Notes

1. See Yoshikawa Kojiro, “Ch’ieh Ch’ien-yi and Tung-lin,” *Yoshikawa Collected Works* XVI, 11-35 (Tokyo, 1970).
2. See Yoshikawa, “Ch’ien-yi as a Lay Buddhist,” *ibid.*, pp. 36-54.
3. On this point see my third paper, “Ch’ien Ch’ien-yi and Han Learning in the Ch’ing Dynasty,” *ibid.*, pp. 57-135.
4. For more arguments on this point, see “Ch’ien Ch’ien-yi and Han Learning,” pp. 108-112.
5. *Shih yen chih pien* 詩言志辨 (Shanghai: K’ai-ming shu-tien, 1947).
6. See Yoshikawa, “Ch’ien Ch’ien-yi and Han Learning,” pp. 112-114.