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THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEALIZED CHINESE POETIC AESTHETIC FROM THE LATE T'ANG THROUGH THE NORTHERN SUNG DYNASTY

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> Exiles are we. Were exiles born. The 'far away,'
> language of desert, language of ocean, language of sky,
> as of the unfathomable worlds that lie
> between the apple and the eye
> these are the only words we learn to say.
> Each morning we devour the unknown. Each day
> we find, and take, and spill, or spend, or lose,
> a sunflower splendor of which none knows the source.
>
> Conrad Aiken, "A Letter from Li Po"

> "It is assumed that there is something about the power of creative energy that cannot always be analyzed, for great poetry is an organic unification of individual genius and technical devices."
>
> Kang-i Sun Chang, *The Evolution of Chinese Tz'u Poetry*

Chinese poetry enjoys an uninterrupted three-thousand-year tradition out of which have evolved many forms, meters, and styles. The word *shih,* used by the Chinese as a generic label for poetry, excluding only the *tz'u* and the *ch'u,* is derived from the *Shih Ching,* the earliest known anthology of Chinese poetry. From the very beginning, Chinese poetry has been intimately related to music. Underlying the affinity of Chinese poetry with music is the

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nature of the Chinese language itself, in which each written character has a monosyllabic pronunciation. Hence, the rhythmic quality of Chinese verse is based not on the system of stressed and unstressed syllables of Western poetry, but on a patterned alternation of words of different tone or pitch.

Two of the most notable phenomena in the development of *shih* poetry occurred during the Han dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD). These developments were the preference for lines of equal lengths and the tendency to employ lines composed of an odd number of characters. During the Han times, the five-character-line poem became the most popular poetic form. In contrast with the *Shih Ching,* where a standard four-character-line form was employed, the practice of using odd-number lines created a new kind of poetic rhythm.[2] The gradual rise of the eight-line *lu-shih* ("Regulated Verse") at the end of the Six Dynasties (222-589) and its lasting popularity through the T'ang Dynasty (618-907) brought to the Chinese tradition an entirely new spectrum of poetic experience.[3] The insistence of the *lu-shih* on a rigid tonal system and a structure of parallelism was believed to represent the perfect form of poetry.[4] "Recent Style poetry" *(chin-t'i shih)* became the term used to refer to this new style of poetry, as opposed to "Ancient Style poetry," *(ku-shih)* which refers to both poems produced before the T'ang and poems written after the T'ang in the pre-T'ang style. The aesthetic of Recent Style poetry stressed the notion of regularity, which included a pattern of tonal regulations based on the systematic alternation of oblique and level tones.

Despite the exalted status enjoyed by poetry as a literary form, there is no special class of people or profession in traditional Chinese society designated as poets. Chinese poetry has historically drawn its inspiration from two distinct groups; namely, the common people, "with their colloquial idiom and plain style of speech," and the literati, "with their vast erudition and sophisticated sensibilities."[5] The technical and intellectual complexity of a Chinese poem is the result of this confluence of sources.

The writing of poetry was considered among the literati an avocation, a personal accomplishment, or a means of self-expression.[6] Beautiful calligraphy, "the visual appeal being but another dimension of Chinese poetry,"[7] and literary skill were virtual necessities among the Chinese elite. With the unification of the empire under the Sung Dynasty (960-1279), the early Sung poets continued for a time to imitate the technical aspects of late T'ang poetry. The genius of such poets as Mei Yao-ch'en (1002-1060), Ou-yang Hsiu (1007-1072), and Su Shih (1037-1101), however, succeeded in "arresting this trend and brought poetry into closer contact with the life of the prosperous Northern Sung society, in all its aspects—secular, intellectual, and artistic."[8] "Realistic poetry," or the poetry that reflected more accurately the lives of the people, grew in popularity and the exponents of this style included most of the major *shih* poets of the Sung such as Li Yu (937-978), Liu Yung (987-1053), and Su Shih (1037-1101). Sung dynasty scholars mastered the traditions of the past, imitated them in practice, and then continued and elaborated on them with their own scholarship and literary writing.[9]

High T'ang poetry, in translator Robert Owen's account, "marks a transition from poetry as a social gesture to poetry as an art with cultural and personal dimensions that transcended the social occasion."[10] The practice of emulating T'ang poetry began "when the Sung swept away the outmoded practices of the Five Dynasties, [and] there arose the *Po* [*Chu-i*], the *K'un* [*Hsi'-k'un*], and the Late T'ang styles in poetry."[11]

The term "Late T'ang" is considered to be primarily chronological rather than stylistic. It is nevertheless convenient to use the term to refer to a certain type of intimate landscape poetry written in the late T'ang period and also practiced by a number of early Sung poets.[12] The Late T'ang schools wrote nothing but five-character regulated verse. Late T'ang poets also hated to use allusions, which they called "conjuring up ghosts," and instead "sought actual scenes before their eyes, and then thought about [the scenes] intensely."[13] During the T'ang dynasty, Buddhism had become the dominant religion in China. The contrast be-

tween Buddhist monks and birds of some kind in late T'ang poetry is typical. The third couplet of the five-character regulated verse poem typically consisted of "precisely balanced, sensitively observed scenes that came to be considered characteristic of Late T'ang poetry."[14]

The revivification of the humanistic Confucian tradition in the Sung was associated with the creation of a more realistic poetic style which could encompass descriptions of everyday life and protest against social injustice. "We are moving closer to the real world."[15] In the poetry of Wang Yu-ch'eng (954-1001), a member of the *Po Chu-l* school, "the aesthetic distance between the poet and his materials has been lessened."[16] Wang Yu-ch'eng therefore foreshadows later tendencies in the tone of Sung poetry. "After the *Hsien-t'ung* period (860-873)," Wang wrote in a poem, "literature fell apart and was no longer refined. Then it passed through the Five Dynasties (906-960), when the wielders of the brush wrote mostly in a romantic, pretty style."[17] Wang was conscious of the need to create a revitalized poetics for the Sung dynasty. The breadth of vision and excellence revealed in Wang Yu-ch'eng's work entitles him to the title, "The Father of Sung poetry."[18] It is appropriate that two of the greatest Sung poets, Ouyang Hsiu and Su Shih, should both have written poems in praise of Wang Yu-ch'eng.

The *Hsi-k'un* style, the third of the three main schools of early Sung poetry, is very different from the style of Wang Yu-ch'eng and the *Po Chu-l* schools. The *Hsi-k'un* school was named after an anthology of poems issued in 1004, entitled *Hsi-k'un ch'ou-ch'ang-chi*. The poetry emulates the style of the T'ang poet Li Shang-yin (813?-858), although the most recent Li scholars find that *Hsi-k'un* poetry is successful only in "achieving a superficial resemblance to some of [Li's] stylistic idiosyncrasies, but not in capturing the complexity and depth of his poetry."[19] Typical of the *Hsi-k'un* style are poems called "Untitled" (*Wu-t'i*), in imitation of Li Shang-yin's frequent use of the term. The trends of *Hsi-k'un* poetry were criticized for their allusiveness and heavy use of parallelism. *Hsi-k'un* poet Yang I's [*sic*] poems, however, with such

titles as "The Prisons are Full of Convicts," and "Many of the People's Oxen are Dying of Plague," foreshadow the concern for political and social problems that was to become a prominent mark of the poetry of the following period.[20]

If any generalization can be made about the three main schools of early Sung poetry, it is that these poets were all conditioned by later T'ang poetry. It is due partly to this T'ang influence that later critical opinion tended to dismiss early Sung poetry as a mere carry-over of T'ang styles; nevertheless, it is important to note that anticipations of later Sung developments were already appearing.[21]

An outstanding characteristic of late T'ang and Sung literature is that most of the great poets, prose writers, and scholars were also officials; conversely, most of the great statesmen were also accomplished men of letters.[22] The greatest achievement of the lyric poets of the Sung eras appears to be their ability to assimilate not only the new music and new vocabulary of the market place, but also the "intellectual discourses of all persuasions."[23] Mei Yao-ch'en and Ou-yang Hsiu are often pictured by the Chinese critics as revolutionary figures who "rejected the work of earlier Sung poets and created a totally new style of their own."[24] In fact, Mei and Ou-yang appear to have responded to their new literary environment with greater subtlety than this view would suggest.[25]

Mei Yao-ch'en and Ou-yang Hsiu had comprehensive tastes in poetry. For them, the correct poetic tradition originated in the *Shih Ching*. It was developed in the Six Dynasties by Juan Chi and T'ao Ch'ien, and practiced in the T'ang dynasty by Tu Fu and Li Po, and by the "outstanding poets" of the mid-T'ang period, most notably Han Yu.[26] Mei and Ou-yang agreed that the tradition had waned during the late T'ang, Five Dynasties and early Sung. The poets felt that the *Hsi-k'un* and Late T'ang styles were limited, and that a more comprehensive poetic style was called for to express the mood of the still relatively young Sung dynasty. Mei Yao-ch'en criticized Late T'ang poets for writing poetry consisting solely of descriptive landscape imagery. Although Mei could

appreciate the beauty of it, like Ou-yang he felt that it was restricted in scope and inadequate for the purpose of revitalizing Sung poetry.[27] The very catholicity of Mei and Ou-yang's tastes, however, made it possible for them to recognize that early Sung poetry had its merits, and they did not reject all of it by any means. It was Mei and Ou-yang's purpose to revitalize poetic practice "by selecting elements from a number of different styles which coexisted within the orthodox mainstream and some of which had been preserved by certain early Sung poets, especially Wang Yu-ch'eng."[28] The actual poetry which Mei and Ou-yang wrote encompasses a variety of expressive modes and cannot be easily categorized because the sources from which their poetry was derived were so various. The influences ranged from versified prose to lucid diction, from rustic simplicity to fantastic visions, and from intimate landscape scenes to grim social commentary.

Ou-yang Hsiu's own contribution to literature rested on his reform of the prose style of the time and his many innovations in poetry. Early in Ou-yang's life he developed a great admiration of the T'ang writer Han Yu, which led to his advocacy of the ancient-style prose *(ku-wen)* movement, stressing vigor and simplicity, in opposition to the florid style of the Six Dynasties prose. As a writer of *shih* poetry, Ou-yang was adept in all verse forms and considered by some of his contemporaries as the equal of Li Po.[29]

Mei Yao-ch'en was a poet of the real, whether he was writing about his personal life or the social and political realities of his time.[30] Liu K'o-chuang (1187-1269) expressed his feelings about Mei Yao-ch'en's role in the history of Sung poetry when he said, "Mr. [Ou-yang Hsiu's] poetry is like that of [Han Yu]; it should not be discussed as poetry. It is [Mei Yao-ch'en] who is the mountainhead-opening patriarch of the poetry of his dynasty."[31] In this passage, Liu states his opinion that Mei's role in creating a Sung style of poetry that revived the orthodox tradition of the *Shih Ching* was as important as Ou-yang Hsiu's role in revitalizing prose.[32]

In Mei's few pronouncements on poetry, he called for originality and skill in the depiction of "scenes that are difficult to

describe, in such a way that they seem to appear right before the reader's eyes."[33] He advocates poetry in which natural imagery serves an end beyond itself, and condemns poetry which "merely stresses the description of natural beauty and poetic techniques such as [the] parallelism and allusion" of the early Sung schools. In other words, Mei is calling for the revival of the orthodox Confucian tradition of poetry which originated in the *Shih Ching,* and the rejection of the kind of poetry which was being produced by both the *Hsi-k'un* and Late T'ang schools.[34] In reaction to earlier poetic styles in which complex language concealed an inner emptiness, Mei advocated relatively simple diction, which would nevertheless express a "meaning beyond the words themselves." The term he used for this "poetics of understatement" was *p'ing-tan,* literally, "even and bland."[35]

Mei's concept of the poetic ideal consisted of "a theory of poetry which strikes a balance between Confucian ideals and aesthetic standards."[36] In a poem by Ming Chiao (751-814), a poet who had considerable influence on Mei, Ming rejects the "feminine, slightly decadent poetry of the 'palace style' popular in the sixth century in favor of the *Chien-an* (196-220) school, which was more powerful in its diction and wider in its scope." The same poem goes on to say that poetic lines should be "refined and correct," terms used by Wang Yu-ch'eng to praise the work of a fellow poet who he felt had helped to revitalize Sung poetry.[37] Another poet who influenced Mei Yao-ch'en was Chang Chi (c.765-830). In Chang's poetry, "the simplicity of diction, the intimacy of the imagery, and the subtle [tonal shifts] established a relaxed, intimate mood which appealed to Mei Yao-ch'en."[38]

The most extensive existing statement on poetry by Mei Yao-ch'en opens, "In poetry, it is the meaning which is paramount. Diction is of secondary importance. A poem whose meaning is profound and whose purport is exalted is naturally a masterpiece, even though its diction may be facile."[39] Mei then presents his criteria for outstanding poetry: the poetry must be "new," in the sense that it says things which have never been said before; it must be able to "conjure up a desired mood that transcends the actual

words of the poem."[40] Such "meaning which exists beyond the words" implies a poetics of suggestiveness and oblique expression.

In one of Mei's poems to statesman-poet Yen Shu (991-1055), written in 1046, he says, "I write poems about that which is in harmony with my feelings and nature, trying as best I can to achieve the 'even and bland.' My rough diction is not rounded or smoothed, but sticks in the mouth more harshly than water-chestnut or prickly waterlily."[41] He then goes on to express concern for the difficulty of the task of carrying on the tradition of the *Shih Ching*. It is of considerable interest that Mei associates the even and bland style with rough diction and with the orthodox Confucian poetic tradition of the *Shih Ching*.

Perhaps because *Hsi-k'un* poetry was often quite obscure, one of Mei's concerns was that poetic diction should not be excessively difficult to understand. Poet Chu Tung-jun (1081?-1159?) is of the opinion that the influence of prose on the diction of Sung poetry began with Mei Yao-ch'en. As a poet of essentially Confucian persuasion involved in a literary movement working to revive the orthodox literary tradition, Mei felt a need for a poetic style which would allow him to present his ideas in verse; in other words, a discursive style.[42] Thus, one of Mei's goals was greater flexibility in the use of poetry for discourse and description, and he approached this problem by expanding the range of his diction. Another important passage for the understanding of Mei's views on poetry is:

> Poetry is basically stating one's feelings;
>
> There is no need to shout them out loud!
>
> When you realize that the poem should be even and bland,
>
> You'll devote yourself to Yuan-ming morning and evening.[43]

In the passage, *p'ing-tan* appears to refer to poetry which is based on the poet's real, personal emotion, but which expresses that emotion in understated terms.[44] By contrast, the poetry of the *Hsi-k'un* school was based on artificial emotion and employed extravagant expressive techniques.

That the term "ancient and bland" is close to "even and bland" is suggested by the fact that Ou-yang Hsiu used the term "ancient and bland" to describe Mei Yao-ch'en's poetic style: "[Mei] has worked hard at poetry all his life, writing with feeling that is calm and detached, ancient and bland."[45] Mei therefore epitomized the Sung concept that a poet only achieves *p'ing-tan* style after a long period of development. Wu K'o (c.1126) clearly expressed the view that *p'ing-tan* represented the culmination of a poet's development:

> All literature is first flowery and beautiful, and later even and bland. It is like the sequence of the four seasons. In spring, things are flowery and beautiful; in summer, flourishing and ripe. In autumn and winter, they withdraw and hibernate. It is like something which is withered outside but rich inside. The flowery and beautiful, flourishing and ripe, are enclosed within.[46]

Although *p'ing-tan* does not seem to have been used as a term of literary criticism until relatively late in the T'ang dynasty, early non-literary uses are well attested. Related terms occur as early as the Taoist classics. The phrase "bland and with a little flavor," applied to the Taoist poetry of the Yung-chia period, is modeled on the phrase "bland and flavorless" from the *Lao Tzu,* where the phrase describes the ineffable *Tao.* Giving a positive meaning to a quality which is otherwise overlooked or even despised is typical of Taoist irony, which would have been attractive to Mei Yao-ch'en and his contemporaries.[47]

Once established by Mei Yao-ch'en as a *sine qua non* of poetics, *p'ing tan* quickly became one of the most important terms in Sung literary criticism. Su Shih ensured the prestige of the concept of "blandness" in poetry by his approval of it. "What is prized in the 'withered and bland,'" wrote Su, "is that the external is withered but the internal is rich. It seems bland but is actually beautiful."[48]

Su Shih was the man who came closest to fulfilling the Confucian ideal of the scholar-literati-artist-official. At the center of the political life of his day, an outstanding governor of Hangzhou, an accomplished painter and calligrapher, and ranked among the

greatest poets and essayists, Su's fame was well established in his own day and has lasted until the present.[49] After Ou-yang Hsiu's death in 1072, Su Shih became the most influential literary figure of the day. Su's prose became a model for *ku-wen* writing, he was seen as a great poet, his calligraphy was valued, and his comments on painting were studied. As a provincial administrator, Su derived an immense knowledge of the lives of the common people, which was revealed in much of his poetry.[50] Han Yu was known as the last great representative of Confucianism, but Su Shih hoped that he himself would be able to lead a Confucian revival in his own time. His arguments against Buddhism closely resemble those used by Han Yu in his famous dissertation *Yuan tao,* a work for which Su expresses great admiration in his writings. It was Su's revolutionary idea that both the religious doctrine and the literary style prevalent in early Sung times were unorthodox in that they were non-Confucian. Nevertheless, Su believed with the *Ching-yu* period (1034-1037), the "great Confucians [would] sing again, [and men of letters would stand] up like rows of hemp."[51]

As the *shih* declined in freshness, a new form of poetry, the *tz'u,* which originated in the lyrics of popular songs, rose to prominence. The *tz'u* first emerged in the High T'ang (c.713-755). On the one hand, *tz'u* was basically a song form, taking shape at a time when Chinese music was undergoing radical changes. As a literary genre, however, *tz'u* shows a different pattern of evolution. The popular song tradition is generally distinguished from the literati tradition in the following way: "while the [popular song tradition] tends to adopt new forms immediately in response to new musical requirements, the [literati tradition], staying with the conceptual framework of past rigid poetic conventions, progresses slowly in an orderly fashion until a new set of systems is properly established for an emerging genre."[52] The evolution of the *tz'u* represents a departure from and a continuation of certain principles characteristic of established genres. Within its tradition there are gradual developments of sub-genres, such as *hsiao-ling* and *man-tz'u,* as well as widely different stylistic possibilities that in turn condition the nature of the genre as a whole.[53]

Long before *tz'u* became a literary genre, it was written in the form of popular songs or entertainment songs. At first it was known as *chu-tzu-tz'u,* meaning "song words," or "words accompanying tunes." Unlike the cosmopolitan T'ang, Sung China was a self-consciously nationalistic country. Central Asian music, introduced to China during the T'ang, was synthesized with Chinese music by Sung times and its theory incorporated into the Chinese musical aesthetic. As the new music came into China, the old *yueh-fu* ballads that were popular during the Sui (581-618) and the T'ang (618-907) ceased to be sung, and the *tz'u* gradually rose in its place as the new song form. In terms of musical function, *tz'u* was often viewed as a continuation of the *yueh-fu* songs, and thus many critics and poets throughout the Sung continued to place *tz'u* under the category of *yueh-fu.*[54] *Tz'u,* however, did not emerge merely as an extended form of *yueh-fu* songs—it initiated a special tradition of composition. Whereas the *yueh-fu* titles do not point to fixed metric patterns, the *tz'u* titles specify particular tune patterns *(tz'u-p'ai)* to which the poems are composed. There was a great variety of these tune patterns: according to the prosodic manual *Tz'u-lu* and its supplement, there were 825 tunes in total, and more than 1,670 forms when the variations were considered. It was the use of these tune patterns and the new music which first marked the *tz'u* as an independent genre, distinct from the earlier poetic forms which had belonged to the larger category *shih.*[55] The sophisticated artistry of the *tz'u* reached a new level in the works of Li Yu (937-978), the last ruler of the Southern T'ang, Liu Yung (987-1053), and Su Shih.

Immediately after the outbreak of the An Lu-shan rebellion in 755, which shook the foundation of the T'ang Dynasty, courtesans and musicians of the *chiao-fang* (Palace Music School)[56] were scattered and began to seek new locations for their musical performances. As a result, in the cities there was a sudden booming of entertainment halls *(chi-kuan)* where the new *ch'u-tzu tz'u* were produced, sung, and popularized. The dispersion of the trained members of the *chiao-fang* after the rebellion had a direct impact on the growing popularity of *tz'u* songs after the Middle T'ang.[57]

While *tz'u* songs began to emerge during the T'ang, poets also continued to write in the old song form *yueh-fu*. Moreover, not all poets shared the same enthusiasm for the newly popularized *tz'u* tunes. In fact, courtesans and musicians had been singing *tz'u* for a long time before literati poets began to take the new song form seriously. *Tz'u* songs became popular with the poets only when the entertainment quarters in major cities were in full bloom. As *pei-li* quarters became more and more prosperous in the cities during the Northern Sung,[58] the *chiao-fang* slowly declined. Consequently, not only did scholar-officials frequent these quarters, but the emperors themselves had liaisons with professional singers.

The difference of subject matter between the literati *tz'u* and the popular *tz'u* songs points to a more basic difference regarding modes of poetic expression. Whereas the literati *tz'u* songs are characterized almost exclusively by the lyrical mode, the popular songs contain a variety of modes—narrative, dramatic and lyrical.[59] At first, the literary *tz'u* poetry was based on the poetics of the *chueh-chu* quatrain. The conventions of the *chueh-chu* quatrain consist of four lines and a total length of either twenty or twenty-eight characters, depending upon whether it is a five-character line or a seven-character line *chueh-chu*. "Simple words with profound meanings" is an expression used frequently to describe the aesthetic value of *chueh-chu*.[60]

The period around 850 was crucial to the development of the *tz'u* because it was then that the aesthetic principle of the two-stanza *hsiao-ling* began to take shape. Before 850, *tz'u* poetry had not yet become an independent literary genre; after 850, *tz'u* assumed a new phase, slowly growing into a unique system.[61] After the zenith of Recent Style poetry during the High T'ang, the continuing tendency to employ lines of equal length and odd numbers of characters persisted, and in fact was reinforced; there was no further admixture of irregular lines, only five-character or seven-character lines were permitted. At this juncture, *tz'u* poetry suddenly emerged and began to mix odd-number-character lines with even-number-character lines. Viewed historically, no poetic

form previous to *tz'u* ever employed lines of unequal length on such a large scale. Thus, *tz'u* became what author Claudio Guillen[62] might call a "counter-genre," a reaction against the previous firmly entrenched Regulated Verse tradition.[63]

Another important technical feature of *tz'u* is the increasing use of oblique tone rhymes and the mixture of level and oblique tone rhymes in a single poem. According to the traditional patterns, rhymes were normally confined to level tones; oblique tone rhymes appeared very rarely, and only the ends of even-numbered lines were expected to rhyme with one another. Thus, the rhyming pattern in many *tz'u* poems would have seriously violated conventional requirements.[64]

After 850, the standard *tz'u* poem no longer resembles a *chueh-chu* in structure or length, but rather is recognized as containing two equal structural units termed *p'ien,* with a combined length not exceeding fifty-eight characters. This two-stanza verse gradually replaced the single-stanza poem, and by late in the Northern Sung, almost all the single-stanza *tz'u* had disappeared.

In the *tz'u* poetry of the T'ang and Five Dynasties period, the names of two famous courtesans, *Hsieh-niang* and *Hsiao-niang,* were often used as general names to refer to *pei-li* singers. During the Sung, though, the real names of singers began to appear in the *tz'u* poems. This shows that the Sung poets were more interested in writing about individuals than were the T'ang *tz'u* writers.[65] In the *tz'u* tradition, the generic changes seemed to reinforce a definite shift from a public function to an individualized expression of private feelings. When the main purpose of writing poetry was no longer to meet the demand of musical performers, the poet tended to concentrate on a world that was entirely personal.[66]

To the Chinese critic, style was the manifestation of a person's inner self, and thus was a measure of the poet's life's achievement. Therefore, a distinction of style was not simply a literary accomplishment, but rather a direct expression of the poet's level of self-cultivation. The *tz'u,* which had hitherto been limited almost exclusively to themes derived from the palace-style poetry began in Li Yu's hands to acquire a more personal style and

to establish a new identity.[67] Ch'ing Dynasty poet Wang Kuo-wei (1887-1927) said "not until Li Yu did *tz'u* poets expand their feelings. Consequently, the *tz'u* of musical performers was transformed into the *tz'u* of scholar officials."[68] The lyrics of Li Yu's last period were particularly acclaimed by later critics for the delicacy and poignancy with which Li expressed not just his personal grief, but a sense of waste in all human endeavors. Li Yu's lyrical incorporation of external events was crucial to the development of *tz'u* poetry. Later Sung poets further developed Li's technique into the *man-tz'u* form of poetry, making one of the most important principles of *man-tz'u* aesthetic the lyrical incorporation of external events.[69]

Throughout the Early Sung, very few new tunes were invented because poets devoutly followed the *tz'u* forms developed during the Late T'ang. Liu Yung, however, broke away from this exclusive concern and invented a large number of new tunes in the *man-tz'u* form. *Man-tz'u* differed from the rest of *tz'u* poetry in two respects: 1) it was longer, with lengths ranging from around seventy to 240 characters, as opposed to the previous average of sixty-two; 2) the numbers and patterns of the strophes (syntactic units which end in rhyme) grew to such an extent that traces of the structure of Recent Style poetry could no longer be found. Perhaps the most important distinguishing features of the *man-tz'u* form is its use of the device called *ling-tz'u* (literally, "lead-in words") which functions as a lyrical directive through which a series of lines in the poem are connected.[70]

Liu Yung's poetic orientation was part of many radical changes taking place in early Sung cultural phenomena. Two Sung emperors T'ai-tsung (976-997) and Jen-tsung (1023-1063) were extremely interested in new music and continually encouraged the *chiao-fang* quarters to adopt hundreds of new tunes, which were said to be quite different from the T'ang and Five Dynasties music. It was natural that a poet-musician like Liu Yung would take advantage of contemporary musical trends to experiment with unconventional tunes.[71] Some traditional *tz'u* critics attribute the development of the *man-tz'u* form in the early Sung

to the combined effect of a sudden urban growth and a need for new music in entertainment circles, as well as to Liu Yung's familiarity with his subculture. Many of Liu's lyrics reflect the gaiety of urban life as found in such prosperous cities as Hangchou, Soochow, or the Sung capital K'ai-feng. Urbanization seems to have played a major role in Liu's realization of *tz'u* to be the ideal form for elaborate, realistic depiction of scenery, for he used the *tz'u* form to write about almost all the major newly-flourishing cities.[72] Liu Yung was especially noted for songs depicting the sorrow of farewell and separation, "endowing them with thought and emotion."[73] As a *tz'u* expert, he succeeded so well blending colloquial idiom with the requirements of music that his verses were sung in every village.[74]

Historically, the *man-tz'u* evolution should be viewed as part of the continuous development of the *hsiao-ling;* nevertheless, it must be understood that the diverse stanza patterns of the *man-tz'u* poems represented a decided shift from a structure associated with Recent Style poetry to that of an independent poetic form.[75] In the view of the traditional Chinese, a new genre was considered mature only after it had become a literary form through which a poet could express the full range of his ideas and feelings. The transformation of a lesser genre into a major genre often occurs when a literary genius extends the possibilities of his medium by combining old poetic devices in a new way.[76]

While Liu Yung derived his poetic inspiration mainly from the popular song tradition, Su Shih drew his from other poetic genres. Su Shih's achievement as a *tz'u* writer is considered extraordinary "in that he has accommodated lyric poetry to all kinds of themes and broadened its scope."[77] A versatile master of almost all literary forms, Su Shih brought to *tz'u* poetry a totally new perspective. As the traditional critic Liu Hsi-tsai put it, "there is no idea which cannot be expressed, and there is no subject which cannot be treated" in the *tz'u* poetry of Su Shih.[78]

Su's poetic diction ranged from colloquialism to classical expressions. The *tz'u* form, in the hands of Su Shih, became a medium for writing farewell poems as well as elegies; for express-

ing political ambition, patriotism, and philosophical ideas, or even to describe the life of farmers. What is significant here is not that Su Shih wrote about these subjects, but that he wrote about these subjects through the *tz'u,* a form previously thought to depict mainly the sensual or emotional aspects of life. He clearly wished to avoid being associated with the particular *tz'u* style popularized by Liu Yung, for to Su, Liu Yung represented a very narrow vision of poetry.[79] Unlike Liu Yung, who mainly expressed love for women, Su Shih broadened the concept of love to include his affection for male friends.[80] Such a striking enlargement of a definition explains why critics often claimed that Su Shih was the founder of the school of "heroic abandon" *(hao-fang)* in *tz'u* poetry. The term *hao-fang* generally refers to Su Shih's stylistic tendency to be vigorous and unrestrained, but the term may also be taken to be a criticism of his lack of concern for the musical aspects of *tz'u* writing.[81] A part of Su's poetry which is often overlooked as a contributor to the quality of "heroic abandon" is his imagistic language. For instance, the image of turbulent waves reaching to the sky is a familiar one in Su Shih *tz'u* poetry. Like Li Yu, who often used images of the moon and the flowing waters to signify eternity, Su employs river and wave imagery "to convey the universal quality of permanent things."[82] More precisely, such images represent the totality of the poet's inner visions:

> In a small boat I shall disappear from here,
>
> And spend my remaining years on the rivers and the sea.[83]

To Su Shih, rivers and waves symbolize his own impulse toward liberation. What he is attempting to capture is a larger-than-life vision; "if reality [consists of] cares and constraints, it is the flowing rivers that will free the self from this world."[84] He parallels his enlargement of thematic scope with broadening imagistic functions.

Present in Su's *tz'u* poetry is the "awakening of a new spirit and a profound concern with the larger issues in life," a poetic style radically different from that of Liu Yung. To the *tz'u* tune *Pa-sheng kan-chou,* for example, Su Shih writes "as though he has penetrated into the secrets of life itself," in contrast with Liu's exclusive

concern with emotional experience in his own *Pa-sheng kan-chou.*

> The wind comes rolling up the tide from ten
> thousand miles away, perhaps with feeling,
> It sends back the tide, perhaps unfeelingly.
> I ask: On the Ch'ien-t'ang River,
> In the bay at Hsi-hsing,
> How many times have we seen the slanting beams of
> the setting sun?
> Don't contemplate present and past —
> In one instant the ancients are all gone.
> Who is like the old Tung-p'o
> With hoary head, yet remaining carefree?[85]

The image of an old man standing aloof from the troubled world (lines 9-10) is a familiar one in both Su's *shih* and *tz'u* poetry, and "connected with this transcendental aloofness is a genuine love for the simplicity of nature itself."[86] In Chinese poetry, this combination of the physical and metaphysical aspects of life is considered to form the highest poetic world, as the duality represents the ideal state of human existence in Chinese philosophy. The two literary giants of the *shih* tradition, T'ao Chi'ien (365-427) and Wang Wei (701-761), both attempted to capture the same conception of life's duality in their *shih* poetry. As Su Shih began to express this traditionally esteemed lyrical vision through the *tz'u* form, a great change necessarily took place. The *tz'u* form became for the poet a perfect tool for visualizing aesthetic experiences in life. "The poet allows his imagination free play in poetry and through this creative process he combines life and art in one."[87] Such self-realization through poetry marks the most unique function of lyric poetry.

Earlier poets had identified each completed *tz'u* poem by the name of the tune to which it was set; this name did not usually correspond to the poem's natural subject matter. During the early years of the Northern Sung, poets began to add short titles to their *tz'u* poems, but Su Shih was the first *tz'u* poet to include long

prefaces revealing the serious intent behind the act of the composition.[88] In view of the overall development of the *tz'u* genre, the addition of the preface marks the beginning of a new poetic era. As author Shuen-fu Lin has pointed out,

> the preface of a poem is an introduction to the poetic act. If the moment of lyrical experience must be frozen in time (symbolized by the form of poetry itself), then the preface must point to the external reality which moves with the flow of time. In practice, the preface aims at providing a biographical dimension which the poem itself lacks — for the poem is an autonomous, self-contained structure reflecting the visionary movement of a lyrical consciousness. By combining the preface and the poem, the poet can achieve a harmonious unification of the real and the imaginative, the prosaic and the poetic.[89]

The preface serves as a realistic counterpart to a poem's lyric act of self-realization, while the poem in turn represents a lyrical version of the external reality. What is most significant is that by writing such prefaces, a poet attaches a link with tradition to the *tz'u* poetry. Traditional *shih* poets had often used prefaces to bring forth a biographical dimension to their poems. By introducing an old device to a new form, Su Shih actually recreated what had already been in existence.[90]

Su seems to have reserved the *tz'u* form for expressing complex innermost feelings and the *shih* for dealing with miscellaneous types of expression, such as argumentation, social comment, and occasional writing.[91] In Su's *tz'u* poetry, he tried to avoid the device of parallelism. When he did use the device, it was to balance the more hypotactic syntax of the rest of the poem. Thus did the use of parallelism become considered no longer a formal requirement, but rather a poet's tool to be employed only when desired. The flexibility concerning the use of parallelism may be partially responsible for the more casual syntax in *tz'u*.[92]

In a way, Su combined Liu Yung's *man-tz'u* structure and Li Yu's prototypic images in constructing his poetic world. The result was a new emphasis on the total impression of natural images and a much more elaborately stratified atrophic structure. There is no longer the "camera-eye-view, moving gradually from one natural setting to another, but [instead,] the immediate comprehension

of the grand scene in focus. The natural images in Liu Yung's poetry may be compared to very fine delicate drawings; in Su's, they become larger pieces of impressionistic paintings."[93]

Su Shih represents both a logical conclusion to the long, continuous process of broadening the poetic vision of the *tz'u* tradition and a significant step toward further imagistic expansion. After the device of the *ling-tz'u* and the use of hypotactic syntax had become a conventional practice for *man-tz'u,* later poets, especially those in the Southern Sung, began to develop a metaphorical dimension in *tz'u,* "a perfect means for sustaining the rhetoric of [understatement]."[94] The poet Chou Pang-yen (1056-1121) at the end of the Northern Sung represents the beginning of this new poetic development. While Su Shih remained an observer in creating a metaphorical relation between external objects and universal human feelings, Chou Pang-yen developed a situation of "poetic empathy" in which the "lyric self maintains a symbolic correspondence with external objects." In his *Lan-ling wang, Liu Ch'ou, and Hua fan,* Chou Pang-yen "reveals a new poetic sensitivity whose emphatic involvement with the external has become so real that it does not need to dissociate itself from its objects." The poem and its message have become so intertwined that the poet makes few explicit statements to assert his own independent existence. Later, this growing complexity in the direction of symbolism was to characterize the school of "delicate restraint," *(wan-yueh)* in the Southern Sung *tz'u.* Yet without Su Shih's enlargement of poetic scope and Su's exploration of almost all possible rhetorical methods, Chou Pang-yen would not have had a basis for his metaphorical explorations.[95]

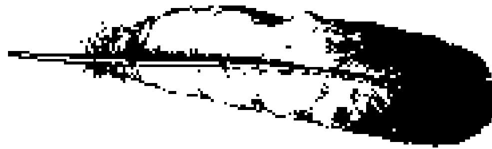
The direction taken by the stylistic development of *tz'u* poetry was similar to that taken by the tradition of *shih.* In each form, immediately after the pioneer stage of generic development, many influential poets appeared who expressed thoughts in a straightforward fashion. These poets were succeeded by poets who were more interested in the manipulation of poetic images for the purpose of constructing a private, symbolic world.[96]

While *tz'u* poetry became as perfect a form of pure lyricism as the Recent Style poetry had been in the T'ang Dynasty, *shih* poetry began slowly to venture out of the purely lyric domain. Unlike *shih* poetry in the T'ang, the Sung *shih* had a tendency to dwell on philosophical issues and arguments that manifested a degree of reason and intellectualism. Thus, as time went by, the *tz'u* form established itself as the "lyric par excellence," while *shih* poetry began to touch on other levels of experience. The uniqueness of the *tz'u*, however, does not lie exclusively in its emphasis on lyricism; lyricism has always been the general phenomenon of the classical Chinese tradition. The lyrical exploration of narrative and other non-lyrical elements remains one of the most significant features of *tz'u* poetry. *Tz'u* explored new areas of literature that were, by traditional standards, unpoetic or low in style, while simultaneously maintaining a concentrated lyric vision. This transition was no doubt enhanced by the lyrical quality of Su Shih's *tz'u* poetry.[97]

Author Susanne Langer describes the "'illusion' of experience" as lyric poetry's essential substance. Langer believes that since events in actual lives are fragmented and indefinite, the lyrical poet's duty is to create "the semblance of events lived and felt." In other words, "all poetry is a creation of illusory events, even when it looks like a statement of opinions—philosophical or political or aesthetic."[98] If one views Su Shih's poetic world in light of Langer's definition, one realizes that the discursive elements in Su's *tz'u* poetry are actually nondiscursive in function, because they all "belong to a symbolic context supported by the art of illusion." Su's philosophical statements are often the reflection of the present moment, meant for expression rather than for argument.

Throughout the long tradition of Chinese poetry, two features stand out clearly: 1) Chinese poetry's utilitarian or didactic aspect, written by poets to move others, and 2) Chinese poetry's function as a means of self-expression or self-cultivation, written by poets to please or console themselves. In the sense of affording self-cultivation/expression on the one hand, and purposefulness

on the other, poetry is generally regarded by the Chinese more as a "literature of power" than as a "literature of knowledge."[99] As the critic De Quincey describes in discussing Homer, Sophocles, and Shakespeare, the goal of Chinese literature is to "restore to man's mind the ideals of justice, of hope, of truth, of mercy, of retribution, which else (left to the support of daily life in its realities) would languish for want of sufficient illustration." The English critic goes on to predict that such literature will triumph forever "as long as the languages exist in which they can speak or can be taught to speak."[100] The poets of the Sung dynasty revolutionized their language which, according to the words of Conrad Aiken, exists in the "'far away' language of desert, language of ocean, language of sky," all of which communicate "a sunflower splendor of which none knows the source."



[1] Wu-chi Liu and Irving Yucheng Lo, Sunflower Splendor: Three Thousand Years of Chinese Poetry (London: Doubleday, Inc., 1975) p. xiv

[2] Kang-i Sun Chang, The Evolution of the Chinese Tz'u Poetry: From Late T'ang to Northern Sung (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) p. 3

[3] Ibid., p. 3

[4] Ibid., p. 4

Author Kang-i Sun Chang describes parallelism: "The scheme of parallelism is complex and manifold, but the basic rule is that the two parallel elements should usually belong to the same semantic category (e.g., in the strict sense, number parallels number, color parallels color, location parallels location, proper name parallels proper name; and in a loose sense, adjectival form parallels adjectival form, adverb form parallels adverb form, and verbial form parallels verbial form)."

[5] Liu, p. xv

When poetry emerged under the T'ang as an important, if not chief, criterion in the imperial examinations for the selection of officials, many scholar officials achieved the coveted *chin-shi* (presented scholar) degree and appointment to official posts. Therefore, a number of poets, especially during the T'ang and early Sung eras, were primarily high officials. John K. Fairbank et. al., East Asia Tradition and Transformation (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989) p. 144

[6] Liu, p. xvi

[7] Fairbank, p. 144

[8] Liu, p. xx

[9] Peter K. Bol, This Culture of Ours, Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992) p. 1

[10] Ibid., p. 107

[11] Jonathan Chaves, Mei Yao-Ch'en and the Development of Early Sung Poetry (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980) p. 52

[12] Ibid., p. 53

[13] Ibid., p. 54

[14] Ibid., p. 54

[15] Ibid., p. 63

The broad class of people trained during the Sung dynasty in the writing of poetry included many women and some Taoist and Buddhist monks. This tradition has continued to the present time. Liu, p. xvi

[16] Chaves, p. 63
[17] Ibid., p. 64
[18] Ibid., p. 64
[19] Ibid., p. 65
[20] Ibid., pp. 66-67
[21] Ibid., p. 68
[22] Fairbank, p. 146
During the Sung dynasty the culture and way of life of the scholarly gentleman acquired a characteristic style that lasted for centuries. Robert I. Murowchick, ed., China: Ancient Culture, Modern Land (Oklahoma: Weldon Russel Pty Ltd., 1994) p. 141
[23] Liu, p. xxi
[24] Chaves, p. 69
[25] Ibid., p. 69
[26] Ibid., p. 106
[27] Ibid., p. 79
[28] Ibid., p. 107
[29] Liu, p. 586
Ou-yang Hsiu's comments on poetry and poets included in a volume entitled *Liu-yi shih-hua* (Liu-yi's Talks on Poetry) became the first *shih-hua* treatise ever written. It established a tradition of impressionistic criticism of poetry, which was continued in China until the twentieth century. Liu, p. 587
[30] Liu, p. 585
[31] Chaves, p. 70
[32] Ibid., p. 71
[33] Liu, p. 585
[34] Chaves, p. 80
[35] Liu, p. 585
[36] Chaves, p. 86
[37] Ibid., p. 86
Wang yu-ch'eng praised a poet's work by stating "the poetry of the imperial Sung has here returned to refinement and correctness." Chaves, p. 64
[38] Chaves, p. 91
[39] Ibid., p. 111
[40] Ibid., p. 113
[41] Ibid., p. 114
[42] Ibid., p. 128
[43] Ibid., pp. 123-124
[44] Ibid., p. 124
[45] Ibid., p. 120

[46] Ibid., p. 122
[47] Ibid., p. 117
[48] Ibid., p. 125
[49] Murowchick, p. 141
[50] Liu, p. 589

In his writings on the theory of painting, Su Shih explicitly argues that the purpose of painting was not to depict the appearance of things, but to express the painter's own feelings, making it much more like poetry. Murowchick, p. 141

[51] Bol, p. 72
[52] Chang, p. 26
[53] Ibid., p. ix
[54] Ibid., p. 1
[55] Ibid., p. 2

"A genre is that which emerges in response to a particular need for expression, and the *tz'u* genre, taken as a whole, has special poetic functions distinct from those of other literary forms." Ibid., p. 209

[56] The Palace Music School was established by the T'ang emperor Hsuan-tsung (r. 713-755) in the capital district where hundreds of musicians and singers were trained to perform new music. He also admitted both popular and foreign music tunes into the court, and thus destroyed the rigid dichotomy between "elegant music (*ya-yueh*) and popular music (*su-yueh*)." Ibid., p. 9

[57] Ibid., p. 10

From the beginning of the Sung, entertainment halls were so expanded that some contained more than 100 rooms. Ibid., p. 10

[58] The term *pei-li* (literally, "Northern Ward"), which later became a popular name for all entertainment quarters, originally referred to the particular quarter north of P'ing-k'ang fang in Ch'ang-an, in existence since the time of Emperor Hsuan-tsung. Ibid., p. 14

[59] What is meant by "lyrical poem" is a "sustained expression of the poet's emotions, felt in the present, such that external realities are shaped and molded to form part of the artistic world of the self and the present. The dramatic or the narrative modes, on the other hand, focus on the presentation of a concrete human encounter or the development of an event." Ibid., p. 19

[60] Ibid., p. 28
[61] Ibid., p. 32

[62] Claudio Guillen, Literature as System (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971)

[63] Chang, p. 4

[64] Ibid., p. 5

[65] Ibid., p. 14

[66] Ibid., p. 208

[67] Liu, p. 582

[68] Chang, p. 65

[69] Ibid., p. 106

[70] Ibid., p. 112

Man-tz'u had been practiced in the popular song tradition since the High T'ang period circa 750, but had not been well received by literati *tz'u* poets for hundreds of years. Chang, p. 108

[71] Ibid., p. 109

[72] Ibid., p. 109

Among the poems is his famous *Wang hai-ch'ao,* describing the scenery of Hangchou. This *tz'u* poem is said to have originally inspired the Emperor of Jurchen to invade the South China region. Ibid., p. 109

[73] Liu, p. 585

[74] "*Man-tz'u* was formed during the Jen-tsung reign (1023-1063). After the war was over in the Central Plains, *pien-ching* became prosperous and flourishing, and the singing clubs and dancing halls competed in creating new sounds. Frustrated and listless, [Liu Yung] lingered in the entertainment quarters. He incorporated colloquial idioms extensively in his *tz'u* poems so that entertainers could sing them. Later, such people as [Su-Shih] continued to write in this form, and thus *man-tz'u* became popular." Wu Ts'eng, *Neng-kai-chai man-lu*

[75] Chang, p. 112

[76] Ibid., p. xiii

[77] Liu, p. 590

[78] Chang, p. 158

[79] Ibid., p. 160

[80] Even for the performance purposes of his *tz'u* poetry, Su Shih deliberately devised a method quite opposite to Liu Yung's: while Liu Yung would ask gentle courtesans to sing his songs, Su Shih had strong men sing his *tz'u.* Such a transfer from the effeminate to the manly may have added to the genre's rise in popularity for the general society.

[81] Su Shih was not a musician like Liu Yung, and because of his limitations in this area, he often had to follow the ready-

made *tz'u* tunes instead of composing new tunes. Ironically, these limitations exercised an important impact on later *tz'u* practice. The notion that a *tz'u* poem was primarily a literary creation and only secondarily a musical composition helped the promotion of the literary value of *tz'u*. Chang, p. 162

[82] Ibid., p. 201

[83] Ibid., p. 201

[84] Ibid., p. 201

[85] Ibid., p. 162

Tung-p'o meaning "eastern slope," was the style of Su Shih. Su Shih acquired the name Su Tung-p'o sometime during his exile in Huangchou (1080-1083).

[86] Ibid., p. 163

[87] Ibid., p. 165

[88] Ibid., p. 160

[89] Ibid., pp. 166-167

[90] Ibid., p. 167

[91] While Su Shih wrote his most lyrical *tz'u* poem *Chiang Ch'eng tzu* in remembrance of his dead wife Lady Want, he did not write any such piece in the *shi* form. Likewise, his aesthetic experience of music was mostly expressed through the *tz'u* form. On the other hand, many of his *lu-shih* poems were written to present arguments, and a great number of his *chueh-chu* poems were composed for colophons on paintings. While his Ancient Style poems often include long narrative passages, few of his *tz'u* poems do. The narrative elements in Su's *tz'u* poetry, "as the momentary reflections of his lyrical consciousness, are usually free from a temporal sequence. It is the instantaneous lyrical expression that forms the center of Su's *tz'u*, for all of his experiences are internalized and refashioned into aesthetic vision." Ibid., p. 170

[92] Ibid., p. 181

[93] Ibid., p. 203

[94] Ibid., p. 205

[95] Ibid., p. 205

[96] Ibid., p. 208

[97] Ibid., p. 169

[98] Ibid., p. 204

[99] Liu, p. xxiii

[100] Ibid., p. xxiii

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