

A Translation of Four Chinese Shi-Poems

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1. Original text and translation of the *shi*-poem *Chenyi chaoshiyuan*

duchanjing 晨詣超師院讀禪經

1.1 Original text

Respected provost, Miss Deng, good morning. My name is Manyu Yang. Today I would like to share with you four Chinese Shi-poems and their translations, together with the commentaries.

晨詣超師院讀禪經（柳宗元）	
汲井漱寒齒，清心拂塵服。	道人庭宇靜，苔色連深竹。
閒持貝葉書，步出東齋讀。	日出霧露餘，青松如膏沐。
真源了無取，妄跡世所逐。	澹然離言說，悟悅心自足。
遺言冀可冥，繕性何由熟。	

1.2 Translation

Reading Zen Scriptures in the Morning at Ven. Chao's Monastery (Liu Zongyuan)

With cold well water I brushed my teeth, With a pure mind I patted my clothes, Walk out with Buddhist sutra from Dongzhai's door, I read it in a relaxed mood, From where one can catch the truth, For the false things all fight to pursue, The Buddha's words can hopefully be tasted, It is not easy for one to correct bad habits;	How tranquil it was in the Monastery's backyard, The dark green moss melted with bamboos' deep roots, Fog and dewdrops dazzled with brilliance when the sun shined, Green pines sparkled as if they were greased, Detached from the language and words, I was filled with the happiness of emptying my heart.
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2. Original text and translation of the *shi*-poem *Xinglunan* 行路難

2.1 Original text

行路難（李白）

金樽清酒斗十千， 玉盤珍羞直萬錢。 停杯投箸不能食， 拔劍四顧心茫然。 欲渡黃河冰塞川， 將登太行雪滿山。	閒來垂釣碧溪上， 忽復乘舟夢日邊。 行路難！行路難！ 多歧路，今安在？ 長風破浪會有時， 直掛雲帆濟滄海。
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2.2 Translation

Hard Way (Li Bai)	
Fine wine in golden goblets, Fancy dainties on jade plates, How precious the meal is! Put down chopsticks and the goblet, Draw the sword and look around, I can hardly describe my mind in words. Hoping to cross the Yellow River, Wanting to climb the Mountain Taihang, But in my way, it is snowing and ice-bound.	Thinking of Jiang Ziya fishing by the stream, Yiying passing by the sun in his dream, They were found by the wise kings. What a hard way! What a hard way! So many crossroads! So easy to get lost! But still, raise the sail, prepare the boat, Get ready for departure!

	Believe in one day, we can overcome the storm!
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3. Original text and translation of the *shi*-poem *Kurexing* 苦熱行

3.1 Original text

苦熱行（王維）	
赤日滿天地，火雲成山嶽。	思出宇宙外，曠然在寥廓。
草木盡焦卷，川澤皆竭涸。	長風萬里來，江海蕩煩濁。
輕紈覺衣重，密樹苦陰薄。	卻顧身爲患，始知心未覺。
莞簞不可近，絺綌再三濯。	忽入甘露門，宛然清涼樂。

3.2 Translation

A Hard Hot Trip (Wang Wei)	
The burning sun spread hotness, As the scorching air accumulated into huge mountains of clouds, Grass and trees withered, As rivers and lakes lost their lives	Let the thoughts fly away from the universe, Enjoy the winds that come along thousands of miles, Then the mind suddenly feels so

and became silent, A light gauze is too heavy for one to bear, A thick shade of trees is too few for one to share, Heat stops one from lying on the mat, Washing the summer clothes again and again to cool it down,	wild and refreshed, The troubling thoughts are washed away by seas and rivers. I know for sure, The body always traps me from becoming enlightened, But still, I enjoy this rare moment, Gaining awareness of Buddhism brings me supreme pure happiness.
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4. Original text and translation of the *shi*-poem *Qiuxing bashou* 秋興八

首・其三

4.1 Original text

秋興八首・其三（杜甫）	
千家山郭靜朝暉， 日日江樓坐翠微。 信宿漁人還泛泛， 清秋燕子故飛飛。	匡衡抗疏功名薄， 劉向傳經心事違。 同學少年多不賤， 五陵衣馬自輕肥。

4.2 Translation

In Autumn Days • No.3 (Du Fu)	
Thousands of houses stand in the light of the rising sun, Rows of pavilions sit in the green verdant mountains, Fishermen are slowly rafting above the brook, With two or three swallows darting through the air.	Kuang Heng discarded the fame and gave true advice was then appreciated by the emperor, I dreamed about being asked to give lectures on Five Classics like Liu Xiang but it never comes true. For my classmates, they shall be enjoying noble and rich lives, With well-fed horses so tall, and fur coats so light.

3. Commentary

In order to translate Chinese *Shi* poetries, my first step is to understand the poet's personality, experience and the feelings they may have had when they write the poems. Wang Rongpei says it is important to 'keep the forms and spirits while conveying the meanings 传神达意'¹ when translating the Chinese *Shi* poetries, hence it is important to get as close as possible to the core spirits contained in them. For keeping the forms, I chose to translate most of them into couplets poem in order to stay in accordance with the traditional form of *lvshi* 律詩, a form usually composed by couplets. Only for the *Hard Way* by Li Bai, I used a rather free

¹ Wang Rongpei 汪榕培, Wang Hong 王宏, *English Translation of Chinese Classics* 中國典籍英譯 (Shanghai: Shanghai Waiyu Jiaoyu Press, 2009), p.92

form of Tercet, the first reason is this poem is Yuefu 樂府 poetry, its original form is freer than the lvshi 律詩. The second reason is for expressing the emotions of the poet more clearly, I will explain this part later.

For the first poem, Liu Zongyuan's *Reading Zen Scriptures in the Morning at Ven. Chao's Monastery*, was written during the poet being banished from the court to a remote place called Yongzhou 永州. He had been disgraced due to the failure of Yongzhen revolution (永貞革新), which was initiated by Wang Shuwen, one of the Emperor Shun of Tang(唐順宗)'s teachers who was later appointed as finance minister by Emperor Shun. Liu Zongyuan was firstly put in an important position by Wang Shuwen. Being born into a prominent family, and experienced a life of smooth in both academic and professional careers in his youth ages, being disgraced became Liu Zongyuan's first taste of failure.² At the beginning, he has only been assigned to a small city in Hunan province as a major. However, what is even more tragic, is he has been notified again that he is assigned to Yongzhou, which is a even more remote place, to take up a small post outside the national establishment which makes him even cannot be provided with a house to live in by the country(俄而叔文敗，貶邵州刺史，不半道，貶永州司馬).³ This poem described his complicated mood during the troubled days, and tried to dispel his sadness through reading Buddhist scriptures.

The poet used many words which includes Buddhist background. The word *beiyeshu* 貝葉書 refers to Buddhist scriptures because ancient Indians use the leaves of Bay trees to record Buddha's words. For the word *yiyan* 遺言, it refers to Buddha's words as Buddhist doctrines

² Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元, *Liu Zongyuan Ji* 柳宗元集[The Collection of Liu Zongyuan](Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju Press, 1979), p.1

³ Xu Jialu 許嘉璐, ed. *Xin Tangshu* 新唐书[The New Version of the Book of Tang Dynasty](Shanghai: Hanyu Dacidian Press, 2004), vol.6, p.3736

have also been called *yijiao* 遺教, which means ‘the left doctrines’. *Zhenyuan* 真源 and *wangji* 妄跡 are Buddhist conceptions refer to the intangible Buddhist nature and tangible things in the real world, hence I translated them into ‘truth’ and ‘false things’.

For the second poem, the author is Li Bai, a romantic poet living in the middle and late Tang dynasty. Li Bai had personally experienced the process of the Tang Dynasty from prosperity to decline, including the An-Shi Disturbances. In his young ages, he used to be very fond of Daoism. He had also spent a lot of time to ‘live in seclusion’⁴ in order to pursue his ideal Daoist way of life. However, the favour of Daoism did not stop him from realizing his political aspirations. His dream is to emulate someone like Zhuge Liang and Zhang Liang—taking on the great responsibility of assisting the king when the country needs him and retiring to live in seclusion in mountains after a success.⁵ His strong passion for creating a good future for his mother country and enthusiasm for the pursuit of Taoist thought constituted his passionate and unrestrained life. When He Zhizhang 賀知章 firstly met with Li Bai, he sighed that ‘Bai is like the fallen fairy from heaven!(此天上謫仙人也)’⁶ This lifestyle has also been shown in his poems. Like the poem, *Hard Way*, the emotions of it are ups and downs. The first stanza described a feast with gorgeous words, but the next two stanzas suddenly show the lonely mood of the poet. The fourth stanza cited the examples of Jiang Ziya and Yi Ying, symbolising the poet’s wish of realizing his lofty political aspirations. But again, he sighed that this is too difficult in the fifth stanza, and in the sixth stanza he

⁴ Li Bai 李白, annotated by Qu Tuiyuan 瞿蛻園, Zhu Jincheng 朱金城, *Li Bai Ji Jiaozhu* 李白集校註[An Annotation of the Collection of Li Bai](Shanghai:Shanghai Guji Press, 2018), vol.1, p.5

⁵ Li Bai 李白, annotated by Qu Tuiyuan 瞿蛻園, Zhu Jincheng 朱金城, *Li Bai Ji Jiaozhu* 李白集校註, vol.1, p.3

⁶ Xu Jialu 許嘉璐, ed. *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書[The Old Version of the Book of Tang Dynasty](Shanghai: Hanyu Dacidian Press, 2004), vol.6, p.4343

showed his firm belief again. During this period, Li Bai was experiencing a very hard time because he had offended Gao Lishi by asking him to take off shoes for him, and then lost his job in the royal court.⁷ Even though he was in difficulties, but his optimistic personality would not let him indulge in pessimism completely, hence the emotions contained in this poem appear to be jumping over and over, giving people a strong impact and encouragement. Hence I chose to translate it into a tercet poem, using three lines to express the full emotions contained in two lines of the original Chinese text, often the first two lines describing the events and realistic materials and the third line expressing the poet's feelings.

For the third poem, *A Hard Hot Trip* written by Wang Wei 王維, is also a poem that expresses the poet's trying to get rid of troubling thoughts and obtain happiness through learning the Dharma. This poem also contains descriptions of scenery. Wang Wei had been called 'the Buddhist Poet' by later literati, both he and his brother are vegetarians and they believe in Buddhism all their lives. After his mother's death, he had rebuilt one of his houses in Wangchuan 輞川 into a Buddhist temple.⁸ Same as Li Bai, Wang Wei had also experienced the most prosperous time of Tang Dynasty and the An-Shi Disturbances, but his career is smoother than that of Li Bai and Liu Zongyuan. Wang Wei is a loyal and patriotic person who is indifferent to fame and fortune, but he did not agree with the behaviour of disregarding the living expenses of the family in order to stay away from the corrupt officialdom. Hence when the traitor Li Linfu framed the virtuous prime minister Zhang Jiuling, although Wang Wei was very angry and disappointed and wanted to resign, he finally

⁷ Xu Jialu 許嘉璐, ed. *Xin Tangshu* 新唐书[The New Version of the Book of Tang Dynasty](Shanghai: Hanyu Dacidian Press, 2004), vol.7, p.4340

⁸ Xu Jialu 許嘉璐, ed. *Xin Tangshu* 新唐书[The New Version of the Book of Tang Dynasty](Shanghai: Hanyu Dacidian Press, 2004), vol.7, p.4342

chose to stay.⁹ Then, in order to survive in the dark officialdom, he must swallow his voice and do something against his will. He once had written a poem called ‘A Trip to Wentang Spring Together with Virtuous Ministers (和僕射晉公扈從溫湯)’ to praise Li Linfu.¹⁰

However, doing these unintentional things made him feel very uncomfortable, so he often read Buddhist scriptures to deal with the distress in real life. His poems in his middle and old age are full of the Zen meanings like being at ease, and the relief after letting go of mundane things. In the poem I have shared before, *A Hard Hot Trip*, we can still see this logic clearly. In the former four stanzas, the poet depicts a few very specific things, to give the image of the extreme heat. Then in the last four stanzas, he used the description of his own changes from hot to cool both psychologically and physically, demonstrated the benefits that Dharma brings to him. Therefore, when translating the first part, I adopted a more objective tone to highlight the description of the scene and a more subjective tone for the second part in order to emphasize the feelings of the poet.

For the fourth poem, *In Autumn Days* written by Du Fu, is still a *Lyshi* 律詩 of Tang dynasty. Du Fu and Li Bai almost lived in the same era and had similarities in character, so they were called *Lidu* 李杜 together. Both of them had a bold and unrestrained life style, worrying about the country and the people.¹¹ Du Fu’s career was not very smooth either. His life was relatively poor in his middle and old age because he had given up his officialdom due to the corrupt politics. He used to depend on his old friend Yan Wu, after Yan Wu’s death, his life

⁹ Wang Wei 王維, Annotated by Zhao Diancheng 趙殿成, Wang Youcheng Ji Jianzhu 王右丞集箋注[An Annotation of Wang Youcheng’s collection], p.3

¹⁰ Wang Wei 王維, Annotated by Zhao Diancheng 趙殿成, Wang Youcheng Ji Jianzhu 王右丞集箋注, p.205

¹¹ Xu Jialu 許嘉璐, ed. *Xin Tangshu* 新唐书[The New Version of the Book of Tang Dynasty](Shanghai: Hanyu Dacidian Press, 2004), vol.7, p.4316

became even more impoverished which can be seen through his poems like *The Song of Seeing the Hut Blown out by the Autumn Wind* 茅屋為秋風所破歌. Due to the chaos of society in the late Tang Dynasty and a life full of setbacks, Du Fu's poems often contain sentences that appeal his aspirations in order to dispel his sadness. For example, in the fourth poem I shared above, Du Fu cited two examples of Kuang Heng and Liu Xiang to insinuate his own experience. According to *Hanshu* 漢書, during the time of King Yuan of Han (漢元帝), Kuang Heng wrote to the King for giving advice on politics many times and won the King's appreciation for it.¹² Liu Xiang was asked by the royal court to give lectures on the Five classics in *Shiqu* 石渠.¹³ These two figures had the ideal career path which Du Fu was dreaming about, hence he cited their examples in his poem in order to tell how much he wants to serve the country. Therefore I translated this couplet into 'Kuang Heng discarded the fame and gave true advice was then appreciated by the emperor, I dreamed about being asked to give lectures on Five Classics like Liu Xiang but it never comes true'.

This is all for my presentation today, any suggestions and feedback would be appreciated.

Thank you very much.

4. Bibliography

Books

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¹² Ban Gu 班固, *Han Shu* 漢書[The Book of Han Dynasty](Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju Press, 2000), p.2483

¹³ Ban Gu 班固, Li Xueqin 李學勤 ed., *Han Shu* 漢書[The Book of Han Dynasty](Haikou: Hainan Guoji Xinwen Press, 1995), p.376

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