



East Asian History

NUMBER 38 · FEBRUARY 2014

www.eastasianhistory.org

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Design and production	Lindy Allen and Katie Hayne Print PDFs based on an original design by Maureen MacKenzie-Taylor This is the thirty-eighth issue of <i>East Asian History</i> , the second published in electronic form, February 2014. It continues the series previously entitled <i>Papers on Far Eastern History</i> .
Contributions to Back issues	http://www.eastasianhistory.org/contribute http://www.eastasianhistory.org/archive To cite this journal, use page numbers from PDF versions
ISSN (electronic)	1839-9010
Copyright notice	Copyright for the intellectual content of each paper is retained by its author. Reasonable effort has been made to identify the rightful copyright owners of images and audiovisual elements appearing in this publication. The editors welcome correspondence seeking to correct the record.
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Banner calligraphy	Huai Su 懷素 (737–799), Tang calligrapher and Buddhist monk

Published jointly by
The Australian National University and Leiden University



Australian
National
University



Universiteit Leiden

SU SHIH, POEMS



Translated by A.R. Davis

On First Setting Out for Chia-chou

As we set out in the morning the drums boom;
The west wind flutters the painted banners.
My old home has drifted far away;
My thoughts of the way, vast and without limit.
The Brocade Stream is faint and not to be seen;
The Barbarian's River, clear and lovely.
Flying along, we pass the Buddha's Foot;
As the river widens we come to smooth water.
In the country town there is a Chan monk staying,
By the fishing platform he searches the evening mist.
We promised definitely to hurry there,
For a long while he waits while the water gurgles.

On the River Watching the Hills

On the boat we watch the hills like running horses,
Swiftly there pass several hundred herds.
The hills in front are jagged and suddenly change their shapes;
The ranges behind are confused as if fleeing in fright.
I look up and see a small path slanting round,
On it a traveller high up and indistinct.
In the boat I raise my hand and would speak with him,
But our solitary sail goes south like a flying bird.

Yellow Ox Temple

At the River's edge the rockwall is high and trailless,
 Above there is a yellow ox which does not bear a yoke.
 Before the temple travellers prostrate themselves and dance,
 They beat the drum, blow the pipes and kill white goats.
 Beneath the hill the plough-ox toils on the stony ground,
 His horns grind on the cliff, his hooves are wet.
 With a half-bundle of green grass he endures hunger,
 He looks up at the yellow ox, but how can he equal him?

The Ancestral Temple of the Duke of Chou

The temple is seven or eight *li* northwest of Ch'i-shan. A hundred paces or more to the rear of the temple there is a spring beside a hill. Its flow is unusually cold. The official histories call it the Spring of Abundant Virtue. When the age is disorderly it dries up.

How should I now again dream of the Duke of Chou?
 Yet still I am glad in autumn to have passed his ancient temple.
 The blue phoenix of old rested on the cliff's sheerness,
 The pure spring has ever accorded with the age's failure and success
 Still the visitor is grieved by hanging millet ears,
 But the scholars of the ancient kingdom sing of the rain's drizzle.
 Oxen and wine are not brought, the crows scatter,
 Aspens without number at evening sigh in the wind.

*Coming Out of the Mouth of the Ying I See the Huai Hills for
the First Time on this Day we Reached Shou-chou*

I travel night and day towards the river and the sea,
 With the maple leaves and rush flowers autumn feelings are sustained.
 The long Huai suddenly blurs the sky's distance,
 The green hills long rise and fall with the boat,
 At Shou-chou I already see the white pagoda,
 Although the short oar has not yet turned Yellow Reed Hill.
 The waves are flat, the wind gentle, we have not reached our journey's end,
 My friends long stand in the misty distance.

From Chin-shan I Sailed My Boat to Chiao-shan

Chin-shan storied monastery, how vast!
 Its struck bells and beaten drums are heard in Huai-nan.
 What does Chiao-shan have? It has tall bamboos,
 Two or three monks gathering wood and drawing water.
 Cloud wrapped, wave dashed and deserted,
 Though sometimes there are shore folk praying for their spring silkworms.
 When I came to Chin-shan I stayed the night,
 But before I reached here, my mind was ashamed.
 When my companions had no desire, I decided to go alone,
 With a lot so poor I made little of the River's depth.
 In the dawn there was no wind, the waves leapt of themselves,
 In mid-stream singing and yodelling, I was half drunk.
 An old monk came down the hill, astonished at a visitor,
 He smiles in welcome, glad to talk with a man from Pa.

He says that long away he has forgotten his village,
 And only has Maitreya for his companion.
 For his weary slumbers he makes the best of paper bed-curtains warmth,
 For a hearty meal he does not tire of mountain vegetable's sweetness.
 In hills and woods there has ever been hunger,
 Not to retire without a farm is surely only greed?
 Though Chan-ch'in has not been dismissed three times,
 Shu-yeh himself knows the seven things he cannot bear.
 My conduct is worthy of impeachment; I renounce hairpin and tablet ribbon,
 In an excellent place please keep a thatched hut for me.

Making Fun of Tzu-yu

Your piled table is full of dusty documents.
 You attack them like a bookworm.
 How can you know that the sages' intention
 Lies not wholly in their books?
 When the tune is ended the strings remain,
 When the utensil's made the machine is empty.
 Subtle was the wheelwright
 Who in the courtyard laughed at Duke Huan.

*In the Fan-t'ien Temple I Saw a Little Poem. It was Graceful and Lovely.
 I Wrote a Poem with the Same Rhymes*

I only hear the bell beyond the mist,
 I do not see the temple in the mist.
 The hermit has gone out and not returned,
 The dew on the grasses wets his straw sandals.
 Only must the moon over the hills
 Night after night light his coming.

*Two Poems Sent to the Monk Ch'ing-shun of Pei-shan
 When I Passed the Night at Shui-lu Monastery*

Grasses drown the river embankment, rain obscures the village,
 The monastery is hidden by tall bamboos, one cannot see the gate.
 They gather wood to boil herbs in pity for a monk's sickness,
 They sweep the floor and burn incense to purify my soul.
 Farm work's not done and drags on to little snow,
 Buddha's lamp is lit to mark the dusk.
 Lately I have gradually learned the taste of retirement,
 I think of talking with you from facing couches.

I have long hated the bells and drums stirring the lake and hills,
 This place is lonely and withdrawn into nature.
 If one begged food round the village one would be filled,
 If they wordlessly face their guest is truly not Chan.
 Parting the thickets to find the path I plunge in to the mud,
 I wash my feet and close the door and sleep listening to the rain.
 Distantly I think of a latter day poor Chia Tao,
 In the night cold he must be shrugging his shoulders in composition.

On Hearing a Worthy Master's Lute

Large strings have spring warmth, mild and even,
 Small strings are plangent, clear and shrill.
 All my life I have never known one not from another,
 I only heard an ox bellowing in a hollow, a pheasant alighting on a tree.
 At the gate there are taps, who is knocking? The mountain monk is not free; don't be angry.
 When I go home I shall seek a thousand *hu* of water,
 To cleanse my ears of the zithers and flutes I heard before.

*On the 21st Day of the 1st Month after an Illness Shu-ku Invited
 Me to Go beyond the City to Seek Spring*

The mountain birds on the roof earnestly call me,
 In front of the railing the frozen pool suddenly grows wrinkled.
 With old age I tire of drinking with red skirts,
 Rising from sickness I vainly wonder at my new white hairs.
 I lie and listen to the sounds of the Prefect's drum and horn,
 Tentatively I call the boy to prepare my cap and turban.
 Curving railed ways and shady arbours in the end constrict,
 Let's take a look at the boundless spring on the heath beyond the city.

From P'u-chao Temple I Visit Two Small Temples

Among the tall pines the wind sings, the evening rain is fine,
 The eastern side temple is half shut, the west is closed.
 Walking in the hills all day I met no one;
 Sweetly the wild plum's scent entered my sleeves.
 The temple monk laughed at my fondness for fair scenery:
 "I am weary of the mountain depths but have no way to get out."
 Although I love mountains, I smiled too,
 In secluded solitude the soul may be wounded and after to continue is hard.
 It is better by the West Lake to drink fine wine;
 The red apricots and green peaches' fragrance hangs about my hair.
 I write a poem to bear my regrets to old "fern-gatherer",
 Since I have not withdrawn from persons, how should I withdraw from the age?

*At the Beginning of Autumn Praying for Rain. I Spent the Night at
 Ling-yin Temple with Two Magistrates, Chou and Hsü*

My hundred layer piled desk impedes my leisure;
 A single leaf's autumn sound comes as I sleep.
 Snow and frost before my bed, the moon that invades the room;
 Zithers and lutes by my pillow, the spring that falls on the steps.
 Harsh to taste the world's experiences must always be,
 Quietly to grow old in a mountain retreat is easier.
 Only I still have a heart that grieves for the farmers,
 I rise to observe the Milky Way and am still more uncertain.

Passing the Night at Hai-hui Temple

In a bamboo chair for three days I travel among the mountains,
 Among the mountains it's very beautiful but seldom level far.
 Down we plunge to the Yellow Springs, then ascend to the blue void,
 On the thread-path we always jostle the monkeys.
 When we find the storied tower cramped in a mountain hollow,
 My thighs ache, my hungry belly grumbles.
 Northward across a flying bridge our steps patter,
 The surrounding wall's a hundred paces like an ancient city.
 The great bell is struck, a thousand fingers are joined in welcome,
 The high hall receives the guest, even at night not barred.
 From the pine tank the lacquer ladle pours rivers of water,
 The "original unsullied" is washed still lighter.
 When I fall into bed my snores startle all my neighbours;
 Boom! the fifth watch drum, the sky is not yet bright.
 The wooden fish calls to gruel, clear and shrill,
 I hear no voices but hear the sound of sandals.

Written for Master Chan's Room at the Twin Bamboo Temple

The evening drum, the morning bell you strike yourself,
 You shut the door and on a solitary pillow face a fading lamp.
 The white ash will be stirred into a red flame,
 You lie and listen to the sighing rain upon the window.

Hui-ch'in has Just Given Up His Priestly Office

Free-soaring is the Ch'ing-tien crane,
 Distressed to be in a cage.
 Since he was in the toils of things,
 He became one with us.
 Now for the first time he has resigned,
 The world's affairs can be shrugged away.
 His new poems seem washed clean,
 and unsmutched by outward filth.
 Pure breezes blow in his beak,
 His speech is like a pine in the wind.
 His frosty whiskers sprout from sick bones,
 In hunger he sits and listens to the noon bell.
 "It is not poetry that can bring one to extremity.
 When one is in extremity his poems become skilful."
 This saying truly is not rash,
 I heard it from the Drunken Old Man.

The Eastern Slope

The rain has washed the Eastern Slope, the moonlight is clear;
 Where city folk no longer walk, a rustic walks.
 He doesn't dislike the path along the boulder-strewn slope,
 He likes the ringing sound of his dragging staff.

The Mirage at Teng-chou

For a long time I had heard of the mirage at Teng-chou. The old man said: It always comes out in spring and summer. Now it is late in the year. It will not be seen any more. I came to my post and left after five days. Because I was vexed not to have seen it, I prayed in the temple of the King of Wide Power, God of the Sea. Next day I saw the mirage and so wrote this poem.

The clouds and sea to the east are emptiness upon emptiness,
 But massed immortals appear and disappear in the empty brightness.
 The shifting floating world gives birth to a myriad forms,
 But how should cowry gates conceal pearl palaces?
 In my mind I know all I see is illusion,
 I dare for ears and eyes trouble the divine craftsman.
 The year is at winter, the water cold, heaven and earth are closed,
 Yet for me the hibernating are roused, fish and dragons whipped up.
 Storied towers, blue hills arise from the frosty dawn,
 The strange event startles old men of a hundred.
 What is to be gained in the human world who has strength may take,
 Beyond the world there is nothing. Who is the master?
 When suddenly I had a request he did not refuse me,
 Truly my troubles are from man not heaven-sent distress.
 When the Prefect of Ch'ao-yang returned from southern exile
 He rejoiced to see Stone Treasury piled above Chu Yung.
 And declared his uprightness had moved the mountain spirit,
 How should he know the Creator pitied his old age.
 A pleased countenance—how is it easy to get?
 The spirits' reward to you also was ample.
 The sunsets; over ten thousand *li* a solitary bird dives,
 I only see the green sea polishing its bronze mirror.
 My new poem's fine words, also what use?
 They'll go with change and decay after the east wind.

In the Rain, Passing by Director of Studies Shu's House

Scattered the bamboos behind the blind,
 Clear the rain among the bamboos.
 The house is still and undisturbed,
 Ink slab on the table is cold and raises a mist.
 The gentleman delights in secluded isolation,
 His gains result from having no desires.
 Sitting, he practices meditation on rush mat in coarse robe,
 Rising he listens to the voices of the wind bells.
 Whether visitors come he is indifferent,
 In his preparations he takes no account of rank.
 Strong tea washes away accumulated confusion,
 Subtle incense cleanses floating cares.
 He returns to the darkness of his northern hall,
 Which one by one faint fireflies cross.
 Amid the distresses of this life,
 For a while he is content to live in retirement.
 The flying kites brought regret for the former laughter,
 The yellow dog made sad the late awareness.
 Unless he himself is a T'ao Ching-chieh
 Who should recognise the significance here?

Written on the 9th Day at the Yellow Tower

Last year's double ninth cannot be spoken of,
 At the southern wall in the middle of the night a thousand leaks started.
 The water boring under the wall made a noise of thunder,
 Mud filled the wall top, which the flying rain made slippery.
 The yellow flowers and pale wine no one went to visit,
 At sunset we went home to wash our boots and stockings.
 How could we know whether again this year
 We might take our cups and be able to sip before the flowers?
 Do not complain of the wine's thinness and the clumsiness of the powder faces,
 After all they are better than a thousand spades in the mud.
 The Yellow tower is newly complete; its walls are not yet dry;
 The Clear River stars have already sunk, the frost for the first time is sharp.
 As morning comes the white mist is like fine rain,
 In the southern hills we cannot see the eight-thousand-foot monastery.
 Before the tower it becomes like the sea's expanse;
 Below the tower we faintly hear the creaking of oars.
 The chill strikes us and the old are fearful,
 But when warm wine flows in their stomachs, their querulousness is checked.
 When the mist clears and the sun comes out we see the fishing villages,
 The distant waters are rippled, the hills jagged.
 Poets and bold soldiers mingle like dragons and tigers;
 Ch'u dances and Wu songs are mixed like geese and ducks.
 When I pledge you a cup, do not, Sir, refuse,
 How does this scene differ from drifting on the clear Cha?

On Reaching Huang-chou

I mock myself for being all my life busy with my mouth,
 As old age comes the business becomes absurd.
 The Long River surrounds the outskirts, tells me the fish will be fine,
 Good bamboos line the hills make me feel the shoots will be sweet.
 The exile still has a supernumerary post,
 The poet has precedents for being Water Board Secretary.
 Only he is ashamed not be equal to the smallest task,
 And yet still costs the government wine-squeezing bags.

My Nephew An-chieh Came from Afar, We Spent the Night Sitting

You came from the south not realising it was the height of the year,
 By night we stir the cold ashes and listen to the rain's sound.
 "The documents" hidden from our eyes from the first are unread;
 The lamp light that accompanies us is indeed full of emotion.
 Alas, I am cast down with no day of return,
 And caused you to falter for half your life.
 Let us avoid making His Excellency Han grieve over the world's affairs,
 And white-headed again he may face a short lamp base.

 My mind failing, my face altered, the height of emaciation,
 When you see me you must only recognise my old voice.
 In the long nights I thought where might my family be,
 For my remaining years I shall know your love in coming from afar.
 Fearful of others I sit and become stupid,
 Enquiring for friends I exclaim in alarm that half are dead.
 My dream is broken, I sober from wine, the mountain rain has stopped,
 I smile to see the hungry mouse has climbed the lamp base.

On Cold Food it Rained. Two Poems

Since I came to Huang-chou
I have passed three Cold Foods.
Every year I want to husband spring,
But spring passes and does not let me husband her.
This year too there's bitter rain,
For two months it whistles autumnally.
I lie and listen to the cherry-apple blossoms,
While mud defiles their rouged snow.
In the darkness they are stolen away;
At midnight truly will come the strongman.
How does it differ from a sick youth?
When he rises from sickness his hair is white.

The spring river seeks to enter the house,
The threat of rain is unceasing.
The little house is like a fishing boat
Amid clouds of drizzling rain.
In the empty kitchen we boil cold greens;
In the broken stove we burn damp ferns.
How should we know it's Cold Food?
It's only that one sees a crow with paper in its beak.
Our ruler's gates are nine-fold deep;
My family tombs are ten-thousand *li* away.
I too resemble him who wept at the road's ending,
My dead ashes cannot be blown into life.