

Tied up at Maple Bridge Once Again

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One of the most frequently discussed T'ang poems must certainly be Chang Chi's 張繼 (fl. 753) "Feng-ch'iao yeh-po" 楓橋夜泊 (Moored for the Night at Maple Bridge). This poem has elicited comment in both Chinese and Western criticism.¹ Thus it is not surprising that Mr. Shu-hsien Fu 傅述先 (James Fu) has reopened the subject in an impressive, recent article entitled "Tu 'Feng-ch'iao yeh-po'" 讀楓橋夜泊 (A Reading of "Moored for the Night at Maple Bridge"), *Chung-Wai wen-hsueh* 中外文學 (Chung-Wai Literary Monthly), 9.2 (July 1980), 110-115.

Before turning to Mr. Fu's analysis, however, it will be necessary to provide the text, a rough phonetic transcription (based upon H. Stimson's reconstructions²), and yet another translation of this well known *chüeh-chü*.

月 •	落 •	烏 •	啼 •	霜 •	滿 •	天 •
ngiuæ t	lak	qui	thei	shang	man	then
江 •	楓 •	漁 •	火 •	對 •	愁 •	眠 •
kang	piing	ngii	hua	tuə i	tshiu	men
姑 •	蘇 •	城 •	外 •	寒 •	山 •	寺 •
kui	sui	shiɛŋg	nguai	han	shɛŋ	shi
夜 •	半 •	鐘 •	聲 •	到 •	客 •	船 •
ia	pan	tshuing	shi ng	tau	kak	tshiuɛŋ

The moon sets, crows caw, frost fills the sky;
maple trees, fishermen's lamps [all] facing [me] brings sorrow to my sleep.

From the Cold Mountain Temple beyond the Soochow walls,
the sound of a bell midway through the night reaches my traveler's boat.³

Tonal pattern: • is inflected, ○ is even.

My impression of Fu's explication is generally quite favorable. He begins his discussion by pointing out that the finest pieces of literature are immortal. Their significance cannot be "nailed down," but develops continually, from one generation, or even one critic, to another. His analysis of the poem certainly offers new insights, such as the unifying function he sees in the poet's use of sounds: nature's cries (the crows) in line one giving way to the sounds of man (the temple bell) in the final line. His depiction of the poem as one of two circles—an inner and an outer—is useful in arriving at one possible understanding of the structure of the piece. And, as a solicitous host, he provides his readers numerous tasty lagniappes, such as noting that the juxtaposition of the crows, obviously in their nests in the middle of the night, to the persona who is far from his home. His emphasis on the relationship between the poem, music and painting, is for the most part convincing (I fail to see, however, how the scene here can be compared to a Chinese painting in which a tiny, human figure cowers before the backdrop of some massive piece of nature—the perspective in this poem is not broad enough!). And of course I am gratified to see that Mr. Fu has been a careful reader of *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*. Though he does not emulate James J. Y. Liu's study of time and space in poetry (*CLEAR*, 1.2 [July 1979], 137–156), he is careful to refer the reader to it. His logic is usually sound and the numerous quotations from subsequent poetry presented in support of his discussion of time and space indicate that he has done his homework.

What disturbs me, however, is what he has not provided, perhaps not even considered. There is, for example, no discussion of the text, its variants, history, etc. There is a variant in line two (父 for 火), which merits some comment. Nor is there any consideration of Chang Chi's other poems. Fu's argument that Cold Mountain Temple is symbolic here seems less compelling in the light of Chang Chi's predilection for mentioning temples in several other poems describing his travels (see his 宿白馬寺 or 城西虎跑寺, for example⁴).

More significant, though, is Fu's approach to the tremendously important comment on the poem by Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) to the effect that since bells were not rung in the middle of the night, this poem is contrived and superficial.⁵ Nearly every commentator since Ou-yang Hsiu has felt the need to comment on this claim. Mr. Fu could have simply cited Wu Tseng's 吳曾 (fl. early 12th century) notice in his *Pien-wu lu*

辨誤錄 [A Record of Errors Discerned]⁶ which points out that Huang-fu Jan 皇甫冉 (714–767) has a poem which indicates bells did ring through the T'ang nights.⁷ Since this information was certainly available to Mr. Fu, it would have been a service for him to have released Ou-yang from the piles of this bridge once and for all. Instead, however, Fu follows Ou-yang's lead and notes other similar objections by "later critics" (here I assume for various reasons⁸ that he is referring to modern scholars) that midway through the night is also not the time for the moon to set or for crows to caw (p. 112). This in turn engenders an extended dissertation on poetic license and the role of time and space in Chinese poetry.

Although these arguments make some valid general points, their specific claim, that the contradictions in this poem suggest a complicated human system of association beyond logic (pp. 112f), is irrelevant, as more careful research would have revealed. It has already been shown that the night/bell "contradiction" is the result of a misunderstanding. The "contradictions" of moon-setting/mid-night and crows-caw/mid-night can also be easily resolved. Depending on which phase it is in, in fact, the moon can set at any time during the day or night. In this poem we would expect a first-quarter moon (or one slightly further towards full) which would set at midnight (or slightly thereafter if it were more than first-quarter—the full moon sets approximately at dawn). The crows are more problematic. We had no idea whether crows caw during the night, with or without a moonset.⁹ However, the most elementary research (checking the gloss for *wu-ti* 烏啼 in the *Daikanwa jiten*—v. 7, entry 18998. 239) uncovered two other T'ang poems in which *frost* and *crows cawing* (and *moonset* in the latter) seem to be part of a conventional association. The first, Tu Fu's 杜甫 (712–770) "Mu kuei" 暮歸 (Returning at Dusk) has the lines:

To a frost-yellowed, emerald parasol-tree, a white crane settles;
Atop the city wall the watchman's rattle—a crow caws again.¹⁰

霜黃碧梧白鶴栖；上城擊柝復烏啼。

These conventional elements can also be seen in the following couplet from Li Tuan's 李端 (fl. 785) "Sung Ts'ung-hsiung fu Hung-chou Pieh-chia hsiung shan ch'in" 送從兄赴洪州別駕兄善琴 (Seeing Off My Cousin Going to Hung-chou to Become Vice-prefect: My Cousin is Skilled at Playing the Zither):

The cranes dance as the moon is about to set;
Crows caw just as the frost spreads.¹¹
鶴舞月將下，烏啼霜正繁。

And reference to the *Yüeh-fu shih chi* 樂府詩集 confirms this suspicion. There we find that several of the earliest “Pa-ch’ü” 八曲 (Eight Songs) written to the tune “Wu yeh-ti” 烏夜啼 (Night Cries of the Crow) provide a textual background for Chang Chi’s composition. “Number Two,” for example, depicts a persona traveling far from his home:

The long mast, the iron deer, why raise the cloth sail?
Wondering where I am now, a thousand miles from where we began.¹²
長橋鐵鹿子，布帆阿那起？詫儂安在閒，一去數千里。

“Number Three” continues this theme:

Said farewell to home and traveled afar,
My love and I seem to be the only ones apart.
Today no sound of weeping,
As I rent a piece of cloth to send a letter home.¹³
辭家遠行去，儂歡獨離居。
此日無啼音，裂帛作還書。

In the fourth of this series the “black-headed shrike,” a bird considered related to the crow, spoils a liason through its habit of crowing very early¹⁴:

The poor black-headed shrike!
It boasts it knows when dawn will come;
Then mistakenly cries in the middle of the night,
Sending my lover away to brave the dark.
可憐烏白鳥，謾言知天曙，
無故三更啼，歡子昌關去。

“Number Five” returns to the theme of separation and insomnia caused by sorrow:

The crows seem to want to fly off—
Two fly away, each to its own destination.

For the birds to be separated precludes peace of mind—
Crying through the night until the break of dawn.¹⁵

鳥生如欲飛，二飛各自去，生離無安心，夜啼至天曙。

Indeed, already before the T'ang these *yüeh-fu* conventions were combined in most poems written to the title "Wu yeh-ti." A poem by Emperor Chien-wen of the Liang (503–551) provides a good example:

In a courtyard of green grass watching the moon,
Facing a golden door-ornament in an emerald-green hall:
Strumming the singing strings they sound strange at first,
Plucking the zither or wanting to pipe, all the tunes are different.
Unexpectedly the three-legged [crow; i.e., the sun] begins to swallow
 shadows at dawn;
All I can say is that the nine chicks have cried out to each other in
 the night.
Ashamed to say that sleeping alone I weep on my pillow,
I blame it all on the crow nesting by itself atop the city wall.¹⁶

綠草庭中望明月，碧玉堂裏對金鋪，
鳴弦撥瑟發初異，挑琴欲吹衆曲殊，
不疑三足朝含影；直言九子夜相呼，
羞言獨眠枕下流，託道單樓城上烏。

With the development of these conventional associations in mind, the temporal elements stressed by Mr. Fu in his analysis of Chang Chi's poem (and indeed also by Kao Yu-kung and Mei Tsu-Lin in their "Syntax, Diction and Imagery in T'ang Poetry," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 31 [1971], 53, 55 and 61) seem less significant than he would have us believe.

Having gone this far in criticizing Mr. Fu's understanding of the poem, it would be remiss not to offer our own. First, although Chang Chi may well be depicting a scene he experienced, this is not necessarily the case. Equally as important are the mental (topical) associations (memorized lines) he brings to the actual setting. These associations may include some or all of the lines cited above. Thus the key seems to be spatial—distances, motion and countermotion, and of course separation. The persona (or the poet—they are close in this work) is in his boat looking up at the moon as the poem begins. In a pensive mood he slowly lowers his eyes, noticing first the crow which is calling (in the maple tree?) and then the frost (or moonlight)

hovering in the air.¹⁷ The three verbs in this line tend to fragment its syntax. This effect is heightened by sound associations (the consonantal endings of 月 *ngiuat* and 落 *lak*, the assonance of 烏 *qui* and 啼 *thei*, and the nasal finals common to 霜 *shang*, 滿 *man* and 天 *then*) which result in a stacatto 2-2-2-1 or 2-2-3 parsing.¹⁸ The line sets the scene and, by its disjointed pace, echoes the impatience of the persona awaiting the dawn. The interrelationships between moon, crow, frost, and the implied persona-traveller far from home, as noted above, seem to be conventional. Yet their skillful juxtaposition in this poem is perhaps what has made the piece so popular. In line two the persona's vision continues to focus on objects ever closer to him—the river maple, fishermen's lamps (on boats?) or fires (the variant 火 would weaken the overall effect by introducing another human being).

The entire scene, depicted in rich imagery (five images portrayed by the first eleven characters!), is transformed by the verb *tshui* 愁 into an irritant which disorients the persona and keeps him from a sound sleep. This combination of actual (or apparently actual) detail with conventional elements¹⁹ regenerates the potential emotional effect of the poem. The feelings here are those of the persona, who, though placed in a conventional setting, is faced with a real, jarring environment. There is a return in line three to a point distant from the persona, this time in the mind's eye which pictures far off Cold Mountain Temple. The lack of any verb in this line spurs the reader on (the third and fourth line are joined by enjambment), and the sounds of this line (*kui-sui* 姑蘇, a rhymed-compound, *shi-εng-nguai* 城外, affording a blend of the final initial *-ng*, and the alliterative *shen-shi* 山寺) tend to quicken the pace and lull both reader and persona. The fourth line, however, paralleling the motion of the second line, refers the sound and the persona's perception back to his immediate environment (Fu's "inner circle"). No humans are present here either, although they are implicit in the sound of the bell. The time, only hinted at earlier, is now specified. Despite the persona's hopes (and perhaps the reader's expectations—surely this is the function of the bell, to tease the reader and the persona with the prospect of imminent daylight²⁰), it is still deepest night.

The subject of this poem is the sadness of being away from home. It is nowhere, unless in the conventional setting itself, explicit. The artistry lies in unstated irony. Though the persona's means of transport (the boat) remains stationary, he is able to "travel" by means of his senses (and perhaps

via the lines of previous poets who had established the convention utilized here). Yet this motion is illusory, conveyed by the unreliable vehicles of sound, light, and memory, which transmit representations of distant objects to him, but cannot after all overcome these distances. The persona's trip ends when his perception arrives (*tau* 到)—as it must—where it began, back on the traveller's boat.

Notes

1. Most thoroughly perhaps by Arthur E. Kunst in his "A Critical Analysis of Witter Bynner's 'A Night Mooring near Maple Bridge,'" *Tsing-hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, N.S., 7.1 (August 1968), 114–142. Although Kunst's approach is linguistic, he examines a number of previous translations of this poem.
2. From his *The Jongyuan In Yunn* (New Haven: Far Eastern Publications, 1966); some slight simplifications of Stimson's system have been made.
3. *Ch'üan T'ang shih* 全唐詩 (Taipei: Ming-lun ch'u-pan-she, 1971), v. 4, ch. 242, p. 2721.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 2722 and 2725, respectively.
5. I have consulted only the citation of this commentary in P'eng Kuo-tung 彭國棟, *T'ang-shih san-pai-shou shih-hua hui-pien* 唐詩三百首詩話彙編 (A Compendium of Poetry-talk Comments on the Three-hundred Poems of the T'ang) (rpt.; Taipei: Chung-hua wen-hua ch'u-pan shih-yeh-she, 1963), v. 2, p. 408.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 408–409.
7. In fact the gloss under *yeh-chung* 夜鐘 in the *Daikanwa jiten* (v. 3, entry 5763.211) lists three more T'ang poems which refer to bells ringing nocturnally.
8. There is, for example, no such objection in the poetry-talk excerpts on this poem collected in P'eng Kuo-tung. Moreover, it seems unlikely that a traditional Chinese critic would not be totally aware of the movements of the moon; his modern counterpart is often, as a modern man, inattentive to such details of nature.
9. However, it is clear that *wu-chiu* 烏臼, a bird related to the crow, was notorious for cawing in the middle of the night; see the fourth of the "Pa-ch'ü" written to the tune "Wu yeh-ti" discussed below and also entry 18998.66 in v. 7 of Morohashi Tetsuji's 諸橋轍次 *Daikanwa jiten* 大漢和辭典。
10. *A Concordance to the Poems of Tu Fu* (Reprint; Chinese Materials and Research Aids Service Center, 1966), v. 2, p. 536.
11. *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, v. 5, ch. 285, p. 3254.
12. Nakatsuhamō Wataru 中津濱生, ed., *Gakufu shishū no kenkyū* 樂府詩集の研究 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin 汲古書院, 1970), ch. 47, fol. 10a (p. 313). The "iron

- deer" (*t'ieh-iu-tzu*) is a puzzle. Perhaps it refers to an ornament on the prow of the ship. *Ah-na* 阿那 is probably equivalent here to *nai-ho* 乃何.
13. Ibid. The word *ti* 啼, translated here as "weeping," is the same used for the caw of the crow.
 14. Ibid. On the habit of early crowing, see note 9 above.
 15. Ibid. This poem is built on paronomasia. The *sheng* 生 in line three may refer to the *wu-sheng* 烏生 (crows) in line one or to "while alive/in life" (opposed to *ssu-li* 死離 "parted by death").
 16. Ibid. The translation here is very tentative. It would seem there is a persona in rich surroundings (A woman? She is playing a zither.), who is so distraught by her separation that she idles away the night longing for her beloved. She may well be playing "Night Cries of the Crow"—this very tune. Whatever her song, her mood has ruined either her ability to perform or to perceive her own music—it seems mere raucous cawing of crows to her (line six). There is an apparent allusion to the nine crows who were killed by dandies in an earlier *yüeh-fu* (see Yü Kuan-ying 余冠英, *Yüeh-fu shih-hsüan* 樂府詩選 (Hong Kong: Shih-chieh, n.d.), "Wu-sheng" 烏生 (Crows), p. 11. In the final line the persona claims these cries were those of the lonely crow on the city wall (which also fits the tune title!). A "clever" poem, such as Hsiao Kang 蕭綱 was wont to write.
 17. Scholars have puzzled over this image of frost filling the air, too. Many translators have "maneuvered" the frost onto the ground (where they believed it belongs). Other critics see the expression as a metaphoric description of moonlight. There is yet one other possibility, since in earlier times frost was believed to descend through the heavens—see *Huai-nan tzu*, ch. 3, fol. 9b (*Ssu-pu pei-yao* ed.): 至秋三月…青女乃出以降霜雪。
 18. Or even 2-2-1-2, since the "sky" 天 is certainly "filled" 滿 with images.
 19. One might speak of a *topos* here, even though it is the situation—a frosty night, the moon, crows, a traveller—rather than the place, which determines so much of the poem. We find nothing "anxious" about a Chinese poet basing his work on earlier verse, since this is a basic principle of composition, and would therefore prefer to avoid Bloomian jargon. Recently (anticipating the rise of "deconstruction" among critics of Western literatures?) several studies have appeared which are relevant to this brief study: Hans H. Frankel, "The Contemplation of the Past in T'ang Poetry," in *Perspectives on the T'ang*, ed. by Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 345–365; Stephen Owen, "Deadwood: The Barren Tree from Yü Hsin to Han Yü," *CLEAR*, 1.2 (July 1979), 157–179; and William H. Nienhauser, Jr., "From Tewksbury to Dù Fu: Exercises toward Introducing Graduate Students to the Study of Chinese Literature," *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association*, XV. 3 (October 1980), 101–116. See also Stuart Sargent's "Can Latecomers Get There First: Sung Poets and T'ang Poetry," forthcoming in *CLEAR*. Yet another study which merits attention, although not properly concerned with literature as such, is Wang Hsiao-lien's 王孝廉 "Shen-hua yü shih" 神話與詩 (Myth

and Poetry), in *Shih-hsüeh* 詩學, v. 1, ed. by Ya Hsüan 堯弦 (Taipei: Chü-jen, 1976), pp. 289–321, in which Wang deals with the mythological origins of such associations in poetry and even discusses certain conventions which surround the maple tree (pp. 303–311). His findings, although primarily concerned with texts other than those discussed herein, associate water, the “South” of China (i.e., the Yangtze Region), broken hearts, autumn, birds, and returning home with the maple.

20. Similar to the function of the metaphoric “bell” in Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale”:

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!

...

Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music: —do I wake or sleep?

