



MOON KWAN

Collected Poems

POEMS, TRANSLATIONS, FANTASIES, AND PLAYS

EXTREMES AND MODERATIONS:
EARLY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA POETRY

A TEXT-TECH PAPERS PROJECT

Extremes and Moderations

Early Southern California Poetry

Extremes and Moderations is a Text-Tech Papers project devoted to recovering poetry written, published, and circulated in Los Angeles and Southern California. Each volume brings neglected books and poems back into view through carefully prepared texts, archival images, biographical context, and a clear record of the surviving sources.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans

The Text-Tech Papers | Los Angeles, 2026

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ARCHIVAL IMAGES

Three distinct images of the poet and translator, placed before the biographical introduction.



*Moon Kwan, photographed by Margrethe Mather, c. 1918. National Portrait Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution; CCo.*



Moon Kwan, photographed by Nelson Evans before 1922.



Moon Kwan demonstrating a Chinese flute to composer Charles Wakefield Cadman, 1920.

INTRODUCTION

A transpacific career in poetry, translation, journalism, and cinema.

Stage I | Kaiping, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, 1894–1920

Moon Kwan was born on August 24, probably in 1894, in Dawu Village near Chikan in Kaiping County, Guangdong. The date is genuinely disputed: family information used by film historian Stephanie Chung and the California death index support August 24, 1894; a Social Security application gives the same day in 1895; a 1917 Los Angeles record gives 1896; and the Hong Kong Film Directors Guild gives September 30, 1896. The 1894 date is the best-supported choice, but the conflict should remain visible. His father had late-Qing classical training and taught in the village. Kwan entered private school at about seven, read poetry and essays, and was sent to Hong Kong around 1910 to learn English. His later writing repeatedly returned to the village landscape, household, schoolroom, and moral vocabulary of that childhood.

According to the family chronology assembled by Chung, a Washington State University professor identified as Miss Greenlee selected Kwan in 1911 from a group of seventy-five students for study in the United States. He joined an elder brother in San Francisco and worked while studying. His brother's death in 1914 removed both family support and financial security. Convinced that moving pictures could educate a mass public and help create a modern Chinese film industry, Kwan moved to Los Angeles in 1915. Clan connections helped him find initial employment at the Guang Ju Lung grocery, and he washed dishes while looking for film work. A 1917 local record places him at 342 North Main Street. Later bookseller claims that he attended the University of Southern California or the University of California, Berkeley have not been corroborated.

Through artist Howard Willard, Kwan entered the Baker Block, a downtown Los Angeles residence for artists and bohemians. He found extra

work on a Cecil B. DeMille production, took a short film course, and joined an independent picture remembered as *The Foolish Detective*. Although the film was not sold and he was not paid, he worked as assistant director, actor, cook, and general hand, learning camera operation, laboratory processing, and editing. Current Hong Kong Film Archive research also identifies him as translator and assistant director on *The City of Dim Faces* (1918), where he met Anna May Wong. Their relationship continued across years: Kwan taught Wong a Wang Changling poem in Taishanese, and she later recalled and performed it.

Journalist Harry Carr commissioned Kwan to write about his Chinese childhood. A May 2, 1919 letter to Poetry editor Harriet Monroe says that he had written ten Sunday articles for the *Los Angeles Times*, including work on Chinese poetry, and was preparing translations. Two installments of “My Boyhood in China,” reprinted by the *Washington Herald* on September 3 and 10, 1919, survive; they evoke Chu-Yang-Li, the “Village of Facing Light,” a mother’s sleep song, rice fields, school discipline, and a bully called Hungry-Ox. Other reported pieces include two novellas, “Behind the Curtains of Dragon Land,” “The Beauty of Chinese Poetry,” and the translation “Worse Than Tigers.” Most have not yet been recovered. Contemporary publicity called him a “Chinese O. Henry” and cast cultural interpretation as his life-task.

Carr introduced Kwan to D. W. Griffith. On *Broken Blossoms* (1919), Kwan advised on the Chinese male character’s appearance, cultural details, props, and sets. The assignment gave him access and publicity but not control: the film still placed a white actor in yellowface within an Orientalist racial structure. Kwan’s poem “The Greatest Thing in Life,” written after another Griffith photoplay, shows how closely his literary and cinematic worlds overlapped. He was photographed as a poet by Margrethe Mather in 1918 and by Nelson Evans before 1922; participated in the Berkeley and California literary community around Witter Bynner; and contributed “To Witter Bynner” to the 1919 tribute volume *W.B. in California*.

Kwan’s first book, *A Pagoda of Jewels*, was issued in Los Angeles by Joseph A. Eliason Enterprises in 1920—not 1922, as the project filename and some later records suggest. Jason Lester identifies it as the earliest known American poetry collection in English by a person of Chinese descent. Its hybrid architecture is crucial: twelve lyric and aphoristic poems are followed by five comic “Chinese

Junk” vignettes, “A Tale of the Eclipse,” and the one-act fantasy *The Turtle and the Lily*. The book’s mirror metaphor and alternation of lyric, dialect comedy, cultural explanation, and drama present a young transpacific writer negotiating American expectations rather than a conventional single-mode poet. Some comic language accommodates stereotypes current in 1920; this edition preserves it as part of the historical text.

Stage II | Poetry, translation, and return to China, 1920–1932

National magazine publication immediately widened Kwan’s literary record. The November 1920 *Liberator* printed three Wang Wei poems—“The Green Brook,” “A Farm House by the Wai River,” and “Passing the Heng Tze Temple”—translated by “Moon Quan and Max Eastman.” In June 1921, *Poetry* printed Kwan’s versions of Li Po’s “Goodfellowship” and Wang Wei’s “Lonely.” Composer Charles Wakefield Cadman used three Kwan translations for a song cycle, Op. 72: “Moonlit Tears,” “Spring Longing,” and “The Streams of Fate.” The first two texts have not been recovered under those titles; the third appears throughout Kwan’s English books. The collaboration is documented by a 1920 photograph of Kwan demonstrating a Chinese flute to Cadman and by 1921 concert notices.

Discrimination in Hollywood and Kwan’s determination to transfer production knowledge to a Chinese-controlled industry prompted his return to China in 1920, though some later accounts say 1921. Early film-company efforts in Shanghai failed, and he briefly worked as a cashier before joining Minxin in Hong Kong. He worked as a makeup artist on *Rouge* (1925), formed the Nanyue Film Company in Guangzhou, and directed his first film, *Newfound Wealth from a Newborn* (1926). A later American trip brought consulting work on MGM’s *Mr. Wu* (1927), again within a yellowface production. Back in Hong Kong, he directed and taught at the Lianhua studio, training workers who would become major figures in Cantonese cinema.

A Chinese Mirror: Poems and Plays, published by the Phoenix Press in Los Angeles in 1932 with an introduction by Manly P. Hall, enlarged Kwan’s English poetic record from twelve to twenty-four poems and added *The Sword of Heaven*, introduced by George Sterling in 1926. Its new work turns toward desert travel, Indigenous dispossession, labor, freedom, technology,

philosophy, and the Japanese attack on Shanghai. The later *Songs of China: Poems and Plays*, printed in Hong Kong by Wing Fat & Co., is undated in the examined copy; “1949” is only a project filename, and should not be treated as established. It carries the earlier books forward, revises several titles, and adds six poems, including “Dragon Boat Festival,” “The Library,” and “Crossing the Canadian Rockies.”

Stage III | Cantonese cinema, later books, and transpacific legacy, 1932–1995

Kwan became a central builder of Cantonese-language cinema. He helped develop sound production, directed the socially engaged *Lifeline* (1935), and made films of national resistance including *Resistant*, *For Duty’s Sake*, and *Enemy of Humanity*. He helped organize opposition to attempts to suppress Cantonese films and trained roughly twenty younger filmmakers. In the United States in 1941 he wrote, co-directed with Esther Eng, and briefly appeared in *Golden Gate Girl*, a rare transpacific Cantonese production centered on San Francisco Chinese life. After the Japanese occupation he resumed directing in Hong Kong; later works included *The War Ended* (1947), *Is Parents’ Love Ever Rewarded?* (1955), the Eastmancolor *Kwan-ti, God of War* (1956), and his final film, *Charlie Catches the Cat* (1969). The Hong Kong Film Directors Guild lists sixty-one directing credits.

Kwan continued to write in Chinese and English long after the Los Angeles books. Three Chinese poetry editions—*Shan-yuet Zi Ming Ji* (about 1960), *Zi Ming Ji* (1965), and a revised *Zi Ming Ji* (1977)—are documented but have not been digitized in full. His film memoir *Zhongguo Yintan Waishi* appeared in book form in 1976 after a ten-part serialization in *Wide Angle* in 1974; a separate three-part memoir, “A Record of Seeking Dreams in Hollywood,” ran in 1973–74. In 1985 *Renditions* published four Li Bo poems in his translation: “Bring in the Wine,” two poems called “The Long Longing,” and “The Drifting One.” Their complete English texts were not available for this edition. Kwan returned to the United States in 1988 to join family and died in San Francisco on June 17, 1995. His career joins Chinese American poetry, Los Angeles modernism, translation, and the institutional formation of Hong Kong cinema.

ORIGINAL INTRODUCTIONS AND FOREWORD

Manly P. Hall's framing of the enlarged book and Moon Kwan's own statement of purpose.

Manly P. Hall's Introduction

From A Chinese Mirror (1932); reprinted in Songs of China

The kindly reception accorded the earlier collection of poems and plays by Moon Kwan is responsible for the present enlarged edition of his writings. China, one of the oldest civilizations now enduring upon the earth, has produced out of its ample store of genius this delightful personality in whose verses are blended the severe dignity of ancient Cathay and the swift moving spirit of western poesy. The occidental world is just beginning to appreciate the literary artistry of the Orient. A race long bound to the conventions of Grecian and Roman learning is now turning to Asia for a new aesthetic stimulus. We wish for Moon Kwan all well-merited success in bringing to Western thinkers those facts and ideals of art, science and literature upon which the Chinese civilization was originally founded and through the restatement of which not only China but the whole world would be brought to a better state.

Manly P. Hall

Moon Kwan's Foreword

From A Pagoda of Jewels (1920); revised in the later collections

Honorable readers, before you peruse the following pages, I wish to make clear to you the motive behind these lines. First of all, these fragments were written not because I wanted to express myself to the world, but rather to express the thoughts of the world to myself. Since they are only my ideas from the thoughts of the world, they are, therefore, neither new nor original—but as old as the world itself. They are like the winds that blow, the rains that fall, the snows that drift and the clouds that float and all appear at random in the Universe swayed by the unseen hand of Nature.

Who can say that the winds, rains, snows and clouds of this year are not the same as those of last or the year to come? And who can say that the sky of China is not the same as the sky of America? Since neither time nor space can claim the things of Nature as its own, then how can I claim that the thoughts of the world are creations of mine? My work is not the picture that the mirror reflects, but the mirror that reflects the picture. So it is for you, diligent readers, to look into the mirror and see whether the image is ugly or beautiful. And lastly, I wish to apologize for not having the ability to polish the mirror as bright as it might be.

Moon Kwan

EDITORIAL NOTE AND SOURCES

Reading texts, cumulative editions, corrections, and the limits of the surviving archive.

The three English books are cumulative enlargements, not three independent collections. This edition prints each distinct poem once, in the section where it first entered Kwan's book record. Poems from *A Pagoda of Jewels* follow the 1920 Los Angeles scan. The 1932 section contains only poems first added in *A Chinese Mirror*; the undated Hong Kong section contains the six poems first added in *Songs of China*. Later reprints, retitlings, and substantive variants are recorded after the relevant reading text. "Shanghai Invasion" and "The Fall of Shanghai" differ too little to justify printing the poem twice.

Original page images—not the project's earlier reader PDF and not raw OCR—govern lineation, stanza structure, italics, punctuation, and deliberate indents. Narrow-column wraps have been rejoined; scan debris, running heads, and obvious OCR substitutions have been removed. Clear typographical slips have been silently corrected when the intended word is certain. Em dashes have been restored where the page shows a dash rather than a hyphen, and extra spaces around punctuation and quotation marks have been removed.

The five national-magazine translations are transcribed from *The Liberator* (November 1920) and *Poetry* (June 1921). The two Cadman titles whose words have not been located and the four 1985 Li Bo translations are documented but not reconstructed. The three Chinese poetry books are likewise recorded rather than represented by invented translations. *Songs of China* is treated as undated because the examined title and printer pages carry no year; "1949" is a project filename, not bibliographic proof.

The appendices retain the prose and drama Kwan chose to place beside his poems. Comic dialect and racial language are preserved as historical features of

the 1920 text. The plays have been reset as drama: character names, stage directions, scene divisions, and speech paragraphs are distinguished typographically. *The Sword of Heaven* follows the 1932 scan; *The Turtle* and *the Lily* follows its 1920 first printing, with the later reprints recorded. Obvious scanner errors have been corrected against the page images.

A PAGODA OF JEWELS (1920)

The twelve poems of Kwan's first Los Angeles book, in original order.

Reflections of the Wanderer

—1—

For eight years I have drifted in America
Like the rootless weed in the sea;
Vain, vain is the thought of the future path—
Ah, who can foretell? . . .

—2—

Into the world of games I chase the deer,
But some artful hunter is already there!
A stray sheep upon a rocky pass
Is not a sign of fortune.

—3—

Alas, the frothy cloud has no definite home,
It is ever so since the ancient time;
And likewise the endless sea of struggle,
How incessant are its surging waves!

—4—

On the Western window I lean my head
And fain would search the dream of old,
But my heart wings back to Fatherland
When it stirs to the renewal of Spring.

—5—

Like smoke, lightly the rain drifts through the night;
With a warmthless volume by a dim and chill lamp
I reflect upon the lonely person of the lowly me—
Yet, after all, wealth and fame are as vain as dreams . . .
Do I not already hear the cuckoo's wistful call?
It urges the wanderer to return!

A Pagoda of Jewels (Los Angeles: Joseph A. Eliason Enterprises, 1920), pp. 13–14. Reprinted with light punctuation changes in A Chinese Mirror (1932) and Songs of China (undated).

Ambition

Ambition, how powerful it is!
The spirit of ancient Rome.

Ambition, how heroic it is!
The master of Napoleon.

Ambition, how deceitful it is!
The mirage in the desert of life.

Ambition, how cruel it is!
The enslaver of human souls.

Ambition, how inimical it is!
The creator of separations.

Ambition, how fanciful it is!
The builder of air-castles.

Ambition, how heartless it is!
The breaker of home and romance.

Ambition, how deadly it is!
The god of slaughter and war.

A man of ABILITY with no Ambition is like a
water-lily planted in the heart of the desert.

A man of AMBITION with no ABILITY is like a
drop of water poured into a burning house.

A man of ABILITY and AMBITION with no
SENSE of DIRECTION is like one climbing
a tree in the hope of catching a fish.

A man who succeeds is he who succeeded in
making his SOUL the MASTER of his
AMBITION.

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), pp. 14–15. The display capitals and aphoristic indents follow the first edition; later editions reset the prose comparisons in longer lines.

Incense and You

Pure is the fragrant incense
And the flower-like soul of you,
Divine is its drifting beauty
And the delicate form of you.

Magic and mystic musings
The scented smoke has brought,
But none as thrilling and haunting
As the tenderness of your thought.

Sweet and gracious its spirit
As it slowly wafts on high
In gentleness and softness
Like the gaze of your kind clear eye.

Caressing and compelling
Like perfumed mist a part
So is your precious loveliness
Enshrined within my heart.

A-dream, a-dream is the redolent air
And dreamily I see the jewel in your hair.

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), pp. 15–17. Reprinted in *A Chinese Mirror* and, as “Incense, and You,” in *Songs of China*.

To Witter Bynner

I, a wanderer; thou a weaver of the petal-speech,
In the bridge-land of the East and West have met.
Though flowers may bloom and fall,
The Spring breeze shall not forget.

First printed in W.B. in *California: A Tribute* (Berkeley, 1919); reprinted in *A Pagoda of Jewels* (1920), p. 17, and both later English collections.

Melancholy

I used to think there was a Paradise
Where sorrow, grief and care should never be;
There I sought to retire.

Alas! such a place is a vain dream,
Sorrow fills the Universe like wind and rain.

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 17; reprinted in A Chinese Mirror and Songs of China.

To a Pine Tree

Thou art larger and loftier now, beloved pine tree;
Much larger than thy former size,
And much loftier than thou used to be.
Art thou too large for the rambling vine to grow upon thee now?
Art thou too lofty for the homeless bird to nest upon thee now?
Nay, thou art ever gracious, generous and fair!
But only the sacred phoenix should share thy grace,
And only the delicate ferns would dare embrace.

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 18; reprinted in A Chinese Mirror and Songs of China.

Ghost of Love

Whence comest thou, ghost of love?
From the hell below or the Heaven above?
From the world without or the heart within?
From the path of virtue or the sea of sin?

Thou comest like a tender wind, soothing and singing,
Singing songs of happiness, sorrow, joy and pain.
Thou goest like a temple bell, sobbing and ringing,
Ringing tunes of loneliness, shadow, loss and gain.

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 18; reprinted in A Chinese Mirror and Songs of China.

Upon the Path of Life

Upon the Path of Life I roam
And search for the Light of Truth . . .

But lo, so dark, so dark the Path!
Where is the Light of Truth?

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 18; reprinted in A Chinese Mirror and Songs of China.

The Greatest Thing in Life

Written after seeing D. W. Griffith's photoplay.

God forgot the world:
Man lost his soul.

Selfishness, jealousy, vanity, pride
Stirred the hateful wave of human tide
When came the hordes of Huns,
Who only valued men as guns.
Such test of horrors set our hearts aflame,
To make us know Life's greatest thing,
Which knows no race, no rank,
No rich nor poor,
Which builds the divine bridge to every bank
And reaches each man's door.

'Tis Love—the Greatest Thing in Life:
Not alone that which we offer to a wife,
But that which in the bosom glows
And from inward to outward flows
Into the empty souls of God's forgotten beasts
Until they know the brotherhood of peace.

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 19. The poem responds to Griffith's 1918 film *The Greatest Thing in Life*; it was reprinted in both later collections.

A White Rose

A white rose—a frail rose
Obscure and lone in a garden grows . . .

Does it wish to adorn the dragon-vase
For guests to gaze at its perfect face,
Or rather dwell in its shadowed place
And quietly fade in nature's grace?

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 19; reprinted in A Chinese Mirror and Songs of China.

The Little Bird

Little bird, thou hast been hovering all the day . . .
There are many branches on many a tree,
Yet thou art not able to choose one to nest.
Ah, I know, little bird, I know . . .

I, too, have been wandering for a long, long way . . .
There are many things and faces I see,
But none that is able to offer me rest.
Ah, little bird, I know!

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 20; reprinted in A Chinese Mirror and Songs of China.

The Streams of Fate

The Streams of Fate flow
With murmuring waters, drifting cold.
Vague, wordless fears . . .

Here two flowers grow
Through lonely years.

Their souls are ours in woe,
Petals are tears.

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 20; reprinted in both later collections. Charles Wakefield Cadman set the text as Op. 72, no. 3.

PERIODICAL TRANSLATIONS, 1920–1921

Wang Wei and Li Po in The Liberator and Poetry.

The Green Brook

Wang Wei, eighth century. Translated by Moon Quan and Max Eastman.

Talk of discovering the Earthly Paradise—
I'll follow this green little brook of water
Up into the mountains of ten thousand curves;
Before the path has wound a hundred miles,
Music will mingle and voices with the rocks,
Color and quietness among the green pines,
Heavily, heavily, the lilies and the reeds,
Gleamingly, gleamingly, the mosses and the grasses,
Shining to my heart will make it void and still—
So clear and pure a stream it is. I'll rest
On this huge rock, drop hook, and stay forever.

The *Liberator* 3.11 (November 1920), p. 7. The magazine credits "Moon Quan and Max Eastman"; the variant spelling is retained in the subtitle.

A Farm House by the Wai River

Wang Wei, eighth century. Translated by Moon Quan and Max Eastman.

The resting sun shines on the highlands only;
The sheep return along the pauper street;
The old man peering for his youthful shepherd
Leans on his staff beside the brown thatched door;
The cocks are young, the rice-blades very green,
The silk-worms lie in many mulberry leaves;
The farmers bringing on their backs their plows,
Come in together, and they talk as friends;
In envy of their idle quietude
I pensively recite The Hermit's Song.

The Liberator 3.11 (November 1920), p. 7.

Passing the Heng Tze Temple

Wang Wei, eighth century. Translated by Moon Quan and Max Eastman.

I did not know it was the Heng Tze temple,
High up in the cloudy-headed hills,
The aged trees—no trodden path comes here.
From what deep mountain heart resounds a bell?
Is it but water sobbing on the perilous rock?
The sun's declining color chills the pines,
And a thin twilight fills the winding gorge.
The demon greed of power is silenced here.

The Liberator 3.11 (November 1920), p. 7.

Goodfellowship

A fragment by Li Po. Translated from the Chinese by Moon Kwan.

Hast thou not beheld the Yellow River
Which flows from Heaven?
It runs rapidly down and empties into the sea,
Nevermore to return.

Hast thou beheld the mirror in the hall
That reflects the grief of white hair?
In the morning it is like black silk,
In the evening it will be covered with snow.

While we are in the mood of joy,
Let us drink!
Let not the golden bottle be lonely,
Let us waste not the moon!

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse 18.3 (June 1921), p. 130.

Lonely

Wang Wei, eighth century A.D. Translated from the Chinese by Moon Kwan.

When the moon begins to grow
And the autumn dew to fall,
My silken jacket is lightly thin,
But I have not changed:
Wistfully I play my lute
Long and deep into the night,
For my heart is shy
Of the empty chamber.

Poetry: A Magazine of Verse 18.3 (June 1921), p. 130. This translation is distinct from Kwan's original poem of the same title in *A Chinese Mirror*.

POEMS FIRST ADDED IN A CHINESE MIRROR (1932)

The poems added when Kwan doubled and reorganized his English collection.

Lonely

Many a time have I answered
The canary's call.
Many a time
Have I grieved
The flowers fall.
But who can answer me when I sing
Of life's
Sweetest thing?
There's no one—
No one at all
To answer
My heart's secret call!

A Chinese Mirror: Poems and Plays (Los Angeles: Phoenix Press, 1932), p. 17; reprinted in Songs of China. This is Kwan's original English poem, not the Wang Wei translation of the same title.

A Golden Altar

Your bright smile has charmed the world,
And your dancing eyes
Have captured my heart.
I kneel at your feet
As a worshiper before his God.
But
As the holy idol
Is unaware of its worshiper;
So you have never known of my love;
Which I keep always within,
Like a goddess
In a golden altar . . .
Too sacred to be watched
By mortal eyes.

A Chinese Mirror (1932), p. 19; reprinted in Songs of China.

Air Ride

Up! up in the air!
Drop! drop mortal care!
Here, here I am free
As winds would be!
Go! swift soaring car,
Challenge the shooting star!
I want to feel the soft bosom
Of yon white cloud
And tear away the gloomy sun's thick shroud!
What matter if I should fall?
As long as I hear freedom's call.
What can there be to fear,
When heaven is so near!

A Chinese Mirror (1932), p. 24; reprinted in Songs of China.

The Grassless Valley of Sand

Like sailing on a river of fire
We speed through the grassless valley of sand.

Long, blue shadows
Of chained hills,
Stretch like dead dragons
In a veiled bed.

And barren peaks of purple
Stand
Like crowns of sapphire and gold,
Against
A red horizon.

The breast of mother earth
Is already too dry and shrunken
To bear
Any vegetation.

Only a few scattered cactus
Pointing at the flaming sun,
Like giant fingers
Of mother earth.

As if to say:

“See, I still have milk enough
To nourish
My only child!”

A Chinese Mirror (1932), p. 29; reprinted in Songs of China.

An Indian in Yuma

Along the avenue of flying wheels
And swift passing feet
You ride
Like your forefathers of forgotten days.

Your stoical face and long dusty hair
Tell me that you are still loyal
To your race.
Yet your ragged garments mark you
For a victim
Of civilized ways.

Your ancestors were once
Masters of rocky hills
And grim beasts.

Yet your kin are disappearing
From the earth
As fast as pale stars
From the dawning sky.

Do you know why?
It's because you live to fear God
While others live
To conquer Nature.

A Chinese Mirror (1932), p. 30; reprinted in Songs of China.

Coolie Song

Lay ah hown—
Off the traffic zone!

Lay ah hown—
Watch your own!

Lay ha hown—
Pull it alone!

Lay ah hown—
Watch the stone!

Lay ah hown—
Aching bone!

Lah ah hown—
The devil is known!

First printed as “Coolie Song” in *A Chinese Mirror* (1932), p. 31; reprinted under the same title in *Songs of China*. Some contents lists shorten the title to “Coolie.”

Song of the Peasant

1st Moon

With burning incense and candle light,
With firecrackers shot through the night,
With all the good will and spirit gay
To welcome the arrival of a better day
With merry greetings and festive song,
With rolling drums and beating gong,
With pastry of rice and delicious food
To ward off the devil and invite the good.

2nd Moon

Spring is chill with a gentle rain—
Soon the robins will come to sing
And tell us to sow the seeds of grain
Into the moistened soil of spring.
Beside the earthen stove I sit,
To repair tools and plows refit.
With infinite leisure and in quiet way,
I work through the hours of a rainy day.

3rd Moon

Nesting under the eave, the swallows have come,
And the moon has been thrice full in total sum.
Come, children, we must leave for the field
And transplant the crop that will in plenty yield.
Oh no, 'tis not hard, and 'tis not toil—
Just an occupation for a son of the soil.
You will appreciate the rice
When you have to work hard for the price.

4th Moon

When the sun is rising high
In the southern fields I weed,
And the cowherd comes with rice to feed
The hungry belly of the working man.

In bamboo baskets and pottery pan,
Are mustard-greens and salty fish.
With bean-curd fill a china dish—
And satisfy the inner man!

A Chinese Mirror (1932), pp. 32–33. The later *Songs of China* contents calls the poem “Peasant Song,” while its poem page prints “Song of the Peasant.”

Freedom

The east wind has blown.
The naked limbs of the peach tree
Are adorned with young tender buds.

The butterfly has already awakened
From her long winter-sleep.

By the window the little lark
Flutters fervently within her cage
As if to say:

“Oh let me go!
I want to go out to the open space
Where I can fly with a natural grace.
I don’t want to eat your grain
Out of your charitable hand.

This is not a comfortable nest—
Only a jail at the best!
I want to soar above meadows
And cleave the cloud shadows.

I want to find out where the rainbows meet
And dance amid petals with merry feet.
I want to visit gardens wherever I go
And sing to the mate I know.”

“Ah, then you shall go—
Go where the skies are blue;
And let your fancy lead you
To rise or fall,
And answer Nature’s call.”

A Chinese Mirror (1932), pp. 36–37; reprinted in Songs of China.

The Value of Life

Life is only a fleeting moment
Of a dreamless day.

So while we may
Let's snatch this moment
And make it stay
In the memory
Of a future day.

A Chinese Mirror (1932), p. 39; reprinted in Songs of China.

The Inexorable God of Life

From East and West
Two orioles fly.
They perch together for a space
To sing the glory
Of dawn,
And the secret of life.

But dawn is veiled by a grey mist—
And life
Is only a long dark way!

Then apart they fly.
One to the North
Where the wind is chill;
One to the South
Where the sun is red . . .
Sacrifices before the altar
Of the inexorable
God of Life.

A Chinese Mirror (1932), p. 40; reprinted in Songs of China.

Life's Secret

Don't regret the past,
But make the most of the hours that last.
And don't worry over the day
That is well on its way.

Don't grumble over a hard time,
But know that the worst is the best in its prime.

Don't weaken in trouble,
But lift up your spirit and efforts re-double.

Don't go astray
Like a butterfly in May.

Don't envy wealth, nor look down on the poor
But open your heart as freely as a temple door.

Don't cover another's virtue but another's sin,
And hold every man as dear as your kin.

If you can be so,
Then you will know
The secret of life
And the aim of all strife.

A Chinese Mirror (1932), p. 41; reprinted in Songs of China.

Shanghai Invasion

At the Yangtse's mouth on the Pacific shore
With a population of two millions or more,
Stands the City of Shanghai;
With lives swarming the streets
And buildings crowding the sky.
From the four corners of the earth
People of every color came!
Men of lowly birth and men of fame,
With goods by every nation made—
All come for the gold and trade.
They drink champagne cold and hot rice gin
With foods from bird's nest and shark's fin.
They import foreign music and passion's dance,
And pay a thousand Yen for a maiden's glance.
Their minds are worldly and senses keen
For exotic pleasure and strange scene.
Some call it a city of mad whirl-pools
While some call it a melting pot of fools.
Then one day—
They ceased to make merry . . .
Up comes the devil from the Land of Cherry,
With flying steel and deadly gun.
Oh, the wild blood of the beast has run!
So such is the way—
Shells of gas and bombs of fire . . .

And the killing that never seems to tire.
Like summer storms the bullets pour
While the blood-thirsty devils roar.
Flee! poor soul, and look never more
At your jewelled mansion and banquet-hall—
Who would care to save a crumbling wall
When death is pounding at the door?
Myriad are the shooting crafts that fly
To attack the homeless millions from the sky
Until explosions mingled with terror-stricken cry
And over corpses iron heels tramp by;
Until churches and temples fall in smoke

While the devil laughs loudly to joke;
Until the Yangtse swells with innocent blood
And man is devil and devil is god;
Until the dark grey soil turns red
And horrors reach even unto the dead.
Only a few of the rich and strong
Escaped south to Hongkong,
Or to the settlement
Where flags of powerful nations fly,
With great “iron-horses” that shoot up high.
But what became of the helpless throng?
Since the legs are short and arms are long?
The children and feeble among the ruins lie
Waiting for the devil to watch them die.

A Chinese Mirror (1932), pp. 43–44. Songs of China reprints the poem as “The Fall of Shanghai,” with only minor punctuation and wording changes; the later state is therefore recorded rather than duplicated.

POEMS FIRST ADDED IN SONGS OF CHINA (UNDATED)

Six poems added in the undated Hong Kong enlargement.

The Golden Path

Do you remember, dearest one,
That infinite hour by the sea,
When your sweet soul call'd out to me?

Do you remember that rosy sun?
Between misty isles roll'd on,
To brighten life with golden dawn?

That golden path was yours and mine,
When the ripples sought to entwine
My soul and my heart into thine!

Songs of China: Poems and Plays (Hong Kong: Wing Fat & Co., undated), p. 27. This is one of six poems not present in the 1932 collection.

Sailing Through Japan Sea in Rain

A veil of mist, a crown of cloud,
A tiny face, conceited and proud!
On Pacific's bosom you stand,
Touching the world with wanton hand.
With wicked wish and wanting heart,
Watching the world to take a part!
But beware! O sister of desire,
Remember the world is of fire!

Songs of China (undated), p. 30. The reading “tiny” follows the scan; the OCR layer incorrectly gives “tinny.”

The Dragon Boat Festival

“Once, long ago,
A minister of Cho,
Was very kind and wise
And full of good advice.
But the king listened to his foe,
Who sponsored his wanton wish;
Till the minister’s heart sank low.
Into the river of Mi-lo
He leapt to answer the king’s wish,
To feed the belly of the fish.
But the people knew the sad tale soon.
So on the fifth day of the fifth moon,
Made a Festival of Dragon Boat;
To comb the rivers and city moat,
And cook’d tamales of meat and rice
For the spirit that was kind and wise.”

Such was the legend of Mi-lo,
And why dragon boats yearly row.

Yo, yo, yo!
Here they go!
Fire-crackers roar—
Adding power to the oar;
Gay banners fly—
Lending colors to the sky!

Dong, dong, dong!
Keeping pace with the gong!
Tom, tom, tom!
Count the tempo of the drum!

Here’s where the water devils meet
And dragons dance with merry feet.

Yo, yo, yo!
The louder they yell

The faster they go!

Ho, ho, ho!

The harder they race

The better the show!

Songs of China (undated), pp. 40–41. Scanner substitutions in “Mi-lo,” “fifth,” “knew,” and “feet” have been corrected against the page image.

The Library

Each year, flowers in the garden would bloom anew,
So too, songs of the soul would echo through the ages.

Songs of China (undated), p. 45.

On Planting a Tree in the Poet's Garden

Out of the chaotic strife
Nature has given you life.
I only open your eyes
So that you may know and see,
Where the world of beauty lies.
Where the poets call paradise!
All these—and more you may see,
Through eyes of eternity,
From the view point of a tree.

Songs of China (undated), p. 46.

Crossing the Canadian Rockies

Look! look at Nature's magic show!
Look at the black giants in a row!
Look at the stage of Great Divide,
And the green banners on the side!

Show of sunrise, show of sunset,
Showing scenes you will not forget.
Look to the east, look to the west,
Look at the Glacier and the rest!

'Tis not drama of human care,
But opera of divine air!
Hear the whistle and hear the roar?
Such melodies—forever pour!

Songs of China (undated), p. 47.

APPENDIX I | COMIC PIECES

*The five “Bits of Nonsense or ‘Chinese Junk’” from *A Pagoda of Jewels*.*

Loo Koo—Noodle Poet

Poor Noodle-Poet

Hallo! august 'Melican man,
Me wantta tell you samething,
Make you laugh and sing.
Ah, you say me no can?
Oh please, let's try at least,
Don't treat me as if a beast.
Me wantta laugh and sing
Likee birds in Spring.
Me wantta be a maker of pome,
But them say me "No-body-home!"
Alas! alas! what can'e do?
Poor noodle-poet Loo Koo!
Ah, me wantta know
What made Walt Whitman so
Swell with fame,
And people tell his name?
He got a beard white and long,
That what made known his song!
Me thenk me gonta get one too,
Meybe it will advertise poor Loo.

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 23.

Cooking Is Art—Eating Is Art

Long time ago me got a job fo' cook,
Learnt ta makee cake—from out a book.
One day me makee a strawbelly pie
And it was beautiful fo' the eye.
Me took it outa table with pride.
When boss cut it him suddenly cried:
“O Loo! I can't eat, too much juice!”
Me 're verie muchee surpri'd and said “E'cuse.”

“Cooking is art,
Eating is art.
Me done me part,
You show you art.”

He took the pie with his big hand
And ate just likee jazz band!
When the juice ran down his chin
He licked it—heap easy—likee sin.

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), pp. 23–24.

The Amateur Moonshiner

Me hikee up hills other day,
Met a wild man on my way.
He made a funny face as he came near
And whispered with much mystery in my ear:

“In my cave I got a trunk
Full of stuff to make you drunk.
... Slip over a dollar—
I show you my parlor.”

“No, thanks,” said I,
“Me are not dry.”
And passed him by.

This morning, me saw him on street,
Tramping by with jail-ward feet.

“By gum!” he cried with pain,
“..... Caught again!”

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 24.

Sailor No Good for Husband

Last night, fo' moonlight's sake,
Me walkee 'round West Lake;
Saw a pretty damsel and a sailor boy,
Spooning cute as a Christmas toy.

He got sentimental and proposed
While she lingered with eyes closed:

"Do you love me?" asked he,
But cold as glass was she.

"Will you marry me?"
Again asked he,
As silly as can be.
But she was silent,
Showed him no relent.

"Will you be my wife?"
He questioned with fire
From keen desire.

She was having the time of her life,
Amused, but stayed dumb.
His heart beat likee drum.

"Dog-gone-it!" he finally cried,
Got up with a sort of cockadoo pride,
"I have made myself a fool!"
"No," said she, "You are no fool,
But you are too cool—
Too cool to be my groom:

You have a ship for room,
And an ocean for home."

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), pp. 25–26.

Chop-Stick Poor Kick for 'Melican Man

One day me ate Chop Suey in Chinatown,
Saw 'Melican man with heavy frown.
“How the hell!” he said with wicked tongue,
“Can you eat with chop-stick?
It makes me go crazy and sick!”
“Be patient, 'Melican man,
By and by you surely can.”
Said me, trying to be nice,
But he twinkled his eye like a mice.

“Gosh!” and pretended to be wise,
“I would be a fool
If I use such a queer tool!
You can't get a 'kick'
Out o' that chop-stick.”

A Pagoda of Jewels (1920), p. 26. The source partially censors “hell”; the restored word is supplied from context.

APPENDIX II | A TALE OF THE ECLIPSE

The complete prose fantasy from A Pagoda of Jewels (1920).

When God created the sun He created the moon to be its mate- The sun is the Master of Day—masculine and warm; the moon is the Hostess of Night—feminine and cold. Now it is the Will of God that Lady Moon should come out of the East with full face to meet her mate, Master Sun, once a month for a few moments before he enters the West-gate to rest. This enables them to renew their intimate feeling and reminds them that they are the heavenly models of perfect companion ship which is set for mankind to look upon, and that their duties are to work in harmony to enlighten the Universe. But alas, Lady Moon is a bashful maiden, too bashful to show her entire features before the males. She is soft-hearted, though timid and cold, yes, very cold. She always wears a veil to cover part of her face when duty requires her to appear in the day. How inconsiderate God is," she had selfishly thought, "to insist that I should come out with my full face to meet that Fire-like Villain once a month! It is plain that she dislikes Master Sun's flamy appearance and dreads the coming of the Meeting-Day. The whole family of Heaven always have pity on her because of her bashfulness. They do not wish to see her suffer in facing her disagreeable mate for these few unescapable moments, and often Sister-Mist veils her or Cousin-Cloud entertains him. Now it happened that, by the command of God, Aunt-Wind took Sister-Mist and Cousin-Cloud for a visit in the South on the very day of the Fatal-Meeting. The desert spread clearly from horizon to horizon like a sheet of gold; the meadow

stretched vastly and miles away like a miles piece of green jade. The restless ocean lay with intense moods and the motionless mountain stood calmly in repose. Everything was vivid and bright. Through the great space of silence and emptiness floated an air of resentment. . . For it was time for Lady Moon to appear! Timidly, oh so timidly, she tiptoed out the gray Gate at the East according to God's Will. There was a slowness in her motion and her

countenance was yellow with fear. How frightful and loathsome was her unbeloved mate's radiant face! But oh, what joy and delight for Master Sun! Has he not been traveling and toiling alone all day and without a soul of female tenderness near him? Now he beheld the full beauty of Lady Moon and was in toxicated. His glaring eyes were glowing with golden dreaminess, changing into dull amber and then turning into lustrous red.' 'How thoughtful God is!" he secretly rejoiced, "to have Aunt-Wind take Sister- Mist and Cousin-Cloud away. So seldom I have this pleasure! Alas, how Lady Moon suffered! What humiliation she endured! If the Shooting-Star had been there she would have directed it to shoot into his unholy eyes! But none were there—alas, none to help her. Even her dearest maid, the Evening-Star, was still locked in the Day-Chamber of Heaven. . . Aye, she could do nothing but to endure. She had glazed her blue eyes with resentment and frozen her pale face with fright, though Master Sun heeded her not. "Oh, what a pity that thou art so timid and disagreeable." Master Sun grinned disdainfully, "Did the Creator not mean to create thee as a thing to look at—a thing to amuse?"

Lady Moon rose a bit in anger. The great humiliation had overcome her bashfulness and fear, and no longer could she retain her gentle manner. "I need not thy pity nor thy attention, she sharply retorted. My love lies with mankind; I love them and they all love me, whether rich or poor; rough or gentle, they never tire of seeing me; I lure the poets to sing and lovers to call; I soothe the weary travelers to rest and console the broken hearts of the lonely ones. What good art thou? There are none on earth who love thee; they loathe thy cruel Nature of Fire! "Ha! ha!" Master Sun laughs amusingly, "How ignorant art thou! Knowest thou not my power? Oh well, what can one expect from the sharp and good-for-nothing tongue of a female? Shall I tell thee about my power? Keep thyself calm then, lest thou may faint away ere finish. I light the Universe for man to toil; heat the earth for plants to grow; steam the water into air for rain and give warmth to the world; without me, all things would fail to grow and humanity cease to live. Now how would my power compare to thy frivolous beauty that can only bring to mankind a mere moment of pleasure?" He paused here and gazed at Lady Moon with an air of great importance as though he had expected her to faint upon hearing of his power. But Lady Moon did not faint. She was cold and impassive. "Well I must retire now," he continued in a disappointed tone, "Farewell lady, till next month. I shall breathe warmth into thy soul." And he disappears into the horizon at the West. Lady Moon was filled with humiliation and anger. "I could not forgive him!"

she murmured bitterly. Aye, such an unbearable insult! . . . No, she would not forgive him—that Fire-like Villain! So she went and complained to God and God consoled her, saying:

"I know it all, my child. It was he who started the quarrel and he shall be punished according to the Fixed-Law. Now go thou to thy duty.' Wherefore, Lady Moon took her leave obediently with gratitude; and God, at once, summoned the Imperial black slave, who bears the bloomy title of "Eclipse," to arrest Master Sun and imprison him in a dark cell for the period of time that the Fixed-Law decreed. And when Master Sun came out of the cell he was greatly subdued. His rude and haughty manner was gone and he dare not treat Lady Moon any more with his former contempt. Ah, how true it is that failure and defeat make us be humble. . . . However, success and victory often lead us to be conceited. From now on, Lady Moon would no longer regard Master Sun as her mate or the Master of Day. Vanity and pride were now overwhelming her and consuming up all the tenderness, loveliness, sweetness, gentleness, grace and all the refined qualities that belong to the true feminine being. She now would tease Master Sun as the "Fire-like Villain" or laugh at him as a "Jail-bird," until Master Sun cannot bear all the disdain and humiliation any longer. So he, too, went and complained to God and God consoled him, saying: "I know it all, my child. It is she who is now spoiled and she shall be punished according to the Fixed-Law. Now go thou to thy duty." Wherefore, Master Sun took his leave obediently with gratitude; and God, at once, summoned "Eclipse" to fetch Lady Moon and imprison her in a dark cell for the period of time that the Fixed-Law decreed. Hence it is said, that whenever Master Sun or Lady Moon, commits an unprincipled act, God always knows the Truth, "Eclipse" never fails to perform his duty, and thus the Fixed-Law in Heaven never has been violated.

APPENDIX III | THE SWORD OF HEAVEN

A one-act fantasy; introduction by George Sterling, dated San Francisco, 1926.

Out of China, mysterious and ever enduring, comes this dramatic and significant fantasy, “The Sword of Heaven.” It embodies the priceless thought that though power be the way to the attainment of the heart’s desire, it is efficient only when the desire is unselfish. The young Prince of China asks for the Sword of Heaven, with what seems to him a noble and sufficient motive. But a nobler and more imperative motive existed—the salvation of a kingdom and its folk—and beside that motive his love for the Princess seemed small and unworthy. Hence the Sword that should save her nation from death was refused him, and he nearly became its victim. But the Princess, casting aside, in an exaltation of unselfishness, her dream of love and its happiness, and asking for power only that she might use it in behalf of others, was freely granted the Sword of Heaven. Mankind, by reason of its own self-seeking, is ever united against the individual who seeks self. But let that individual show self-denial, and that same mankind will serve his purposes and heap him with honors. It is thus that we show our true ideals, however thwarted and betrayed in the struggle for existence. China, first to light the lamp of Truth among the nations of the world, contains in her literature and sacred writings many lessons as precious as this one shown in “The Sword of Heaven.” It is only by the realization that vain desires are the basis of all pain and strife that the world may be led at last to true peace and brotherhood.

George Sterling

Characters

Sun Liang — Prince of Wei

Ying Ying — Princess of Han

The Giant — Guardian of the Sword of Heaven

Loy Poo — A Watchman

Scenes

1. The Royal Garden of Han

2. The Summit of Woo Chung Mountain

Time: Long, long ago

SCENE I

The royal garden of Han. At the rise of the curtain, the scene is dimly revealed in moonlight. The background is in darkness. In the foreground there are a few leafy boughs of willow drooping on one side, and a row of flowers in porcelain vases arranged in Chinese fashion on the other. Below the willow boughs is a tapestry-covered bench on which Princess Ying Ying reclines asleep. A watchman walks slowly across the stage, beating his drum and gong thrice at a time. This is to indicate the time of the night. Ying Ying moves restlessly, to register dreaming. Then the background is brightened to reveal the giant, seated on a snow-capped peak with the magic sword in his hands. He rises slowly to his full height, flashes the sword thrice and speaks a solemn message in Chinese. Then the light gradually fades out. Ying Ying wakes up, looking around with fear.

PRINCESS

What a dream! What a dream! What did the giant say? He called his great sword the Sword of Heaven. I am afraid! Oh, that Sun Liang were here.

PRINCE

(Calls from behind the scene)

Ying Ying! . . . Ying Ying!

PRINCESS

Who calls my name? Can it be the sweet voice of Sun Liang?

PRINCE

(Enters and peeps about, then calls in restrained voice)

Ying Ying! . . . Ying Ying. . .

PRINCESS

Sun Liang! You have come?

PRINCE

Yes, my sweet one.

PRINCESS

And you are not false to me?

PRINCE

Should I not cherish your love, false would I be indeed. What news have you from your father?

PRINCESS

(She frowns and turns her face aside, shakes her head and sighs)

Alas! No good news, my lord. It will break your faithful heart as it has already broken mine.

PRINCE

The earth may sink and the sky may fall, but so faithful is my heart that it cannot break. Have I not the throbbing of your own to give it strength and life?

PRINCESS

But I fear the woe is so great that it will crush you, as an ill wind crushes a fragile flower.
..

PRINCE

Our love is stronger than the wind, so it cannot be crushed. Come, I am ready to hear the woeful news.

PRINCESS

My father's land is threatened with destruction by countless thousands of Tartars from the north, unless...

PRINCE

(Anxiously)

Unless?

PRINCESS

Unless I wed the barbarian chief!

PRINCE

You, as pure as a newly blossomed lily, to wed the barbarian chief? O Heaven! No, no; never!

PRINCESS

My father wills it—to save our beloved land from destruction...

PRINCE

(Bitterly)

Is not your father able, with the dignity and power of a king, to shelter his own daughter from a Tartar beast? I shall go and ask my own sire to grant me a thousand men, weak as they are from long years of war with the Mongols. I shall lead them against the Tartars. And perhaps, with the light of our love and faith, we may win!

PRINCESS

But the Tartars are countless; your father can spare only a thousand men. The Tartars are strong, your men are weak. Oh you must not go, my lord. How can I bear to see you leading your innocent people against the cruel barbarians, like a flock of sheep to slaughter, and all for me! . . .

PRINCE

Have faith, sweet one. The eyes of Heaven are not blind, the evil forces will not endure. The sword of justice strikes with giant strength.

PRINCESS

The sword! The giant! My dream!

PRINCE

You had a dream? Tell me!

PRINCESS

While I was waiting for you, a wind came suddenly upon me and put me to sleep. I felt myself in the dark, lost from you. I called—none answered. . .

PRINCE

Then what? Tell me.

PRINCESS

Then came a light from the sky and revealed a narrow path stretching up to the top of a snow-capped mountain. . .

PRINCE

Yes, a light—a mountain top!

PRINCESS

On the summit of the mountain was a giant with a great sword in his hand. I saw you running up the path, so I ran after you—

PRINCE

(Anxiously)

Then I stopped and waited for you?

PRINCESS

No, I seemed to be alone. The giant spoke. He called his great sword the Sword of Heaven. All that he said I could not understand.

PRINCE

My love, your dream reveals a way of hope for us. Have you never heard of the giant and his magic sword?

PRINCESS

No, my lord.

PRINCE

Far, far above the homes and cities, above seashores and valleys, is the summit of Woo Chung mountain—guarded always by the giant who is keeper of the sword. It is a magic sword that can level cities and destroy great armies, and the hand that holds it is invincible!

PRINCESS

Oh, that we possessed this wonderful sword!

PRINCE

Ah, countless warriors, magicians and men of might have sought to gain that sword in vain—its mighty giant guardian struck them down, one by one, until the mountain trails are strewn with their bones.

PRINCESS

Those men may have gone with wanton or with wicked purpose. But we shall go to beg him for the sword in the name of love and for the good of our land and people.

PRINCE

If your love be as deep as mine, your courage and faith as unflinching, we may be able to gain that sword and pierce the black heart of the Tartar chief who threatens our happiness. But if we fail. . .

PRINCESS

We cannot fail. Put me to the test. We shall win!

PRINCE

(A white ray shoots on from the right.)

We shall, we shall! For look! The light of our faith and love has opened a way for us!

(He puts his arm about her and they exit through the light.)

SCENE II

The summit of Woo Chung mountain. The background is a dark sky with a crescent moon and a few stars. The giant is discovered, seated upon the snow-capped peak as in scene one. A skull and a few bones scattered about. Prince Sun Liang enters and Ying Ying follows. Both seem to be exhausted. Sun Liang kicks the skull and startles with fear.

PRINCE

Behold, the giant!

PRINCESS

Yes, ready to scatter our bones along the trail. Keep me close to you, my lord, so that if our fates are no better than the others, we may at least die together.

PRINCE

No, you stay here while I go forth to speak to him. (He goes a step forward and the giant moves.)

PRINCESS

(Frightened)

Come back to me, I am afraid!

PRINCE

Fear not, sweet one. He will not harm us who have come with noble intentions. (He steps nearer and speaks to the giant.) O great spirit, keeper of Heaven's decree—we are here with humble hearts to beseech you: grant us the sword, so that we may protect our love from the greedy Tartar beast. (The giant rises to his feet and raises the sword as if ready to strike. Sun Liang retires hastily and Ying Ying holds him, both tremble with fear.)

PRINCESS

He has no mercy, my lord. We have failed!

PRINCE

Have faith, beloved. True gold fears no fire. Is not our love as pure as true gold? I shall try again! (He goes, and the giant flashes the sword. Sun Liang retreats again.)

PRINCESS

Let me go forth, my lord, and make my appeal. And if his heart is as cruel as he looks, then let him strike me first! (She approaches the giant.)

PRINCE

(With an effort to stop her)

No, you must not go, my love.

(Ying Ying beads not. The giant flashes the sword and she startles with a pause, then goes to kneel below. The giant flashes the sword once more then remains impassive. Ying Ying pleads.)

PRINCESS

O wonderful one! You are mighty and your eyes flash fire, but your duty is to carry out the command of Heaven. There in your hand is the instrument of power, the magic sword. You can, if you will, unite our two souls forever, and save me from the hateful embraces of the Tartar. But to urge our love would be a selfish thing. I love my lord, but I do not urge my love. I speak for our people, beloved above all else, our beloved land threatened by the invasion of the Tartar barbarians. Here at your feet I sacrifice my love, and ask you only this: Save our people from the Tartar foe! O wonderful one, place the sword in our hands. I promise you that we shall forget our own unhappiness, and remember only the land and people that we love.

(Lightning flashes with low rumbles of thunder. The Princess screams with fear and the Prince joins her. The thunder rolls more loudly, the lightning flashes more terribly. The giant whirls his sword, while Prince and Princess cower before him. When the storm is over the giant speaks in Chinese.)

PRINCE

(To Princess)

He says that the storm has brought to him the voice of Heaven. He would give us the sword!

PRINCESS

Hush! He speaks again. (The giant speaks.) He would have me take the Sword of Heaven. (To the giant) Nay, give it to my lord. (Prince gets up to receive, the giant withdraws indignantly with a flash of the sword.)

PRINCE

I am ashamed. I pleaded selfishly, thinking of love alone. You pleaded for our people. . . I failed.

(The giant gives the sword to the Princess, then stretches one hand up while the other holds his red whisker, looking up impassively to Heaven. The Prince and Princess kneel below him, both holding the sword.)

PRINCE

(Continuing)

You have saved our land and people.

PRINCESS

My lord, your love taught me how.

CURTAIN

A Chinese Mirror (1932), pp. 47–54; reprinted in Songs of China.

APPENDIX IV | THE TURTLE AND THE LILY

*The one-act play first printed in *A Pagoda of Jewels* and revised for the later collections.*

Characters

Shoo Leong — The Cripple

Suy Sen — The Bride

Mrs. Shoo — The Mother

Woo Ma — The Go-Between

The scene is the interior of a Chinese living room, richly furnished. A door on the right leads outside, another on the left to an inner room. A full-moon window center back, with green painted bars and shutters closed on the outside. A long, carved teakwood table, level to the window-sill has on it a bowl of lilies and two porcelain vases; a chair on either end. Another square table stands in the center of the room, with bamboo stools on both sides. On the table are books and writing materials. In the right hand corner stands a shrine, with a pair of candlesticks, a censer, three cups of tea and a peanut-oil lamp hanging in front. In the left-hand corner is a small tea-stand on which are a teapot, a few cups in a bowl of water and a silver tobacco-pipe. Pictures adorn the walls in pairs after the Chinese fashion. The afternoon sun is shining through the chinks of the closed shutters.

(SHOO LEONG is seated on the left-hand side of the table by the window, reading; the MOTHER is seated on the right-hand side of the table in the center, sewing, when the curtain rises.)

MOTHER

(complacently)

By the blissful shadows of our ancestors, I have chosen you a sweet and beautiful wife.

SHOO LEONG

(stops reading, looks at his mother sadly and forces a smile)

Yes, mother.

(He opens one of the shutters and glances out, the sunlight floods over him.)

MOTHER

The key to happiness is now in your hands.

SHOO LEONG

(turns from window)

I'm ever earnest in craving to be happy and smile with the world (looks out toward the sunlight again) as brightly as the sunshine.

MOTHER

Then why do you still spend so much time in these melancholy and tragic books!

SHOO LEONG

(a little bitter)

There is happiness in sharing another's sorrow—and solace in sympathizing with another's misfortune—and it helps one to forget one's own. . . (he pauses abruptly as if he regrets what he had just said.)

MOTHER

(turns keenly to Shoo Leong)

What foolish thought have you! Do you mean to say that you have sorrow to forget? Tell me, what fears are troubling you?

SHOO LEONG

(evasively)

Nothing. . . mother. . . nothing. . .

(Turns his face and looks out the window to conceal his feeling.)

MOTHER

(sharply)

Tell me. . . a son must not keep secrets from his mother.

SHOO LEONG

(mutters sadly)

Oh, it's. . . it's. . .

MOTHER

(anxiously)

It is what? Now be an obedient son and tell your mother what is troubling you.

(Puts her sewing down on the table)

SHOO LEONG

It is the sadness of the heart—how can it be put in words? . . .

MOTHER

(dumbfounded, gets up)

Sadness of the heart. . . What. . .

(A knock is heard at the door.)

SHOO LEONG

(relieved)

Oh, mother, there is someone without.

MOTHER

(sarcastically)

No doubt a neighbor has come to borrow something.

SHOO LEONG

(in gentle reproof)

Mother!

(The mother crosses to the door. Enters the GO-BETWEEN wearily. SHOO LEONG continues his reading.)

MOTHER

(surprised)

Woo Ma! What brings you here? You look worried.

GO-BETWEEN

(excitedly)

Calamity has befallen us! The reward of my skill as a match-maker will soon have to go to satisfy the ever-hungry pockets of the honorable magistrate. . .

MOTHER

(dismayed)

What mean your words?

GO-BETWEEN

Chang Sen, the honorable father-in-law of your precious son is very angry and has gone to the capital to complain to the magistrate about me. He says that it is an outrage for me to deceive him and take his lily-daughter into the nest of your turtle-son. But why should I say the bridegroom is a hunchback when he never asked? Yai, yai!

(SHOO LEONG, who has been listening now drops low his head with great humiliation.)

MOTHER

(turns angrily)

How absurd! His daughter has been betrothed and married to my son according to the custom of the country, and I gave three thousand marriage cakes, four pigs, twelve flagons of pure rice wine, twelve pairs of dragon candles and four hundred pieces of gold! How dare he complain?

GO-BETWEEN

He will return the marriage gifts.

MOTHER

(bewildered)

What will he then?

GO-BETWEEN

He will put me in jail and demand his daughter back again.

MOTHER

(fear creeps over her face)

Demand his daughter back again! (wails in trembling voice) O what evil spirit is bewitching! (throws up her hands and goes to the shrine and kneels). O ancestors of mine, stretch your shadows to ward off the cloud of trouble that is approaching my household. (Rises and turns to the GO-BETWEEN.) Come, let us go consult the fortune teller at the temple and pay homage to Quan-Yim.

GO-BETWEEN

Yes, the Goddess of Mercy surely will help us.

(The MOTHER and the GO-BETWEEN start toward the door and the MOTHER suddenly discovers that she has not the sacrificial offerings.)

MOTHER

Wait, Woo Ma, we have not the holy incense and pure rice wine to offer and invoke the Goddess yet. Wait just a moment, I'll go and get them. . .

(The MOTHER hurries into the inner room. The GO-BETWEEN crosses to SHOO LEONG and speaks ingratiatingly.)

GO-BETWEEN

I have brought much trouble upon myself for your sake.

SHOO LEONG

(curtly)

For the sake of the added fees you mean.

GO-BETWEEN

(to evade the truth)

Has she no love for you?

SHOO LEONG

Love was not in the bargain.

(Picks up his book and begins to read, ignoring the GO-BETWEEN. His mother returns carrying a bamboo staff and a bamboo basket which contains the wine and incense.)

MOTHER

We must make haste. (In a very agitated manner to SHOO LEONG) Now my son, be calm. Be calm and pray to your blessed ancestors while I am gone.

(She rushes out followed by the GO-BETWEEN.)

SHOO LEONG

(he watches after them, then sinks low into the chair with an aimless sigh. After a moment of meditation he starts to recite as if to himself.)

"Confucius said: The superior man can find himself in no situation in which he is not himself. If in a high situation, he does not treat with contempt his inferiors. If in a low situation, he does not court the favor of his superiors. He rectifies himself, and seeks nothing from others, so that he has no disappointments. He does not murmur against Heaven nor grumble against men. Thus it is that the superior man is quiet and calm, waiting for the will of Heaven; while the mean man walks in dangerous paths, looking for lucky occurrences."

(Enters SUY SEN with two cups of tea on a tray. She looks about in surprise.)

SUY SEN

Where is your venerable mother?

SHOO LEONG

She has gone to the temple to offer her prayers before the altar of Quan-Yim.

SUY SEN

(innocently)

What favor does she seek?

SHOO LEONG

She prays for the happiness of our household.

SUY SEN

(puts the tray on the table and offers a cup to the husband with both hands)

Has the Goddess the power to grant that?

SHOO LEONG

(takes a sip of tea)

No—it is only within the power of our own hearts.

SUY SEN

(sadly)

I wonder—does happiness ever visit mortals? . . .

SHOO LEONG

That depends upon what you deem happiness.

SUY SEN

What mean you, my lord?

SHOO LEONG

(wisely)

For some happiness lies in bringing joy to another, and for some it comes at another's expense. Then there is happiness in solitude and meditation.

SUY SEN

(aimlessly)

What is your happiness, my lord?

SHOO LEONG

(with a soft sigh, gazing at her affectionately)

I have found happiness in the trees, the moon, in books and dreams, but—but now I must choose anew. Now I may snatch it at the expense of another's suffering, or I may seek it in giving to another what I lose. But it is only the animal that could sacrifice another's life to satisfy his own greed. . .

SUY SEN

What mean you, my lord?

SHOO LEONG

My mother thought to make me very happy when she brought you—beautiful and sweet as the newly bloomed lily—for my wife. Indeed, I forgot the trees and the flowers, my books and even myself. . . when I beheld you. . . But to the moon my misshapen body brings no distress. The rose does not draw back from my caress. . . but to you. . .

SUY SEN

How I long to be like the flowers that do not feel.

SHOO LEONG

What does life seem to you, SUY SEN?

SUY SEN

We poor mortals are born only to suffer until the years have worn away. . .

SHOO LEONG

(pitifully)

For me—perhaps—but not you—you should know life's joy.

SUY SEN

(smiles sadly)

It is not thus that fate decrees

SHOO LEONG

(suddenly, after a moment of silence)

Will you do something for me?

SUY SEN

(hesitating)

I will seek ever to fulfill my wifely duties.

SHOO LEONG

(firmly, yet a little bitter in tone)

Fate is a deceiver—I am not your life-mate—I wish you to go back to your home. Another will come—one who will bring you happiness. Now go, at once. It is not right for me to hold you—and your father is right (more bitterly). Yes, he is right—a lily will not grow in a turtle's nest. . .

SUY SEN

(bewildered with doubt)

What mean you, my lord?

SHOO LEONG

I mean what I said—oh, you needn't doubt me—perhaps—my features are ugly, but my heart is not, my conscience is not, my soul is not. . . now go, sweet one. I will give you the written words to free you from the binding of our marriage

SUY SEN

(perplexed)

But your mother—the people of the village—our customs. . .

SHOO LEONG

Custom is a tyranny to which my mother is a slave and so are all the village people! Ah, what do they matter. . . they can't stop me from doing right—They can't break the heart of humanity!

SUY SEN

But you, my lord?

SHOO LEONG

The flame of my life has been quenched by the earthly water of sorrow long ago, and its ash has become as tranquil as the impassive Buddha. My heart is like a canary in an iron cage; oh, how it craves to be free,—to soar into the great space of celestial blue! Alas, too great hath my soul suffered within this hideous imprisonment of flesh. . . Shall I permit another to suffer as I? . . No! my solace must come through another's joy.

SUY SEN

But I should remain. . .

SHOO LEONG

Do not delay. Happiness was never built on deceit. Go pack at once ere my mother returns.

SUY SEN

(kneeling beside his chair)

My father and ancestors will add their gratitude to mine, my lord, for this great generosity.

SHOO LEONG

You must not loiter.

(She goes into the inner room. SHOO LEONG watches after her then rises and walks slowly to the table in the center of the room)

SHOO LEONG

(murmuring sadly)

She will go . . . she will go. . .

(He sits down at the table and writes the letter. Soft music is being played during this scene. SUY SEN enters with her bundle, trying to conceal her joy and fear.)

SHOO LEONG

Are you ready?

SUY SEN

Yes, my lord.

(She kneels beside him. He finishes the letter and putting it in a Chinese envelope hands it to her.)

SHOO LEONG

Keep this carefully. The cage is open now. Fly, my beautiful phoenix. . . fly far and high to the paradise that the gods have prepared for you.

SUY SEN

Your nobleness overcomes me, my lord. All my life long I shall pray blessings for you. *(She rises and bows.)*

SHOO LEONG

Farewell—sweet lily. . .

(SUY SEN goes to the door, pauses and looks back in gratitude. The gate clicks outside. Both start at the sound.)

SHOO LEONG

(agitatingly)

It's mother at the gate! Go by the back path— *(pointing to the other door)*. . . quick! . . .

(SUY SEN rushes across to the inner room. SHOO LEONG picks up his book and pretends to be reading when the mother enters.)

MOTHER

(a little weary)

Ah, my son, are you at peace?

(She sits on the other side of the table.)

SHOO LEONG

(with an effort of concealment)

Yes, mother.

MOTHER

Thank for the mercy of the Goddess. "We needn't be afraid. The fortune teller says that our trouble is but a drifting cloud which the blissful wind will blow to nothingness ere it approaches our household. And here is Quan-Yim's answer to my prayers. (She gives him a piece of paper which he unfolds and reads aloud to her): "True gold fears no fire, A single hand cannot shade the sun's light. If the heart holds no evil desire " Then shall the days of your future be bright.

MOTHER

(self-righteously)

Right has ever controlled my actions, so I need not fear. I am thirsty after my long journey. Where is my daughter-in-law? Let her bring me tea.

SHOO LEONG

(startled, in effort to be calm)

She is not here.

MOTHER

(sharply)

Not here?

SHOO LEONG

She . . . she . . .

MOTHER

Speak—where is she?

SHOO LEONG

She has gone. . .

MOTHER

Gone where?

SHOO LEONG

(mustering up his courage)

She has gone back to her mother's house.

MOTHER

(gets up with alarm)

Gone! . . . back to her mother's house? . . . The wicked woman! The evil one! (turning to SHOO LEONG) You stupid pig, could you not even keep her until my return?

SHOO LEONG

(pauses frightened)

I sent her thence.

MOTHER

(incredulous and then angry)

You let her go? . . . You sent her thence? . . . You fool! (She picks up her bamboo staff, in rage.) Who has given you such authority? When did you get such evil thoughts to betray your mother? Have you gone insane?

(Her voice rises higher and higher as she advances toward SHOO LEONG.)

SHOO LEONG

(alarmed, drops from the stool and kneels before her)

Mother mine, most reverent mother, I did not mean to disobey you—or to hurt your feelings. . . I sent her away. . . because. . . —I could not be happy by seeing her suffer. . . Forgive me, mother!

MOTHER

(boiling with rage)

Ingrate! after all that I have done for you. Weak, brainless fool. If you are not manly enough to wish a wife—what of me—what of my happiness? Shall I have no daughter to wait on me in my old age? . . .

SHOO LEONG

(trembling)

Mother, forgive me—I am stupid and weak—I know . . . but. . . oh, I could not resist the promptings of my heart. . . Forgive me. I'm weak . . . I . . .

MOTHER

But strong enough to defy my wish! You

(She raises the bamboo staff as if to strike him. He is frightened and tries to get up and run, but in vain—the stick falls upon his deformed back and hurts the sensitive nerves. He falls senseless to the floor, (in the struggle the blow is given more by accident than by cruel intention.) The mother, her anger gone, stands looking at him dazed as the curtain falls.

(Sad music to be played as the curtain is lowered.)

(When the curtain rises again several days have elapsed. The table, in the center of the room, and the stools have been removed and a couch has been placed upon which SHOO LEONG is lying, seriously ill. There are bottles of medicine and dishes on the table by the window and a slight disorder of things shows an atmosphere of a sick

room. The peanut-oil lamp, in front of the shrine, is lighted and a candle on the table. The moonlight shimmers thru the open shutters. Other lights should be subdued and should only allow enough to illuminate the facial expression. The mother enters from the inner room with a bowl of steaming rice broth which she tastes and cools. All solicitude—a mingling of anxiety and remorse.)

MOTHER

(tenderly)

Come, sip you this my son; it will drive away the evil spirits and make you well again.

(She puts the bowl to his mouth, but he weakly motions it away.)

MOTHER

(imploringly)

You must drink it. You grow weaker with every breath. Oh, my son, my son, forgive your wicked mother and regain your health. (She dips out a spoonful of broth.) Come, just a taste.

(SHOO LEONG motions her away gently but firmly. The MOTHER puts the bowl down in despair and goes over to the ancestral altar and begins to pray. Her supplications rise in rhythmical tone.)

(SUY SEN enters in the same attire as she had left; looks about and is startled at seeing SHOO LEONG in bed. She pauses abruptly as she hears the mother's wailing. Doubt and fear creep over her face. After a moment she timidly and frightenedly moves toward the sickbed and kneels beside it, looking at the pale face of her husband.)

SHOO LEONG

(opens his eyes and sees her. With a weak move of surprise he murmurs.)

You—you—(He stares at her with a sense of illusion.)

SUY SEN

(lowers her eyelids in repentance)

I have come back to you, my lord.

(The MOTHER, hearing voices, turns and sees SUY SEN. She springs up and advances toward her, eyes blazing with hatred.)

MOTHER

You—wicked woman! . . . See what you have caused. My son—my only son. . . You vile creature! . . . (She makes a menacing gesture toward SUY SEN.)

SHOO LEONG

(Throwing back the covers in an attempt to rise)

Mother!

(The single word arrests the mother's anger. She lets her hands drop to her side. SUY SEN springs to support SHOO LEONG as he falls back on the couch, choking.)

SUY SEN

(believing that she has caused his illness)

May the gods forgive me. My noble husband, you have sought my happiness at the cost of your suffering. But now my heart knows the true love. . . and the beauty of your soul.

SHOO LEONG

(putting out a hand and touching her gently, with a sad-happy smile)

Oh, my beloved wife. . . beautiful lily. . . you have never brought me suffering. There can be no grief for me if I know that you are happy. . . (his voice lowers at every breath).

SUY SEN

(choked with tears)

I am not worthy. . .

MOTHER

(impressed by their conversation begins to weep)

Oh, my son, my only son. . . for your mother's sake. . . get well. . . (she kneels beside SUY SEN.)

SHOO LEONG

(mustering his strength with an effort)

No longer will my mortal eyes behold the flowers and moon. . . (to SUY SEN) and you. . . my lily. . . but I'm happy . . . you are here . . . you here . . . I hap-py . . . hap . . . py . . .

(His lips frame the word again but he cannot speak. SUY SEN leans closer to catch the word as death slowly seals his eyes.)

MOTHER

(in desperate grief)

Oh, my son, my son—so you leave me forever—oh Heaven,—oh my fate; how cruel! (She covers her face with her sleeve and mourns in agony.)

SUY SEN

(touches his hand with frightened awe; she breaks into a long wail)

My husband. . . oh, my husband

(Soft music being played with the sobbing of the women.)

SUY SEN

(slowly raises her head in a calm and brave manner as if addressing the departing spirit)

O my lord of the yonder world. . . may you know. . . (pauses with a choke of tears) here will I stay and serve your mother as mine and tend the flowers of our love while you

wait for me in the full bloom of your soul's eternal beauty.

MOTHER

(moved by SUY SEN'S words, raises her head, gazing at her with humility)

My daughter

(The MOTHER stretches her hands in forgiveness and grief. SUY SEN turns and looks pathetically into the mother's eyes, then slowly bows with hands and forehead touching the floor in reverence. The MOTHER tenderly bends and raises her. Both looking at each other understandingly with tears.)

The Curtain Falls

First printed in *A Pagoda of Jewels* (1920), pp. 35–56; later text in *A Chinese Mirror* (1932), pp. 55–68, and *Songs of China*.

APPENDIX V | LATER AND UNRECOVERED WORK

Titles securely documented but not available as complete reading texts.

“Moonlit Tears.” Ancient Chinese poem translated by Moon Kwan for Charles Wakefield Cadman, 1921; complete text not located.

“Spring Longing.” Ancient Chinese poem translated by Moon Kwan for Charles Wakefield Cadman, 1921; complete text not located.

“Bring in the Wine.” Li Bo, translated by Moon Kwan, *Renditions* 23 (1985), 104–07; complete text unavailable for this edition.

“The Long Longing.” Two poems by Li Bo, translated by Moon Kwan, *Renditions* 23 (1985), 104–05; complete texts unavailable for this edition.

“The Drifting One.” Li Bo, translated by Moon Kwan, *Renditions* 23 (1985), 105; complete text unavailable for this edition.

Chinese-language books

Kwan’s *Shan-yuet Zi Ming Ji* (about 1960), *Zi Ming Ji* (1965), and revised *Zi Ming Ji* (1977) are bibliographically established but not available in complete digital facsimile. Secondary scholarship reports a substantially overlapping corpus of Chinese poems, including self-translations, but no text has been reconstructed from descriptions alone.

COLOPHON

Editorial and production record.

Edited by Brian Kim Stefans for The Text-Tech Papers. Designed in the Extremes and Moderations format: 6 × 9 inches, mirrored margins, EB Garamond, restrained historical apparatus, and one poem opening per page. The cover uses Brian Kim Stefans's unlettered wanderer-and-red-moon artwork. Reading texts were checked against the original book and periodical scans; archival images appear once each. Prepared August 2026.