THE GENESIS OF POETIC TIME

The Greatness of Ch’ü Yuan, Studied

With A New Critical Approach

The Late SHIH-HSIANG CHEN

Editor’s note: The author was formerly a member of the Advisory Editorial Board of our Journal. He wrote this article before his death which occurred on May 23, 1971.

Foreword:

About Traditional Chinese Criticism And This Paper

(To Colleagues at the Virgin Islands Seminar)

A group gathers at Virgin Islands to discuss Chinese literary criticism. One is tempted to picture how in the Chinese tradition critical literature was produced, and what made it in form and character generally so different from that of the west. In form it may seem, with a few exceptions, casual or desultory; and in character subjective or laconic. One naturally thinks of the Shih-hua 詩話 and Tz’u-hua 詩話 which represent perhaps the largest bulk of material of critical interest to us. We need not apologize for them. They are casual, subjective or laconic because they are so intended. Ou-yang Hsiu’s Liu-yi Shih-hua, perhaps historically if not substantially the most important because of its precedence in this genre, frankly admits it was compiled to “tzu hsien t’an” 資閱談, “supply leisurely conversation”, or “idle talk”, if you will. But it is remarkable how this casual or even desultory form has since become so popular and prolific for the next eight hundred years, even when the “talks” were not really so leisurely or idle. One of the reasons at least, I think, is revealing. That is, the Shih-hua, or poetic causersies as we may call them, remained a favorite form for a limited, highly sophisticated circle of literati, which a very ripe poetic tradition sustained. The causersies writers were either themselves poets or those who knew the poetic craft extremely well, and like good causers, they were addressing only their peers. They had only to be witty, perceptive, perhaps erudite but not too explicit, certainly never verbose or systematic. They were chatting among themselves. They were not introducing a great, prospective best seller, nor preaching to any general public. They were not concerned with university literary education to save the humanities programs. They could safely assume what they freely quoted, or said with brevity which they knew was the soul of wit, was to be immediately understood. When they were being technical, all they needed was to concentrate on a precious word: whether it should be tui or ch’iao, should the monk “push” or “knock at” the door in a good poetic line to conjure a moon-lit scene. Or when they were asking facetious or mischievous questions, whether should it be a duck, goose or fish that first knew the warmth in a spring river, the humor was readily understood. Their
scope, admittedly, was limited, as was their concern. But their privileged situation causes us to envy. And their subtle accomplishments in their deep perceptions often of one single important word or sentence remain admirable, because these make worlds of difference to our understanding. This paper, fashioned in modern western academia, certainly has for its length and organization none of the virtues of the "causeries". But, for all its lack of the soul of wit, it still honors that tradition by building its arguments actually on one single key word in classical Chinese thought and poetry.

A great monument in Chinese criticism, eminently different from the causeries tradition and always admired, is of course the Wen-Hsin Tiao-Lung. Its serious concerns with history and civilization, as well as its unexcelled expositions on all aspects of literature known to its day, set a model never emulated, as it has since dwarfed in scope and aspiration perhaps all later critical writings. This paper does not pretend to aspire after any part of the Wen-Hsin, except, as the chosen subject happens to permit, it also concerns itself with Ch'ü Yuan's poetry and human civilization.

Another tradition where in fact the modern Chinese term for "criticism" stemmed is the practice of p'i 抽, a kind of critical or appreciative marginalia. Disregarding the pretentious tone of this schoolmasterly term associated no doubt with judicial bureaucracy, or civil examinations, we see the practice at its best actually attempts in modesty and admiration the most alert, diligent and sympathetic reading. This spirit is revealed in the Chinese critiques of the novels, with distinguished examples in Chin Sheng-t'an's writings and, of course, the Chih-yen Chai intimate notes on the Dream of the Red Chamber. This paper tries humbly to follow their spirit in its diligent, attentive reading of Ch'ü Yuan's works.

Chin Sheng-t'an and his peers, as we know, were championing a slighted if not entirely despised genre which in their days was the novel. Ch'ü Yuan's works today are not exactly slighted, but glorification of him in recent years as Arch Patriot and Political Reformer does not really do service to modern understanding of the greatness of his poetry either. Moreover, the over-enthusied scholastic polemics early in this century about his biographical data, casting suspicion on his historicity, have necessarily affected the appreciation of the value of his poetry. The earlier dust now has fairly settled. But the suspicion, once sown, continues to distract. Its repercussions had reached far and wide, and while more or less quelled later in China, they still remain somewhat perplexing abroad. In cautious skepticism about his historicity, one of the easy ways out seems to have been to take Ch'ü Yuan out of the classical Chinese tradition, and treat him as an exotic product of some folk culture. Anthropological interests feed upon this approach. Anthropology, while it objectifies human values in its own worthy discipline, inevitably alienates literary experiences when it is too zealously or submissively embraced in literary studies. This paper, while it subscribes to none of the present native trend of the apotheosis of Ch'ü Yuan, attempts to redeem him a securer position in the development of the main tradition of classical Chinese thought and language as well as of poetry and literature. So this may, after all, be a championing action like that of the early novel critics. Though it is not in the marginalia fashion, it is the result, I hope, of careful reading of details and contextual relationships of the words in Ch'ü Yuan's poetry, especially the Li Sao.

Lastly, it may be noted that this paper turns out to be comparative. This, I confess, is primarily as much necessitated as intended. Having to write on such complex Chinese subject with hard material in an European language, one while
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going through the chores tries to make a virtue out of necessity, or turn the handicap into some advantage. If one were to write in one’s native language on a native subject for a native public, one would certainly have had a much easier time. But then many of the ideas, or some discoveries, may not likely to have occurred without the benefit of comparison. One is given additional mirrors to cast light. With this thought, I feel convinced of the value of our gathering among colleagues from many different linguistic as well as national traditions, and am looking forward to it.

S.H.C.

I.

Analogy And Divergence

At certain junctures in human history, during those epochs most often remembered as cataclysmic, there would appear in poetry and philosophic or religious literature a new disquieting consciousness of time and existence. There we find that time is felt most acutely and treated in the most affective state of mind. The temporal is no longer simply accepted as part of the objective order of things. It is not any more the objective time that is normally taken for granted, or practically reckoned with, or aloofly contemplated. It takes on an immensely personal character and becomes a haunting image, a spiritual focus of irrevocable force in which the individual soul is constantly entangled, wrestling as it were, hope against hope. For the poet, this anguishing experience produces the deepest pathos that pervades his poetry or underlies the motifs of his religious or moral thought. Time, a generalized concept, is now felt as an entity perceptible, vivid, personal. Indeed as a commentator on Spengler says, now “‘personal’, ‘destiny’, ‘time’ are identical words.”(3) And we hear naturally the echo to Shelley’s lament, “O world! O life! O time!”

But this anxiety, this poignant consciousness of man in time of course did not begin only with the 19th century European Romantics. And the author of the Decline of The West, who when he says. “...The enigma of time, queer, tempting, insoluble. Suddenly the words ‘past’ and ‘future’ have acquired a fateful meaning”(2) is just summing up a western tradition since long ago. But not so long ago as in China, where this sudden sense of the fateful meaning of Time bears more ancient marks, marks that, when carefully discerned, distinguish the dawning of a new age of classical Chinese creative literature, with new religious echoes as well. To elucidate the Chinese case, we may resort to some analogies in old Europe, where a like phenomenon has been rather recently observed by Georges Poulet in his astute Études sur le temps humain.(5)

Let use consider a few parallel quotations:

Every day, every hour, thus without ceasing,
I must finish my life and recommence. In this death uselessly alive.(4)

To those who have read the Li Sao, these lines offhand may ring familiarly like
that major work of Ch'ü Yuan, now celebrated as the first man to stamp Chinese poetry with that unmistakable sense of agonized individuality, of Weltschmerz and tragic heroism. But no, the lines just quoted are from a much later European literary development, though they signify no less a new epoch in human history during post-medieval Europe than Ch'ü Yuan's poetry did during the fourth century B.C. in China. Those lines are, in fact, from a poem entitled Délie, by the 16th century French poet Maurice Scève (c. 1500–1564). But they sound familiar to readers of Ch'ü Yuan for good reason. For his Li Sao does say, too, in the same helpless tone of fear and despair, and with the same time motif:

Every day, every month thus swiftly, without tarrying,
Spring and autumn speed on in succession.
I think of the decay and fall of trees and plants,
And fear my beloved Beauty will fade in twilight.

The next quotation is from an European source perhaps far more celebrated than Scève, with whom he is exactly contemporary. John Calvin, exemplifying the Zeitgeist of the Reformation period, signals the spirit of an age obsessed with time, human existence and personal fate, when he cries out in fear and trembling, and with a last resort to stubborn faith, thus declares:

I see myself continually flowing away: no moment passes without my seeing myself at the point of being engulfed.
But since God sustains his elect in such a way that they never sink and drown,
I firmly believe that I shall live despite innumerable storms.(5)

Compare then what Ch'ü Yuan says in the very opening passage of his Li Sao:

I flow like a fast torrent, as if never to catch up,
Afraid that the years will go without me.
Each morning I gather angelica on the mountain side,
Each evening I pluck sedges on the river isles.
(That is, to be worn as emblems of "my" virtue)

And in a later passage:

Time, wan and opaque, soon will be setting.

Then desperately asserting his faith apparently in his own election, he says:

High Heaven has no private bias,
But looks for the virtuous ones to bestow its help,
Only the saintly and the wise, with virtuous conduct (are elected),
If they are given to possess this earth below.

And, again, in more personal terms to conjure up some sense of possible permanence of the ideal human essence in a corrupt, worthless, ephemeral world:

Only one graced with such an emblem(6) of virtue is worthy,
Despite the disregard of its beauty by the world now as always.
Its pervading fragrance never easily diminishes.
Its perfume lasts even until now without fail.
To be sure, these utterances are from very disparate cultures, separated as well by almost twenty long centuries. We remember, too, that they are quotations out of very different literary contexts, produced under quite variable actual historical conditions. Their striking similarity, however, is accountable by perhaps the most common human experience. That is, during a certain period of history, the awareness of man in time, a sudden assault, as it were, on the consciousness, one that stirs the roots of the poetic and religious imagination. And it is because of this very depth of its affectiveness that when this consciousness first found its clear expression in literature it would appear so forceful as if it came all in a rush.

But of course man had lived through time ever since he was born, or created, if you will. He had had notions of it which were but haphazard and scattered, as we can assume at least on such Chinese evidence as we shall see. He had learnt to abide by it, even to manipulate or act according to its various aspects which he had given different names. As the ages advanced, earlier poetry had made references to it, but, again, most often to various respects of temporal phenomena, and not under a unified single name. Philosophy would later recognize it, and treat it explicitly or implicitly according to different cultural tempers and forms. But it should be safe for us to say that ancient philosophical treatment of time, despite all the different means and conclusions whether Confucian or Platonic or what else, was as a rule to regard time as an objective entity. Time, the generalized concept expressed as a definite, fixed, and unitary term in poetry had to wait for a still later age in China at least, as did the affectiveness such a concept would have on the subjective thought of the individual as man in time. When this event occurred, it would clearly mark a new epoch, distinguishable by events that characterize violent changes in human civilization.

We have drawn European analogies from the age of the Reformation, for Ch'ü Yuan's poetic discovery of subjective time. There may be other parallels in human history, but the one we have chosen should be as good as any to show the immense historical impact of that discovery. It is a common place that the Renaissance and Reformation constitute the great watershed of European civilization, where it gave birth to the modern nations of Europe as we know them today. The analogy for the age of Ch'ü Yuan of some two millennia before is all too obvious: a period of the Warring States greatly intensifying the conflicts of the turbulent epochs of the Ch'un Ch'i'u, or "Spring and Autumn", to shake at last the antique House of Chou to its very foundation, and usher in the Chinese empire which lasted up to our present century.

In our post-medieval European and post-middle Chou examples, the attitudes toward time, both as to its subjectivity and the affective language that expresses it, are indeed strikingly similar. And their close comparability is explicable in the analogy of the two great ages in China and the West. But two millennia on two distant continents separate these analogical phenomena. Two different peoples
in two different cultures had experienced, speculated on or dealt with what we now call Time, until the two parallel situations transpired. Precedents in the treatment of time in poetry, philosophy and religious thought therefore may be found to have greatly varied in each tradition. Forms of expression, and modes of thinking as exhibited in linguistic and philological as well as emotional and intellectual manifestations had very much diverged earlier. By way of a very brief general summary here, we may observe that the ancient Chinese had very rarely dealt with time in the abstract. From high antiquity even through the age of Confucius, there had been none of such animated controversy as stirred by Parmenides’ insistence that what is, is eternal; and Heracleitus’ famous contrary belief that all is change so that you cannot step into the same river. Even as Chinese philosophy developed, therefore, nor could there have ever been that brilliant idealistic definition of time as the “moving image of eternity” in Plato’s ideal philosophy, nor such eloquent discourse on the creation of time. For, as we shall hope to demonstrate, time as a generalized notion, as a pure, abstract and integrated conceptual entity had been hardly formed until after Confucius. And to be strict in our “rectification of names,” though it may sound surprising, we shall have to submit that time as pure concept had not until a later age received its rightful name, so to say, in the Chinese language, as \( \varsigma \rho\delta\nu\sigma \) in ancient Greek.

To pursue the comparison a little further, we see that before it took on the new, affective aspect in subjective thought from the Renaissance to the Reformation, time had in the west had a firmly established name. Whether \( \varsigma \rho\delta\nu\sigma \) in Greek or \textit{tempus} in Latin, it signified a well-defined general concept, with a long distinguished pedigree in the European tradition. Perceived objectively, time had been treated as an entity, even a geometric one by the ancient European thinkers: By Plato as a created “pattern” after eternity;\(^{(6)}\) by Aristotle as “a solid, namely either a line or a plane.”\(^{(9)}\) Marcus Aurelius saw time more vividly as a “river” that carries things away, each by each.\(^{(10)}\) These ancient thinkers shared at least one common standpoint, that is, despite all differences, an objective regard for time. Among early Christians, St. Augustine puzzled about time and said, “If no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to a questioner I do not know.” Wistful remark though it was, it yet indicated an intellectual puzzle belonging to the realm of objective thought, not of subjectivity. For the ancient European thinkers even when time found such emotional expressions as \textit{tempus fugit}, “time flies”\(^{(11)}\) or \textit{tempus edax rerum},\(^{(12)}\) “time the devourer of things”, in Ovid, it was still from an objective stance. The critical relation was of time and things. It was not “Time and I” in confrontation. It was as if the subjective “I” was somewhat outside, looking contemplating, and commenting. It was therefore fitting that Marcus Aurelius maintained his objective Stoic calm. For his “river” of time was carrying away \textit{things}; while he, in Stoic tranquility, was remarking, as it were on a grand spectacle.
A change took place during the middle ages. The intellect of the devout Christian seems to begin to enter himself, so to speak, into the stream of time. "Incessantly" says Georges Poulet when he speaks of the Middle Ages in his *Studies in Human Time*, "the Christian felt time as a flood which, overflowing his flesh, penetrated his soul." But in his unshakeable Christian faith this flood of time was taken to be rather a trusted vehicle. For "all...that was naturally spontaneous and instantaneous in spiritual life," as Poulet sums up the belief of St. Thomas, "the act of comprehending, the act of feeling, the act of willing, or of enjoying—all of this was being achieved in man only with the help of time, only as if borne by time toward its completion." Time was still secure and had a direction, steered by God and was finally to carry the Christian toward God, until the cataclysmic centuries that ensued.

All these are the great precedents, we observe, from the very ancient to the Middle Ages, which the European mind inherited, and through the Renaissance and Reformation it developed, reacted against and contended with them to usher in the beginning of our modern age. The modern philosophical preoccupation with time and personal identity was of course foreshadowed in Descartes and had its great spokesman in Kant. Then existential philosophy carries on new explorations, and discovers contemporary perspectives on time and being in our day. In imaginative literature, names like Rousseau and the great Romantics signal the profound impact of the new sense of temporal existence, a sense whose motto could be—for its pathos—Shelley's cry: "O world! O life! O time!"

II.

Background And Clue

But the genesis of Ch'ü Yuan's poetic time, almost two thousand years before the Renaissance and Reformation, yet in some ways so remarkably modern as we have seen, was without the benefit of anything like the great ancient European philosophic precedents, although its influences on later ages, too, are infinitely great. We can only reconstruct a philological background and find a clue to the sudden phenomenon. If the Sung commentator and collator of Ch'ü Yuan's works, Hung Hsing-tzu (1090–1155), who transmitted to us perhaps the still best edition extant since the 12th century A.D., read the works correctly, we would find that Ch'ü Yuan's *Tien Wen*, or "Interrogations of Heaven," marked the first instance in Chinese intellectual, religious, as poetic history, of the most challenging question of all ages: What is time? Or what does time do? *Wei shih ho wei*? 難時何為？

Later research has taken exception to Hung's reading. But it is not about the interpretation of the verb, *wei* 為, either as "to be" or as "to do." For the ambiguity of the word in ancient Chinese interpreted in the sense of being, doing or making, most often does not trouble our understanding of the identity of a
person or a thing: One is what one does; one does as a good king, one makes a good king, then one is a good king. Some later textual exegetes differ rather about whether the essential word shih, 彼, here really meant ‘time,’ and some of them tend to favor an archaic reading of shih simply as the neuter pronoun “it”, or the demonstrative “that”. Every modern reader of Chinese texts would think as readily as Hung Hsing-tzu that shih means time. And some may regard the exception taken against Hung as odd. But Hung’s demurrs, such good and discriminate scholars as Tai Chen of the 18th century, and Liu Yung-chi and Wen I-to of our present era following Chu Hsi’s (1130–1200) earlier assertion, built their case upon apparently very respectable authority. They, like Chu Hsi, the great Confucian classicist and perhaps the most influential traditional authority on the Shih Ching, or Book of Songs, since late Sung, read shih here in Ch’ü Yuan’s “Interrogations” according to its archaic usage in the Shih Ching, and other early Chou classic, as shih 是, hence to mean “it” or “that”. They cite the ancient lexical definition of shih as shih from the Erh Yeh, and parallel archaic usages from the Shang Shu, or Book of History. Both, again, are tomes in the Confucian classics, although Ch’ü Yuan’s text was of a much later date.

We dwell on this particular exegetical detail not so much to vindicate Hung Hsing-tzu, however, as to use it as a clue to lead us to close observations of how the word shih finally evolved to mean time in Chinese: That is, shih as a well established name for time in its fully developed sense as a general, abstract concept fitting for later traditional or even modern philosophic discussion, as well as to be a distinct image to excite the affective state of the poetic mind. We have observed that there had long since been a vast, well-developed philosophic and religious background to prepare for the development of the strongly subjective and affective sense of time and human existence in 16th century Europe. The rise of it in China of the 4th century B.C., lacking philosophic precedents and previous religious controversy, was a sudden flash of poetic vision. It was the genesis of poetic time. Or we may even say that the full growth of time in ancient China as a distinct general concept, with its definitive name shih, was a poetic genesis, stemming essentially from the passionate, affective poetry, created by Ch’ü Yuan. This, we are aware, is a very strong statement, which we intend to prove by evidence and close reasoning. And when we are done, we hope some new light will be cast on our reading of the works of an author whose biographical data have been most subject to controversy, but who is certainly also the most important Chinese poet.

To say that in the poem, T’ien Wen, or “Interrogations of Heaven”, the word shih means not time, but “it” or “that”, even if we agreed with Chu Hsi and Tai Chen, still does not change the fact that the poet was the first one in Chinese history to ask about time, “What is it?” or “What is that?” We shall see this understanding to be warranted by the contexts of the question.
The structure of the "Interrogations" is that each set of questions in a normally four-line unit asks about one thing or very closely related matters. Where our present question appears in one unit, it in fact asks about nothing less than the whole mystery of time, being and becoming:

Ming ming an an
Wei shih ho wei
Yin yang san ho
Ho pen ho hua

Even though we concede to the latter exegetes, this would mean:

Light unto dark, dark unto light revolving,
What is that indeed?
The yin and yang intercourse,
What is basic, and what changes?

In other words, the language of modern philosophy might say, what is being (basic) and what is becoming (change) in that which we conceived of as continuous mutability through days and nights and which we now call time?

Now the fact that Chu Hsi and Tai Chen point out that shih in archaic texts meant "it" or "that" serves well to remind us that long before the age of our poet when time was conceived of in China, very dimly by early human intuition, it was with a very vague, indefinite sense of a "it" or a "that". It had been perhaps even with a primitive sense of the ominous quality of an indefinable "thing". Hence the word shih came into vague being. But as archaic civilization advanced, and language sobered, the word shih in its antique usages became for a long duration, to the ancient exegetes at least, a mere colourless grammatical entity in the sense of a "it" or a "that". This sense remained predominantly so in the Shih Ching, or Book of Songs. Even down to about the 6th century B.C. most often the word shih is translatable as a "it" or "that", or their derivatives "then" or "there". But ever so frequently, as we shall see, it conjures the mythical feeling of the ominous or auspicious, thus recalling the primitive virtue of the word. But the word shih in the Shih Ching for all practical purposes, never really means time.

We shall show by a number of examples from ancient texts beginning with the Shih Ching, through the age of Confucius and down to about the mid-4th century B.C., how the word shih evolved its implications. Then with the advent of Ch'ü Yuan's poetry it developed into the full sense of strongly personalized time, identified with the affective state of one's individual being, thanks to his poetic powers and vision. We have indicated the ancient Chinese awareness of time since remote antiquity as a "thing" or "object", imaginably with perhaps certain mythic virtues. But it was always bound up with particular human incidents and events, therefore hardly ever freed from such bondage to be an abstraction for
general contemplation; nor sufficiently sublimated, so to say, to make a self-supporting image. It was a “it” or “that”, spoken of perhaps apprehensively and with a feeling of mystification, but never really with an essence of its own, always attached to some actual occurrences, which were as if, in grammatical terms, the necessary antecedents of such a “it” or a “that”. Primary evidence can be gleaned from the most ancient scripts now extant in the Shang oracle shell and bone inscriptions. The graph found there and recognized to be shih is 聽, in archaic pronunciation 夐, and its components are chih 夬 and jih 日. Interpretation of the semantic compositions of this character seems to be ready and easy: namely chih, meaning “that”, placed on top of the graph of jih, “the sun”. Furthermore, the usages of the character in however few and scantly fragments of the Shang bone writings, seem to make its sense very simple and clear. The graph of the “sun” meaning also “day”, the character for shih 聽 would signify a particular point or fraction of time, glimmering in the primeval sense of it. In the few fragmentary sentences that remain coherent enough among the shattered oracle-bone inscriptions, shih 聽 makes perfect sense when interpreted as “that day”.

But we may here pause a little to consider, even though shih interpreted as “that day” serves well the meaning of the archaic prose inscribed, yet does this prosaic usage really tell the whole story of the etymology? We observe that the basic component of the character, the phonetic which is the true etymon, is chih 夬, in archaic pronunciation 夐. It is clearly recognized as a graph drawing a foot on ground. Philologists agree that it means either “to stop” or “to go”, depending of course on its contexts. And as a component to form compound characters, it means both. I have elsewhere discussed in detail, by drawing analogies from western etymological phenomena as well as from other cases of Chinese word-history, that such apparently ambiguous meaning as the word chih signifying both to stop and to go primordially suggests a composite sense of dynamic or rhythmic movement. It is the considered opinion of paleographers that the Shang script represented a language far advanced from the really primitive. It can be expected therefore that the usages of words were becoming discriminate and delimited. The word shih, therefore, in the few coherent sentences in the bone inscriptions that have remained came to mean merely “that day”, thus a particular point or fraction of time. But the word shih represented by the graph 聽, distinctly with the foot stepping at a point as the sun revolves, we would think, nevertheless indicates primordially a dynamic sense, however intuitively conceived by the primitive imagination when the character was first made. The word did indeed come to mean a fixed point of time in its early known usages, but still contained also at least a feeling of the movement of time.

We make this observation here so that we can see it is no accident that the word shih, among so many other Chinese words, variously representing points or sections of time, should alone be elected to evolve eventually into such a high
abstraction of a term to mean time in general, as a continous all-embracing movement and force. It finally became in Ch'ü Yuan's poetry a controlling image which subsumes under it all the other words signifying time and lends them a new moving power to achieve the deep pathos pervading whole structures of his major poems.

Before this great event in Chinese cultural as well as poetic history, the long process of the evolution of the Chinese conception of time as a distinct entity can be pinpointed by observations of the semantic vicissitudes which the Chinese word for time had undergone in its usages through the epochs. We should logically begin our observation with extensive examples from the *Shih Ching*, or *Book of Songs*. The word *shih* appears there with high frequency. Some forty-three occurrences of it are counted in the whole corpus of the three hundred and five songs. Most often it is glossed by authoritative annotators as *shih* 是 as if it were a substitute, or loan-word, or equivalent, in the basic sense of "that" or "it", with derivative meanings as if it were to say "it's just that" or "that's just it", namely "right" or "correct". And the two most distinguished translators of the *Songs*, Karlgren and Waley render it accordingly. We do not question their fidelity, nor the validity of the traditional glosses, so long as we remember that glosses give only the affinitive, not the identical, meanings of words. We know very well that in the *Songs* the word *shih* is not a simple expedient or haphazard loan-word for *shih* with exactly identical senses and usages. The glosses and translations as usual cannot very well represent the great differences in nuances, but, on the contrary, have to reduce them to deceptively apparent equivalents. One reason that this is not a case of simple loan-word should be self-evident: The *shih* 同, in archaic pronunciation 炎, is not homophonous with *shih* 祥. And there is even a more important reason that *shih* and *shih* must be differentiated in textual considerations. If we consider the texts of the whole corpus of the 305 poems we find that the latter word, *shih* 同, in the ordinary sense of the demonstrative "that", the neuter pronoun "it" or the attributive "correct", is used as good hard currency in its own right, so to speak, for no less than 125 times. And often it appears in the very same poems as our word *shih*, which is used 43 times in the *Book*. You do not raise such a sizable loan when you can already manipulate a much larger capital on hand. Then we note that our word *shih* though roughly equated in glosses and translations with *shih*, actually emerges in quite different contexts and with more complex effects.

We may first observe the large contexts of the whole Book, and find the remarkable fact that the word *shih* is used only once in the Kuo Feng, or "Airs of the States" section. Then its frequency progressively increases through the *Hsiao Ya* and *Ta Ya*, the "Minor and Major Elegantiae" sections, until it reaches the highest frequency in the *Chou Sung*, or the "Chou Eulogia", that is, the most elevated, solemn, ceremonial "Temple Odes" of the Chou royal house. The signifi-
cance of this textual phenomenon can suggest itself. We know well that the four main divisions of the Book of Songs, from the “Airs”, “the Minor and Major Elegantiae” to the temple “Eulogia”, despite textual overlaps, become progressively more concerned with formal and ceremonial occasions, with ever greater national and historical events, growing more and more manifest in their religious sentiments for the sacred, and ever more involved with solemn sacrifices, worship, augury and divination. The ever growing frequency of the word shih in an unerring upswing of a statistical curve in these divisions, therefore, indicates special nuances, with an aura cast upon it by the ceremonial, religious and sacred. This remarkable fact is not to be ignored whether shih is glossed as a demonstrative, as a “that” or “it” to stand for a particular event, action, or person or place or thing; or as an attributive to comment on any of them as “correct” or “good”.

The rich quality becomes evident in the close contexts of each poem. We may discuss the examples by summarizing them into three large catagories. First it is where the word shih can be clearly recognized as demonstrative, understood as “that” or “this”, hence “there” or “here”, or loosely translatable as “it”; secondly, shih as attributive, basically meaning “correct”, or “right”, hence “fitting” or “good”; thirdly shih as either demonstrative or attributive, but is in reference to a special kind of action. But in all cases we shall observe that where shih is merely glossed as “shih yeh” 西也, or “shen yeh” 善也, hence translated as “that” or “good”, it is never such a simple, innocent demonstrative or attributive, but strongly suggests a sense of omens or auspices, for individuals on some occasion, or fortunes of a nation or people for a long duration. Poem number 245, Sheng Min, or “Birth of Our People”, is a notable example. This is how the first stanza begins and ends. For distinction we capitalize SHIH in the texts below, and underscore its English equivalent in my translations:

Ch'ueh ch'u sheng min 虎初生民
SHIH wei Chiang Yuan 時維姜嫄

.............................

Tsai sheng tsai yu 戴生戴育
SHIH wei Hou Chi. 時維后稷

In the beginning, she gave birth to our people
And that was Chiang Yuan

.............................

She gave birth, she nurtured;
And that was Hou Chi.

Here we see shih, according to its grammatical position as well as established gloss, as a pronoun. But its usage bears peculiar emphasis: “That was Chiang Yuan...That was Hou Chi”. Here shih as that is no ordinary pronoun, but it
stands for the sacred primogenitor of the Chou people Hou Chi, who was born of *that* Chiang Yuan, the legendary matriarch, by Holy Union with Shang Ti, God on High. And the birth was after her prayers and sacrifices, under divine auspices. The event obviously affects the entire fortune of a people. We see the personages each spoken of as *shih, that*, with a feeling of omen. We take *shih* grammatically as a pronoun, but we do not fail to see that the antecedents it stands for are agents of action or occurrences that are momentous, wished for, related to fortune, and to the opportune. The sense of the opportune, with implications of fortune, we may indeed discover as the sense underlying all the usages of the word *shih* in the *Shih Ching*, although in glosses it appears reduced barely to a demonstrative "that" or an attributive "correct", hence it is translatable also as "there", "here" or "this" or "it", and "right", or "well" or "good". There is clear evidence that *shih* is not such a simple demonstrative and attributive as *shih*. If it were to express such simple meanings, the latter word is ready at hand for the *Shih Ching* poets, and can be found in the same poem we are considering. When Hou Chi, the demigod ancestor is said to perform his ordinary plain task, cultivating plants of the millet, the event is described as follows:

Shih huo shih mou

..............................

Shih jen shih fu.
These he reaped, these he counted by the acre,

..............................

These he shouldered, these he carried.

Another distinct example of our word *shih* used as demonstrative but with either implicit or obvious senses of augury, is found in two poems relating early migrations and choices of settlements of the Chou people. Poem number 250 says:

Yu SHIH ch'u ch'u
Yu SHIH lu lu
Yu SHIH yen yen
Yu SHIH yu yu

*Here* they stayed,
*Here* they lodged,
*Here* they spoke,
*Here* they talked.

*Here* is the place which their clan leader, Duke Liu the Stalwart (Tu Kung Liu) 駕公劉, chose for them. He chose the place by climbing up again and down again,

Chih tse tsai yen
Fu chang tsai yuan
Up as high as the hill-tops,
And down again on the plain.

It is particularly noted that as he did so,

Ho yi chou chih 何以舟之
Ts'yu chi kao 镇玉及琇
Ping peng jung tao 鞀琫容刀

What did he wear?
Jade and green stones,
And ceremonial knife in ornamented scabbard.\(^{22}\)

And afterwards,

Chi ching nai kang 既景霓冈
Hsiang ch'i yin yang 相其隂陽

.............................

Tu ch'i hsi yang 度其夕陽
Pin chu yun huang 睶居尤荒

Having measured the sun's position on the ridge,
He observed the Yin-yang, the shade and the light,

.............................

He reckoned the sun rays by evening tide,
And the settlement in Pin was truly vast without end.

where they "stayed" and "lodged" is therefore shih, understood as an emphatic demonstrative "here", the place that was wished for, found, auspicious and opportune. The suggestion of ceremonial attire of the hero in this poem, his actions of scanning the sun and the earth, should imply prognostication, perhaps geomancy, which should not be surprising for such a momentous undertaking as the founding of the first settlement of their remote ancestors, celebrated in a poem by the ancient Chou people.

The use of the word shih as a demonstrative to designate "here", "this place", but with a strong sense of augury, is explicit in poem number 237. It relates precisely the same kind of event, that of migration of the same Chou people. And the poem says:

Yuan ch'i wo kuei 愛契我懐
Yueh chih yueh SHÍH 日止曰時
Chu shih yu tzu 織室於兹

So we notched our tortoise (to divine)
It said "stop!" it said "Here!\(^{23}\).
We built our houses in this place.

Before we observe other examples, we may pause for a very brief moment to
remark already that the word *shih*, which eventually was to mean time in the full sense, to be used so affectively as in Ch’ü Yuan’s works, here in the *Shih Ching* had emerged in its first Chinese literary usages most often only to refer to some particularized space. Or as a protean kind of word, it stands for events or personages or attributes, which were conceived to be of some special portentous significance.

Secondly, when the word *shih* in the *Shih Ching* is used as an attributive, it always indicates a positive quality, basically meaning “right”, or “good”, signifying something well suited to an occasion, or auspicious for an event to take place. It is remarkably often related to ceremonial or religious performances, where blessings by the gods and spirits are asked or granted; or again, when fortunes are told. In the most solemn instances, *shih*, meaning “good” or “right”, signifies man’s accord with the gods, meeting with their express approval. Poem number 209, describing a very elaborate ceremony of sacrifice, with food and drinks offered to the spirits, asserts:

Shen shih yin shih
Shih chün shou kao
K‘ung hui kung SHIH
Wei ch‘i chin chih

The spirits enjoy the drink and the food,
They will give our lord a long life,
For all is in accord, all go *good*
This (the ceremony) is perfection indeed.

Arthur Waley,\(^{(24)}\) though he translates this passage more freely than I, sees with his vivid imagination these words as direct quotations spoken by the sacrificers, who at the end of the ceremony understood the approval of the gods, and called it *shih*, “good”.

A similar instance is found in poem number 245, where at the end of the poem sacrificial rites, supposedly initiated by the Chou people’s sacred primogenitor, Hou Chi, are described: grains were cooked, rich meat was prepared, whole lambs were roasted, all were contained in vessels and displayed on stands, and the poem says:

Shang Ti chū hsin
Hu hsiu t’an *SHIH*

God on high enjoys them,
The magnificent flavor is truly *good*.

I have here given the barest literal English equivalent to these lines according to generally accepted glosses. But Waley, again, in his imaginative version treats the last line as a direct quotation, and takes the word *shih* as a comment by God,
who, like a gracious guest sniffing the delicacies of a banquet, called it "good". Hence Waley's version:

God on high is very pleased:
“What smell is this, so strong and good?

In any case, here shih meaning "good" signifies, again, human perception of the will or mood of the divine, in accord with which would come good auspices. In other solemn passages in the Shih Ching, therefore, when shih is used in the position of a simple adjective it makes the best sense if understood as a strong attributive, meaning "auspicious" or "blessed". Poem number 273 is in hommage to the Chou king, who it says "may great Heaven cherish...as a son" 昊天其子之, so that the "beneficent power, (yi te) of Chou can spread all over shih Hsia. Notwithstanding traditional glosses followed by such authoritative translators as Waley and Karlgren to read shih as shih and translate it as "that", here shih Hsia means the "auspicious Hsia", that is, the ancient Chinese states, as distinguished from the barbarians, ruled by the early Chou king under the good auspices of Heaven. Poem 275 speaks of shih Hsia in precisely the same sense. It pays homage to the primogenitor of Chou, the sacred Hou Chi who is said "able to be partner of Heaven" 克配彼天, and thus "gives us wheat and barley" 赉我來牟, which by God's decree were spread "without discrimination of boundary" 无此疆界於 all over shih Hsia, that is, the Chinese states blessed under good auspices. By exactly the same token, the shih Chou, is spoken of as the "blessed", "auspicious" Chou, in poems 295 and 296, which celebrate the good fortunes of the dynasty when it was founded, with its "destiny of the Chou under the auspices" 時周之命 of heaven. Other examples are still plentiful which would show that shih, where it has been by exegetical authorities glossed as shih, to mean basically "that" or "correct", must be understood as suggesting auspices or fortune or luck.

Before we draw a conclusion on the significance of all these, it now remains for us to observe, by way of summary, a third category in the Shih Ching of the use of the word shih in connection not with such great historical or religious events as we have seen, but with a certain specific human action. The action is archery. Three times the word shih is used therewith, in the grammatical sense and position as demonstrative adjective, demonstrative pronoun, and attributive adjective, but it is in contexts that clearly indicate a lucky strike or an ominous hit of the arrow. Poem 127, which represents, by the way, the single instance of the employment of the word shih in the Kuo Feng, or "Airs of the States" section, is a song about the Duke of Ch'in's hunting. The attendents on the hunting ground drove out, thus "presented those animals female and male" (feng shih ch'ên mu 命時辰牡). And kung yueh iso chih/ she pa tse huo 公曰左之，舍彼則獲. "The duke says 'to the left!' He lets off his arrow, and makes his hit". We see here shih is grammatically understood as a demonstrative, and translated as "those", but it
represents *those* animals which are particularly marked for targets, as they were moved to the correct position in space to receive opportunely the lucky strike.\(^{(28)}\)

Even more explicitly, a correct, good strike of the arrow in the shooting match of archers is called *shih* in Poem 220, where it says:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Chao pi k’ang chueh} & \quad \text{酌彼康候} \\
\text{Yi tsou erh SHIH} & \quad \text{以奏爾時}
\end{align*}
\]

Fill that large cup,
To celebrate that you are *good* (with your shot).

The last example, Poem 257, on the other hand, is a lamentation. It bemoans the national suffering of Heaven’s doom from which none could escape. The poet addresses his friends like a seer who sees through Heaven’s wrath and man’s folly with this ominous rhetorical question: “Do I not know...?” *Ju pi fei ch’ung/ SHIH yi yi huo*, 如彼飛蟲/時亦弋獲. “Like those flying birds,/ they, too, are shot by arrows and caught.” Here, *shih*, understood and translatable as a definite pronoun, is again a marked target that got hit, though here it signifies an ominous, not an auspicious, instance in the contexts of this poem.

All these lead us to conclude, at this point, that the word *shih* had been a protean kind of particle in the magic world of the *Shih Ching*, or *Book of Songs*, long before it became a conceptualized, independent entity to mean time in the full sense, for either philosopic discussion or poetic representation. It had not yet had, so to speak, any substance for its own word-meaning. Hence the remarkable fact that it was grammatically never a substantive, or noun, in all the usages we have observed in the *Book of Songs*. As a demonstrative or an attributive, it had to depend on a person, place or thing, each a spatial phenomenon, as its antecedent or for its substantiation. Yet we also observed that the word *shih*, when so used, imbued the statements of the objects or events with a strong sense of destiny or fortune, of auspice or omen. But, again, in no case did it represent or qualify the object or event with any sense of temporality. Indeed, on the contrary, as a demonstrative or attributive, it only indicated the fixation or transpiration of the objects or events as a spatial phenomenon, whether it was the holy birth of a demi-god primogenitor, the discovery by augury of a capital site, or the hit on its target of an arrow. Thus if the word *shih* contained as it did an embryonic sense of time, discernible in its etymology as well as its usages in the *Shih Ching*, we find in it a primeval example to prove the insight of Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms: “In designating temporal determinations and relations, language is at first wholly dependent on the mediation of space.”\(^{(29)}\)

Furthermore, to the extent it suggested fortune and destiny, it was impregnated with a time-sense only in the world of myths. For in the world of myths, observed Cassirer, too, “Time is...experienced as destiny—long before it was conceived as a cosmic order of change in the purely theoretical sense.”\(^{(30)}\) In the mythical
imagination it was a power invisible, but incarnated itself in personages or things at an efficacious moment. Invisible and undefinable, it could therefore hardly be a separable name, but closely bound up, virtually lost in, persons, events and things, and is only called "that", "it" or "right—that's just it", when its power was felt. It can therefore be said with justices that in the world of the poetry of the Shi Ching, there was no independent word for time, because there was no independent concept of it. Ever so often it was intuited, portentously, by the mythical imagination, but its bondage with things was such that its name shih was thereby pre-empted, as it were, and made only to stand demonstratively for the things and their opportune qualities.

The close bond of the primitive sense of time with things and objects, and its virtual loss of identity in them in linguistic expressions, remained so among other archaic texts. The dates of the texts of the Shang Shu, or Book of Documents, are wearisomely polemical. But even the most cautious scholarship would accept that antique linguistic features since early Chou or before, are preserved in them either from original sources or by later imitation. From the twenty-nine chapters in the "Modern Script" (chin wen), which have a better chance of early textual integrity, we may observe the usages of the word shih in archaic Chinese prose. We find that it maintains in prose much of the same meaning of "that" or "it" or "right" as it does in the poetry of the Shi Ching except perhaps in a more matter-of-fact way as a demonstrative or attributive than the emotive mode of its poetic usages. And more often than in the Shi Ching another sense of the word shih becomes prominent. It means the seasons of the year. This may seem to have given the word shih greater substance in connection with the sense of time, but it actually advanced no further the notion of conceptualized time as an abstracted independent entity or a free, self-contained image than in the Shi Ching. Karlgren, following closely the ancient exegeses, has translated accurately such familiar expressions in Shang Shu, ching shou jen shih 尊授人時, as "respectfully gave the people the seasons", (31) and pai kung wei shih, 百工惟時 as "all the functionaries are observant of the seasons". (32) It is clear that the word shih here does not signify any notion of general time. But, meaning the "seasons", it indicates merely a sense discovered in high antiquity of very specific sections or divisions of time, thinkable and expressible only in terms of natural phenomena and objects, and human events in relation to them, in the early agricultural society.

In fact, shih meaning "the seasons", in the corpus of the Shang Shu, far from being a general concept of time, was itself placed in the same category with five other natural phenomena as one of the "various omens" shu cheng 序徵, from physical nature, like "rain, sunshine, warmth, cold and wind". (33) It was as if it had material substance or physical force like the other natural elements. And no doubt derived from the same tradition of reading omens in natural phenomena there developed the notion in the Tso Chuan 左傳 that shih in its very concrete
sense of specific divisions of time, namely the “seasons”, was classified as one of the “six things”, *liu wu* 六物. The “thing”, particularly called *wu* in the *Tso Chuan* and its related texts, often signifies omens, auspices or manifestations of the spirits themselves. Here the “six things” are *sui, shih, jih, yueh, hsing, ch'en*, 歲、時、日、月、星、辰, translatable as “year, seasons, day, month, stars and constellations”; but “day” and “month” as we all know in Chinese are synonymous with the sun and the moon, and *sui* meaning “the year” is according to the best paleographic authorities etymologically the name of year star (identified with Jupiter in western astronomy). In this context therefore, even if a specific sense of certain division of time, namely the seasons, was signified by the word *shih*, that limited sense of time at this stage of early Chinese thinking was not only bound up with, but subsumed and submerged under the notion of the physical, visible celestial objects, the “things”. It in fact becomes itself like the sun, the moon and the stars, a specific concrete “thing”. Hence no chance in Early Chou China for the development of an abstracted, general notion of time, nor, of course, any full linguistic expression for it. Thus for a long time *shih* remained identified with the “seasons”. And when used as an attributive, as it often was in the *Shang Shu* texts, it meant “seasonable”. This sense, let us remember, is again closely allied with that which in its frequent usages in the *Book of Songs*, meant “opportune”. For this sense the Greeks would use the word *kairos*, the opportune or right occasion, to make a clear distinction of it from *χρόνος*, time in general.

By the next stage of Chinese thought, when the intellect further turned from myths and legends to human affairs, for Confucius the word *shih* meant predominantly the opportune occasion or the right season for human act. The *Analects* of course gives us the most reliable textual evidence. There it says a good government should *shih min yi shih*, 使民以時 “engage the people according to the right seasons”. The master is a good persuader, because he *shih jan hou yen* 時然後言, sees that it is “opportune and then will talk”. And he would advise *pu shih pu shih*, 不時不食 “do not eat when it is not the right occasion”, or according to another commentary, “when any dish is not seasonable”. (This makes him an exemplary gourmet or just a fussy eater!) The very first sentence in the *Analects*, *hsueh erh shih hsi chih pu yi yueh hu*, 學而時習之不亦說乎 which every Chinese school boy used to know has been interpreted wrong ever since the Sung schoolmen in their pedagogic zeal added to it a heavy-handed meaning. James Legge, following the Sung neo-Confucianists, translated it as “Is it not pleasant to learn with constant perseverance and application?” We know this is wrong because first of all common sense can answer that it cannot be very “pleasant” if one has to learn so “constantly”. We have other commentaries as well as the primary, typical meaning of the word *shih* in Confucian classics to guide us to see what is “pleasant” is “to learn and practise on due occasions”. Hence *shih*, again, indicates
the opportune or the seasonable. All the rest of the usages of the word *shih* in the *Analects* indicate opportunity or the seasons, except in one case where it says *shào chī shī* 少之時, meaning a stage of one’s life, “in youth”. This usage is to indicate a part of the life of an individual human being. This it never did in the more archaic *Shih Ching* or *Shu Ching*, where it was in its protean ways always bound up with large natural phenomena, great historical events, solemn ceremonies or public activities. Now it is as if a sense of time, expressible with the word *shih* begins to glimmer, becomes secularized and vaguely personalized. But it was, as with the *Analects*, a very particularized sense of a stage, a section or division, not at all a generalized concept of time.

This particularized or fragmented sense of time, serving to designate a particular duration of personal life or an event with the word *shih*, continued to develop down to the early 4th century B.C., notably among the Confucian thinkers. The texts of Mencius have especially plenty of such expressions as “this” or “that time”, or “sometimes” or “at that time”: *tsʻu shih* 此時, *chīn shih* 今時, *chʻı shih* 其時, *su shih* 斯時, *yu shih* 有時, or *tăng shih shih yeh* 曾是時也. All Mencius’ usages of *shih* are in grammatical terms “bound forms”, each governed by a modifier, for time was not yet spoken of as an independent entity or concept, because it was not yet so conceived. Mencius hardly spoke of time but to indicate a historical or biographical occassion. Even when he thought of larger temporal units, he meant *shih* to be an age or a generation. His famous saying: *pʻı yı shıh yeh, tsʻu yı shıh yeh* 此一時也, 此一時也, which has remained a favorite quotation even among modern Chinese speakers, therefore actually means historical ages are different from one another. His equally famous sayings about *tʻien shıh* 天時, “heavenly auspices”, of course, reverts back to the primeval sense of the word to suggest opportunity, manifested by celestial omens. In all the rest of the relevant cases we have observed, if by the 4th century B.C. a Confucian sense of time advanced from that of the early Chou, it was a sense of strictly historical or biographical time. It was a limited, *ad hoc*, totally objective measurement of apparent phenomena in the span of physical life and events. This Confucian sense of time as such is positivistic. And for the early Confucianists, “positivistic knowledge”, even though it was about so elusive a concept as time, should, as John Dewey commented on such knowledge, properly be “concerned with merely physical utilities”.

By the early 4th century B.C., as no surprise, it was the Taoists who added a new dimension to the concept of time. The whole Taoist philosophical stance, however, as we well know, is unitarian, monist and ultimately transcendental. By transcendence they effect reconciliation or obliteration of all differences. Consequently, while a new distinction of more of an integrated sense of time than the Confucian positivistic notion of it seems to have emerged with Chuangtzu, Taoistic philosophy in its utmost aim was to obliterate that distinction. Hence Taoism
constitutes an ultimate denial rather than affirmation of any interest in the concept of time, though Taoistic thought seems to have at first promoted an advance in that concept. This paradoxical Taoistic position is revealed in the remarkable fact that after Chuangtzu, in the final culmination of Taoist wisdom in the great Tao Te Ching, or Book of Tao, time was no longer discussed at all. Textually observed, the great Book uses the word shih only once, and it does not mean time at all but reverts to the old meaning, “opportune”: in tung shan shih 劉山時, (32) “A move is good when it is opportune”.

Chuangtzu’s construction of the concept of time, giving the word shih that full, all-inclusive sense in high abstraction as the rightful name for time, is an important step in the history of the Chinese language as well as of thought. In linguistic or grammatical terms we see the word shih, meaning time, used now as an independent noun or substantive, “free” from, not “bound” with, any such modifier or antecedent as in the Confucian classics we have so far cited. Time, so to say, seems to have philosophically come to its own, though it was to be ultimately negated in that philosophical system itself, and had to wait as we shall see for its poetic genesis in Ch’ü Yuan. In philosophical terms, Chuangtzu’s construction of the concept of time is an idealistic one, such as is necessary to free and uplift it from its earlier subservience to the positivistic, material or physical concerns. To the collected works of Chuangtzu we owe the clear definite statement on time and its common attributes in shih wu chih, 時無止, “Time never stops.” This appears in the chapter Ch’iu Shui 秋水, “Autumn Waters”, which is likely written by his disciples or immediate followers. The idealistic nature, however, as well as the linguistic distinction of the important contribution of Chuangtzu, I believe, can be clearly epitomized in one quotation from the authentic part of his texts; (40)

“When in touch (with things) time grows from the mind.” shih chieh erh shih sheng yu hsín che yeh, 是接而時生於心者也。This is extraordinarily like St. Augustine’s observation: “In te, anime mens, tempora metior.” (It is in you, O my mind, that I measure time….) (41) But let us consider at the moment this important Chinese sentence. In grammatical terms here shih, time, is an unqualified, unattached word of a substantive and completely “free” from any antecedent. It is now a true category. We can be sure that here shih, time, is in the categorical, general sense of temporality, and no longer only identified as before with a unit, section or any other mere division of time, such as the seasons or the day or the night. For the preceeding part of the sentence clearly stipulates that it must be conceived that “day and night are without division or distinction,” jih yeh wu hsí 日夜無時(隙). All are a part of the large general category, Time, which grows from the mind. This may not seem to us today to be too hard or profound a thought to accept, but in the early 4th century B.C. China Chuangtzu must have felt it to be very novel. He stressed that only the sublime, transcendental mind of a man who grasped the “essence in perfection” ts’ai ch’üan 才全, could know it. And by the
same inference, all the seasons, subsumed under the category of time, are without
distinction or division: wherever things grow it is spring. The man of perfect
essence "acts as spring does, wherever things are," *yu wu wei ch'un* 與物為春.

Let us translate the whole sentence now and see how this concept of time
established by Chuangtzu utmosly stands in the whole system of the Taoist
philosophy: "Conceive that day and night are without division, and act as spring
does wherever things are; that is, in touch with things, time grows from the
mind." It is important to note here that spring, when all things come into being,
when all things are, is the metaphor which by extension into the next statement
means Taoistic time. Time, that is, by which all things acquire their temporal
being. But Taoist philosophy, as we well know, in its ultimate transcendence
negates being by juxtaposing thus countervailing it with nonbeing. Consequently,
time which is of the essence of all being is ultimately negated by Taoist belief.
The quality of time is temporality. To come into existence, into being, to gain
life, means to enter time and acquire temporality. But in the grand course of the
self-generated rhythm of the Tao, the inevitable sequel is to go out of existence,
to lose being and life, thus offsetting temporality. Temporality, which is the
character of mortal life, of being in time, is, as modern existential philosophy
would like to emphasize, basic to inescapable human anxiety, to the forever pre-
carious sense of self identity, and to all psycho-physiological drive, strife and
contention, ending in utter despair. Chuangtzu discovered this close bond between
time and being, accepted its inevitability, but in his mental philosophy sought to
break it by seeing beyond it. There is, again, textual evidence.

Chuangtzu in two important statements made his position clear. Having
advanced an integrated sense of time, by elevating the word *shih* to a categorical
status to be used as an independent, unqualified substantive to mean time, he
proceeds to reveal his idea of the quality of time in his usages of the word as an
attributive. In one case he deals with death and in the other, with serious illness
and deformity, and he regarded both death and illness as mere transformation of
physical life. Life or the normal physical condition of life he calls *lai* 來, "to
come", or *te* 得, "to gain", that is, to come into being, or to gain in existence. For
both to come into being and to gain existence his epithet is *shih* 時, which in
such contexts of his philosophy we are sure means temporal or temporality, and
suggests temporariness. Death or the decay of the body he calls, as expected,
*chü* 去, "to go", or *shih* 失, "to lose", that is to depart from being, or to lose out
in existence. And for both of these latter conditions Chuangtzu has the comforting
epithet, *shun* 順, "accord", that is, in accord with the Tao. The two statements
are similar. We present them in full. The one is the fabled comment on the
death of Laotzu:

*Shih lai, fu tzu shih yeh, shih ch'ü fu tzu shun yeh*,

適來夫子時也，適去夫子順也.
As he came, the master acquired temporal being (in life),
As he went, the master is in accord (with Tao).

The other statement is purported to be by a sage on the deforming and decay of his body:

_Te che shih yeh, shih che shun yeh._(43)

得者時也，失者順也.

To gain (life) is to acquire temporal being,
To lose (it) is to be in accord (with Tao).

And both statements end with the same counsel of Chuangtzu's Taoistic wisdom in precisely identical words. Chuangtzu knew well, as he identified time with being, that temporality is the source of all anxiety, care, problems of selfhood, strife and existential despair. For all the turmoil caused by time in one's life of temporal mortality he therefore counselled "Be at peace with temporality", _an shih_, 安時. For beyond time and being there is the "accord", and he counselled, "Abide by that accord", _ch'iu shun_ 餘順. So all passions and anxieties will be relieved. The full statement is:

_An shih erh ch'u shun, ai lo pu neng ju yeh._

安時而處順，哀樂不能入也.

_Be at peace with temporality (in life) and abide by the accord (which is beyond time and being), so that sorrow or joy cannot enter you._

So did Chuangtzu seem to have established philosophic time and related it to being but then offset and, as it were, escaped it. In offsetting and balancing it with countervailing opposite, "beyond time and being", he sought to free man's being-in-time, from all anxieties and passions, be they sorrow or joy.

III.

**The Genesis: Textual Analysis And Appreciation**

But toward the end of the 4th century B.C. there in China arose a new vision, a new voice that was the poetry of Ch'ü Yuan, which in its bravery took upon itself the mission to "encounter sorrow". This is the meaning of the very title of his magnum opus, the _Li Sao_, as Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the earliest authority on Ch'ü Yuan's poetry, understood its theme to be. It displayed all the passions, dwelt on the deepest human anxieties, wrestled with the problem of man's being and self-identity in the flux of time, and thus with it came the genesis of poetic time: Time baptized, called by name as its properties were wrought into poetic image.

This genesis had its roots in the intellectual fermentation of its own age, as well as in the new poetic realization of fundamental questions in life. In the 4th century B.C. through the whole turbulent period of the Warring States, the Chinese intellect, among the conservatives and radicals alike, asked many fun-
damental humanist questions. Mencius, for instance while upholding a Utopian social order, questioned the traditional hierarchy of political values and came to the answer that "the common people are the most important... and the ruler the least." And he harked back to ancient history to justify revolutions by force which founded the Shang and Chou dynasties. Chuangtzu raised the very fundamental question of being, which, we must notice, however, though it may sound abstract especially in western terminology, was in its basic concern as well as in its whole metaphorical range of language, centered upon the mental and physical state of being of man. Now, in their raising of new, fundamental questions, Mencius' historicism and Chuangtzu's ontological perspective necessarily brought forth and advanced a new consciousness of time. But their very humanism or anthropocentricism, which generally characterizes Chinese thought, prevented them from fully developing the time concept into anything so elaborate as in western philosophy or religion. This limited Mencius, as we have seen, to treating time as merely fragmented, opaque markers of any haphazard biographical or historical duration; and Chuangtzu grasping but then letting it loose to free the spirit of man. Perhaps at no great risk of simplification we may observe a pat formula: In the western tradition, the concept of time developed in the Greek "world of ideas" and then in the medieval Christian world, of God and eternity, hence the rich discourses and theories on the subject in western philosophy and religion; but in China time remained in the world of man, hence it was up to the impassioned human vision of poetry, rather than philosophic speculation or religious contemplation to bring it, when conditions ripened, to full flourish.

What characterizes Ch'ü Yuan's treatment of time in his poetry is his intense subjectivity, in doubt, bewilderment and despair, whether as it concerns the universe, general humanity, or the personal desperate consciousness of the individual self in the perilous, unredeemable passage of time. This makes his position, as we have earlier indicated, so remarkably analogous to the intellects of the 16th century Europe. If his predecessors since early 4th century B.C., such as Mencius and Chuangtzu, with their awakening sense of historical or biographical time or, however cursorily, philosophic time, prepared any meagre background for the full development of Ch'ü Yuan's poetic time, their stance had been by contrast objective. Their concern was with time and events, or time and things, or of time and man as part of the things. In terms of emotional attitudes, there had been the positivistic equanimity of Mencius, and Chuangtzu's transcendent calm, but never the sense of affective confrontation and peril. Theirs had been at least a sense of security and surety. These earlier attitudes are at least for practical purposes comparable to the western classical and early Christian attitudes as contrasted with the drastically changed one of 16th century Europe, so cogently summed up by Georges Poulet. Ch'ü Yuan's attitude toward time is all affective subjectivity, for the sake of man, and of himself. Yet in bewilderment and despair, by his
persistent, vehement and brave questioning, he heightened the human vision. And by his strong assertion of the value of pure human essence as he conceived of it, he elevated the dignity of the human self in the face of freshly discovered perilous time.

The T'ien Wen, or "Interrogations of Heaven" which we have cited, in questioning time—"What is time?" "What does it do?"—asks for no less than the total meaning of creation, of being and becoming: "What is basic?" and "What changes?" Thence follow vehement questions about the utterly inexplicable mysteries of the unstable construction of the universe, the puzzling movements of the celestial bodies, and the changes of seasons. The long series of cosmic questions addressed to large phenomena in heaven and on earth since creation superimposes on the whole poem from its beginning an overwhelming sense of ponderous time dimension and mutation. Then there follow the perplexing myths and legends, and finally the absurdities, injustices and incredible occurrences in human history in the temporal world. Altogether some hundred and seventy questions are asked. Corruption and jumble of the original order of the text of the "Interrogations" have often been suspected. But imperfection of its extant text does not justify neglect of its value, as happened earlier in this century, or, more recently in some western scholarly endeavors, failure to heed its seriousness of tone and intent. Even in its present shape one can observe a fair sequence beginning with the undatable, timeless chaos, leading to the beginning of time, which begot myths and legends, and then streams through human chronology. The fact that the T'ien Wen asks only questions, on momentous moral, historical, religious issues, but without, like Pilate, "stopping for an answer", has remained a tantalizing unsolved problem of literary form as regards its native sources or foreign analogy. But intrinsically considered, we may see that such a form serves well the intent of the great poem itself, if we are alerted of the total time dimension that adumbrates the structure of the poem all in all. For then the questions, momentous and stirring as they are, may very well be just without any answer, as time sweeps along, the leveller of them all. All are so many temporal vicissitudes, as inconsistent as they are inconstant. In incessant temporal mutation, the whole universe, whether morally or physically considered, is a huge question mark. But the poet is not at all accepting it with equanimity. For the questions in impassioned, rapid succession are fundamentally raised not by any objective contemplation or the cool, speculative, reasoning spirit, neither in tone nor in substance. On the contrary, he asks them on behalf of all mortal men, as perpetually puzzled sentient temporal beings, in a deeply disturbed, affective state of mind which is all subjective agitated perception. His treatment of time could not therefore have been one of purely conceptual, hence by definition objective, time for the benefit of philosophic contemplation and scientific thought. But it was all perceptual, hence strongly subjective time best suited to the expression of the cosmic as well as individual passions of his lyrical poetry, which
discovered and was integrally structured with it. The realization of the time dimension in the structural meaning of the "Interrogations" would help ascertain its authorship claimed since Ssu-ma Ch'ien as that of the creator of the great Li Sao, in which the pathos of Time and Being dominates the entire lyrical contesture.

Ch'u Yuan's magnum opus, the lament called Li Sao, or "Encountering Sorrow", as we may conveniently still call it here, has for twenty centuries moved its Chinese readers with its almost unbearable intensity of passionate outcries. This long poem of three-hundred seventy-four lines being purportedly autobiographical, its expressions, including its treatment of time, are naturally more personalized than those in the "Interrogations of Heaven". The power of its passionate utterances should appeal directly, appealing to readers the more readily the closer they were to his age. Witness Chia Yi (201–169 B.C.) and Ssu-ma Ch'ien's (?–117 B.C.) genuine emotional responses and Liu An's (179–122 B.C.) enthused panegyrics in praise of it at Emperor Han Wu's court. The admiration has since remained. But because of its immense complexity of references and allusions to myths and legends, to historical events which became obscured, and to personal data no longer available, later interpretations of it has tended to be either biased by changing morality or ideology, or distracted, more so today, by scholastic research in extrinsic minutiae or tangential interests in speculative anthropology. My hope has been to redirect our attention to the internal structure of this major work, and thus to restore some sense of the organic integrity of the poem, from which the total impact of its moving power is derived, and the dynamism of its whole structural development can be understood.

One of the important keys to the revelation of the organic integrity and internal dynamics of the poem, as well as what makes Ch'ü Yuan the creator of a poetry that opened a new epoch in Chinese literary history, is discovered by our observations of his innovation and construction of time in his poetic usages. This is more evident in his Li Sao than in any other of his works. It is time reconstituted in poetry by its total identification with personal being. Consistently as never before, in every instance in the Li Sao as we shall see, when time is mentioned, the concern is always Time and I, Time and what I do, Time and what I am or become. The persona of the poem being the poet himself, and the poem being that of a heroic quest for the ideal good and beauty, the "I", fired with passions for public good and personal self-realization, is naturally the grand figure that occupies the whole foreground of the poem. But, as is evident in the text, from the very beginning this figure is plunged into the flux of time, swimming up and down, swept by it or struggling against it in desperate self-assertion of his human virtue, his human essence, his Being. He succumbs to it in his last frustration, ending as in all great tragic works, in a moment of tragic tranquility and submission. His, as we shall see, is such consciousness of time as accounts for all the existential anxiety and despair, especially in the high adventures of the human
soul in search of the glory of the ideal, permanent good and beauty, which if it were in the Christian tradition might have been God. Such temporal consciousness pervades the whole poem in its phraseology, diction and whole structure, when we become alert to its internal organic integrity by close textual reading.

Traditional Chinese scholarship did see the logicality of the developmental structure of the poem, though Arthur Waley, with good reason, too, struck by its affective power, applied Goucourt's phrase to describe it as issuing from the poet's propre nbrevosit\é. Some seven noted Ching authorities on the Li Sao tried analytically to divide the poem into sections to show the logical order. Their opinions more or less differed. The latest of them, Wu Ju-lun (1840-1903) had the advantage of his predecessors' trials and errors, and achieved an order by establishing eight sections plus the ian or "Envoi". Time, too, because of its too frequent usages, did not entirely escape the attention of careful readers. But scholastic historicism in the tradition has taken too narrow a view, it seems, of the textual references to time, and treated them, rather fruitlessly for the lack of enough documentary corroboration, as mere biographical data for speculation. If the affective power grown out of the frequent, strongly suggestive usages of time in the poem was sensed, it has never been explicated and demonstrated. By following the established order of the sequence of the sections, we shall attempt here to give the demonstration, thus presenting in the process a brief synopsis of the poem with analysis and appreciation of it in a new light.

The highly elevated tone and rich symbolic diction throughout the poem have been evident to even the most casual reader. Thus in the very beginning stanza when the persona introduces himself by giving his exact birthday in elaborate phrases, it can by no means be a prosaic report of vital statistics, but a poetic, emotive statement of a mortal being born, as he says, under the movement of the celestial bodies, into Time. Strikingly, an acute sense of temporality dominates virtually the whole first section of twelve couplets or distichs (Section I, line 1-24). Born into time, the man that is the poet as hero of the poem, acquires his living being, his human essence, in the temporal world; yet he has to arduously preserve, cultivate his human essence, while carried by, racing with, and struggling against the rushing stream of time. This is the main, basic emotional burden of the first section which sets off and continues to control the whole poem. There repeatedly expressed is the deep pathos of irrevocable temporality, the anxiety to cultivate and develop so as to maintain his "virtue", his human essence, to withstand the ravages of time. And this is in both direct and symbolic language which deserves additional comments as we quote again:

I flow like a fast torrent, as if never to catch up,
Afraid that the years will go without me.
Each morning I gather angelica in the mountains,
Each evening I pluck the sedges on the island.
Every day, every month thus swiftly without tarrying,
Spring and autumn speed on in succession.
I think how the trees and flowers fade and fall,
And fear my beloved Beauty, too, will fade in twilight.

So the poem commences with a grand parade of the passage of time. Mornings and evenings, days and months, the seasons and the years rush by in a mocking yet awesome and fateful procession. And with them there was the constant fear and anxiety of man, made the more acute in his high aspiration after ideal virtue and beauty, which he tries desperately to cultivate so as to realize the noble worth of man's being in a temporal world that flows by.

The imagery that constitutes the symbolic language throughout the poem is taken from both the natural and the human world with respect to mutation and transience. We know of course that the sacredness of flowers and plants had its ancient origin in the Ch'ü Shamanistic religion, because of their close association with the deities in ritualistic offerings. The exquisite “Nine Songs” of Ch'ü Yuan retain clear traces of this tradition, though, by the way, I think it has been very misleading to treat the “Nine Songs” as primitive Shamanistic hymns. Fragrant flowers and sweet plants fill the pages of the Li Sao. That to cultivate, gather and wear them would mean symbolic actions to conserve and assert noble virtues must, because of their sacred, religious origin, have been readily understood by Ch'ü Yuan's contemporaries, as they have been easily accepted and appreciated through all later generations. The flowers and plants were public symbols, but because of this very subjective nature of the poem they become personalized, as they are infused with the human pathos of temporality, of subjective time. We note that the flowers and plants are employed as symbols not only for their loveliness. More important, it is for their purity as they are said to be gathered in remote mountains and islands. But most important of all is the thought that they will inevitably fade and fall in time. Their loveliness and purity are by the very temporal nature of their life and being fragile and frail, so are the beauty, virtue and good in the temporal world of man. Yet precisely because of their temporality, one must desperately cultivate, gather, preserve, and make the best of Nature when one can; as one must against all the fateful odds of the flux of time assert the human essence for its utmost capability to realize beauty, virtue and good, to make temporal life and being and worthy reality at all. Throughout the whole poem, the tenor of the Li Sao is such desperate assertion. In its entire length of nearly 400 lines it draws all it can from the human, the natural and the supernatural world in vivid imagery to set up a dazzling cosmic frame of reference to bear out the desperation in tragic human glory.

The great intensity of the passions, which accounts for the soul-stirring power of the poem, results from dramatic exhibitions of the deepest concerns, the most
basic instincts of man in his temporal life: the love instinct and the death instinct, which Freudian psychology knows well, and calls Eros and Thanatos. The reader is struck by the constant expressions of the Death-wish throughout the first several high-strung sections of the poem. It is however not a negative wish, a weak resignation, by any means, but on the contrary a strong affirmation of the precious purity of the personal heroic character. This purity the poet knows to be frail, but it is all the more heroic as it pitched with pain of death against a changing, hence constantly compromising, impure, and fickle world at large, which is necessarily so in the irresistible flux of time. The same fickleness, uncertainty and hence the woeful failure of any constant human affection or moral principle are personified in his love objects too. The women he pursued and the king he adored often become in his poetic montage one and the same entity which always fails and escapes him, as time does, in his high-principled, desperate quest of them, in the human, natural and supernatural world.

The direct appeal and overwhelming power of the poem, as we have suggested, derives from its tragically exalted viewpoint and tone of intense subjectivity, in its treatment of time and events. It cannot therefore be, despite all its great length, narrative or dramatic literature, but an exaltant lyrical poem, a lament. But the tragic, total subjectivity gains universality, acquires a distinct sense of Weltschmerz as the personal passions are infused with public concern about national affairs as well as individual affection. It is no mere romantic pursuit of the unobtainable beauty of the other sex ending in the despair of Young Werther, though there is the same poignancy. It has been easily recognized as a politico-erotic poem. The passions in erotic terms, that is, in the poet's pursuit of female beauties, and, in political terms, in his desperate quest for public, human good under a wise king, often become a whole, indistinguishable complex. So do the female beauties and the inaccessible king often appear as one whole composite love object. This complex is not resolved until after the climax of the poem is reached, in Section VI. And to note the resolution of the complex as we shall show is essential to the understanding of the structure of the poem, hence its basic meaning. This resolution I think has been rather overlooked, as the politico-erotic complex is as yet barely noted in modern scholarly studies.

The device of juxtaposition and fusion of passions for the ideal female beauty and for good government is not unparalleled in great world literature. There is a distinct example in western classics in the Divine Comedy. But the striking difference is that the persona in Dante is a perfectly safe and protected on-looker, a poet on a guided tour through Inferno and Purgatory. And, more important, there he is in eternity, not in Time. But Ch'ü Yuan plunges himself into the temporal world of merciless time, naked as it were except for the fragile adornments of quickly withering flowers and easily tarnished jade which he symbolically wears. The acute consciousness of time, once it is fully, poignantly expressed in the first
section to set the keynote of the poem, is always with him, driving him constantly forward in his desperate movements. His vision spans all human time, back into past history, as in the beginning of Section II (line 25-50), and, again, in Section V (line 131-184), where there is a full review of the shining examples of virtue and vice of the historical past. “Make thee vivid images”, we recall the words of the eighteenth century European Christian thinker Saint-Lambert: “Make thee vivid images of the good fortune which reward the wise—and of the misfortune into which the foolish fall, and thou wilt interest thy heart in being virtuous”. This is practically what Ch’ü Yuan had said in Sections II and V of his Li Sao, about the 4th century B.C. And in our modern era the author of the Studies in Human Time, while quoting Saint-Lambert, would call this “affective memory”, on which is established a structure of subjective temporal duration for 18th century European philosophy to secure a sense of stability of being in time. But Ch’ü Yuan’s age was not an age of Reason like that of 18th century Europe. Nor by any means is the contexture of his poetry meant to establish stability, equanimity, or submission of the fervent spirit to cool reason. So his “affective memory” of the past, with all its nobility, sagacity and surety, only serves to make him more desolate about the depraved present, and throw himself apace into the unknown future.

Man’s fated “thrownness” in time is the German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s term Geworfenheit, which he relates to the “potentiality-for-being” in his study of Being and Time in existential philosophy. With this “thrownness” is discovered the basis for all anxiety, fear and despair in man’s temporal existence on the one hand, but, on the other, the possibility of freedom of the Self as authentic being, resulting from “resoluteness”—Entschlossenheit. The greatness of Ch’ü Yuan’s poetry, lies in that self-resoluteness which Paul Tillich in our day would call “the courage of despair”. The poet hurries himself into the unknown, uncharted future, in constant anxiety, despair and doubt. These tribulations, however, because of their inherent fundamental nature in everyman’s temporal being, make the hero’s resolve in preserving and realizing the human essence, the fragile purity of human virtue by self-choice, all the more heroic, affective and glorious. The frame of reference, the sources of imagery, and the great odds he is up against to build up the conflicts in his poetry, if it were in other cultural contexts, might be different. Christianity might have provided God, as in some powerful thought in modern philosophy—God against whom Kierkegaard struggled to realize his self-purity, and whom so that he would finally reach by what he calls “absurdity” and “paradox”. The ancient classical west might have given the dire personified Fates and Furies and all the world of the pagan gods for him to battle. But the Chinese cosmos for Ch’ü Yuan wears a completely human and naturalistic cast. Even his supernatural world is but an extension or reflection of the natural and human, all subsumed under human subjective temporality. Neither God nor the Fates could
dominate any part of the drama, but the stream of Time does. It is invisible, entirely impersonal, but irrevocable, perceptible and constantly felt, as it pervades the poem and bears up the stature of the self of the human hero, who is tossed up naked and bare in its current. In the structure of the *Li Sao* poem, therefore, the human figure of the hero dominates the entire foreground, but is inundated with time.

The imagery is predominately taken from the natural and human world for its acute sense of temporality and mutation. Thus in Section III (line 51–106), before he sets out on his long quest, as if for psychological preparation, there is the symbolic action of cultivating virtue, which “nine acres” and a “hundred rods” of flowers, in great varieties that he nurtured, stand for. But he knows well and says explicitly that his “wish to reap the harvest in time”\(^{(54)}\) is only a wish. For in time they will all wither. Here the word for “time” is *shih*, which is used six times in the *Li Sao* consistently as substantive, and in such contexts as we have analysed cannot but acquire the fateful sense of incessant temporality. The only meaning of the human effort in irrevocable temporality is, symbolically, to cherish and distinguish the flowers, likewise human virtue, while one can for a time, so that one does not have to “only lament the fragrant blossoms overtaken by filthy weeds”\(^{(55)}\) even when they are in bloom. Interfused with the rich natural imagery in this section is his exposition of the fickleness, depravity, and absurdity of the human world. In it he “stands alone, in desperation all the time.”\(^{(56)}\) Here is his stance of self-determination, of “courage of despair.” Or, again to borrow Heidegger’s term, his assertion of his “being-in-the-world,” *in-der-Welt-sein*. Time in the temporal world may indeed change, and sweep away all. One might take consolation either by resignation or by drifting, however, only when one could either pose oneself outside of time and the world or lose one’s selfhood in time and the world. Minds of different ages in history, and of different temperaments, might have made these choices. But Ch’ü Yuan’s choice was the assertion of being-in-the-world, the more strongly the greater the depravity of his world and the utter futility of worldly achievement in his time. Thus he set out on his painful, impetuous quest, equipped with nothing but his redoubtable sense of virtue. That precious fragile human essence in time and the world is made the more distinct, the greater its self-determined collision with the world and its self-consciousness of the rush of time. So regarded, his self-directed pursuits are no mere acts of ordinary morality. No reformist political zeal, nor conventional ethics can explain his movements, or, especially, the deep pathos of his poetry. If there is a moral, as there must be in all great poetry, it is a more fundamental one. It concerns the very question of the authenticity of being in an impossible world of temporality. The very fundamental nature of this issue therefore calls into play in his poetry the most basic and common human instincts: Eros and Thanatos dramatized and exhibited, against the backdrop of rushing time that is the common fate to all.
Section III is a long passage, furnished completely with earthly imagery, from flowers that bloom and wither to avaricious, benighted men and jealous petty women. All the main motifs of the poem, the symbolism of virtue and vice, the politico-erotic complex, the fear of "old age with forward steps stealing on", the despair of time, and the passionate death-wish, are in concrete detail reinforced and firmly established for the poem in this section. From this earthly frame of reference it leads to a short section IV (line 108–130). By contrast expressions of this short passage are forlorn and spare, concentrating on the anguish of existential aloneness, with regrets of ever having mixed, hence perhaps compromised a little with the depraved world. But it is as if after an ordeal to enhance all the more forcefully the faith in self-choice and self-will. The self, otherwise threadbare, now in its symbolic wearing of a "lotus cape" and a "hibiscus skirt" is all the more "truly fragrant of feeling", with "bright pure substance undiminished". His physical existence is of course subjected to the ravages of the temporal world, "my body, may be torn apart and disintegrate", but now the "I will never change" having been assured of authentic being, and attained the "constant" (ch'ang 常). Thus he raises immensely the stature of the human spirit in time and the world. So will he hurl himself forward bravely into the unknown future, into uncharted space "to view the vast outlying regions in all four directions".

We do not see him, however, immediately venture into any distant outlying region. Next in Section V on which we have just briefly commented, he meets with the only human being close to him, his sister or consort, Nü Hsü, not in affectionate leave taking but for a strong argument to assert his uncompromising principles. There is deep poignancy in this episode, which by a final stroke completes his utter aloneness in the human world. "How single and solitary, that even to me you do not listen!" so says his sister. Thus spoke the last human voice on earth he heard, but not heeded. But thus he also sets himself entirely free from the last human bondage, as he must, if that bondage means any compromise, hence sure loss of the selfhood which he has cultivated and in which he persisted against rushing time and the world. Then follows the long passage of his search into human time, into history, to establish "vivid images" of past exemplifications of virtue and vice, and, as if by such "affective memory" as we referred to, to ascertain the durability of the human essence after all, in memorable time. He is all alone in his own lifetime, but not alone in historic time. He laments at the end of this section, "I grieve this time of mine is unfit". This is a literal translation, with "unfit" for pu tang, and "this time of mine" for chen shih, where chen 赞 of the three first-person pronouns along with wu 吾 and yu 余, 予 in the Li Sao is the only one that is clearly and consistently used in the possessive case, to express a strong emotional relationship or state. To say his own time, that is, the time of his own age, is "unfit" nearly means Hamlet's "Time is out of
joint”, but with greater self-consciousness of his temporal being, and implies in its context a much larger vision of personalized, subjective time than hitherto in Chinese thought.

This leads to the climatic Section VI. Now he explores into the “outlying regions” which are predominately the supernatural realms and the divine sphere. His exhaustion in the preceding section of triumphant examples of virtue over vice in human history, and with it his strong affirmation of the faith in the endurance of the “human essence” in his greatly expanded vision of time, now have armed him, as it were, with aspirations after immortality, like a lone but self-sufficient and self-confident hero. But this is only at the beginning of his excursion into the supernatural and divine sphere. The first moment he sets out from the human world, he seems to have gained full mastery of time, and contracted the distance in space. He reaches from one end of the world to another, ascending the mythical realm in one day:

In the morning I start from Tsangwu, the District of Blue Wut'ung Trees,  
In the evening I reach Hsuanpu, the Suspended Garden of Heaven.\(^{(64)}\)

But he seems to be in control of time only when he is in fast motion, in his unmindful, so to say, pure ascent. Once he “wishes to stop at the Gate of the Spirits for even a short while, the day swiftly will be dusk”.\(^{(67)}\) Temporality has overtaken him even in the divine sphere, which, as in all Chinese literary tradition, long since enhanced by Ch'ü Yuan here, is but a replica of the imperfection of the human world.\(^{(68)}\) The Chinese poet's painfully cultivated Self is not in the divine sphere to find salvation by heavenly grace, but to attempt to assert and realize all that is worthy of the singular stature of man in its moments of high elation as well as tragic glory.

Temporality overtakes him. The poet Ch'ü Yuan as Man in the heavenly sphere after all his earthly strifes to make human excellence endure in him, now certainly does, as he should, realize his heroic stature which is displayed with all the more shining splendor in supernatural imagery. He appears able to command the sun-god to slow his pace, the moon and the winds to be part of his equipage, the thunder-god to be his messenger, and the phoenix to carry him forward “day and night”. But there is again the deep pathos of inescapable temporality. Pursue on he must, and move forward constantly. Once he feels he is near his object, however, and may tarry or stop, time streams by. And the object of pursuit must never be obtained, since it by definition must be always in futurity into which one constantly hurries oneself to keep alive one's temporal being. The object worth the pursuit of course must be conceived of as the highest ideal of good and beauty to lead one on. But nearing it, tarry or stop, and you are left barren and desolate, as it must recede out of reach. You are left in your loss to feel the more keenly that in the ordinary shabbiness around, there is intolerable ugliness and evil.
Ch'ü Yuan arrives at the gate of heaven. He feels he has at long last reached his destination. The object of his politico-erotic pursuit, the personification of Beauty and Good, the "Jade Goddess" and his sovereign king all in one, is in the celestial palace. The poet stops, and orders the gatekeeper, who now appears to be a very ordinary creature of a doorman in heaven, to open the gates. But he only leans back on the door and stares at me.

Every reader senses in this line a sudden comic relief. David Hawkes in his translation, for good reason, calls the fellow in heaven a "churlish" one. But this comic relief breaks a spell. Is it the sloth, apathy, contumely or avarice for some palm oil, as the slang would say, at the courtly entrance, or all of them, that is the same here at Heaven's gate as down below on earth? Suddenly the shabbiness of the world returns, fraught with evil and ugliness of the ordinary herd. And with it returns, too, now in full force, the sense of earthly temporality, which has before driven him into such despair, yet set him out on his quest. For immediately a most inspired line on time follows this one of comic relief:

Time, wan and opaque, soon will be setting! O!
—shih ai ai ch'i chiang p'i hsi
時暖暖其將罷兮

The rich tone of this line in Chinese, the eerie pallid waning light in its imagery, and the symbolic fusion of world-weariness and life's despair in time, defy any translation. But, happily, we have a comparable expression speaking of setting time in Robert Burns,

The white moon is setting behind the white wave,
And Time is setting with me. O!

"There are", says W. B. Yeats, "no lines with more melancholy beauty than these by Burns." For us, the line by Ch'ü Yuan crowns his achievement in begetting the genesis of poetic time. And only he, with such acute consciousness and impassioned subjective vision of Time and Being, as we have elicited from the very beginning of the structure of the poem, could have written it. But this line standing at the very apex of the climactic section, also marks structurally the great turning point of the poem.

This line brings back all the worldly care and despair even when he is in the heavenly sphere. And he will be henceforth heading back to the human world. The sense of temporality has been fully restored to him in heaven as on earth. And he is to act, again, to prove his courage of despair. But the espiodes to follow after the climax yield gradual resolution of the mental conflicts and complex of the hero. From this point on, Thanatos is gone. Strikingly we can see from the text that there is no more mention of death, in contradiction with the vehement expressions of the death wish in almost every preceding section. The Li Sao, I strongly believe, in agreement with some recent Chinese studies,
is not a suicide note. And after the climax of the poem, the politico-erotic complex is also dissolving. The hero now realizes more of himself. His political concern yields for a moment to the erotic drive. The "preserved orchids" (yu lan 雲蘭) which he has "knotted" to contain a secret message could not be delivered to his "Jade Goddess"(72) and sovereign in the inaccessible palace of heaven. Now heading back earthward, he plucks a jasper flower, thinking to bestow it upon an earthly "maiden below". (hsia nü 下女). On his way back through space, what he seeks are all love objects of female beauties, from river and mountain goddesses to legendarily famed human princesses, who he desires for matrimony. But either he finds them imperfect of virtue, as temporal beings generally are bound to be fickle, or he may be too late, in time. At the end of this section there seems to be an apparent acceptance of the realities:

The female quarters of the Beauties are deep, inaccessible,
And the wise king, too, cannot be met face to face.(74)

This is the last juxtaposition of the female and royal image. The politico-erotic complex is henceforth resolved. Yet life and time go on, his affective state of mind is not ended, as there is still the future, which one, in order to consummate being-in-the-world, must live with feelings. Therefore:

If I hold my feelings unexpressed,
How can I endure them until all is past?(75)

What the hero has gained, after the dissolution of the politico-erotic complex and the calm of the death-wish, is the capacity for a clearer sight of life and the world than before, although he is still beset with doubts and despair to test his adamant resolve to realize his worthy Being-in-the-world. Section VII (line 255–334) consists of divination, leading, however, to unbelief of the oracles, trust of only his own mind. His view of the world will sober up and finally his new search will be for an object of ideal love rather than of political aspirations. The divination is repeated, done twice, because after the first oracle, "my mind is unconvinced, suspicious of it as a fox". There is clear indication that the politico-erotic complex is dissolved, as the two oracles, if neither of them entirely convinced him, speak discriminately of love for a desired woman and loyalty for one's king, now as two separate concerns. The sorcerers are unlike the witches, the weird sisters, whose incantations sealed Macbeth's doom as they suggestively controlled his mind from the beginning of the play. Ch'ü Yuan's soothsayers rather offer him choices to test the fortitude of his mind toward the end of the poem. Ch'ü Yuan makes his choice eclectically. He seems to have chosen to follow partly the first oracle spoken by Ling Fen to pursue ideal love for self-realization and the freedom of movement, and is assured partly by the second oracle of Wu Hsien that his
...age is not as yet old,
And Time has not come to its end.

*Chê niên ssu chih wei yen kši,*
*SHÍH yi yu chî wei yang.*
及年歲之未晏兮 時亦猶其未央

Here for linguistic as well as poetic interest we should note what is perhaps the clearest example of the usage of the word *SHÍH*, which is literally a distinct general concept of Time, an image of continuous flux, as it is juxtaposed with *niên ssu*, "year and age", to distinguish itself from any fixed or limited temporal period: year or age, or any season, day or month for that matter. It is, fittingly, Time pronounced by the spirits in an oracle which inspires in him a new sense of self-realization.

The end of the section in one stanza conclusively sums up the hero's new determination after divination to pursue love as his main goal, with a new sense of freedom, which is implicitly recognized as limited but non-the-less liberating and exaltant for the moment:

I will calmly measure my capacity and rejoice myself,
Just roam about to seek for a lady.
While I am still in beauty adorned,
I will tour all around, up and below.

But this is only after he has through all the agony obtained a clear and realistic view of the world. Having come through the divine as well as the human sphere, he recognizes and articulates more distinctly than ever before the fateful effects of all-pervading temporality. The new insight produces for him a measure of temperance. But there is still the question of how "I", my being, should stand with time, as he declares, achieving again marvelous imagery:

Time falls away in shreds, changing always,
How can I tarry and stay?

*SHÍH piên fën ch'î piên yî hš*  時紺紈期變易兮
*Yu ho k'o yî yen liu*  又何可以淹留

In his subjective, despairing view of time, he sees in it the revelation of all evil and deceit, and can counter it only with self-chosen virtue and unfaltering faith, within one's human capacity. The flower symbolism in this passage now undergoes an important transformation. Flowers and plants in the natural world have hitherto stood only for good and beauty. But now they are revealed to have changed into ugly filth, after the hero returns frustrated, sadder and wiser, we might say, from his divine excursion. "How all the fragrant plants of days gone by/now become filthy weeds!" And in his clear sight he sees, as if contaminated by human evils, the *lan* 蘭 and the *chiao* 椒, the "orchid" and the "pepper", which are the most exquisite or pungently fragrant of plants, are actually synonymous
with the names Chiao and Lan, two of the most crafty and fickle men he has known. He no longer cultivates flowers, but cherishes and trusts only their precious little essence, which he extracted, made into a garland or wreath that he wears (p'ei 佩) for its “unfailing fragrance even now”.(76) It is like the fragile but persisting human essence that he has realized and precariously kept through all the ordeal, in defiance of all time and the volatile world of misery and vanity.

His realization of the human self, and his utmost sense of freedom, over above the natural as well as the temporal human world, finally seem complete. The last section of the poem cannot but be momentarily heroic and ecstatic in tone and imagery. He is, though only for a moment, exalted like an immortal and king. We see him feed on elixer extracted from jaspers, and ride in a chariot decked with ivory and jade, drawn by flying dragons.(77) There again seems to be the mastery of time, as he in his grand movement traverses from the farthest east, “starting from the Ford of Heaven in the morning/I arrive in the evening at the world’s western extremity”.(78) He commands all space. Though there are still great detours to make, his excursion is not hindered. But he is no longer to reach for the supernatural or divine sphere. At a certain point, as if with perfect freedom, he suspends his majestic tour at will. And for a moment of complete mastery of his own will, as of time and space, “I calm my will and slow down my pace/to let my spirit soar high into infinity”.(79) The phrase miao-miao 飛逸 is the Chinese hyperbole for endless distance or duration, hence infinity or eternity. Infinity suggests the utmost freedom of the spirit. And eternity, as modern mathematical philosophy would submit, is the perfection of a moment rather than the interminable length of time. Such moment the persona of the Li Sao has attained, and he says he celebrates it with sacred songs and the most glorious dance(80) toward the end of the poem. But with perfect control of his senses and his will, and with his clear sight of all about temporality, he also says realistically that this moment is but a portion of time, or as he literally puts it, “a day appropriated (chia jih 假日) to rejoice”(81) his spirit. This is a moment of great serenity and elation near the end of the poem, when the hero is in full self-possession. But there is also the last tragic revelation. For this moment is after all appropriated, that is, borrowed time. The irresistible grand flux of temporality is overtaking him again, and the vision shatters. The last spell is finally broken. Old mundane memories return. His majestic equipage that was a while before replenished with dragons and phoenix now turns into a single jaded hack of a homesick horse, with a sad weary man-servant for his attendant. Forward they will go no more, as if lost in space. So ends the main body of the text.

A short envoi of four spare lines follows, and finishes the whole poem. It sums up the utter forlornness of the hero, the futility of remembrances of his earthly old habitation, and the vanity of political aspirations. His final determination is to follow the paths and find the resting place of a Peng Hsien 彭咸,
who is his ideal of an ancient man of exemplary human virtue but also of very uncertain identity. Perceptive critics since the Sung age have argued that despite the tradition, "to follow P'eng Hsien" does not mean to commit suicide by drowning.\(^{62}\) Other textual references in the *Li Sao* as well as in the rest of the *Ch'utzu* corpus suggest P'eng Hsien to be a wandering recluse of impeccable integrity, a solitary paragon of a human being whose reputation survived all the ravages of time.\(^{63}\) And since the Ming age there has been the belief that P'eng Hsien is a man of fabled longevity,\(^{64}\) a Chinese Methuselah, who at least partly succeeded in withstanding time. We shall uphold these views for their symbolic meanings, which fit perfectly the rest of our analysis. We can thus well appreciate the effect of this simple envoi in the whole structure of the poem. By contrast with the richly ornate language, the dazzling imagery and the elevated tone of the main text, the envoi is plain-speaking and undorned in its calm dignity. There is now tranquility in this poetic finale. But the poignancy of the tragic element in real life as suggested in the whole poem is here by implication not to have ended. Indeed, perhaps, as the 19th century European poet and thinker, Maeterlinck, says of tragedy: "the true tragic element of life only begins at the moment when so called adventures, sorrows and dangers have disappeared", and "the interest centers solely and entirely in the individual face to face with the universe". The envoi of the *Li Sao* in the end plainly reveals to us such a solitary individual who in entire desolation faces the vast universe.

**IV.**

**Summation And Conclusion**

We have analyzed the structure of the *Li Sao*, Ch'ü Yuan's magnum opus with its pervasive usages of Time as its general leitmotif. This is a rather new approach, which we hope can bring forth the secret of the so far only intuited but undefined moving force of the poem. It is a poem of heroic stature, but represents a common human condition. Its heroism is in its brave quest for the authenticity of being with exemplary individual courage of despair, whether in love or politics—which can be identified as the basic concerns of the ego and the superego—in the temporal world. But temporality as regards these basic human concerns spells the common fate of all mankind. Hence the deep and broad appeal of the poem, in which the acute consciousness of subjective time is projected into all the human, natural and supernatural worlds to set the keynote of cosmic pathos.

We have observed, as from the beginning of our discussion, that remarkably at a certain important juncture in human history, there would arise the new attitude towards time, and the new treatment of it in poetry, philosophy and religious literature. And we have compared the epochs from the Renaissance to the 16th century, which shaped the modern European nations, with the 4th century
B.C., which after much human anguish ushered in the Chinese empire. But we have also noted that while the attitudes and treatments of time are comparable, their precedents in each case are vastly different. In the Chinese case, for the meagreness of previous disquisitions on time, our study has to resort to a slender linguistic clue, by tracing the evolutions of the meaning of a single word shih in literary diction. Not until the advent of the poetry of Ch'ü Yuan do we arrive, with some assistance from Chuangtzu earlier, at such affective meaning of the word shih in the modern sense of time as a fully developed general concept. In our quotations from Li Sao we have therefore taken no liberty with this precious word shih, but consistently treated it as a specific term, understood to be Time. And we have permitted ourself to interpret only that word in the text as time, a new entity with definitive senses unknown in the Shih Ching or other Confucian classics. This interpretation we find not only justified, but paramount for our understanding of the structure of the poem, which is all motion and dynamism, characteristic of time which is conceived as all mobility and change. Most notable also is that there is seldom any fixed point of time in the poem. For no sooner is morning spoken than it is evening; no sooner days than they become months; and spring is followed by autumn in one breath of the sentence. All such words as morning and evening, chao hsi 朝夕, day and month, jih yueh 日月, spring and autumn, ch'un ch'iu 春秋, year and the count of age, nien ssu 年歲, are oftenest paired off in a couplet or a single sentence. All these terms, in the separate usages of each, hitherto connoting feelings fairly stable, delimited, or matter-of-fact, have since Ch'ü Yuan acquired more personal, dynamic qualities and larger emotive powers as manifestations of the great unified concept of perpetually streaming time. It was Chuangtzu who once aphorized, let days and nights be without distinction, but time, incessant time, grow out of the mind. Then it was not in China the philosophic mind, but the passionate, tortured imagination of a tragic poet, Ch'ü Yuan, that in search of enduring human essence fully embodied this concept of ceaseless temporal fluctuation in the name of shih, Time—a concept so momentous and so forcefully expressed that it was to influence Chinese thought and literature ever since.

NOTES

(2) Spengler, op. cit, P. 59.
(4) Coleman: op. cit, P. 10.
(6) The emblem 佩 is in this passage nearly personified to signify Ch'ü Yuan
himself. As modern commentator, Ma Mao-yua points this out in his Ch'u-
Tzu Hsuan.

(7) Timaeus (37)
(8) Timaeus ibid.
(9) Categories, Chap. 6 (5a).
(10) Meditations, IV.
(11) Fasti VI.
(12) Metamorphoses, XV.
(13) Coleman, op. cit, P. 6.
(14) Ibid.
(15) Since 時 will be the all important term in our study, it is romanized in this
paper with a diacritic mark as shih to distinguish it from its near homophone
是 shih to avoid confusion, as they have to be together considered.
(16) Cf. 朱熹: 楚辞集註 on 天問.
(17) The two most learned translations: B. Karlsgren, The Book of Odes; and
Arthur Waley, Book of Songs.
(20) Two most ancient sources e.g. 郭象: “釋詁” and 毛傳 on 秦風: “駸駸” Poem
No. 127, both say: “時, 是也”.
(21) E. G. 廖鴻: “釋詁” and 毛傳 on 小雅: “顛弇”, Poem No. 217, both say: “時, 善
也”.
(22) Karlsgren: in his translation too, carefully maintains the meaning “ceremonial”.
(23) Some philologists prefer to read shih here as a verb. Wang Yin-chih 王引之
in his Ching-yi Shu-wen says here shih also means “to stop”, as the proceeding
chih: 時亦止也. He did not give any reason. We may conjecture that he sees
parallel positions of the two words in the same line, and derives the sense
of “stop” for shih from its possible synonym tai 請, “to wait”. But such a
full verbal sense for shih departing so far from its basic demonstrative or
attributive sense, is very rare in the Shih Ching. If a parallel is sought to
determine the meaning of shih in this line, it is clearly in parallel position
with the word 為 in the next line, which is doubtlessly a demonstrative
meaning “here”, “this place”. Such interlineal parallel is in evidence in
poem number 265.
(24) Book of Songs, Number 199.
(25) Fu Sau-nien, one of the most perceptive and erudite modern scholars, in his
詩經講義 puzzled about the peculiar usage of the shih in Shih Ching. But he
merely called attention to it, and posed a question without suggesting an
answer. Here we are, by the way, answering that question.
(26) We follow Ma Jui-ch'en's reading of 夫 as 見, hence “female”.
(28) As side light, we may consider the old tradition that position to the left is a lucky position, noted especially in the Tao Te Ching, or Book of Tao, Chapter XXXI, though this chapter is believed to be an amalgamation of the original text with the lost commentary of the 3rd century A.D.


(30) Ibid. P. 166.

(31) Book of Documents, tr. by B. Karlgren, reprinted from the MFEAB, 1950, Stockhnom, P. 1.

(32) Ibid. P. 8.


(34) “Duke Chao, 7” (535 B.C.).


(38) Third century A.D. exegeses in 論語集解 ed. by 何晏 quoting 王肅, who read 時 as “以時”, i.e. “on due occasions”. Waley observed this, and translated it more properly than Legge as “due times”.

(39) Chapter VIII.

(40) 德充符, one of the so-called “Internal Chapters”, 內篇, which are believed to be more likely from Chuangtzu's own hand, whereas "Autumn Waters", the 秋水, is one of the “External Chapters” 外篇, believed to represent Chuangtzu’s thought, but not his words.

(41) The Confessions, Book II. I owe this quotation to Dean Walter Knight, who calls my attention to T. J. Fraser, The Voices of Time, (Braziller, 1966) where same appears in Roland Fischer, “Biological Time,” page 357.

(42) Chuangtzu, “Internal Chapters”：養生主.

(43) Ibid. 大宗師.


(45) This is the meaning of the title literally understood by such Han readers as 資ma Ch’ien, Pan Ku and Wang Yi. Modern research, relating it to such phonological affinities as 勞商卽愁 or 年計 tends to interpret it as simply to mean “plaint” or “lament”. This latter interpretation has the virtue of suggesting the name possibly of an ancient literary or song form, rather than the title of a specific work. The question should be of great interest to the study of genre history. But here we are dealing with a unique piece of work without peer. The ancient understanding of the literal meaning of its title fits well its content. We adopt this sense here for its expressiveness in translation.
(46) 賈誼：弔屈原.

(47) 司馬遷：屈原賀生列傳.

(48) I have generally concurred with Wu's divisions, and followed them with slight modifications in my class lectures. Then to my pleasure I found recently that in a new Peking publication Wu is followed by Ma Mao-Yuan in his 楚辭選, 1962, perhaps the best exegesis to come out of the mainland Chinese press in two decades.

(49) Cf. my paper on "Nine Songs", delivered at AAS meeting. 1968.

(50) E.g. Arthur Waley, Temple and Other Poems.

(51) Coleman, op. cit. p. 25.


(54) Line 56.

(55) Line 58.

(56) Line 96.

(57) Lihe 65.

(58) Line 118.

(59) Line 122.

(60) Line 129.

(61) Line 128.

(62) Line 124.

(63) Line 142.

(64) Line 180.

(65) Cf. lines 2, 109 and 257.

(66) Line 187–188.


(68) Lucien Miller, in his Ph. D. dissertation which I have had the pleasure to direct and see completed this year, on the Hunglou Meng, perhaps the greatest Chinese novel, cogently refers to this imperfection of the divine in his study of the novel's use of myths.

(69) The ambiguity of the sex of the object in question will always remain, and it may as well. Wen I-to 聞一多 rather cogently interprets it as the "Jade Goddess" yǔ nǚ 玉女 but cites as evidence two lines from the text about the benighted world "jealous of the worthy" to suggest the political overtone. This reconciles with rather than refutes the traditional reading of it of Wang Yi as the Heavenly King, who can be understood properly as the reflection of the human king.

(70) Line 110.

(71) Line 111.

(72) Most notably, 林庚 in his 詩人屈原及其作品之研究 1951, in line with the argument
developed through Sung, Ming and Ch'ing periods by 錢杲之, 林應沬 and 汪瑗 and 安枚 as well as recent Japanese scholar 瀧川麿. 林庚 ’s evidence and reasoning strengthen the case against the conservative counter-arguments by 禪國恩; 屈原之放逐及楚辭地理 1935.

(73) For this identity see 閻一多: 鎖鎖解話 supported by Ma Mao-yuan, op. cit.

(74) Line 255–256. Word 戴 interpreted in accordance with 戴霞 as 達, close to 暗, “to meet face to face”.

(75) Line 257–258.

(76) Line 330.


(78) Line 347–348.


(80) Line 365.

(81) Line 366.

(82) See note 72.

(83) Cf. Passages in 九章: 抽思, 您同風.

(84) Cf Ming scholar 汪瑗, 楚辭集解; supported by 孫作雲: 楚辭研究論文集 P. 239. Peking, 1957.

論時: 屈賦發微

陳世騏著

編者註: 作者乃本刊顧問編輯。此論文完成於作者仙逝（一九七一年五月廿三日）之前。

本文先從遠古到現代，論述和比較中西和西方對“時間”一辭的觀念。詩經中“時”一字歷代學者多訓作“是”；它的意義常與命運、符兆等相連，而不像現代的“時間”一辭那樣，有獨立而明確的意義，足為哲學思辨和文學藝術的主題。一般來說，尚書和左傳中的“時”字意指“季節”，論語中的“時”字乃謂“時機”，孟子中的“時”字則指歷史上某些特定的“場合”，都未演成現代的“時間”一辭的獨立而明確的觀念。莊子產生了“時間”的完整而獨立的概念；可是，虛無的道家思想終於連這個概念也被否定了。直至公元四世紀，現代人所理解的“時間”一辭的明晰概念才從大詩人屈原的作品中誕生。古代西方對“時間”的概念，與中國的很不相同；類似屈原的對“時間”的看法，則在十六世紀的宗教改革時期出現。
屈原的傑作離騷，廣泛運用“時”字及其相關觀念。“時間”儼然成為它的中心旨趣。離騷一詩的推動力，奧秘莫測，只可意會而不可言傳。以“時間”觀點剖析它的結構，是一鏡新的蹊徑。我們希望藉此可使此隱秘的力量透顯出來，離騷氣象雄偉，而代表的卻是一種普通的人類的處境。詩人因羣小當道，詭詐交加，失意仕途之餘，憂心忡忡，卻不畏一切地竭力在短暫的人世間追求一安身立命之所。可是人生如寄，萬物稍縱即逝。離騷中對這種主觀的“時間”感覺至為敏銳。以此觀照人世間，自然界和神靈界，則一切莫不短暫不居。這實在是千古共悲、莫可奈何的事情。離騷既深且廣的感染力，就此表現出來。

離騷通篇充滿動作和活力，其特點正與“時間”的性質扣合。詩人剛提起早晨，馬上便說到黃昏；日子才出現，立刻就變成月份；此句中是春天，下句轉口氣便是秋天了。朝、夕，日、月，春、秋，年、歲等字眼，或雙雙見於對句，或雙雙於同句中出現。屈原之前，這些字眼分別運用時，已涵了相當穩固、有形和落實的感覺。屈原之後，它們就被賦予了新的意義；這些字眼一變而為個人的、活躍的，同時具有更大的感人肺腑的力量，正表徵了那永遠流逝的“時間”的觀念。莊子要人無分日、夜，而“時間”——無休無止的“時間”——則生於心。之後，在中國，那悲劇性的詩人屈原，在上下求索永恆的人生真諦的過程中，以其激越而沉鬱的想像力，完完全全地把那無休無止、變動不居的“時間”的概念，用“時”字具現出來。由於這概念的本身已極重要，而藉以表現出來的氣魄又那麼雄長，因此它對後世的中國思想和文學，一直產生極大的影響。

庚戌十二月