

is unacceptable), a function narrower than the English "is not", let alone "not" or "no". His only reason for claiming that it "seems to hold three different meanings" is that it is convenient to translate it by three words in English.

The present study does not encourage one to take it for granted that Chinese is either better or worse than English as an instrument of thought; each language has its own sources of confusion, some of which are exposed by translation into the other. Although the supposed vagueness of classical Chinese may not be altogether an illusion, some of the factors which contribute to this impression are certainly misleading. We discover by listening or reading that a foreign word is used in contexts where a similar English word is not; we also discover by speaking or writing that we cannot use the foreign word in contexts where we can use the English one. But most Western sinologists (including myself) read literary Chinese without being able to write it, so that, although we gradually learn to narrow down meanings, every classical Chinese word seems a little vaguer than it really is. Again, we know too little about Chinese grammar. We say that *ju* 如 has two senses, "if" and "like". In the former sense, it is obviously used quite differently from, for example, *kou* 苟, also translated "if", and in the latter quite differently from *yu* 猶, the dictionary meaning of which is also "like". Has anyone ever clearly explained what these differences are? Until we can distinguish between the ordinary words with which classical Chinese deals with such basic ways of thinking as hypothesis and comparison, how can we tell whether it is a vague language or not? None of us yet knows classical Chinese. Even if the accusation of vagueness eventually proves to be true, it is a truth which it is unhealthy to keep too much in mind.

¹ Fung Yu-lan, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, translated Derk Bodde, Vol. I (2nd edition, 1952), 210 n.

HSI P'EI-LAN

by DAVID HAWKES

Say not that love is like a cloud
One moment dense, the next dispersed.
Say not that love is like a flower
That blooms so soon and falls so fast.
True love is hard as rock or iron;
Knows no todays or yesterdays:
A flower whose fragrance does not fade,
A cloud whose vapour constant stays;
That only fears the untrue thought,
The mirthless smile, the tear constrained;
The clouds that wet a dreamer's clothes,
The flowers in the mirror feigned . . .

Hsi P'ei-lan ae. c.34.

Readers of Dr. Waley's delightful *Yüan Mei* will recall that only one of the poet's lady disciples, Chin I, is mentioned there by name. Perhaps the most famous of them, and certainly the one whose poetry Yüan Mei regarded with most approval, was Hsi P'ei-lan, (席佩蘭, T. 韻芬, 道華, 浣雲), wife of the poet Sun Yüan-hsiang (孫原湘, T. 子瀟, 長真, H. 心青, 1760-1829).

Yüan Mei's high regard for her as a poetess is expressed in the introduction he wrote for a volume of her poems:

Every word from the heart; no echoing of the ancients; a jadelike sonority: these are the qualities that make Hsi P'ei-lan's verse so unusual—and not only among her own sex, either. For with her, inspiration always comes first before the poem is written; and in this respect she puts to shame many of the so-called poets of our time. His Excellency Ho-lin wrote to me from the Army to say that every line of my verse which he can get hold of is conned and chanted by him night and day with as much devotion as if it were from the Sūtras. I, too, feel this way about Hsi P'ei-lan's poems.¹

Yüan Mei knew the husband before he met the wife, and seems at first to have been dubious about her talents:

My lady disciple Hsi P'ei-lan has a pure and ingenious poetic talent. I used to suspect that her poems were written for her by her

¹ *Ch'ang-chen ko chi* 長真閣集, Preface.

husband. Then this spring I went to Ch'ang-shu to call on them. P'ei-lan was in mourning for her mother-in-law and appeared in her white mourning clothes. She has a beautiful, rather frail face: very intelligent-looking. She gave me a little painting which she wanted me to inscribe. Slipping it into my sleeve, I carried off her husband on a visit to Wu Wei-kuang for some drinks. Towards evening she came to present me with three poems which she had written. I could see at once from the delicacy and brilliance of the style that Hsü Shu was indeed more than a match for Ch'in Chia.²

Sun Yüan-hsiang himself made no bones about the debt he owed his wife as a poet:

As a lad in my early teens I scarcely knew what the word poetry meant. I started learning to write poetry after I married Hsi P'ei-lan in 1776, and within a couple of years I had composed more than 500 poems.³

Though Hsi P'ei-lan usually heads the list of Yüan Mei's lady disciples, almost nothing is known of her life. She and her husband were a devoted couple, and she was a flower painter as well as a poetess. That is about all that can be discovered in any of the standard reference works.⁴ Actually a certain amount of patient dredging in her and her husband's Collected Works reveals a good deal more about her than has so far been recorded. I shall set out below a few of the facts that I have been able to discover.

BIRTH AND PARENTAGE

Hsi P'ei-lan was probably born in 1762. A homesick poem written presumably not long after her marriage in 1776⁵ mentions that she had not left her parents' side for fifteen years, and a New Year poem apparently written on February 1, 1783⁶, refers to the brief passage of "twenty green springs". Allowing for the notorious vagueness of such calculations, 1762 cannot be more than a year out. She was therefore married probably at the

² *Sui-yüan san-shih-chung*, *Sui-yüan shih-hua pu-i* 隨園三十種, 隨園詩話補遺 ch. 8. The last sentence contains two allusions. "Delicacy and brilliance" (細膩風光) comes from Yüan Chen's poem to the poetess Hsüeh T'ao, 元稹, 寄舊詩與薛濤因成長句. *Ch'üan T'ang shih*, Yüan Chen, 27. (This poem is not, as far as I can discover, in *Ch'ang-ch'ing chi*.) Hsü Shu was the wife of the Han poet Ch'in Chia and was herself a poetess.

³ *T'ien-chen ko chi* 天真閣集, Preface.

⁴ Even Liang I-chen's *Ch'ing-tai fu-nü wen-hsieh shih* (梁乙真, 清代婦女文學史, *Chung-hua shu-chü* 1927) and Shih Shu-i's *Ch'ing-tai kuei-ko shih-jen cheng-lüeh* (施淑儀, 清代閩閩詩人徵略 CP 1922) do not add substantially to this information.

⁵ *CCKC* 1/2b. Hart (Poems of the Hundred Names, p. 191) comes a sad cropper with this poem by mistranslating the title "A Wife to a Husband".

⁶ *CCKC* 1/9a.

age of 14, when Sun was 17, and had already borne two sons when he left her to join his father at Mukden in 1779.

Hsi P'ei-lan's father, Hsi Kuang-ho (席光河, T. 應辰, 1741-79) seems to have been a mild and ineffectual man who could not bear to take rent from hard-up tenants.⁷ The family appears to have lived somewhere outside the city of Ch'ang-shu in Kiangsu. Hsi Kuang-ho was a youngest child born when his father was an old man. The only reference I can find to brothers or sisters of his concerns an aunt of Hsi P'ei-lan's who was also a poetess.⁸

Hsi P'ei-lan's mother must, like her daughter, have married very young. She died, an old lady of 80, in 1826 when Hsi P'ei-lan was in her sixties.⁹ The mother's father, Chang Chuan-yüan (張巽園 d. 1798) was a great orchid fancier and is said by Hsi P'ei-lan to have published poems.

Hsi P'ei-lan was the eldest of the family. She had two brothers and two sisters younger than herself. Sun mentions four daughters in the father's funerary inscription, but one daughter must have died very young. Hsi Shih-ch'ang (席世昌, T. 子侃, d. 1808), the elder of the two brothers, appears to have been about two years younger than P'ei-lan. He had a considerable reputation as a scholar and wrote a book on the *Shuo Wen*.¹⁰ He and P'ei-lan's husband were devoted and inseparable friends ("two hearts in one heart"¹¹), constantly visiting each other, travelling together, and sitting for the same examinations. The other brother, Hsi Shih-ch'i (席世琪 d. 1788) was the baby of the family. I am not quite clear where in the family the two younger sisters came. The elder of them married a certain Wu Wen-ju (吳溫如) of Yen-ling (about 80 miles west of Ch'ang-shu) and died in 1827. A son of hers, Wu Lai-fu (吳來復) married one of P'ei-lan's daughters. The other sister, who appears to have stayed at home to look after the widowed mother, died in 1801/2.

⁷ *TCKC* 47/13a.

⁸ *CCKC* 1/1b, 5/10a, and *Ch'ang-Chao ho-chih kao* 常昭合志稿 (Kuang-hsü edn.) 44/41a. She was a Mrs. Ch'ü (屈氏), the wife of Hsi Chung-t'ien (席仲田). The name Chung-t'ien suggests that Hsi Kuang-ho had another elder brother.

⁹ *TCKC* 53/4b, which is also my authority for stating that the middle sister died in 1827. The poetical date of this *lei*, 歲在疆園, is admittedly vague. It could mean 1807 or 1817. But the *lei* mentions (a) the death of P'ei-lan's mother a year before at the age of 80 or more, and (b) the fact that Wu Lai-fu was Sun's son-in-law. An earlier date than 1827 would mean that Hsi P'ei-lan's mother was older than Hsi Kuang-ho when she married; and the first mention of "my son-in-law Wu Lai-fu" in Sun Yüan-hsiang's poems occurs in 1828 (*TCKC* 32/4b). An earlier date would also mean that Hsi P'ei-lan's grandfather died at a prodigious age, which she would surely have mentioned. I therefore regard 1827 as a fairly safe guess.

¹⁰ *CCHCK* 30/54b. The book was *Hsi-shih tu shuo-wen chi*, *shih-wu chüan* 席氏讀說文記十五卷. Actually *CCHCK* has 續 for 讀. The correction follows *Ch'ing-ch'ao hsü wen-hsien t'ung-k'ao*.

¹¹ *TCKC* 19/1a.

EARLY MARRIED LIFE

Sun Yüan-hsiang's father, Sun Hao (孫鏞, T. 豐謀, 芭溪, H. 訥夫, 1733-1789), had two younger brothers who died young. Sun Hao himself had three sons, Yüan-ch'ao (原潮 d. 1812), the poet Yüan-hsiang, and Yüan-t'ao (原濤), and made the two younger sons his brothers' heirs, Yüan-hsiang and his younger brother already had different mothers, and these somewhat confusing circumstances always make it difficult to decide which "mother" is being referred to in the Works. At any rate, it is clear that Yüan-hsiang lived in Ch'ang-shu and saw nothing of his father from an early age, and that when P'ei-lan married him she went to live in the Sun household at Ch'ang-shu.

The Suns were a numerous and impoverished clan. Sun Hao's ascent in his official career is marked by the gradual increase in the number of dependents he felt able to support. Yüan-ch'ao was the first to join him, in about 1770.¹² Yüan-hsiang, and probably his younger brother too, went to join him in Mukden in 1779,¹³ leaving Hsi P'ei-lan a grass widow with two children at the age of seventeen.

A few months after Sun left for Mukden, P'ei-lan was called to her father's deathbed and stayed a while to look after the family. Her mother was ailing and rather helpless. (She is nearly always referred to as ailing, but lived to a very ripe old age). P'ei-lan wished that she was a man, and before she returned to her husband's home left some touching poems for her brothers and sisters in which she entreats them to behave well, not to quarrel, and to see that poor Mamma is properly looked after.

In 1782 Sun Hao was promoted to the prefecture of Lu-an-fu in Shansi and felt rich enough to import his family on a large scale. Yüan-hsiang was sent home to fetch P'ei-lan and the children. Yüan-t'ao was to acquire a bride, P'ei-lan's beloved "Ts'an-hua" (Li Hsiu 李秀, T. 餐花, 1767-1824)¹⁴ and take her north; and old Mrs Shao (邵氏), Sun Hao's mother, was also to be installed at the prefecture. P'ei-lan paid a visit to her old home to say goodbye to her mother.

The journey, an exciting experience for P'ei-lan, was the occasion of numerous poems, so that it is possible to trace it almost step by step. Much of it was along the Grand Canal, which meant going first to Soochow. Waking up in the boat to hear the sound of Soochow women talking, she is reminded, she tells her sister, of the jolly times they had as little girls. Perhaps the Hsi children had had a Soochow nurse. The journey was a fairly leisurely one, allowing for trips en route to places of interest. They went, for instance, to Ch'ü-fu, Confucius' birthplace, which would have

¹² TCKC 50/11b.

¹³ TCKC 1/4a and CCKC 1/3a.

¹⁴ TCKC 48/17a-b.

meant leaving the Canal at Chi-ning probably for a two-day excursion. P'ei-lan, as a "mere woman", felt a little awed on that holy ground, but reflected that "one day when I am back home again I shall be able to boast to my brothers and sisters that I too have been to the homeland of the Sage".

P'ei-lan was, of course, pregnant by now, and a few months after their arrival at Lu-an-fu, on February 11, 1783, the tenth day of the Chinese New Year, she gave birth to a little son, Sun Wen-k'uei (孫文樞, T. 叔奮 1783-8). His parents called him "Ah-an" or "An-erh" (阿安, 安兒) in honour of the prefecture. He was a pretty, intelligent baby, but at a few months old developed a horrible disease. His face swelled up and "blood and matter burst from it as though it had been pierced by needles". Poor Yüan-hsiang was packed off to Peking to take the Second Examination when the sickness was at its height, and this second parting of the young couple was a worried and tearful one. The examination was to be the first of several failures. But though P'ei-lan was half frantic about the baby, who was getting no better, she found time to console him with a poem which is a model of delicate and graceful tact.¹⁵

The baby's sickness lasted for more than a year. There was a crisis in July 1784. At midnight a ghostly noise arose and the wasted little figure in her arms seemed to grow stiff and cold. "At this time", says P'ei-lan, "I seemed no longer to be in my own body. It was as though there were spirits behind me and in front of me". And then a wonderful thing happened. The baby, who had for months been too weak to cry, burst into loud wails. A gust of wind ended the ghostly noises, the lamp flame leapt up, and the little body began to grow warm again. From then on he gradually recovered. But friends who saw him later took the year-old boy for a baby of five months.

The patriarchal establishment at Lu-an-fu did not last very long. In 1784 Sun Hao was demoted and sent to Chengtu, from which he never returned alive,¹⁶ and the numerous dependents he had gathered around him had to return south to Ch'ang-shu. P'ei-lan and her husband both left inscriptions on the walls of the Residency. P'ei-lan's poem is a trifle wistful. Who will sit at the window and watch the trees and flowers she has come to love so well? Perhaps, she says, another young wife will write a poem to match hers. Yüan-hsiang's poem is somewhat cynical and resigned, as

¹⁵ CCKC 1/10a. The account of Ah-an's sickness is to be found on 1/11b *seq.* There are several traps for the unwary in this last poem if one is reading it with a view to dating events.

¹⁶ In 1788 trouble had already begun between Nepal and Tibet and Sun Hao was sent from Chengtu to superintend the transport of supplies. He appears to have died at Chinese headquarters somewhere in Tibet. I am grateful to Mr. David Farquhar of Harvard University for telling me that 巴勒布 means Nepal.

befits a philosophical male. "This is just like life", he says, and reads the next occupant a little sermon on the transience of human affairs.¹⁷

Some time in 1786, the year in which Yüan-hsiang went to Nanking in another unsuccessful attempt to pass the Second Examination, P'ei-lan bore another son, Wen-shu (孫文樞, variously referred to as Lu-erh or Ah-lu (祿兒, 六兒, 阿祿). Ah-an was meantime growing into a little boy of great charm and intelligence. He could not bear other people to get into trouble, and would own up to things the servants had done rather than see them blamed. By the age of five he could recite from the *Book of Songs*, compose couplets, and write rather incomprehensible little poems. His parents would wake in the morning to hear him chanting passages from Tu Fu and Li Po as he lay in bed. This seems a scarcely suitable regimen for a convalescent child, and one is not greatly surprised to learn that he died young. The year in which he died was a terrible one for P'ei-lan. After nursing Ah-an through another sickness for more than a twelvemonth she was advised by a quack to give him gypsum. He had been getting better, but died within hours of taking the medicine, on March 26, 1788, which was Kwanyin's birthday. Next day the baby, Lu-erh died, and three days later their little uncle, Hsi Shih-ch'i—three deaths in five days. The simple, almost naive verses in which she records these losses are the most moving and tender that she ever wrote.¹⁸ Yüan-hsiang was inconsolable and wrote more than a dozen poems during the following five years in memory of his little son. When on November 16, 1789, P'ei-lan bore a little girl the image of Ah-an after dreaming that Ah-an had been beside her plucking at her sleeve, and when it was observed that this, like the day on which Ah-an died, was a 壬子 day, Yüan-hsiang almost overcame his Confucian scruples and persuaded himself that the little girl was a reincarnation.¹⁹

Besides these children P'ei-lan bore another boy and another girl. The three sons and two daughters all grew up, married and had children of their own. As far as I can discover P'ei-lan lived to be a great-grandmother.

HER FRIENDS

As a painter and occasional poetess Hsi P'ei-lan wrote scores of poems on fans, pictures, portraits and so on, and as the member of a highly-cultured group of painters, poets, scholars, and musicians, she addressed her poems to a large number of people, some of whom it is impossible to learn much about. She had, however, a small circle of close friends with whom she was a regular "correspondent". Li Hsiu, or Ts'an-hua, as she is always called in the Works, was, as I have said, the wife of Yüan-hsiang's

¹⁷ CCKC 1/11a and TCKC 2/18b seq.

¹⁸ CCKC 2/7a.

¹⁹ TCKC 6/24b.

younger brother. When the family returned to Ch'ang-shu after Sun Hao's demotion, old Mrs. Shao, who had taken a fancy to Ts'an-hua, went to live with her. She was joined presently by Yüan-t'ao's adopted mother, Mrs. Wang (汪氏) and then by Mrs. Lu (陸氏), his "real" mother. Poor Ts'an-hua must have had rather a thin time with all her mothers-in-law. Mrs. Wang seems to have been quite a Tartar who would sentence her daughter-in-law to "long kneeling" for the least offence. Ts'an-hua had never cooked before but was obliged to learn, since Mrs. Wang would eat nothing but what she had prepared; and often when Mrs. Wang was sick she was called on to hold her head until she could get to sleep. Yüan-t'ao was not much comfort. In fact Yüan-hsiang was quite shocked at the way he treated his wife. He seems to have been somewhat of an idle waster, and I get the impression that there was not much love lost between the two brothers.

Another relative who was Hsi P'ei-lan's "friend in poetry" is "Ts'ui-hsia". This was Hsieh Li-hsien (謝麗仙, T. 翠霞), whom both P'ei-lan and her husband refer to as "nephew's wife". I have been unable to find out who the nephew was, or indeed anything else about Hsieh Li-hsien. P'ei-lan once mentions that it was she who taught both Ts'an-hua and Ts'ui-hsia how to write poetry.²⁰

One might have expected some reference to Yüan-hsiang's sister, since the husband, Chang Hsieh (張燮, T. 子和 d. 1808) was Yüan-hsiang's inseparable companion; but she must have been an unpoetical lady as she is never referred to by either of them.

The one person who received more of Hsi P'ei-lan's poems than any other individual is Ch'ü Ping-yün (屈秉筠, T. 婉仙, 協蘭, 1767-1810). Ch'ü Ping-yün was already the author of several well-known poems when she was still a little girl and was as famous for her flower and bird paintings in black-and-white as for her poems. When she married Chao T'ung-yü (趙同鈺, T. 子梁), a poet and aesthete whose one passion in life was collecting inkstones, the match was compared with that of the Sung poetess Li Ch'ing-chao and her husband Chao Ming-ch'eng. The two couples got to know each other in 1786 when P'ei-lan and her husband moved from the South City to the North City and became their neighbours.²¹ Thereafter they were constantly dropping in and out of each other's houses and all four seem to have been on the most intimate of terms. Curiously Ch'ü Ping-yün, though a delicate and fastidious person who hated household duties, was an excellent cook, and we find the four of them meeting one February night in 1798—with some trepidation, one feels—to eat a menu all prepared by

²⁰ CCKC 7/1a.

²¹ TCKC 47/3a dates the move, and this was the year in which Tz'ü-liang first appears in TCKC and Yüan-hsien in CCKC.

her whose exotic names make the *Yüan Mei Cookery Book* seem very dull stuff.²²

Kuei Mao-i (歸懋儀, T. 佩珊, H. 蘭泉) was a Ch'ang-shu girl who lived with her husband (Li Hsüeh-huang 李學瓚, T. 安之) in Shanghai. Her mother, Li Hsin-ching (李心敬, T. 一銘) was also well known as a poetess. Yüan-hsiang called her, P'ei-lan and Ch'ü Ping-yün the Three Orchids (P'ei-lan, Hsieh-lan and Lan-kao). P'ei-lan exchanged a number of poems with her when she came to Ch'ang-shu to visit her parents in 1801, but I have the impression that she was more Yüan-hsiang's friend than P'ei-lan's, as he addressed a far greater number of poems to her and several times visited her in Shanghai.

Not all of Yüan Mei's lady disciples were in any sense his pupils. Hsi P'ei-lan never met Yüan Mei until the spring of 1788, and it is doubtful whether she actually saw him more than three or four times in her life. Like many of his lady disciples she was a devoted admirer for whom the Master's patronage represented a sort of diploma in poetry. Her ideas on poetic theory, as indeed those of all of the circle in which she moved (including Yüan-hsiang's father, Sun Hao), were entirely derived from Yüan Mei. All of these people talk about "inspiration", "sincerity", "originality", and so forth. But they derived these ideas from his writings rather than from personal contact. Yüan-hsiang saw a good deal more of Yüan Mei than his wife did, as he was constantly travelling to and from examinations or for pleasure. The poetess and the old man exchanged little presents from time to time. P'ei-lan was thrilled when she heard that her dear Yüan-hsien (Ch'ü Ping-yün) had also enrolled as a disciple. She was modestly triumphant when she discovered that he had put her first in his anthology of poems by his young ladies. And when he died in 1798 she felt, she said, that there was no one left who could really appreciate her poems—a statement that was certainly not meant to be taken literally.

The only other male apart from her husband and Yüan Mei who was a fairly frequent recipient of her poems was Wu Wei-kuang (吳蔚光, T. 燕甫, 執虛, H. 竹橋 1744-1803). Wu Wei-kuang was one of those people about whom one would give a great deal to know more. He was a Bohemian—some people even thought a shocking person—who threw up an official career at the earliest opportunity and passed his days in Ch'ang-shu with a number of boon companions, of whom Yüan-hsiang was one, in picnics, excursions, drinking parties, and aesthetic amusements. He was one of the young couple's earliest friends, and is constantly mentioned in their poems.²³

²² TCKC 12/1b.

²³ It may be of interest to record that his name appears among those of other academicians in the immense list of compilers at the beginning of *Ssu-k'u ch'üan-shu tsung-mu t'i-yao*.

There is unfortunately not room in the space of a short article to say much about Hsi P'ei-lan's poetry. There are poems in her collection written at least as late as 1818 when she was 56, and nearly half of her published poems were written after the death of Yüan Mei. Indeed there are poems of hers preserved in her husband's collection which she wrote at 60. It would therefore be a mistake when reading her poetry to cleave too closely to the picture of a young ingénue which the tag "lady disciple" usually conjures up. I find her an attractive, warm-hearted person, and her poetry, at times curiously "occidental" in its straightforwardness, illustrates the Yüan Mei poetic perhaps the more vividly for having been written by a person who was not so heavily overburdened with erudition as the average educated Chinese male of the period.