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# THE FRAGRANT HERMITAGE

Soong Hsun-leng

*Translated by*  
John Minford

**SKS**  
SHUKONG SOONG

## *Biographical note*

Soong Hsün-leng, *tzu* Hsin-leng, also Yü-li; *hao* Hsing-an (literally Fragrance Hermitage). He came from a Wu-hsing family, in Chekiang Province. He was born in the second year of the Hsüan-t'ung reign (1910) in Foochow, and grew up in Shanghai. He graduated in 1932 from National Central University.

When China Mainland fell to the Communists, he took refuge in Hong Kong. His lyrics, written privately over the years, have here been collected into a single volume entitled *The Fragrant Hermitage*. He was never one for writing affected verse, but always proceeded from something real, a person in his heart, an idea conceived in his mind: such things he would strive his utmost to express in lyric verse. His younger work tends to be more flowery and sentimental; after the fall of China to the Communists, his verse took on a more vehement and melancholy tone.

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## *Translator's foreword*

To have been invited to participate in such an intimate and poignant literary event as this has been for me a great privilege. The Chinese lyric is, as the contemporary scholar Miao Yüeh wrote, 'perfectly suited to the expression of subtle feelings and fugitive melancholy moods.' It is the peculiar power of the lyric poet 'to create, with delicate imagery, a unique world embodying his intimate personal experience.' It has been part of the peculiar challenge of translating these poems of Soong Hsün-leng's, that I have been drawn into that highly refined literary world of the lyric, a world that often tests the very outermost limits of verbal nuance and elusiveness. At the same time I have been brought face to face with a number of intensely lived personal experiences, with moments of lived emotion, with life itself. To quote Miao Yüeh once more, 'sensitive feelings and transcendent emotions, deep aspirations and intimate yearnings are the pulse of the lyric soul. All true lyric poets, all men with a character cultivated in the lyric mould, manifest this lyric quality in their life and thought.' My own life has been enriched by this experience, and for this I thank not only the poet himself, but his son Shu-kong, for his generosity of spirit in making this possible.

*John Minford*  
*Fontmarty*  
*April 2005*

## *Preface*

I have always loved writing old-style lyric verse, but despite all my efforts I have never been an accomplished practitioner. Of old, Chang Hui-yen and Ch'en T'ing-cho in their critical studies of the lyric genre layed great emphasis on certain qualities:

*ch'ing-k'ung* — ethereal interiority;

*ch'en-yu* — utter seriousness;

*i-nei yen-wai-chih-chih* — inner meaning and the resonance beyond words.

These are the qualities *par excellence* of the lyric, qualities to which I, alas, have never been able to attain.

But although this can to some extent be attributed to shortcomings in my literary scholarship, the circumstances of my life have also been partly responsible for this failure. The lived experience of my generation, the things we have seen and heard, the encounters and emotions of our lives, all these have little in common with the traditionally rarefied world of the Chinese lyric poet through the ages. If despite the very different nature of our experiences and ideas I had forced myself to write in that old allegorical boudoir style, with all of its subtle references to beautiful ladies and fragrant grass, how could I ever have hoped to body forth my own inner feelings, how could I ever have hoped to allow others to share my true inner life? At the same time, I saw no reason why I should abandon the lyric style of composition altogether, just because my

world was so different from that of the ancients. There have always been poets aplenty to sing the beauties and joys of nature, the delights of the landscape; it was simply that for me the flowers and plant of nature were incapable of understanding or expression, the landscape was devoid of feeling. And besides, I was such an uncultivated boor, how could I dare to pretend to consort with such stylish and distinguished precursors. So my lyrics seldom broached such themes.

With the great upheaval that has shaken China, many of my early compositions have been lost for ever. The ones I have been able to include here are for the most part either fragments that have survived, or poems reconstructed from memory. In addition, this collection also contains a number of poems inspired by experiences that took place during my stay in Hong Kong. Poems written in this plain, homespun manner do not, I know, belong with literature of true distinction. But these poems do contain true emotion, they do reveal something of my true self. If I were to reject them all out of hand, I should in a sense be betraying my own original feelings. That is why, poor as they are, I have ventured to have them printed. I shall count myself most fortunate if others endowed with greater learning than myself should deign to peruse these humble lines and be indulgent enough to remember them.

*Soong Hsün-leng*  
*April 2005*  
*at the age of ninety-six*

## *Lyric one*

*To the tune Ying t'i hsü (鶯啼序)*

*The title of this lyric metre means literally 'Oriole's Lament'.*

*I wrote this poem in 1933, when I was still in my early twenties. It has the hallmarks of youth: a certain sincerity, a certain heartfelt candour. When I read it again now, I cannot help smiling. And yet it has undeniable qualities. Metrically, it abides faithfully by the rules recorded by Wan Shu (tzu Hung-yu, 1625-1688; author of the great treatise on tz'u prosody, Tz'u-lü); its rhymes accord with the principles in the Tz'u-lin cheng-yün of Ko Tsai (hao Shun-ch'ing, early 19th century). There is a sense of diligent application about it, an unmistakeable intensity. I could not bring myself to throw it away.*

Hard to cast aside  
The myriad threads  
Of ancient grief.  
I still recall  
The shining pendant,  
The misty tresses;  
Still remember  
The tender  
Lingering words

Of bygone days,  
As she recounted in detail  
The precious news  
Of her visit to the West.

That easy smile  
As we sat at her feet  
To learn;  
The subtle dots of rouge,  
The delicate fingers  
So sleek;  
The way she drove her fancy car,  
Fluttering like a  
Startled swan;  
Soft dust rising  
In her wake,  
Last traces  
Of her scent.

Once I knocked respectfully  
At her door.  
The turquoise screen  
Was unfurled;  
And there I saw a maid-servant  
Fair beyond all telling.  
Through the slats of the screen

Faint flower-shadows,  
And a courtyard brimming  
With fragrance.  
Beside the make-up case  
Exquisite words,  
A subtle elegance;  
A forceful style of expression,  
Worthy of the Great Bard  
Shakespeare;  
Her unforgettable utterance  
Breathed orchid sweetness,  
Her thoughts  
Showed true distinction.

Then the sad song of parting  
Was sung,  
And the plaintive lament  
Of the ship's horn  
Sounded.  
Secret traces of tears  
Were wiped away.  
After we had parted  
A coloured note  
Conveyed your words:  
You had given birth to  
A daughter —  
A radiant pearl in the hand.

I sent

A gift,  
Bearing afar  
My heart's inner message.

Time passed:

Again the river plums bloomed,  
Once more the spring wind blew.  
And men contended for another glimpse  
Of the fairy beauty.

Fine as a flower,

Now a beautiful wife,  
A lifetime companion.

We held another joyful gathering  
As of old.

Ah! How the wine entered

Her very entrails,  
Lighting a glow  
In the shallow pools  
Of her jade dimples.

I was long

A drifter in solitude,

A phoenix floating,  
A *luan*-bird fluttering;  
Sighing at my lone shadow,  
My wretched fate.

I yearned to don a monk's robe,

To sit on the meditation mat,  
To worship in the temple.

I was not destined

To touch such beauty,  
To fondle those tresses,

Not destined,

No, not in this life!

On whom can I depend

To convey my message?

The wheel of the moon

Is my heart's burden;

My grief finds words

In this lyric form,  
This oriole's lament.

Golden memories

Of joys past  
Are all consigned  
To a bitter void.

Paradise lies far

Beyond the clouds.

I gaze at the twinkling stars

Of the Milky Way,

Alone

With my pure feelings.



## Lyric two

To the tune *Chu-ying Yao-hung* (燭影搖紅)

*Kao Ying-san the seal-carver from Yü-chiang (Yangchou) came with his son T'ien-hsin to earn a living carving seals in Wu-hsing. They frequently came to my home on social calls, and I used to brew them some of our best Pi-lo-ch'un tea. T'ien-hsin wrote a poem with the line:*

Once the horse-trainer Po Le has gone,  
It will be hard for him to return.

*Fifteen years later, when the Japanese were running amok, T'ien-hsin and I ran into each other unexpectedly in Ch'eng-tu, and I presented him with this lyric of mine. Today I do not know where T'ien-hsin has made his abode.*

Fifteen years ago  
I recall  
Walking arm in arm  
In the wilds  
Near Huchou,  
By the T'iao stream.  
You and your father

Will be known as artists  
For generations.  
I pointed out to you  
Ch'ao-yin Bridge  
In Huchou,  
And my home,  
Studio of the Plum Blossom Eulogy,  
Named in honour of the great T'ang statesman  
(My namesake) —  
Who once wrote in praise  
Of that flower.  
We drank  
Exquisite Pi-lo-ch'un tea;  
You wrote  
Your fine poem.  
Ah! Such moment of leisure  
And refinement were ours!

Now, in these days of turmoil  
We meet again,  
Both grey-haired  
With the commotion of the times.  
We urge one another  
Never to abandon  
The lofty ideals of a scholar.  
We swallow the bitter sound  
Of the Japanese invaders.

When will our warships  
Sail east again?  
When will we see once more  
In our homeland  
Of water and clouds  
The old pavilions?  
When the mood takes you,  
You grind your stones;  
When I am tipsy,  
I write my lyric verses.  
Around us stretch the rivers and hills  
Like a landscape scroll.

### *Lyric three*

*To the tune Lung yin ch'ü (龍吟曲)*

*In the late autumn of 1948, I returned to Hangchou, after an absence of more than ten years. So much had changed, so many people that I had once known were no more. I felt a deep sense of grief and loss, and wrote this poem in a mood of profound melancholy. The sounds of autumn sighing on the lake seemed to echo the mournful music of my mind.*

My drifting steps return  
To West Lake;  
After ten years  
Who knows  
This wild goose  
Migrating home  
To the south?  
Crimson bridges and  
Fancy pillars,  
Green waves and  
Painted boats,  
Ducks loitering  
In the sunset clouds.

The chrysanthemum garden  
In the depths of autumn;  
The long streets deserted,  
Music of strings and flutes  
Drifts from a few houses.  
I sigh at the gates and alleys of olden times,  
Ts'ui Hu returning,  
Never to see again  
The face of his Fairy Consort.

I steel myself to pass by  
The house on  
Hui Hsing Road,  
With its old echoes  
Of love.  
Heart-rending memories return:  
Of twin swallows  
On the painted beam,  
Of a deep dream  
Behind kingfisher-blue curtains,  
Of eternal spring  
On the brocade screen,  
Of passionate attachment.  
Fair Purple Jade  
Has vanished,  
Among men as in heaven.  
Heart broken,

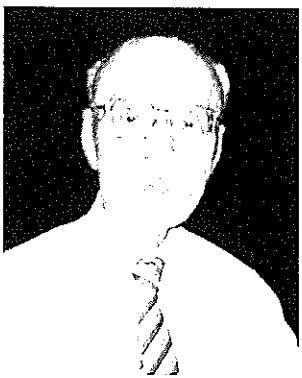
Gut wrenched.  
And there  
In the early light of morning,  
Stands Su Dyke,  
Summoning  
The soul of autumn.

馨菴詞稿

宋訓倫著

SKS  
SHUKONG SOONG

老去衰頹同病鶴，  
祇餘清啖唱曼辭。  
馨菴



#### 簡歷

宋訓倫，字馨菴，號心冷，別署玉狸。原籍浙江吳興，一九一十年生於福州，旋即移居上海。一九三二年畢業於國立中央大學，乃殫心竭智，效命於國營之各大金融機構。一九四九年大陸易幟，即避地香港，服務於航運巨擘所經營之輪船公司歷三十餘年之久。倚聲為其業餘性情所寄，惟以播遷流離，所作散失殆盡，遂哀其殘縑片楮，彙為一帙，名之曰馨菴詞稿。

#### 自序

余夙嗜倚聲而苦不工。昔張惠言陳廷焯諸家盛倡清空沉鬱，意內言外之旨，以此為詞人之極則，而余殊愧未能。雖云學殖未逮，要亦時會使然。吾人今日所見所聞所接所感，絕非花間草堂與夫歷代聲家筆墨所能狀其萬一。若以今人今時之遭際及意境，而強效古人託意帷房，美人香草之隱筆為之，將何以暢所欲言，而使人明其本義哉。然又豈能因今人今時之遭際及意境非古人所有，遂并詞而廢作也。至於花木娛心，山川怡性，古今作者夥矣；余則以為花木豈真解語，山川自古無情，況鄙俗如余，何敢謬附風雅，此則又為拙詞所鮮及者也。

喪亂以來，舊作散失殆盡。茲編所輯，多為寸楮零縑偶爾

倖存者，或記憶所及而能信筆默書者，餘皆曩昔流寓香港時興到之作。下里巴音，原無當於大雅；然此中哀樂，俱見性情，如遽予屏棄，實背初衷，是以不自揣其淺陋而逕付印行。苟荷博洽君子鑒余一得之愚而姑息存之，余之幸也。

二零零五年四月宋訓倫自序時年九十又六



宋訓倫  
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馨菴詞稿

宋訓倫撰

鶯啼序

一九三三年，余甫逾弱冠，遽填此詞，情意懇摯，一片  
純真。今日視之，竊自失笑。然格律恪遵萬紅友，韻目  
謹從戈順卿，當時所詣，倖有會心，固不忍忽然刪棄。

難拋舊愁萬縷，記明璫霧鬢。憶當日溫語芊綿，  
細說西渡珍訊。倚宣幔〔註〕時舒笑靨，丹脂巧點纖  
蔥潤；駕華車翩若驚鴻，軟塵香蘊。曾叩龍  
門，翠幕乍捲，見樵青〔註〕絕韻；透簾隙，花影依  
稀，一庭芳氣盈醞，傍妝台清談婉雅，騁文采莎



翁相印，最難忘吹氣如蘭，總為名論。驪歌唱  
徹，汽笛哀鳴，淚痕暗自搵；念別後彩箋傳語，  
掌上珠燦，喜寄木桃，遠申衷悃。江梅又放，春  
風重到，人間爭看神仙侶，羨如花美眷堪偕隱；  
歡筵似昨，憐伊酒入柔腸，玉渦淺處微暈。青  
衫落寞，鳳泊鸞飄，歎影孤命靳；欲打點緇衣蒲  
座，頂禮慈藍，惜媚假壘，此生無分。憑誰與  
訴，月輪心事，傷情數譜鶯囀曲，好年華皆付空  
中恨，蓬山遙隔雲涯，耿耿銀河，素懷漫付。

註：晉太常韋逞之母傳其父業，以周官音義傳授後生，就其家立講  
堂，置生員百二十人，隔絳紗幔而授業，時人尊之為宣文君。

註：唐書張志和傳：帝賜奴婢二人，奴名漁童，婢名樵青。



侯介亭心 侯名

### 燭影搖紅

邗江印人高應三攜其子名甜心者，鬻印吳興，屢過余家  
清話，余烹碧螺春茶款之。甜心賦詩有「伯樂去難回」  
之句。後十五年倭亂作，余與甜心忽邂逅成都，贈以此  
詞，今不知甜心棲遲何所矣。

十五年前，記曾把臂茗谿野，君家喬梓可千秋，  
藝苑添嘉話；指點潮音橋壩，賦梅花廣平舊舍，  
碧螺春細，伯樂詩清，閒情高雅。劫裡重逢，  
各驚雙鬢星星也，相期端莫負平生，飲恨聽胡  
馬；何日樓船東下，水雲鄉重尋故榭，興來摩  
石，醉了填詞，江山如畫。



高甜心在成都刻此章酬答燭影搖紅詞  
印文：玉想瓊思過一生

邊款詩句：

萬里家山未可歸，天涯遙望總依依，  
論文最愛無言石，不肯人前說是非。

三十三年冬日玉經老哥正 甜心

天上人間  
龍吟曲



### 龍吟曲

一九四八年秋暮重至武林，前塵回首忽忽十餘年，而人事已非矣。感逝傷離，愴然賦此，秋聲湖籟，不覺其與哀音之相應也。

萍踪又到西湖，十年誰識南歸雁；朱橋綺棟，綠波畫艇，霞飛鷺戀；老圃秋深，長街人靜，幾家弦管；歎舊時門巷，重來崔護，難再覩，靈妃面。忍過惠興樓畔，憶淒迷玳梁雙燕，翠幃夢穩，錦屏春永，恣情繾綣；紫玉煙沉，人間天上，柔腸都斷，向朝陽影裡，蘇堤佇立，把秋魂喚。



別有傷心  
秋聲湖籟