Three Tz’u Songs with
Prefaces by Chiang K’uei

Translated by Huang Kuo-pin

To the Tune of Kē-hsi-mei ling

Written to express my thoughts on my return from Wuhsi 無錫 in the winter of 1196.

Beautiful flowers are denied to one enamoured of their fragrance.
The ripples are clear.
When the spring breeze departs I am afraid the shade of the foliage will be complete.
Where then shall I recover the jade hairpin?

By a pair of magnolia oars, in the clouds of a dream,
She once gently reclined.
Looking for the fair one in vain, I go to the foot of Lone Hill,
Where a green bird sings throughout the spring.

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To the Tune of Yangchou Man

On the day of Winter Solstice, in the year 1176, I passed through Yangchou, where the snow that had been falling throughout the night had just stopped. Stretching before my eyes were all shepherd’s purse and wheat. On entering the city and looking around, I found it was all deserted, with cold water, unnoticed, shining green. Gradually evening approached, and the garrison’s bugles began to wail. Filled with sorrow and moved by the changes that had taken place over the years, I composed the following lyric to a tune of my own, which, in the opinion of “Old Man amidst a Thousand Crags”, has the abiding pathos of Shu li 萬里 (“Luxuriant is the Broomcorn Millet”).

In the famous city south of the Huai River, On a scenic spot by the West-Bamboo Pavilion, I unstrap the saddle of my horse to rest awhile on my first trip there.
Travelling for miles in the spring breeze I see only green shepherd’s purse and wheat.

1 The assumed name of Hsiao T’ai-chao 蕭太章, whose niece was married to Chiang K’uei. In his last years, Hsiao lived in Huchou 淮州, where, enamoured of the beautiful crags around him, he called himself Ch’ien-yeu Lao-jen 千巖老人 (“Old Man amidst a Thousand Crags”).

2 A poem in The Book of Songs, lamenting the decline of the Chou Dynasty.
Since the incursions of Chin troops into the Yangtze region,  
Even deserted ponds and lofty trees  
Loathe the mention of war.  
Towards evening,  
Wails of plaintive bugles that raise a chill in the air  
All come from the empty city.

Tu Mu, who once made his amorous sojourn here,  
Would be dismayed if he should revisit Yangchou.  
Though his verse on the round cardamom is well composed,  
His poem on the dream of the blue chamber3 fine,  
He would be hard put to it to express his deep feeling.

The Twenty-Four Bridges are still here.  
In the centre of the lake, the water ripples,  
And the cold moon makes not a sound.  
The red Chinese herbaceous peonies by the bridge —  
For whom do they bloom year after year?

3Euphemism for “brothel”.
To the Tune of Ch'ê-tien yüeh

One evening, in the year 1196, while Chang Kung-fu and I were drinking in Chang Ta-k'o 张達可’s reception room, we heard a cricket chirping in the wall. Chang suggested that we each write a lyric about the insect, to be sung by the singer. Chang’s piece, written in exceedingly beautiful language, was completed first. Pacing up and down amidst the white jasmine bushes, I looked up and saw the autumn moon, which instantly aroused deep feelings in me. As a result, I also succeeded in completing the following piece. The cricket, called ch’ê-chi 凑蟬 in Hang-chow, is fond of fighting. Sometimes, fans of the game would pay two to three hundred thousand coppers for one cricket, and keep it in a carved ivory mansion.

It begins with yü hsên chanting his ‘Fu on Sorrow’ alone.

Plaintive, a low whisper is heard.
Where the dew stains the brass knocker,
Where the moss creeps into the stone well—
These are places where it has been heard.
Its mournful chirps sound as if one were lamenting,
When a woman, sleepless, oppressed with cares,
Rises to look for her loom.
Within the winding hills of screens,
Alone on such a cool night, how does she feel?

By the west window, a darkling drizzle is blowing again.
Chiming with the pounding on the washing-blocks,
Repeatedly, off and on, for whom does the cricket chirp?

In guesthouses where autumn is seen in,
In imperial lodges where the moon is lamented,
There are other grieved hearts, too numerous to count.

Writing a poem in the style of the Pin ballad⁴ extempore,
I envy children of the common folk,
Who, catching crickets, are calling for lanterns by the hedge.

Once set to music for the ch'in,
The chirps will sound all the more doleful.

⁴This refers to "The Seventh Month of the Lunar Year" (七月), a poem in The Book of Songs, in which there is a line describing the cricket.