

Chinese Classical Poetry – Poems of Tang Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty (618-907) is often considered the golden age of the development of Chinese classical poetry. In this period, a great number of famous poets came forward, leaving more than 50 thousand poems in classic books and passing them on to later generations. The “Poems of Tang Dynasty”, is one of the precious cultural heritage of the Chinese nation and the greatest contribution to Chinese culture. The “Poems of Tang Dynasty” and the “Poems of Song Dynasty” are called the “two maxims” of Chinese classical poetry; they are adored by the world because of its highly symbolic and suggestive language, neat and balanced form, as well as its profound meaning.

Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau issued the stamp under the theme “Chinese Classical Poetry – Poems of Tang Dynasty”, including four stamps and one souvenir sheet.

“Thoughts on a silent night”, by Li Bai: “A bed, I see a silver light, I wonder if it’s frost around. Looking up, I find the moon bright, bowing, in homesickness I’m drowned.”

Moonlight shines on the bed when he was between wakefulness and sleep, making the poet mistakenly thought that hoarfrost was everywhere. When the cool autumn came, he could not help thinking of his family. Nostalgia came to his mind while he saw the moon in the sky. A thousand-year-old mystery was buried in this popular and easy-to-understand poem: is the “bed” mentioned by Li Bai an indoor couch, or an outdoor “Silver Bed” which is a type of wooden frame for the protection of a well, or the “Hu Bed” which is a type of folding chair originated from the Hu ethnicity to sit and rest during a trip? Or is the “bed” an interchangeable word which is referred to a “window”? Different interpretations can bring different artistic conception, which has been debated by Li Bai’s readers for years.

“Happy rain on a spring night”, by Du Fu: “Good rain knows its time right, it will fall when comes spring. With wind it steals in night, mute, it moistens everything.”

The timely rain as if to know the season, quietly fell with the spring breeze in the night, silently moistening all things. There are also the second half in the poem: “O’er wild lanes dark cloud spreads, in boat a lantern looms. Dawn sees saturated reds, the town’s heavy with blooms”, which means the darkness of the cloudy fields and paths reflected the brightness of the fishing boats by the river. After the dawn, flowers were moistened by the rain, and the Jinguan city (old name of the present-day Chengdu) was decorated with flowers.

“Yearning”, by Wang Wei: “Red beans grow in the southern land, how many load in spring trees? Gather them till full is your hand, they would revive fond memories.”

The red bean (rosary pea) is a plant grown in the southern regions of the Yangtze River, also known as love pea in China. The name of the plant has aroused the imagination of many sentient poets. The red bean grows on the southern land and sprouts many new branches every spring. The poet hoped that people could collect the plant as much as possible, which represent the eternal love and lovesickness.

“River snow”, by Liu Zongyuan: “From hill to hill no bird in flight, from path to path no man in sight. A straw-cloak’d fisherman afloat, is fishing snow in lonely boat.”

The “Poems of Tang Dynasty” are particular about poetry and profound meanings. In this poem, the poet only used 20 words to finish a quiet and cold artistic conception: on the river with heavy snow, birds were flying away, and no one was there to be seen, an old man sitting on the boat alone, fishing in the cold river. It not only demonstrates its extremely lonely imagery but also shows his independence, perseverance, and indomitable sentiment. This is a vivid portrayal of the environment and mood of Liu Zongyuan at that time.

“Invitation to the river pavilion with a view of the sunset”, by Bai Juyi (souvenir sheet): “Looking east at dusk, I see sea and sky a vast expanse, and mountains and rivers spreading far and wide. Myriad lights are bright in various houses, the reflection of the Milky Way shines in the middle of the river. The sound when wind breezing through aged trees, it’s like drizzles falling in sunny day; the scene when moonlight shining on the ground, it’s like the frost in summer. May the river pavilion offer you refuge from the heat? It will surely be cooler than your thatched hut.”

This is an invitation to friends for a drink. The talented poet described the splendid scenery near a grand restaurant. It is not the liquor that intoxicated the drinkers, they got drunk by the splendid view.

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