

CHICAGO REVIEW



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from TWELVE DYNASTIES

I. 周朝

你的圓周至今無遠弗屆
你的圓心是寧靜，無邪的
颱風眼，以西，以東，以
春秋戰國為半徑，爆開百家
爭鳴，穿越時空的知識的
暴風圈。Confucius says 就是
子曰，有朋自遠方來訪不可道
不可名的自由大道，不亦樂乎
學無用、無為而時習逍遙之
以游無窮，不亦悅乎？自行
束脩（也就是帶著十條肉乾）
以上（來留學的），吾朝未嘗
無誨焉——無論是政治學或
營養學。治大國若烹小鮮，烹
小魚可以用治大國的方式
混以前面所收的腐儒之肉
荀子的荀子，加上墨家的
墨魚汁，名家油腔滑嘴的口味
以縱橫家縱橫交替之鍋鏟法
料理之，美味其周全矣。你的
子民日出而作，在圓周上半的
「田」中耕耘。你的子民日入
而息，用圓周下半的「口」
隨興歌唱：鄭風、衛風、豳風
周南……詩三百中最好的詩歌
道是虛的還是實的？天是圓的
還是扁的？他們週而復始問
這些問題。你以周而復始
不斷被世界翻新的一波波
思潮，圓滿地回答他們

I. ZHOU DYNASTY

Your circumference is all encompassing even to this day. Your center is the gentle, innocent eye of a typhoon, marking Western Zhou, Eastern Zhou, the Spring and Autumn Period, and the Warring States Period as your radii. Along them, the Hundred Schools of Thought erupt into a stormy intellectual circle across space-time. *Confucius says* in English means, isn't it a joy to have a friend visiting from afar to see the ineffable Liberty Avenue? Isn't it a delight to learn to flow in nature's course, to practice with a mind flowing in joy and ease, and, ultimately, to flow into infinity? Qualified candidates who arrive (to study), bearing gifts (of ten strips of jerky), won't be refused by our dynasty—whether the subject is political science or nutrition. Governing a great state is like cooking a small fish; the same recipe serves both: mix the pickled tofu of the expatriate pedants who showed up just now, the bamboo shoots of Xunzi, the squid ink of Mohism, and the smooth tongue of the School of Names, then cook by turning the spatula in the alternate vertical and horizontal moves of the School of Diplomacy—the great taste will make you perfectly round. From dawn to dusk, your people work on the field in the upper half of your circumference. Through the mouth in your lower half, they sing to their heart's content: Songs of the States of Zheng, Wei, Bin, Zhou Nan... the best numbers from the *Book of Songs*. Is Tao abstract or concrete? Is the sky round or flat? They ask these questions in cycles; you round out your answers with circles of thought that the world ceaselessly renews.

II. 魏晉南北朝

清談。閒坐。隨意玩手機
上網。四通八連，混亂
堆疊的臉書裡，只記得
你的臉。倒立觀天，以
形下學為形上學。秉燭
夜滴油，在男／女同志
身上。月明心虛，虛心
以待寂寞隨稀星稀釋。
遊山。玩水。游手。不好
錢。為賭而賭。為亂世而
不倫。AV女：優。三明
（主義）：不治。明天
不如今宵，明白不如裝傻，
明星夢不如暗爽。知音。
不用耳機。作樂。無弦琴。
兩黨政治。什麼東西。

II. WEI, JIN, AND NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN DYNASTIES

Having philosophical conversations. Lounging about. Spending time on handheld devices and the net. Remembering only your face in the books of faces, eclectically related, stacked in disarray. Observing the sky in a headstand, the physical in place of the metaphysical. A candlelit night, oil dripping on comrades, political or same-sex. A bright moon baring the heart, the heart bearing itself with modesty, waiting for lonesomeness to dilute in isolated stars. Roaming the mountains, cruising the waters, messing about, off the path of fortunes. Gambling for gambling's sake. Tromping on morals in honor of troubled times. AV porn star:let. Vidyā sandwiched in Tri-vidyā(ism): no remedy. Why not enjoy tonight instead of tomorrow, fake silliness at the expense of true understanding, self-indulge in secret rather than yearning to be a pop star? Finding the best listener, headsets unnecessary. Playing music with no lute or zither. Bipartisan politicking. What the heck is that.

III. 唐朝

我們走在唐人街。在韓劇日劇裡
片斷溫習散失的大唐文化，禮樂
電子報上讀到他們選出第一位女總統
乍然想起我們獨一無二的女皇帝武女士
日文雜誌裡平假名如岸邊細草被微風
吹動，逆流而上把我們帶回草聖
連綿如腹瀉的肚痛帖。長安不見，使人
長不安。留學生，學問僧，傳教士
商人，使者。壯盛的唐像飽滿的蠶
緩緩吐絲，穿過絲路把絲綢，瓷器
鐵器，銀器，金器，銅鏡，造紙術
印刷術吐向西域，吸回來葡萄，核桃
胡蘿蔔，胡椒，胡豆，胡樂，胡服
以及信仰伊斯蘭教的黑衣大食的
倫理學，語法學，天文學，算學
航海術..... 雖然他們的教主說過：
「學問雖遠在中國，亦當求之」
我們在棋盤狀的京城豎立不同宗教的
寺廟，禮拜堂，碑塔，以這些色彩
造型各異的棋子，進行萬國棋賽
長安一片月，萬富數錢聲。公孫大娘
在宮廷，在街坊舞劍器，健舞妙姿
胡旋女在棋盤上擊鼓急旋，縱橫萬轉
如迴雪飄飄。公開競技的百戲，雜技
跳丸、吐火、吞刀、筋斗、踢毬.....
虛實秘連的傳奇：遊仙窟，南柯夢
黃梁夢，西廂雲雨，倩魂小玉.....
我們走在島上北城長安東、西路的
交會口，向北是邁向小巨蛋體育館

當代藝術館市立美術館酒泉街
敦煌路垃圾焚化場淡水河的捷連線
向南是通向火車站立法院中央銀行
總統府職業圍棋協會歷史博物館的
市民大道凱達格蘭大道。聞道長安
似奕棋。春寒入浴北投硫磺泉
夜店美眉勸我們進酒，君莫停.....

III. TANG DYNASTY

We walk in Chinatown of the Tang Chinese. Korean and Japanese soap operas patch up our knowledge of the Great Tang's lost culture and ritual music. The eNews said a first female president was elected. I suddenly think of our one-of-a-kind empress, Madam Wu. In a Japanese magazine, the hiragana script trembles in the breezes like grass by the shore, taking us upstream of time to the divine grass calligrapher's cursive writing, *Upset Stomach*, which makes characters melt like the diarrhea. Absent from sight, Chang'an, City of Everlasting Peace, only perpetuates distress. Students from abroad, monk-scholars, missionaries, merchants, ambassadors. The High Tang is like a plump silkworm that slowly builds its cocoon, emitting silk, porcelain, ironware, silver and gold articles, bronze mirrors, papermaking, and woodblock printing to the West via the Silk Road. It inhales grapes, walnuts, carrots, peppercorns, broad beans, exotic music, fashion, as well as the Abbasid Caliphate's ethics, grammar, astrology, algebra, navigation... Despite their leader's words, "Seek knowledge even if it takes you to China." In the chessboard-like capital, we erect multifaith temples, churches, monuments, and use them as chess pieces in a multinational tournament. Under a bright moon in Chang'an, wealthy people count their riches out loud. Lady Gongsun perfects the sword dance in palaces and plazas with exquisite martial-arts finesse. Whirling dancers bang drums, spin like snowflakes twirling all around. Open variety contests: acrobatics, juggling, fire-breathing, sword-swallowing, somersaults, feather-ball-kicking... Tales of strange events blur fiction and reality: a night with two beauties, the Southern Commander's dream, a world inside a pillow, a romance of the western chamber, the ghost of Lady Huo Xiaoyu... We walk at the intersection of East and West Chang'an Road in Taipei on the island. To the north is the metro line for Taipei Arena Museum of

Contemporary Art Fine Art Museum Jiuquan Street Dunhuang Street
the incineration plant Tamsui River. To the south are the boulevards
Civic and Ketagalan, which lead to the train station Legislative Yuan
Bank of Taiwan the Presidential Office the Professional Go Association
National Museum of History. Chang'an looked like a chessboard,
they said. In the chill of spring, we bathe in a sulfur spa in Beitou.
Clubbing pretties urge us to drink: *Gentlemen, don't let it stop...*

IV. 宋朝

感謝給我們瘦金體，讓我們在貨幣貶值荷包變瘦時，對著流金的字跡，欣然削薄物質的慾望

感謝給我們前後赤壁賦，讓我們在紅極一時的赤壁被土石流沖垮後，仍能清楚看到它前方後方的風景

感謝給我們清明上河圖，讓我們不必放映機電視機，就可以觀賞以我等百姓為主角的熱鬧連續劇

感謝給我們岳飛和秦檜，讓我們從小就知道什麼是好人的，什麼是壞人的，什麼是民族英雄，什麼是奸臣，並且崇拜手部背部刺字的老大

感謝給我們谿山行旅圖，萬壑松風圖，讓我們知道天下很大，旅行社推出的行程很多，所費不貲，而一張複製的畫照樣可以帶我們到遠方

感謝給我們暗香浮動，疏影橫斜的黃昏，讓我們置身小紅低唱我吹簫的，美艷，酒家那卡西氛圍

感謝給我們一綁千年的纏足，讓三寸金蓮四寸銀蓮豐當我們情趣銀行，無息互貸固態液態變態的快感

感謝給我們聲聲（傲）慢的尋尋覓覓冷冷清清淒淒慘慘戚戚，讓我們乍悟，破格的女／詩人才真正正

IV. SONG DYNASTY

Thanks to your Slender Gold calligraphy, we gladly cut back material wants in front of the words of a golden past when depreciation makes our wallets skinny.

Thanks to your “Former and Latter Odes to the Red Cliff,” we can behold the cliff’s front and back even when it was destroyed by a rockslide after its glory days.

Thanks to your painting *Spring Festival along the River*, we can watch a bubbly soap opera starring ordinary people like us without a projector or the television.

Thanks to your Yue Fei and Qin Hui, we know at a young age who’s good and bad, are able to tell the patriot from the traitor, and worship gang leaders who have words tattooed on their hands and backs.

Thanks to your *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* and *Windblown Pines in Myriad Valleys*, we know the world is big, the package tours offered by travel agencies are many and costly, and a painting replica can take us just as far.

Thanks to your sunsets crisscrossed with faint fragrances and scant shadows, we are in the mood of the poet’s flute accompanying Xiaohong’s singing, gorgeous, Nakasi.

Thanks to your millennium-long foot binding, our sensual bank acquired three- and four-inch gold and silver lotuses, with deposits of interest-free, debtor-to-debtor, fixed and floating deformations as perverse arousals.

Thanks to the reduplicated *seeking, bleakness, suffering, wretchedness, and torment* in your poem “A Slow La(-di-da-)ment,” we realize that what refines refines through the grid-breaking poet/ess.

V. 元朝

大口大口吃肉
大口大口喝奶，喝酒
大雪初融的草原上，快馬
奔馳，向西，向南，向東
跨過洲際線，跨過長城
把一滴一滴巨大的熱汗
滴在世界地圖，滴在第一次
由永恆的火焰熏炙出的體液
黏合起來的中國地圖：
成吉思汗，窩闊台汗，忽必烈汗.....
沒有錯，像口出粗話的惡少的
體臭，侵入你們典雅秀麗的
詩文的閨房，俚俗它，非禮它
在勾欄瓦舍混生出鮮活的
生之雜劇：汗味與香氣的交媾

V. YUAN DYNASTY

They pig out on meat,
chug milk, swig spirits.
Thick snow starts to melt on the steppe. Horses
head west, south, and east at full gallop, jumping
over the continental border and the Great Wall.
They cast enormous drops of their khans' sweat
across the world map. For the first time, the map
of China was glued together by the bodily fluids
secreted in the sweat bath of Eternal Flame:
Genghis Khan, Ögedei Khan, Kublai Khan...
That's right, like the stink of a foul-mouthed rogue
that intrudes on the graceful bed chamber of your
literature, vulgarizing and harassing it. A vibrant
mixed-arts *zaju* of life crossbreeds in the theatre:
the mating of sweat odor and sweet scent.

VI. 新唐朝

唐朝的米是糖。二十四史裡
沒有這麼說，但沉浸在一天
二十四小時熱戀甜蜜的情侶們
都同意：我們每日的米食是糖
我們在遺糖使日日來朝的新唐

我們用糖的語言書寫我們每日的小歷史
（雖然不免夾雜渴望、等候、猜疑之鹽粒）
並且用近體的五言嚙句、七言嚙句
反覆咀嚼它們
我說：君之聲如蜜黏我
你說：剝我如剝糖
我說：吃君令齒老
你說：我要你永遠嗜糖

嗜糖的意思就是悉數、盡情地
把糖吃光，不要有剩糖
因為欲望的糖罐要隨時清空
才裝得下不斷更新的愛的新唐
它的虛成就了它的實

我們在新唐朝吃糖
想念糖詩三百首的糖朝

VI. NEW TANG DYNASTY

The rice of Tang sweetened all its tangs—
The Twenty-Four Histories didn't say this but lovers steeped
in their syrupy romance twenty-four hours a day would agree:
our staple is the sweetened tang. We are in the New Tang,
to which confectionery ambassadors pay daily tributes.

Using the sweetened tang's language, we write our snippety
everyday histories (inevitably sprinkled with grains of salty
hankerings, lingerings, and misgivings). We chew over them
in morsels of five- and seven-syllable regulated verse.
I say, your voice coats me like honey.
You say, un-candy-wrap me.
I say, devouring you, my teeth age.
You say, love the sweetened tang always.

To love the sweetened tang means feasting on it
without leaving a trace, not to say its best because
the candy tin of desire must be unfillable anytime
to make room for the ever-upgrading New Tang of love—
its in-tang-ible content realizes its richness.

We start the day with candy in the New Tang
as we miss the Sweetened Tang in its 300 classic poems.

NOTES

These poems are from the sequence “Twelve Dynasties.” The timeline of the six dynasties discussed in this excerpt is as follows: Zhou (Western Zhou, 1046–771 BCE; Eastern Zhou, 770–256 BCE); Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern (220–589 CE); Tang (618–907 CE); Song (Northern Song, 960–1127 CE; Southern Song, 1127–1279 CE); Yuan (1271–1368 CE); and New Tang, which is fictional. The other six dynasties included in this poem sequence are Xia, Shang, Qin, Han, Ming, and Qing. The Chinese character for “dynasty,” 朝 (*cháo*), means “morning” or “day” when pronounced as *zhāo*.

“Zhou Dynasty”: Two of the meanings of 周 (*zhōu*) are “circumference” and “all over.” “Governing a great state / is like cooking a small fish” comes from *Dao De Jing*. In print, the upper part of the character for *zhōu* (周) resembles that for “field” (田 *tián*). The character for “mouth” (口 *kǒu*) is in the lower half.

“Tang Dynasty”: “The divine grass calligrapher” refers to Zhang Xu (張旭, c. 675–750 CE). Lady Gongsun (公孫大娘, d. 394 CE) was the top dance artist at the peak of the Tang dynasty. It is said that her dance inspired Zhang Xu’s perfection of his grass script. References are made to individual Tang poems throughout the text: “Absent from sight...perpetuates distress” alludes to Li Bai’s “Ascending the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling”; “Under a bright moon... out loud” parodies a line in Li Bai’s “Midnight Songs: Autumn”; “Chang’an looked like a chessboard, they said” refers to Du Fu’s “Autumn Meditations (4)”; “In the chill...Beitou” mimics Bai Juyi’s “Song of Everlasting Sorrow”; and “Gentlemen, don’t let it stop” invokes Li Bai’s “Bring in the Wine.” Beitou is an area of hot springs in northern Taiwan.

“Song Dynasty”: The Slender Gold calligraphy style was created by Huizong (徽宗, 1082–1135 CE), the eighth Song emperor. “Former and Latter Odes to the Red Cliff” were written by Su Shi (蘇軾, 1037–1101 CE). *Spring Festival along the River* was a large-scale painting by Northern Song artist Zhang Zeduan (張擇端, 1085–1145 CE). Yue Fei (岳飛, 1103–1142 CE), a military general in Southern Song, was heroized posthumously for his patriotism. Qin Hui (秦檜, 1090–1155 CE) was a domineering chancellor who ordered the execution of Yue Fei and was regarded as a traitor. *Travelers among Mountains and Streams* was painted by Fan Kuan (范寬, 950–1032 CE), *Windblown Pines in Myriad Valleys* by Li Tang (李唐, 1050–1130 CE). Xiaohong was a female singer mentioned in the poem “Crossing Chuihong Bridge” by the Southern Song poet Jiang Kui (姜夔, 1155–1221 CE). Nakasi

was a popular live band service including performance and accompaniment in bars and restaurants in Japan and Taiwan before the karaoke. “Three-inch golden lotuses” is an idiomatic expression for bound feet. Four-inch bound feet were called “silver lotuses.” The poem “A Slow Lament” by Li Qingzhao (李清照, 1084–1155 CE), arguably the most accomplished female poet in Chinese history, reduplicates seven written characters in its opening lines.

“Yuan Dynasty”: In Mongolian, Mongolia means “eternal flames” (蒙古一詞，在蒙古語裡意為「永恆的火焰」—Chen Li). The word *Khan* appears as a phonetic borrowing in Chinese, using the character 汗 (*hàn*), which means “sweat.” *Zaju* (雜劇) is a form of variety show popularized in Yuan Dynasty.

“New Tang Dynasty”: The character for “Tang,” 唐 (*táng*), combines with that for “rice” (米 *mǐ*) to form 糖 (*táng*), meaning “sugar or sweets.” The pinnacle of Tang Dynasty is known as 盛唐 (*shèng táng*), which sounds the same as 剩糖 (*shèng táng*, “remaining sugar/sweets”). The “300 classic poems” refer to the *Three Hundred Tang Poems*. The Chinese version of this poem has been slightly revised subsequent to its first publication.