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Author(s): Hans H. Frankel

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# THE CHINESE BALLAD "SOUTHEAST FLY THE PEACOCKS"

HANS H. FRANKEL  
YALE UNIVERSITY

THE anonymous ballad "Southeast Fly the Peacocks," also titled "Chiao Chung-ch'ing's Wife," is one of the most remarkable poems in the Chinese language. It is the longest narrative poem prior to the Tun-huang ballads of the T'ang dynasty. It is unique among the early *yüeh-fu* poems in its elaborate narration, composed with great literary skill. The domestic tragedy it relates has moved readers through the ages and is of great interest from the viewpoints of literary history, social history, and social psychology. Before entering into a discussion of the poem I will offer a fairly literal translation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Earliest text: *Yü-t'ai hsün-yung* 玉臺新詠 (SPTK ed.) 1.16a-21a. Annotated texts: *Liang Han wen-hsüeh shih ts'an-k'ao tzu-liao* 兩漢文學史參考資料 (Shanghai: Kao-teng chiao-yü ch'u-pan-she, 1960), pp. 541-561; Huang Chieh 黃節, *Han Wei yüeh-fu feng chien* 漢魏樂府風箋 (Hong Kong: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1961) 14.176-184; Wen I-to 聞一多, *Yüeh-fu chien* || 箋, reprinted as an appendix to Kuo Mao-ch'ien 郭茂倩, *Sung-pen yüeh-fu shih chi* 宋本 || 詩集 (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1961), pp. 33-41; Yü Kuan-ying 余冠英, *Yüeh-fu shih hsüan* ||| 選 (Hong Kong: Shih-chieh shu-chü, n.d.; his postface to revised ed. dated 1954), pp. 62-75; Yü Kuan-ying, *Han Wei Liu-ch'ao shih hsüan* 漢魏六朝詩選 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1961), pp. 45-58; P'an Chung-kuei 潘重規, *Yüeh-fu shih ts'ui chien* ||| 粹箋 (Hong Kong: Jen-sheng ch'u-pan-she, 1963), pp. 47-64; Hsü Ch'eng-yü 徐澄宇, *Yüeh-fu ku shih* || 古詩 (Hong Kong: Chin-tai t'u-shu kung-ssu, n.d.; his preface dated Shanghai, 1955), pp. 54-66; Uchida Sennosuke 內田泉之助, *Koshi gen* 古詩源, Part I (= *Kanshi taiki* 漢詩大系 IV; Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1964), pp. 171-194; Kung Mu-lan 龔慕蘭, *Yüeh-fu shih hsüan chu* ||| 選註 (Taipei: Kuang-wen shu-chü, 1961), pp. 67-83; Chu Chien-hsin 朱建新, *Yüeh-fu shih hsüan* (Taipei: Cheng-chung shu-chü, 1963), pp. 105-113. English translations: Arthur Waley, *Chinese Poems* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946), pp. 89-100; anonymous translator in Robert Payne, *The White Pony* (New York: John Day, 1947), pp. 132-143. French translations: Tchang Fong, *Le Paon, ancien poème chinois* (Paris: Jouve, 1924), pp. 5-20; L. Aurous-

- Southeast fly the peacocks,  
 2 Every five miles he flits back and forth.  
 “At thirteen I could weave silk,  
 4 At fourteen I knew how to tailor clothes,  
 At fifteen I played the harp,  
 6 At sixteen I could recite the *Classic of Songs*  
 and the *Classic of Documents*,  
 At seventeen I became your wife.  
 8 In my heart there’s always bitter pain.  
 Since you became a prefectural clerk  
 10 I’ve kept pure, my affection hasn’t changed.  
 When the cock crows I go to the loom,  
 12 Night after night I get no rest.  
 In three days I finish five bolts of silk,  
 14 But the lady of the house finds it too slow.  
 It’s not that my weaving is slow  
 16 But that it’s hard to be daughter-in-law in this family.  
 I cannot bear such treatment;  
 18 It’s no use: whatever I do is wrong.  
 You can tell the old lady:  
 20 Let her send me back home as soon as possible.”  
 When the prefectural clerk heard this  
 22 He went up to the hall<sup>2</sup> and spoke to Mother:  
 “Your son was born to a lowly fate,  
 24 But I was fortunate to get this wife.  
 Since she tied up her hair we’ve shared pillow and mat,  
 26 To be companions till we go down to the Yellow Springs.  
 Together we have lived for two or three years,  
 28 It has not been long.  
 Her behavior has been faultless,

seau, “Deux paons se sont envolés . . .,” *Etudes Asiatiques* 1 (= Publications de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient 19[1925]), pp. 1–36; anonymous translator, “Vers le sud-est un paon s’envole,” *Etudes Françaises* 2.6(1941).477–493. German translation: Chiang Hsüeh-wen, “Die Pfauen flogen nach Südosten,” *Sinica* 14(1939).213–220.

<sup>2</sup> I accept Wen I-to’s (see note 1) emendation, reading *shang t’ang* 上堂 in place of *t’ang shang*.

- 30 Who would have thought you would not like her?"  
Said Mother to the prefectural clerk:
- 32 "Oh, you're too too stubborn!  
This wife has neither manners nor morals,
- 34 She does only what suits her fancy.  
Long have I resented her;
- 36 How can you form your own opinion?  
Our neighbors to the east have an attractive daughter,
- 38 Her name is Ch'in Lo-fu.  
Lovely is her body, without peer.
- 40 Mother will request her for you.  
You should quickly send this one away,
- 42 Let her go, be sure not to keep her."  
The prefectural clerk knelt straight up and begged;
- 44 Humbly he addressed Mother:  
"If now you send this wife away
- 46 I'll never marry again the rest of my life."  
When Mother heard this
- 48 She pounded the couch and cried in great wrath:  
"My little son has no respect at all;
- 50 How dare you speak up for your wife?  
I have lost all regard for her,
- 52 I will most certainly not yield."  
The prefectural clerk was silent and made no sound.
- 54 Making repeated obeisance he returned to his apartment.  
He started to tell the young wife
- 56 But choked and could not speak.  
"I'm not the one who is driving you out,
- 58 It's Mother who is forcing me.  
You just go back to your home for the time being,
- 60 And I'll report now to my office.  
Before long I am bound to return;
- 62 When I return I won't fail to bring you back.  
Don't you worry about this matter,
- 64 Be sure to do as I say."  
Said the young wife to the prefectural clerk:
- 66 "You need not trouble yourself any more.  
Some time ago, in late winter,

- 68 I left my home and came to your noble house.  
I worked for the old lady and took orders from her;
- 70 How would I dare to insist on having my own way  
in anything I did?  
Day and night I exerted myself
- 72 In a continuous cycle of hardships.  
It's fair to say I committed no fault,
- 74 I did my best to meet my obligations.  
Yet I am being driven out;
- 76 How can you speak of my coming back?  
I have an embroidered jacket,
- 78 Gorgeous and scintillating,  
A red-gauze bed-curtain of double thickness
- 80 With incense bags suspended at the four corners,  
And sixty or seventy boxes
- 82 Of blue-green jade with green silk strings,  
Each one different,
- 84 Including all kinds.  
As my person is cheap, the things are also vile,
- 86 Not worthy of being handed on to the next.  
You just keep them to give away some day;
- 88 From now on we'll have no chance to meet again.  
Always take care of yourself,
- 90 Let's never forget each other.”
- The cock crowed, outside it was about to get bright,
- 92 The young wife rose and made up carefully.  
“I put on my embroidered lined skirt.”
- 94 Every piece she tried on four or five times.  
On her feet she put silk slippers,
- 96 On her head a tortoise shell hairpin.  
Around her waist she draped flowing white silk.
- 98 On her ears she wore “bright-moon” earrings.  
Her fingers were like peeled scallion stems,
- 100 Her mouth like a red jewel.  
Minutely she took tiny steps,
- 102 Perfectly beautiful, without equal.  
She went up to the hall and took leave of Mother.

- 104 Mother agreed to let her go, made no attempt to keep her.  
 "In the past, as a child,  
 106 I grew up in a rustic village,  
 Without education.  
 108 I was ashamed to become the wife of a man from  
 a noble family;  
 Much money and silk did I receive from Mother.  
 110 I cannot bear being expelled by Mother.  
 As today I go back to my home  
 112 I think of Mother toiling in the house."  
 Then she took leave of her little sister-in-law.  
 114 Her tears fell like strings of pearls.  
 "When I, the young wife, first came,  
 116 Little Sister-in-law could just touch the bed.  
 Now, when I am being expelled,  
 118 Little Sister-in-law is as tall as I.  
 Exert yourself to provide for the old lady  
 120 And take good care of yourself.  
 On the seventh and nineteenth of each month,  
 122 When you celebrate those festivals, don't forget me."  
 Out the door she went and mounted the carriage.  
 124 Her tears fell in more than a hundred rows.  
 The prefectural clerk's horse was in front,  
 126 The young wife's carriage behind;  
*Yien yien*, it went, *tien tien*.  
 128 Both stopped at the main road corner.  
 He got off his horse and entered her carriage,  
 130 Lowered his head, and whispered in her ear:  
 "I swear I won't abandon you.  
 132 Go back to your family for now,  
 And I'll go to my office for the present.  
 134 Before long I'll be sure to return,  
 I swear to Heaven I won't desert you."  
 136 Said the young wife to the prefectural clerk:  
 "I thank you for your affectionate concern.  
 138 If you will remember,  
 Before long I'll expect you to come.

- 140 You must be like a flat rock,  
I must be like a reed.
- 142 The reed is tough and pliable like silk,  
The flat rock neither moves nor shifts.
- 144 I have a blood brother,  
By nature he is as cruel as thunder.
- 146 I fear he won't let me do as I wish,  
When I think of it my bosom boils.”
- 148 They raised their hands in a long, painful farewell;  
Both were loath to separate.
- 150 She entered the door of her house,  
In a dilemma and with a loss of face.
- 152 Mother clapped her hands:  
“I had no idea you would return by yourself.
- 154 At thirteen I taught you to weave silk,  
At fourteen you knew how to tailor clothes,
- 156 At fifteen you played the harp,  
At sixteen you knew etiquette and decorum,
- 158 At seventeen I married you off.  
It was fair to expect you would not violate your  
obligations.
- 160 Have you now committed any fault  
That you return without our calling for you?”
- 162 “Lan-chih is ashamed to face Mother.  
Your daughter has truly committed no fault.”
- 164 Mother was greatly distressed.  
When Lan-chih had been home for ten-odd days,
- 166 The district magistrate sent a go-between  
To say he had a third son,
- 168 Handsome, without equal,  
Just eighteen or nineteen years old,
- 170 Eloquent, with many talents.  
Said Mother to Daughter:
- 172 “You should accept his offer.”  
Daughter answered with tears in her voice:
- 174 “When Lan-chih departed for home  
The prefectural clerk insisted

- 176 That we swear not to abandon each other.  
 If now I went against my feelings and obligations
- 178 I fear it would not be right.  
 You should decline the offer
- 180 And tell the messenger you'll talk about it by and by."  
 Said Mother to the go-between:
- 182 "The daughter of this poor, unworthy family  
 Was sent out to be married but came back home.
- 184 Unfit to be a clerk's wife,  
 How could she be a match for that fine lord?
- 186 Please direct your inquiries elsewhere,  
 We cannot respond to your offer at this time."
- 188 When the go-between had been gone a few days,  
 Another came on official business: an assistant.
- 190 (He had spoken of this girl Lan-chih  
 Whose family had produced officials for generations.
- 192 They had told him of the prefect's fifth son,  
 Reared delicately and in comfort, not yet married.
- 194 They had ordered him to act as go-between,  
 The secretary had passed the word to him.)
- 196 Coming straight to the point, he said: "The prefect's family  
 Has this fine son.
- 198 He wants to ally himself to your great house,  
 That's why he has sent me to your noble gate."
- 200 Mother thanked the go-between:  
 "My daughter swore an oath,
- 202 How can I argue with her?"  
 When Elder Brother heard this
- 204 He felt provoked and annoyed in his heart.  
 He spoke up to Younger Sister:
- 206 "In making plans, why don't you use your head?  
 In your first marriage you got a prefectural clerk,
- 208 In the next marriage you can get a noble lord,  
 A difference as between heaven and earth;
- 210 This can bring you honor.  
 If you don't marry that fine gentleman,
- 212 What will become of you hereafter?"  
 Lan-chih raised her head and replied:



- 214 “Surely Elder Brother talks good sense.  
I left home to serve my husband,  
216 In mid-journey I returned to Elder Brother’s house.  
In everything to be settled I’ll agree with Elder  
Brother’s view;  
218 How could I act on my own?  
Though I have a bond with the prefectural clerk,  
220 There is no chance of meeting him again.  
I am ready at once to give my consent,  
222 The wedding may proceed.”  
The go-between got off the couch.  
224 “Yes, yes,” he said, “all right, all right.”  
He returned to the office and reported to the prefect:  
226 “Your humble subordinate received your command  
And my negotiations had great success.”  
228 When the prefect heard this  
He was greatly pleased in his heart.  
230 He consulted a calendar and a book of horoscopes:  
“Fortunately in this month  
232 All six correspondences are fitting.  
The thirtieth is a lucky day,  
234 Today is already the twenty-seventh.  
Go ahead with the wedding preparations.”  
236 The word was passed on, all things were got ready.  
The continuous procession was like floating clouds,  
238 A boat decorated with blue birds and white snow-geese,  
With dragon pennants at the four corners,  
240 Flap flap, banners fluttering in the wind,  
A gold carriage with wheels of jade,  
242 Staggering piebald horses,  
Tasseled saddles with gold filigree,  
244 Three million in gift coins,  
All strung on green silk strings,  
246 Three hundred bolts of colored silks,  
Fish and meat dishes bought in Chiao and Kuang,  
248 Four to five hundred attendants  
Crowding up to the prefect’s gate.  
250 Said Mother to Daughter:  
“A letter has just arrived from the prefect;

- 252 Tomorrow they will come to fetch you.  
Why aren't you making your clothes?  
254 Don't be unprepared!"  
Daughter was silent and made no sound.  
256 Her handkerchief she pressed to her mouth and cried,  
Her tears fell as if poured.  
258 "I move my crystal-adorned couch  
And place it below the window."  
260 With her left hand she grasped scissors and  
measuring rod,  
With her right hand she took the silk material.  
262 In the morning she finished an embroidered lined skirt,  
In the evening she finished a thin gauze blouse.  
264 Gloomy, gloomy, the day was about to darken.  
With grieving thoughts she stepped outdoors and cried.
- 266 When the prefectural clerk heard of this disaster  
He requested leave to go home.  
268 When he was still two or three miles away  
His horse neighed with a mournful sound.  
270 The young wife recognized the horse's neigh.  
She put on her slippers and went out to meet him.  
272 Depressed, she awaited him from afar,  
She knew it was her husband.  
274 She raised her hand and stroked the horse's saddle,  
Her sighs showed her heart's grief.  
276 "Since you separated from me  
Events have been unexpected.  
278 What happened was not as I wished it  
Nor as you imagined it.  
280 It was my own parents  
Who forced me, and my brother;  
282 They engaged me to another man,  
What hope is there for you?"  
284 Said the prefectural clerk to the young wife:  
"Congratulations on your lofty advancement!  
286 The flat rock is still firm,  
It can last a thousand years.

288 The reed was tough and pliable for a while,  
 From dawn until evening.  
 290 You'll prosper and move up from day to day,  
 I must go alone to the Yellow Springs."  
 292 Said the young wife to the prefectural clerk:  
 "I'd never have thought you'd say such things.  
 294 We were both coerced,  
 It happened to you and also to me.  
 296 Below the Yellow Springs we'll see each other;  
 Let's not go against what we say today."  
 298 They held hands and then went their separate ways,  
 Each returned to his house.  
 300 Still alive, they parted for death;  
 Grief, grief, how can it be told?  
 302 They resolved to depart from the world,  
 Never again to be whole.  
 304 The prefectural clerk returned to his home,  
 Went up to the hall, and made obeisance to Mother.  
 306 "Today the great wind is cold,  
 The cold wind strips the trees,  
 308 Severe frost forms on the orchids in the courtyard.  
 Your son's day is now darkening.  
 310 I'm causing Mother to stay behind alone,  
 This is my own evil design,  
 312 Do not blame ghosts and spirits.  
 May your life last like the rocks of South Mountain,  
 314 May your four limbs be strong and straight."  
 When Mother heard this  
 316 Her tears accompanied his speech.  
 "You are the son of a great family  
 318 That held office in high places.  
 You must not die for the sake of a woman.  
 320 Between noble and base there is no obligation.  
 Our neighbors to the east have an attractive daughter,  
 322 Handsome, the prettiest in town.  
 Mother will request her for you,  
 324 It'll take no longer than from dawn to evening."  
 The prefectural clerk made repeated obeisance and went back.

- 326 Long he sighed in the empty chamber.  
He made his plan and determined to carry it out.
- 328 He turned his head toward his mother's door,  
Suffering from the searing pressure of grief.
- 330 On that day, cows lowed and horses whinnied.  
The young wife entered the green wedding tent.
- 332 Gloomy, gloomy, after dusk,  
Quiet, quiet, when everyone had settled down.
- 334 "My life will be cut off today,  
My soul will depart, only my corpse will remain."
- 336 She grasped her skirt, took off her silk slippers,  
Raised her body, and plunged into the clear pond.
- 338 When the prefectural clerk heard of this event  
He knew in his heart the eternal parting was at hand.
- 340 Back and forth he walked under the trees of the  
courtyard,  
Then hanged himself from the southeastern branch of  
a tree.
- 342 The two families asked for a joint burial.  
Jointly they were buried by the side of Mount Hua.
- 344 East and west were planted pines and cypresses,  
Left and right were set *wu-t'ung* trees.
- 346 The branches covered each other,  
The leaves crossed each other.
- 348 In the trees there was a pair of flying birds  
Called mandarin ducks.
- 350 Raising their heads they called to each other  
Every night until the fifth watch.
- 352 Travelers stopped and listened,  
Widows were roused and stirred.
- 354 Mark this, people of later generations,  
Take heed, be sure not to forget.

In the oldest extant text, contained in the *Yü-t'ai hsin-yung*, the poem is preceded by the following prose preface:

During the Chien-an era [A.D. 196–220] at the end of Han, the wife of Chiao Chung-ch'ing, a clerk in the prefectural office of Lu-chiang Pre-

fecture, née Liu, was expelled by Chung-ch'ing's mother. She swore not to remarry. When her family compelled her to do so, she drowned herself. When Chung-ch'ing learned this, he too hanged himself on a tree in his courtyard. Their contemporaries were grieved by these events, therefore they made the following poem.

At the end of the Han dynasty, the administrative center of Lu-chiang Prefecture was situated in modern Ch'ien-shan District, Anhwei Province.<sup>3</sup>

While the location is thus clearly stated, the date of the poem's composition is not easy to establish. If we take the preface at face value, as many critics have done, the ballad is based on a sequence of true events that occurred during the Chien-an era (196–220), and must therefore have been composed during that period, or soon thereafter. If, on the other hand, we assume a later date, as some scholars have done for reasons to be given in a moment, the latest possible date would be that of the compilation of the anthology *Yü-t'ai hsün-yung*, that is to say, the mid-sixth century.

The arguments that have been put forward in favor of a later date are based on two kinds of criteria: they have to do either with customs, beliefs, and institutions, or with language. In the former category we find the modern Chinese scholar Lu K'an-ju, who asserts that the “dragon pennants” mentioned in line 239 originated during the Southern Dynasties, and that the “green wedding tent” (line 331) was an institution of the Northern Dynasties.<sup>4</sup> But he is refuted by Ku Chih, who shows that both can be traced back to Han times.<sup>5</sup>

In the linguistic category, there are a number of phrases in the poem which according to some scholars are of post-Han origin. The Japanese scholar Suzuki Shūji cites the following: *na te* 那得 “how could I?” (line 218), *ch'ü* 渠 “him” (line 220), *teng chi* 登即 “at once” (line 221), and *tso chi* 作計 “to make plans” (line 327 and also, we may add, line 206).<sup>6</sup> Suzuki furthermore notes that the couplet

<sup>3</sup> The place was identified by Wen I-to.

<sup>4</sup> Lu K'an-ju 陸侃如, “K'ung-ch'ieh tung-nan fei k'ao-cheng” 孔雀東南飛考証, *Kuo-hsüeh yüeh-pao* 國學月報 3. (I have not been able to see this.)

<sup>5</sup> Ku Chih 古直, “Chiao Chung-ch'ing ch'i pien-cheng” 焦仲卿妻辨證, in his *Han-shih yen-chiu* 漢詩研究 (Shanghai: Ch'ü-chih shu-chü, 1934).

<sup>6</sup> Suzuki Shūji 鈴木修次, *Kan-Gi shi no kenkyū* 漢魏詩の研究 (Tokyo: Dai-shūkan, 1967), pp. 358–359. Suzuki also includes *erh* 爾 “thus” (lines 28 and 327, and also, we may add, elsewhere in the poem), but this use of *erh* is found as early as *Mencius*.

“A red-gauze bed-curtain of double thickness / With incense bags suspended at the four corners” (lines 79–80) is nearly identical with the first half of a singing-girls’ song of the fourth century: “A red-gauze bed-curtain of double thickness / With vermilion pendants suspended at the four corners.”<sup>7</sup> The Chinese scholar Chang Wei-ch’i lists another group of eleven lines which in his view are written in post-Han language.<sup>8</sup>

In our present state of knowledge about the historical development of the Chinese lexicon, it seems to me hazardous to assume that certain phrases which we know to have been current, say, in the fourth or the fifth century A.D. could not already have been in use during earlier periods.

It is conceivable, of course, and even likely, that *some portions* of the poem were revised in the lengthy process of transmission, first by ballad singers and then by those who committed it to writing for eventual inclusion in the *Yü-t’ai hsün-yung*. (It should be noted that three of the phrases suspected by Suzuki as being post-Han occur within the space of four lines, lines 218–221.)

A strong negative argument in favor of a mid-third century date is made by Hu Shih. He points out that though some have claimed to see influences of Buddhist literature in the poem, he finds none; if it had been composed during the Southern and Northern Dynasties, when Buddhism was increasingly establishing itself in popular belief, surely Buddhist thought would be visible in some of the many passages dealing with death and separation.<sup>9</sup>

The early date is further supported by the editors of the anthology *Yü-t’ai hsün-yung*, who call it an “ancient anonymous poem.” As Li Ch’un-sheng points out, they must have had good reasons for placing the poem between those of Fan Ch’in (died 218) and Ts’ao P’ei

<sup>7</sup> “Ch’ang-le chia” 長樂佳, in Kuo Mao-ch’ien (see note 1), 45.9b.

<sup>8</sup> Chang Wei-ch’i 張爲騏, “K’ung-ch’üeh tung-nan fei shih-tai ch’ü-i” 時代祛疑, and “K’ung-ch’üeh tung-nan fei nien-tai te t’ao-lun” 年代的討論, *Kuo-hsüeh yüeh-pao* 2.11–12 (not seen), cited in Lu K’an-ju and Feng Yüan-chün 馮沅君, *Chung-kuo shih shih* 中國詩史 (Peking: Tso-chia ch’u-pan-she, 1957), pp. 241–242. The lines listed by Chang are 22, 49, 95, 101, 121, 191, 217, 224, 226, 232, and 247.

<sup>9</sup> Hu Shih 胡適, *Pai-hua wen-hsüeh shih* 白話文學史 (Taipei: Le-t’ien ch’u-pan-she, 1970), pp. 65–75.

(187–226). If it had been composed much closer to their own time, they probably would have known about that.<sup>10</sup>

We are now ready to consider some of the poem's literary features. As far as structure is concerned, it is evident that the plot is constructed very tightly. Every scene immediately follows upon the preceding one (aside from nocturnal rests) with only these exceptions: there is an interval of ten-odd days between lines 164 and 165, and another interval of a few days between lines 187 and 188, and the wedding preparations (described in lines 237–249) presumably take up three to four days. What is more, the action is speeded on at several points. The young wife departs on the morning after the domestic crisis is aired; the second marriage proposal to Lan-chih follows close on the heels of the first; the wedding date is set for the third day from the receipt of the bride's family's acceptance; and Lan-chih makes her wedding clothes in just one day. This compression of the action into the shortest possible time period is accomplished at the expense of credibility: it is unlikely that an elaborate wedding such as the poem describes would or could be arranged in three days, or that an *embroidered* skirt could be finished in half a day. (More will be said shortly about this and other unrealistic features.)

Another remarkable aspect of the plot structure is the way in which different episodes are linked to each other. The magistrate's marriage proposal leads up to the prefect's. The prefect's yamen, in turn, furnishes a connection between Lan-chih's new husband and her first husband. Since the latter is employed as a clerk in this office, he naturally hears of the wedding plans as soon as they are formulated. This connection thus makes plausible the first husband's quick reaction to his wife's apparent infidelity.

The form in which the story is presented is partly straight narration, partly dialogue. Direct speech takes up more than half of the poem (204 out of 355 lines, that is to say, 57%). The narration is almost entirely objective; the narrator himself speaks up only twice, in an emotional exclamation (line 301) and in the admonition of the final couplet. Direct speech is normally introduced by a narrative statement, with the important exception of the young wife's opening speech. (This opening section will be further discussed below.)

<sup>10</sup> Li Ch'un-sheng 李純勝, *Han Wei Nan-pei-ch'ao yüeh-fu* (Taipei: Shang-wu yin-shu-kuan, 1966), pp. 70–76.

An interesting phenomenon is the shift from the third to the first person in three narrative sections (lines 93, 258, and 334). This is a typical feature of the ballad genre in China and elsewhere. In the Han ballad "The Orphan," for example, the narrator generally speaks of the orphan boy in the third person, but in three places (lines 8, 20, and 42) there is a switch to the first person, with the orphan telling parts of the story himself.<sup>11</sup> In the ballad "Mu-lan," dating from the fifth or the sixth century A.D., we find the same switch: the first person pronoun is used in lines 49, 50, 51, and 52, while the rest of the poem speaks of the heroine in the third person.<sup>12</sup> Such shifts also occur in English ballads; for example:

Down in London where *I* was raised,  
Down where *I* got my learning,  
*I* fell in love with a pretty little girl;  
Her name was Barbara Ellen.

*He* courted her for seven long years,  
She said she would not have *him*.  
*Pretty William* went home and took down sick  
And sent for Barbara Ellen. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Such a switch of person should be considered together with the switch of tense that has long puzzled students of the orally transmitted Spanish ballads (*romances*). There the narration often shifts back and forth between past and present tense, without any apparent reason. The Hungarian scholar Joseph Szertics points out that in such cases the narrator mingles his own voice with that of the interlocutors.<sup>14</sup> Discussing this feature of the Spanish ballads, Professor Stephen Gilman of Harvard has aptly spoken of "double directionality": the singer addresses both his audience and the interlocutor of the story.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese ballads, too, can be better understood through the con-

<sup>11</sup> "Ku-erh hsing" 孤兒行, in Kuo Mao-ch'ien (see note 1), 38.9ab.

<sup>12</sup> "Mu-lan shih" 木蘭詩, in Kuo Mao-ch'ien, 25.10a-11a.

<sup>13</sup> "Barbara Allen," in Matthew Hodgart, ed., *The Faber Book of Ballads* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 235. This is a seventeenth-century English ballad (Child, No. 84) which became popular in America.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Szertics, *Tiempo y verbo en el Romancero Viejo* (Madrid, 1967), pp. 82 and 195.

<sup>15</sup> "The *Romancero* as a Literary Genre," public lecture at Yale University, 9 October 1968.



cept of double direction. The singer usually maintains his role as outside observer and narrator; but at certain dramatic moments he sheds this role and impersonates instead the main character, singing that character's part in the dialogue, or addressing the audience from the viewpoint of the protagonist.

The language of our poem is preponderantly formulaic, as I have demonstrated in detail in an earlier study.<sup>16</sup> This formulaic language strongly suggests that the poem belongs to the oral tradition, as is also indicated by its classification in the *Yü-t'ai hsin-yung* as an “ancient anonymous poem.” Typical formulaic phrases recurring in the poem are *te wen chih* 得聞之 “when he (she) heard this” (lines 21, 47, 203, 228, 315), *A wei* 謂 B “said A to B” (lines 31, 65, 136, 171, 250, 284, 292), *mo wu sheng* 默無聲 “was silent and made no sound” (lines 53, 255), and *yen yen* 陰陰 “gloomy, gloomy” (lines 264, 332). Other stylistic features typical of the ballad genre are repetitions and numerical series. Lines 3–7 are repeated, with slight variations, as lines 154–158, and lines 37–40 recur, varied, as lines 321–323. The numerical series of lines 3–7 and 154–158 is comparable to that of the Han ballad “The Mulberry Trees on the Field Path,” lines 44–47:

At fifteen he was county clerk,  
At twenty, provincial court councilor,  
At thirty, palace attendant,  
At forty, lord governor.<sup>17</sup>

Different sections of the story are linked to each other not only through the just-mentioned repetitions but also through presentiments and predictions. When the husband promises his wife to bring her back, she skeptically exclaims, “How can you speak of my coming back?” (line 76). As they take leave of each other, she foresees her elder brother's coercion (lines 144–147), and the husband's final speech to his mother predicts his own death (lines 306–314). In view of the tragic outcome of events, the magistrate's reference to a “lucky day” (line 233) is a sort of tragic irony.

Another interesting structural feature is the change in the appellation of the heroine. In the first part, she is always referred to as “the young wife” (*hsin fu* 新婦, literally “the new wife,” a conventional

<sup>16</sup> “The Formulaic Language of the Chinese Ballad ‘Southeast Fly the Peacocks,’” *CYYY* 39.2 (1969). 219–244.

<sup>17</sup> “Mo shang sang” 陌上桑, in Kuo Mao-ch'ien, 28.3b–4b.

term distinguishing her from her mother-in-law, the lady of the house). But after she has been expelled and returned to her own family, her changed status is indicated by referring to her by her given name, Lan-chih (lines 162, 165, 174, 213), or else by calling her "Daughter" (lines 171, 173, 250, 255) or "Younger Sister" (line 205). When her first husband comes to see her, she becomes again "the young wife" (line 270 and thereafter).

Other narrative devices are the use of stock characters and of sounds and symbols. Typical characters that also appear in other Han ballads are the exploited young wife whose worth is rated in terms of her production as a weaver (as in the Han poem "She Went Up the Mountain to Pick Herbs");<sup>18</sup> the pretty girl with the type name Ch'in Lo-fu (line 38, as in "The Mulberry Trees on the Field Path");<sup>19</sup> and the domineering elder brother (as in "The Orphan").<sup>20</sup> As for sound effects, we have crowing cocks (lines 11 and 91), a rumbling carriage (line 127), a horse's hoof beats (line 270), lowing cows and whinnying horses (line 330), and mandarin ducks calling to each other (line 350). As for symbols, we have, first, the expressly stated symbols of constancy, the rock and the reed (lines 140-143, 286-289), then the series of symbols in the husband's final speech to his mother (lines 306-314), which includes a literary reference to "South Mountain" (line 313) as a symbol of longevity, based on Poem No. 166 in the *Shih ching*. Lan-chih's valuable possessions, which she enumerates and determines to leave behind (lines 77-88), may be said to symbolize in her mind her status as legitimate wife: when she realizes that she has lost this position, she no longer wants to keep them. Since in the poem's finely tuned emotional orchestration the open display of human emotions is held to a minimum, the husband's horse serves as an active and passive surrogate for expressing the feelings of the two protagonists: "His horse neighed with a mournful sound" (line 269); "She stroked the horse's saddle" (line 274). The burial at Mount Hua (line 343) is perhaps to be connected with the fifth-century *yüeh-fu* song and legend "Hua-shan chi," which involves the joint burial of two lovers.<sup>21</sup> The animal and plant symbol-

<sup>18</sup> "Shang shan ts'ai mi-wu" 上山采蘼蕪, in *Liang Han* (see note 1), p. 571.

<sup>19</sup> "Mo shang sang," see note 17.

<sup>20</sup> "Ku-erh hsing," see note 11.

<sup>21</sup> "Hua-shan chi" 華山畿, in Kuo Mao-ch'ien, 46.2ab. It is of course not necessary

ism of the poem's opening and close will be discussed below. Finally, we may note two passages where the evening gloom symbolizes the young couple's impending death (lines 264 and 332).

Characteristic of the poem's skillful narrative technique is the economical device of relating actions in such a manner that they simultaneously reveal previous actions that had not been mentioned. "Lan-chih raised her head" (line 213) implies that she had kept it lowered up to that point, and "The go-between got off the couch" (line 223) shows where he had been sitting all that time.

To some of the poem's unrealistic features we have already alluded. The setting of the wedding date three days from the receipt of the bride's family's consent is highly improbable, as noted above, and forms part of the consistent effort to speed up the action as much as possible. The completion of the bride's wedding clothes in one day falls into the same category. Another impossibility resulting from the speed-up strategy is the delivery of fish and meat from Chiao Prefecture (in northern Vietnam) and Kuang Prefecture (in southern Kwangtung) for the wedding guests (line 247); they could not possibly have arrived in Anhwei in three days.<sup>22</sup> But in poetry, of course, nothing is impossible. Another unrealistic detail involving a time element is the rapid growth of Lan-chih's sister-in-law (lines 115–118), which conflicts with the earlier statement (line 27) that Lan-chih had been married only two or three years. The exaggerated luxury of the wedding preparations made by the prefect's family is a typical feature of the ballad genre, designed for the humble audience's vicarious pleasure. In this particular ballad, it serves two additional functions: to contrast with the tragic events (the wedding preparations go forward at the same time as the young husband and wife prepare for their own deaths) and to enhance Lan-chih's character by showing how much she is turning down.<sup>23</sup>

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to assume a connection of our ballad with that legend and song. Mountains with the name Hua-shan are found in many parts of China.

<sup>22</sup> Noted by Yü P'ing-po 俞平伯, "Man t'an 'K'ung-ch'üeh tung-nan fei' ku shih te chi-ch'iao" 漫談 古詩的技巧, in *Yüeh-fu shih yen-chiu lun-wen chi* 研究論文集 (Peking: Tso-chia ch'u-pan-she, 1957), p. 141.

<sup>23</sup> The latter point is brought out by Wang Yün-hsi 王運熙, "Lun 'K'ung-ch'üeh tung-nan fei' te ch'an-sheng shih-tai ssu-hsiang i-shu chi ch'i wen-t'i" 論 的產生時代思想藝術及其問題, in *Yüeh-fu shih yen-chiu lun-wen chi*, Ser. 2 (Hong Kong: Chung-kuo yü-wen hsüeh she, 1970), p. 114.

Finally, two instances of unrealistic distribution may be pointed out. In the account of Lan-chih's education (lines 3-7 and 154-158) it is unlikely that the young lady acquired each of her skills in a different year, but it is aesthetically pleasing to have her accomplishments thus neatly divided up. The same aesthetic need for an even distribution at the expense of realism can be observed in lines 260-261: "With her left hand she grasped scissors and measuring rod, / With her right hand she took the silk material."

The poem is a protest against the prevailing absolute authority of the family elders in matrimonial matters. The plot revolves around conflicts between the young couple and their elders: their marriage is opposed, and broken up, by the husband's mother; and a new marriage is imposed on Lan-chih by her elder brother. We are struck by the Freudian slant in both situations: it is the mother who disapproves of her son's wife, and it is the brother who prevents his sister from keeping faith with her first husband. The same types of conflict are common in English-language ballads, as Albert B. Friedman points out: "Family opposition to the course of true love accounts for the conflicts in dozens of song-stories, tragic or otherwise. In such contests the Freudian paradigm holds: fathers oppose the marriage of their daughters; mothers attempt to frustrate their sons, or, if overriden, torment their unwelcome daughters-in-law."<sup>24</sup> In our ballad, the father's role is taken over by the elder brother. (Lan-chih's father is apparently dead or absent.) Though Friedman cites no specific examples, they can easily be found in the large corpus of English traditional ballads. In "Willie's Lady," the husband's mother hates her daughter-in-law and uses witchcraft to prevent her giving birth to her child; she wants her son to marry another girl, but he refuses.<sup>25</sup> In "The Lass of Roch Royal" (Child, No. 76), Lord Gregory's mother refuses entry to her son's pregnant sweetheart and thus causes her death. In "Prince Robert" (Child, No. 87), the mother objects to her son's bride and poisons her son. The second stanza of Child's Version D is worth quoting: "It is the fashion in oor countrie, mither, / I dinna ken what it is here, / To like your wife better than

<sup>24</sup> Albert B. Friedman, ed., *The Viking Book of Folk Ballads of the English-Speaking World* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), Introduction, p. xxi.

<sup>25</sup> Francis James Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York: Dover, 1965), No. 6.

your mither, / That . . . bought you sae dear.' ” In “Fair Janet” (Child, No. 64), the bride’s father wants her to marry another man, and she dies. In “Lord Saltoun and Auchanachie” (Child, No. 239), too, Jeanie Gordon dies when her father prevents her from marrying Auchanachie, her true love, and forces her to marry Saltoun instead. The father’s role is taken over by a brother (as in our Chinese ballad) in “The Cruel Brother” (Child, No. 11). Here the groom neglects to get the bride’s brother’s consent for her marriage, and the brother kills her.

Thus the mother-son syndrome and the father-daughter (or brother-sister) syndrome are not uncommon in ballads. What makes our Chinese ballad unique is that both syndromes are present at the same time, and they parallel each other. There is another parallel also in that in both families the father is dead or absent; his place is taken by the wife in one case, and by the son in the other. The tendency to arrange matters in matching correspondences is very strong in Chinese literature.

Let us consider now the poem’s opening couplet. At first glance it seems to be unrelated to the rest of the poem, like the “nature” openings in many *Shih ching* poems (the technical term for such openings is *hsing* 興) and in some European ballads. But to Chinese audiences it must have recalled poems such as the *yüeh-fu* “Yen-ko ho-ch’ang hsing” 豔歌何嘗行, where the birds are a loving couple forced by the female’s illness to separate:

White swans come flying in pairs,  
From the northwest they come,  
In tens and fives,  
Forming orderly rows.  
  
Suddenly a female is taken ill,  
She can’t keep up with the flock.  
At five miles he looks back,  
At six miles he hesitates. . . .<sup>26</sup>

This *yüeh-fu* song is likely to be older than our ballad. We note that in both poems the birds fly in the same direction (from northwest to southeast), and that the last two lines quoted from the earlier poem are combined into a single line in the second line of our ballad. The

<sup>26</sup> Kuo Mao-ch’ien, 39.6ab.

same bird imagery is used in three other poems, including an “Ancient Song” of unknown date that is obviously closely related to our ballad:

East fly the peacocks,  
Bitter cold, no clothes.  
As your wife  
I’ve suffered pain in my heart.  
Night after night I weave,  
Never get to leave the loom.  
In three days I finish a bolt,  
But still she says I am too slow.<sup>27</sup>

The second is one of the poems falsely attributed to Su Wu (140–60 B.C.), which are believed to date from the early third century A.D.<sup>28</sup> This poem contains the following lines:

The brown swans are suddenly far separated,  
At a thousand miles he looks back and flits hither  
and thither.

. . . . .  
I wish we were a pair of brown swans,  
And I were going along with you, flying far together.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, one of the fifth-century *yüeh-fu* songs titled “Hsiang-yang Music” begins as follows:

The brown swans fly penetrating the sky,  
Having gone halfway, he is anxious and flits  
hither and thither . . . .<sup>30</sup>

Thus the opening couplet of our ballad is clearly designed to suggest the general theme of a tragically separated married couple. At the same time, the opening lines may be more directly related to the first part of the poem proper, as proposed by Wang Yün-hsi.<sup>31</sup> He cites two sixth-century poems in which peacocks appear as designs in colored silk. One is “The Middle Son’s Wife Weaves Colored Silk,” by Hsiao Kang (503–551), and begins as follows:

<sup>27</sup> *T’ai-p’ing yü-lan* 太平御覽 (SPTK ed.) 826.4a.

<sup>28</sup> Suzuki (see note 6), pp. 322–341.

<sup>29</sup> *Wen-hsüan chu* 文選注 (Taipei: Shih-chieh shu-chü, 1962) 29.405–406.

<sup>30</sup> Kuo Mao-ch’ien, 48.6b.

<sup>31</sup> Wang (see note 23), p. 123.

Fluttering petals fill the steps,  
 The sad lady goes up to the loom alone.  
 “In the northwest rises a floating cloud,”  
 “Southeast fly the peacocks.” . . .<sup>32</sup>

The other is titled “Ten Roses.” It is by Ting Liu-niang (second half of the sixth century), and its opening couplet reads:

She cuts a skirt from peacock gauze,  
 With red and green facing each other. . . .<sup>33</sup>

In Hsiao Kang’s poem, the lady takes the themes for the designs she is about to weave from two poems, one of them being “Southeast Fly the Peacocks.” (Note that the two poems are chosen in such a way that their opening lines match each other.) In Ting Liu-niang’s couplet, peacocks are seen in the design of the colored silk. The choice of peacocks, rather than some other species of birds, begins to make sense now. The peacock is not noted as a long-distance flier, but it is the most spectacularly colorful bird known to the Chinese, and therefore best suited to a colored silk design. If Wang Yün-hsi’s suggestion is correct—and I find it very plausible—the opening of our ballad presents Lan-chih weaving, as it were, her own fate, forecasting in a silk design her imminent separation from her husband. Wang’s suggestion is further supported by the references to Lan-chih’s weaving silk in line 3 (immediately following the opening couplet) and again in lines 11–16, where her weaving is the issue that brings the family conflict to a head. (Compare the poem “She Went Up the Mountain to Pick Wild Herbs” [see note 18], where efficiency in weaving is also the yardstick of a wife’s worth.)

It is noteworthy that the opening couplet contains two phrases that recur in neighboring lines toward the end of the poem: *tung-nan* “southeast” (lines 1 and 341) and *p’ai-huai* “(walk or fly) back and forth” (lines 2 and 340). There is another aspect of the opening section that deserves attention. The fact that lines 3–20 are direct discourse, spoken by the young wife, does not become apparent until line 7. Up to that point, it sounds as though it might be a narrative

<sup>32</sup> *Ch’üan Liang shih* 全梁詩 (in Ting Fu-pao 丁福保, *Ch’üan Han San-kuo Chin Nan-pei-ch’ao shih* 全漢三國晉南北朝詩 [Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1959]) 1.889.

<sup>33</sup> *Ch’üan Sui shih* 全隋詩 (in Ting Fu-pao, *op. cit.*) 4.1726.

account: "At thirteen *she* could weave silk. . . ." In the remainder of the ballad, it will be recalled, direct discourse is always introduced by a phrase such as "Said A to B." The omission of such an introductory phrase in this case falls in line with the generic feature of ambiguity in the opening of many ballads.

At the end of the poem, the symbolic use of intertwining trees and a pair of mandarin ducks represents worldwide folklore motifs. In China, both motifs occur together in the stories of Han P'ing and his wife, née Ho, as told in the *Sou-shen chi*, ch. 11, and of Lu Tung-mei and his wife, née Chu, as recorded in the *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi*, ch. 389, citing the *Shu-i chi*. The theme of intertwining trees on the graves of husband and wife is found in a story of an unnamed citizen of Ch'in and his wife in the *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi*, ch. 389, credited to the *Shu-i chi*, and in the story of Wang Chung-hsien and P'an Chang in the *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi*, ch. 389.<sup>34</sup>

The choice of *wu-t'ung* trees in line 345 of our ballad has a special significance. It involves a pun: *wu-t'ung* is homonymous with the words "we together." That such a play on *wu-t'ung* is intended can be seen from two other poems where the same pun occurs; one dates from the same period as our ballad, the other is much later. The first, a *yüeh-fu* titled "Song of the Wild Tiger," is by Ts'ao Jui (204-239; reigned as Emperor Ming of Wei, 226-239):

A pair of [*wu*]-*t'ung* trees grows by the empty well,  
Their branches and leaves mix with each other.

. . . . .  
On top there is a pair of nesting birds,  
Joining their necks they sing in mutual harmony. . . .<sup>35</sup>

The other poem, by Meng Chiao (751-814), is also a *yüeh-fu*, titled "Song of the Exemplary Woman." Its opening lines are:

*Wu t'ung* trees age in mutual support,  
Mandarin ducks die together in pairs. . . .<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> All of these stories are cited in *Liang Han* (see note 1), pp. 570-571.

<sup>35</sup> *Ch'üan San-kuo shih* 全三國詩 (in Ting Fu-pao, *op. cit.*) 1.140.

<sup>36</sup> *Meng Tung-yeh shih chi* 孟東野詩集, ed. by Hua Ch'en-chih 華忱之 (Peking: Jen-min wen-hsüeh ch'u-pan-she, 1959) 1.1.



We note that, in both poems, the *wu-t'ung* tree motif is combined with the bird-pair motif, just as in our ballad.

The tree motif is also common in English ballads. Many of them have this formulaic conclusion:

They grew as high as the church-top,  
Till they could grow no higher;  
And then they grew in a true lovers' knot,  
Which made all people admire.<sup>37</sup>

The same combination of the two motifs as in our Chinese ballad occurs in the Breton ballad “Le Seigneur Nann et la Fée,” cited by Wimberley in translation:

Next morn from the grave two oak-trees fair  
Shot lusty boughs high up in the air;  
And in their boughs—oh, wondrous sight!—  
Two happy doves, all snowy white—<sup>38</sup>

It is a mark of the artistic skill with which our ballad is constructed that its opening, “Southeast fly the peacocks,” is echoed at the end in the *topos* of birds as a symbol of conjugal fidelity and harmony, transcending separation and even death.

<sup>37</sup> See Child (see note 25), “Index of Matters and Literature,” s.v. “Plants from Graves”; see also Lowry Charles Wimberly, *Folklore in the English and Scottish Ballads* (New York: Dover, 1965), pp. 37-43, “The Plant Soul,” and pp. 44-52, “The Bird Soul.”

<sup>38</sup> Wimberly, *op. cit.*, p. 48.