

Wixted, John Timothy, "Yüan Hao-wen," in *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed. and comp. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 953-955. [元好問]

**Yüan Hao-wen** 元好問 (*tsu*, Yü-chih 裕之, hao, I-shan 遺山, 1190-1257), one of the greatest of Chinese poets, was the outstanding literary figure of the Chin dynasty. A descendant of the T'ang poet Yüan Chieh,\* he was born in Hsin-chou 忻州 (in Shansi) and raised by his paternal uncle, who held a series of provincial posts. Initially unsuccessful in passing the imperial examinations, Yüan spent most of his twenties in Honan, eventually passing the examination in 1221 under the aegis of the Chief Examiner Chao Ping-wen.\* He eventually served for a short time as the magistrate at two posts in Honan before temporarily leaving official life. He was later called to the capital Kaifeng, where he became a major official at the disintegrating Chin court over the two-year period before the city's fall to the Mongols in 1233. His action in helping to draft an inscription praising Ts'ui Li 崔立, the tyrant who took over the capital immediately

before its demise, has been the source of both partisan criticism and defense of the poet over the centuries. When Kaifeng fell, Yüan wrote a famous letter to the Mongol official Yeh-lü Ch'u-ts'ai 耶律楚材 asking that fifty-four outstanding cultural figures of the Chin be spared. He was himself interned by the Mongols in Shantung for two years, during which time he started the compilation of a collection of extant Chin-dynasty poetry, the *Chung-chou chi* 中州集 (Anthology of the Central Land). Upon his release, he was free to pursue this and another self-appointed task, that of preserving the records of the Chin dynasty and drafting its history. He received the patronage of certain powerful local officials of the Yüan but refused to serve the new dynasty. Making his base mostly at the family site of Tu-shu shan 讀書山 (Book-reading Mountain) near Hsin-chou and at Lu-ch'üan 鹿泉 (Deer Spring) in Huo-lu Prefecture (modern Hopei), Yüan constructed a "Yeh-shih T'ing" 野史亭 (Unofficial History Pavilion) at each of the sites and made frequent trips throughout North China during his final score of years to gather materials for his history. His work formed a major source for the *Chin-shih* 金史 (History of the Chin Dynasty), which was compiled in the decades immediately after his death.

Yüan is most famous for his poems lamenting the demise of the Chin and for his series of poems on poetry. In these, as well as in most of the rest of his poetic corpus (totaling 1,366 *shih*\* poems), he balances directness and indirectness of statement, allusiveness and originality in diction, and intensity of feeling and restraint in expression. The central characteristic of his poetry is its dignity and gravity, in which regard he was said to have been perhaps the foremost poet since Tu Fu.\*

Yüan's poems narrating historical events, specifically those surrounding the fall of the Chin, present descriptions of events in highly selected fashion, written in allusive and carefully controlled language that heightens the effect of the poet's anguish over the fall of the dynasty. The allusive-

ness and compression of statement in these poems are of the highest technical order, and intensity of communicated statement is effected through surface restraint of emotion. The most famous examples are the three-poem series "Ch'i-yang" 岐陽 (Ch'i-yang), the five-poem series "Jen-ch'en shih-erh-yüeh ch'e-chia tung-shou-hou ch-shih" 壬辰十二月車駕東狩後即事 (An Account of What Happened in January 1233, After the Imperial Carriage Went on Tour to the East), and the fifteen-poem series "Hsü hsiao-niang ko" 續小娘歌 (Maidens' Songs, Another Series). Yüan's critical views are expressed in three series of poems on poetry, the most famous being "Lun-shih san-shih-shou" 論詩三十首 (Thirty Poems on Poetry), and in selected prose prefaces and essays. His stated critical aim is to order the poetic tradition by distinguishing between its "pure" and "impure" elements. The critical theory implied in his poems, and made more explicit in some of his prose writings, is not original, whereas the specific cast of his applied criticism often is. Yüan emphasizes sincerity (the *Shih-ching*\*), naturalness (T'ao Ch'ien\*), and strength of expression in writing (the Chien-an Poets). He decries poetry that is self-consciously novel (Lu T'ung 盧仝) or belabored (Ch'en Shih-tao\*), weak in expression (Ch'in Kuan\*), or captive to rules of versification (the Chiang-hsi poets). He argues that poetry should be the sincere expression of directly experienced feeling, decorously expressed; poetry must also be well-written. He has great praise for Tu Fu and (with some ambivalence) for Su Shih.\* He is said by some to show partiality to poets who reflect the heroic strengths he associates with North China. His critical comments, so well-turned and memorably expressed, became the model for a later series of poems on poetry, most notably that by Wang Shih-chen\* (1634-1711).

Yüan also wrote a wide variety of traditional *shih* poems on other themes, which are generally of outstanding quality. Moreover, he is characterized as an innovator in the *tz'u*\* genre, especially in the use of new themes.

#### EDITIONS:

*Yüan I-shan shih-chi chien-chu* 元遺山詩集箋注, Mai Ch'ao-shu 麥朝樞, ed. Peking, 1958; rpt. Taipei, 1978. The best edition for Yüan's poetry; punctuated. Includes the commentary of Shih Kuo-ch'i 施國祁 (1822), Yüan's only extended commentator, who is strong on historical sources. Shih incorporated most of the textual emendations suggested by Cha Shenhing 查慎行 (1650-1727).

*I-shan Hsien-sheng wen-chi* 遺山先生文集, in *Wanyu wen-k'u* 萬有文庫. The only punctuated edition of Yüan's prose writings, best checked for misprints against the *SPTK*.

*I-shan Hsien-sheng wen-chi* 遺山先生文集. *SPTK*. The best edition of Yüan's prose, based on the 1498 edition of the author's complete works, which in turn was apparently based on the earliest edition of his writing (c. 1298), now no longer extant.

*I-shan yüeh-fu* 遺山樂府, in *Sung Chin Yüan Ming pen tz'u ssu-shih chung* 宋金元明本詞四十種. Shuang-chao Lou 雙照樓, 1911-1917. An edition of Yüan's *tz'u* which are not included in the works listed above.

#### TRANSLATIONS:

Demiéville, *Anthologie*, pp. 413-416.

Li, Kuan-li 李冠禮. *Shih-jen Yüan I-shan yen-chiu* 詩人元遺山研究. Taipei, 1975. Apparently draws on Suzuki (see below) for his translations; also includes a study of the poet.

*Sunflower*, pp. 405-408.

Suzuki Shūji 鈴木修次. *Gen Kōmon* 元好問. Tokyo, 1965. An excellent study of the poet, with an extensive selection of translated and annotated poems.

Wixted, John Timothy. "A Finding List for Chinese, Japanese, and Western-Language Annotation and Translation of Yüan Hao-wen's Poetry," *Bulletin of Sung-Yüan Studies*, 17 (1981), 140-185. Lists all translations of Yüan's poetry, including partial ones, as well as any studies that treat his work; also lists all *nien-p'u* for the author.

#### STUDIES:

Chan, Hok-lam. "Yüan Hao-wen and His *Chung-chou chi*," in *The Historiography of the Chin Dynasty: Three Studies*, Wiesbaden, 1970, pp. 67-119.

Hsü, K'un 續琨. *Yüan I-shan yen-chiu* 元遺山研究. Taipei, 1974.

Wang, Li-ch'ing 王禮卿. *I-shan lun-shih ch'üan-cheng* 遺山論詩詮證. Taipei, 1976.

Wixted, John Timothy. *Poems on Poetry: Literary Criticism by Yüan Hao-wen (1190-1257)*. Wiesbaden, 1982.

Yoshikawa, Kōjiro 吉川幸次郎. "Gen Kōmon" 元好問, in *Gen-Minshi gaisetsu* 元明詩概説, Tokyo, 1963, pp. 29-49.

—JTW