

Beyond Spring

Tz'u Poems of the Sung Dynasty

Translated by Julie Landau
Translations from the Asian Classics

NEW YORK: COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1997
275 PAGES

This elegant book is a fitting addition to a publication series which, since 1961, has published translations of classic works of literature from India, China and Japan by such master translators as Burton Watson, Donald Keene, and Barbara Stoler Miller. Julie Landau's translation of Chinese *tz'u* or song-lyrics from the Sung Dynasty (960–1279) is limited to a selection of works by fifteen poets. However, her judicious choice of which authors and poems to include and her spare yet evocative translations effectively capture and convey the essential qualities of this particular Chinese poetic genre.

The roots of the *tz'u* lie in the “music, the themes, the language, and probably the inspiration” of the entertainment districts of the late T'ang period. This explains in part why the genre never completely lost its function as a voice of the personal even as it was taken over by highly educated scholar-poets. The primary themes of the *tz'u* were often those of love and longing in a world which very much privileged familial, political and social duty and form. In fact, as one reads through this lovely selection of translations, it becomes clear that the dominant motif is rarely that of love satisfied. These are, for the most part, poems of love either remembered or longed for from a heart-breaking distance. In fact, the title of Landau's anthology of translation, *Beyond Spring*, comes from a line in a *tz'u* by Ou-Yang Xiu that describes the emotions of a woman left abandoned in the midst of spring's verdant splendor. She is so consumed with grief that she does not even dare go outside to gaze in the direction of her lover's disappearance—far away beyond the plains, beyond the spring-greened mountains and even beyond spring itself. It is perhaps for this very reason that these poems are so intrinsically accessible to readers in general and to high school students and college undergraduates in particular, many of whom will find themselves in the throes of just such an emotion at least once in the course of a semester!

Thematic accessibility aside, Landau does admirable justice to the language of the original Chinese with translations that are vernacular and yet not bland, spare but delicately evocative. In

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other words, her sensitive choice of just the right English equivalent for the Chinese original—often, although not always, the most simple word—manages to avoid the “flattening” effect that is the bane of even the best translators of Chinese poetry. We see this in the way she manages to capture the very different poetic moods in two well-known poems by Su Shih (1036–1101), arguably the greatest, and certainly the most versatile, of the Sung *tz'u* poets. In the first of these *tz'u*, the speaker returns home after a drunken night on East Slope to find the door locked. He is suddenly filled with an impulse to simply vanish and not be bothered with the petty concerns of the world of sobriety: “I hate it!? I'm not my own person—When will I stop this frenzied buzzing?/This late, the wind is still, the river silken—/I could take a skiff and



drift/My life away, downstream, out to sea.” In the second example, the sparse simplicity of the English words Landau has chosen to translate Su's poem is powerful in a different—and strikingly contemporary—way: “Inside the wall, a swing; outside, a road/Outside, a man, walking/Inside, a girl, laughing/The laughter dies away, and all is still/All but desire, fired by indifference.”

Part of the reason for the surprising directness and freshness of these translations of poems—many of which will be familiar to readers and teachers of Chinese literature—is, I believe, the way in which Landau gives the voices of these fifteen poets enough space to breathe, as it were. She does this by using the necessary scholarly annotative apparatus as a frame that sets off and supports the poems without overwhelming them. Thus, each poet's selections are divided not by commentary, but rather by reproductions of paintings or calligraphy by great Sung artists. Similarly, instead of footnoting each poem, she provides an introduction at the beginning—two introductions really, one to the history and nature of *tz'u* during the Sung dynasty and the problems of translations, and the other to some of the recurrent symbols and stories that give the poems their allusive resonance. In addition, she provides a useful set of appendices at the end,

BOOK REVIEWS

including short biographies of the authors, a glossary of terms, people and places, and a well-chosen bibliography of reference works.

Although there are a few very small points in this background material that I might quibble with, such as that there are practically no women writers represented until the Ch'ing dynasty (there were, in fact, a significant number of women writing and publishing in the Ming period), this material is, much like the translations of the poems themselves, spare and essential but surprisingly informative, useful and often insightful. Reading it will greatly add to the reader's understanding and enjoyment of the poems, but in a very unobtrusive way. What this means is that the poems themselves retain center stage. The fact that the voices of these Sung dynasty poets speak out with such surprisingly poignant clarity and feeling is testimony to the translator's skill. It is up to us to listen with renewed appreciation. ■

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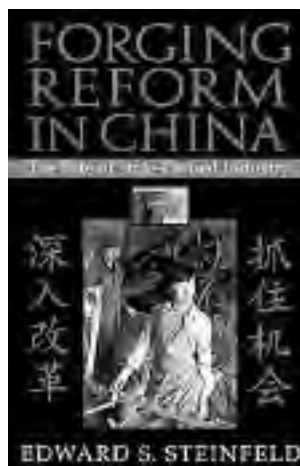
Forging Reform in China

The Fate of State-Owned Industry

By Edward S. Steinfeld

NEW YORK: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1998

318 PAGES



Forging Reform in China by Edward Steinfeld is an ambitious attempt to explain the failure of state sector reform in China. The study is well thought out, deals with a broad range of literature, and utilizes case studies. Because the theory assumes familiarity with economic analysis and some knowledge of the Chinese situation, this book is most appropriate for upper division and graduate courses on transition economies or the Chinese economy.

Steinfeld argues at length that explanations of problems in transition economies that use a property rights approach are inadequate in the Chinese case. These approaches cannot explain why some firms do well and others do not. In addition, he argues that the issue is not who owns what, but rather the external environment that sets the opportunities and constraints on managerial and government behavior. His alternative approach, which he calls a "nested problems dynamic," focuses on whether or not decision makers face hard budget constraints with real consequences for poor decisions. The author uses three cases of steel companies, Anshan, Ma'anshan and Shougang, to further illustrate and support his argument.

On the surface, each of these three large state-owned steel companies has been dealt a different hand in the reform process. Anshan is an example of a firm that was given some managerial autonomy and told to pay attention to market demand. Ma'anshan went public in Hong Kong, altering its ownership arrangements substantially. Shougang was taken off the dole completely and given unprecedented freedom to manage its own strategy. While some successes can be found, the outcome of all three cases was spectacular failure to transform themselves into profit-generating, value-creating enterprises. The underlying problem, Steinfeld argues, is that for a myriad of reasons, despite the reform measures the firms do not have to make a profit to survive. The managers continue to focus on output maximization,

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