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Han Ancient-style Poetry : The “Nineteen Old Poems” : Interplay of images and emotions : Binary structure and multilateral texture

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How to Read Chinese Poetry Podcast

Topic 7 Han Ancient-style Poetry: The “Nineteen Old Poems”

Host: Zong-qi Cai (Lingnan University; University of Illinois)

Episode 20 Interplay of Images and Emotion: Binary Structure and Multilateral Texture

I. Text

Bright Moon Shines in the Clear Night 明月皎夜光

Bright moon shines in the clear night,
Crickets chirp near the eastern wall.
The jade handle points to early winter,
The myriad stars, how they crowd into one another!
White dew gathers on wild grasses,
The cycle of seasons suddenly changes again.
Cicadas buzz among the trees,
Dark swallows, where have they gone?
Once we were friends studying together,
High you soared, strong, beating wings.
Our friendship you have not remembered,
And abandon me like a footprint left behind.

míng yuè jiǎo yè guāng
明月皎夜光
cù zhī míng dōng bì
促織鳴東壁
yù héng zhǐ mèng dōng
玉衡指孟冬
zhòng xīng hé lì lì
眾星何歷歷
bái lù zhān yě cǎo
白露沾野草
shí jié hū fù yì
時節忽復易
qiū chán míng shù jiān
秋蟬鳴樹間
xuán niǎo shì ān shì
玄鳥逝安適
xī wǒ tóng mén yǒu
昔我同門友
gāo jǔ zhèn liù hé
高舉振六翮
bù niàn xié shǒu hǎo
不念攜手好
qì wǒ rú yí jī
棄我如遺跡

Southern Winnow, Dipper in the North,
Or Draught Ox that cannot carry a yoke.
Truly, without the firmness of a rock,
What good can you gain from these empty names?

nán jī yǒu běi dòu
南箕有北斗
qiān niú bú fù è
牽牛不負軛
liáng wú pán shí gù
良無磐石固
xū míng fù hé yì
虛名復何益

Characters in red: mutually resonating images of stars and constellations
Characters in green: mutually resonating images of flying insects and birds

[Translated by Zong-qi Cai]
The poem read in English by Brian Zeng
The poem read in Mandarin by Zhao Wenxuan

II. Episode Notes

1. Binary Structure: external observation + emotional utterances
2. Multilateral Texture: an intricate network of textual resonance
3. Poetic texture as a distinct feature of written poetry
 - Wang Shizhen's 王世貞 (1526–1590) comments

III. Textual Source

Zong-qi Cai. "Pentasyllabic Poetry: "The Nineteen Old Poems." In *How to Read Chinese Poetry: A Guided Anthology*, ed. Zong-qi Cai. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, pp. 103-117, especially pp. 113-116.