

which one is worth noting, however impertinent it may seem: Great statesmen are great chiefly because of their work, their thought and their character, not always because of their sensibility. Now, poetry is something most intimate to man. It can hardly tell lies or else the poet is not a poet. So that they don't necessarily gain by revealing their inner selves.

In such men as Ho Chi Minh intelligence and sensibility are one. There is no secret door between his public and private lives. For him the sight of suffering is a call both to action and to poetical expression.

*A rose blossoms, and then fades.
It blooms and withers — listless.
But its scent the cells invades
And arouses the prisoners' bitterness.*

This small note-book should enable us to understand its author much better than lengthy memoirs could do.

PHAN NHUAN

PRISON DIARY

*Thy body is in jail.
But thy spirit, never.
For the great cause to prevail,
Let thy spirit soar, higher!*

BEGINNING THE DIARY

*I've never been fond of chanting poetry ;
But what else can I do in thraldom ?
These long days I'll spend composing poesy :
Singing poems may help in the wait for freedom.*

ARRESTED IN GLORY STREET

*In Glory Street, cruel irony ! shame was brought on me
Deliberately, so as to retard my journey.
Groundlessly I was accused of the crime of spying,
And a man's honour, for no reason, was reduced to
nothing.*

ENTERING ZINGSI DISTRICT PRISON

*In jail veteran inmates greet the newcomer ;
High above white clouds are chasing black ones away.
In the sky both white clouds and black freely have
gone their way ;
On earth a free man is to stay a prisoner.*

HARD IS THE ROAD OF LIFE

I

*Having travelled o'er steep mount and deep vale,
How could I expect in the plain to meet even greater
danger?
In the mountain I suffered no harm when meeting a
tiger;
In the plain I ran into men and was thrown in jail.*

///

II

*I am a delegate of the Vietnamese people
On his way to China to meet an important official.
Why should a storm break out o'er a serene scenery
And I be flung into prison by way of hospitality?*

III

*A loyal man, with my heart torn by no remorse,
I'm suspected of being a Chinese traitor somehow.
It has ne'er been easy in life to steer one's course,
But how difficult it all has become now!*

MORNING

I

*Every morning the sun, emerging o'er the wall,
Beams on the gate, but the gate is not yet open.
Inside the prison lingers a gloomy pall,
But we know outside the sun has risen.*

II

*Once awake everyone starts louse-hunting.
At eight the gong sounds for the morning meal.
Come on, let's go and our stomachs try to fill:
After such long misery happier days must be coming.*

NOON

*In the cells how nice it is to have a doze!
For hours we lie about in deep repose.
I dream of riding a dragon up to heaven.
Waking, I find myself still pining in prison.*

AFTERNOON

*Two o'clock: the doors open to make the cells airy.
Everyone lifts his eyes for a look at the heavens.
O free spirits roaming the sky of liberty!
Know you, one of your peers is languishing in irons?*

EVENING

*The meal over, the sun sinks below the western horizon.
From all corners rise folk tune and popular ditty :
Suddenly this dismal, gloomy Zingsi prison
Is turned into a little music academy.*

PRISON MEALS

*For each meal only one bowl of rice reddish brown ;
No vegetables, no salt, even no broth to wash it down.
If you get food sent in you may soothe your hunger ;
Failing this, you'll famish and can only cry to Mother !*

THE FLUTE
OF A FELLOW-PRISONER

*Nostalgically a flute wails in the ward.
Sad grows the tone, mournful the melody.
Miles away, beyond passes and streams, in infinite
melancholy,
A lonely wife mounts a tower to gaze abroad.*

THE STOCKS

I

*Opening a hungry mouth like a wicked monster,
Each night the stocks seize the ankles of the prisoner.
Their jaws grip the right leg of the wretch;
Only the left is free to bend and stretch.*

II

*There happen in this world things even stranger:
People jostle to get their feet in priority bound.
For once locked, they can look forward to peaceful
slumber;
Otherwise, where could they lie undisturbed on this
crowded ground?*

LEARNING TO PLAY CHESS

I

*To while the time away we learn to play chess.
 Horse and foot are engaged in pursuit endless.
 Move with lightning speed either to attack or defend :
 Talent and nimble feet will give you the upper hand.*

Look far ahead and ponder deeply.

Be resolute : attack and attack incessantly.

*A wrong move and even your two chariots¹ are useless ;
 Come the right juncture : a pawn can bring you
 success.*

II

*The forces on both sides are balanced equally,
 But victory will come only to one player.
 Advance, retreat — do both with unerring strategy :
 Only then can you be called a great commander.*

MOONLIGHT

*In jail there is neither flower nor wine.
What could one do when the night is so exquisite?
To the window I go and look at the moonshine.
Through the bars the moon gazes at the poet.*



D. E.

THE WATER RATION

*The water ration is half a basin only :
You can either wash or make tea, just as you please.
If you want to clean your face, then go without tea.
Should you be keen on tea, well, you can't wash your
phiz.*

MID-AUTUMN FESTIVAL

I

*Like a round mirror the moon shines in mid-autumn,
Beaming on the earth her silvery light.
You who enjoy the festival in your family's bosom,
Think of those in prison and their sorrowful plight.*

11

*In jail we also celebrate mid-autumn.
But moon and wind carry a tinge of sadness.
Barred from enjoying the autumn moon in freedom,
My heart wanders after her across the heavens
boundless.*

GAMBLING

*Ordinary folk who gamble are at once arrested.
But once locked up they can play games to their
hearts' content.
And so jailed gamblers are often heard to lament:
"Why did we never think of this place blessed?"*

JAILED GAMBLERS

*The State supplies no food to those jailed for gambling,
So they may learn to mend their ways all the sooner.
Each day "affluent" inmates can enjoy copious
eating.
As for the poor, hunger makes their eyes and mouths
water.*

TRANSFERRED TO TIANBAO ON
“DOUBLE TEN”² DAY

*Every house is decked with lantern and flower:
It's national day, the whole country is filled with
delight.
But just now I'm put in chains for a transfer:
Contrary winds persist in hampering the eagle's flight.*

OUT ON THE ROAD

*Out on the road we grow fully aware of the difficulties.
One peak hardly climbed, another above us rises.
But once we've struggled up to the highest pass,
Ten thousand li at one glance can our eyes encompass.*

DUSK

To the wood seeking shelter a bird flies, forlorn.
Leisurely a lone cloud floats across the expanse of
heaven.
In yonder mountain hamlet a girl is grinding corn.
The grain ground, a hot fire glows red in the oven.

OVERNIGHT STOP AT LUNGQUAN

All day my "two horses"³ have trotted, tireless.
When night comes I'm served with "five-spice
chicken."⁴
Bed-bugs and cold draughts attack, merciless.
How welcome, the dawn-announcing song of an
oriole golden!

TIANTUNG

*For each meal only a bowl of rice gruel:
 The hungry stomach moans, wails, and curls.
 Three yuan of rice is not enough to feed a man well
 When wood sells as dear as cinnamon and rice as
 pearls.*

ARRIVAL AT TIANBAO JAIL

*Today I walked fifty-three kilometres.
 My hat and clothes are soaked through, my shoes in
 tatters.
 Without a place to sleep, all through the night
 I sit on the edge of the latrine, waiting for light.*

VISITING HER HUSBAND
IN PRISON

*On this side of the bars, the husband.
Outside stands the wife.
So close, only inches distant ;
Yet as heaven from earth apart.
What their mouths cannot let know
Their eyes try to impart.
Before a word is said, tears flow :
Truly their plight rends your heart.*

THE PRESS:
WARM WELCOME TO WILLKIE⁵

*Both good friends of China, for Zhongqing
We are both heading.
But there you are, offered the seat of honour ;
While here I am, down the steps, a prisoner.
Like you I'm a visiting delegate ;
Why then is the difference in treatment so great ?
Such is life : coldness to some, warmth towards others.
Forever eastward flow the waters⁶.*

ADVICE TO MYSELF

*Without the cold and bleakness of winter
 The warmth and splendour of spring there could
 never be.
 Misfortunes have steeled and tempered me
 And strengthened my resolve even further.*

COUNTRY SCENE

*When I came here the rice was still tender green.
 Now half the autumn harvest has already been brought
 in.
 Everywhere peasants' faces wear smiles of gladness,
 And the ricefields resound with songs of happiness.*

THE GRUEL STALL

*On the roadside, in the cool shade of a tree opulent,
Stands a thatch hut calling itself "restaurant".*

*The menu consists of cold gruel and white salt :
Drop in, traveller, and enjoy a restful halt !*

GODE PRISON

*Life in the ward calls for quite a bit of housekeeping :
Wood, rice, oil, salt — everything must be bought and
paid for.*

*In front of each cell there's a little stove standing ;
On it all day boil rice, broth, and more.*

DEPARTURE BEFORE DAWN

I

*The cocks have crowed just once: the night has not
yet passed.
With a retinue of stars the moon sails o'er the hills
yonder.
On the road for a long journey has set out the traveller,
His face beaten by gust after gust of icy autumn blast.*

II

*The pale east has turned rosy: nascent day
The last shadows of the night has swept away.
A warm breath blows across the immense skies,
And the wayfarer feels poetic inspiration rise.*

FROM LUNGAN TO TUNGZHENG

*Vast but alas! barren is the land.
No wonder the people work hard and are thrifty.
This spring there has been a bad drought, we
understand:
Of the hoped-for harvest they've brought in a fraction
only.*

ON THE ROAD

*My arms and legs are tightly bound.
But in the hills birds sing and flowers blossom.
Who can prevent my enjoying such sweet scent and
sound?
In my long trudge I may feel a little less lonesome.*

TUNGZHENG

November 2

*Tungzheng jail can be to Pingma likened:
Each meal a bowl of gruel, the stomach as good as
empty.
But water and light we can have aplenty,
And each day for airing the cells are twice opened.*

THE PAPER BLANKET
OF A JAIL-MATE

*Old scrolls and new books complement each other.
A blanket of paper is indeed better than no cover.
Do you people in jade-and-brocade beds ever think
Of those in prison who cannot sleep a wink?*

COLD NIGHT

*In the cold autumn night, with neither quilt nor
mattress,
I curl myself up for warmth but cannot close my eyes.
Moonlight on the banana-palms adds to the chilliness.
I look through the bars : the Little Bear has lain down
in the skies.*

THE BONDS

*Entwined round my arms and legs is a long dragon :
I look like a foreign officer with braid on the shoulders.
But the cords officers wear are of golden thread woven,
While my decoration is but a thick rope of fibres.*

GOOD-BYE TO A TOOTH

*You were, my friend, hard and unyielding;
Not like the tongue, soft and stretching.
The bitter and the sweet we have shared to this day,
But now each of us must go his own way.*

THE WIFE OF
A CONSCRIPT DESERTER⁷

*That day, never to come back, you went away,
Leaving me alone, weighed down with sadness.
The authorities, in pity of my loneliness,
Invited me to prison for a temporary stay.*

SAID IN JEST

*The State feeds me, I stop at State-owned palaces.
Guards work in relays to keep me company.
Passing by mounts and streams, I enjoy wonderful
scenery.
It fills a man with pride thinking of such privileges.*

ON THE WAY TO NANNING

*The supple rope has been replaced with hard irons.
At every step like jade bracelets they jingle.
Although a prisoner, detained on spying suspicions,
I have the dignified carriage of a Court official.*

GUARDS CARRY A PIG

I

*Going with us, guards carry a pig
On their shoulders, while I'm dragged along rudely.
A man is treated worse than a pig,
Once deprived of his liberty.*

II

*Of the thousand sources of bitterness and sorrow
None can be worse than the loss of liberty.
Even for a word, a gesture, you're no longer free:
They just haul you along, like a horse or a buffalo.*

A STUMBLE

*It was still pitch-dark when we started.
The road was uneven, rough and rugged.
I slipped and landed in a dangerous pit
But managed to jump out: lucky, wasn't it?*

IN A BOAT
TO YONGNING (Nanning)

*Carried by the current, the boat sails towards
Yongning.
My legs are tied to the rail, a new style of hanging!
On both river banks a truly prosperous countryside;
In midstream light fishing-boats swiftly glide.*

NANNING JAIL

*Here's a jail built on the latest model :
All night the cells are lit up with electric lamps.
But each meal is nothing more than a bowl of gruel,
And one's stomach suffers continuous cramps.*

SADNESS

*The whole world is ablaze with the flames of war.
To the battlefield eagerly fighters ask to be sent.
In jail inaction weighs on the prisoner all the more :
His noble ambitions are not worth a paltry cent.*

LISTENING TO A COCK'S CROW

*You are only a very ordinary rooster.
Every morning you crow to announce the day nascent.
Cock-a-doodle-doo! You rouse people from slumber.
Truly, this feat of yours is no mean achievement.*

A JAILED GAMBLER DIES

*Nothing but skin and bone remained of him.
He slept close to my side only last night.
But misery, cold and hunger were the end of him,
And this morning gone he was to the world of eternal
night.*

STILL ANOTHER

*Ba-i and Shu-ci⁸ would not eat the Zhou's rice.
 That man would not swallow the government's gruel.
 Ba-i and Shu-ci died on the Shouiang mountainside;
 The jailed gambler starved to death in his cell.*

NO SMOKING

*Here smoking is strictly prohibited!
 Your tobacco by the warder is quickly confiscated.
 Of course he can smoke his pipe whenever he wants to;
 But just try to have a puff and he'll handcuff you.*

TWILIGHT

*The wind on mountain rocks the edge of its sword
sharpens.*

The cold with its spear the tree-boughs pierces.

*The bell from a far-off pagoda the traveller's steps
hastens.*

*Flute-playing buffalo-boys leisurely ride home to the
villages.*



THE CHARGES

Sixty cents to get a pot of rice cooked.

A basin of hot water costs no less than one yuan.

*For sixty cents' worth of goods you're charged a full
yuan:*

How clearly the prices in prison are fixed!

SLEEPLESS NIGHT

*The first watch... the second... the third dies.
I toss about, restless: sleep would not come, it seems.
The fourth watch... the fifth... No sooner have I closed
my eyes
Than the five-pointed star haunts my dreams.⁹*

睡不著。
 一更...二更...又三更，輾轉徘徊睡不成。
 四五更時才令眠，夢魂環繞五尖星。
 普君送赤至江濱，問我歸期指谷新。
 現在新田已犁好，他鄉赤作獄中人！
替誰友們寫報告
 同舟共濟義難辭，替友編修報告書。
 奉此等因今始學，多多博得感恩詞。

Facsimile of
President Ho Chi Minh's handwriting

THINKING OF A FRIEND

*That day you went with me to the edge of the river:
"When will you be back?" — "When you see the rice
ripen."*

*But now that the fields have been ploughed for the
next season,
In a foreign land I still remain a prisoner.*

WRITING A PETITION
FOR JAIL-MATES

*Being in the same boat, how could I refuse to help you?
On your behalf to the authorities I wrote that petition.
"Whereas... in consequence of..." — For such newly-
learnt jargon
No end of thanks I got as my due.*

SCABIES

*Covered with red and blue as though dressed in
brocade;
Scratching all day long, we seem to be playing the
guitar.
Honoured guests, of our rich garbs we make a parade.
Strange virtuosos, sharing an itch for music we
surely are!*

LISTENING TO THE SOUND
OF RICE-POUNDING

*Under the pestle how terribly the rice suffers!
But it comes out of the pounding as white as cotton.
The same thing to man in this world occurs:
Hard trials turn him into polished diamond.*

THE ELEVENTH OF NOVEMBER

I

*Formerly when came the Eleventh of November,
Of the armistice in Europe was observed the
anniversary.
Today bloody fighting rages the five continents over:
The wicked Nazis for this crime bear the responsibility.*

II

*Now China has been resisting for almost six years.
 Her heroic feats of arms are known all the world over.
 Although victory is just around the corner,
 Even more effort is needed when counter-offensive
 time appears.*

III

*All over Asia anti-Japanese flags flutter.
 Big flags, little flags—in size they differ.
 Of course the big banners must be present;
 But the little ones can never be absent.*

AIR-RAID WARNING

November 12

*Enemy planes come roaring in the sky.
 People flee helter-skelter, leaving the place empty.
 Out of prison we are ordered for safety:
 How gladly we all hasten to comply!*

IDEOGRAMS ANALYSED¹⁰

Freed, the prisoner can build the country.

Misfortunes are tests of a man's loyalty.

*To worry about the common good is a great
merit no doubt.*

*Let the prison door open and the real
dragon will fly out.*

THE "INN"

*Newcomers to the prison, as a rule,
Must spend the night near the privy.
Anyone who wants a sleep peaceful,
To pay some cash let him be ready!*

THE MORNING SUN

*The morning sun into the prison penetrates :
 The smoke clears away, the mist dissipates.
 The breath of life suddenly fills the skies,
 And the prisoners' faces are now all smiles.*

COMMOTION IN VIET NAM

News reports in the Nanning press

*Death rather than servitude! Everywhere
 in my country
 The flags of insurrection again proudly flutter.
 Oh, how sad at such a time to be a prisoner :
 To rush into battle I wish I could be free!*

A BRITISH DELEGATION IN CHINA

November 18

*The Americans gone, now the Britons are there.
 Their delegation is warmly received everywhere.
 Though I'm also a delegate on a visit friendly,
 Of a peculiar kind is the welcome accorded me!*

TAKEN BACK TO WUMING

*They transferred me to Nanning;
 Now they are taking me back to Wuming.
 Transfer after complicated transfer:
 My journey they seek to hinder.
 Oh, how bitter!*

DOG-MEAT AT BAOXIANG

*At Gode the guards relished fish fresh.
Now at Baoxiang they savour dog flesh.
Ah, even that gang of turnkeys
At times show a taste for delicacies!*

THE ROAD-MENDER

*Drenched with rain, flogged by the wind, given a rest
never:
In what wretched conditions you work, road-mender!
Of all who pass — on foot, on horseback, or in a
carriage —
How many show any gratitude to you ever?*

TO MY STAFF,
STOLEN BY A GUARD

*All your time with me you've been upright
and unbending.
Hand in hand we've passed many seasons
of mist and snow.
Cursed be the rogue who caused our parting!
A long, long time will last our sorrow.*

THE MILESTONE

*Neither high up nor far away,
On neither emperor's nor king's throne,
You're only a little slab of stone
Standing on the edge of the highway.
People ask you for guidance;
You stop them from going astray,
And tell them the distance
O'er which they must journey.
The service you render is no small one;
People will remember what you've done.*

THE CHILD
IN BINIANG PRISON⁷

*Boohoo! Away ran my conscript Daddy :
He was afraid to serve in the army.
That's why I'm here in jail with Mummy
Though I'm half a year old barely.*

LIGHTING COSTS

*For the cost of lighting every newcomer pays :
Six yuan per person in local currency.
In this realm of darkness and haze
Light is worth only that much money.*

PRISON LIFE

*A stove for each of the prison folk,
And earthen pots of every imaginable size,
For making tea, boiling vegetables, and cooking rice:
All day the whole place is filled with smoke.*

Mr. GUO

*Like duckweed meeting water, glad we were to see
each other.*

How kind and cordial Mr. Guo was to me!

*Nothing much: "A little gift of coal in wintry
weather."*

Yet, that such people still exist is a blessing truly.

Mr. MO, THE CHIEF-WARDER

*A generous man, Mr Mo, the Biniang chief-warder !
 He buys rice for the prisoners with his own money ;
 At night he takes the fetters off for them to sleep
 better ;
 He never resorts to force, only uses bounty.*

ON THE TRAIN TO LAIBIN

*After weeks of trudging along wearily,
 Today we board a train happily.
 Although our seats are but a heap of coal,
 Still it's much better than to resume our stroll !*

A PRISONER SEEKS TO ESCAPE

*Driven by only one thought: liberty,
Reckless, he jumped off the moving train.
Alas, after running about half a li,
He was caught by the guards and a prisoner again.*

LAIBIN

*The head-warder plays cards every day;
The police-chief extorts money from transferred
prisoners;
By lamplight the district mandarin busies himself with
his papers:
In Laibin peace is indeed there to stay!*

ARRIVAL AT LIUZHOU

December 9

*There must come an end sometime to suffering:
On the ninth, here I arrive in Liuzhou now.
As from o'er a hundred days' nightmare I'm awaking,
A trace of sadness still lingers on my brow.*

LONG DETENTION
WITHOUT INTERROGATION

A bitter drug tastes all the more bitter when the cup is almost empty.

The last stage of a hard journey is often the hardest of all.

To the mandarin's residence the distance is no more than one li:

Why then for so long have I been kept in thrall?

MIDNIGHT

*In sleep an honest look all faces adorn;
Only when people wake does good or evil show.
Good and evil are not qualities inborn;
More often than not from education they flow.*

AT THE MANDARIN'S RESIDENCE

*We had thought this was to be the last gate,
And the day of deliverance was approaching.
Alas, there is another pass to negotiate.
Transfer! Now we are going to Guilin.*

FOUR MONTHS HAVE PASSED

*"One day within prison walls seems as long as a thousand years without."
How right the ancients were, no doubt!
Four months of a subhuman life, it appears,
Have aged me even more than ten years.*

Indeed

*For four months I've lived on meagre fare;
For four months I've never had a sound sleep;
For four months I've never changed my wear;
For four months I've never taken a dip.*

And so

*One of my teeth has fallen away;
Much of my hair has turned grey;
Scabies covers my body;
I'm dark and thin like a demon hungry.*

Fortunately

*Stubborn and persevering,
I've not yielded an inch.
Physically I'm suffering,
But my spirit will ne'er flinch.*

SERIOUSLY ILL

*With my health harmed by China's fickle weather,
And my heart grieved by Viet Nam's long suffering,
Oh, to fall ill in prison, what a trial bitter!
Enough to make you weep, but I prefer to sing.*

ARRIVAL AT GUILIN¹¹

*Neither forest nor cinnamon is found in Guilin ;
Only high mountains and deep rivers are in sight.
In the shade of a banyan the prison looks terrifying :
Dark in the daytime, grim and desolate at night.*

?!

*Liuzhou, Guilin, and now again Liuzhou;
Kicked back and forth like a soccer ball.
Innocent, I've been dragged o'er Guangsi, to and fro :
An end to this shuttling can one ever hope to call?*

AT THE POLITICAL BUREAU
OF THE FOURTH WAR ZONE

*Hauled o'er thirteen districts of Guangsi;
Kept in eighteen prisons successively !
Tell me, of what crime have you found me guilty ?
That of showing my people unflinching loyalty ?*

MORNING SCENERY

*Each morning the sun emerges from behind the mountain
And bathes the countryside in a rosy glow.
But in front of the prison there remains a dark shadow,
And sunlight cannot yet reach the warder's domain.*

QINGMING¹²

*Pure Brightness! Yet a drizzle falls monotonously
And the prisoners' hearts suffer grievous agony.
"Which way to freedom," we plead, "pray?"
To the yamen the guard points, far away.*

EVENING SCENERY

*A rose blossoms, and then fades.
It blooms and withers — listless.
But its scent the cells invades
And arouses the prisoners' bitterness.*

RESTRICTIONS

*Without freedom one leads a wretched life truly !
Even on relieving nature restrictions are imposed.
When the door is open the bowels are, alas, not ready ;
When one has the gripes, it remains of course closed.*

SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

*During the long, sleepless nights in prison,
I've written a hundred-odd poems on thraldom.
At the end of each quatrain I put down my brush often
And through the bars looked up at the sky of freedom.*

ENDLESS RAINS

*Nine days of rain, of sunshine one day :
Really the sky above has shown no feeling.
Tattered shoes, muddy road, legs caked in clay !
Still, tirelessly I must keep slogging.*

REGRET AT TIME LOST

*On a militant an adverse destiny maintains its hold.
 Eight useless months now have I spent in custody.
 A day is worth a thousand taels of gold :
 When can I ever again hope to be free?*

AUTUMN IMPRESSIONS

I

*The Little Bear lies atop the hill, it's ten in the evening.
 Autumn has come, says a cricket's intermittent chirping.
 But what does the prisoner care about the season ?
 Of only one thing does he dream : liberation.*

II

*Last year when autumn came I was free.
This year autumn finds me into prison cast.
With regard to services rendered my country,
This autumn is, let me say, equal to the last.*

PERMITTED TO TAKE A WALK
IN THE PRISON YARD

*After such long inactivity my legs are soft like cotton.
Trying a few steps, I stagger and totter.
But very soon bellowes the chief-warder:
"Hey you, come back, no loitering in prison!"*

AUTUMN NIGHT

*At the gate guards holding rifles stand.
Above, shredded clouds with the moon are drifting.
Bed-bugs swarm about like tanks manoeuvring.
Real air squadrons, mosquitoes assemble and disband.
My heart travels a thousand li to my country.
Sadness turns my dreams into a thousand tangled
skeins.
An innocent man, yet I've been a whole year in chains.
With tears dropping on my inkslab, I compose a poem
on captivity.*

READING THE
“ANTHOLOGY OF
A THOUSAND POETS”

*Of nature the ancients loved to sing the beauty :
Moon and flowers, snow and wind, mist, hills and
streams.
But in our days poems should contain verses steely,
And poets should form assault teams.*

LANDSCAPE

The branches of yon tree draw a portrait of Zhang
Fei; ¹³
The red sun forever lights the heart of Guan Yu. ¹³
For a whole year I've received no news from my
country;
O my people, every day I'm waiting for word from you!

THE WEATHER IS CLEARING UP

*Everything evolves, such is the law of nature.
After days of rain, here's fine weather coming!
In an instant the earth has cast off its damp clothing;
O'er ten thousand li the land spreads its brocade
coverture.
Under a warm sun and balmy wind flowers smile
with rapture;
In the tall trees with shiny boughs birds their trills
rehearse.
Joy fills man's heart as well as the universe.
After the bitter comes the sweet: so runs the course
of nature.*

August 29, 1942
September 10, 1943

AFTER PRISON,
PRACTISING MOUNTAIN - CLIMBING¹⁴

*The mountains embrace the clouds, the clouds hug
the mountains.*

The river below shines like a spotless mirror.

*On the slopes of the Western Range, my heart throbs
as I wander,*

*Looking towards the Southern skies and thinking of
old friends.*

NOTES

1. The most powerful men on a Chinese chessboard.
2. Tenth of October, Chinese National Day under the Kuomintang regime.
3. Jokingly, the two legs.
4. To cook this dish, the legs of the chicken are tied crosswise. The phrase is a jocular description of the way the prisoner's limbs are bound at night.
5. Head of an American delegation to China in 1942.
6. Major Chinese rivers all flow east towards the sea.
7. Families of Kuomintang army deserters were subjected to harsh penalties.
8. Sons of the chief of a principality in ancient China. When King Wu, acting against their advice, conquered the country and founded the Chou dynasty (c. 11th century B.C.) both refused "the Chou's rice" and starved to death.
9. The national flag of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, founded by President Ho Chi Minh in 1945, is red, with a five-pointed gold star in the middle.

10. The poem written in Chinese ideograms:

拆字
 囚人出去或爲國
 患過頭時始見忠
 人有憂愁漫點大
 籠開竹門出真龍

The analysis:

Take 人 (man) from 囚 (prison), add 或 (probability) and you get 國 (country).

Lop off the top of 患 (misfortune), that gives 忠 (loyalty).

Add 亻 (man) to 憂 (worry) to get 優 (merit).

Take 竹 (bamboo) off the top of 籠 (cell), that leaves 龍 (dragon).

11. Guilin (Kweilin) means Cinnamon Forest.

12. The word means "Pure Brightness" and designates a period in the lunar year which corresponds roughly to early April.

13. Two warriors in the period of the Three Kingdoms in China, famed for their valour and loyalty.

14. After his release from prison, Ho Chi Minh took long walks in the mountains to recover his health.



In the translated poems, Chinese names are written in the Chinese latinized script.

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 PRINTED AT TIEN BO PRESS
 DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIET NAM

