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Songs of a hidden orchid: Yuefu and Gexing by Li He (791-817)

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**Songs of a Hidden Orchid:
Yuefu and *Gexing* by Li He (791-817)**

Proefschrift

**ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof. mr. P.F.van der Heijden,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op dinsdag 24 juni 2008
te klokke 16.15 uur**

door

**Kuniko Ukai
geboren te Yanagawa in 1956**

Promotiecommissie:

Promotor: **Prof. dr. Wilt L. Idema**

Referent: **Prof. dr. Stephen Owen**

Overige leden: **Prof. dr. Maghiel van Crevel**

Prof. dr. Ivo B. Smits

Prof. dr. Paul F. Rouzer

**For Goro, Kuro, Chiro, Chiyo
And My Parents**

With Love

Preface/Acknowledgement

My thesis is an effort to study Li He's *yuefu* and *gexing* in a broad literary context. Especially for its part on *gexing* I have made a quite extensive survey of works belonging to this genre, approximately from the late Six Dynasties until the end of the Mid-Tang. In my book I have translated a large number of *yuefu* and *gexing* and also poems of other genres that have been written by Li He and many others. I have tried to establish the nature of the changes and developments that took place in the *yuefu* and *gexing* in the course of time, and have also endeavoured to map out the presence of diversity from a synchronic perspective. In doing so I have assumed – but perhaps I have gone too far – that it was also important to read, analyse and interpret individual poems with more care than is usually spent on it in studies of the development of a literary genre. In fact, I have considered the reading and interpreting of individual poems in themselves an important part of my study, which is the reason why my thesis has become so voluminous. My only hope is that my readers may perhaps have the kindness of at least enjoying the reading of a few poems they have at random chosen from my thesis and that my interpretations of these poems may be able to add a bit to their pleasure and understanding in reading them.

I have worked on my Ph. D for almost half of my life. During this long span of time, I have never become bored with it, have never disliked it and have never stopped writing. During these twenty-over years I have lived in four different counties, have held several different teaching jobs, and my life has undergone many other changes. But the writing of my thesis has always been with me, like a *basso ostinato*. Every small surprise I have encountered in the process of my reading hundreds of classical Chinese poems has been a source of delight for me. These pleasures, together with my various teaching jobs, and my efforts on behalf of the protection of animals, have already since long ago become a daily part of my life. But I must not selfishly speak only about my personal experiences.

Because I had taken up the task of writing a Ph. D thesis within the framework of a carefully scheduled programme devised for the training of future academics, I should not have allowed its research to drag on like this. I am only too clearly aware that in this way I have been causing trouble to many people. In this acknowledgement, besides expressing my gratitude, I would therefore also like to offer my apologies to those who have been involved in the writing of my thesis. However, Leiden University's "promotie reglement" prohibits me from stating my gratitude to the members of the Promotion Committee, and I have to reserve doing this for another occasion. Here let me say a sincere thank you to a few of the many others who have helped me complete this book.

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Barend ter Haar, who has always welcomed me when I needed to use the facilities of the library of the Sinological Institute of Leiden. He has also kindly helped me to obtain teaching jobs by writing letters of recommendation during financially difficult years. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to him.

I am also deeply beholden to Prof. Dr. Wim Boot for his kind encouragement. Whenever I visited Leiden he would invite me for a drink and tell me many interesting things. In the cheerful conversations he has had with me over the years, he has often frequently given me new stimuli in a subtle way.

My heartfelt thanks are also due to the staff members of the library of the Sinological Institute of Leiden, who have always most willingly assisted me in my research by allowing me direct access to all the books, the old and rare ones included.

I would also like to thank the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek and the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange for the generous financial support they have provided me.

A special word of thanks also for Arie Pos, who although having to prepare his own Ph. D. for publication with the patience of an angel has helped me make pdf files and has with painstaking care corrected the Dutch of my summary. Without his kind help this book might never have seen print.

Last but not least I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my husband and my parents for the mental, as well as, practical support they have always given me.

The young Li He once wrote: “In your garden don’t plant trees, / If you plant trees, you will grieve the whole year round”. The passing of time indeed causes one to experience the pain of loss. How many hundreds of thousands of classical Chinese poems have been inspired by this pain, I do not know. But in exchange for the irrecoverable loss of dear things and beings, the passage of time gives one memories, which can be much more precious than even real life. Ultimately one’s existence is an accumulation of memories. Li He could not live long enough to become aware of this. But the memories of those who have helped me in the course of these long years have become something so dear to me that they will continue to give me warmth and moral courage for ever.