

Literature and its Characters – Jiu Ge

The “Chu Ci – Jiu Ge” is a set of extremely elegant lyric poems composed by the great poet Qu Yuan in China, which is re-composed based on the popular ritualistic songs of the State of Chu with extra artistic work. The work “Jiu Ge” does not literally mean 9 tracks of song, as it consists of 11 tracks. Just as stated in the “Explanatory document of Songs of Chu” of Hong Xingzu, “Those that are named with ‘Jiu’ are named after the concept of ‘Xiao Shao Jiu Cheng’ (Nine Chapters of Music); therefore, there exist the meanings of ‘Jiu Bian’ (Nine Arguments) or ‘Jiu Ge’ (Nine Songs)”. In the “Chu Ci Zhang Ju”, Wang Yi claimed the work “Jiu Ge” as a unique literary work, excellent with gold in the form and quality of jade in the content. Qu Yuan had set up the first summit of romanticism in our country by composing splendid and exotic poems in the “Jiu Ge” with misty artistic conception, touching sentiment and elegant wordings.

“The God and the Goddess of River Xiang” – Qu Yuan used the God and the Goddess of River Xiang as the main protagonists of the Chant in “Xiang Jun (God of River Xiang)” and “Xiang Fu Ren (Goddess of River Xiang)” respectively. They expressed their adorations to each other and sang about the sadness and resentment caused by separation and death, and the cruel fate of unable to reunite. Who are Xiang Jun and Xiang Fu Ren? Qu Yuan never explained their identities, but it was certain that they are the deities of River Xiang despite the debates among scholars of later generations. According to the legend which is widely influential, Xiang Jun is the incarnation of Yu Shun. During his tour to southern China, Shun died at Cangwu and was buried at Jiuyi Mountain, thus he was considered as the God of River Xiang. Xiang Fu Ren was originally the Goddess of River Xiang in legend, a nameless deity similar to the God of Sun and the God of Cloud, and was attached and claimed to be the concubine of Shun later. According to the legend, the two daughters of Emperor Yao, Ehuang and Nuying, were married to Shun at the same time. During Shun’s tour to southern China, both of them did not accompany with Shun at first, when they traced his path up to Dongting Lake afterwards, they learnt about the news of Shun’s death, they wept all over the bamboos, and there were dots that looked like tear stains appeared on the bamboos, hence the name of “mottled” was derived. After the pair threw themselves into the lake to commit suicide for love, the people deified them as the Goddesses of River Xiang – “Xiang Fu Ren”. Whether Xiang Fu Ren was a nameless deity or the combined incarnation of Emperor Shun’s two concubines, romantic stories that happened by the shore of River Xiang had never stopped to be heard of, which makes the image of the God and Goddess of River Xiang even more touching.

“The Lords of Fate – The Greater and the Lesser” – The Greater and the Lesser of Fate were originally the names of two constellations. The Greater of Fate is in charge of human’s life and death; the Lesser of Fate is in charge of heir, especially children’s fate. The Greater of Fate is a serious and solemn god; while the Lesser of Fate is a gentle goddess. The Greater of Fate depicts people’s sad thoughts that they pray for prolonged life, yet it is helpless and out of their control. The Lesser of Fate illustrates how goddess protect the children by “Caressing comet stars” and “Revering long sword”, winning people’s respect and praise.

“The Lord of the East” – The Lord of the East is the God of Sun. In ancient times, there were ritual festivals for the sun, the moon and the stars. As the sun rises in the east, the ritual festival for the sun must be held at the east, thus the God of Sun is named the Lord of the East. The God of Sun rides the dragon boat with numerous cloud-like flags on the boat; he is in a white cloth with a long arrow, exuding endless flame. It rises in the east and sets in the west; it keeps revolving around ceaselessly to benefit the people by radiating light and warmth. This song is the reverence and praise to the God of Sun.

“The Mountain Spirit” – According to research, the Mountain Spirit is the Goddess of Wu Mountain. This poem depicts an infatuated lover’s feeling of sorrow and sadness as she had been waiting for her lover in the mountain for a tryst as previously did yet he never showed up, which in turns pours out the regretful emotional state that welcoming the arrival of gods who never come. By portraying the elegant and affectionate image of an infatuated lover, a soul stirring love song is revealed, expressing the plaintive sentiment of being unable to meet the gods.

“Hymn to the Fallen” – It is an elegy to mourn for the soldiers of the State of Chu who died in battles. This poem sings the praise of the soldiers’ heroic manner and patriotic spirit, which places great hope in wiping out the

national humiliation, expressing the writer's lofty feeling of enthusiastic patriotism. The emotion expressed throughout the poem is sincere and splendid, with distinct and rapid rhythms. The poem is expressed in an open hearted and exaggerated manner, conveying a beauty that is awe-inspiring and tragic with strong integrity.

“Honoring the Spirits” – It is a song for sending off gods after offering sacrifices to them. Since those to be sent off are not merely gods but also the spirits, hence its title as honoring the spirits but not honoring the gods. Spirits means the god of breath, the so-called gods in general. Sending off gods is the last session of ritual festival in ancient times, which is also the most solemn sacrificial offering ceremony. It is sung by a beautiful witch; both male and female youngsters would dance along, and pass on the flowers to accompany with the songs and dancing, praying to various gods and spirits for their eternal blessings.

“Jiu Ge” – The souvenir sheet blends the classical characters and scenes in Jiu Ge together vividly, the pictures from the left to right are, “The Lords of Fate – The Greater and the Lesser” – which concerns about the stages of life including Birth, Aging, Sickness and Death; “The God and the Goddess of River Xiang” – which sings about the sadness and happiness caused by separation and union; “Hymn to the Fallen” – which mourns the heroes of previous generations who sacrificed their lives for the country; “The Mountain Spirit” – which portrays the image of an enamored lover; “The Lord of the East” – which was praised respectfully through the magnificent image of the Sun shining on the land, and “Honoring the Spirits” – which soothes the deceased, prays for those in the present time and looks forward to the future.

The great poet Li Bai once said, “Qu Yuan's poems still remained alongside the sun and the moon, while the palace of the king of Chu has already vanished in the mountains” (Li Bai in “Jiang Shang Yin”). Although time flies and thing changes, Qu Yuan's legacy of literature gem and patriotic sentiment is imperishable throughout all ages.

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