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CLASSICISM
IN LIU HSIEH'S "WEN-HSIN TIAO-LUNG"*

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Introductory Note: A biographical sketch of the author of *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*

Liu Hsieh[a], alias Yen-ho[b] (c. 465–522 A. D.) was a native of Tung-kuan, the present Lü-hsien in Shangtung province. His father died when he was a child and he was reared in poverty by his mother. When he was about twenty years of age, his mother died. He never married, partly because of his poverty, and partly, no doubt, because of his interest in Buddhism. He is said to have assisted Seng-yu in editing Buddhist sûtras in Ting-lin Monastery, and to have taken part in the preparation of the *Hung-ming chi*. His own contribution to this collection is "Mieh-huo lun"[c], which is found in chüan 8. We are told that both Hsiao T'ung, the author of the famous anthology entitled *Wen hsüan*, and Shen Yüeh, the great exponent of musical patterns in literature, spoke well of his literary talents. But no mention of Liu occurs in either's biography. Liu wrote *Wen-hsin tiao-lung*[d] ("The Mind of Literature in the Carving of Dragons") in the Southern Ch'i period; but as he lived into the Liang dynasty, he is generally regarded as belonging to the Liang period, and his biography is included in the *History of Liang*. Late in life, he was commissioned by Emperor Wu of Liang to re-edit Buddhist sûtras in Ting-lin Monastery, and this time in cooperation with a monk by the name of Hui-chen[e]. With the completion of this task, he petitioned the emperor for permission to take Buddhist vows. The permission was granted, and he became a monk in the same monastery where he twice had edited Buddhist sûtras. There he received the Buddhist name of Hui-ti[f]. Shortly after he died.

Some modern writers[1] believe that Liu Hsieh's classicism was motivated by a desire to lend authority to his own views, a version of "reform in the name of antiquity."[g] But many others[2] think that Liu was sincere in

* This paper was read before the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Far Eastern Association at Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A., on the 30th of March, 1953.

1. Liang Sheng-wei[aj], "Wen-hsüeh p'i-p'ing-chia Liu Yen-ho p'ing-chuan,"[ak] *Hsiao-shuo yüeh-pao*,[al] Vol. XVII, Supplement.

2. a. Lo Ken-tse[am], *Wei-chin liu-ch'ao wen-hsüeh p'i-p'ing shih*[an], Chungking, 1944.

b. Chu Tung-jun[ao], *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh p'i-p'ing shih ta-kang*[ap], Kweilin, 1944.

c. Kuo Shao-yü[aq], *Chung-kuo wen-hsüeh p'i-p'ing shih*[ar], Shanghai, 1934.

advocating classicism as an effective means to check the growing tendency in current literary circles to deviate from the classical pattern. It is the purpose of this paper first to give a brief account of Liu's classicism, then to study his literary criticism, and finally, to ascertain what role classicism does play in his system and the degree to which he may be considered a classicist.

Liu's classicism is revealed in his "Preface," where he tells us that he, ceremonial vessels in his hands, followed Confucius in a dream. He also indicates that had there been no Ma Jung and Cheng Hsüan before him, he would have used his talent to make commentaries on the classics.[3] Even his decision to devote himself to literary criticism was influenced by the fact that for him the functions of literature have their source in the classics.[4] In view of the prevalent indulgence in an exceedingly florid style in literature, he considered it his duty to try, by writing critically on literature, to check this divergent tendency. Thus he says, "The writing of *Wen-hsin* has its source in *Tao*, its model in the sages, and its pattern in the classics."[5] His book opens with the chapter "On The Source of Tao,"[h] followed by "On the Evidence from the Sages"[i] and ,,On the Classics as Literary Sources."[j]

In the first chapter, while tracing the origin of literature to nature, he seems to envisage an orthodox principle, taken from nature, a principle which was handed down from one sage to another until Confucius completed it by writing the "wings." The other classics were developed in the hands of sages and it was again Confucius who, excelling all others before him, brought the six classics to their final form.[6]

In the second chapter, Liu seeks to establish Confucius as the authority for the various functions of literary forms by reference to his utterances as recorded in the classics and their commentaries. The functions of these literary forms are political and moral in nature.[7] As for the lit-

3. *Wen-hsin tiao-lung chu*, ed. by Fan Wen-lan, K'ai-ming shu-tien, 1947. Henceforth abbreviated as *Wen-hsin*. Chüan 10, pp. 20b–21a.

4. *Loc. cit.* 5. *Ibid.*, ch. 10, p. 21b. 6. *Ibid.*, ch. 1, pp. 1a–1b. 7. *Ibid.*, ch. 1, p. 9b.

erary styles exemplified in the classics, they are: simplicity in conveying thought; linguistic richness in embodying emotions; logical clarity in establishing fundamental principles; and allegorical and figurative speech as a means of suggestive remonstration.[8]

In chapter three "On the Classics as Literary Sources," Liu defines the classics as the essence of literature, embodying eternal principles.[9] According to him, the general characteristics of the classics are that they contain ideas which are completely adequate for expressing one's emotions, and that their language is of such a quality that it follows perfectly the literary principles.[10] If one is versed in them, one's utterance would naturally be profound; for he says, "a bell of ten thousand weights would never ring out petty sound."[11] Liu traces all literary genres back to the classics. If one always took the classics as his sources, there would be no danger of his becoming withered up and fading away. If a writer relied on the classics, his work would be characterized by these six qualities: deep emotions untouched by artificiality, pure modes unmixed and unalloyed, factual truths free from falsehood, right ideas involving no perversity, simplicity in style free from verbiage, and literary beauty unmarred by excess.[12]

Apart from these first three chapters, there are many other references to the classics. In the chapter entitled "An Analysis of *Sao* or *Ch'u-tz'u*,"[k] Liu considers the rise of *Sao* as a consequence of the decline of *feng* and *ya*.[13] In considering different views concerning the conformity of *Li-sao* to the classics, Liu recognizes two divergent tendencies in *Li-sao*, one of which is in harmony with the classics and the other contrary to them. In *Li-sao* Liu finds four things which are in harmony with *feng* and *ya*. These are: The *Sao* contains a style of *tien*[l] and *kao*,[m] it employs the style of satirical suggestion,[n] it adopts the use of metaphor and allegory,[o] and it expresses the sentiments of loyalty and lament.[p] There are also four things which mark *Li-sao* as unclassical. These are: strange

8. *Ibid.*, ch. 1, p. 10a. 9. *Ibid.*, ch. 1, p. 13a. 10. *Loc. cit.*
11. *Ibid.*, ch. 1, pp. 13a–13b. 12. *Ibid.*, ch. 1, p. 14a. 13. *Ibid.*, ch. 1, p. 28b.

tales, fantastic stories, an eccentric and narrow mind, and an indecent desire for a loose life.[14]

In the chapter on "An Exegesis of Poetry,"[q] a province in which classical and literary elements coincide, Liu quotes the description of poetry from the *Shu-ching:* "Poetry expresses feelings, and songs are these expressions set to music."[15] He also repeats Confucius' statement that in the *Shih-ching* there is no perverse thought.[16] He cites with approval Confucius' utilitarian view of poetry,[17] and endorses the general theory enunciated in Mao's "Preface" that poetry reflects the political conditions of the times, and that poetry declines as time passes and departs from the age of the sage. In line with this view, he condemns the poetry of the Cheng-shih period (240–248) and Eastern Chin for being adulterated by Taoism and having a metaphysical flavor.[18]

He thinks that musical poetry *(yüeh-fu)* rose after the decline of the *ya* odes,[19] and refers to the *fu*[r] as one of the six elements of the *Shih-ching*.[20] Liu claims that the *fu* receives its life from the poets of the Odes,[21] and therefore may be traced back to them.

Liu makes many allusions to the classics, particularly the *Shih-ching*. The chapter entitled "Metaphor and Allegory"[s] is completely dominated by the spirit of traditional interpretation. But what has been said is enough to indicate Liu's classical tendency. We shall pass on to the discussion of his literary criticism.

The term "literary criticism" is used here in its broadest possible sense. It includes literary history, literary theory, and literary appreciation and evaluation. In the case of Liu Hsieh, these three are closely interwoven and give his work an underlying unity in the midst of apparent chaos.

14. *Ibid.*, ch. 1, pp. 29a–29b.
15. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, p. 1a; *Shu-ching*, "Shun-tien," Shih-san chu-shu edition, chüan 3, p. 26a.
16. *Loc. cit.*, *The Analects of Confucius*, Harvard Yenching Institute, Peiping, 1940, 2/2/2.
17. *Wen-hsin*, *Loc. cit.*, *The Analects*, 2/1/15; 4/3/8.
18. *Wen-hsin*, ch. 2, p. 2a. 19. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, p. 24b 20. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, p. 46a.
21. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, p. 46b.

Liu's desire to write the *Wen-hsin tiao-lung* rose from his dissatisfaction with the general state of literary production of the times, and with the fragmentary manner in which literary criticism had been dealt with. As a prelude to his work, he reviews existing critical works and gives to each an epigrammatic verdict which implies some general criteria of his own. Of Wei-wen,[t] Lu Chi, Chih Yü and others, he says, "Each reflects a particular corner, and few have envisioned the open vista."[22] And, he further comments, "They are all unable to start from the leaves and trace back to the roots, or begin with the tide and search back to the source."[23] These verdicts indicate a discerning mind equipped with a penetrating critical spirit. In the chapter called "A General Consideration of the Art of Writing," he says of Lu Chi, "Although his 'Wen Fu' is most exhaustive in certain respects, its consideration of the minute details still leaves the real substance untouched."[24] Thus Liu apparently feels that it is up to him to offer a comprehensive account of the principles of literary criticism.

Liu has an interesting idea of a competent critic. In his opinion a competent critic is one who is widely acquainted with literature and highly sensitive to its intrinsic values. Then there are other prerequisites to the understanding of a piece of literature: the ability to recognize the genre and style; the ability to determine if the work complies with the principle of adaptability to change; and the ability to distinguish between the extraordinary and the orthodox in subject matter and to pass judgment on the appropriateness of historical allusions and musical patterns. Through these abilities, a critic is enabled to grasp the meaning or the æsthetic beauty of a literary work.[25] But an understanding critic[v] is rare, because most people depreciate their contemporaries and worship only the ancients.[26] However, an appreciative critic is essential to the realization of the value of a literary work. For a literary work loses much of its richness if it is not appreciated.[27]

22. *Ibid.*, ch. 10, p. 21a. 23. *Ibid.*, ch. 10, p. 21b. 24. *Ibid.*, ch. 9, p. 12a.
25. *Ibid.*, ch. 10, p. 13b. 26. *Ibid.*, ch. 10, p. 13b. 27. *Ibid.*, ch. 10, p. 14b.

Liu traces the origin of literature to nature. For him, just as it was for Horace, literature is both sweet and useful, with his verbal emphasis on the useful and his real interest in the sweet[28]. In his "Preface" he says, "Years and months are fleeting and transient, and life is ephemeral. The only way to achieve fame and recognition of one's real worth is to write." This utilitarian view is more than balanced by his deep interest in aspects which are *purely* literary. This interest is revealed in the title of his book: "The Mind of Literature in the Carving of Dragons." His own explanation is: "By the mind of literature is meant that the mind strives after literary forms."[29] And the term "the carving of dragons" stands specifically for literary embellishment. For, he says, "since ancient times literature has always been the result of carving and adorning."[30] His scope of literature is broad. From the types of writing he includes in his discussion of literature, it is apparent that his is a view which holds nothing in writing to be beyond the province of literature.

Literary development is treated by Liu Hsieh in a number of ways. Development of general trends, Liu believes, follows the principle of adaptability to change.[w] He says, "As times change, literary substance and forms change accordingly."[31] And again he says, ,,It is the law of literature to move along and go full circle; the merit of literature is renewed day by day. If it changes, it will be lasting; if it adapts itself to changing situations, it will lack nothing."[32] Thus, the literary forms of each generation conform to the spirit of that generation, and, when changes take place in the spirit of the age, literary forms modify themselves accordingly. This explains the rise of different genres in different ages. Occasionally Liu emphasizes the moral and political influence of an age on the character of literature.

When Liu moves from the discussion of general trends in literature to a discussion of literary genres, he holds that the form of each genre is characterized by certain norms, and his classification of literary genres

28. *Ibid.*, ch. 10, p. 21b. 29. *Loc. cit.* 30. *Loc. cit.* 31. *Ibid.*, ch. 9, p. 22a.
32. *Ibid.*, ch. 6, p. 18a.

is based on these norms. His distinctions between literary genres are, at times, very strict. This indicates that he does not seem to see the possibility that changes might have taken place across the ages in the conception of these genres. But, on the other hand, the arbitrariness of his classification cannot escape the attention of even the most casual reader when it is noted that his genres are not mutually exclusive but are over-lapping.

Liu's book abounds in critical evaluation of individual authors and their works. All that can be attempted here is to ferret out the assumed criteria he used in making these evaluations. These criteria seem to fall into the following categories: 1. natural talents, 2. fullness of feelings and emotions, 3. style as expressed in terms of artistic quality of language, 4. moral convictions and philosophy of life, 5. scholarship and learning, 6. the nature of the subject matter treated, and 7. the musical patterns. Liu himself, on two occasions, reduces these categories to neat formulas. On one occasion he offers three main patterns: the pattern of colors,[x] the pattern of sounds,[y] and the pattern of emotions.[33 z] On another occasion he gives four categories: emotions and sentiments which are the spirit of literature; facts and principles, which are the bone and marrow; linguistic patterns, which are the flesh; and, musical patterns, which are the voice and the breath.[34] He devotes most of the second portion of his work to the elaboration of these elements, and the discussion of the relationship between them. In view of the fact that Liu never discusses any element in isolation, it may be wise to begin *our* analysis with the relationship between the elements.

In considering the relative importance of these literary elements, Liu shows a remarkable sense of balance. He says, "Literary beauty means adorning the language; but language's appropriateness and beauty is conditioned by inner feelings. Therefore, feelings are the warp of literary patterns and linguistic forms are the woof of ideas. Only when the warp is straight, can the woof be formed; and only when ideas are de-

33. *Ibid.*, ch. 7, p. 1a. 34. *Ibid.*, ch. 9, p. 9b.

finite, can linguistic forms be expressive."[35] His respect for the ancient poets lies in the fact that they built their literary forms on emotions, while later poets prefabricated emotions to fit literary forms.[36] But literary forms are not fallacious in themselves; the fallacy lies in having the forms alone without emotions. Emotions are tuned to changes of external scene. Spring, summer, autumn and winter each affects us in a specific way and arouses in us certain specific emotions.[37] Since stock phrases are inadequate for the depicting of varying emotions, Liu demands freshness in linguistic pattern as a condition of good literature.[38] Thus the importance of emotion is matched by that of literary expression. In defense of linguistic beauty he says, "What is written by the sages and worthy men is summed up under the phrase *wen-chang*. What is it, if not beauty of form?"[39] Liu is apparently expressing a new appreciation of the literary qualities of the classics. For him, substance depends on literary pattern for expression, just as expressions depend on emotions for their content.

Liu not only defends rhetoric; he also endorses literary exaggeration and embellishment. For his justification, he paraphrases Mencius, "Though the language be exaggerated, it harms not the ideas."[40] Here Liu sees the real function of literature as consisting in the creation of beautiful linguistic forms for the purpose of moving the heart of the reader.

In his discussion of musical poetry he discloses the intimate relationship between music and poetry. He says, "Poetry is the heart of music, and sound is the body of music. Since the body of music lies in sound, musicians must tune their instruments; since the heart of music lies in poetry, superior men should make right their literary forms."[41] From this it is only a short step to the view that music is the reflection of the age, and that by listening to the music of any age one is able to discern the character of that age. Poetry and music are thus intimately bound together in their identical function.

35. *Ibid.*, ch. 7, p. 1b. 36. *Loc. cit.* 37. *Ibid.*, ch. 10, p. 1a. 38. *Ibid.*, *Loc. cit.*
39. *Ibid.*, ch. 7, p. 1a. 40. *Ibid.*, ch. 8, p. 5b. 41. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, p. 25a.

The ability to weave these literary elements into beautiful rhythmic and musical expressions of real emotion and feeling, incorporating into the texture true moral convictions and principles, is, of course, a gift of nature. But effort and learning contribute much to the resourcefulness and richness in materials and the ease with which one adapts his style to the nature of the subject under treatment.[42] As natural talents vary with individuals, Liu conceives of eight different styles: 1. elegant and graceful or in the style of *tien* and *ya*,[aa] 2. far-reaching and profound,[ab] 3. refined and concise,[ac] 4. lucid and logical,[ad] 5. profuse and florid,[ae] 6. vigorous and beautiful,[af] 7. fresh and extraordinary,[ag] and 8. light and trivial.[ah] Few have the genius to command all these styles, but many can adapt some style to fit their talents.[43]

In discussing talents, there is a chapter on "The Wind and the Bone," "wind" meaning lyrical or in the manner of *feng*, and "bone" meaning vigor and strength. He says, "For the expression of mournful emotions one has to begin with the wind, and for the purpose of linguistic construction, one must above all emphasize the bone."[44] The wind gives wings to words and the bone gives them vigor and strength.[45] By the wind and the bone, Liu is talking about what Wei-wen had called the breath. His quotation from Wei-wen convinces us that he shares with Wei-wen the feeling that genius is born and not made.[46] But important as genius is, it is only half the story; the other half depends on experience and scholarship. It is by means of wide acquaintance with literary works and extensive experience that one can hope to avoid poverty in expression.[47]

Genius operates through imagination, the power of association of ideas, and the ability to forge metaphors. The manner in which genius operates is such that it cannot be transmitted by instruction. Like I Chih

42. *Ibid.*, ch. 6, p. 1b. 43. *Ibid.*, ch. 6, pp. 8a–8b. 44. *Ibid.*, ch. 6, pp. 13a–13b.
45. *Ibid.*, ch. 6, pp. 13b–14a.
46. *Ibid.*, ch. 6, p. 13b. Wei-wen-ti, "Tien-lun lun-wen", *Wei-wen-ti chi*, Han Wei liu-ch'ao pai-san ming-chia chi edition 1892, chüan I, p. 70a.
47. See note 42.

who could not inform people how he cooked, and the wheelwright Pien who could not tell people how he wielded his ax, so a writer is unable to transmit his manner of operation to others.[48]

Liu, in his treatment of metaphor and couplet, displays remarkable analytical power. His analysis of metaphor includes what is now described as onomatopoeia,[49] and his analytical categorization of the couplet seems to be the first attempt of its kind.[50]

With his insistence on the importance of real emotions and feelings as the foundation of literature, Liu inclines toward spontaneity and naturalness.[51] It is not accidental that in the first chapter he traces literature to natural patterns and forms. By nature we have seven emotions, and these emotions are naturally aroused when affected by external circumstances.[52] When thus affected, it is only natural for us to try to express our sentiments in winged words. If we follow our spontaneous tendency, it will be internal emotions which determine the literary forms and styles, and not the *external forms* which force themselves upon our inner feelings. In this spontaneity we shall find the unlimited resourcefulness of our spirit. If we should in any way work against our nature, Liu holds that in the end we would be exhausted and withered up.[53] His chapter on "Fostering of Breath" is a lesson in spontaneity, which is apparently based on Chuangtzu. Liu shares Chuangtzu's view that to keep one's mind empty and quiet is the only way to keep one's vigor forever fresh and sharp as a newly honed blade.[54]

48. *Wen-hsin*, ch. 6, p. 2a. – "I Chih" is another name for I Yin. The reference is to a passage in *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* where I Yin, in answer to T'ang's question, says: "... The changes which take place in a cauldron are subtle and delicate, neither expressible in words by the mouth nor conceivable by the mind." *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng edition, Shanghai, 1935, chapter on "Pen-wei", chüan 14, pp. 140–141. (Cf. *Frühling und Herbst des Lü Bu We*, translated by R. Wilhelm, Jena 1928, p. 182.) – For the wheelwright Pien s. *Chuangtzu*, Book XIII, Chapter 10.

49. *Ibid.*, ch. 8, pp. 1a–1b; ch. 10, p. 1a. 50. *Ibid.*, ch. 7, p. 33b.

51. *Ibid.*, ch. 1, p. 1a; ch. 7, p. 1a; ch. 7, pp. 1a–10b.

52. *Ibid.*, ch. 2, p. 1a. 53. *Ibid.*, ch. 9, pp. 8b–9a.

54. *Ibid.*, ch. 9, pp. 6b–7b, cf. Wang Hsien-ch'ien[as], *Chuang-tzu chi-chieh*[at], Chu-tzu chi-

Now, in evaluating Liu's position as a classicist, let us see what his attitude really is when he talks about the classics. He eulogizes the classics as the source of all literary genres and maintains a properly reverent attitude for the orthodox ideas in them. It is in his evaluation of the classics as literature, however, that he discards all platitudes, and waxes warm in true praise. Moreover, in pronouncing *Li-sao* to be a "hero" of poetry, but only "a ruffian" in the realm of *ya* and *sung*,[55] he definitely conceives of poetry as independent of the *Shih-ching*. In reiterating the traditional theory of poetic function and development, Liu seems to have done so as a matter of habit rather than as a result of conviction. His belief that literature develops in accordance with the needs of the times, and that each new age gives literature a new emphasis and a fresh point of view is in violent contradiction to traditionalism. Poetry must change according to the principle of adaptability to new needs of new ages. This principle of adaptability to change is enunciated in the same breath with which he advises people to go back to the classics. At the very moment when he exhorts men to worship the classics, he condemns the popular view of depreciating the contemporaries and worshipping the ancients.[56] From the general tenor of his writing, we must conclude that his conservatism is a matter of habit while his progressive ideas rise from convictions. He pays lip service to the classics, but gives his heart to the study of elements which are purely literary. And even in treating the classics, he gives them more of a literary appreciation rather than a moralistic interpretation. For him, it seems, the classics are important because they possess literary value; he does not believe that literary value depends upon conformity to the classics.

When he discusses literary elements in the second portion of his book, his freedom from classicism is even more surprising. He occupies

ch'eng edition, chüan I, chapter 3, "Yang-sheng-chu", pp. 18–19. (Cf. translations of *Chuang-tzu*, book III, chapter 2.)

55. *Wen-hsin*, ch. 1, p. 29b.

56. *Ibid*,. ch. 6, compare text on p. 17b and "Eulogy" at the end of the essay on p. 18a; see also ch. 9, "Shih-hsü", and ch. 10, "chih-ying."

himself almost exclusively with what is purely literary. In the eight styles he formulates, only the first style, *tien ya* refers to the *Shu-ching* and the *Shih-ching*. But, as used in his critical judgements on individual authors and their works, these terms mean merely "elegant" and "graceful." It is, therefore, abundantly clear that whatever he conceives to be the value of a classical element, this value is only one among many other literary values. He brings the classics down to earth for us to admire as works of literature. Such being Liu's literary outlook, it would not be far wrong to conclude that in his system classicism plays the same role as any other literary element, and thus, Liu Hsieh cannot be called a classicist without twisting facts beyond recognition.

a 劉勰
b 彥和
c 滅惑論
d 文心雕龍
e 慧震
f 慧地
g 託古改制
h 原道
i 徵聖
j 宗經
k 辨騷
l 典
m 誥
n 規諷
o 比興
p 忠怨
q 明詩
r 賦
s 比興
t 魏文
u 總術
v 知音
w 通變
x 形文
y 聲文
z 情文
aa 典雅
ab 遠奧
ac 精約
ad 顯附
ae 繁縟
af 壯麗
ag 新奇
ah 輕靡
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