



The Songs of Chu: An Anthology of Ancient Chinese Poetry by Qu Yuan and Others (Translations from the Asian Classics)

Yuan Qu

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Sources show Qu Yuan (?340–278 BCE) was the first person in China to become famous for his poetry, so famous in fact that the Chinese celebrate his life with a national holiday called Poet's Day, or the Dragon Boat Festival. His work, which forms the core of the *The Songs of Chu*, the second oldest anthology of Chinese poetry, derives its imagery from shamanistic ritual. Its shaman hymns are among the most beautiful and mysterious liturgical works in the world. The religious milieu responsible for their imagery supplies the backdrop for his most famous work, *Li sao*, which translates shamanic longing for a spirit lover into the yearning for an ideal king that is central to the ancient philosophies of China.

Qu Yuan was as important to the development of Chinese literature as Homer was to the development of Western literature. This translation attempts to replicate what the work might have meant to those for whom it was originally intended, rather than settle for what it was made to mean by those who inherited it. It accounts for the new view of the state of Chu that recent discoveries have inspired.

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