

**SONGS OF LI-TAI-PÉ:  
FROM THE  
"CANCIONERIO CHIMES"**

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**ANTONIO CASTRO FEIJO**

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# Songs of Li-Tai-Pè

*from the*

**"CANCIONERIO CHINES"**

OF ANTONIO CASTRO FEIJO

*An Interpretation from the Portuguese by*

JORDAN HERBERT STABLER

"... quelques extraits de ce délicat LIVRE DE JADE dont l'exotique parfum de ginseng et de thé se mêle à l'odorante fraîcheur de Peau qui babille, sous un clair de lune, tout le long du livre."

L-K. HUYSMANS, "À REBOURS."



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1922

*To E. H. W. S.*  
*THIS LITTLE BOOK IS DEDICATED*

•

*"As límpidas canções que me inspiraste,  
Ao som da flauto d'ebano cantadas."*



## Introduction

"O Cancioneiro Chines"  
(The Book of Chinese Songs)



*HINA is the land of lyric verse. The Western World is but little acquainted with the grace, delicacy, and simplicity of the Chinese lyric,—particularly little acquainted with the lyrics of the great poets of the Tang dynasty, who had such a marvelous faculty of producing the greatest effect with the lightest touch. These poets—artists, we should call them—traced images so simple; they brought into being a fantasy, flexible and lucid as the bluish depths of water seen in a cup of transparent "blanc de chine."*

*The true artist will search for the highest expression in art and poetry throughout the entire world, without regard for its nationality or origin. A greater interchange of thought than ever before is now occupying the minds of the cultured of the Eastern and Western worlds. If the man of letters in Peking makes a close study of our most eminent writers, past and present, may we not enjoy and marvel at the masterpieces of Chinese literature and at the rare charm of the poems of the great Li-Tai-Pé?*

*Through the verses of Li-Tai-Pé and of Thu-Fu and through those of their colleagues runs one dominant theme: the worship of the beautiful, particularly the beautiful in nature. In artistic, romantic metaphor the lyrics of China are almost unequalled and the poets people their verses with quaint and delicate creatures of a land of dreams—gliding, unreal visions which are the more beautiful because of their unreality.*

*As we have not that tenacity of purpose and that unrelenting energy of the Oriental, which enable him to become proficient in the Western languages and as there are very few of us who have the aptitude or the opportunity to undertake the careful study of Chinese, we must seek our knowledge of the Chinese Classics in*



the various translations and interpretations, which have been produced from time to time in the different Western languages. Such a work is "O Cancioneiro Chines" of Antonio Castro Feijo.



*Antonio Castro Feijo—scholar, diplomat and one of Portugal's foremost lyric poets, is, alas, no more. But in his contributions to the literature of his country he has left behind him an enduring monument.*

*A master of simple lyric verse, who sang of nature and whose love poems contain the very essence of that extraordinary Portuguese word, "Saudade." There is no adequate English translation of this word but its meaning can perhaps be conveyed by reference to that undefined, dull contentment, which is sometimes the aftermath of the acute sorrows and pains of this World,—bitter-sweet memories of love unrequited, of cherished friends left behind or of favorite abiding places forsaken.*

*It was my great privilege to be among the younger colleagues of Antonio Feijo in Stockholm, where he occupied the post of Portuguese Minister for many years: a great honor also to have had two years of close association with a master—a master of diplomacy and of literature—who was kindness itself in imparting to others something useful from his abundant storehouse of information.*

*Castro Feijo, the diplomat, and Castro Feijo, the poet, were two most distinct persons. The shrewd diplomat of the old regime, clever internationalist, with a quarter of a century of experience of the drift of European politics—well versed in protocol and diplomatic usage, punctilious to a degree—hid the carefree, gentle soul of a true artist only revealed to those in whom he encountered the necessary sympathy.*

*It was both an honor and a pleasure for me to accompany Castro Feijo often on his rambles through Stockholm—in the face of a gale from the Baltic or on brilliant Swedish summer days—when he would discourse of men and things and far-off lands and explain the philosophy and mysticism of his own poems. One afternoon I had gone to the Legation to hear some of his sonnets, just finished for the work he then had in contemplation, and to enjoy with him a cup or two of the port of Portugal, known only to the Portuguese—"O vinho ricamente fabricado"—as the Poet himself sings.*

*High in one of the large buildings in Drottningsgatan, the Legation windows overlooked all Stockholm and a goodly part of*

*the Archipelago—but inside there was a bit of the Iberian Peninsular; quaint Portuguese stuffs, old silver chalices and crucifixes, old Church paintings of much merit and a unique collection of Church vestments for the children, who took part in the Religious Processions of the Middle Ages: a most proper setting for the discussion of Portuguese verse.*

*The reading of his poems finished, the Poet turned to me, and knowing that I was then engaged on the translation of some 15th Century French verse, asked me if I would not make an attempt at rendering into English of some of the poems from his favorite work "O Cancioneiro Chines."*

*Nine years have gone by since that afternoon in the old-world atmosphere of the Portuguese Legation in Drottninggatan: the Master is dead, the War has passed over all the world with its black clouds when all thoughts of the gentler side of life were forced to one side; but now I venture to offer in affectionate memory of my friend and master, an attempt at a translation or rather an interpretation of those poems in the "Book of Chinese Songs" of which Castro Feijo himself was most fond.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*"O Cancioneiro Chines" of Castro Feijo needs a certain amount of explanation. When it appeared in Lisbon in 1890 it aroused a great deal of interest. Its author was well known. He had already published two of his most notable works, "Transfigurações" and "Lyricas e Bucolicas," but the "Book of Chinese Songs" was so different and so strange to the Portuguese mind, that many conflicting theories were advanced as to how it was written and from what sources derived. The various articles which appeared in the Lisbon Press at the time of the publication of the book, give an excellent idea of the interest in both the man and his work and I quote herewith a translation from one of them:*

*"Antonio Feijo, that most distinguished Consular and Diplomatic Officer, who is also endowed with an extraordinary gift as a lyric poet, sent us as his P. P. C. card, upon his departure for his new post at Stockholm, a new book of verse. Nothing could be more gracious or more subtly diplomatic—to substitute for the banal visiting card, a packet of delightful jewels, which he alone knows how to polish to their highest brilliancy.*

*"After an hour's incomparable pleasure, which the reading of these verses gives us, we feel our heart beat even more warmly, for this delightful artist and our being filled with 'saudade' at the thought of his departure.*

"The 'Book of Chinese Songs' as the collection is called is a compilation of verses from 'Le Livre de Jade,' through which, as Huysmans says, 'the exotic perfume of Ginseng and of Tea mingles with the freshness of running water silvered by the rays of the full Moon.'"

As the foregoing article states, Feijo's "Cancioneiro" is an adaptation into Portuguese verse of Judith Gauthier's "Livre de Jade," and in fact, that work in prose was used as the principal basis. He has often told me, however, that during the six years in which he was engaged on his book, he read greatly in French and Portuguese in connection with Chinese literature and made a careful study of the works of the Jesuit missionary fathers, "Les Livres des Pères Jesuïtes." In these works there is an extensive section devoted to the Chinese Poets, notably to those of the famous Tang dynasty such as Li-Tai-Pé (705-762 A.D.), who was known as the "Banished Angel," so heavenly were his poems which, we are told, he dashed off when in his cups. In "Les Parfums de la Pagoda" Judith Gauthier informs us: "Le poète/Li-Tai-Pé est mort de la Lune." Did his passing occur in this wise as her friend the Mandarin avers? One night, at full-moon, in the fairy gardens of the Emperor at Tchan-Ngan, the ancient capital, in the midst of a magnificent fête, the Poet was drifting over the lake with several boon companions in a small skiff and after drinking many toasts to the Emperor and to the Immortals, he leaned over the side of the boat as if making an attempt to embrace the reflection of the moon in the waters, and drank the following toast: "In the unknown spaces there is neither height nor depth; I drink to you, O Moon, who calls me and who makes me understand that to reach the other World, it matters little if one mounts or descends." A harmonious voice immediately was heard in answer, a crest of white foam appeared on the surface of the Lake and from its midst bearing standards rose two youthful Immortals sent by the Lord of the Skies to invite the poet to take his place in the celestial regions: a Dolphin then appeared upon which Li-Tai-Pé placed himself and, preceded by the heavenly cortege, slowly advanced until engulfed in the lake at the spot where the Moon's image silvered the waters, and disappeared forever.

The "Cancioneiro Chines" may be termed a reconstruction—yet Feijo has so identified himself with the very nature of the Oriental poetry he interprets, that his verses appear as fresh as the originals. He has succeeded in following the three canons of the Tang Poets—lucidity, simplicity and eloquence—with the result that he has reproduced with exactness the spirit of the masterpieces.

The author of "Le Livre de Jade," Judith Gauthier, was well prepared for her task. Tradition relates that Theophile, her