

Interpreting Tang Dynasty Poetry: "Visiting an Old Friend in His Farmhouse"

August 07, 2005 | By Wen Sige

(Clearwisdom.net)

Visiting an Old Friend in His Farmhouse

By Meng Haoran

An old friend prepared a meal of chicken and rice,
And invited me to join him at his farmhouse.
The village is surrounded by green trees
And the pale blue of outlying mountains.
The window opens to the garden and field,
While holding wine in our hands, we talked of mulberry and hemp.
We are looking forward to the Autumn Festival,
when I will return to visit the chrysanthemum bloom.

About Meng Haoran

Meng Haoran (689-740 A.D.) was one of the most famous poets of the Tang Dynasty. He and Wang Wei, another famous poet of the Tang Dynasty, were often referred to together as Wang Meng. Meng Haoran's poems are mostly descriptions of his pastoral life of leisure, or poems written to friends. He has a talent of writing refreshing, natural and very inspiring poetry in a unique style.

The Author's Interpretation

This poem was written in very plain language and a simple style. Literary critics have tried to find the secret of Meng Haoran's timeless popularity by studying the language or techniques of his writing. I personally consider that a waste of time. While techniques and language might enhance a poem, what truly makes this poem great is Meng Haoran's pure, innocent mind. He is true to his heart and feelings, which is naturally reflected in his poems.

This poem might seem like a fairly common poem describing a visit to an old friend. The language is so simple that even people without much education can understand it. It might give some people an impression that anyone can write a poem like this, but why is this "simple" and "common" poem known as a masterpiece of the Tang Dynasty? It is the truthfulness and sincerity in his heart, which gives the poem an ethereal and inspiring feeling. This is the same reason why a Chinese literary giant like Su Dongbo admired Tao Yuanming's poems the most. This is such a simple principle, but numerous poets throughout the ages have looked in the wrong direction!

First published in English at: <http://www.pureinsight.org/pi/articles/2005/8/1/3186.html>

CATEGORY: Traditional Culture