

Interpreting the Yuan Dynasty Song, "Lamb on the Hill"

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"Lamb on the Hill" in Music Scale of "Zhonglu" *By Chen Caoan*

I lower my head, admitting I am of lowly social class and I am a coward.

I pretend to be stupid and to fall behind everyone.

Nevertheless, troubles continue to seek me out.

Let them have their way. What can I do?

They can even find fault with Heaven for obstructing the farmer's work.

Silkworms are vulnerable to rainy and chilly weather whereas crop sprouts are vulnerable to the scorching sun.

When it rains, Heaven is at fault.

When it shines, Heaven is also at fault.

About Chen Caoan

Chen Caoan was born in 1245 A.D. He wrote this poem during the Yuan Dynasty (1271 - 1368 A.D). Chen Caoan had many aliases. He was also known as Chen Yin and Chen Yanqing. He died in his late 70s. *The Book of Yuan Dynasty Songs* contains twenty-six of his works.

About Yuan Dynasty Song

The Yuan Dynasty Song is a form of poem performed with a musical score. It was developed and gained popularity during the Yuan Dynasty

(1271 - 1368 A.D).

"Zhonglu" is one of the most popular music scales, equivalent to the western music scale such as C major, E minor, etc., for Yuan Dynasty Songs. Like western musical scales, each scale in Yuan Dynasty Song expresses a different mood. There were nine most popular music scales for Yuan Dynasty Songs, referred to as the Nine Music Scales.

Each poem (or Song) must follow the specific format of the chosen musical score called "Song Format" and each music score has a name. A "Song Format" to a Yuan Dynasty Song is like a "Lyric Verse Format" to a Song Dynasty Lyric Verse. "Lamb on the Hill" is the name of a very popular Yuan Dynasty Song Format.

The Author's Interpretation

This poem talks about the misery of the Han people under the reign of the Mongolians in the Yuan Dynasty. The Han people did everything they could to show their obedience to their new rulers, but the government, led by the Mongolians, would stop at nothing to find fault and harass them. The Han people didn't do things to cause trouble. Instead, it was the Mongolian government that was trying to find fault with the Han people and to make the Han people live in misery! Those who try to find faults in others will never run out of excuses!

It was the way of life of the Han people to be constantly vigilant. The Yuan Dynasty exerted racial discrimination in its rule by classifying different ethnic groups into four social ranks, including the Mongolian, the Semu, the Han and the Nan (in descending order of social rank.) Each social rank was differentiated by the colors of their clothing.

Even when a Han man passed the government official qualification examination and was appointed to an official post, he would be subject to discrimination and surveillance. Take Chen Caoan for an example. He was a Han who rose to the post of Deputy Prime Minister. Even a

Deputy Prime Minister experienced the pain of discrimination, let alone common Han civilians and peasants. Chen Caoan expressed his misery using sarcasm and dark humor, but the humor in the poem made the poet's sadness become more apparent. Readers are likely to find the poem mildly amusing but feel terribly sad for the poet.

Under the rule of the Mongolians, a foreign tribe, China was enveloped with terror due to the conflicts instigated between different ethnic groups. But the Mongolians have not been the only source of terror in China. Take a good look at today's China. Hasn't China been enveloped in the same kind of manmade ambiance of terror since the Chinese Communist Party seized power?

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