

## LI BAI AND HIS WORKS

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**Abstract**

*Li Bai is one of the most renowned poets from the Tang Dynasty. He is considered one of the greatest poets not only in China but also in the history of Chinese literature and world literature. He wrote about nature, friendship, love, and emotions. The simplicity of his poems makes him very popular. Li Bai's poems are a must-have part of different course syllabi covering Asian literature, Chinese literature, and sometimes even the history of the world. This paper explores the enduring connection people have with his poetry, examining why and how it continues to resonate even after so many years.*

**Keywords-** *Chinese Literature, Chinese poetry, Tang China, Li Bai, Li Bo*

## Introduction

Tang China is regarded as one of the greatest kingdoms in world history. The significance of this period is reflected in its remarkable achievements: widespread economic prosperity, influential rulers, vibrant cosmopolitan cities, and notable works by its writers. As it is widely viewed as a pivotal chapter in Chinese poetry, the influence and accomplishments of the dynasty were so profound that all main routes to East Asia converged at Chang'an, which was then the capital of China. The works of the famous poets of the Tang dynasty enhanced the cultural significance and appeal of the era, with each poet contributing uniquely to its literary legacy. Many poets produced exceptional works that demonstrated the dynasty's greatness. Although only a few poets are well known, all contributed to shaping the era's literary beauty.

This work will primarily focus on Li Bai, one of the most beloved and renowned poets, whose works are particularly appealing. In this paper, I will discuss his work and explain why his works are considered an excellent treasure for posterity.

## Li Bai and his writings

Li Bai is considered to be the most celebrated poet of China. He wrote poems on friendship, love, nature, and human emotions. One of his poems, which is known as his best representative work, is 静夜思. This poem attracted the attention of readers so much that today a course in Chinese literature or on Chinese civilisation is incomplete without this poem. People of every age feel touched by the simplicity, originality, and meaningfulness of this poem. Li Bai, in this poem, writes about a moonlit night, when the light of the moon is very soothing and gives a personal touch to whoever reads this poem. In the poem, a man sees the flash of moonlight in front of his bed. As he looks down, he feels the floor is covered with frost—a common sense perception. He looks up and sees the moon, then looks down and starts feeling homesick. This takes him back to his homeland, making him miss his family and home. The poem in Chinese goes like this.

床前明月光，疑是地上霜  
举头望明月，低头思故乡

Li Bai began writing as a child. However, he gained widespread fame only in his 40s. Li Bai was originally from Sichuan. In his 40s, he travelled to Chang'an, a city renowned for its urban sophistication, which at that time was at the height of its prosperity and splendour. In Chang'an, he met some of the finest poets of that era. It was during this time that his work was recognised, and he was also granted patronage by the Royal Court; from then on, his reputation as a poet grew, spreading far and wide. Soon, he became well known throughout the Chinese state and society for his poems that resonated with the people, earning him recognition as the most beloved poet in Chinese literary history. Before long, he joined the prestigious Hanlin Academy, a significant honour and position. But Li Bai had a notable weakness—his love for wine. He enjoyed drinking so much that he was reportedly seen visiting taverns regularly. Some of his finest poems were created while he was completely intoxicated. It is said that once he was in a tavern, thoroughly drunk, when he received a summons from the imperial court. Being so drunk, he ignored the call. Du Fu, his contemporary and close friend, writes: (Liu Wu Chi, 1966)

A hundred poems Li Bai wrote after a cask of wine  
He was asleep at a tavern in Chang'an;  
When the emperor called, he would not board the imperial barge,  
But said your humble servant is at the God of wine

There are many stories about his love for wine and his carefree attitude to life. No specific reason is recorded. Nonetheless, after a few years in the capital as a distinguished member of the Academy and an associate of the Royal Court, he eventually had to leave the city. By then, he was already so renowned that wherever he went, people recognised him and greeted him with affection and respect. During the An Lushan rebellion, he was travelling in the Yangtze region. Although he was not directly involved in the rebellion, he is reported to have been involved in another uprising, for which he was imprisoned and exiled to south-west China. However, this was the period that elevated him, when he fell seriously ill and died. Li Bai could not have lived a long life. But during his brief lifetime, he produced some of the finest works, which later became very popular not only in China but across the world.

In the following paragraphs, I analyse some of his representative works. Romanticism was a defining feature of his poetry, as mentioned above. He wrote about love, friendship, nature, and human emotions. As reflected in his poems, he did not believe in any form of conventions and thus believed in living life freely, without boundaries. Drinking, friendship, love, understanding, observing, and cherishing the beauty of nature are the main themes of his poems.

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He was loved and respected by his fellow poets, and his name features in many of the works of Tang poets. He also wrote about some of his fellow poets, expressing the joy of drinking and spending time with them as well as the sorrow of parting. Mentioning Wang Lun, one of his friends, he writes. (Liu Wu Chi, 1966)

Li Bai takes a boat and is about to depart,  
Suddenly, the sound of footsteps  
and singing on the shore, the water in the Peach blossom pool is  
a thousand feet deep  
but not as deep as Wang Lun's parting love for me.

He writes, though parting with dear friends brings sorrow to life, a sweet sorrow; drinking with friends gives absolute joy, an incomparable experience. Such expression can be seen in the poem in the following paragraph (Liu Wu Chi, 1966)

Willow blossoms, blown by the wind, find the wine shop  
With fragrance.  
A girl of Wu, pressing Wine afresh, invites guests to drink.  
The young man of Nanjing came to bid me farewell:  
The traveller and those seeing him off all train there cups.  
"Please go and ask the river flowing to the east,  
If it can go farther than the parting love of a friend?"

In another poem, he writes (Liu Wu Chi, 1966)

Do you not see the waters of the Yellow River,  
coming down from heaven,  
Rush and roll into the sea, never to return?  
Do you not see how men mourn their hair at the bright mirror in the Great Hall-  
What was silken black in the morning has turned to snow by night?  
And to be elated in life, one should enjoy oneself to the full  
And never let the golden Goblet stand empty towards  
the moon,  
Heaven-endowed talents must have their use  
Throw away 1a thousand gold coins, and they will all return  
Roast the sheep, slaughter the ox! Let's take our pleasure,  
And with one long drink, empty three hundred cups!  
Young scholar can Q, master's sun  
Wine will be served:  
Don't stop drinking!

Let me sing you a song :  
Please incline your ears to listen.  
Bells, drums, and jade vessels are to be treasured: one desires only to be forever drunk, never to be sober again.

The sages of olden times are all still and lonely. Only the great drinkers have left their names behind.  
Prince Chen once gave a feast at the temple of peace and joy:  
A cask of wine worth ten thousand cash they drank,  
Indulging in mark and jest.  
Why should the host say he has no money first?  
Go and fetch wine to drink with you.  
The five coloured horse,  
The thousand gold for dash  
Let's call them to take them out and pawn them for good wine,  
That drinking together, we may dispel the sorrows of myriad years.

In this poem, he reflects on the significance of friendship in life and how enjoying good times with friends—such as drinking and celebrating—offers an experience that cannot be matched. He regards the company of a good friend as refreshing, a genuine gift from life. He writes that those who attempt to lead a controlled life often end up quite lonely. He believes that we only have one life, and that success lies in living it to the fullest. Wine, he suggests, is one way to celebrate life—by being with friends, relaxing, and speaking freely. There should be no secrets among friends; they ought to share everything, just as they do when they are drunk. In this way, he eloquently emphasises that true joy resides in sharing and caring. He underscores that life is not about money, high status, or wealth, but about the simple pleasures and happiness shared with loved ones.

Li Bai effectively evokes emotions from society and expresses them through his poetry. These feelings and the audience's connection to them cannot be fully conveyed through words, making his writings distinctive. He writes about the young bride, her feelings and fears, the patience of a wife waiting for her husband, the beauty of Tatar girls from the north, and the grace of women he observed while travelling, as well as the love between friends and how they share grief and joy.

He also highlights how nature offers comfort and peace to humankind, capturing the joy of drinking and how this often provides an escape from heartache.

He Writes ( Liu Wu Chi, 1966)

Your lingering footsteps add to the front gate  
where hidden, every one of them, under the green Moss.  
The mouse was too deep to sweep away,  
And the leaves fell with the first spring wind,  
In the 8th month, the butterfly is turned yellow; in pairs, they flew over the grass in the West garden.  
Moved by this sight, my heart was saddened,  
Lest the bright cheeks would soon become furrowed.

In another poem, he writes: ( Liu Wu Chi, 1966)

Lazily, I wave a white feather fan  
and lie naked in the green forest.  
I hang my cat on a crag  
My bed head, sprinkled by the pine wind.

This approach of a carefree life, the desire to be in nature and enjoy it, sometimes even withdrawing from the world and being amidst nature, is explained through this poem. It attempts to signify the fact that nature provides us with the quality and willingness to give us everything. Often, we ignore nature's giving attitude and harm her in many ways.

He loved nature, and many times he rode far away from our worldly space. As he writes about these places, he describes their beauty and how the absence of worldly articles makes them even more beautiful. He describes it as heaven, a very different world. In another poem, he writes about his love for mountains and why he loves spending time there. ( Liu Wu Chi, 1966)

You ask why I Nestle in the Green Mountains.  
I laugh, but I answer not - my heart is serene.  
Peach blossoms and flowing waters go without a trace  
There is another heaven and earth beyond the world of man.

## Conclusion

Li Bai's approach of describing nature's beauty and worth is unmatched; his style is original and bold. His writings reveal mankind's longing for expression, empathy, and the significance of human emotions. Through his poems, he touches many lives. His poetry is appreciated worldwide and has been translated into various languages. Even after many years, his poems continue to be widely read and cherished across the globe. Looking at his poems, it seems that his words and expressions flow naturally and spontaneously.

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