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Tang Dynasty

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Throughout Chinese history, Tang Dynasty has been considered to be the most glorious dynasty which brought many prosperous aspects to the whole country during the sixth and the ninth century. The emperor reigned the kingdom righteously. The citizens lived happily. Being vast, wealthy, and mighty, the dynasty developed social welfare, military order, social structure, culture and arts to its fullest.¹ However, the main change incredibly appeared in poetry because it became popular culture which was used in various fields of social activities. It is interesting how important Tang's poetry is and how this poetry can influence on the world's literature.

Since Tang Dynasty was the golden age of Chinese poetry due to the fact that poetry became an important part of social life, there were about 50,000 poems written by more than 2,000 authors.² The poetry is classified into 4 parts: Early, High, Middle, and Late. In Early period, the old poetry was changed into new forms which have more restrictions. Poetry continuously were supported and passed through high period when there were diversified forms. Additionally, this is when the most famous poets Li Bai and Du Fu wrote many excellent poems. Later on, there were corruptions and social problems that led to the fall of poetry to middle period. So, the tone of poems was sad. Finally, in the late period, some poet still existed but most of them obviously disappeared because of the turbulence in the kingdom.³

¹ "Tang Dynasty" *TravelChinaGuide* < <http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/history/tang/> >

² "Tang poetry" *Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia* 6 February 2013
< http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tang_poetry >

³ "Tang poetry" *Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia* 6 February 2013
< http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tang_poetry#History_of_Tang_poetry >

As accepted as creative and outstanding, poetry in this period have various forms which are different from others. The ancient style is loose, so there are numerous number of characters in each clause which can make diversified verse, on the other hand, the modern style has more restriction and rules by consisting of only five or seven words in each clause. Moreover, the creative method also includes combination tone of realism and romanticism to form the fascinating poems. Nevertheless, there were many poets who developed poetry to the regulated form, which was finally combined to four couplets and became an important kind of verse in Chinese tradition.⁴

Poetry is known to depict history in this period. Most poems were written as diaries to express personal life and feelings. Some poems described about wealth of the land while some were sarcastic about politics and wars. However, the main themes were nature, philosophy, and special events which inspired their writing. Whatever they wrote, these poems are the writing evidences that reflect the social situation during Tang Dynasty. They vividly reveal not only the way of living but also traditions, citizen's faith, and important events in this era. Thus, if historians or researchers want to know information about Tang Dynasty, poetry is the good source to learn about its story.

Besides Tang poetry can reflect its history, Tang poetry also influenced on both social activities and cultures. Since Tang Dynasty was an aristocratic society, poetry was an important part to improve and create them. For example, sometimes poems were used to be the end of the speech. Sometimes people wrote them to be farewell letter to friends who were leaving for the journey or seeking for a new home. Also, people wrote poetry to praise the host in the parties. Even in serious government

⁴ "Tang poetry" *Cultural China* < <http://history.cultural-china.com/en/61History2885.html> >

services, poetry also played an important role in civil service examination. As every human could not choose to be born or live in upper class or be in rich and powerful family that had high rank in the society, those who were born in lower were required to take the exam by composing poetry in order to be recruited as government officer for civil service while those who were already born in the upper class did not have to take examination. This exam was the only way for normal people who had the thoughts of social mobility to have rights and ability to improve and change the government's policy.⁵

Moreover, Tang poetry was the tool to sustain people's mind and behavior. In this period, there were three traditional religions, spiritual anchors, which were Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.⁶ All three religions had connection with poetry since poetry taught the religious objectives for human beings which is based on philosophical reflection. The purpose of those poetry was to clarify religious teachings and help people understand life and nature. During the golden age of poetry, there were the famous poets who wrote well-known religious poems which now become lessons. Those poets are Wang Wei, and Li Bai.⁷ Wang Wei was a great poet and painter. His works reflected the Buddhist idea of simplicity, and he suggested that moderation leads to happiness in life through his poems.⁸ In contrast, Li Bai who was known as a banished immortal tended to write about Daoism's culture. His works steeply express the balance of quiet nature which is the starting

⁵ "Tang Poetry of China: the Peak of Chinese Literary Achievement" *Yahoo!* 27 October 2008
< <http://voices.yahoo.com/tang-poetry-china-peak-chinese-literary-2064424.html?cat=38>>

⁶ "Tang poetry" *Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia* 6 February 2013
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tang_poetry#Buddhism.2C_Taoism.2C_and_Confucianism_in_Relation
ship_to_Tang_Poetry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tang_poetry#Buddhism.2C_Taoism.2C_and_Confucianism_in_Relation_ship_to_Tang_Poetry)>

⁷ "Tang Poetry of China: the Peak of Chinese Literary Achievement" *Yahoo!* 27 October 2008
< <http://voices.yahoo.com/tang-poetry-china-peak-chinese-literary-2064424.html?cat=38>>

⁸ "Wang Wei (8th century poet)" *Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia* 6 February 2013
<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Wei_\(8th_century_poet\)#Works](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wang_Wei_(8th_century_poet)#Works)>

point of freedom and intellect.⁹

When we talk about the master poet in Tang Dynasty, it is inevitable not to mention Du Fu. He was the great man who served the country as a civil servant during the time of turbulence. Most of his works focused on the important moment in history. With his morality and wonderful technique, he expressed realistic events and also hid his personal comment in his poems while making them easy to understand.¹⁰

Most people thought that these poets affect only Chinese history, but they were wrong. Wang Wei, Li Po, Du Fu, and other poets had influence on not only Chinese but also international literature. The influence which becomes visible is the poetry that includes poems and painting. This has continuously been used in Japan until today.¹¹ Tang poetry was the models of religious-poetry style and also inherited the adapted folk songs to later generation. In addition, many of the best Tang poems were copied and compiled into the books for the purpose of studying. Later on they were translated to numerous languages and they inspired international poets from all over the world to start composing.¹²

In conclusion, the Tang Dynasty will be memorized as the most powerful dynasty in Chinese history because of its civilization in every fields especially poetry. Poetry became popular tradition and played the important role in many aspects of life in period of Tang Dynasty and of next generation. It is also a crucial key to open the door of history. Let us imagine the world without Tang poetry; it would be lack of many beautiful cultures and new poetry. Therefore, Tang poetry played the role more

⁹ "Li Bai" *Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia* 4 February 2013
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Bai#Works>

¹⁰ "Tang Poetry of China: the Peak of Chinese Literary Achievement" *Yahoo!* 27 October 2008
<<http://voices.yahoo.com/tang-poetry-china-peak-chinese-literary-2064424.html?cat=38>>

¹¹ "Du Fu" *Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia* 8 February 2013
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Du_Fu#Influence_2>

¹² "Li Bai" *Wikipedia, The free encyclopedia* 4 February 2013
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Bai#Influence>

than normal poetry did. It was the art which represents human's civilization that is worth to be mentioned.