

Classic poems

(May 04 JKW)

The well-known poems of China are written in classical Chinese. But although they were written long ago, because they are written in characters, they can be given a modern pronunciation – whether Mandarin, as below, or Cantonese, Shanghainese or some other regional pronunciation. The following selection includes poems by four of the best known poets of the Tang dynasty. Memorizing poems, of course, makes them your own, which is exciting in itself; but memorizing them also provides good practice in both pronunciation and character writing.

靜夜思

Jìng yè sī

Quiet night thinking

李白

Lǐ Bái or Lǐ Bó

701-762, native of Sichuan, served the Tang court briefly, wandered through the S and SE, incarcerated for a time after the An Lushan rebellion. He was pardoned, but never regained full favor, and died soon after.

床前明月光

疑是地上霜

舉頭望明月

低頭思故鄉

床前明月光

疑是地上霜

舉頭望明月

低頭思故鄉

Chuáng qián míng yuè guāng

yí shì dì shàng shuāng

jǔ tóu wàng míng yuè

dī tóu sī gù xiāng.

Bed front bright moon light

suspect is ground on frost

raise head look bright moon

lower head think-of old country.

鹿柴

Lù Chái

Deer Park

王维

Wáng Wéi, 699-759, a Buddhist, and a landscape painter, rather mystical in his outlook.

空山不見人

但聞人語響

返景入深林

復照青苔上

空山不見人

但聞人語響

返景入深林

復照青苔上

Kōng shān bú jiàn rén

dàn wén rén yǔ xiǎng

fǎn jǐng rù shēn lín

fù zhào qīng tāi shàng.

Empty mountains no see people

but hear peoples' talk sound;

return shadows enter deep forest

again illuminate green moss rise.

春望
Chūn Wàng
Spring view

国破山河在
城春草木深
感时花溅泪
恨别鸟惊心

烽火连三月
家书抵万金
白头搔更短
浑欲不胜簪

Guó pò shān hé zài
chéng chūn cǎo mù shēn
gǎn shí huā jiàn lèi
hèn bié niǎo jīng xīn.

Fēng huǒ lián sān yuè
jiā shū dī wàn jīn
bái tóu sāo gèng duǎn
hún yù bù shèng zān.

春晓
Chūn Xiǎo
Spring Dawn

春眠不觉晓
处处闻啼鸟
夜来风雨声
花落知多少

Chūn mián bù jué xiǎo
chùchù wén tí niǎo
yè lái fēng yǔ shēng
huā luò zhī duō shǎo.

杜甫
Dù Fǔ, 712-70, a friend of Li Bo's, who also suffered as a result of the An Lushan rebellion. Often ill, he clung to civilized values as his world collapsed around him.

國破山河在
城春草木深
感時花濺淚
恨別鳥驚心

烽火連三月
家書抵萬金
白頭搔更短
渾欲不勝簪

State ruined mountains-rivers survive
city spring grass-trees thick
moving times flowers splash tears
hating separation birds surprise heart.

Beacon-fires continue 3 months
home-letter equal 10,000 gold
white hair scratch even shorter
whole will-be an equal-to hatpin.

孟浩然
Mèng Hàorán, 689-740, failed at politics and returned home to Hubei to lead a reclusive life. He was also a friend of Wang Wei and Li Bo.

春眠不覺曉
處處聞啼鳥
夜來風雨聲
花落知多少

Spring slumber not notice dawn
everywhere hear cry birds
night come wind rain sound
flowers fall know many few.

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