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A Lotus' Sorrow

Hsi Murong

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A Lotus' Sorrow

I am a summer lotus in full blossom
Craving deeply
You
To see the present me.

The frosty wind has not yet come to erode;
The autumn rain has not dropped;

The season of green tartness has gone away.
I am now slim and graceful
Neither worried nor fearful.

Now is the exact moment when I am the most beautiful.

But
My heart's heavy gate is securely locked;
Behind each fragrant smile
No one knows this lotus sorrow of mine.

Oh , you,
the careless one:
First you came too early
And now too late.

—8·21·1979

Hsi Murong is probably the most commercially successful poet alive in the Far East, though not necessarily as recognized for her artistry as are other contemporary Chinese poets. Her two collections of poems, *Ch'i-li hsiang (Seven Mile Fragrance)* and *Wu-yüan te ch'ing-ch'un (A Sorrowless Youth)* are in their seventh and sixth editions since their initial publication in 1981 and 1983; approximately one and half million copies of pirated editions of these two collections were sold in mainland China last year. Hsi Murong's initial success and popularity were regarded as a passing fad by most Taiwanese critics. After a sixteen year "fad," Hsi Murong's poetry doesn't seem to be "passing" at all. On the contrary, she is now generating a new "fad" in China, and collections of her complete work (including three collections of poetry and various volumes of prose essays) are scheduled to be published in Beijing in May 1997.

An ethnic Mongolian residing in Taipei, Taiwan, Hsi Murong was born in Ssuchan province in China in 1943, during the Sino-Japanese war. Her Mongolian name is "Mu-lun," meaning "grand river." Her grandmother was a princess of one of the Mongolian tribes believed to be the direct descendants of Genghis Khan. Hsi Murong and her family fled to Hong Kong in 1949 after Communists took over China, and they moved to Taipei in 1954. Writing was not what Hsi Murong was trained for; her first love was painting and she began her formal art education at the age of fourteen at Taipei Normal School. She later studied at Taiwan Normal University and at the Brussels Royal Art Academy in Belgium. After twenty-five years of being an art teacher, Hsi Murong has retired from teaching and is now devoted entirely to her own painting and writing.

In the postscript of *Seven Mile Fragrance*, Hsi Murong acknowledges that she loves painting and writing equally. She started scribbling in her diary when she was thirteen; that was her way of "extracting" herself from the world. However, Hsi confesses that painting is something she always pursues, actively, enthusiastically and seriously. As for poetry, she never deliberately works very hard on it. She puts it this way: "I simply waited silently with tranquillity, under the lamp light, in the fragrant night, waiting for it to come to my heart."

This is how the editor of *Seven Mile Fragrance* describes Hsi Murong's talents: "Her oil-paintings have an air and style of expansiveness; her sketches are sophisticated and ethereal, and her poetry is lucid with feminine tenderness; reading her poetry is like reading a full ground of moonlight. Hsi Murong is a tree from the heavenly world and is now fully blossomed with beautiful flowers."