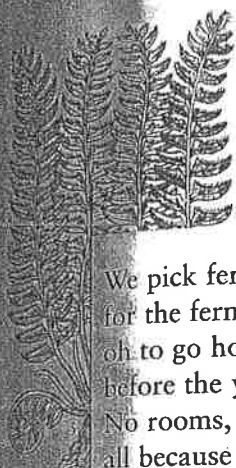


from the Book of Odes
We Pick Ferns, We Pick Ferns

Translated by Burton Watson



We pick ferns, we pick ferns,
for the ferns are sprouting now:
oh to go home, to go home
before the year is over!

No rooms, no houses for us,
all because of the Hsien-yün,
no time to kneel or sit down,
all because of the Hsien-yün.

10 We pick ferns, we pick ferns,
the ferns now are tender:
oh to go home, to go home!
Our hearts are saddened,
our sad hearts smolder and burn.
15 We are hungry, we are thirsty,
no limit to our border duty,
no way to send home for news.

20 We pick ferns, we pick ferns,
now the ferns have grown tough:
oh to go home, to go home
in the closing months of the year!
The king's business allows no slacking,
no leisure to kneel or rest.
Our sad hearts are sick to death,
this journey of ours has no return!

6 Hsien-yün (shyŭn'yün'): fierce tribes who invaded China from the north and were finally driven back around 800 B.C.

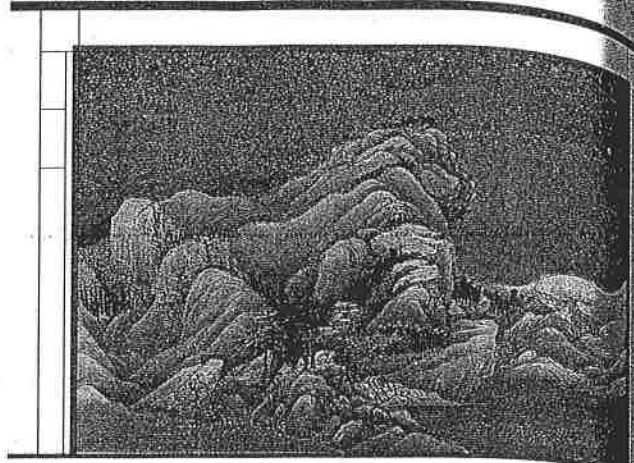
1, Beijing.
York.

was one of three
figure is carrying
pike.

25 What splendor is here?
The splendor of cherry flowers.
What chariot is this?
The chariot of our lord.
The war chariot is yoked,
30 four stallions sturdy and strong.
How would we dare to stop and rest?
In one month, three engagements!

We yoke those four stallions,
four stallions stalwart and strong,
35 for our lord to ride behind,
for lesser men to shield.
Four stallions stately,
ivory bow-ends, fish-skin quivers:
could we drop our guard for a day?
40 The Hsien-yün are fearfully swift!

Long ago we set out
when willows were rich and green.
Now we come back
through thickly falling snow.
45 Slow slow our march,
we are thirsty, we are hungry,
our hearts worn with sorrow,
no one knows our woe.



Ink drawing. Collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.

38 quivers: cases for carrying arrows.