

LI BAI, ESTEEMED POET

In China, the Tang Dynasty (618-907 C.E.) was a golden era for art and poetry. And Li Bai (also known as Li Po) is considered its greatest poet. Many of his poems survived the centuries. They are loved by both the Chinese people, and in translation, by people around the world.



He was born in Central Asia in 701, in what is now Kyrgyzstan. When he was a young child, his family moved to Sichuan, a province in southwest China. In 725, Li Bai set sail on the Yangtze River and became a wandering poet and a traveling man.

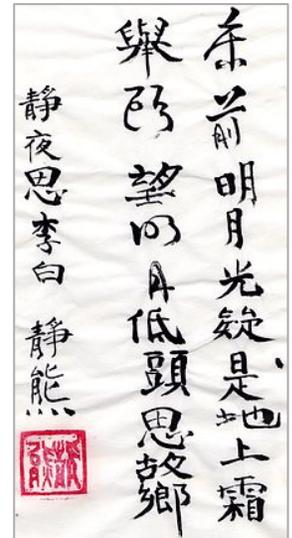
Along the way, he met and married the granddaughter of a ruler, made friends with famous people, gave away his wealth, and became something of a celebrity. Eventually he joined a community of poets, who lived as vagabonds and encouraged one another's work.

Considered a genius, he became an advisor to the Emperor Xuanzong. When a war toppled the Emperor, Li Bai attempted to seize power. He failed and was arrested and sentenced to death. Luckily he had made friends with a general in his younger days. The death sentence was overturned, but Li Bai was exiled.

The poem used by Chen Yi as lyrics for *Thinking of My Home* is one of Li Bai's most loved poem, *Quiet Night Thoughts*. The lyrics read:

Moonlight in front of my bed,
Is it frost on the ground I guess?
Lift up my eyes, gazing at the moon,
Low down my head, thinking of my home.

Li Bai wrote the poem while serving in the court of Emperor Xuanzong, a long ways away from his home in Sichuan. In it, Li Bai expresses a yearning for his hometown. *Quiet Night Thought* is featured in anthologies and taught in schools all over China.



Quiet Night Thoughts
in Chinese Calligraphy

Look for the similarities and differences in two other translations:

Moon twilight approaches, coating the
ground through the window,
Resembles a touch of frost,
Moon at the window,
Taking me back to where I am from.

Bright moonlight before my bed;
I suppose it is frost on the ground.
I raise my head to view the bright moon,
Then lower it, thinking of my home village.

Li Bai continued traveling and writing until his death in 762. A romantic rumor was spread about the cause of his death. It suggested that drowning occurred when Li Bai attempted to embrace the reflection of the moon in a lake.

Resources

- [Spoken-word version by a Chinese speaker](#)
- [More on his biography and poetry](#)
- [Li Bai drawing](#)

