



## To the tune "Qingping Music"—"The gold wind is gentle and tender" | 清平樂 · 金風細細

### Text Information

Author | Yan Shu

Language | Chinese

Period | 11th Century

Genre | Song lyric (*ci*)

Source | Tang, Guizhang 唐圭璋, editor. *Quan Song Ci* 全宋詞, vol 1. Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1965, 92.

Collection | Love Songs of the Medieval World: Lyrics from Europe and Asia

URL | [https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/yan\\_shu\\_gold\\_wind/](https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/yan_shu_gold_wind/)

Translation by Qian Jia. Introduction and notes by Nina Du and Runqi Zhang.

### Introduction to the Text

By presenting autumn tropes and images that evoke the natural processes of decay, this song conveys the speaker's feelings of loss and loneliness. Many readers may assume that the person being described is female, but there is really no unmistakable mark of this. A "gold" (or "metallic") wind is the west wind, the wind of autumn, owing to associations between elements, directions, and seasons. The "silver screen" in the last line is the screen that stands before the speaker's bed.

The *ci* genre of Chinese poetry first emerged in the Sui dynasty (581-619), was further developed in the Tang dynasty (618-907) and matured in the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127). *Ci* is usually translated into English as "song lyrics". This is because *ci* were composed by poets to fit pre-existing tunes. The number of lines, the line lengths, and the tonal and rhythmic patterns of *ci* vary with the tunes, which number in the hundreds. One common occasion for composing *ci* would be a banquet: song lyrics would be scribbled down by guests and then sung by musical performers as entertainment. Other occasions for composing and enjoying *ci* would be more casual: the poet might sing the lyrics to himself at home or while travelling (many *ci* poets were civil servants of the Imperial Court and often had to travel great distances to carry out their work). Sometimes the lyrics would be sung by ordinary people in the same way as folk songs. This oral and musical quality sets it apart from other genres of poetry in China during the same period, which were largely written texts with more elevated objectives. There are two main types of *ci*: *wǎnyuē* (婉約, "graceful") and *háofàng* (豪放, "bold"). The *wǎnyuē* subgenre primarily focuses on emotion and many of its lyrics are about courtship and love, while the *háofàng* subgenre often deals with themes that were considered more profound by contemporary audiences, such as ageing and mortality, or the rewards and disappointments of public service.

Yan Shu, a powerful statesman in the early Northern Song court, had a long and successful career both as an official and as a poet. Among his many literary achievements (which include poetry, song lyrics and prose), his *ci* compositions are best known. His lyrics are elegant in their choice of words, controlled in the emotions they express, and not as playful as the *ci* of other well-known poets. They often capture feelings of solitude and sorrow, creating a melancholic mood, but the poet is rarely explicit about what triggers the worry or sadness.

### About this Edition

The original text of this *ci* is based on the edition by Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋 (*Quan Song Ci* 全宋詞, vol 1. Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1965). Punctuation follows the edition. Since *ci* poetry rarely includes personal pronouns, and gender-differentiated pronouns did not exist in Classical Chinese of this period, the gender of the speaker as well as their perspective (e.g. first-, second- or third-person) must often be deduced by the translator from context.



### Further Reading

Chang, Kang-i Sun. *The Evolution of Tz'u Poetry: from Late Tang to Northern Sung*. Princeton UP, 1980.

- *A standard survey of the early history of Chinese song lyrics (romanized as both ci and tz'u).*

Egan, Ronald. "The Song Lyric". *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, vol. 1, edited by Stephen Owen, Cambridge UP, 2010, pp. 434-452.

- *An overview of the genre.*

Owen, Stephen. *Just a Song: Chinese Lyrics from the Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries*. Asia Center, Harvard UP, 2019.

- *A recent new history of the genre.*

Tang, Guizhang 唐圭璋, editor. *Quan Song Ci* 全宋詞. Zhonghua shu ju, 1965. 5 vols.

- *A comprehensive edition of ci from the Song dynasty and the source text for the ci in this collection (introductions and annotations are in Chinese).*



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清平樂

金風細細。  
葉葉梧桐墜。  
綠酒初嘗人易醉。  
一枕小窗濃睡。

紫薇朱槿花殘。  
斜陽卻照闌干。  
雙燕欲歸時節，  
銀屏昨夜微寒。

To the tune "Qingping Music"

The gold wind is gentle and tender,  
The leaves of the parasol tree fall one by one.  
The first taste of the green wine easily makes one tipsy.  
Lying by the window, I sleep soundly.

5 The crepe-myrtle and hibiscus have withered,  
But the slanting sun still shines on the railing.  
It is the time when swallows are about to depart in pairs;  
Last night it was slightly cold behind the silver screen.

### Critical Notes

#### Translation

Line 1 "Gold wind" refers to the autumn wind.

Line 3 "Green wine" refers to fine wine.

Line 8 "Silver screen" refers to the screen separating the women's room from the living area, where only men were allowed.