



To the tune "Waves Scour the Sand"—"I hold up the wine and toast the eastern wind"

浪淘沙·把酒祝東風

Text Information

Author | Ouyang Xiu

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. 141.

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

URL | https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/ouyang_xiu_i_hold_wine/

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

Introduction to the Text

Ouyang Xiu composed this song lyric when he and his friends revisited their old haunts in the northern suburbs of Luoyang during springtime. The time frame depicted spans the previous year, the current year and the year ahead. The lyrics convey sadness about the inconstancy of life and the inevitable passing of time.

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.

Ouyang Xiu was a highly influential politician, scholar, and historian of the Northern Song dynasty. He was revered as a grand master of literature and philosophy, and it is not an exaggeration to say that he laid the foundation for the literati mentality of the dynasty. When Ouyang was four years old, the death of his father, a fifty-seven-year-old military officer, left the family destitute. Poverty did not stop Ouyang's passion for reading: he would borrow books from his neighbors and make copies in order to study them further. Later, he became a bureaucrat and was posted to many cities as a prefect of the imperial court. In his political life, he was principled and solemn, and wrote a great deal in many genres. Much of his writing reflects his dignified character. His song lyrics, however, provide an interesting contrast. Their content may be drawn in part from the colorful private life he enjoyed in his younger years, including liaisons with many different courtesans. Interestingly, they are often written from the perspective of a lovelorn courtesan abandoned by an inconstant lover, in effect casting himself as the villain.

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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I hold up the wine and toast the eastern wind,

且共從容。

"Let us dally and not rush."

垂楊紫陌洛城東。

Along the lilac-laden path with drooping willows in the east of Luoyang,

總是當時攜手處，

Is where we used to walk hand in hand,

游遍芳叢。

5 Roaming among the thickets of fragrance.

聚散苦匆匆。

Gathering together is always fleeting and separating is always bitter.

此恨無窮。

My regrets about this have no end.

今年花勝去年紅。

The flowers this year are redder than the last;

可惜明年花更好，

It is a pity that when next year's ones are even better,

知與誰同。

10 I do not know with whom I will look at them.

Critical Notes

Translation

Line 5 Fragrance refers to flowers