To the tune "Like Fish and Water"—"Dallying in the capital" | 如魚水 · 帝里疏散

Text Information
Author | Liu Yong 柳永
Language | Chinese
Period | 11th Century
Genre | Songs
Source | Tang, Guizhang 唐圭璋 (ed.). *Quan Song Ci* 全宋詞. Vol 1. Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1965, 40.
Collection | Songs of Love and Loss: Lyrics from the Chinese Song Dynasty, Love Songs of the Medieval World: Lyrics from Europe and Asia
URL | sourcebook.stanford.edu/liu_yong_dallying_capital/

Translation by Qian Jia. Introduction and notes by Dante Zhu.

Introduction to the Text
In this *ci*, the speaker evokes his carefree life in the capital city and reflects on his own life philosophy, rejecting the pursuit of fame and profit in favor of a hedonistic lifestyle with no consideration for reputation. Such an outlook was generally frowned upon in Imperial China, as it contravened cornerstones of Chinese culture and Confucian philosophy, including the obligation to serve the empire and the nobility of entering the political arena. However, this outlook is typical of Liu Yong's *ci*, as can be seen from another in this collection: "To the tune 'The Lost Soul'".

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 (婉约, "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.

Liu Yong was possibly the most widely-read *ci* writer in the Northern Song period, with fans ranging from courtesans to officials and critics. He excelled in writing love songs, portraying the emotions of lovelorn individuals in unprecedented detail and depth. Despite being born into a family of officials, he did not lead a successful professional life. After he failed *keju*, the Imperial Chinese civil service examination, he wrote the song "To the tune 'Crane Soaring in the Sky'", in which he claimed that ci poets are as important as prime ministers. This led the Ren Emperor of Song 宋仁宗 to personally deem him unfit for imperial service. The emperor suggested that if he really thought that way, he should just be a *ci* poet instead of pursuing the career of an official. The emperor went so far as to deliberately fail Liu Yong in his following attempt at the exams.

Liu Yong's continued output of poetry, deemed frivolous, trivial and vulgar by court officials, had a lasting impact on his professional life. He did not pass the civil service exam until he was 48 years old; before that, he spent much of his time with singers and courtesans, writing *ci* and living a hedonistic existence. After he finally passed *keju*, he worked as a low rank official in several areas and sought to advance his career through the assistance of the prime minister of that time, Yan Shu, who was also a famous *ci* poet (and is featured in this collection). Yan Shu mocked the frivolity of Liu Yong's lyrics and refused to assist him, and the emperor, upon learning of his attempt, commented that Liu Yong, as a *ci* composer, should stick to composing ci. In response to the emperor's comment, Liu Yong, in typically rebellious fashion, began signing his *ci* "composer of *ci* by imperial decree". He made a final attempt to salvage his career by writing a and

complimentary *ci* to the emperor, but this was regarded as offensive and the emperor stripped him of his official titles stated that he would never be accepted back at court. From then on, he returned to his previous lifestyle, indulging in the company of singers and courtesans.

Because of his unique life experience, the sentiments expressed in Liu Yong's *ci* are often very different from the views typically expressed in Chinese society at that time, with an especially cynical attitude towards serving the empire and a pronounced defense of hedonism. Nevertheless, Liu Yong's *ci* were extremely popular throughout the empire, giving rise to the frequently repeated observation that "if you can see a well in a place, you can hear Liu Yong's *ci* being sung there". As every tiny town had a well, this indicates the wide reach of Liu's lyrics.

Liu Yong is also notable for his many formal innovations to *ci* poetry. Before Liu, most *ci* were written to accompany short tunes, but he initiated a trend of writing lyrics for longer tunes, which allowed for more complex portrayals of human psychology. He was also less restrained by the tune, and often modified the traditional rhyme as well as the line breaks. For example, even when he wrote two ci to the same tune, they might sound very different from one another, with different rhymes, line lengths or numbers of lines. The tunes that Liu Yong used were also more diverse than those of his contemporaries: some were folk songs, and some he composed himself. Many of Liu Yong's *ci* have a stronger narrative element, probably due to the influence of storytellers whose street performances he would have watched. Liu received considerable criticism for his focus on love and for his use of commonplace language rather than a refined poetic vocabulary, but this did little to curtail his popularity or his influence on the development of the *ci* genre.

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 2. 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).*

Egan, Ronald. The Works of Li Qingzhao. De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 94-198.

- *A bilingual edition, with Chinese and English translations on facing pages.*

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如魚水	To the tune "Like Fish and Water"
帝里疏散， 數載酒縈花系， 九陌狂遊。 良景對珍筵惱， 佳人自有風流。 勸瓊甌。 絳唇啟、 歌發清幽。 被舉措、 藝足才高， 在處別得艷姬留。	Dallying in the capital[1], for years, I have been surrounded by wine and flowers[2], roaming wildly in the nine avenues[3]. On a beautiful day, I was irritated yet enticed[4] by (too many) exquisite banquets, (accompanied by) a beauty with special charms of her own. She urged me to empty the jade cups, opened her red lips, purity and tranquility poured from her song. Because I was famous for my abundant skills and great talent, wherever I went, I was adored by other voluptuous girls.
浮名利， 擬拚休。 是非莫掛心頭。 富貴豈由人， 時會高志須酬。 莫閒愁。 共綠蟻、 紅粉相尤。 向繡幄， 醉倚芳姿睡， 算除此外何求。	The ephemeral fame and profit— I tried hard to discard them. One should not be concerned with right and wrong. Fortune and esteem, how could they come as one wishes? The favorable time will arrive and my aspiration will be fulfilled. I should not worry pointlessly, but drink the green ants[5] with her— fall in love with this beauty[6], enter the embroidered canopy[7], in drunkenness, lean towards the flower-like one to sleep; I want nothing more aside from this.

Critical Notes

Translation

1	Refer to the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty, Bian Jing.
2	"Flowers" here refers to young women.
3	During the Han Dynasty, the capital Chang'an had eight streets and nine avenues. Later the term "nine avenues" was used to refer to large urban roads more generally.
4	"惱" means both irritated and enticed. The irritation here is very light.
5	"Green ants" is a literal translation. In this context it means the green bubbles that float on top of fine wine, which are as small as ants.
6	That is, the courtesan.
7	That is, the courtesan's bedroom.