Flagging this dash—I don't think we've seen this previously. Is this supposed to be there?

To the tune "A Single Cutting of Plum Blossom"—"The red lotus fragrance still lingered" 一剪梅・紅藕香殘玉簟秋

Text Information

*Note: All Li Qingzhao documents share the same Text Information, Introduction, About thie Edition, and Further Reading. See li_qingzhao_courtyard_deep for edits to those sections.

Author | Li Qingzhao 李清照
Language | Chinese
Period | 11th Century
Genre | Songs
Source | Tang, Guizhang 唐圭璋 (ed.). *Quan Song Ci* 全宋詞. Vol 2. Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1965, 928.
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/li_qingzhao_red_lotus/

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

Introduction to the Text

Note: this first paragraph is unique to each Li Qingzhao document. It has been proofread here, with no edits.

It is believed that Li Qingzhao wrote this *ci* during a period of separation from her husband due to his work, and that it expresses her personal heartache over his absence. As in her other compositions, the poet employs images from the natural world (a withering flower, flowing water) to express the dynamics of human interactions.

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.

Li Qingzhao was probably one of the most prominent female poets in Imperial China. Born into an elite family of imperial bureaucrats, Li Qingzhao aspired to become a writer even though literature was considered a male domain. She quickly gained fame for her poetic talent and became not only a celebrated composer of *ci* but also an important critic of the genre. In her view, the male poets composing lyrics for female singers struggled to convey these women's thoughts and voices convincingly. In her song lyrics, Li Qingzhao offers the modern reader something rare and precious: the inner world of women in medieval China, as imagined by a woman poet. Her songs are often considered to be among the most affecting of the genre.

In 1127, when Li Qingzhao was in her forties, the capital city of the Song dynasty (present-day Kaifeng)—the city where Li Qingzhao lived—was conquered by the Jin dynasty in the Jin-Song Wars, along with the northern half of the Song dynasty's territory. The surviving members of the dynasty consolidated their regime in the south, establishing a new capital city, first in Nanjing, then in Lin'an (present-day Hangzhou). The conquest of Kaifeng marked the end of the Northern Song dynasty and the beginning of the Southern Song dynasty: two distinct eras in the political history of China, and two distinctive periods in Li Qingzhao's own poetry. Following the invasion of Kaifeng, she moved first to Nanjing and then to Lin'an, where she spent the remaining decades of her life; her husband died in 1129. In contrast to the love themes of her earlier *ci*, much of her later poetry is concerned with the sorrow of her forced migration and her personal loneliness in her new surroundings.

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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一剪梅		To the tune "A Single Cutting of Plum Blossom"
紅藕香殘玉簟秋。		The red lotus fragrance still lingered on the jade-like mat in autumn.
輕解羅裳，		I gently untied my silk gown,
獨上蘭舟。		and boarded the thoroughwort boat.
雲中誰寄錦書來，		Who would send the brocade letter from the clouds?
雁字回時，	5	When the wild geese return in the form of the character "one",
月滿西樓。		moonlight will fill up the western tower.
花自飄零水自流。		The flower withers alone and the water flows on its own,
一種相思，		the same kind of yearning,
兩處閒愁。		pointless sorrow in two locations.
此情無計可消除，	10	There is no way of dispelling this feeling;
才下眉頭，		as soon as it steps down from the eyebrows,
卻上心頭。		it mounts to the heart.

Critical Notes

Line 3 Thoroughwort is a flowering plant in the aster family. The "thoroughwort boat" may not indicate that the boat itself contains thoroughworts, as there is a tradition in Chinese literature of using fragrant plants to signify a person's moral integrity. This tradition originates from the *Songs of Chu*, which is generally dated to as early as the second or third century BCE.

GMS prefers that centuries be written out as 2nd or 3rd

Line 4 "Brocade letter" implies a love letter.

Line 5 Wild geese usually form a flock in the shape of the Chinese character "ren" 人 (meaning "people"), or "yi" 一 (meaning "one") while flying.