To the tune "The Fisherman is Proud"—"The sky merged the sea of clouds with the mist of dawn"
漁家傲・天接雲濤連曉霧

Text Information
Author | Li Qingzhao 李清照
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. 927.
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_sky_merged/

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

Introduction to the Text
This *ci* is usually interpreted as a dream vision, where the speaker experiences a brief taste of the afterlife: a beautiful palace in the sky where the immortal dwell. This may be of particular interest to readers more familiar with medieval Christian, Jewish, and Muslim beliefs about life after death.

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 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.*

— *The Works of Li Qingzhao*. De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 94-198.

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

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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漁家傲		To the tune "The Fisherman is Proud"
天接雲濤連曉霧。		The sky merged the sea of clouds with the mist of dawn.
星河欲轉千帆舞。		The starry rivers swirled as if a thousand sails fluttered.
彷佛夢魂歸帝所。		I felt as if my dreaming soul had returned to the gods' palace:
聞天語。		I heard the sky speak,
殷勤問我歸何處。	5	asking me repeatedly, where do I belong?
我報路長嗟日暮。		I replied that the road was long and the sun about to set.
學詩漫有驚人句。		I learnt poetry and wrote astonishing lines in vain.
九萬里風鵬正舉。		The Peng bird glided in the wind, soaring nine thousand miles into the sky
風休住。		O, wind, please do not stop,
蓬舟吹取三山去。	10	blow this tumbleweed boat to the Three Mountains.

Critical Notes

Translation

Line 1	濤 literally means a wave, i.e., a wave of clouds.
Line 3	It is unclear which gods are referred to here; in the Buddhist tradition of the Tang Dynasty, people believed in an emperor who inhabited a palace in the sky and was surrounded by a court of other gods. In some ancient Chinese mythology, there is an idea that the soul originates in the sky and ultimately returns to the sky.
Line 8	The Peng bird is an enormous bird of legend, notably depicted in an influential philosophical work, the *Zhuangzi*, written by Zhuangzi (B.C. 369–B.C. 286), the Taoist philosopher with the same name.
Line 10	The Three Mountains was the name given to the place where immortals were believed to live.