To the tune "The Fisherman Is Proud"—"I suddenly heard the strike of two oars"
漁家傲 · 花底忽聞敲兩槳

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. 129.
Collection | Love Songs of the Medieval World: Lyrics from Europe and Asia
URL | https://sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/ouyang_xiu_beyond_willows/

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

Introduction to the Text

This is one of six sets of song lyrics that Ouyang Xiu wrote for the tune "The Fisherman is Proud". It depicts lotus-picking girls enjoying themselves and drinking wine, instead of diligently picking lotuses as they are supposed to be doing.

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.

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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漁家傲		To the tune "The Fisherman Is Proud"
花底忽聞敲兩槳。		I suddenly heard the strike of two oars beneath the flowers;
逡巡女伴來尋訪。		After a short while, the girlfriends came visiting,
酒盞旋將荷葉當。		Substituting lotus leaves for wine cups.
蓮舟蕩,		As the lotus boat rocks,
時時盞裏生紅浪。	5	Red ripples keep appearing in the cups.
花氣酒香清厮釀。		The aroma of the flowers and the scent of wine mingle together.
花腮酒面紅相向。		The flowers' cheeks and the drinkers' faces are equally red.
醉倚綠陰眠一餉。		Tipsy, I lay in the green shade to nap for a moment.
驚起望。		Startled awake, I arose to look:
船頭閣在沙灘上。	10	The bow of the boat was stranded on the beach.