To the tune "The Immortal by the River"—"When I wake up from the dream"
臨江仙 · 夢後樓臺高鎖

Text Information
Author | Yan Jidao 晏幾道
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. 286.
Collection | Songs of Love and Loss: Lyrics from the Chinese Song Dynasty, Love Songs of the Medieval World: Lyrics from Europe and Asia
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Translation by Qian Jia. Introduction and notes by Dante Zhu.

Introduction to the Text
This song evokes a relationship between the speaker and the courtesan Xiaoping (whom Yan Jidao knew personally). The first stanza portrays the speaker waking up late after a night of drinking. The dreary scenery ("locked doors," "low curtains") reinforces the sense of nostalgia for a lost happiness. The second stanza portrays his first meeting with Xiaoping. An important concept here is "the sorrow of spring" 春恨. The idea originates in the poignant brevity of springtime's beauty in nature, and thus is often deployed in *ci* poetry to express the sentiment that "all good things must come to an end."

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.

Yan Jidao 晏幾道 was the son of the eminent *ci* poet Yan Shu 晏殊. Together, Yan Jidao and Yan Shu are often referred to as "double Yan," with Yan Jidao being the "Little Yan 小晏" and Yan Shu being the "Big Yan 大晏," reflecting the fact that during their lifetimes they were both the iconic poets of the *wǎnyuē* (婉约, "graceful") subgenre of *ci*. Unlike his father, who held a prestigious state position alongside a blooming poetry career, Yan Jidao led a far more arduous life. As the seventh son of Yan Shu, he was born into a noble and wealthy family, and had little interest in officialdom at a young age. His lifestyle was extravagant, filled with luxurious banquets, joyous travels with friends, and beautiful courtesans.

After Yan Shu passed away in Yan Jidao's late teens, the young man realized the imminent financial difficulties which would befall him and abandoned his previously extravagant lifestyle, devoting himself to a political career. However, he struggled to replicate his father's success and was framed for his involvement in the movement against Wang Anshi's New Policies (a series of government reforms), which led to him being jailed. Even though he was quickly released, this incident did huge damage to both his political career and his finances. In his later years, he returned to writing *ci*, and started compiling a collection of his own works, called *Little Mountain Ci* (小山词). In the prologue to this collection, he wrote: "I now think of the ones who once drank with me. Some of them have passed away; others fell prey to illness. I

read through my collection as if reliving my past sadnesses, joys, separations and gatherings, which now are like fantasies, or a sudden lighting strike, or a faded dream. Thus I could only cover my pages and mourn, for time slips away too fast, and past joys are illusory and unreal."

As a poet of the *wǎnyuē* subgenre, Yan Jidao's lyrics pay great attention to romantic affairs with courtesans. Compared to his contemporaries, Yan Jidao focuses more on the existential and emotional aspect rather than the physical aspect of these affairs, and incorporates more introspection into his poems. Because of the occurrence of specific names and locations in his *ci*, some of his *ci* invite a biographical reading. However, as *ci* are song lyrics intended for multiple performances by different singers on different occasions, there is also a universal character to the sentiments evoked in Yan Jidao's *ci* which transcends the poet's personal experiences.

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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臨江仙		To the tune "The Immortal by the River"
夢後樓臺高鎖，		When I wake up from the dream, the buildings already have their doors locked.
酒醒簾幕低垂。		As I sober up, the curtains droop low.
去年春恨卻來時。		The sorrow of last year's spring hits me again.
落花人獨立，		In the falling petals, I stood alone;
微雨燕雙飛。	5	a pair of swallows flew by in the drizzling rain.
記得小蘋初見，		I remember the first time I met Xiaoping:
兩重心字羅衣。		her silk gown with the pattern of double hearts.
琵琶弦上說相思。		She uttered her longing with the lute strings.
當時明月在，		The bright moon from that time is still here now,
曾照彩雲歸。	10	which once shone upon her, as she left like a rosy cloud.

Critical Notes

Translation

Line 7 There are two interpretations for 心字羅衣, one is that the hearts are the patterns on the silk gown, while the other is that the heart refers to the shape of the collar of the women's clothes. Here the translator chooses to go with the first interpretation.

Line 10 The "rosy cloud" 彩雲 refers to Xiaoping. "Cloud" is an image that is often associated with sexual intercourse, and here it refers to one who had a physical relationship with the speaker. The "cloud" metaphor suggests Xiaoping is both beautiful and ephemeral, and the relationship between her and the speaker is passionate yet transient.