

The attached, translated from the Japanese by John Timothy Wixted, appeared in the 20-pp. booklet, *The Ninety-Ninth Annual Award of Prizes of the Japan Academy, June 1, 2009: The Recipients of the Prizes and the Outlines of Their Works* (Tokyo: The Japan Academy, 2009).

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for “Studies on Ci in Song Period”



Outline of the work:

The winner of the Japan Academy Prize, Murakami Tetsumi 村上哲見, is especially distinguished for his two volumes of research on the *ci* 詞 genre of “song-poetry” during the Song dynasty of China. The first volume, published in 1976, bore the title, *Studies on Song-Dynasty ‘Ci’: The Tang, Five Dynasties, and Northern Song Periods* [宋詞研究：唐五代北宋篇]. The second volume, appearing in 2006, was entitled *Studies on Song-Dynasty ‘Ci’: The Southern Song Period* [宋詞研究：南宋篇]. In these volumes, Prof. Murakami systematically outlines the history of the genre — its origins, development, and maturation — analyzing changes in the style and prosody of its principal authors.

Central to the early development of the genre, according to Prof. Murakami, are the writings of the Late Tang author, Wen Tingyun 温庭筠 (Wen Feiqing 温飛卿) — writings where “feelings of longing for the beautiful, and of loss for that which has faded” are expressed in poems whose “laments repeatedly sing of a beauty that has passed.” In contrast with the then-dominant genre of *shi* 詩 poetry, where the “who, what, and when” of a poem’s circumstance are generally made clear, Wen Tingyun dispensed with all such concrete reference, creating a commensurably symbolic world of pure feeling, and in so doing established a defining characteristic of the genre.

Treated next as occupying an important place in the standard line of *ci* development is Liu Yong 柳永 (Liu Qiqing 柳耆卿), characterized by Prof. Murakami in the following terms: “First, drawing on the flesh-and-blood relations of down-to-earth men and women, Liu sang of the emotions of male-female sexual pleasure, of male longing for women, and of obsessive love attachments. Second, in works that have female entertainers (sing-song girls) as a theme, Liu always treats these women as near equals.”

About Su Shi 蘇軾 (Su Dongpo 蘇東坡), who is taken to be almost the diametrical opposite of Liu Yong, Prof. Murakami writes as follows: “First, Su contemplates with equanimity the human figures he has sketched with a light but scrupulous touch, endowing them, almost nonchalantly, with the deepest of feeling. Second, surmounting sentiment, he displays a certain perspicacity vis-à-vis humanity, a generous contemplativeness.” In this respect, Su’s *ci* reflect characteristics of Song-dynasty *shi* poetry by “closely adhering to ordinary life” and by ‘possessing equanimity.’ Prof. Murakami places Song-period developments in context: “*Ci* poetry had been initiated as a form radically independent of *shi* poetry; but *ci* during the Song again approached *shi*: for example, in expounding on the grand and majestic, and in portraying scenery with intensity.”

The *ci* of Zhou Bangyan 周邦彦 (Zhou Meicheng 周美成) are analyzed in the following terms: “First, being more mental than physical, Zhou’s is a world of vague, boundless sentiment, one fashioned with minute detail. Second, what the poet wishes to reveal is held in and suppressed, such that his poems express a world abounding in emotions of unfathomable depth.” Embodying as they do a refined beauty, Zhou’s *ci* follow in the tradition of Liu Yong and make for a natural transition between the *ci* of the Northern and Southern Song.

In carrying his history into the Southern Song, Prof. Murakami treats Xin Qiji 辛棄疾 (Xin Jiakuan 辛稼軒), Jiang Kui 姜夔 (Jiang Baishi 姜白石), Wu Wenying 吳文英 (Wu Mengchuang 吳夢窗), Zhou Mi 周密 (Zhou Caochuang 周草窗), and others. In contrast with the major poets of the genre during the Northern Song, who were officials, *ci* poets during the Southern Song were mostly professional literary men (*wenren* 文人) and not part of officialdom. As a result, their *ci* were removed from the real world; aiming solely at “classical elegance” (*dianya* 典雅), they achieved a high degree of detailed refinement.

Xin Qiji, rejecting the positive assessment of the style of “heroic abandon” (*haofang* 豪放) associated with Su Shi and his followers, was adept at the use of complicated, convoluted lyrical expression. For example, in his *ci* regretting the passing of spring, wherein spring embodies the future of the dynasty and where, amid a melancholy replete with a highly refined lyricism, he indirectly expresses doleful dissatisfaction, he is closer to the advocates of “classical elegance.”

Jiang Kui is viewed as having carried on the vigorous strain in Xin Qiji’s *ci*, opening a realm that was pure and strong to the core. For example, in his *ci* on plums, Jiang’s understated narration of thoughts that conventionally surround the flower melds together with the purity plums are traditionally associated with to create a poetic realm of unsullied otherworldliness.

Wu Wenying is said to draw on Zhou Bangyan and to develop his central characteristics. For example, in those instances where spring prompts reflections on the past, Wu not only directly relates his own thoughts but also, benefiting from a lengthened *ci* poetic form, deals extensively with a variety of themes. The world thus developed is one profound both in thought and feeling.

Zhou Mi is characterized as having harmoniously joined polished expressions in superb language with musical tunes to create nearly perfect *ci*. Among his late works in particular, those lamenting the fall of the dynasty opened up a profound world.

Earlier *ci* scholarship in China would focus on the corpus of individual poets, on which poet had what kind of poetry as his ideal; as a result, the writings of other *ci* writers active at the time were “flattened out” and assessed with a certain uniformity.

In contrast with this, Prof. Murakami’s approach is more dynamic. He views developments historically, from the broad perspective of shifts in literary direction from the Tang through the Song. And he analyzes in detail the period background of each writer and the styles each draws upon. In doing this, his is the first systematic description of how the *ci* genre emerged in Tang and Five Dynasties times, came to fruition in the Northern Song, and reached its ultimate in the Southern Song.

Moreover, in earlier *ci* criticism poetry in the genre was divided into two contrastive types or schools, those of “heroic abandon” (*haofang* 豪放) and of “delicate restraint” (*wanyue* 婉約). In contradistinction to this — and as a sign of his independence of judgment — Prof. Murakami perceives a subtle interaction between the two, which he ably analyzes.

With their perspective on a literary history that embraces China and Japan, Prof. Murakami’s published volumes outlining the process of Song *ci*’s development display the fruits of outstanding scholarship. They are here offered as an achievement well worthy of the Japan Academy Prize