

# 李清颢

c.3. Li Qingzhao (1084–ca. 1151)

On Li Qingzhao, see p.17.

## c.3.1. *On the Song-Lyric* (Lun ci)

*Yuefu* ballads and popular song were both well in evidence during the Tang dynasty. They especially flourished during the Kaiyuan [713–41] and Tianbao [742–56] reign-periods. There was a certain Li Balang who was so fine a singer that he dominated the world. Once, when those who had just passed the examination to become *jinsshi* [presented scholar] were having a banquet at Qujiang, the top one on the list of successful candidates summoned Li ahead of time. He had him change his clothing and disguise his name; putting an old and tattered cap and clothing on him, he made him look quite run-down. Together they went to the banquet, where the one said, “My cousin would like

cation of the five tones [*yin*], the additional classification of the five sounds [*sheng*], the additional classification of the six pitches [*lü*], and the additional classifications of the clear and the muddy [*qingzhuo*] and the light and the heavy [*qingzhong*].

- (8) Furthermore, in recent times the song-tunes titled “Sheng sheng man,” “Yuzhong hua,” and “Xi qianying” [Rejoicing that the warbler has flown] either use a *pingsheng* rhyme or additionally use a *rusheng* one. “Yulou chun” originally could use a *pingsheng* rhyme, but it can also employ a *shang-* or *qu sheng* or a *rusheng*. A tune to a *zesheng* rhyme can work well with a *shangsheng*, but a *rusheng* would make it unsingable. As for Wang Anshi and Zeng Gong, their writings are like those of the Western Han [i.e., full of difficult characters]; if they manage a minor song-lyric, people are overwhelmed, finding it unreadable.
- (9) Song-lyrics form a realm of their own. Those aware of this fact are few. Only when Yan Jidao, Ho Zhu, Qin Guan, and Huang Tingjian emerged on the scene was there recognition of the fact. Yet Yan is sadly lacking in more extended narrative, and Ho has lamentably little classic gravity. As for Qin, he puts great store on the expression of feeling, and gives scant attention to the substantive and real. His writing is like a beautiful woman of poor family—it is not that she is not alluringly beautiful, it is just that in the end she lacks a wealthy, high-born air. Huang, on the other hand, esteems the substantive and real, yet has numerous defects. His writing is like a fine jade with flaws, whose worth is thereby diminished by half.

(Guo Shaoyu and Wang Wensheng, eds., *Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan*, 2: 350–54)

The text of “Lun ci” on which the present translation is based is the *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua* text (Houji, *juan* 33), as reprinted with added punctuation and notes by Guo Shaoyu and Wang Wensheng. With specific reference to this piece, see also Wixted, “The Poetry of Li Ch’ing-chao,” esp. pp. 160–62.

*par.* 3, “all culture died out”: An echo of *Analec*s 9.5.

*par.* 3, “Done playing . . . spring water”: Translations from Bryant, *Lyric Poets of the Southern T’ang*, pp. 64 (Li Yu) and 35 (Feng Yansi).

*par.* 3, “lament and brooding”: Li Qingzhao refers here to “Yue ji” (Record of music), *Li ji* (Records of ritual). Translation from Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*, p. 52.

*par.* 6, “a gourd of water from the great sea”: In other words, something very simple to do, according to Guo Shaoyu and Wang Wensheng.

*par.* 7, “level and oblique [*ping/ze*] tones”: This distinction is essential for the composition of Recent-Style *shi* poetry (*jinti shi*), namely *jueju* quatrains and *lüshi* regulated verse. The four tones of northern Chinese of the time (*ping, shang, qu,* and

to sit at the foot of the table.” No one paid any attention. When it was time for the wine to be served and for musical entertainment, singers were brought on, headed by Cao Yuanqian and Niannu. Their singing over, the top candidate, pointing at Li, said, “Let’s ask my cousin to sing.” Everyone laughed, and not a few were annoyed. But having vocalized a few strains, with a single song he had everyone sobbing. People formed a circle around him to pay respects, saying, “It’s Li Balang!”

From this time on, the strains of Zheng and Wei [i.e., the corrupting music of states in decline] daily intensified, and licentious mutations [in song] became daily more noisome. Tune-titles of the time included the following: “Pusa man,” “Chun guang hao,” “Shaji zi” [The cricket], “Genglou zi” [The nighttime water clock], “Huan xi sha,” “Meng Jiangnan,” and “Yufu,” too numerous to enumerate in full. [See Appendix A.] (2)

During the Five Dynasties, a time of strife when the realm was carved up, all culture died out. Only the sovereigns of Jiangnan, surnamed Li [Li Jing and Li Yu], as well as their minister [Feng Yansi], esteemed what was cultured and dignified. As for their poetic lines — “Done playing in a tiny pavilion, the cold of jade pipes” and “[A breeze about to rise] / Blows ripples over a pool of spring water” — even though their diction is unique in the extreme, nonetheless, as it is said, “The tones of a ruined state are filled with lament and brooding.” (3)

Coming to our own dynasty, when the rites and music, the civil and military, are all well in place, it took more than a hundred years of careful nurturing before there emerged a Liu Tuntian or a Liu Yong, to transform old songs and fashion new ones. He issued a *Yuezhang ji* [Collection of musical compositions], which gained the widespread approval of the age. Even though his compositions accord with the rules of prosody, their language is lower than dust. (4)

Then Zhang Xian, Song Qi and his brother, Shen Tang, Yuan Jiang, Chao Duanli, and their crowd appeared in succession. Although at times their expression is marvelous, since this occurs only in fragments, overall how can they be counted famous writers? (5)

Coming to Yan Shu, Ouyang Xiu, and Su Shi, even though in learning they were virtual celestials, they composed but minor song-lyrics. These can best be likened to dipping a gourd of water from the great sea. Their compositions are nothing more than *shi* poems made up of lines of uneven length and often do not accord with the rules of prosody. (6)

How is this so? *Shi* poetic writing makes the distinction between level and oblique [*ping/ze*] tones. But in the song-lyric, there is the additional classifi- (7)

*ru*) were divided into “level” (*ping*) and oblique tones (the other three—*ze*). The “level” tone later split to become the first and second tones of modern Mandarin, *shang* became the modern third tone, *qu* the modern fourth tone, and *rusheng* (*ru*-tone or *ru*-sound) characters came to be distributed among all four modern tones. For discussion of prosody in the poetry of the time, including rhyme and *ping/ze* tones, see Radtke, “The Development of Chinese Versification.”

*par. 7*, “the five tones [*yin*]”: The five tones of early Chinese music (*gong, shang, jue, zhi, yu*) “are not to be construed as fixed pitches but are rather a ‘movable doh scale [Needham].’ When any one of the five was fixed with a keynote, the entire group was fixed with respect to pitch and became a mode-key, i.e., a distinct performance group of five tones” (DeWoskin, *A Song for One or Two*, p. 44).

*par. 7*, “the five sounds [*sheng*]”: Perhaps the five sounds are those identified by Zhang Yan (thirteenth century, using the term, “five tones”) as being associated with the lips, teeth, throat, tongue, and nose. The “five sounds” may refer to the “five tones,” and vice versa.

*par. 7*, “the six pitches [*lü*]”: See DeWoskin, *A Song for One or Two*, pp. 46–48 and 85.

*par. 7*, “clear and muddy [*qingzhuo*] . . . light and heavy [*qingzhong*]”: “Clear” and “muddy” “are variously explained as ‘high’ and ‘low’ when referring to pitch, ‘unvoiced’ and ‘voiced’ when referring to speech, and ‘pure’ and ‘resonant’ when referring to timbre” (DeWoskin, *A Song for One or Two*, p. 125). “Light” and “heavy” presumably indicate “unstressed” and “stressed.”

*par. 8*, “people are overwhelmed”: The phrase *juedao* means to be so overwhelmed that one breaks out in laughter, swoons from grief, or is awestruck with admiration—laughter being the likely implication here.

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