

# A Solitary Boat in the Autumn Chill: Chinese *Ci*-Poetry and Literati Painting

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Traditional Chinese poetry is marked by vivid and striking imagery as well as refined and alert sensibility. The pictorial character with its aesthetic principles and expressive techniques accentuates a unique affinity between Chinese poetry and painting. In many ways the pleasure poetry – be it *shi*-poetry or *ci*-poetry<sup>1</sup> – and painting afford is very similar. Take a lyric by Li Yu (937-978), for example, in which the rich images create a multisensory dimension that evokes landscape paintings such as the one below by Yuan (1271-1368) artist Wu Zhen (1280-1354):

*Yi Jiangnan (Recalling the South)*  
Idle dreams roam far,  
The Southern country is in its late fall.  
A thousand *li* of land is shrouded in  
chilly dusk,  
Deep amidst the reed flowers anchors a  
solitary boat,  
From the moon-lit tower comes the  
sound of flute.  
(QTWC, p. 459)<sup>2</sup>

Li Yu's lyric depicts a landscape shrouded in mist and chill of the southern country, where a solitary boat anchors amidst reed flowers, and the sound of flute comes from the moonlit tower. The first three lines paint a



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vast background of bleakness and desolation, against which the images of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Shi*-poetry (or simply *shi*), often translated into English as 'poem,' and *ci*-poetry (or *ci*), often translated as lyric, are the two major poetic genres in classical Chinese literature. While *shi* reached its acme in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), *ci* enjoyed its golden age in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). *Shi* can also be used to refer to poetry in general.

<sup>2</sup> All the lyrics quoted in this article are taken from either *Quan Tang Wudai Ci* (QTWC) (*A Complete Collection of Ci-Poetry during Tang and Five Dynasties Periods*) ed. Huang Yu (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1986), or *Quan Song Ci* (QSC) (*A Complete Collection of Ci-Poetry in Song Dynasty*) ed. Tang Guizhang (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965).

solitary boat, the sound of the flute and the moonlight are foregrounded. The character “山” *shan* (mountain), and the water radical ‘氵’ that appear in five characters in this short lyric conjure up a typical Chinese *Shanshui* (mountain-and-water) landscape, such as Wu’s painting above. All the images in the lyric, especially, the moon, boat and flute, carry with them a repertoire of symbolic meanings associated with emotions of loneliness and homesickness, which are also common motifs in literati<sup>3</sup> painting.

The chilly autumn air and pallid cold mist that permeate both the lyric and painting not only form the basic tone and emotional colouring of the two pieces, but also create a breathy resonance – the *qi*,<sup>4</sup> the ever-circulating cosmic energy, and a fundamental concept in traditional Chinese philosophy, art and literature. Despite different translations and interpretations of the concept of *qi*, it has always remained central to the issue of artistic creativity. It is often conceived of as the expression of man’s nature or personality,<sup>5</sup> and associated with physiological vigour in the literary or artistic organism. It is the power or impetus that brings to the surface what is in the writer’s or artist’s mind. It is where we find a dynamic flow of life, an effect of empathy and the emotional import of literary and artistic works.

All these characteristics – the strong visual appeal, aural stimulus, the flow of the *qi*, as well as the expressive bent with symbolic associations and subtle emotions of homesickness, loneliness and sadness – that are shared by Li’s lyric and Wu’s painting centuries apart epitomises the special and long-lasting bond between traditional Chinese poetry and painting.

The view that poetry (*shi*) and painting (*hua*) are sister arts is not new, nor uniquely Chinese, however. Similar to ancient Chinese belief, the Western classical theory also holds that the arts of poetry and painting are fundamentally the same. Simonides of Ceos’ (c. 556-469 BC) notion *poesia tacens, pictura*

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘literati’ refers to scholar-officials of imperial China who were highly educated and versatile. They were normally assigned official positions after excelling in the civil-service examinations, but at the same time they were also writers, poets and artists in their own right, albeit amateurs in some cases, and hence literati artists are often contrasted with academy artists and artisans.

<sup>4</sup> For more explanation on *qi*, see Xu Fuguan, ‘Zhongguo wenxue zhong de *qi* de wenti’ in his *Zhongguo wenxue lun ji* (Taizhong: Zhongyang Shuju, 1966), pp. 297-349, and David Pollard, ‘Ch’i (*Qi*) in Chinese Literary Theory’, in *Chinese Approaches to Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch’i-ch’ao*, ed. Adele Austin Rickett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 43-66.

<sup>5</sup> See *Lun wen*, in *Sibu cong kan* (Shanghai: Shangwu chubanshe, 1920-36), 52/9a-b, also see *Wenxin diaolong*, in *Si bu bei yao* (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1927-35), 2/2b.

*loquens* – poetry as talking painting and painting as silent poetry – and the Horatian (65-8 BC) formula *ut pictura poesis*<sup>6</sup> – as is painting, so is poetry – laid basis of much aesthetic and literary thinking from the Renaissance (spanned roughly the fourteenth to the seventeenth century) until well into eighteenth century. As aesthetic conceptions and standards started to change in China during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), the West also witnessed a shift of focus during the Romantic period (roughly from the second half of eighteenth century to nineteenth century) from pure imitation to more imagination in aesthetic apprehension, and there were more interactions between art and poetry.

Take for instance the situation in France, where classical tradition held even stronger than in either England or Germany. Apart from many fruitful collaborations between artists and writers, and multiple literary influences on French Romantic painting, many poets during nineteenth-century were to seek in the visual arts a creatively stimulating dimension. Many of the most original poets – Gautier (1811–1872), Baudelaire (1821-1867), and Laforgue (1860-1887) – were also the great art critics of the period. Never before had the relationship between poetry and painting been as dynamic and creative as it was at this time. The exploration of the verbal/visual relationship still remains a central concern of twentieth-century art, literature and criticism.

Despite some striking parallels between Western and Chinese, there exists a special affinity between Chinese poetry and painting with a long and continuous tradition and abiding convention. This gave rise to an iconography, a whole repertoire of recurrent images and motifs that are shared by both poets and artists over centuries, phenomena that is not often seen in the Western tradition.

The affinity between Chinese poetry and painting has been observed by Chinese artists and scholars since ancient times. From the Tang Dynasty (618-907) onwards, the mutual interaction between painting and poetry is noticeably common. During the Song Dynasty, artists became even more conscious in seeking after poetic flavour and lyrical richness in their paintings. The most influential comment on the typical relationship between poetry and painting is perhaps the one made by Su Shi (1036-1101) on Wang Wei's (699-761) verse and painting: "Read carefully the poems of Mo Jie (Wang Wei), and you will see that there are paintings in his poems. Look carefully at the

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, see Christopher Braider, 'The Paradoxical Sisterhood: *Ut Pictura Poesis*', in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 3 *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 168-175.

paintings of Mo Jie, and you will find that there are poems in his paintings.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, “both poetry and painting are scholars’ occupations which help to express human moods and feelings. Therefore what can be a subject of poetry can also be a subject of painting.”<sup>8</sup> It is a common practice for ancient Chinese artists to paint pictures based on poetic lines, or compose poems based on paintings. Below is Ming (1368-1644) artist Wen Zhengming’s (1470-1559) visual representation<sup>9</sup> of the last two lines of a quatrain by Tang poet Wei Yinwu (737-792), which are inscribed on the painting (at the upper left-hand corner), a common practice in traditional Chinese art.

The Spring tide surges with over-night rain,  
The ferry is empty with the boat drifting aslant.



The relationship between Chinese poetry and painting is also very often observed by modern critics: Qian Zhongshu, Zhu Guangqian, Zong Baihua, Yuan Xingpei, and Li Zehou, to name only the few.<sup>10</sup> Qian Zhongshu’s essay

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<sup>7</sup> See Su Shi, ‘shu mojie lantian yanyu tu’ (on Mojie’s painting of the blue fields and misty rain), *Shu Shi wenji* (Collected works of Su Shi), vol. 70 (Zhonghua shuju, 1986); also see Shen Tsung-ch’ien, ‘Chiehchou Hsuehhua p’ien’, trans. Lin Yutang, ‘The Art of Painting’, *The Chinese Theory of Art* (London: Heinemann, 1967 [1781]), p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> Shen Tsung-ch’ien, ‘Chiehchou Hsuehhua p’ien’, trans. Lin Yutang, ‘The Art of Painting’, p. 191.

<sup>9</sup> [xy.eywedu.com/Ancient/2/mydoc005.htm](http://xy.eywedu.com/Ancient/2/mydoc005.htm)

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Zhu Guangqian’s five-column work *Zhu Guangqian meixue wenji*, which includes, among others, his well-known *Xifang meixue shi* (Shanghai: Wenyi Chubanshe, 1982); Zong Baihua’s *Weixue yu yijing* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1987); Yuan Xingpei’s *Zhongguo shige yishu yanjiu* (Beijing: Daxue Chubanshe, 1987); Li Zehou’s *Huaxia meixue* (Beijing: Zhongwai Wenhua Chuban Gonsi, 1989), as well as Li’s most popular book *Meide licheng*, which has been translated into English by Gong Lizeng, *The Path of Beauty: A Study of Chinese Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

“Zhongguo shi yu Zhongguo hua” (Chinese poetry and Chinese painting)<sup>11</sup> is certainly one of the best studies on this subject. Many overseas scholars have also contributed to this field of study: Hans H. Frankel sees paintings as soundless poems and poems as paintings in sound;<sup>12</sup> Susan Bush examined the poetry-painting relationships through the Chinese literati’s views on painting;<sup>13</sup> while Wai-kam commented on the literary concepts of *ru-hua* (picture-like) and artistic concept of *xie-i* (writing-idea) in the relationship between poetry and painting.<sup>14</sup> A few other names are also worth mentioning here: James Cahill, who has written brilliant books on the relationships between the two,<sup>15</sup> Francois Cheng, who has made extensive studies, and written at least two books in French on this subject<sup>16</sup> and Simon Leys, whose essay ‘Poetry and Painting: Aspects of Chinese Classical Aesthetics,’ as its title suggests, examines the relationship between Chinese poetry and painting in a broad context of Chinese Aesthetics.<sup>17</sup>

However, little has been done in the comparative studies between the particular genre of *ci*-poetry and painting. Centering around the *ci*-poetry of Li Yu (937-978) and Li Qingzhao (1084-1151), this paper attempts to fill in the gap in the scholarship by exploring some of the aesthetic features shared by *ci*-poetry and painting, in particular the three major styles of landscape painting in Song and the ensuing dynasties – namely: the Monumental landscape painting of the Northern Song (960-1127), the Southern style landscape painting and Flower-bird brushwork, as well as Freehand brushwork of expressionism favoured by Chinese literati artists.

As a literary genre, *ci*-poetry was originally called *Qu Ci* (tuned poetry, or lyrics of songs), and written to music and meant to be sung. Its emergence and development had much to do with folk music, especially *Yanyue*, that became

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<sup>11</sup> This essay can be found in *Jiuwen si pian* (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> See Hans H. Frankel, ‘Poetry and Painting: Chinese and Western Views of Their Convertibility’, *Comparative Literature*, vol. 9, no. 4 (1957), pp. 289-307.

<sup>13</sup> See Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shi (1037-1101) to Tung Chi-ch’ang (1555-1636)* (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>14</sup> See Alfreda Murck and Wen C. Fong (eds), *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Princeton University Press, 1991), pp359-404.

<sup>15</sup> For example, James Cahill, *The Lyric Journey: Poetic Painting in China and Japan* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). A few of his books have also been published in Chinese language.

<sup>16</sup> *Vide et Plein: La Langue Picturale Chinoise* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1979), and *Souffle-esprit: Texts Theoriques Chinois sur L’art Pictural* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> See Simon Leys, *The Burning Forest: Essays on Chinese Culture and Politics* (London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1987), pp. 13-41.

popular since the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties. In around mid-Tang many literati started to practise this genre, which was further developed in the Five Dynasties Period (907-960) and flourished in the Song Dynasty (960-1279). *The Complete Song Lyrics* alone contains up to 19900 lyrics by 1330 Song poets.

Compared with *shi*-poetry, a genre of high order, *ci*-poetry was considered an unorthodox poetic form by many traditional poets and critics, especially in the mid-Song dynasty (960-1279), when the Confucian school of idealist philosophy sprang up, which regarded “literature as a vehicle for the way”<sup>18</sup> and poetry as means for moral instruction. Consequently there were restrictions as to what should be included in literature. As *ci*-poetry was not considered an orthodox form, there were less restrictions, so it took the fancy of many poets, and became a popular poetic form of expressing delicate and complex human emotions, especially romance and love between man and women. Zhang Yan (1248-1320?), a distinguished *ci* writer and critic in late Song, says in his *Fu Qing (Verse on Emotions)*: “Singing about the moon and wind, writing about people’s temperament, *ci* is more graceful than *shi*.”<sup>19</sup> Wang Guowei’s (1877-1927) comments on *ci* as a lyric form shed more light on the characteristics of *ci*-poetry:

The *ci* form is one of exquisite refinement and sophisticated beauty.

This on one hand enables it to deal with subjects that are beyond the scope of *shi*, while at the same time limits its range. *Shi* is broader in scope, while *ci* is deeper in emotion.<sup>20</sup>

Traditionally, Chinese *ci*-poetry is classified into two schools: the *wanyue* 婉約 (delicate restraint) and the *haofang* 豪放 (heroic abandon)<sup>21</sup>. While *haofang*

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<sup>18</sup> This idea was put forward by Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073), one of the most important representative of this school. See his *Tongshu*, *Wenci* 28 in Gu Yisheng, Jiang Fan and Liu Mingjin, *Song Jin Yuan wenxue pipingshi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996), p. 753.

<sup>19</sup> See *Ci yuan (The Origin of Ci)*, in *Cihua congbian* vol. 2, j. 2, p. 7. See also Gu Yisheng, Jiang Fan and Liu Mingjin, *Song Jin Yuan wenxue pipingshi*, p. 680.

<sup>20</sup> Wang Guowei, *Renjian cihua (Lyric Remarks for the Human World)*, in *Cihua congbian* vol. 24, j. 2, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> While Zhang Yan, *zi Shuxia* (1248-1314) of late Song described the poetry of Xin Qiji (1140-1207) as heroic in his work *Ci yuan (The Origin of Ci)*, it was Zhang Xian, *zi Shiwen*, *hao Nanhu* (of the Ming Dynasty) who was the first to make such a distinction in his book *A Collection of Tones of the Remainder of Shi-poetry (Shiyu tupu)*: “There are roughly two styles of *ci*: one is called *wanyue*, and the other *haofang*. *Wanyue* poets intend to make their poetry refined in emotion while *haofang* poets tend to make their poetry grand in atmosphere. Both of these inclinations can be found in people. For example, most of Qin Shaoyou’s (Qin Guan) poetry tend to be *wanyue*, and most of Su Zizhan’s (Su Shi) poetry is *haofang*.” Wang

*ci*-poetry has a wider range of subjects for lyrical expression, *wanyue ci*-poetry is characterized by limited substance and effeminate sentiments. The beauty of *wanyue* lyric is associated with gentle and delicate sentiments, while that of *haofang* is associated with grand and heroic aspirations. The two lyricists in question - Li Yu and Li Qingzhao - have always been considered two major representative poets of *wanyue* school. I have challenged this dichotomy, and argued, from a linguistic and stylistic approach, that the poetry of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao is on the whole very different from *wanyue* convention (See Wang "Catching butterflies" in LHS 2.3, 2006). The present article will approach the issue from artistic and aesthetic perspective by comparing the poetry of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao with Chinese landscape painting, especially literati painting. A hypothesis is put forward that despite its superficial similarities with *wanyue* poetry, the poetry of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao is very different from it; it partakes some features of both *wanyue* and *haofang* poetry while sharing a great deal in common with literati painting. This renders their poetry a unique quality we define as *qingli* 清麗 (fresh and spontaneous beauty)<sup>22</sup> which is marked by a simple and natural style with a lyrical impetus and a touch of subtle enchantment.

Longinus<sup>23</sup> compared the sublime with physical greatness, vastness, spatial immensity and magnitude. Hugh Blair maintained: "sublimity produces a sort of internal elevation and expansion; it raises the mind much above its ordinary state..." In terms of emotion involved, Blair argued sublimity "is of a serious kind: a degree of awfulness and solemnity, even approaching to

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Shizhen of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) made the following summary: "Zhang Yan divided *ci* into two schools: one is called *wanyue*, and the other is called *haofang*, I would say *wanyue* school has Li Qingzhao as its master, and *haofang* school has Xin Qiji as its leader." See his work *Huacao mengshi (Flowers and Grasses Collected)*, in *Cihua congbian*, ed. Tang Guizhang (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), p. b673. This dichotomy was to be followed by generations to come. My translation of these two terms are based on that of Kang-I Sun Chang's. See her book *The Evolution of Chinese Tz'u (Ci) Poetry: from Late T'ang to Northern Sung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 160.

<sup>22</sup> Su Shi saw poetry and painting as one, and used the term *qingli* to describe the desired quality of poetry and painting: the naturalness, and freshness. See *Su Shi Shiji* (Collection of Su Shi's poetry), (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1982).

<sup>23</sup> Dionysius Longinus was a Greek literary critic of the first century. His well-known treatise *On the Sublime* was the first great example of an approach to literature that was to become very common in critical writing after the mid-eighteenth century. See *On the Sublime*, translated into English by William Smith, A. M. (London: Printed for B. Dod, 1752).

severity.”<sup>24</sup> He also claimed “the mental sublimity coincides in a great measure with magnanimity, heroism, and generosity of sentiment.”<sup>25</sup> These features by and large also characterize the monumental landscape painting of the Northern Song and *haofang* poetry.

‘Beautiful’ on the other hand refers to what is small, smooth, delicate, and gentle. It is also “characterized by gradual variation, qualities which necessarily limit the variety and intricacy essential to the picturesque.”<sup>26</sup> Similar traits can also be found in flower-bird brushwork and *wanyue* poetry.

While Wylie Sypher pointed out “the 18th-century sought in the picturesque a sentimentalized sublimity,”<sup>27</sup> Walter John Hipple, Jr. commented on the characteristics of picturesque in relation to sublime and beautiful: “picturesque has, in its origins, a more evident connection with beauty than with sublimity.”<sup>28</sup> In distinguishing the difference between ‘beautiful’ and ‘picturesque,’ Gilpin said that “roughness, either real, or apparent, forms an essential difference between the beautiful, and the picturesque.” He then gave another example: “That lovely face of youth smiling with all sweet, dimpling charm, how attractive is it in life! how beautiful in representation! but what gives that face a picturesque beauty are the dignity of character; that force of expression: those lines of wisdom, and experience; that energetic meaning, so far beyond the rosy hue, or even the bewitching smile of youth.”<sup>29</sup> Gilpin’s comments on picturesque beauty seem also to capture to some degree the main features of literati art and *qingli* poetry, and shed some fresh light on the differences between the poetry of the Li Yu and Li Qingzhao and that of conventional *wanyue* poets.

Chinese landscape painting has enjoyed an abiding valence for artistic expression and played a pivotal role in Chinese culture for the high-minded literati and the philistine alike. We find a correspondence between the styles of

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<sup>24</sup> See Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Letters*, V (London and Edinburgh, 1790) I, pp. 59-62.

<sup>25</sup> This is from another major work of Hugh Blair: *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* (London, 1790) II, p. 425.

<sup>26</sup> See Chapter 14 of Walter John Hipple, Jr., *The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque in 18th Century British Aesthetic Theory* (Carbondale: The Southern Illinois University, 1957), pp. 210-211.

<sup>27</sup> See Wylie Sypher, ‘Baroque Afterpiece: The Picturesque’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, XXVII (January, 1945), p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> See Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime*, p. 191.

<sup>29</sup> William Gilpin, *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape: To Which is Added a Poem on Landscape Painting* (Farnborough: Gregg, 1972), p. 9.



*ci*-poetry and that of painting - a resemblance between *haofang ci* and Monumental landscape painting of Northern Song; between *wanyue ci* and the Southern-style landscape and bird-flower brushwork; and between *qingli ci* and Literati painting.

### **The Monumental Landscape Painting and *Haofang Ci*-Poetry**

Monumental landscape painting reached its apogee around the mid-eleventh century. Despite differences, artists of this style of painting shared one fundamental principle: to achieve a formal resemblance, or a convincing replica of nature. Monumental landscape paintings present objective, panoramic pictures of nature, depicting the vastness and multiplicity of the natural world, especially mountains, rivers and trees. Song masters depict nature with such compelling realism that the beholders of the painting are drawn into it, so much so that they feel as if they are wandering in the mountains themselves. The picture is normally filled with layers of mountains and trees and soaring monoliths. The size of the objects being painted, the grandeur of the presentation, the lofty ideas conveyed, and the power and energy embodied in the pictures render the monumental landscape painting a beauty of power and magnitude. Guan Tong and Fan Kuan (ca. 1000-1031) and Guo Xi (fl.1020-90) are representative artists of this style.



Left: Guo Xi, *Early Spring* (Hanging scroll, ink and light colours on silk. National Palace Museum, Taipei).



Right: Fan Kuan, *Travellers Among Streams and Mountains* (Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk. 81 1/4 x 40 3/4 in. National Palace Museum, Taipei).

Fan Kuan's 'Travellers among Streams and Mountains,' dated 1000, reveals a sense of tactile immediacy and realism. "The composition is divided into three separate stages – foreground, middle distance, and background – and the towering peaks above are arranged almost symmetrically."<sup>30</sup> Guo Xi's (fl.1020-90) "Early Spring," dated 1072, also creates an impression of grandeur and power, although it is more complex and unified than Fan Kuan's work. The effect is achieved largely through a sophisticated use of ink wash, whereby mist or vapour softens and blurs the mountain silhouettes as much as unites them. The two paintings above illustrate the typical characteristics of the Northern Song Monumental painting marked by realism, macrocosm, power and grandeur; it is at once substantial in content and indefinite in meaning. All these traits also find an echo in *haofang ci*-poetry.

Like Monumental painting, *haofang* poetry is also associated with what is grand, serious, awesome, vigorous and powerful. Most of the traditionally classified *haofang* poets share this style: Xin Qiji (1140-1207), Lu You (1125-120-9), Zhang Yuangan (1091-1170), Zhang Xiaoxiang (1132-1169), Chen Liang (1141-1194), Liu Kezhuang(1187-1267), and also Su Shi to certain extend. Their poetry is marked by macrocosm, verisimilitude, vastness, grandeur, as well as sublime sentiment and strong emotions.

A few lines from Su Shi's lyric *Nian nu jiao* will suffice to show the similarities between the style of *haofang* poetry and that of the monumental landscape painting.

*Nian Nu Jiao (Charm of a Maiden Singer)*

The great river flows east,  
Roaring waves wash away,  
The gallant heroes of a thousand ages

...

Jumbled rocks penetrate the sky,  
Terrifying waves beat on the shore,  
Rolling up a thousand heaps of snow.

(QSC, p. 282)

The above lyric is reminiscent of monumental landscape paintings of Northern Song. Like the paintings of Fan Kuan and Guo Xi, Su Shi's lyric also create an impression of elevation and expansion, grandeur and power. It raises the mind much above its ordinary state; there is a degree of magnanimity, heroism,

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<sup>30</sup> See Wen Fong, *Sung and Yuan Paintings* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973), p. 22.

generosity of sentiment, and a sense of sublimity. Such features are also reflected in some of the lyrics of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao.

### **Flower-bird Brushwork and Southern-Style Landscape Painting, and *Wanyue Ci*-Poetry**

Another major artistic form in the Song Dynasty is the fine brushwork of flowers and birds. Known as *gonbi hua*,<sup>31</sup> and closely associated with the Academy paintings of the imperial court, this style of painting is marked by delicacy and realistic details. The flower-bird brushwork, as its name implies, is often confined to the presentation of flowers and birds, forming a contrast with the broad vision and varied subject matters and themes of the monumental landscape painting. However its limited presentation of the objective world is supplemented by sensitive, tender and pliable brushwork. The painting ‘The Scent of Ripe Apples Attracts Birds,’ attributed to Lin Chun, may demonstrate the major features of this type of painting: the immaculately executed details, beautiful colours and an effeminate quality. Such aesthetic quality also finds an echo in *huajian* and *wanyue* poetry.



Lin Chun *Guoshu laiqin tu Liang Song huihua* vol. 2 *Zhongguo meishuquanji* (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1989), p.123.

Like flower-bird brushwork of the Southern Song, *wanyue* poetry is associated with what is domestic, delicate, smooth, beautiful, and often pleasurable as well. The *Wanyue* School of *ci* poetry has as its founders Wen Tingyun (812-870) and Wei Zhuang (836-910) who are known as the originators of *Huajian ci* (*Among the Flowers*). As a literary genre, *ci* gained full recognition with the appearance of *Huajian Ji* (*Collection from*

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<sup>31</sup> *Gongbi hua* is one of the two major schools of traditional Chinese painting. The other one is known as *xieyi hua*, characterised by vivid expressions, as demonstrated by literati paintings in the ensuing section. While *gongbi* painting resembles Western realism, *xieyi* painting is more similar to Western impressionism. See Wu Lifu, *Zhongguo hualun yanjiu* (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1983); *Liang Song huihua*, vol. 2 in *Zhongguo meishu quanji* (Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1989); Li Zehou ‘Song yuan shanshui yijing’ in his *Meide licheng* (Taipei: Jinfeng chubanshe, 1987), chapter 9; Zong Baihua, *Meixue yu yijing* (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1987), pp. 98-103.

*Among the Flowers*), an anthology of five hundred lyrics by eighteen poets who lived between 850 and 940, and wrote in a similar style, which Ouyang Jiong (896-971) referred to as “carved jade and engraved jewel”<sup>32</sup> in the preface to the book in 940. Indeed, *huajian ci* are generally referred to as having a beautiful form with little substance, dedicated mainly to love, pleasure and also pain caused by love. Stories of secret rendezvous, passionate embraces, parting sorrows and lost love dominate *ci*-poetry. Most of the conventional *wanyue* poets fall into this category, such as Wen Tingyun, Wei Zhuang, Liu Yong (987-1053), Qin Guan (1049-1100), Huang Tingjian (1045-1105), Zhang Xian (990-1078), He Zhu (1052-1125), Yan Shu (991-1055), Yan Jidao (ca. 1030-ca. 1106), Ouynag Xiu (1007-1072), Zhou Bangyan (1056-1121), and Wu Wenying (1200-1260). Their lyrics are generally marked by its limited scope, feminine sentiment, as well as delicate beauty of rich details and colours. See, for example, Wen Tingyun’s *ci* below:

*Pusa man (Buddhist Dancers)*

On bed-screen with double-peaked hills light plays, dim and bright,  
Cloud-like hair sails across the sweet cheeks, snow-white.

Too listless to rise and paint (my) pretty eyebrows,  
Drowsy and lazy, slowly applying make-ups.

Appreciating front and back in the mirror,  
Flowers and cheeks in beauty contest.

On the newly-embroidered silk vest,  
Pairs of golden partridges rest.

(QSWC, p.194)

The lyric above exemplifies *wanyue* poetry. While the *Haofang* School is marked by grandeur and power, and a wider range of subjects for lyrical expression, the *Wanyue* School is characterized by its limited scope, stereotyped voice of female persona, general and affected sentiments and emotions, as well as a delicate and exquisite beauty, similar to that of flower-bird brushwork. What one expects to find in *wanyue* lyrics are usually ‘boudoir repinings’- the affected feminine tenderness of love and the sorrow of parting, amorous thoughts or sentimental laments – and flowery language and ornate style. Liu Yong’s parting sorrow is best voiced in his *Yu Lin Ling (Bells Ringing in the Rain)*, particularly the last few lines:

Lovers since old days grieve over parting,  
Let alone the cold and desolate autumn!

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<sup>32</sup> See Ouyang Jiong, *Huajianji xu*, ‘Preface to *Among the Flowers*’, trans. Lois Fusek, in *Among the Flowers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 33-36.

Where will I be when I sober from tonight's wine?  
On a willow bank, in the dawn breeze and waning moon.  
(QSC, p. 21)

Like academy painting of birds and flowers, *wanyue* poetry may be conventional and stale, nonetheless, this is not to suggest that it is uniformly bad. On the contrary, it has a special charm and beauty of its own, and indeed, as a poetic genre, it has played a significant role in the development of Chinese poetry. Nor is our intention to divorce the poetry of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao from the *wanyue* tradition. In fact, we maintain that the poetry of the two Lis, especially their earlier lyrics share many *wanyue* features. Take the following lyric by Li Qingzhao, for example:

*Ru Meng Ling (Like a Dream)*  
A night of scattered rain and strong wind,  
Sound sleep can't dispel the remaining drunkenness.  
I ask the person rolling up the curtain,  
She says the flowering crab-apples are as they were before.  
But don't you know? / Don't you know?  
By now the green should fat and the red thin.  
(QSC, p. 927)

This lyric represents *wanyue* sentiment of boudoir repining, and pathos on the transience and fragility of youth and beauty represented by the images of flowers which were damaged by the rain and wind. As a result among the lush (fat) leaves red flowers are barely seen.

Another type of painting that is closely related to the Academy is the Sothern style of landscape painting initiated by Ma Yuan (fl. 1190-1225) and Xia Kui (ac 1190-1225). As the Northern Song moved towards the Southern Song, aesthetic conceptions and standards started to change. Gradually, the incredible grandeur of the Northern Song monumental mountains as seen in the works of Fan Kuan and Guo Xi was replaced by a more intimate vision that prefigures the development of the Southern Song period.

'Scholar by a waterfall' by Ma Yuan represents the quintessence of the Southern Song sensibility. In this painting there are no layers of towering mountains, there is only a scholar accompanied by his servant taking a quiet stroll in a garden in Hangzhou. The scenery is intimately familiar; Hangzhou, above all else, was a city of unsurpassed beauty with lakes, parks, waterfalls, and pavilions. A similar style is found in Xia Kui's 'Moon Floating on the Pine Brook' – albeit the latter is even smaller in scope and more subtle in expression.

## *A Solitary Boat in the Autumn Chill*



Left: Ma Yuan, *Scholar Viewing a Waterfall*,

Album leaf, ink and colour on silk; 24.9x25cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
Right: Xia Kui, *Moon Floating on the Pine Brook*, *Liang Song Huihua* vol. *Zhoungguo meishuquanji huihuabian*. Beijing: wenwu chubanshe, 1989, p.123.

Southern style artists moved towards a minimalist, subtractive painting more fully engaged with the aesthetic subtleties of place and its meditative possibilities. Under their brushes, every gesture, every branch, leaf, and pine needle, and even wrinkle in the rock is a superb aesthetic statement. This style marked a step away from Northern Song Monumentalism. Instead of focusing on the description of the external world, artists were more concerned with the real nature of things, the inner emotions, as well as the expressive function of art. And this leads to the other style of painting - the freehand brushwork of expressionism favoured by literati artists.

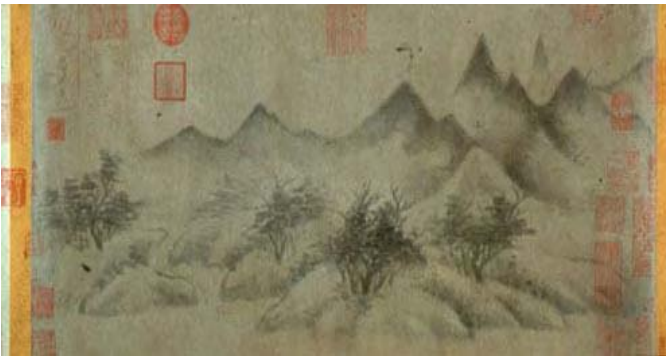
### **Freehand Brushwork of Expressionism, and the *Ci* of Li Yu and Li Qingzhao**

The freehand brushwork of expressionism by Su Shi (1037-1101), Wang Tingjun (1151-1202), Mi Fu (1051-1107) and Mi's son Mi Youren (1086-1165) became very popular among literati painters of the Southern Song. Their predecessors include Gu Kaizhi (344-405), Zong Bing (375-443) and Wang Wei (701?-761). Literati painting reached its acme during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), with the four great artists Huang Gongwang (1269-1354), Wu Zhen (1285-1354), Ni Zan (1301-1374), and Wang Meng (1309-1358), who best represented the expressive trend of the time which was carried on by the four artists of the Wu School in Ming Dynasty (1368-1644): Shen Zhou (1427-1509), Tang Yi (1470-1523), Qiu Ying (1494-1552), and Wu Zhengming (1470-1559). Flower-bird brushwork under the brush of literati artists was also

endowed with fresh meaning and new flavour that was different from the Academy style. Representative artists include Yang Wujiu (1097-1169), Zhao Mengjian (1199-1264), and Zheng Sixiao (1241-1318).

For the literati artists and poets, formal likeness was not their true goal. With a heart in tune with nature, they viewed nature through the microcosm of a single pair of trees, one or two rocks surrounded and contained by an all-pervasive void, allowing *qi* to inhabit human and nonhuman worlds at once, “making them more same than different, *interanimated*, as it were”<sup>33</sup> Tinged with literary flavour, and coloured with emotions, their paintings, whether landscape or flower-bird brushwork, marks a beginning of new taste. Almost everything - be it a stream of water, a contour of hills, a ray of moonlight, or a branch of plum blossoms, a grove of bamboos, a cluster of chrysanthemums – carries with it a symbolic significance. Apart from this strong expressive bent, literati art is also characterised by simplicity, naturalness and spontaneity.

Take Mi Youren’s painting ‘Cloudy Mountains,’ for example. It is very different from the Northern Song realistic landscape painting: there is not much formal likeness, but a personal voice – the cloudy peaks could be seen as signs of the interior peaks and valleys hidden in the painter’s heart and soul.



In *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000).<sup>34</sup>

Wang Tingjun’s and Su Shi’s paintings below best represent the essence of literati art and poetry: impassioned and forceful expressions of very often pent-up feelings as embodied in the withered branches with twists and knots,

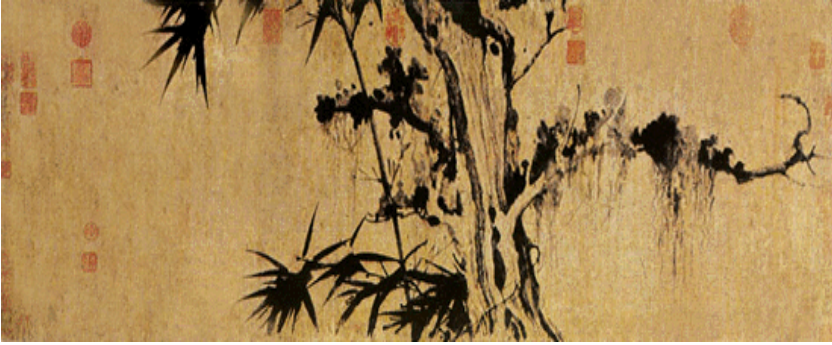
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<sup>33</sup> See Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 93-95.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1973.121.1> (June 2008)

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and odd rock, the simple strokes and sparse lines that leave large space for the *qi* to circulate, as well as the vivid and bold outlines that reveal a spontaneous and free spirit.



Wang Tingjun, *Youzhu kucha tu* (Secluded Bamboo Withered Stubbles), *Liang Song huihua* vol. 1 *Zhongguo meishu quanji huihua bian* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 158.



Su Shi, *Kumu guaishi tu* (Withered Tree With Odd Rock), *Liang Song huihua* vol. 1, *Zhongguo meishu quanji huihuabian*. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 51

Like literati painting, *qingli ci*-poetry represented by Li Yu and Li Qingzhao is also marked by its simple and natural style, strong lyrical voice, and spontaneous overflow of emotions, often sad and tragic feelings. Other poets who share similar style include; Zhang Xian (990-1078), Ye Mengde (1077-1148), Jiang Kui (1155-1221), Zhang Yan (1248-1320), Wang Yisun (1240-1290), Zhang Xiaoxiang (1132-1169), and Su Shi, to a large extent. The rest of this paper will concentrate on the comparison between the poetry of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao and literati artists, focusing on their shared aesthetic features:



expressiveness and individual voices, simplicity and natural style, spontaneity and free spirit.

### 1. Expressiveness and Individual Voices

For most Chinese literati, poetry and painting is first and foremost an expressive outlet for inner emotions rather than representations of objective world. This idea is echoed in the Western culture as well. Cousin maintains “poetry is the art that surpasses all other forms because it is incomparably the most expressive” (“*L’art par excellence, celui qui surpasse tous les autres, parce qu’elle est incomparablement le plus expressif, c’est la poésie*”).<sup>35</sup> The following bamboo painting by Ni Zan writes out the exhilaration in his art; whether the bamboo shows formal likeness or not is less important. Ni’s paintings are typically simple, even barren, but full of emotional vigor, showing a longing for a simpler, cleaner and more peaceful world. Indeed, almost every single brush stroke in his painting is an emotional statement. The bamboo below symbolises nature, simplicity, detachment, humility, flexibility and resilience.



Ni Zan, *Bamboo Branches*, ink on paper, 34x76.4cm (Beijing: Palace Museum).

The strong emotional expression, distinctive individual voice as well as symbolic connotations that mark literati painting are readily found in the poetry of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao. The expressive force in the poetry of Li Yu and Li Qingzhao is achieved, among other things, by rich images. Imagery clarifies and concretises the poet’s vision, conveys and reinforces a sensory impression. Indeed images give their lyrics a quality of immediacy and transparency similar to that of paintings, a quality highly regarded by Chinese literary critics such as

<sup>35</sup> Victor Cousin, *Du Vrai, du Beau et du Bien* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1923), p. 202.

Wang Guowei.<sup>36</sup> Understanding images involve not only appreciating them as pictures with sensuous appeals, but as impassioned entities. According to Chinese literati, a good image should be a harmonious fusion of both *jing* – perceptual objects/scenes in the empirical world – and *qing*, emotions and thoughts, similar to what T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) calls “unity of sensibility and intellect”<sup>37</sup> and what Ezra Pound defines as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time”.<sup>38</sup>

Although both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao sometimes also use hackneyed images and motifs of the *ci* poetic convention, yet, rather than expressing general and stereotyped emotions as many *huajian* and *wanyue* poets did, they managed to, as Stephen Owen observes, embody and express genuine and particular feelings in categorical and conventional language.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the images they use may not all be original, they are nonetheless often endowed with particular forces and freshness with present contingencies of individual emotions. Consequently these conventional images become revived, and the lyrical voice enhanced. Take, for instance, Li Qingzhao’s images of flowers, such as plum blossoms and cherry blossoms. What is noteworthy about these flowers is that they all have specific characteristics, reflecting specific emotions and sentiments. The images representing different stages of flowers - in buds or in blossoms, or damaged by wind and rain, or withered and fallen - correspond to the poet’s own life journey - the early, middle and late periods. There are buds just about to burst open in her earlier lyric *Yu jia ao* (*Fisherman’s Pride*, QSC, p. 926); “sweet-smelling face half open, tender and charming”; there are proud Chinese herbaceous peonies in *Qing qing zhao* (*Celebrating Clear Morning*, QSC, p. 933): “elegant looks, straight posture, and graceful carriage, all reveal natural beauty”; there are sweet-scented osmanthus which Li Qingzhao calls “the first-rate among flowers” in her *Zhe gu tian* (*Partridge Sky*, QSC, p. 930):

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<sup>36</sup> Wang Guowei maintains the highest kind of poetry should have a quality of *bu ge* (not veiled from the reader), which is often translated as transparency. See his discussion of *Yijing* (the poetic world) in his well-known work *Renjian Cihua*, ann. Teng Xianhui (Jinan: Qilu Shushe, 1994), p. 133.

<sup>37</sup> For more explanation on the issue of ‘unity between sensibility and intellect, please refer to T. S. Eliot’s ‘The metaphysical poets’, and ‘Imperfect critics’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1922).

<sup>38</sup> Ezra Pound, ‘A Retrospect’, in *New American Poetry*, eds Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Evergreen, 1973), p. 37. Originally published in *Poetry*, March (1913).

<sup>39</sup> Owen investigates how *ci* poets, including Li Qingzhao and Li Yu, give the sense of genuine feeling in their lyrics. See his ‘Meaning and Words’ in *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, ed. Pauline Yu (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 30-69.

“faint light yellow with a gentle nature and ‘fragrance.’” On the other hand, there are also gloomy and bleak pictures: “few drops of rain hastening flowers to fall” in Li Qingzhao’s *Dian jiang chun* (*Rouged Lips*, QSC, p. 932); people “thinner than the yellow flower” in *Zui hua yin* (*Tipsy in the Flowers’ Shade*, QSC, p. 929); “fallen chrysanthemums piling up on the ground” in *Sheng sheng man* (*A Slow, Slow Song*, QSC, p. 932), and in *Wulin chun* (*Spring in Wuling*, QSC, p. 931), as well as “who would sympathise the withered and fallen” in *Lin jiang xian* (*The River Fairy*, QSC, p. 927).

The flower images in the lyrics above not only add visual and pictorial appeal to the lyrics, but also carry an expressive force with a direct and distinctively individual voice, revealing the deepest and most intricate personal feelings. This forms a striking contrast with *wanyue* poetry, which was often written by men, but from the viewpoint of a female persona, and hence, very few, if any, can be viewed as a real lyrical utterance of the poets themselves. Under their pen, women, typically beautiful but suffering are almost reduced to a kind of abstraction that represents not so much an individual being as a general feeling of aloneness.

Metaphors were often adopted by the two lyricists to create kinaesthetic images that enhance the expressiveness. For example, in describing sorrow, Li Yu and Li Qingzhao used the following images. Li Yu’s *Yu meiren* (*The Beautiful Lady Yu*) ends with:

Asking me how great is my sorrow?  
It is like a river of spring water flowing eastwards.  
(QSWC p. 444)

Li Qingzhao’s *Wuling chun* (*Spring in Wuling*) ends with:

Alas! I’m afraid, the grasshopper skiff of the Twin Stream,  
Cannot carry so much sorrow.  
(QSC p. 931)

In classical Chinese poetry and painting, it is not uncommon that the feeling of ‘sorrow’ is compared to ‘a river,’ ‘a sea,’ ‘a mountain,’ ‘rain,’ or ‘grasses’ and ‘catkins,’ for that matter. For examples: Qin Guan’s line “ten thousand dots of fallen flowers, sad feelings just like sea,” and a few lines from *Qing yu an* (*Green Jade Cup*) by He Zhu (1052-1125): “It may well be asked how much idle sorrow I know, a plain of misty grasses, a whole city of flying catkins, and the intermittent drizzles in the rainy season.” However, the pictures they present formed by nominal phrases are more static. Li Yu also compares ‘sorrow’ to ‘spring water,’ but what is different is that he uses the verbal phrase ‘flowing to the east’ to suggest motion. As a result, the last line of the lyric – “It is just like a river of spring water flowing eastwards” – becomes dynamic, adding more

power to the lyric. The image of the flowing water mirrors the swelling fullness of the lyrical voice, flowing, and dashing into a powerful grandeur.

Sometimes the poets use unexpected words, which, when recognized and activated through lexical collocations, set off a chain of associations alerting the reader to new levels of meaning in the piece. The collocation of ‘carry’ with ‘sorrow’ in Li Qingzhao’s lines: “Alas! The little boat of Twin Stream, I’m afraid / Cannot carry so much sorrow” is such a case in point. She was not the first to use the concrete word ‘carry’ metaphorically in collocation with something abstract. Zhen Wenbao, for instance wrote: “Carrying parting sorrow across to the south of the River” in his lyric *Liuzhi ci* (*Willow Branch Song*),<sup>40</sup> and Su Shi also wrote: “Only carrying a boat of parting sorrow to the Western prefecture.”<sup>41</sup> However, Li Qingzhao uses the verb creatively in the phrase ‘*zai bu dong*’ (cannot carry) so that the meaning of heaviness is emphasised, and the special significance of the line foregrounded.

Both Li Yu’s *Yu meiren*, and Li Qingzhao’s *Wulin chun* above were written at the later stage of the poets’ lives, when Li Yu was taken captive by the Song Court, and Li Qingzhao became a war refuge. Their lyrics therefore are no longer confined to domestic settings, limited themes and stereotyped sentiments that are typical of *wanyue* poetry, but covered a much broader spectrum of themes, wider range of emotions. Indeed, had it not been for Li Yu who had developed and expanded the melodic lines, and broadened the topics and themes, Song *ci* might not have evolved from popular song to a full-fledged literary genre, just as Wang Guowei put it: “Not until Li Houzhu ( Li Yu ) did *ci* poets expand their field of vision and deepen their feelings. Consequently, the *ci* of musical performers was transformed into the *ci* of scholar-officials.”<sup>42</sup>

The strong subjective rhetoric in their poetry is further reinforced, among other things, by the high frequency of such dictions as ‘chill,’ ‘frost,’ ‘coldness,’ ‘tears,’ ‘worry,’ ‘sorrow,’ ‘grief,’ as well as ‘alone,’ ‘lonely,’ ‘depressed,’ ‘heartbroken,’ and ‘remorseful’; by the unusually high occurrence of interrogative mood and negative auxiliary words such as *bu*, *fei*, *mo* and *xiu* – all can be loosely translated as either ‘no,’ or ‘do not’; as well as strong assertives and exclamations, such as *zishi*, *wuyi*, and exclamatory words, such as *wunai*, *naihe* and *zen*, often rendered in English as rhetorical questions, such as:

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<sup>40</sup> See Xubeiwen ed. *Li Qingzhao quanji pingzhu* (Jinan: Jinan chubanshe, 1996), p. 68

<sup>41</sup> See Su’s lyric ‘Yu meiren’ (The Beautiful Lady Yu), *Quan Song ci*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonhu shuju, 1992), pp. 306-307.

<sup>42</sup> Wang Guoei, *Renjian cihua*, in *cihua congbian*, vol. 24, ed. Tang Guizhang (1934). Also see Tang Xianhui, *renjian cihua xin zhu* (Qilu shushe, 1981), p. 93.

“What can one do about the long, long night” (Li Yu, *Chang xiangsi*)!  
“What can be done about this word ‘grief’” (Li Qingzhao, *Sheng sheng man*)!

All of these devices help to intensify the feeling of sadness and helplessness with a keen lyrical sensibility. Together with vivid images, they contribute to the gloomy and desolate atmosphere permeating the poetic lines.

Below is a lyric by Li Yu:

*Ziye Ge (Midnight Song)*

How can life be free from sorrows and regrets?  
What is limit to my overwhelming grief?  
My native country returns in my dreams,  
Awake, tears come down in streams.

Who will climb the tower with me,  
Always remember viewing clear autumn.  
Past affairs have turned into nothing,  
I was as thought still in my dream.  
(QTWC, p. 453)

In the lyric above, there is a high frequency of words with explicit contextual meanings and emotional associations such as ‘worry,’ ‘lonely,’ ‘regrets’ or ‘remorse,’ ‘sad’ or ‘distress,’ and ‘tears.’ The second stanza brings in the dimension of the past whereby this feeling of deep regret is reinforced through the contrast between past and present, between the dream world and reality. This sense of remorse runs through many of Li Yu’s lyrics. Other examples include, ‘how many regrets, last night in my dream’ (*Wang Jiangnan*) and ‘Looking back full of regrets’ (*Lin jiang xian*). It is not hard to see the bitter remorse on the part of the poetic persona, or in this case the poet himself. His own over-sentimental and indulging nature dragged him into too deep an abyss to help himself, and, indeed, his Kingdom. According to Aristotle, a tragedy is very often caused by human limitations and errors; and a good tragedy usually involve recognition and reversal on the part of the characters. Many of Li Yu’s lyrics reveal a process of self-recognition and self-rediscovery.

The following lyric by Li Qingzhao also demonstrates how the effective use of negative auxiliary verbs enhances the subjective rhetoric:

*Fenghuangtai shang Yi Chui Xiao*

*(Playing Flute Recalled on Phoenix Terrace)...*

How many things, I want to say, yet withhold.  
My recent state of being thin has nothing to do with wine,  
Nor with autumn sadness.

The above are the last few lines of the first stanza of the lyric written between 1118 and 1120 . According to the traditional dichotomy of Li Qingzhao's life and poetry, this lyric was written during her earlier period, and consequently the lyric is often interpreted as revealing parting sorrows and lovesickness. However, a careful reading between the lines reveals a much more poignantly bitter emotion than mere lovesickness. The strong emotion of pain and helplessness is further intensified in the second stanza which begins with:

No use! No use!  
He's gone anyway this time,  
Even a thousand renditions of *Yangguan* could not stop him.  
(QSC, p.928)

The tragic note at the end brings the lyric to its emotional climax: "Where my earnest gazing stops/Now adds/A new section of sorrow." What is Li Qingzhao's new sorry, then? I agree with Chen Zumei<sup>43</sup> that Li Qingzhao was voicing her pain as an abandoned wife, a pain that gnaws her heart. This is supported by the allusions in the lyric which all refer to man's affair outside marriage (The use of allusions in her lyrics warrants a separate article).

A very dominant feature of the two Lis' poetry as analysed above is the expression-oriented structure. The persona in the lyrics often starts by expressing a particular feeling explicitly and then dwells on it throughout the lyric elaborating on the intensity of this feeling. Here we witness the fullness of *qi*, a reservoir of power that brings to the surface with strong impetus the intense emotions. More importantly, their poetry displays a careful combination of feeling and scene where all kinds of sentiments and emotions – be they vernal romance and love, autumnal melancholy and pathos or wintry sorrow and lament – find echoes in the natural world. The entity of lyrics is not maintained just by continuous, successive statements of a particular feeling, but by an artistic structure in which perception as well as conception, natural scenes as well as inner feelings, form a world of correspondence and mutual relatedness, and indeed an artistic world of a complex whole.

## **2. Simplicity and Natural Style**

As well as the strong expressive bent, Chinese literati also favoured simple and natural style. In prose, Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072) revived Han Yu's *guwen* style, which stood for classic simplicity. In poetry, simple diction was preferred to the floridness of late Tang, which had been imitated by the early Song court poets.

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<sup>43</sup> See Chen Zumei, *Li Qingzhao Ping Zhuan* (Nanjing: Nanjing xaxue chubanshe, 1995), p. 292.

Colloquial words were now used. For Ouyang Xiu and Su Shi, everyday words - the language of the street - could also be used in poetry as long as they were used appropriately. Ouyang Xiu compared Mei Yaochen's (1001?-1060) plain and fresh style to the look of a beautiful woman and the taste of olives:

His diction grows fresher and cleaner than ever;  
His thought becomes profound with age.  
He is like a beautiful woman  
Whose charm does not fade with the years.  
His recent poems are dry and hard;  
Try chewing on some – a bitter mouthful!  
The first reading is like eating olives,  
But the longer you suck on them, the better the taste.<sup>44</sup>

Typically, literati artists depict sparse landscape with ink-monochrome in sketch brushwork. This simple and natural style is also favoured by Li Yu and Li Qingzhao. Unlike *huajian* and many *wanyue* poets, who often use extravagant and baroque language, both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao tend to use plain, simple and even colloquial language to express their unaffected sincere feelings. The following lyrics will serve as examples:

'*Dao lianzi*' (Song of the Washer woman)  
The deep garden is still,  
The small courtyard is empty,  
Now and then the beating of the cold washing stone,  
Now and then the wind.  
How can I cope with the long and sleepless night,  
But count the sound and follow the moon on the blinds.  
(QTWC, p. 467)

This lyric by Li Yu is basically made of simple images: deep garden, and small courtyard, the wind and the moon, setting off a lonely figure in a boudoir unable to sleep. This is a typical boudoir lyric with possibly a female persona. The repetition "on and off the beating of the cold washing stone, on and off the wind" that evoke audile images intensifies the wakefulness. She could not do anything about the sleepless night but count the sound of the beating and follow the light of the moon. What is the cause for her insomnia? The poetic convention suggests two possibilities: either amorous restlessness or sentimental repining. The pervading cold atmosphere of the lyric indicates the latter – the persona must be thwarted in love. This is one of the earlier lyrics by Li Yu which share some of the characteristics of *wanyue* poetry. However, the poet's mood and emotions

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<sup>44</sup> See Ouyang Xiu, *Liuyi shihua*, in *Lidai shihua*, vol. 1, ed. He Wenhuan (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), p. 268.

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are brought about by simple language. Li Qingzhao's *Tianzi caisangzi* (*Picking mulberries*), is another example:

In front of the window who planted the *bajiao* tree?  
The shade covers the central courtyard.  
The shade covers the central courtyard,  
Leaves after leaves, heart to heart,  
Spreading out and rolling up with lingering feelings.

On the heartbroken pillow I hear the midnight rain,  
Dripping on and on.  
Dripping on and on,  
Worries and impairs the Northerner,  
Who's not used to waking up to hearing this sound.  
(QSC, p. 930)

The whole lyric comprises of simple images of *bajiao* (banana) tree and the rain, followed by straightforward expression of sad emotions. The use of refrain or repetition accentuates the plaintive emotions. Compared with typically decorative *huajian* and *wanyue* poetry, the poetry of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao is much plainer and blander. However, 'blandness, as it evolves, tends naturally toward flavour, which, in turn, far from remaining in barren isolation, opens itself to its superseding, revealing itself as an infinite progression.'<sup>45</sup> Indeed, just as Mei Yaochen observes:

Poetry in its essence gives voice to our affective nature;  
There is little point in shouting so loud!  
Once you realize that the principle of things consists of the plain and bland,  
From dawn to dusk, you will find yourself in the Unending Light.<sup>46</sup>

This simple and natural style is further strengthened by a mode of poetic expression that is close to popular songs characterised by colloquial language as well a narrative and dramatic effects as shown in Li Yu's lyric below:

*Pu Sa Man* (Buddhist Dancers)  
Bright flowers dim moonlight bathed in light mist,  
It's time to steal out to see my love.  
With stocking feet on fragrant steps I tread,  
Holding my shoes sown with gold thread.

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<sup>45</sup> See Laozi, B35, in *Laozi Daodejing*, ann. Wang Bi, in *Zhuzi jicheng*, vol. 3, p.20. For more explanation of the concept of blandness, also see Francois Jullien, *In Praise of Blandness: Proceeding from Chinese Thought and Aesthetics*, trans. Paula M. Varsano (New York: Urzone Inc., 2004).

<sup>46</sup> See Mei Yaochen, 'da zhongdao xiaoji jian ji', in *Wanling ji*, 24. 16a-b.



South of the decorated hall we meet,  
And I fall trembling in his arms.  
It's hard for me to come o'er here,  
So ask my darling to love me as much as he likes.  
(QTWC, p. 471)

The simple and colloquial language Li Yu used contributed to the sincerity and unaffectedness of the emotions. Wang Guowei attributes Li Yu's sincerity to his 'childlike' heart. He observes in his *Lyric Remarks for the Human World* that Li Yu having lived in the inner court, and growing up under the care of women was not a good thing for him as a king, but an advantage for him as a poet, for he had not lost the child within him: he retained throughout his life the sincerity of a child. Wang Guowei regards poets with sincere hearts as subjective poets. "Subjective poets," he says, "do not have to see too much of the world, the less they see of worldly affairs, the more sincere their disposition. Li Houzhu (Li Yu) is such a poet."<sup>47</sup> The idea that "The child is father of the man"<sup>48</sup> is not new to the Chinese. Mencius (c.372-c.289 B.C.) said "a great man is one who has not lost the heart of the new-born child."<sup>49</sup> Li Zhi (1527-1602) of the late Ming is probably the first Chinese to apply this concept of 'childlike heart' to literary creation when he asserted that 'childlike heart' is the 'true heart,' and whoever retains it is a 'true man' and will be able to produce great literature. In his opinion, the best literature of the world has always come from the childlike heart.<sup>50</sup> This may sound an overstatement, nevertheless it still has some truth in it - there might be more sincerity in childlike heart.

It is generally hard to find independent sources of information to prove whether a poet really felt the emotion that he professes to feel in a poem. Although in the case of Li Yu and Li Qingzhao some sources of information exist that suggest their emotional state while writing a particular lyric, we should not still base our judgement entirely on such information. We should take into account the artistic skill of the literary work, especially if we adopt an intrinsic approach to literature, for "it is artistic skill that produces the impression of

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<sup>47</sup> Wang Guowei, *Renjian Cihua*, annot. Teng Xianhui, *Renjian cihua xinzhu* (Jinan: Qilu Shushe, 1994), p. 98.

<sup>48</sup> This is a line from the poem "My heart leaps up" by William Wordsworth (1770-1850), in *An Anthology of English Literature Annotated in Chinese*, eds Wang Zuoliang (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), p. 657-658.

<sup>49</sup> *Meng zi*, IV, B, 12.

<sup>50</sup> See Li's 'Tongxin shuo', in *Fen shu*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1975), pp 98-99.

sincerity, not sincerity that produces artistic excellence.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the direct and sincere expression of feelings that mark the two Lis’ poetry owes much to the natural and unaffected style.

The simple and short lines also create spaces between words and images, which, like ‘blanks’ in painting, and silence in music, generate meaning, meaning beyond words, just as Sikong Tu observed: ‘It does not inhere in any single words, / Yet the utmost flair is attained.’<sup>52</sup> Indeed, the blank spaces allow *qi* to circulate and flow, creating a beauty in motion - *qiyun shengdong* ( a lifelike tone and atmosphere), the very first of the six important techniques or laws of painting summarized by Xie He,<sup>53</sup> the early sixth-century portrait painter and art critic. *Qiyun shengdong*, originally referring to the aesthetic standard for figure painting, has become the corner stone of Chinese art theory, which also applies to poetry. Compared with some other poetry with augmented lexical density, which produces the effect of solidity and opacity of meaning, the poetry of Li Yu and Li Qingzhao is more alive and transparent, creating a beauty of motion, The void in Li Yu and Li Qingzhao’s poetry is the space where the lyric-beyond-the-lyric develops, and where the words come to an end but the meaning is endless. This also contributed to the light and ethereal quality of the poetry of Li Yu and Li Qingzhao.

The poetry of Li Yu and Li Qingzhao, as analysed above, is characterized by a simple and straightforward style of writing. The words they use are colloquial, and the lyrics are usually short. The language they use is ‘plain, and easy to understand, yet expresses fresh ideas and emotions.’<sup>54</sup>

They use everyday language to fit the tunes. Simple as it is, their poetry has an enchanting quality. It reveals their mastery in coining the most sensitive and inspired utterances within the confines of the short lines. Their poetry may not be as ornate and flowery as *huajian* and some other *wanyue* poetry in terms of diction, it is nevertheless instinct with a natural charm and a subtle refreshing fragrance just like the rather humble-looking sweet-scented osmanthus, which Li Qingzhao exalts as ‘the first-rate flowers’ in her lyric *Zhegu tian*.

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<sup>51</sup> James J. Y. Liu, *The Interlingual Critic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> See Sikong Tu, *Ershisi shipin* in *Liuyi shihua* in *Lidai shihua*, vol. 1, ed. He Wenhuan (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), p. 40

<sup>53</sup> Xie made the summary in his *Hua pin*, also known as *Guhua pinlu*, see Qian Zhongshu, *Guanzhui pian* (Zhonghua shuju, 1986), p. 1353.

<sup>54</sup> Peng Suntui extols naturalness as the greatest achievement in *ci*, see his *Jinsu cihua Cihua congbian*, vol. 4, p. 1.

### 3. Spontaneity and Free Spirit

Closely associated with the natural style discussed above are originality, spontaneity, and a grand sense of abandon. Su Shi places great importance on this quality:

If anyone discusses painting in terms of formal likeness,  
His understanding is only close to that of a child.  
If when someone composes a poem it must be a certain poem,  
He is definitely not a man who knows poetry.  
There is one basic rule in poetry and painting;  
Natural genius and originality.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike artisans who paint for a living, or some Academy artists who were commissioned to paint, and hence mindful of the standards, conventions and demands, literati artists paint mainly for self-cultivation and self-amusement, so there is a greater degree of freedom, whereby they managed to express their individuality and originality in an essentially conservative artistic milieu.

There is a striking similarity in the creative process between Chinese poetry and painting, including calligraphy - all are complementary elements of an aesthetically integrated creation. This integration is reinforced through the interactions and collaborations between poets, artists and other scholars. It was not uncommon for ancient Chinese poets and artists to exchange their works, or even work together on the same piece. Song Dynasty scholar Wang Shen (1037 – ca.1093), for instance, once organised at his place a gathering of some 16 eminent poets and artists, and invited a well-known artist Li Gonglin (1049-1106) to paint the occasion. The painting was called *Xiyuan ya ji tu* (*The gathering of aesthetic inclinations at the Western Garden*). Although Li's original painting was long lost, some of the copies made by many other artists throughout the history survived, such as the one below by Song artist Ma Yuan (1190-1279).

This painting is a vivid portrait of the happy gathering of such poets and artists as Su Shi, Su Zhe (1039-1112), Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu, Qin Guan, Chao Buzhi (1053-1110), Zhang Lei (1054-1114), as well as a Buddhist and Daoist. They are all engaged in interactive literary and artistic activities: painting, writing poems or lyrics, composing and singing songs, playing zither, all impromptu, responsive and spontaneous, yet revealing profound erudition and refined taste.

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<sup>55</sup> See Su Shih, *Collected Poems*, j. 29 V.11.29a.



Chinese Art Collection, Kansas City: The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, USA

The following painting of winter bamboo and rock is a work of collaboration of five artists: Gu An, Zhang Shen and Yang Weizhen composed the painting together; and later Ni Zan added the rock, as well as the inscription in the upper right-hand corner.



Hanging scroll, ink on paper, 93.5x52.3cm (Taipei: The National Palace Museum).

Here the lines flow naturally in an inexplicable manner; such a painting is not produced by a *tour de force*, rather, it is born of a certain moment and occasion, and as such, it allows the artists to follow their own inclinations, and express their emotions through simple images of bamboos and the rock. Similarly, the poetry of Li Yu and Li Qingzhao is also marked by a spontaneous overflow of genuine feelings, free from affectation and constraint, just as Zhou Ji put it: “The lyric of Emperor Li (Li Yu), like a colt, is uncontrolled.”<sup>56</sup> Wang Zhuo made similar remarks on the characteristics of Li Qingzhao’s poetry:

Her long and short lines (*ci*) can bring out all kinds of feelings in a subtle and skilful way; they are light and exquisite, sharp and fresh with rich and varied features... She writes freely and spontaneously; I have never seen anyone so free from constraints.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> See ‘Jiecen zhai lun ci za zhu’, in *Cihua congbian*, ed. Tang Guizhang, vol. 9 (1934), p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> See ‘Biji man zhi’ in *Cihua congbian*, ed. Tang Guizhang, vol. 1, j. 2 (1934), p. 4.

Su Shi's criteria for both painting and poetry are 'natural genius and originality'<sup>58</sup>. He compares his own writing as a thousand-gallon of gushing water, flowing its natural force:

On level ground it flows smoothly and calmly and can go a thousand miles in a day with no trouble. When it twists and winds in the midst of mountains, its appearance changes with the setting... it always goes when it should go and stops when it had to stop.<sup>59</sup>

This could very well be an adequate description of the free and spontaneous style of the poetry of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao. In their poetry, there are rising-and-falling mountain ranges as well as level and smooth ground; sometimes the water flows calmly and smoothly, but very often it twists and winds, gathering momentum and surging forth until it has to stop. There is no trace of deliberate effort - it's all natural, spontaneous, free and irrepressible. Li Yu's *ci* below is a case in point.

*Yu fu ci (A Fisherman's Song)*

Waves aspire to a thousand piles of snow,  
Peach and plum trees silently display a row of spring.  
A pot of wine,  
A fishing rod,  
How many people are as free as I am?  
(QTWC, p.492)

This free spirit is highlighted in the last line of the second of his *Yu fu ci* which ends with, "I float fully free upon ten thousand waves."

A similar sentiment is revealed in Li Qingzhao's lyric below:

*Ru meng ling (Like a Dream)*

I will always remember that dusk by the brook-side pavilion,  
When too drunk I cannot find my way back.  
Having sailed to my heart's content, I return late,  
And by chance enter deep amongst lotuses.  
I row hard, / Row hard,  
Startling herons and gulls on the shore.  
(QSC, p.927)

Like Su Shi and other literati artists, Li Yu and Li Qingzhao while following the general rules of prosody, are not impeded by them, instead, they let the natural process of creation run its course. Their poetry is unfettered like a boat floating on water, and heavenly horse galloping in the sky. The naturalness and

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<sup>58</sup> *Collected Poems*, V. 11.29a;

<sup>59</sup> *Collected Poems*, X. 57. 16a.; also see Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 35.

spontaneity give their poetry an apparently effortless feeling, a free and easy look. What is more significant is that we find in their lyrics an inspired gusto, not only because they capture the essence, or spirit of things, but also because it reflects their own free spirit and intuition - miraculous, inspired and natural.

### **Conclusion**

Poetry and painting are after all 'sister arts,' and what the two have in common, more than anything else, is that both are the result of artistic creation and the object of aesthetic appreciation. The *ci*-poetry of both Li Yu's and Li Qingzhao gratifies readers' perceptions and sentiments, evokes their feelings and imaginations in the same way as literati paintings do. What this paper attempts to achieve is to create an alternative way to analyse the relationship between *ci*-poetry and Chinese painting, and to provide new insights on the study of the subject matter.

In terms of style, *Haofang* poetry is similar to the Monumental landscape painting, where the picture plane is fully occupied by panorama of the natural world: misty rivers and tiered mountains, and dominated by an overwhelming masculine solidity verisimilitude and power. *Wanyue* poetry resembles Southern Song style painting with its contentment and restraints; in particular the flower-bird paintings with limited scope, dominating feminine gentleness, and over-wrought details. Although there is in some of lyrics by both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao a wistful melancholy, a quiet charm, a subtle enchantment, and a mellifluous beauty that are not unlike the best *wanyue* poetry, most of their lyrics are very different from the *wanyue* convention. On the whole their poetry is more akin to the freehand brushwork of expressionism of literati art. It is characterised by simple images, fresh expressions and strong emotions with a natural and spontaneous flair, which can be better described as *qingli*.

As a synthesiser, *qingli* holds a middle station between *wanyue* and *haofang*, enjoying the greatest facility of union with the other aesthetic characters. It represents a substantialised beauty with variety and intricacy as well as a sentimentalized sublimity with freshness and naturalness. While *wanyue* poetry is marked by delicacy, restraint and flowery language; *haofang* poetry by vigour, power and uncontrolled passion, *qingli* poetry represented by Li Yu and Li Qingzhao tend to be more spontaneous and natural with a strong lyrical voice, often impassioned with sadness. In other words, if we compare *wanyue* poetry to the 'rosy hue,' or even the 'bewitching smile of youth,' *qingli* poetry with its fresh and lucid beauty shows more dignity of character; force of

expression; lines of wisdom and experience - a unique charm that is far beyond the rosy hue.

Like literati painting, the poetry of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao does not only produce the visual stimuli but also deliver a sustained expression of human emotions, often pent-up and tragic feelings; more importantly, it transcends the general demeanour and stereotyped sentiments of the time to articulate distinctive individual voices. Like in literati painting, in the poetry of both Li Yu and Li Qingzhao the external realities are shaped and moulded to form part of the artistic world that is characterised by a natural beauty.

Possessed with all the features discussed above, the poetry of Li Yu and Li Qingzhao has certainly reached the zenith of artistic achievement in *ci*-poetry; and that is why scholars today still extol the strong and lasting aesthetic appeal of their poetry. Indeed their poetry takes us not only on a life journey of heart and soul but also on an artistic excursion, as literati paintings do, to a land of exquisite beauty, where a solitary boat anchored amidst autumn chill, and from the vast vault of heaven comes a plaintive cry of a cuckoo.

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