

Lasting Sorrow: Chinese Literati's Emotions on their Journeys

Ping Wang

On the *Sui* Dyke,
How many times I've seen
Willow branches touching water, gently waving goodbye.
Ascending to look toward homeland,
Who knows the feeling of a weary traveller in the strange land?
Along the road with pavilions for rest and send-off,
Year in and year out,
Thousands of willow twigs must have been broken off.
(QSC, vol. 2, p. 611)¹

This is the first stanza of *Lanling Wang* (*To the Tune 'Sovereign of wine'*), a lyric written by Zhou Bangyan (1056-1121), one of the most well known lyricists of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). Here, the poetic persona (the poet himself in this case) is about to take leave on the embankment built during the Sui Dynasty (589-618). It was customary for ancient Chinese to break off a twig from a willow tree to express their reluctance to part, as the word 'willow,' pronounced as *liu*, is homophonous with the word 'to stay.' The sight of willow trees with their waving branches awakens, in the poet, reminiscences of the countless farewells and parting sorrows taking place at river banks such as this one. In the second stanza, the boat that carries the poet has already left the bank, and the poet, lost in the memory of a previous parting scene with his lover, looks back, and sees a distant figure still standing on the dyke. The third stanza begins with: "Grieved and laden with regret," and ends with:

Lost in thoughts of past affairs,
All seems but a dream,
In secret I shed my tears.

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¹ The lyrics and poems cited in this article, unless otherwise stated, are all taken from either of the following: *Quan Song Ci* [QSC] (*A Complete Collection of Ci-Poetry in Song Dynasty*), ed. Tang Guizhang (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965); *Quan Tang Wudai Ci* [QTWC] (*A Complete Collection of Ci-Poetry during Tang and Five Dynasties Periods*), ed. Huang Yu (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1986); and *Quan Tang Shi* [QTS] (*A Complete Collection of Tang Poetry*), ed. Lin Debao (Dalian: Dalian chubanshe, 1997). *Shi* (often translated as poem), and *ci* (often translated as lyric), are two major poetic genres in Classical Chinese literature.

This lyric epitomises the typical lifestyle of ancient Chinese scholar-officials² who often found themselves travelling far away from their home and loved ones.

At the outset, I would like to clarify two points that are closely related. To begin, I have used the term ‘literati’ to refer to the scholar-officials of imperial China from the Sui Dynasty to the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1912. These were the scholars who became government officials after earning academic degrees by passing the rigorous civil service examinations. By the Song Dynasty (960-1279), with the reinforcement of civil-service examinations, as well as the process of economic development and overall prosperity, the literati, as a class, had been firmly established as the dominant arbiters of ideology and culture. Successful candidates would be sent to official posts, usually away from their respective hometowns. Constant political rivalry at court also led to an increase of decrees of banishment and exile. As a result, these scholar officials travelled constantly. This is why the poetry under discussion is mostly, albeit not exclusively, from the Song period. Travels that had shaped the lives of many literati at the time were woven into the complex fabric of social, as well family structures, leaving far-reaching traces in all corners of Song society. On the national level, for instance, it contributed to strong longing for homeland and patriotism; on a personal level, it was responsible for family tragedies and boudoir sorrows. The latter will be examined in detail through the female respondents to the journeys of men in the second section of this paper, ‘Thwarted Lovers.’

Secondly, I have interpreted the word ‘journey,’ or ‘travel,’ in a broad manner, centring on the lives of the literati class. Given that the entire premise of the scholarly meritocracy was based on mastery of the Confucian classics, it is not surprising that the emotions the scholar-officials experienced on their journeys were deeply influenced by their received Confucian values. With this as the underpinning narrative of the journeys examined here, this article is based on the typical journeys undertaken by scholar-officials, including attempts at the civil service examinations, the search for career opportunities, the taking up of official positions, and the demotion from their posts and exile, as well as their fleeing as war refugees. Other types of travel and their accounts are thus omitted from discussion here, such as the journeys taken by Buddhists who ventured beyond the imperial borders into India in search of religion. Also

² The term ‘scholar-officials’ refers to the literati 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. In some cases, however, amateurs and literati artists are often contrasted with academy artists and artisans.

omitted is another major type of travel favoured by literati: travel for the sake of self-cultivation and artistic pursuit. While this paper is inevitably linked to the literati tradition which values the aestheticisation of the human experience through personal cultivation,³ the issue of self-cultivation and artistic pursuit warrants a full exploration, and will be the topic of a later publication. If the road of the travellers in this paper bred a bitter sorrow, the land they travel on in the next should nurture a sweeter sentiment through more controlled sorrow.

This article, then, is focused on the typical emotions experienced by Chinese literati during their journeys on the long and bumpy road. Disappointment with unsuccessful careers, grief over unfulfilled love, and lament over the transience of existence, among other things, constitute a familiar literati narrative that is marked by a tone of melancholy and sorrow. Turning the pages of classical Chinese literature, particularly poetry, one can see stains of sweat and tears, and hear moans of yearning.

Frustrated Officials

Feelings of frustration have saturated literary pieces written by scholar-officials on their journeys. The following lyric is written by Liu Yong (987-1053), a very popular lyricist of the Song Dynasty:

Ding fengbo (To the Tune 'Settling wind and waves') –

What can I do about the long journeys,
And the downcast and sickly mood.
Of late, dejected, I've tasted the bitterness
Of wandering about seeking office.

(QSC, vol. 1, p. 21)

This lyric is a true reflection of the poet's life. Despite his poetic talent, Liu suffered a series of setbacks and frustrations, wandering around looking for career opportunities. The same emotions are echoed in many of his other lyrics, such as his *Bashen Ganzhou (To the Tune 'Eight beats of a Ganzhou song')* below. Following an elaborate depiction of cold and bleak autumn scenery in the first stanza, the second stanza begins:

I cannot bring myself up to ascend the height,
To look in the distance toward my homeland far away,
Thoughts of returning home cannot be stopped.
Over the winding tracks of past few years, I sigh,
Why is there such a long and bitter delay?

³ For more information about the literati tradition, particularly their view on the nature of the universe and art, see Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shi (1037-1101) to Tung Ch'i-ch'ang (1555-1636)* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); and Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011).

(QSC, vol. 1, p. 43)

Indeed, long and bitter is his wait for an official appointment; he didn't receive one until late in his life. The lyric continues, imagining how his lover waited in vain, time and again, for the boat that would carry him back to her. The deep sorrow is intensified in the rhetorical question of the closing lines: "How could she know that I, leaning against the balustrade here, am laden with sorrow as well?" *Qi shi* (*To the Tune 'Lady Qi'*) is another of Liu Yong's long lyrics written during his demotion to a minor position in present-day Hubei Province at the age of fifty. On his way, he waded along the water's edge and ascended the mountains, where loneliness kept him awake all night long at the inn:

The road is long and winding,
The traveller is desolate and miserable.
Staying in an inn, overwhelmed by loneliness and sadness,
He spent sleepless nights.
At the solitary inn, the days drag on like years.

(QSC, vol. 1, p. 35)

Furthermore, the trials and tribulations Chinese literati had to go through in order to pass the civil service examination, and the shame and frustration they had to endure if they failed, are vividly portrayed in the poem below:

Chang'an Jiliu xing (*Wondering in Chang'an as a stranger*) –

Comb my hair only once every ten days,
With each brush comes dust flying into the air.
Only every thirty days have a few drinks,
And each meal is but plain and simple fare.
Ten thousand things all have their good times,
Only I alone don't feel the warmth of spring.
Those who fail the exam have no visitors,
Those who excel are surrounded by eager friends.

(QTS, j. 372, vol. 2, p. 1432)

This poem, marked by its disgruntled and sorrowful tone, was written by the Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Meng Jiao (751-814). After many years of failed attempts to gain entry into the highest imperial examination, he finally gained qualification as a candidate, and went to Chang'an, the capital, to sit the exam, only to fail again. He was then left stranded, unkempt, and gloomy in Chang'an as a stranger. The poem was written during this period, mirroring the dire straits of his life and venting his grievances over the social snobbery he experienced.

Zhao Ding (1085-1147), moreover, was a statesman and poet of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). He advocated attempts to recover territory lost to the Jin Dynasty (1140-1234), but was banished to Hainan Island, a very remote and backward place after falling out of the court's favour, where he was cruelly persecuted by Qin Hui (1090-1155), the Chancellor of

the Song Dynasty who also played a part in the political execution of the patriotic general and poet Yue Fei (1103-1142). Zhao committed suicide by going on a hunger strike. Zhao wrote many lyrics on his journey of exile and during his stay in Hainan, such as *Xing Xiang zi (To the Tune 'Joy of eternal union')*:

Ten thousand *li* to the remotest corner,
Three years of journey on the sea

...

Raise my eyes to look at the sky.
The capital is not in sight
Gazing into distance,
I shed old tears in sadness.

(QSC, vol. 2, p. 947)

Another one of his lyrics, *Man Jiang hong (To the Tune 'The River is all red')*, paints a self-portrait: "On the way to the remotest corner is a wanderer with a broken heart and white hair" (QSC, vol. 2, p. 944).

Disillusioned and frustrated, many poets expressed their regrets in pursuing official careers, such as in the lyric below by Lu You (1125-1210) of the Southern Song:

Zhen zhu lian (To the Tune 'Real pearl curtain') –
Water Inn, mountain village, and the rugged roads,
Thoughts and emotions that accompany my way
are like floating catkins of late spring days.

...

Scholar officials are prone to this mistake,
I regret in the year back then I didn't make
the decision to row my boat the other way.

(QSC, vol. 3, p. 1589)

Zhao Ding also expressed regret in his lyric *He sheng zhao (To the Tune 'Celebrating holy morning')*:

On the horseback southbound to the remotest regions,
Mountains after mountains,
And plaintive cries of cuckoo in the moonlight,
Remind me to turn back.

(QSC, vol. 2, p. 947)

Su Shi (1037-1101), one of the greatest Chinese poets of all time, and a dominant figure in Chinese literati culture, was also assailed with difficulties and setbacks during his lifetime. Demoted and exiled many times, he wrote numerous lyrics and other pieces, expressing his regret for having followed this path. Tired and weary with service and official life, and longing to go into retreat, Su wrote in his *Lin Jiang xian (To the Tune 'Immortal overlooking the river')* that:

I long regret that I'm no master of myself,

When can I forget about gains and losses?
Night is deep and still and water stirs ripples.
I intend to vanish with the little boat on the sea,
and spend the rest of my life carefree.
(QSC, vol. 1, p. 287)

This frustration with one's career was further aggravated by a strong sense of loneliness and homesickness, as expressed in Su Shi's lyric *Yong yu le* (*To the Tune 'Joy of eternal union'*):

A weary wanderer at the end of the earth,
Finds in the mountain the road to final settling place,
Towards my homeland I exert my longing gaze.
(QSC, vol. 1, p. 302)

Zhou Bangyan's lyric below likewise describes the loneliness he felt when he was staying in an inn during one of his journeys:

Jie dixie (*To the Tune 'On small steps'*) –
At the waiting inn red maple leaves stripped off the trees,
Are tossing around with the wind
In the cold night and frosty moon,
to accompany the lonely traveller...
(QSC, vol. 2, p. 606)

In the second stanza, the poet expressed his strong longing for his lover, so much so that sad tears moistened his pillow. Fan Zhongyan (989-1052) also shed tears in his *Sumu zhe* (*To the Tune 'Screened by Su curtain'*):

A homesick heart,
Loaded with heavy thoughts along the road.
...
When moonlight is bright, don't lean alone on rails of high tower,
The wine that went to sad bowels,
has turned into homesick tears.
(QSC, vol. 1, p. 12)

Tang Poet Du Mo (803-852) also writes in *Lodging in an Inn*:

In the Inn all alone without good company,
I'm lost in sadness and melancholy.
In the cold lamp light I recalled past affairs,
The plaintive cry of goose makes me too sad to sleep.
(QTS, vol. 3, j. 525, p. 2031)

Below is the second stanza of Qin Guan's (1049-1100) *Ruanlang gui* (*To the Tune 'Man returns'*):

Dream of the homeland is broken,
Homesick heart in bleak solitude,
Once again a year has come to an end.
(QSC, vol. 1, p. 463)

The poet then goes on to say that while everybody returns home for the family reunion on New Year's Eve, he was all alone, far away from home, in a remote area in present-day Chenzhou, Hunan province, where mail never reached him. This same loneliness and sadness is expressed in some of the other lyrics he wrote during this period, when he was in exile in Hunan. In *Ta sha xing* (*To the Tune 'Treading on Grass'*), for example, he writes:

Shut up all alone in the Inn how can I bear the chill of spring,
and the cries of the strayed cuckoo while sun is setting.
(QSC, vol. 1, p. 460)

In another lyric entitled *Su mu zhe* (*To the Tune 'Concealed by southern curtain'*), Zhou Bangyan begins with a description of the lotus leaves, which remind him of his hometown south of the Yangtze River, that is known for its beautiful water ponds and lotus flowers:

Hometown is far away,
When can I go back?
My home is in the land of Wu,
But I've long been a stranger in the capital.
(QSC, vol. 2, p. 603)

The lyric ends with the poet dreaming about rowing a boat to the beautiful lotus pond in his sorely missed homeland.

In the Chinese literati tradition, however, homesickness is often extended beyond families. Confucian scholars had a strong sense of social service and commitment. Despite repeated career setbacks and personal tragedies, many of them still showed great concern and responsibility for the fate of their country, and remained loyal and patriotic to their lost land. The Song Dynasty is a case in point. It is divided into two distinct periods: the Northern Song (920-1127), with the capital in the northern city of Bianjing (present-day Kaifeng of Henan Province), and the Southern Song (1127-1279), where the capital was relocated to the southern city of Lin'an (Present-day Hangzhou of Zhejinag Province) when the Song court lost control of northern China to the non-Chinese Jurchens who founded the Jin Dynasty (1140-1234) and had to flee to the South. Many people, including poets, became war refugees there. The political and social upheaval had great impact on the life and work of Chinese literati. Take Xin Qiji (1140-1207), for example, who not only witnessed this historical change, but actually participated in a major military uprising against the Jurchens. After he joined the Southern Song court, he was also involved in an effort to reclaim the lost territory of the Zhongyuan (Central Plain, or Central China). Although he served as an official in the court, he still considered himself a stranger in the South like a solitary wild goose, and never stopped thinking about his lost country in the north. *Shui long yin* (*To the Tune of 'Ode to the water dragon'*) (QSC, vol. 3, p. 1869) was

written when he was touring a beautiful scenic spot with a well-known pavilion, where all he could see was sorrow, and all he could feel was pain.

This was also what Zhu Dunru (1081-1159) saw and felt when he ascended the city wall of Jinling (present-day Nanjing of Jinagsu Province). Below is the second stanza of his lyric *Xiang jian huan* (*To the Tune 'Joy at meeting'*):

The Central Plain is in chaos,
 Officials are scattered in distress.
 When to regain our frontiers?
 Sad wind blows over Yangzhou my tears.
 (QSC, vol. 2, p. 867)

Li Qingzhao's (1084-c.1151) lyric *Tianzi Chou nu'er* (*To the Tune 'Lengthened form of ugly maid'*)⁴ was also written after she fled to the south with other refugees from the north:

In front of the window who planted the *bajiao* (banana) tree?
 The shade covers the central courtyard.
 The shade covers the central courtyard,
 Leaf after leaf, 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, vol. 2, p. 930)

This is one of Li Qingzhao's last lyrics. It was written in 1147, or a bit later, when she was over sixty years old. By this time she had gone through a great deal of hardships and misery in her life. With the Northern Song overtaken, Li Qingzhao had to leave her native land in the North, and flee to the South. This lyric was written when she was seeking shelter in the region of present day Jiangsu or Zhejiang Provinces. It is an autumn night, and she cannot fall asleep; the sound of the raindrops on the *bajiao* tree also drip on her heart, reminding her once again about her native country in the north. *Bajiao* is a plant usually grown in the south; that is why Li Qingzhao, a northerner, a stranger in the south, is not used to the sound of raindrops on a *bajiao*. Her husband's death in 1129 was already a tragic circumstance, and now her personal tragedy was aggravated by national catastrophe. This dramatic change in her life broadened her vision, and contributed to the profound sadness displayed in her poetry.

⁴ This lyric is also known as *Tianzi cai sangzi* (*To the Tune of 'Gathering mulberries'*).

Li Yu (937-978), moreover, is a unique figure among lyricists. Growing up in the imperial court and becoming an emperor after his father died in 961, Li Yu indulged himself in the opulent life of the imperial court until 975, when his kingdom was overtaken by the Song, and he himself was taken into captivity in the Song capital, where he remained a prisoner till his death three years later. The year 975 was as much a turning point in his poetry as in his life. The lyrics written thereafter were permeated with loneliness, homesickness, and bitterness. While Li Yu was not a competent emperor, he was certainly a very talented poet. He was also good at music and art (painting and calligraphy), both of which contributed to the special charm of his poetry. His *Ziye ge* (*To the Tune 'Midnight song'*) is but one example:

How can life be free of sorrow and regret?
What is the limit to my overwhelming grief?
My old country returns in my dreams,
Awake, tears come down in streams.
Who would climb the high towers again?
While the clear autumn views are kept in my brain.
Past events have turned into nothing,
I am as if still in my dreams.
(QTWC, p. 478)

This is one of Li Yu's last lyrics written when he was a captive of the Song.⁵ Just like Li Qingzhao, what Li Yu presents to us is not just his personal feelings, but profound grief over his lost kingdom.

Both Li Yu and later Li Qingzhao, consciously or otherwise, and as shown by the poetry above, contributed to a greater range of subject matter than the dearth hitherto found in the poetic genre of lyric (*ci*). Indeed, it would be fair to say that if Li Yu had not done so, Song lyric might not have evolved from popular song into a full-fledged, canonised, literary genre. As Wang Guowei (1877-1927), a well-known Chinese literary critic, observes:

Not until Li Houzhu (Li Yu) did lyricists expand their field of vision and deepen their feelings. Consequently, the lyric of musical performers was transformed into the lyric of scholar-officials.⁶

Thwarted Lovers

Throughout the history of ancient Chinese literature, there are some tales about happy romances and congenial couples, as well as images of beautiful, talented, and docile women, with whom frustrated scholars find an inn to rest in the company of after long and hard journeys; providing a harbour from wild

⁵ See Ke Baocheng (ed.), *Nantang Li Houzhu Ci Shi Quan Ji* (Taiyuan: Shanxi Gaoxiao Lianhe Chubanshe, 1995), pp. 2-3.

⁶ Wang Guowei, *Renjian cihua*, in Tang Guizhang (ed.), *Cihua congbian*, vol. 24, j. 1, p. 2.

winds, and waves, and a home to indulge in warmth and love. Indeed, some of these women become scholars' favourite companions and confidants. Zhaoyun, Su Shi's beloved concubine, is such an example. Despite harsh conditions of Hainan Island, Zhaoyun accompanied Su Shi on his exile all the way there, giving him comfort and support. Su Shi adored her, exalting her as a goddess.

Unfortunately, there are far more tragedies than happy stories. The constant travel of scholar-officials meant more separations, more estranged relationships, more extramarital affairs, and more abandoned women. Each of these cases gave Chinese literati, and especially women, endless sorrow and pain. Qin Guan (1049-1100), for instance, uses the image of forever-growing grasses to express his long lasting sadness after parting with his lover in his lyric *Ba Liu zi* (*To the Tune 'Eight and six'*):

Leaning against the railings of the high pavilion,
The parting sorrow is just like fragrant grasses,
When the lush and green are destroyed, they'll keep growing.
(QSC, vol. 1, p. 456)

Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072), one of the most influential figures of Northern Song literature and politics, is also known for his fondness for singing girls, and his romantic poetry about them. He has written numerous lyrics on parting sorrow as well. *Ta sha xing* (*To the Tune 'Treading grasses'*) is but one of them, and it was written at an Inn during one of his trips away from his beloved:

At the waiting inn, the plum blossoms have withered and fallen,
...
Further I go, further parting sorrow grows,
Lasting endlessly just as spring water flows.

The second stanza moves away from the inn to the boudoir, where his lover was also suffering from lovesickness:

Inch by inch my soft heart is broken to pieces,
Drop after drop rouged tears trickle down my cheeks...
(QSC, vol. 1, p. 123)

The tragic love story between poet Lu You and his wife Tang Wan, who was also a poet, is perpetuated on the walls of the Garden of the Shen Family in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. Lu You and his cousin Tang Wan loved each other so much that they decided to marry. Lu's mother, however, didn't like her daughter-in-law, and forced them to divorce, and each subsequently remarried. Years later when Lu You was visiting the Shen Garden, he had a chance encounter with Tang Wan, who was also touring the place with her new husband. The sight struck a tender chord in Lu You's heart, and he wrote a lyric on the wall. In response, Tang Wan also wrote a lyric next to it, using the same tune title: *Chai tou feng* (*To the Tune 'Phoenix hairpin'*).

In the first stanza, Lu You says how regretful he is about the divorce, and how sad he has been all those years since their separation. In the second stanza, he diverts his attention to Tang Wan with all his tenderness, followed by a helpless and mournful cry at the end:

Spring is still as green,
But she looks emaciated and thin.
Tears have soaked her kerchief with red stains.

...

Our oath should still exist,
But no letters could be sent.
No! No! No!

Tang Wan's lyric echoes the same grief:

We've gone separate ways,
Over are our old days,
My sick heart twists like a long rope of swings.

...

For fear that my grief would be detected,
I swallow my tears, and pretend contented.
Hide! Hide! Hide!

(QSC, vol. 3, p. 1602)

Not long after that, Tang Wan died of grief, which left a deep scar in Lu You's heart. He would often go back to the Garden over the next forty years, and composed many other lyrics in memory of Tang Wan.

While Lu and Tang were deprived of the right to pursue their own happiness, some female poets could not escape the tragic plight of Chinese women, that is, being abandoned by the men they loved. In the following lyric, Yan Shu (991-1055) assumes a female persona's voice, as was the convention of Song lyric:

Yu lou chun (To the Tune 'Jade tower spring') –
Green willow, fragrant grasses, and traveller's pavilion,
The young man abandons me, and leaves with a light feeling.

...

The end of the sky and cape of land has their limits,
Only my pine for love is boundless.

(QSC, vol. 1, p. 108)

If the voice in the lyric above is general and stereotyped, we can hear a very personal and distinctive voice of a woman thwarted in love in the lyric by Li Qingzhao (1084-c.1151):

Fenghuangtai shang yi chui xiao (To the Tune 'Playing flute recalled on Phoenix Terrace') –

Incense turns cold in the animal-shaped gold censer,
Quilt raises a red wave,
I get up, dejected, too listless to comb my hair.

My make-up box is covered with dust – I don't care,
 The sun already hangs high on the curtain hook.
 I fear the sorrow of parting and its lingering pain,
 Many things I had wanted to say are still left unsaid.
 My recent state of emaciation,
 Has nothing to do with wine,
 Nor with autumn sadness.
 (QSC, vol. 2, p. 928)

The enforced separation due to war, natural calamity, and political office was a frequent trial borne by Chinese families and friends, and hence the pathos of leave-taking between husband and wife, and between courtesans and patrons, has been constantly evoked. A close study, however, shows that very few of Li Qingzhao's lyrics are in fact about parting sorrows alone; most of her lyrics, written even during her earlier days, are emotionally much more complex and painful. The plaintive mood that permeates many of the lyrics written before her husband's death is at odds with her supposedly happy life then, and suggests a relationship that was not as perfect as generally portrayed.

The speculation of conjugal infidelity on the part of her husband, a National University student, was not totally groundless, if we take into consideration the historical and social background of their time. As Dorothy Ko observes:

The consolidation of the examination as the sole channel to a bureaucratic career and hence formal political power in the Southern Song engendered a symbiotic relationship between the literati and courtesan culture. The candidate's political dominance elevated the social standing of the courtesan, an integral part of the candidate's rites of passage to elite manhood and his eventual prize to claim ... The successful candidates in the Tang dynasty, the Presented Scholars, brought their entourage to celebrations in the pleasure quarters in the capital city. The National University students of the Song dynasty, too, were not unfamiliar with ways of the trade.⁷

In the first stanza of *Fenghuangtai shang yi chui xiao*, Li Qingzhao describes how downhearted she was, and that she was in no mood to do anything; she did not care when incense in the burner died out, she did not get up until the sun was up high, she was too lazy to fold up her quilt and comb her hair, and her jewel case was covered with dust. The poetess was getting very thin, but she maintains that this is neither due to too much drinking or her sentimental

⁷ See Dorothy Ko, 'The Written Word and the Bound Foot: A History of the Courtesan's Aura,' in *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, eds Ellen Widmer and Kang-I Sun Chang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 74-100.

lament over autumn. Answers to the real reasons may be drawn from the second stanza:

Be done, be done!
He is going,
Even a thousand renditions of *Yangguan*,⁸
Could not stop him.
I think of the *Wuling* person far away,
And the mist encasing the *Qin* tower.
Only the flowing water in front of my chamber,
Remembers my earnest gazing all day long.
Where my earnest gazing stops,
Now adds, a new section of sorrow.

The term “*Wuling* person” appeared in Tao Yuanming’s masterpiece *Taohua yuan ji* (*Notes on the Land of Peach Blossoms*), referring to people going on a long journey far away from home. Wang Zhihuan’s line, “Chen and Li lost their way then came back, green peaches and flowers fell to *Wuling* brook,” is more relevant to Li Qingzhao. As the story goes, during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), two men, Liu Chen and Ran Li, went to *Tiantai* Mountain to gather medicinal herbs, and got lost in the mountains. They saw two beautiful fairy maidens by the brook, and were so attracted to them that they stayed in the mountains for about six months.⁹ This allusion provides us with a clue to the overtone of Li’s lyric; she is getting so thin recently not because of the wine or the autumn season, or even the sheer parting sorrow. Her sorrow is much deeper and sharper.

Similarly, “mist encasing the *Qin* tower” alludes to a fairy tale in which Long Yu and her husband Xiao Shi lived in a tower known as “*Qin* tower” for ten years, and once caught in the wind they would fly side by side.¹⁰ Li Qingzhao, however, who accompanied her husband for about ten years when they lived in solitude, was to be left alone in the “*Qin* tower” by her husband when he resumed office. So her disappointment that her husband insisted on leaving despite her repeated urge for him to stay, and her “new section of sorrow,” her worry that what happened to Chen and Li may happen to her

⁸ ‘*Yangguan*’ refers to a farewell song popular at the time. A well-known poem by Wang Wei, one of the greatest Tang poets, entitled ‘*Weicheng Qu*,’ was set to such music. The last two lines of the poem read: “Urge you to drink yet another cup of wine, there will be no old friends West of *Yangguan*.” See *Quan Tang Shi* (*A Complete Collection of Tang Poetry*).

⁹ This story was originally from *You Ming Lu* (*The Records of the Dim and Bright*), a collection of tales mainly of mystery and the supernatural, written by Liu Yiqing (403-444), which has since been adopted by many writers over the centuries.

¹⁰ See Liu Xiang, ‘*Xiao Shi*,’ in *Lie xian zhuan* (*Stories of Immortals*), vol. 1.

husband, gnawed at her heart. The sharp agony and poignant sorrow lingered on in a few more of her lyrics written around the same period.

Many other allusions that Li Qingzhao used in her lyrics are also related to men's love affairs with other women. The opening line of Li Qingzhao's lyric below alludes to an earlier lyric by the late Tang poet Xue Zhaoyun to the same tune *Xiao chongshan* (*To the Tune 'Small hills'*). It begins with "spring has arrived at the Long Gate [*Changmen*], spring grasses are green," which is quoted verbatim by Li Qingzhao:

Spring has arrived at the Long Gate, spring grasses are green.
 The river plum buds have just started to open,
 Not in full blossom yet.
 Cloud¹¹ pot crushes jade¹² into powder,
 Keep the morning dreams,
 Stir a cup of spring.
 The shadow of flowers press on the heavy door,
 Light moonlight spread on the thin curtains.
 A fine dusk.
 In two years for three times we let spring down,
 Come back,
 And try to enjoy spring this year.

The word *Changmen* is often used to express palace grievances. Originally, *Changmen* is a name of a palace in the Western Han (206 BCE-24 CE). It has been conventionally used in poetry to refer to 'cold palaces,' places to which disfavoured queens and concubines were banished. This allusion, again, directs us to the implied meaning of the lyric, where knowledge of the historical background of this lyric is also necessary. We know that Li Qingzhao's father was one of the Yuan You members¹³ and, according to historical records, in

¹¹ 'Cloud' refers to the blue colour of the tea.

¹² During the Song dynasty, drinking tea was very popular. A favourite kind of tea was a mixture of tea and other spices made into small balls, which had to be pulverised before use.

¹³ Yuan You is the period that refers to Emperor Zhe Zong's reign for about nine years until the empress dowager's death. Zhe Zong's father, Emperor Sheng Zong, liked Wang Anshi's (1021-1086) idea of reform, and placed those people in important positions. When Sheng Zong died, his sixth son Zhe Zong, then aged only ten, succeeded to the throne with the Empress dowager actually holding court from behind a screen. The empress, on the other hand, didn't like Wang Anshi's idea of reform and abolished the new law, instead putting some senior officials like Su Shi in important positions. When the empress died in the eighth year of Yuan You, Zhe Zong started to hold court himself and changed the title from Yuan You to Yuan Shaosheng. Zhe Zong then restored the new law abolished earlier when the empress was in control, and discriminated against those officials favoured by the empress dowager during the Yuan You period. By 1102, a year after Li Qingzhao married Zhao Mingcheng, the rivalry between the new political power and the Yuan You group intensified, which had disastrous consequences on Li Qingzhao; on one end stood her father-

1103 an imperial edict was issued to announce that none of the children of Yuan You members, no matter whether they were holding an official post or not, were to be allowed to stay in Bianjing, the capital.¹⁴ Being a daughter of a Yuan You member, Li Qingzhao had to leave the capital and went back to her native place in Shandong to live there for a couple of years, during which time she might have occasionally come back to Bianjing to visit her husband, who still managed to hold an office there.¹⁵

Chronologically, this lyric was very likely written after Li Qingzhao came back to the capital; it would have been exactly two years and three springs from 1103 to early 1106. Geographically, the lyric described the surroundings of the house in which she lived before she got married, and in whose yard she had planted a river plum tree. The question, however, is why she did not live with her husband after she came back to him. Why did she stay in her own boudoir? The allusion in the opening line might provide some answers. Li Qingzhao felt that the beautiful spring was meaningless; indeed, the more enchanting the spring was, the more distressed she became, for her home without her husband was but a limbo. She thus pleaded with her husband to come and spend the spring with her.

Such an allusion is also found in Li Qingzhao's lyric *Lin Jinag xian* (*To the Tune 'Immortal at the river'*), in which the opening line is again taken from another lyric, *Die lian hua* (*To the Tune 'Butterflies love flowers'*) by Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072). Li Qingzhao prefaced her lyric with the following remarks: "The revered Ouyang wrote *Die Lian Hua*, in which there is a line: 'deep, very deep, how deep,' which I ardently love. I will use it in my lyric with the old tune of *Lin Jiang Xian*" (QSC, vol. 2, p. 929). Why does she like Ouyang Xiu's line so much? What does his lyric convey? The following is the first stanza of Ouyang Xiu's *Die lian hua*:

The courtyard is deep, very deep, how deep?
Willows pile up mist,
Countless layers of curtains.
Where the jade reins and carved saddles seek pleasure,
The buildings are high but the *Zhangtai* road¹⁶ is not to be seen.

The poetic persona in Ouyang's lyric expresses her distress and misery. Her husband goes out to seek pleasure, leaving her alone at home, cut off from the

in-law, while on the other stood her father, who was included in the list of 120 'treacherous' Yuan You members to be persecuted. See Zumei Chen, *Li Qingzhao ping zhuan* (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1995), pp. 29-32.

¹⁴ See Bi Yuan, *Xu Zizhi tonjian* (*Addition to the Mirror for the Wise Ruler*), vol. 88.

¹⁵ Chen, *Li Qingzhao ping zhuan*, p. 144.

¹⁶ *Zhangtai* Road is the name of a street in Chang'an during the Han dynasty. The name is often used to refer to places where prostitutes reside.

outside world by the deep courtyard and layers of curtains. The poor woman's bitter experience must have touched the right chord in Li's heart, so she began her *Lin jiang xian* with the same line:

The courtyard is deep, very deep, how deep?
 Cloud windows and mist pavilions are often closed.
 Tips of willows and calyxes of plum blossoms start to show.
 Spring has returned to Moling trees,
 A person lives as a stranger in Jiankang city.
 Sing of the moon and the wind – how much's happened,
 Now I'm getting old without accomplishing anything.
 Who takes pity on the wan and lonely – scattered?
 Previewing lanterns is not interesting,
 Going for a walk in the snow – I'm in no mood.

This lyric was written around 1128 when Zhao Mingcheng was a senior official in Jiankang, also known as Jiangning. Readers would often wonder why Li Qingzhao, the first lady of Jiangning, was in such low spirits. The opening line and the allusion of *Zhangtai* in Ouyang's lyric are highly suggestive; the two antitheses "Spring has returned to Moling trees, A person lives as a stranger in Jiankang city," and "Previewing lanterns is not interesting, Going for a walk in the snow – I'm in no mood," intensify the feeling of sadness. While spring has found its home among the trees, the poetess is like a fallen leaf, drifting alone to this strange land.

Like the female persona in Ouyang Xiu's lyric, Li Qingzhao, too, is thwarted in love and loaded with pain. Her anguish is aggravated by her awareness of the passage of time – she is "getting old" – and the remorse she feels when she looks back at her life as she has gone through so much, yet has not achieved anything. Carrying such profound grief, how could she possibly enjoy the lanterns or snow?

Zhu Shuzhen (1135-1180) was another very talented poetess of the Song Dynasty. Like Li Qingzhao, she was also from a gentry family, and was well educated. Her marriage was even less fortunate than Li's, who at least married someone who shared some common interest with her, leading to a few happy years during the earlier stages of their marriage. In her earlier years, Zhu was hopelessly in love with a scholar who abandoned her, which left a long-lasting scar upon her heart. She then entered an arranged marriage with a petty official who gave her nothing but disappointment and pain. Not only was he a person of low character, he was visiting brothels and even brought a prostitute home with him one night. Later in life she found her true love, only to be separated from him due to war. Her indulgence in her newly found love was considered disgraceful, even by her own family, who had allegedly burnt her poems and lyrics. Her profound grief is well reflected in the titles of her two poetry

collections, *Duanchang ji* (*A Collection of heart-breaking poems*) and *Duanchang ci* (*Heart-breaking lyrics*). She remained sorrow-ridden and extremely lonely towards the end of her life, as can be seen in her lyric *Jianzi mulanhua* (*To the Tune 'Shortened form of lily magnolia'*):

Alone I walk, alone I sit,
Alone I chant, alone I drink, and alone I sleep.
Lost in sadness, I stand still,
Alas! Torturing me comes also the spring chill,
Such feelings who could have seen,
Half of my make-ups have been washed up by tears.
Plagued with both sorrow and illness,
The cold lamp keeps me from my dream.
(QSC, vol. 2, p. 1405)

Insofar as travel caused pain, women who were left behind endured no less, and perhaps even more, than male literati, whose journeys left a trail of afflictions on forlorn and forsaken hearts.

Dejected Scholars

Through constant journeying, Chinese literati have come into close contact with the natural world, reinforcing the Confucian tradition of interdependence between people and cosmos, and the correspondence between the seasonal changes and human emotions. This conforms to the great corpus of Confucian ritual proprieties, which, according to *Liji*,¹⁷ “embodies the heaven and the earth, follows the patterns of the four seasons, balances *yin* and *yang*, and comports with human feeling.”¹⁸ Indeed, the affinity with nature and its landscape, and the vital *qi*,¹⁹ has afforded Chinese scholars a keen literary

¹⁷ *Liji* is often translated as the *Book of Rites*, or *Classic of Rites*. It is one of the Five Classics of the Confucian canon, the other four being the *Book of Songs*, the *Classic of Changes*, the *Book of History*, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

¹⁸ See *Li Chi: Book of Rites*, trans. James Legge (Oxford: Kessinger Publishing, 2003).

¹⁹ *Qi*, sometimes translated as ‘energy,’ or ‘vital energy,’ is a very important concept in traditional Chinese philosophy, art, and literature. Although different critics have held different views on the functions of *qi*, it has always remained central to the issue of artistic creativity. The earliest discussion can be found in Cao Pi’s *A Discourse on Literature* (*Lun Wen*) in *Si bu beiyao*, where *qi* is often conceived as the expression of man’s nature or personality. Later critics, however, tend to associate *qi* 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 works. For more discussions on the issue of *qi*, see Xu Fuguan, ‘The Issue of Qi in Chinese Literature’ (*Zhongguo wenxue zhong de qi de wenti*), in *Collected Essays on Chinese Literature* (*Zhongguo wenxue lunji*) (Taizhong: Zhongyang shuju, 1966), pp. 297-349. Some Western scholars also explore the notion of *qi* and the changes it has undergone throughout its history. See David Pollard, ‘Ch’i (*Qi*) in Chinese

creativity and sensibility, as well as an acute awareness of the cyclical rhythms of natural processes, including the transience of youth, beauty, and human existence that accounts for another dimension of their lasting sorrow. Melancholic sentiments thus run through the history of classical Chinese literature. Chinese poets, for instance, would heave a sigh over withered flowers, and shed tears at fallen leaves; raindrops on *wutong* leaves would chill their skin, and cuckoo's cries at dusk would startle their hearts. The awareness of the passage of time has contributed significantly to the tragic tone of classical Chinese poetry. Take, for instance, Li Qingzhao's *Dian jiang chun* (*To the Tune 'Rouged lips'*):

Lonely boudoir,
 Every inch of my heartstring is a thread of sorrow.
 I cherish the spring but spring has gone,
 A few raindrops hasten the flowers falling.
 Leaning on railing after railing,
 I am still not in a good mood.
 Oh, where is he?
 Sweet grass spreads as far as the sky,
 I strain my longing eyes to his way back.
 (QSC, vol. 2, p. 932)

Qu Yuan (c.340-278 BCE), arguably the first poet in Chinese literary history, states in his long poem *Li sao* (*On Encountering Sorrow*):

Afraid that time would race on and leave me behind.
 ...
 The days and months hurried on, never delaying.
 Springs and autumns sped by in endless alternation.
 I worry about the withering and falling of grasses and flowers,
 And fear that my Beauty would fade too...

The same narrative is also apparent in the *Nineteen Old Poems* (Eastern Han Dynasty, 25-220). The idea that life is a voyage, that people are but travellers, that all transient life is a fleeting moment, and that, do what one may, the flowers will wither and fall, is expressed in the poems below.²⁰ Take, for example, Poem 11:

Turning my carriage, I yoke the horses and leave;

Literary theory,' in *Chinese Approaches to Literature from Confucius to Liang Ch'i-ch'ao*, ed. Adele Austin Rickett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 43-66; Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics*; Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe (eds), *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Nathan Sivin, *Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Centre for Chinese Studies, 1987).

²⁰ These few poems are all from the *Collection of Nineteen Old Poems in Wen xuan* (Shanghai: guji chubanshe, 2000), vol. 29.

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The Journey is long, travelling distant roads.

...

Flourishing and decay has its own time

Man's life is not like gold and stone,

How can he expect to have longevity?

Furthermore, Poem 12 states:

The Eastern wall is high and long,

Stretching endlessly into the distance.

...

The four seasons are forever changing,

How swift goes the time.

Poem 13, moreover, says:

I urge my carriage on, out through the eastern gate,

Look in the distance at the graves north of the wall.

...

Time passes like the morning dew,

Life is like a traveller lodging in an inn.

Lacks the firm endurance of metal and stones.

I do not contest that the pathos over the fragility of youth and transiency of life is a universal theme, and that the emotion of peripatetic and rusticated poetry and melancholic sorrow are common literary affectations, and not purely drawn from the experiences of journeying. I contend, however, that travel has played a pivotal role in the lives of Chinese literati; it brings together the internal and external landscape whereby hills, rivers, foliage, or a solitary goose not only constitute the geographical and environmental qualities of travel, but also, and more importantly, cultivate and transmit emotional aesthetics.

While the Han Dynasty poems cited above deliver an outward focused, travel based narrative that is more extroverted and explicit, the lyrics of the Song Dynasty, especially those written in the early *wanyue*²¹ style, are more

²¹ Traditionally, Chinese *ci*-poetry is classified into two schools: that of 'delicate restraint' (*wanyue pai*) and that of 'heroic abandon' (*haofang pai*). This classification was first made by Zhang Xian, a Ming Dynasty scholar, in his book *A Collection of Tones of the Remainder of Shi-poetry* (*Shiyu tupu*), and was to be followed by critics and scholars for centuries to come. I have used Kang-I Sun Chang's translation of the two terms; see Kang-I Sun Chang, *The Evolution of Chinese Tz'u (Ci) Poetry: from Late T'ang to Northern Sung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 160-205. Many other contemporary scholars also follow this traditional dichotomy in their discussion of *ci*. See Xie Tangfang, *Zhongguo cixueishi* (Chendu: Bashu shushe, 1993), pp. 99-106, 438-441; Shuen-fu Lin, 'The Formation of a Distinct Generic Identity for Tz'u,' in *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, ed. Pauline Yu (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 3-29; Grace S. Fong, 'Engendering the Lyric: Her Image and Voice in Song,' in *Voices of the Song Lyric in China*, ed. Pauline Yu (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 107-44; and Ye

restrained and subtle. The following lyric written by Li Qingzhao during her early years, for instance, is marked by sensitivity and a sentimental voice:

Ru meng ling (*To the Tune 'Like a dream'*) –
Last night the rain was sparse and wind strong,
Sound sleep did not dispel the remaining drunkenness.
I asked the person rolling up the curtain,
She said the flowering crab-apples are as they were before.
But, don't you know?
Don't you know?
The green should be fat and the red thin.
(QSC, vol. 2, p. 727)

Through a brief conversation between the poetic persona (Li Qingzhao herself) and her housemaid, this lyric accentuates a typical boudoir sentiment. The pathos of the transience and fragility of youth and beauty is implied in the striking image formed by the use of synaesthesia – green is 'fat,' and red 'thin' – of the flowers barely seen among the lush ('fat') leaves as a result of the damaging wind and rain.

Years later, having gone through so much in her life, Li Qingzhao's tone becomes much gloomier in her lyric *Sheng sheng man* (*To the Tune 'Slow, slow song'*):

Yellow chrysanthemums cover the ground, piled up,
Withered and damaged.
Now who is there to pluck them?
Sitting by the window,
All alone, how can I wait for darkness to fall?
The patter of rain on the *wutong* leaves,
Lasts till darkness, dripping, and dropping.
At such times,
What can be done about this word: grief!
(QSC, vol. 2, p. 932)

Li Yu's *Wu ye ti* (*To the Tune 'Crows crying at night'*), furthermore, mourns the human helplessness of the passage of time and the tragic loss of his kingdoms, which left him remorseful until the end of his life:

Trees have lost their rosy colours;
Too soon, too soon.
What can one do about the night wind and cold rain?
Like the rouged tears,

Jiaying, *Tang Song ci shiqi jiang* (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1989), pp. 265-291, 321-355. I have, however, challenged this dichotomy elsewhere. See Ping Wang, 'Catching Butterflies: A Stylistic Approach to Classical *Ci*-poetry,' *Linguistics and the Human Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2008), pp. 461-483; and Ping Wang, 'A Solitary Boat in the Autumn Chill: Chinese *Ci*-poetry and Literary Painting,' *Literature & Aesthetics*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2010), pp. 123-153.

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They fill my heart with pity and tenderness.
When will the red flowers appear again?
My regrets will last forever like water flowing east.
(QTWC, p. 196)

This lyric also reminds one of another of Li Yu's lyric, *Lang tao sha* (*To the Tune 'Waves washing away sands'*), in which he writes:

Beyond the curtain comes the rain, pattering and pattering,
Spring mood is waning.
The silk quilt can't endure the cold just before dawn.
In my dream, not knowing I am a stranger,
For a moment, I indulge in pleasure.
Don't lean alone against railings,
The boundless land,
Bidding farewell is easy; meeting again hard,
Flowing water, fallen flowers – spring's gone,
Heaven and earth.
(QTWC, p. 476)

'Spring' is often associated with youth and beauty, where 'rain,' another familiar motif in Song lyrics, usually suggests the destructive force of nature, or creates a chilly and gloomy atmosphere which, in this case, is in tune with the mood of the second line, where Spring is almost over. The poet implied his own wakefulness through the rich images; the visual image of "curtain," the audible image of "the patter of rain," and the tactile image of "the cold;" all these images create an evocative nightscape of distress. The poet's momentary indulgence in his dream world, where he is not aware that he is a stranger, makes the tone of the lyric more poignantly tragic.

The poetic world created by many lyricists such as Li Yu and Li Qingzhao arise from the concerns of the self, before extending to a broader sphere and higher concerns relating to the nation and humanity. Words such as 'land,' 'dream,' and 'wine,' embodying an intensely lyrical motif linked with remembrance of things past, and feelings of nostalgia, open up a wider horizon of the spiritual and emotional world. What the reader finds in their poetry are various planes of social reality, and a whole spectrum of human emotions. The awareness of the transient nature of human life lends their poetry a profound power, as embodied in the poignant and universal metaphor found in Li Yu's lyric below:

Yu meiren (*To the Tune 'The Beautiful Lady Yu'*) –
Spring flowers, autumn moon, when will all this ever end?
Of past affairs, how much do I know?
The east wind blew into my little tower again last night,
My old country, I cannot bear to look back in the bright moonlight!
The carved railing and jade stairs should still be there,
Only the rosy cheeks will have faded.

Ask me how great is my sorrow?
 It is like a river of spring water flowing eastwards.
 (QTWC, p. 478)

Tragically, not long after Li Yu had composed this lyric, his life journey came to an ultimate end; with a tormented psyche he died,²² a stranger and prisoner in a land far away from his lost kingdom.

Conclusion

Over the canvas of the Chinese landscape, trekking through hills and across rivers, were a trail of battered scholar-officials whose brows were, as Shakespeare puts in *Richard II*, full of discontent, hearts of sorrow, and eyes of tears. Thwarted in life and career, Chinese literati would consign their anguish and sorrow to writing, resulting in great literature, especially poetry, from which we also hear the heart rending sobbing of women who, laden with the baggage left by men's travels, had to undergo the pain of emotional journeys themselves.

The relationship between one's suffering and writing has long been observed by Chinese philosophers and writers. Confucius, for instance, encouraged his students to read poetry as "poetry can be used to vent grievance."²³ Qu Yuan asserted that "the pent-up emotions will lead to expression of emotions (in poetry)."²⁴ This is also a recurrent theme in *Shijing* (*The Book of Songs*), the first collection of Chinese poetry. In the preface to *The Records of Grand Historians*, moreover, it is commented that all great works from *The Book of Songs* onwards had been works of "pent up melancholy."²⁵ Han Yu (768-824) ranked the poetry written by "melancholy emaciated writers"²⁶ as the highest in quality. Such a connection is also echoed in Western literature, seen in the poem below by the British poet Samuel Butler (1612-1680):

And poets by their sufferings grow,
 As if there were no more to do,
 To make a poet excellent,
 But only want and discontent.²⁷

²² Li Yu was allegedly poisoned by the Song Emperor Taizong in 978 after he had written lyrics that lamented the destruction of his Kingdom by the Song. See the *Moji* (*The Silent record*) of the Song Dynasty.

²³ See 'Yanghuo,' in *Lunyu* (*The Analects*).

²⁴ Qu Yuan, 'Xi Song,' in *Jiu Zhang*.

²⁵ See 'Tai gong shi zi xu,' preface to *The Records of Grand Historians*.

²⁶ See Han Yu, 'Beiji zeng Li Guan,' in *Quan Tang Shi*, j. 321, p. 2.

²⁷ Samuel Butler, 'Miscellaneous Thoughts,' in *The Poetical Works of Samuel Butler* (Boston: Houghton, Osgood and Company, 1880), vol. 2, p. 297.

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Through forced or self-imposed exile, ancient Chinese literati often found themselves travelling far away from their centre and home, causing pain not only to themselves but also to those left behind. In addition to loneliness and homesickness, their poetry embodies an intensely lyrical motif linked with remembrance of things past, feelings of nostalgia, and regret, as well as a yearning for their lost country. Their awareness of the contrast between the constancy of nature and ephemeral human existence, the relentless passage of time and the inevitable decay of beauty, adds yet another tragic dimension to this literary discourse, marked by melancholy and sorrow.