

## The Works of Li Qingzhao

# Library of Chinese Humanities

## Editors

Sarah M. Allen, Williams College

Paul W. Kroll, University of Colorado

Christopher M. B. Nugent, Williams College

Stephen Owen, Harvard University

Anna M. Shields, Princeton University

Xiaofei Tian, Harvard University

Ding Xiang Warner, Cornell University

# The Works of Li Qingzhao

Translated by Ronald Egan

Volume edited by Anna M. Shields

De Gruyter

This book was prepared with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

ISBN 978-1-5015-1263-6  
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-1-5015-0451-8  
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-1-5015-0443-3  
ISSN 2199-966X



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License. For details go to <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018955405

*Bibliografische Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek*

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2019 Ronald Egan, published by Walter de Gruyter Inc., Boston/Berlin  
The book is published with open access at [www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com).

Typesetting: AscoTypesetters, Hong Kong  
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

[www.degruyter.com](http://www.degruyter.com)

# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	ix
--------------------	----

## Chapter 1: Classical Poetry (*shi* 詩 and *fu* 賦)

1.1 春殘	The End of Spring .....	1
1.2-3 浯溪中興頌詩和 張文潛 (二首)	The Wuxi Restoration Eulogy Tablet, Matching a Poem by Zhang Wenqian (Two Poems) .....	1
1.4 分得知字	Written Upon Being Assigned the Rhyme “Zhi” .....	10
1.5 感懷	Stirred by Feelings.....	10
1.6 曉夢	Dawn Dream.....	12
1.7 咏史	On History .....	16
1.8 偶成	Written on Impulse.....	16
1.9 烏江	Wu River .....	18
1.10-11 上樞密韓公 工部尚書胡公 (二首)	Presented to Lord Han of the Military Affairs Bureau and Lord Hu of the Ministry of Works (Two Poems).....	18
1.12 夜發嚴灘	Setting Out at Night from Yan Rapids .....	32
1.13 題八咏樓	Inscribed on Tower of Eight Odes.....	32
1.14 打馬賦	Rhapsody on Capture the Horse .....	34
1.15 皇帝閣端午帖子	Verse Inscription for the Emperor’s Residence on the Double Fifth Festival .....	46
1.16 皇后閣端午帖子	Verse Inscription for the Empress’s Residence on the Double Fifth Festival .....	48
1.17 夫人閣端午帖子	Verse Inscription for the Imperial Ladies’ Residence on the Double Fifth Festival.....	48
1.18 佚句	Fragments .....	48

## Chapter 2: Prose (*wen* 文)

2.1 詞論	On Song Lyrics .....	54
2.2 投翰林學士綦密 禮啟	A Letter Submitted to Hanlin Academician Qi Chongli .....	60
2.3 金石錄後序	Afterword to <i>Catalogue of Inscriptions on Metal and Stone</i> .....	68
2.4 打馬圖經序	Preface to a Handbook for Capture the Horse .....	86
2.5 祭趙湖州文 (斷句)	Eulogy for Zhao, Governor of Huzhou (fragment) ...	92

## Chapter 3: Song Lyrics (*ci* 詞)

3.1 南歌子	To the tune “Southern Song” (天上星河轉) .....	94
3.2 轉調滿庭芳	To the tune “Fragrance Fills the Courtyard, Modulated Version” (芳草池塘).....	96

3.3	漁家傲	To the tune "The Fisherman is Proud" (天接雲濤連 曉霧).....	98
3.4	如夢令	To the tune "As If in a Dream" (常記溪亭日暮).....	100
3.5	如夢令	To the tune "As If in a Dream" (昨夜雨疏風驟).....	100
3.6	多麗	To the tune "Gorgeous" (小樓寒).....	102
3.7	菩薩蠻	To the tune "Bodhisattva Barbarian" (風柔日薄春 猶早).....	106
3.8	菩薩蠻	To the tune "Bodhisattva Barbarian" (歸鴻聲斷殘 雲碧).....	106
3.9	浣溪沙	To the tune "Sands of the Washing Stream" (莫許杯 深琥珀濃).....	108
3.10	浣溪沙	To the tune "Sands of the Washing Stream" (小院閑 窗春色深).....	108
3.11	浣溪沙	To the tune "Sands of the Washing Stream" (淡蕩春 光寒食天).....	110
3.12	鳳凰臺上憶吹簫	To the tune "On Top of Phoenix Tower, Recalling Flute Music" (香冷金猊).....	110
3.13	一翦梅	To the tune "A Single Cutting of Plum Blossoms" (紅藕香殘玉簟秋).....	114
3.14	蝶戀花	To the tune "Butterfly Loves Flowers" (淚搵征衣脂 粉暖).....	116
3.15	蝶戀花	To the tune "Butterfly Loves Flowers" (暖日和風初 破凍).....	118
3.16	鷓鴣天	To the tune "Partridge Sky" (寒日蕭蕭上鎖窗).....	118
3.17	小重山	To the tune "Low Rows of Hills" (春到長門春 草青).....	120
3.18	憶王孫	To the tune "Remembering the Prince" (湖上風來 波浩渺).....	122
3.19	臨江仙	To the tune "Immortal by the River" (庭院深深深 幾許).....	124
3.20	醉花陰	To the tune "Drunk in the Blossom's Shadows" (薄霧濃香愁永晝).....	126
3.21	好事近	To the tune "A Happy Event Draws Near" (風定落 花深).....	126
3.22	訴衷情	To the tune "Telling My Deepest Feelings" (夜來沈 醉卸妝遲).....	128
3.23	行香子	To the tune "Incense Offering" (草際鳴蛩).....	130
3.24	清平樂	To the tune "Clear and Peaceful Music" (年年 雪里).....	132
3.25	漁家傲	To the tune "The Fisherman is Proud" (雪里已知春 信至).....	132
3.26	孤雁兒	To the tune "The Solitary Wild Goose" (藤床紙帳 朝眠起).....	134
3.27	滿庭芳	To the tune "Fragrance Fills the Courtyard" (小閣 藏春).....	136

3.28	玉樓春	To the tune "Spring in the Jade Tower" (紅酥肯放瓊苞碎).....	138
3.29	念奴嬌	To the tune "Recalling Her Charm" (蕭條庭院).....	140
3.30	聲聲慢	To the tune "Note after Note, Long Song" (尋尋覓覓).....	142
3.31	永遇樂	To the tune "Always Having Fun" (落日鎔金).....	144
3.32	憶秦娥	To the tune "Remembering Qin E" (臨高閣).....	146
3.33	添字醜奴兒	To the tune "Vile Charmer, Long Version" (窗前誰種芭蕉樹).....	148
3.34	鷓鴣天	To the tune "Partridge Sky" (暗淡輕黃體性柔).....	150
3.35	長壽樂	To the tune "The Joy of Long Life" (微寒應候).....	150
3.36	蝶戀花	To the tune "Butterfly Loves Flowers" (永夜厭厭歡意少).....	154
3.37	怨王孫	To the tune "Resenting the Prince" (夢斷漏悄).....	156
3.38	怨王孫	To the tune "Resenting the Prince" (帝里春晚).....	156
3.39	浣溪沙	To the tune "Sands of the Washing Stream" (樓上晴天碧四垂).....	158
3.40	浣溪沙	To the tune "Sands of the Washing Stream" (髻子傷春慵更梳).....	160
3.41	浣溪沙	To the tune "Sands of the Washing Stream" (繡面芙蓉一笑開).....	160
3.42	武陵春	To the tune "Spring in Wuling" (風住塵香花已盡).....	162
3.43	點絳脣	To the tune "Dabbing Crimson Lips" (寂寞深閨)....	162
3.44	浪淘沙	To the tune "Waves Scour the Sand" (素約小腰身).....	164
3.45	春光好	To the tune "The Spring Scene is Fine" (看看臘盡春回).....	166
3.46	河傳	To the tune "River Transport" (香電素質).....	166
3.47	七娘子	To the tune "Seventh Maiden" (清香浮動到黃昏) ..	168
3.48	憶少年	To the tune "Recalling Youthful Years" (疏疏整整) ..	170
3.49	玉樓春	To the tune "Spring in the Jade Tower" (臘前先報東君信).....	172
3.50	新荷葉	To the tune "New Lotus Leaves" (薄露初零).....	174
3.51	點絳脣	To the tune "Dabbing Crimson Lips" (蹴罷鞦韆)....	176
3.52	醜奴兒	To the tune "The Vile Charmer" (晚來一陣風兼雨).....	178
3.53	浪淘沙	To the tune "Waves Scour the Sand" (簾外五更風).....	178
3.54	木蘭花令	To the tune "Magnolia Flowers" (沉水香消人悄悄).....	180
3.55	生查子	To the tune "The Quince" (年年玉鏡臺).....	180
3.56	青玉案	To the tune "Dark Jade Table" (征鞍不見邯鄲路)...	182
3.57	臨江仙	To the tune "Immortal by the River" (庭院深深深幾許).....	184

3.58	山花子	To the tune "Wildflower Seeds" (採破黃金萬點輕).....	184
3.59	山花子	To the tune "Wildflower Seeds" (病起蕭蕭雨鬢華).....	186
3.60	殢人嬌	To the tune "The Distressed Lady's Charm" (玉瘦香濃).....	188
3.61	慶清朝	To the tune "Celebrating a Fine Morning" (禁幄低張).....	190
3.62	減字木蘭花	To the tune "Magnolia Flowers, Short Version" (賣花擔上).....	192
3.63	瑞鷓鴣	To the tune "Auspicious Partridge" (風韻雍容未甚都).....	194
3.64	品令	To the tune "Rankings" (零落殘紅).....	194
3.65	鷓鴣天	To the tune "Partridge Sky" (枝上流鶯和淚聞).....	196
3.66	青玉案	To the tune "Dark Jade Table" (一年春事都來幾)...	198
<b>Endnotes</b> .....			201
<b>Major Sources</b> .....			207

## Introduction

Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084–*ca.* 1155) is unquestionably the most celebrated woman writer in Chinese history. Yet what is unquestionable about her perhaps begins and ends with that celebrity. Her life played out against the background of an epochal event in Chinese history, the fall of the Northern Song dynasty, which gives drama and special interest. Yet because of circumstances unique to her, her life and legacy are also fraught with uncertainties for us today. Here, I briefly introduce her life and works and outline the problems of interpretation that they present. Yet at the outset we should also say that for all the questions surrounding Li Qingzhao and how one should read her works, the core of what she left us—a few dozen lyrics set to songs, a handful of other poems, a few prose works—has a certain luster and pathos unique among all Chinese poets. It is these qualities that have intrigued readers through the millennium since her death, and kept them coming back to her, unendingly, even as each new age brings its own prism of predilections through which it views her.

### Early Life and Marriage

Li Qingzhao was born into a family with a history of official service and of literary accomplishment. Her father, Li Gefei 李格非 (*ca.* 1045–*ca.* 1105), was a respected literatus who was on the periphery of the circle of the great Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), and thus had social connections with several of Su Shi's friends. One of those literati, Zhao Buzhi 趙補之 (1053–1110) is said to have noticed the literary talent of Gefei's daughter, Li Qingzhao, at an early age, and remarked about it several times to other literary gentlemen of the time. The girl was not only talented as a poet but also evidently headstrong and fiercely competitive. At the tender age of seventeen, she seems to have written two lengthy poems on the historical theme of a seventh-century stone inscription commemorating the “restoration” of the Tang dynasty upon the imperial defeat of the An Lushan 安祿山 rebellion that tried to topple it. Although this was a well-established historical theme, the immediate inspiration for Li Qingzhao's two poems were poems on the theme produced by leading literati—men her father's age and more prominent than he. Li

Qingzhao not only wrote a lengthy poem matching the rhymes of these pieces, which must have been circulating and well known at the time, she also adopted a radically different stance. Instead of praising the imperial generals who suppressed the rebellion, as the original Tang inscription and other Song period poems did, she castigates the folly of the emperor and court, whose misguided policies and early favoritism toward An Lushan emboldened him until he felt confident enough to rebel. Evidently not satisfied with her first poem, Li Qingzhao went on to write a second one, which is even more outspoken in its criticism of imperial conduct and policy. The boldness and iconoclastic tone of her two poems make the pieces that inspired hers pale by comparison. That a young girl could have produced such works was unheard of and attracted comment at the time, though no one says her poems are actually superior to the others, which we would say today.

When she was eighteen, in 1101, Li Qingzhao was married to Zhao Mingcheng 趙明誠 (1081–1129). It was not unusual for a woman to marry so young. Mingcheng himself was only three years her senior and was still a student in the National University when they wed. It must have seemed a good match for Li Qingzhao's parents to have arranged for their daughter. Mingcheng's father, Zhao Tingzhi 趙挺之, was an eminent court official, serving then as vice minister in the Ministry of Rites. The next few years would be eventful and politically complicated ones for the Zhao and Li families. In Song dynasty political history, opprobrium is attached to this period for the purge of the so-called Yuanyou 元祐 faction (named after the reign period in which they were active, 1088–1093) and the proscription of its members' writings. Li Gefei was one of the hundreds of Yuanyou partisans whose names were publically displayed on steles denouncing the group. Meanwhile, Zhao Tingzhi, a member of the ascendant faction, saw his fortunes rise, as he was promoted to ever more powerful positions, eventually becoming one of the grand councilors. But in this role he was in frequent conflict with his rival, Cai Jing 蔡京 (1047–1126). In and out of the highest offices at the court from 1102–1107, Zhao Tingzhi's eminence came to an abrupt end in 1107, when the powerful minister Cai Jing engineered his final removal from office. Tingzhi died a few months later, at the age of sixty-eight. Zhao Mingcheng's own fledgling official career, which had begun after he finished at the university, was interrupted by his father's death. Mingcheng and Li Qingzhao retired to the Zhao ancestral home in

Qingzhou (central Shandong), where Mingcheng went into the prescribed three-year period of mourning. In all, the young couple would remain in Qingzhou, with Mingcheng out of office, for fourteen years, before he was finally given a new position.

It was during these years that Zhao Mingcheng together with Li Qingzhao expanded their personal collection of books, rubbings of ancient inscriptions, art works (calligraphy and painting), and ancient vessels, which they had already begun to assemble in the first years of their marriage back in the capital. Special care was evidently taken with books and the rubbings of inscriptions. In her detailed account of the collection, Li Qingzhao describes how husband and wife would sit together into the night, collating multiple copies of each book they acquired, and how, once the collating was done, her husband would make a fresh copy of the edited book, in his own hand, to take its place in their personal library. We know that Zhao Mingcheng also lavished attention on the collection of rubbings he gathered of stele, dating from ancient and recent times, which were strewn across the countryside. His rubbings would eventually number two thousand, making his the largest collection of such epigraphical material that had ever been compiled, twice the size of the collection Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072) had famously made half a century earlier. Zhao Mingcheng would write scholarly notes on five hundred of his stele rubbings, commenting on the provenance of each inscription and its contribution to the historical record.

A theme that runs through stories about the Zhao-Li marriage, as well as Li Qingzhao's own writings about her married life, is competition between the two. Consider this famous passage from the "Afterword" that she wrote to her husband's collection of scholarly notes on his collection of rubbings:

It happens that I have a good memory, and in the evenings after dinner we would sit in our hall named Returning Home and brew tea. We'd point to a pile of books and, choosing a particular event, try to say in which book, which chapter, which page, and which line it was recorded. The winner of our little contest got to drink first. When I guessed right, I'd hold the cup high and burst out laughing until the tea splattered the front of my gown. I'd have to get up without even taking a sip. Oh, how I wished we could grow old living like that!

Of course it was fun for Li Qingzhao to win at the guessing game, but why does she laugh so hard? Well, it was Zhao Mingcheng who had spent years as a student in the National University. It was the husband whose social reputation and career depended to a large extent upon constantly demonstrating his mastery of canonical writings. Yet it was Li Qingzhao who seems to have been the real master of those writings. The irony of this inversion of what would be expected as the natural hierarchy of male-female achievement in learning must be part of what strikes Li Qingzhao as so uproariously funny. We note that she makes no mention of Zhao Mingcheng ever taking his turn as the winner.

In terms of quantity, the largest part of the Zhao-Li collection must have been books. Their personal library, consisting both of the collated volumes they themselves had prepared and other imprints and manuscripts they purchased, must have run to several thousand titles. Their collected artifacts also included the rubbings collection, calligraphy scrolls and paintings (from earlier dynasties as well as their own), and ancient bronze vessels. By the time they were forced to leave Qingzhou, because of the Jurchen invasion of 1125–26, their collection of such books and art works was so large that after filling ten rooms of their Qingzhou home with items they decided to leave behind (hoping, no doubt, to return someday to retrieve them), they still proceeded southward with fifteen carts of belongings. When they crossed the Huai River southward it required, in Li Qingzhao's own words, a "string of boats" to convey all these possessions to the other shore.

In the years following the Jurchen invasion, the Zhao-Li books and art collection became, in fact, a millstone around their necks, as they struggled against all odds to keep the collection intact while moving from place to place, during the chaotic years of the early Southern Song. But even before the invasion and southern flight, the collection had taken on an ominous meaning in their lives, which Li Qingzhao writes about openly. Husband and wife had become obsessive about it, and they knew—at least she knew—they could not free themselves from this obsession.

When our books were complete, we built a library in Returning Home, with large cabinets marked with numbers. We arranged the books accordingly inside. Whoever wanted a book to read would have to get a key and record the book's number in a log before

taking it out. If the borrower made the slightest mark or smudge on a page, it was his or her responsibility to repair or clean it. We were no longer as easygoing as at first. In this way, what had started as an amusement turned into a source of vexation. I couldn't stand it, so I decided that we would eat no more than one meat dish per meal and dress in no more than one colored garment at a time. I wore no pearls or feathers in my hair and kept no gilded or embroidered article in my household. Whenever we came across a book of any kind whose text had no lacunae and was free of misprints, we would buy it on the spot to use as a back-up copy.

### **Widowhood and Late Life in the South**

If the Jurchen invasion of 1125–1127 changed the course of Li Qingzhao's life forever, what happened three years later was even more traumatic. In the fall of 1128 Zhao Mingcheng received a prestigious appointment as governor of Jiankang (present-day Nanjing). This lasted only sixth months, because in the spring of the following year, when a court official plotted an uprising in that city, Mingcheng deserted in the middle of the night, apparently to ensure his own safety. When the planned uprising failed, Mingcheng was swiftly removed from his post as governor. After this official disgrace, Zhao and Li sailed up the Yangzi River, looking for a safe place to resettle themselves. But within two months, Zhao Mingcheng was unexpectedly summoned back to the "traveling court" in Jiankang. Song emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 1127–1162) had decided to reinstate Zhao and to offer him the governorship of Huzhou, further downstream. But in his frantic eagerness to answer this summons and appear for an audience with the emperor to personally express his thanks for the imperial reprieve, Zhao bid an all too hasty farewell to his wife, who was not pleased to see how he treated her at this point. He was leaving her alone, riding back first on horseback to answer the emperor's summons as quickly as possible (lest the ruler change his mind). He was leaving her in an unfamiliar region, and one under threat both from Jurchen incursion and native lawlessness. This is how Li Qingzhao describes his departure:

On the thirteenth day of the sixth month, he was packed and, having left our boat, sat on the bank. Dressed in coarse clothes with

a kerchief around his head, his mood that of a tiger on the prowl, his eyes darting and flashing, he looked toward our boat and bid farewell. I was in a terrible state of mind and shouted to him, "What shall I do if I hear the town is threatened?" He pointed at me and answered from afar, "Go with the crowd. If you must, discard the household belongings first, then our clothes, then the books and paintings, and then the ancient vessels. But the ritual vessels, be sure to take them with you wherever you go. Live or die with them. Don't forget!" With this, he galloped off.

By the time Mingcheng arrived in Jiankang, he had taken ill. Upon learning of this, Li Qingzhao says she rushed to be with him, but by the time she arrived his illness had become critical. Within days, he died at the age of forty-nine. Li Qingzhao makes a point of mentioning in her narrative that before his death Zhao Mingcheng made no provision for how she would be supported once he was gone.

Li Qingzhao's "Afterword" continues with an account of her haphazard flight that filled the ensuing months, crisscrossing the southeast in disparate fashion as Jurchen incursions continued. At one point, when the Jurchen armies chasing emperor Gaozong to the seacoast forced him to sail out to sea to elude capture, Li Qingzhao herself boarded a ship and sailed out behind her emperor, likewise to avoid the Jurchen armies. Yet it is clear from her narrative that the invading armies were not the only danger she faced. As a widow who was traveling with a diminished but still considerable collection of valuables, she was also prey to local bandits, unscrupulous officials, and army officers, and just about anyone else who discerned her precarious situation (including a man who rented her a temporary room, which was burglarized one night). It is also clear that Gaozong himself had his eyes on Li Qingzhao's collection.

Less than one month after Zhao Mingcheng died, the emperor's personal physician, one Wang Jixian, appeared at Li Qingzhao's door and made an offer to "buy" some of her ancient works. This initiative was stopped only when a court official who happened to be a relative of Zhao Mingcheng's got wind of it and memorialized against it, saying that it would disgrace the imperial reputation if news of such pressure circulated. It is hardly unexpected, we should point out, that emperor Gaozong had these designs. The great imperial collections amassed by emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1101–1125), Gaozong's father, during the last decades

of the Northern Song had been looted and destroyed when the Jurchen captured the capital of Kaifeng in 1126. Even while pursued by invaders during the first years of his reign, Gaozong was dispatching agents in a desperate attempt to piece together the beginnings of a new imperial library and art collection. An emperor who did not possess such cultural items ran the risk of appearing illegitimate. It would have been particularly galling for an emperor to learn that certain private libraries and art collections surpassed the imperial ones, as Gaozong probably had heard about the Zhao-Li collection.

Many women who had been married for nearly thirty years before their husband died would have had a son in his twenties who would be expected to care for his mother who was now alone. But Li Qingzhao exceptionally had had no children, even after nearly thirty years of marriage, and her own parents, as well as her late husband's, were all deceased. In Li Qingzhao's day, the remarriage of widows was not unusual, and did not carry the stigma it would come to have in later imperial times. The remarriage of a widow who was already close to fifty would, however, have been viewed as exceptional. But the early decades after the flight to the south were also exceptional times of invasion and general lawlessness in China, and Li Qingzhao's situation as a woman of her age with no grown children was also peculiar. Considering her narrative of how others were trying to exploit her situation as a newly widowed woman with considerable wealth, we are hardly surprised to learn that she decided, in 1132 (three years after Zhao Mingcheng had died), to accept a proposal to marry again. It would have been more surprising if she had not accepted the proposal.

Li Qingzhao's new husband, Zhang Ruzhou 張汝舟, was a low-ranking military officer. He is a shadowy figure in the historical record. What we do know is that one hundred days after the marriage, Li Qingzhao brought a lawsuit against Zhang, charging him with misconduct in office. Women in Song dynasty China could not normally initiate a divorce, an act that was the prerogative of husbands. We understand, then, that Li Qingzhao's highly irregular action against her new husband was actually an attempt to rid herself of him. She herself was confined to prison during the trial that ensued, as was normal when there was a lawsuit between family members. She was released after a few days, upon Zhang's conviction. He was stripped of office and sent into exile, and we never see him again. The three-month marriage was effectively annulled.

A few details about this disastrous second marriage emerge in a remarkable letter that Li Qingzhao wrote to a Hanlin academician, Qi Chongli 綦崇禮. This man was a high-ranking court official who drafted decrees on the emperor's behalf. He was also related to Li Qingzhao's first husband by marriage. It is generally supposed that it was Qi Chongli who helped to get Li Qingzhao released from prison, so that soon after she was released she wrote to thank him. In her letter, whose language is fraught with a sense of deep humiliation over this episode in her life, Li Qingzhao tries to explain how she became involved with Zhang and why she decided to leave him. She says that she was tricked into accepting Zhang's proposal by his sweet words and misrepresentation of his status and intentions. She also blames an illness she suffered at the time, and hints that her own younger brother encouraged her to accept the proposal. But as soon as she was married, she says that she quickly understood that, in the twilight of her life, "I had married a worthless shyster of a man." She also makes it clear that Zhang's real intent was, just like so many other men she encountered after being widowed, to help himself to her wealth. When she would not give it to him he began to beat her daily, she says, in one of the few lines in the letter that does not employ a literary allusion.

It is tempting to see in this episode not just the desperation of Li Qingzhao's situation as a newly widowed woman in a war-torn empire but also something of the strength of her character, both in admitting her mistakes and humiliation over the whole experience so forthrightly, and for taking the initiative to bring legal charges against her husband so as to dissolve the recent marriage. What had Zhang done wrong? The language of what little documentation we have in other sources that describe the charges against Zhang is not entirely clear, but it seems that he had exaggerated the number of recommenders he had for his official post. (Such recommendations were an important part of certain bureaucratic appointments at the time.) Whatever the precise nature of Zhang's malfeasance, it seems obvious that he had divulged the matter to his new wife, perhaps even boasting about it to her, never imagining that she would dare to expose what he had done and use it against him in court. That underestimation of his wife proved to be his undoing.

At the end of her letter to Qi Chongli, after saying that she is now the object of general ridicule because of her remarriage and divorce and that she could never again face members of high society, Li Qingzhao vows to

spend the rest of her life in solitude and purification rituals. In fact, in the next few years she did more writing of a public nature than at any other point of her life. Starting with the letter itself, which circulated widely, she cultivated a very public persona as a woman of learning and principle, a wife devoted to the memory of her first husband, an assistant to Zhao Mingcheng's contribution to epigraphical studies, a staunch critic of perceived court weakness toward the Jurchen empire, an advocate of military recovery of the lost northern territory. It is hard to escape the conclusion that she made a conscious decision to use her skill as a writer to try to regain the stature she had once had. In other words, she decided to try to write her way back to respectability.

It is difficult to get a clear picture of Li Qingzhao's last years. One tradition of reading her work paints a very bleak picture of Li Qingzhao indeed. In one after another twelfth-century source, we are told that after her remarriage and divorce, having shown that she was unable to "preserve her virtue" after Zhao Mingcheng died, Li Qingzhao drifted about "on the rivers and lakes" until she died. The language, applied to a woman, suggests not just homelessness but also wantonness and dissolution. It is true that we do not know nearly as much about the final fifteen or so years of her life as we should like to know. But what we do know suggests a very different ending. She wrote that afterword to Zhao Mingcheng's collection of scholarly colophons on ancient inscriptions, and presented it to the court, as a contribution to historical studies. We do not know exactly when she completed this, but we know she did it sometime between 1134 and when she died some fifteen to twenty years later. On two different festivals in 1143, the Spring Festival (New Year's) and the Duanwu Festival in the fifth month, she went to the imperial palace and to offer poems of seasonal congratulations to the emperor, empress, and imperial concubines. She must have done this by imperial invitation. One did not do something like this on one's own initiative. We know that she was still in the capital as late as 1150, because of a house call she paid upon the scholar and artist Mi Youren 米友仁 (1074–1151), the son of the great Northern Song calligrapher Mi Fu 米黻 (1052–1107).

These activities, scattered across several years though they may be, suggest that Li Qingzhao did make strides in regaining the respectability that she herself said she had lost as a result of her remarriage and divorce. If that is the case, how can we explain the contemporary references to her final years as a time of ignominious wandering? There is, after all, a world

of difference between the image of her traversing rivers and lakes in destitution and acknowledging that she was invited to present poems at the palace. The answer is that the sad denouement to her life is what the critics and anecdote compilers believed *should and must* have happened to a woman who was once so prominent but then showed herself to be deficient in integrity by remarrying after her husband died, and even doing that badly. The writers who bought into this image of her final years are not looking at the historical record—they are, wittingly or not, engaged in perpetrating staid Confucian biases concerning womanly “virtue” and the consequences for straying from it.

A related issue concerning the late years of her life is whether or not she regained her status as a “titled woman” (命婦 *mingfu*), which she had been as Zhao Mingcheng’s wife (by virtue of his official rank) and widow. This is not merely a matter of status, it is also a matter of finances, for as a titled woman who was widowed she would have been entitled to a monthly stipend dispensed by the central government. Of course, she would have lost her legal status as Zhao Mingcheng’s widow when she remarried. But if that second marriage was annulled, perhaps she could have regained her legal standing as Zhao’s widow.

We do not know whether she did or not. There are scholars who point to references to her after her divorce as “Zhao Mingcheng’s widow” to assert that she did. But such references might be casual and convenient ways of designating her that do not have any significance regarding her legal standing. More revealing, as some have pointed out, is the fact that Li Qingzhao was invited into the palace to submit poems to the imperial family. Such an invitation was normally an honor extended to women of official status, not to just anyone. It is possible, indeed, that what I referred to earlier as a concerted effort by Li Qingzhao to write her way back to respectability was done not only to recover her good name, but also with the status of titled woman, and its financial benefits, in mind.

A widow in Song imperial times who lived on for decades after her husband’s death must have been constantly worried about money, and that probably would have been true whether or not she was fortunate enough to have a government stipend (which would have been just a fraction of her late husband’s salary). So it is not surprising that even the few details we have about Li Qingzhao’s later years repeatedly touch upon her financial needs. When, as mentioned above, she went calling

upon Mi Youren, it was not just to pay a social call. She brought copies of calligraphy scrolls by Mi Fu—scrolls that must have been part of the Zhao-Li art collection—and specifically asked Mi Fu to authenticate them by adding his own colophons. The art market at the time was rife with copies and outright fakes. A Mi Fu calligraphy scroll with a colophon by his son attesting its reliability would be considerably more valuable than a scroll without such authentication. Whatever other reasons Li Qingzhao may have had for asking the son to add colophons (whose main point *is* the authenticity of the attribution to Mi Fu), it is likely that she was also seeking to maximize the scrolls' monetary value.

Another anecdote from these years concerns an offer Li Qingzhao made to be tutor to a young girl, about ten years old, who was the daughter of a minor court official, Sun Zong 孫綜. We can calculate that this offer was made in around the year 1150 as well, when Li Qingzhao was 66. The offer Li Qingzhao made “to pass on her learning” to the girl was rejected, but the fact that Li Qingzhao made it suggests that she was worried about money, as does her visit to Mi Youren.

This offer to be a tutor, coming from the most famous female writer of her time, is said to have been rejected by the young girl herself, who observed, “literary ability is not something appropriate for a woman.” If the girl actually said this, it shows that as a child she had already absorbed ideas about the incompatibility of women and writing that were widespread at the time. Equally revealing is the fact that this anecdote about the young girl was eventually put into her tomb inscription written by Lu You 陸游 (1125–1210), one of the greatest poets of the Southern Song, who was one generation younger than Li Qingzhao. Lu You records this event in the woman's youthful years to show, of course, that even as a child she had “correct” values and thinking. That even a major poet would condone such ideas is also significant. Although this is surely a minor episode in Li Qingzhao's life, a non-event really, it may be an appropriate way to conclude this brief summary of that life. It suggests something of the enormity of the challenges that lay before a woman like Li Qingzhao, who clearly, from early on, adopted writing as one of her primary pursuits and sources of identity.

We know little else about Li Qingzhao's final years, including the precise year of her death, which is assumed to have been in the mid 1150s. There are no funerary texts concerning her, suggesting that she died without family or powerful friends around her.

## Works

We have only a fraction today of the writings that Li Qingzhao produced. We do not even know the size of that fraction. It is possible that she wrote many times the small quantity that we have today. We simply do not know. We do know that she left a literary collection and a separate collection of song lyrics (*ci* 詞), and that both collections were lost within a century or two after her death. We do not know for certain that the literary collection was ever printed. But the song lyrics collection was printed, probably in one of the very ephemeral editions that were common for that literary form at the time. Everything of hers that survives today survives because it was quoted or anthologized somewhere in the decades and centuries after her death. It was not until the late nineteenth century that anyone bothered to try to piece together the many song lyrics attributed to her, thus reconstituting, as best as could be done, the song lyrics collection that had been lost. And it was only in the twentieth century, when her fame as China's greatest woman writer became secure, that scholars began to put together her "complete works," based again entirely on quoted sources. One might well ask if the early loss of her two collections of writings did not have something to do with her unusual identity as a woman writer. My suspicion is that it did. The reasons I think this should become clear in the remainder of this introduction.

The poetry (in the *shi* 詩 form) that survives today, some fifteen pieces plus fragments, is striking for the range of topics taken up and how generally unlike what we would expect from a woman's hand they are. Her writing in this form stands almost entirely outside the standard themes taken up by other women writers of her time. With a few significant exceptions, she does not write about herself or the domestic sphere that surely dominated her life. She writes instead about the grave political and military issues of her day, or she writes on historical themes that resonate with the same issues. By writing on such topics, she was clearly seeking to write on an equal footing with all the male poets who were likewise expressing themselves on these matters. That a woman would do this is most unexpected, even peculiar. Yet it must also be conceded that any generalization at all about her work is beset by the problem of sources that plagues all aspects of her legacy. We cannot be sure that what survives in this form is actually representative of her work as a whole, as it once existed. The major male poets of her day left poetry collections that

consist of thousands of individual pieces. What we have from her is fewer than twenty. The surviving work provides a tantalizing glimpse of literary originality that is all the more remarkable because it comes from a woman, that is, someone who belonged to the gender of those who hardly ever wrote. Unfortunately, it is only a glimpse. Her one rhapsody (*fu* 賦) on the board game Capture the Horse is a deft treatment of gaming, horse lore, and military strategy, bristling with lines that have double meanings concerning the military stalemate the Southern Song had gotten itself into with its northern invader.

Her surviving prose writings are also few: an essay presenting a history and critique of the song lyrics form (*ci*); the letter to Qi Chongli about her remarriage; the afterword to Zhao Mingcheng's scholarly notes; and a preface to a handbook on the same board game. Each of these is arrestingly original, truly one-of-a-kind pieces not just from the hand of a woman but from any writer of the middle historical period. The essay on the song lyric contains a summary history of the form, comments on the peculiar challenges its prosody presents (with writers needing to set lyrics to pre-existing tunes), and most famously, or infamously, trenchant one-by-one critiques of the weaknesses of each major writer's contributions to the form. Most of these writers—all of whom were men, naturally—had the kind of stature that put them above criticism in contemporaries' eyes. But not evidently in Li Qingzhao's. The best known and most beloved of her prose writings is the Afterword. It is usually read quite simply or naively, one might say, as a poignant reminiscence by the widowed Li Qingzhao of her happy marriage to Zhao Mingcheng. The piece undeniably contains that element, but a careful reading will discern a more complicated layering of tones and meanings, including an unmistakable effort to criticize her husband's lack of concern for her welfare toward the end of his life. More than one modern scholar has also suggested that Li Qingzhao may not have only had remembrances in mind when she wrote the piece but also had one eye on her own future and well-being (and why shouldn't she?), as I have already mentioned.

The song lyrics are the best-known portion of her writings, and the most widely read and anthologized, even today. (Exactly how they should be read is a problem, if there is a single reading at all, which will be discussed below.) The song lyric had dual origins, first, as a popular entertainment song, and second as an elegant literary elevation of that popular song that flourished in tenth century royal courts as a banquet song, and

later morphed into a vehicle for literati expression on sentimental themes during the eleventh century. In Li Qingzhao's time, the song lyric was still often written to be performed at parties and banquets at all levels of urban society, but it was increasingly also being honed by leading poets as a form of personal expression. Because of its origins and lingering association with the singing girls who regularly performed it for a largely male audience, in banquets, tea shops, wine shops, and brothels, these song lyrics often featured a focus on women, especially women in love or frustrated in love, manifested either in descriptions of a fictive female protagonist or actually couched in the words of a female speaker (who could readily pass, to the audience's ears, as the singer herself). There are anecdotes about men singing these songs, but such an occurrence was clearly exceptional. The vast majority of musical performances of these songs was done by women. We have a situation with this poetic genre in which the focus of the songs is largely, though not entirely, female, whereas the writers themselves are overwhelmingly male. In the modern edition that gathers all surviving Song dynasty examples of this poetic form together, which contains some 21,000 compositions, it must be that ninety-nine percent (at least) are composed by men. There is no evidence in any contemporary source that Li Qingzhao ever performed any of the song lyrics that she composed. It would have been quite unthinkable for a woman of her social standing to do so, especially in front of an audience that included men as well as women. But were her songs ever performed by other women, such as professional singers? Certainly they were. They were also printed and circulated, probably without Li Qingzhao's permission, in order to also be read and enjoyed as a literary form.

### **Interpretive issues**

There are a number of knotty problems regarding how to approach and understand Li Qingzhao's writings. The problems are all interrelated and are rooted in the ways that critics and scholars have interpreted, added to, and "packaged" her writings over the centuries. Here I will discuss the issues separately, then explain how they are interconnected.

*Authenticity:* We recall that the two collections of her writings that once existed, a literary collection of prose and *shi* poetry and a separate collec-

tion of song lyrics, were both lost within a few centuries. That loss had enormous and dire consequences. It had a particularly invidious consequence for her song lyrics. It meant that there was no early edition of her songs that later anthologies could be checked against. This is an unusual situation for Song period song lyrics writers. Nearly all the other writers have an early edition of their songs that survived, or at least a Yuan or Ming dynasty edition that is reasonably believed to be based on a Song edition. Not so with Li Qingzhao. The earliest printed edition of her songs that purports to be based on an earlier edition is a seventeenth-century one, printed by the prominent commercial publisher Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599–1659), and is obviously fragmentary, containing only seventeen songs. Recently, a longer manuscript that also passed through Mao Jin's hands, but which he never printed, has come to light in Japan, and it was adopted by Xu Peijun as the basis for the song lyrics in his complete edition of Li Qingzhao's works first published in 2002 (and revised subsequently). But the provenance of that manuscript is unknown and it can only be viewed as a mid-seventeenth century compilation of uncertain origin. In the place of any regular and reliable filiation of editions, what we have instead for Li Qingzhao's song lyrics is a long history of her works appearing in extremely piecemeal and haphazard form in song lyrics anthologies, as well as in assorted other sources, from the Southern Song down through the end of the nineteenth century. A complete list of all the places her works have appeared this way, typically a few at a time, would run to several dozen different works. In the Ming period alone, when compiling and printing Song dynasty song lyrics became a fad among publishers, there is a dismaying hash of works, many brought out in multiple recensions, with some identical titles having different contents, and some different titles having the same contents.

The salient feature of this history of her anthologized works is that through time the number of song lyrics attributed to Li Qingzhao grows, and it grows dramatically. Among anthologies that were compiled during her lifetime, when her song lyric collection was still extant and was circulating in printed editions, there are only twenty-nine pieces attributed to her (and one of these is an obvious misattribution). By the end of the Southern Song in 1279, that number had grown to thirty-five. By 1550, the number had swelled to fifty-six, and by the end of the Ming in 1644 it had increased again to seventy-four. The anthologists keep adding new pieces, most of which had never been seen before in the centuries after

her death, and never tell us where they are finding them. Now, some of these new attributions had been seen before. Roughly one-third of them had appeared in an earlier source, some even as early as the Southern Song. But in that earlier appearance they had been attributed to another author or had appeared without any attribution, meaning that the earlier compiler had no idea who the author was. Whether known or unknown before, new pieces kept appearing and gravitating toward Li Qingzhao as author, as her fame as the single major woman poet in the form continued to grow.

How likely is it that works that had never been known before, or at least had never been attributed to Li Qingzhao, are suddenly revealed several centuries after her death to be authentic pieces written by her? On the face of it, it seems highly unlikely. Of course, it is possible. It is just possible that later editors of song lyrics anthologies had access to early sources that are now lost to us, and they obtained these pieces from them (but did not bother to specify the name of that source). On the other hand, we can readily think of reasons Ming and Qing editors might have *imagined* that previously unknown or unattributed pieces were written by Li Qingzhao (as her fame was growing). Each new piece attributed to her made their anthology a bit more special, more attractive, and more marketable. And each new piece thus attributed to her bolstered the legend that was growing around her life, as I explain below.

In the translations in this volume, I have included sixty-six of the songs attributed to her, that is, all but a handful of songs that have different and more reliable attributions. In other words, I have taken an inclusive approach, including many songs whose authorship by Li Qingzhao seems very unlikely, but which are, nevertheless, commonly included in modern editions of her “works.” I have ordered the songs according to the chronology of their appearance with a specific attribution to Li Qingzhao.<sup>1</sup> The songs that are most reliable as authentic compositions by her are numbers 1–23, which appeared in the anthology *Yuefu yaci* 樂府雅詞 that appeared in 1146. Numbers 24–35 are also early (appearing in other Southern Song sources) and their reliability is high, although num-

---

1 For a chart giving the full chronological list of sources for seventy-five song attributions, see my *The Burden of Female Talent: Li Qingzhao and Her History in China*, 96–97. A fuller discussion of these issues is found in the same work, 91–105.

bers 24–28 present a special problem.<sup>2</sup> A reader who wants to be confident that he or she is reading song lyrics that were actually written by Li Qingzhao should read no further than number 35 (and might want to skip nos. 24–28 as well). Everything after number 45 is even more problematic. By the Ming dynasty, the marriage of Li Qingzhao and Zhao Mingcheng had been romanticized and idealized, reflecting contemporary Ming notions of a “talented scholar and beauty” (*caizi jiaren* 才子佳人) match. Ming and Qing poets wrote “imitations” of Li Qingzhao’s love songs, imagining that they had all been written for Zhao Mingcheng, and adopted her persona, writing as if they were she. When we today read pieces after number 45, it is as likely that we are reading some such fictive recreation as that we are reading something Li Qingzhao actually wrote.

Many modern editions present upwards of sixty song lyrics of Li Qingzhao as if they are equally reliable and unproblematic. The result is a hodge-podge of compositions that is potentially very misleading, if authorial authenticity means anything to us. A few more cautious editors draw distinctions between what they consider reliable works and a handful of other pieces they label “questionable” or “doubtful” in their attribution to Li Qingzhao. (Their first category is still too large in my opinion, and the second one too small.) But these categorizations bring up a related issue. They are done primarily on the basis of style. A piece does not “sound” like Li Qingzhao, or contains some line or lines that the editors cannot imagine her producing, and so it is put in the “doubtful” category. My view is that stylistics is a poor criterion with which to evaluate the authorship of song lyrics. Most of the compositions are a mere forty to sixty characters long. Moreover, the themes are largely conventional ones, and the diction and moods have a relatively narrow range.

---

2 These are the five compositions on plum blossoms, attributed to her in the collection on plums, *Mei yuan*. That work (dated 1129) is actually the earliest surviving source for any of Li Qingzhao’s song lyrics, earlier even *Yuefu yaci*. Yet its attributions to Li Qingzhao are questionable. That is because the five pieces it attributes to her (not counting a sixth one, which is universally considered a misattribution) are not found in any other earlier source. We must wait until the late sixteenth century until any of those pieces appears elsewhere. This makes the *Mei yuan* pieces look very suspicious, for it is obvious that no other early anthologist knew of them or their association with Li Qingzhao. For a fuller discussion of this issue, see *The Burden of Female Talent*, 93–94.

Therefore it is not a form of sufficient length or variation to permit determination of authorship based on style. If that is so generally with this form, it is especially true in the case of Li Qingzhao, when such a large percentage of works attributed to her are mired in questions of authenticity. If we cannot agree which works constitute her “style,” how can we evaluate other works against it? That is why I exclude style from my own assessments of the likelihood of these pieces’ authenticity. My assessments are based on the chronology of the earliest attribution to Li Qingzhao (and, in the case of numbers 24–28, attention to cognate sources, as noted above).

*Autobiographical reading and dating:* There is a long-standing and seldom examined tradition of reading all of Li Qingzhao’s song lyrics as unmitigated expressions of her life and feelings. This habit is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, it treats song lyrics as if they were *shi* poetry, where identification of the persona of the poem with the author is a much safer assumption, though not completely unproblematic. This treatment neglects the performative aspect of song lyrics during the Northern Song. They were, indeed, not just written to be performed, over and again, but performed by persons other than the author. In nearly all cases, moreover, the performer was not just a different person, she was a different gender than the author. This gave the song lyric a certain distance from its author, and that distance allowed for the invention and manipulation of fictive personas. These invented personas gave great freedom to the authors, and that freedom was surely a prime reason the song lyric was so attractive as a form to poets at the time. They rushed to take it up largely because it permitted a degree of invention and separation from their personal lives that was hard to attain in *shi* poetry.

The second problem, a related one, is that we do not insist on a narrowly autobiographical reading of the song lyrics of other writers of the time, virtually all of whom are male. We allow them to invent, we recognize that when they put a song in the voice of a woman they are doing just that, and not using the singing girl who speaks through the song as a transparent substitute for their own personal voice and frustrations (in the manner of the ancient appropriation of the persona of neglected women by *shi* poets). It is true that some commentators have, in the past, read song lyrics this way. But this way of reading them, discovering covert autobiographical meanings in songs about frustrations in love, has been

thoroughly discredited by scholarship of the past several decades. Nor do we insist that when male poets produce songs about male infatuation with charming ladies they are necessarily writing about women the writers themselves were in love with. The fact that may have sometimes been the case, particularly when a writer goes out of his way to identify the object of the person's affections (e.g., by naming her or including other identifying details) does not blind us to the need to be cautious about jumping to such a conclusion. We recognize now that these songs, because of their performative nature, have a degree of separation from their author. Whatever circumstances or feelings inspired a particular song initially, once it was written it took on an existence quite its own (in a way that *shi* poetry never quite equalled), and could and would be used by singers on different occasions to evoke a mood and feeling (about love, the seasons, the passage of time, etc.) in which the particulars of the original inspiration are no longer relevant or even important. The writers knew this, because they lived in a social milieu in which they regularly witnessed the performance of these songs, exemplifying their "detachment" from the very men sitting there who had written them. Here too we must acknowledge that there have been some attempts to read song lyrics as direct personal statements, for example, equating love in Liu Yong's song lyrics with his own love life (under the influence of the autobiographical reading impulse operative in *shi* poetry). But such readings have likewise been discredited in recent scholarship. They strike us today as forced and done without attention to the inherent nature of the form.

Those who write about Li Qingzhao's song lyrics seldom, if ever, reflect on this discrepancy between the insistence on reading her works autobiographically and the allowance made for not doing so with compositions by the male authors of her day. The implications of that discrepancy are far-reaching and disturbing. There is an unfairness about them that is a reminiscent of biases concerning assumptions about male and female abilities that belong to an earlier day. Do we really want to deny Li Qingzhao the capacity to be inventive and imaginative, with personas and dramatized situations and, yes, even seemingly heart-felt emotions, that we accord to her male peers in their songs? That is what we do when we assume, or even insist, that every song she wrote is nothing but a reflection of her life circumstances and her heart-felt emotions.

This is not to claim that there is nothing of Li Qingzhao's life reflected in her songs, which would be an absurd claim to make about her or any writer. For example, many of her songs feature a speaker regretting displacement from a homeland, including sometimes specifying southern displacement from a distant northern homeland. Of course this is readily explained as mirroring her personal experience as someone who, along with tens of thousands of compatriots, was forced south of the Yangzi River by the Jurchen invasion. A few songs are even more closely linked to her personal circumstances, such as number 14 (assuming the prefatory note is authentic), written after parting from her "sisters" in Qingzhou. But a far larger number of pieces have no such explicit and definitive rooting in her life circumstances. With these, it is preferable to understand that, as with most poetry, the relationship between the writer's life and her or his literary expression is complex, multivalent, and mitigated by the very act of writing itself and the conventions of the form. To insist as so many commentators do that each of her songs is entirely reflective of her life circumstances in a narrowly autobiographical manner is a very reductive way of reading her.

Nearly all modern Chinese editions of Li Qingzhao's works, whether they present her complete works in all forms or just her song lyrics, present the song lyrics in what the editor considers chronological order, keyed to her biography. Frequently, a good deal of space is given in the notes and commentary to justifying the date assigned to each song, and pointing out why this date (typically a certain year) is preferable to that assigned in other modern editions of her works. On the face of it, this insistent dating of Li Qingzhao's song lyrics is an odd exercise. The song lyrics of other writers of her time are not read that way (with the exception of Su Shi, who uniquely among songwriters of the time went to great lengths to anchor his songs in his personal life). Moreover, Li Qingzhao's songs do not lend themselves to such a reading in the sense that there is little internal reference in them to the biographical circumstances that inspired them. Of course, it is exactly because scholars bring to Li Qingzhao's song lyrics the assumption that they are unmitigated expressions of her personal emotional state that they embark on this course.

The results of the dating enterprise, when viewed collectively across several editions, are not encouraging. Except for a portion of the songs that are assigned to very early or very late stages of her life, there is wide

and sometimes wild variation in the dating of particular songs from one edition to the next. In other words, there is hardly any consensus concerning the dating of many, many songs. This result alone might raise questions about the wisdom of undertaking the task, as well it should. In fact, the number of her songs that contain any internal evidence that might be used to assign a date (e.g., place names, mention of contemporary events, persons, etc.) is very small. In that sense, Li Qingzhao's song lyrics are no different from most others written at the time. What is different is the way commentators feel her songs must be handled.

*Denial of her remarriage.* There is one last topic that must be discussed here, even though it may appear to be quite irrelevant to a literary reading or appreciation of Li Qingzhao's works. Actually, this topic is inseparable from the way Li Qingzhao has been envisioned for the past two hundred years and that, in turn, affects every aspect of the way her writings are normally read, even today.

Beginning in the late Ming and gaining momentum through the Qing dynasty, culminating in the nineteenth century, there developed an effort to deny that Li Qingzhao had ever remarried after being widowed. I call this a scholarly "campaign" because that is what it was, as one after another eminent scholar came forward presenting ever longer and more ingenious refutations of the several Song period sources that note her remarriage to Zhang Ruzhou. Several of those who joined this effort were major Qing dynasty scholars, well trained in marshaling the methods of "evidential scholarship" and scholarly argument. They often disagree with each other on how best to attack the Song sources and debunk them (because those sources are so unambiguous and unanimous in their assertion of the remarriage). But these scholars are united in their goal of re-writing the story of Li Qingzhao's widowhood.

I have written at considerable length elsewhere about this campaign, its Qing culmination, its influence upon the earliest twentieth-century histories of Chinese literature, the gradual discrediting of its methods and conclusion in the second half of the twentieth century, and the vestiges of it that survive today. Here, I will give only a brief summary of the key points.

Why did this occur when it did, in the late Ming and on into the Qing? The simplest explanation is that the event reflects a collision of two contemporary Ming-Qing trends. The denial of Li Qingzhao's re-

marriage was influenced by trends not seen during the Song or Yuan dynasties, that began only some five centuries after her death. The two relevant trends seem on the surface irreconcilable: they were, first, growing intolerance for the remarriage of widows and second, the increasing acceptance of women's writing. As is well known, the Qing central government activity promoted a cult of widow's "chastity" and saw to it that local governments rewarded widows for not remarrying while they were alive and commemorated such conduct after their death. But at the same time, the late Ming and early Qing saw the growing acceptance of woman's writing and a corresponding increase of women's productivity as writers, historical developments that have been well documented in recent studies. Not surprisingly, aspiring women writers liked to be able to point to a precedent for their involvement with literary work, and Li Qingzhao was a convenient and prominent exemplar.

The two trends simultaneously brought more and more attention to what Li Qingzhao had accomplished as a writer and made her decision to remarry after Zhao Mingcheng's death less and less easy to accept. Something had to give, because the contradiction between her literary fame and her conduct as a widow was becoming unbearable. No one, or nearly no one, was inclined to question her high standing as a poet. Consequently, the alternative solution was to deny that she had ever remarried. The deniers explained that the eight Song sources that refer to her marriage were slanderous attempts to ruin her good name by persons jealous of her talent or those she had offended. It is also noteworthy that as the campaign to denounce this "slander" gained traction, no one came forward to challenge the new viewpoint. That must be a reflection of how eagerly it was embraced.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a consensus had emerged. No one was saying anymore that Li Qingzhao had remarried. Scholars instead said that recent investigations of her life had set aright centuries of misunderstanding. The matter was cast in highly charged and moralistic terms: the revisionist scholarship had "cleansed" Li Qingzhao posthumously from the degradation to which she had been subjected. Not only had she suffered a mean fate in life (losing her husband in middle age), she had suffered the "injustice" of slanderous attacks for centuries after her death. That injustice was now exposed. Her unstained "virtue" was now finally clear for all to see. This new conception of her cleared the way for scholars to get to work reconstituting her song lyrics collection in the

1880s, from all those anthologies in which her songs had been preserved piecemeal since the Song dynasty. No Ming or Qing scholar had ever undertaken to do this before, because her conduct was too problematic. But now that the problem had been eliminated, scholars were freed to put her literary legacy in order.

This late Qing image of Li Qingzhao was the one that, a few decades later, was uncritically adopted by the writers during the 1920s and 1930s in the first modern native histories of Chinese literature. The literary historians gave a literary twist to this portrait of her, saying outright that her uniqueness and effectiveness as a poet sprang from her virtue as a woman and the depth of her love for Zhao Mingcheng. No mention is made of any report of a remarriage, because that could call into question the rest of what was being asserted. Or, if the remarriage is mentioned at all, it is mentioned as a piece of slander that does not deserve to be taken seriously. These influence of these early modern portraits of her lasted through the twentieth century.

It was only in 1957, during the Hundred Flowers campaign, that an able and iconoclastic young scholar, Huang Shengzhang, published lengthy studies that challenged the assertions of the Qing dynasty scholars who had denied the remarriage. Huang gave a point-by-point refutation of their arguments, identifying mistakes in the Qing readings of the Song passages, mischaracterizations of those sources, and many instances of forced and implausible argumentation in the attempt to explain how slander replaced factual recording. Equally important, Huang also pointed out that the Qing scholars' case against the Song sources was hardly the objective scholarly investigation it claimed to be. The thinly veiled motive behind this argument was to recast Li Qingzhao in accord with rigid Qing standards concerning the conduct of widows, standards that in Mao's socialist state Huang could now characterize as "feudal."

Huang's detailed studies caused an uproar in the usually staid realm of literary history. He was attacked by senior scholars, who had a vested interest in the conventional narrative of Li Qingzhao's life and her image as a woman whose devotion to Zhao Mingcheng was unwavering. Only a few more dispassionate scholars acknowledged the persuasive power of Huang's essays. Over the next forty years, a period that was interrupted by the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), a controversy raged. Literally hundreds of books and articles were published by those who championed one side or the other of the disagreement, which came to be referred to

as the “anti-remarriage” and “pro-remarriage” camps. It was not until the 1990s, with the arrival of feminist literary studies in China and Taiwan, and the appearance of the next generation of scholars (which included notably more women) that a new consensus emerged that recognized Li Qingzhao’s remarriage as historical fact.

Today, it is still possible to encounter those who do not believe that Li Qingzhao remarried, or who hedge on the issue, saying there are arguments on both sides. (That is true, but they are not arguments of comparable force.) The scholarly world, in China and elsewhere, widely accepts her remarriage. Yet in popular culture in China today the remarriage is seldom acknowledged and seldom even mentioned as a possibility. In Shandong Province there are three memorial halls dedicated to Li Qingzhao. The largest one in the provincial capital of Ji’nan, the second is in her native Zhangqiu City, and the third is found in Qingzhou City (Zhao Mingcheng’s native place). Wandering through these buildings, sooner or later one comes to a wall with a chart that gives a detailed chronology of Li Qingzhao’s life. In none of these is there any mention of her remarriage to Zhang Ruzhou. In these memorial halls, the remarriage is still today, as it became in the late Qing, an event that never happened.

These various factors—the accretion through time of so many song lyrics attributed to Li Qingzhao of doubtful authenticity, the way of reading of these works in a narrowly autobiographical way, the insistence on dating each one to a particular stage and circumstance in her life, the denial that she could have remarried despite the enormous difficulties she faced as a widow in a time of lawlessness—each played a part in shaping readers’ views of her life and works over time. That transformation occurred slowly and subtly over several centuries, but it was complete by the late Qing, in time to be handed down to the formative period of “Chinese literary history” as it was written up in the Republican period. The conception of Li Qingzhao created then is still very much with us today, even after certain components that helped to form it, like the remarriage denial, have been supplanted.

This conception of Li Qingzhao sees everything she wrote as stemming from her devotion to Zhao Mingcheng. That devotion is not just the inspiration of her literary expression, it is also the reason her writing is so effective. Unlike other song lyrics writers of her time who were, this line of reasoning says, simply indulging in romantic fantasies and play-acting, Li Qingzhao’s sentimental songs are expressions of the true affec-

tion she felt for the man who was the love of her life. That is why they stand out for us as readers. Ironically, it had been said by one of Li Qingzhao's harsh critics in the Song dynasty that she was such an effective writer only because she did not know proper decorum and conduct as a woman. But by the twentieth century, spousal love had replaced impropriety as the essence of her character and root of her literary talent. Everything she wrote is seen through the lens of her identity as devoted wife, lonely woman when her husband is not at her side, and forlorn and nostalgic widow once he passed away. Since her feelings for Zhao Mingcheng of whichever mood (devotion, loneliness, flirtatiousness, grief, nostalgia, etc.) constitute everything she wrote, it is only natural for the commentator to want to tie each piece to a certain date and occasion, the better to explain precisely why she expresses herself in it the way she does.

To understand how this way of thinking about Li Qingzhao could have flourished so well in Chinese history, it is helpful to recall that in the Chinese literary tradition she is the only woman writer who is accorded the status of a major poet. There are many other women writers in pre-modern times, but none of them left a comparable body of work or, consequently, acquired such fame. That she alone among major writers is female, this by itself should make us wary of how the tradition presents her, since it immediately suggests unequal treatment of writers according to their gender. When we notice, as we look more closely, how Li Qingzhao was molded by scholars and critics into a woman whose every word and feeling springs from her affection for her husband, we already understand what is going on. Yes, the literary tradition in China was overwhelmingly male and as such shows clear signs of discomfort upon the appearance of a woman writer of stunning and universally acknowledged talent. Are we surprised, then, that the tradition took it upon itself to intervene and recast this woman in a way that was congenial with its own preferences and biases? The tradition found a way to accommodate her, but at a certain cost.

## Conclusion

It should be clear that there are different ways of approaching Li Qingzhao and reading her works. The conventional way is to come to her writings with her life story in mind, the received story of her marriage to

Zhao Mingcheng, a pairing tinged with sadness over Zhao's frequent separation from her while he was alive and her inconsolable grief once he had died. Her song lyrics about loneliness and nostalgia, interpreted from the viewpoint of this romanticized life story, then form the core of her work. The other writings she produced are peripheral, treated as a curiosity or afterthought, except for the Afterword to the *Catalogue of Inscriptions on Metal and Stone*, which becomes a primary piece of supporting evidence for the validity of this approach.

This way of reading Li Qingzhao has enormous appeal and will not be supplanted any time soon. It is the appeal of the image of two learned and elegant persons, a husband and wife of shared purpose and mutual devotion. It is a rare instance from pre-modern times of a marriage that appears to have been founded upon a more or less equal footing between husband and wife, and in that sense it almost seems to conform to modern ideals, which is part of its attraction. Many readers will find such a reading of Li Qingzhao's works compelling and, indeed, irresistible. I hope that the translations as presented in this volume do not preclude this traditional way of understanding her.

At the same time, in this introduction and the translations that follow I have tried to point the way to an alternative reading. It is one that does not elevate one aspect of Li Qingzhao's life and writings (her affection for Zhao Mingcheng) to the point where it eclipses all others. It recognizes the possibility of a range of meanings and motives behind her writing, posits a distinction between her literary persona and her biography, allows room for expressions of frustration even when she is writing about her marriage to Zhao Mingcheng, and treats her writings in *shi* poetry and prose as equally important and accomplished as her song lyrics. Li Qingzhao will always remain something of an enigma to us as a person and a writer, simply because so few of her writings survive. Yet I believe that this approach permits us to glimpse her work more fully and do better justice to its complexity, limited in quantity though it may be.

### **Note on the Translations**

The translations are arranged according to genre, in the order of classical poetry (*shi* and *fu*), prose, and song lyrics (*ci*). This arrangement is intended to facilitate taking seriously her writing in forms other than the

song lyric. I have translated all of Li Qingzhao's *shi* poems, her one *fu*, all of her prose pieces, and sixty-six of her song lyrics, omitting only those that are reliably attributed to other writers. The only writings of hers that are not translated are thirteen rhymed descriptions of moves and strategies in the board game Capture the Horse (also the subject of her *fu*). The game does not survive and we know little about it today, making it impossible to read Li Qingzhao's verses on the conduct of the game with any confidence of understanding. As for the song lyrics, they are presented in the order of their chronological appearance with specific attribution to Li Qingzhao, as discussed earlier. This is done to permit ready differentiation between very early attributions, made during Li Qingzhao's lifetime or shortly thereafter, and late attributions, made only five or six centuries after her death. I consider the former likely to be authentic compositions by her, and the latter, at least most of them, probably not to have been written by her. This kind of attention to the problem of the authenticity of her song lyrics is missing from most modern editions of her works. An advantage of arranging the songs this way is that it allows for easy reading of the early pieces (especially numbers 1–23, and 29–35) as a group, which then can be read against the late attributions. I believe that such a reading highlights the special qualities and originality of the early attributions, whereas mixing the late attributions together with them, as is usually done, tends to obfuscate those qualities by conveying the impression of an uneven corpus, as apt to be as predictable in one instance as it is startling in another.

The text I have used is Xu Peijun 徐培均, ed. *Li Qingzhao ji jianzhu* 李清照集笺注, rev. edition (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2013). I have occasionally adopted a textual variant, but only among those listed in Xu's collation notes. Information necessary to understand the reading of a particular line or phrase is found in the footnotes, and textual variants are noted in the endnotes, together with additional background information on certain compositions and particular allusions.

The title that Li Qingzhao originally gave to her collection of song lyrics was "Rinsed Jades" or even "Jades to Rinse the Mouth." It is an odd phrase, one that involves a literary allusion (of course) to a phrase that had been used to describe the purity of the recluse's life: he pillows his head on rocks and rinses his mouth in a stream. The two objects (rocks, stream) were mistakenly interchanged in an early quotation, and the illogical inversion became widely known. In naming her collection, Li

Qingzhao substituted “jades” for “rocks.” Odd as it first sounds, the collection title has a certain appropriateness as a designation for something produced by this poet. It evokes hardness, purity, and unexpected convergences (jade and water, or even jade as something that cleanses), something bracing and bold. Above all, the idea of jades glistening with moisture is a fitting image for the words and lines of Li Qingzhao’s writing, whose luster is as noticeable today as it was for her earliest admiring readers.

## The Works of Li Qingzhao

# 1. 詩 & 賦

## 1.1

### 春殘

春殘何事苦思鄉  
病裏梳頭恨髮長。  
梁燕語多終日在  
4 薔薇風細一簾香。

## 1.2-3

### 浯溪中興頌詩和張文潛（二首）

## Chapter 1: Classical Poetry (*shi* 詩 and *fu* 賦)

### 1.1

#### The End of Spring

At the end of spring, what causes me to miss my homeland so intensely?

In sickness I comb my hair, resenting how long it is.

Swallows in the rafters are full of chatter the whole day long,

- 4 a gentle breeze blows on the rose bushes, making the entire window  
fragrant.

### 1.2–3

#### The Wuxi Restoration Eulogy Tablet, Matching a Poem by Zhang Wenqian (Two Poems)

*These poems are thought to have been early compositions by Li Qingzhao, composed probably when she was seventeen or eighteen years old. They “match” a prior poem on the same theme by Zhang Lei 張耒 (1052–1112) or Qin Guan 秦觀 (1049–ca. 1100) (there is a disputed double attribution of the earlier poem), both important poets who were members of Li Qingzhao’s father’s generation. (A “matching” poem uses the same rhyme words as an earlier poem by a different writer, and treats the same theme.) The subject is a Tang dynasty stone inscription by the statesman Yuan Jie 元結 (719–772), written in 761 and erected at Wuxi, that celebrates the suppression of the An Lushan Rebellion and the “restoration” of Tang imperial order. The original composition, as well as Zhang’s or Qin’s treatment of the theme, are fulsome in their praise of the generals who led the imperial armies that eventually prevailed over the rebels. Li Qingzhao’s poems are considerably more critical of the imperial carelessness and corruption that led to the rebellion in the first place. These poems by the youthful Li Qingzhao seem to have been among the earliest of her literary works to circulate, and their boldness attracted the attention of prominent literati.*

## 第一

五十年功如電掃  
 華清宮柳咸陽草。  
 五坊供奉鬪雞兒  
 4 酒肉堆中不知老。  
 胡兵忽自天上來  
 逆胡亦是姦雄才。  
 勤政樓前走胡馬  
 8 珠翠踏盡香塵埃。  
 何為出戰輒披靡  
 傳置荔枝多馬死。  
 堯功舜德本如天  
 12 安用區區紀文字。  
 著碑銘德真陋哉  
 迺令神鬼磨山崖。  
 子儀光弼不自猜  
 16 天心悔禍人心開。

1 The several decades of peace and achievements of Tang emperor Xuanzong's 玄宗 reign (712–756) were wiped away all at once by An Lushan's rebellion, leaving his beloved Huaqing Palace resort looking like the ruins of the Qin dynasty capital of Xianyang after it was burned by Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202 BCE).

2 An Lushan was of Sogdian descent, hence he is referred to as a “barbarian.” In fact he was a Tang dynasty general and although his army must have included some non-Han soldiers, it was an imperial Tang army.

## I

Fifty years' achievement was gone in a bolt of lightning,  
 blossoms and willows of Huaqing Palace became the weeds  
 of Xianyang.<sup>1</sup>

- Lads who trained fighting cocks in Five Imperial Pens  
 4 never worried about growing old amid their meat and ale.  
 Barbarian soldiers swooped down from the heavens,  
 the rebel barbarian was a hero of treachery.<sup>2</sup>  
 Barbarian steeds galloped before Diligent Governance Tower,  
 8 crushing pearls and feathers until the dirt was fragrant.<sup>3</sup>  
 Why were imperial armies routed so readily?  
 Too many horses had died transporting lychees from distant lands.<sup>4</sup>  
 Yao's merit and Shun's virtue were as grand as Heaven,  
 12 what need had they to record it meticulously in writing?<sup>5</sup>  
 To commemorate virtue in a tablet truly is debasing,  
 left then for spirits and ghosts to obliterate on a cliff.  
 Ziyi and Guangbi had no doubts or jealousies,  
 16 heaven regretted the tragedy, the people found ease.<sup>6</sup>

---

3 There is an intended irony in the mention of Diligent Governance Tower because it was there, despite the building's name, that Xuanzong frequently hosted feasts and indulged himself. The pearls and feathers refer to the adornments of the palace ladies.

4 This exaggerated claim refers to the infamous use of imperial riders to deliver fresh lychees to the palace from the distant south to satisfy the fondness of Xuanzong's prized consort, Yang Guifei 楊貴妃, for the fruit.

5 Yao and Shun were the legendary exemplary rulers of high antiquity.

6 Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (698–781) and Li Guangbi 李光弼 (708–764) were the imperial generals credited with suppressing the rebellion and restoring order.

夏商有鑒當深戒  
簡冊汗青今俱在。  
君不見

- 20 當時張說最多機  
雖生已被姚崇賣。

## 第二

君不見  
驚人廢興傳天寶  
中興碑上今生草。  
4 不知負國有姦雄  
但說成功尊國老。  
誰令妃子天上來  
號秦韓國皆天才。  
8 花桑羯鼓玉方響  
春風不敢生塵埃。

1 Benighted rulership that led to the demise of the ancient Xia and Shang dynasties. The bamboo slips are, in Li Qingzhao's imagination, the earliest historical writings that chronicle the fall of those dynasties. As impartial historical records, they are implicitly contrasted with the sycophantic tone of the Restoration Tablet.

2 Zhang Yue (667–731) and Yao Chong (651–721) were grand councilors under Xuanzong. These lines allude to an anecdote found in the miscellany *Minghuang zalu* 明皇雜錄 (but not in the dynastic histories) that tells how Zhang Yue was tricked by Yao Chong into writing a flattering tomb inscription for Yao. When he was dying, Yao instructed his sons to present his various playthings to Zhang when Zhang came to mourn for him, and then request that Zhang compose Yao's tomb inscription. Yao knew that Zhang, delighted with the gifts, would first write a favorable inscription. But Yao also knew that within a few days Zhang would have

The Xia and Shang are a mirror, we are sternly warned.

Their treated bamboo slips are still extant today.<sup>1</sup>

Don't you know—

- 20 Zhang Yue had the most wives and ruses of his day,  
yet Yao Chong managed to deceive him from the grave.<sup>2</sup>

## II

Don't you know—

Those stirring tales of Tianbao era rise and fall—<sup>3</sup>  
today the Restoration Tablet is covered with weeds!

- 4 It says nothing of treacherous ministers who betrayed the empire,  
and speaks only of elder statesmen and their meritorious deeds.  
Who was it allowed the imperial concubine to ascend into Heaven?  
The ladies of Guo, Qin, and Han were surely divine!<sup>4</sup>
- 8 A nomadic drum of mulberry wood, hanging chimes of jade,<sup>5</sup>  
the spring wind did not dare to stir up dust or dirt.

---

second thoughts and return to ask to make some revisions in the text. But the sons were instructed to immediately have the text carved on stone and submitted to the court, so that no revisions were possible. When Zhang did return, just as Yao predicted, he discovered that Yao had thus tricked him from the grave.

3 Tianbao was the reign period (742–756) that ended soon after the An Lushan rebellion began.

4 The women given titles of Guo, Qin, and Han were the three sisters of Yang Guifei. The answer to the question posed in line five is Yang Guozhong 楊國忠 (?–756), Guifei's cousin who rose to the rank of chief minister and helped to install clan members such as the consort into the court and palace.

5 This line is based on Tang accounts of musical performances in the palace that the emperor and his favorites participated in.

- 姓名誰復知安史  
健兒猛將安眠死。
- 12 去天尺五抱甕峯  
峯頭鑿出開元字。  
時移勢去真可哀  
姦人心醜深如崖。
- 16 西蜀萬里尚能反  
南內一閉何時開。  
可憐孝德如天大  
反使將軍稱好在。
- 20 嗚呼，奴婢乃不能道輔國用事張后尊  
乃能念春薺長安作斤賣。

1 The sense is that no one took notice of the future rebels An Lushan and Shi Siming 史思明 (703–761), and that the imperial soldiers and generals who should have prevented the outbreak of the rebellion were indulging themselves and died peaceful deaths rather than give their lives on the battlefield.

2 Baoweng Peak (Li Qingzhao's version of the name is evidently an error for Wengtu Peak) was a site on top of Hua Mountain, near the capital Chang'an, that Xuanzong liked to visit. During the Kaiyuan reign period (713–741) he planned to inscribe the name of that period on a rock there, carved large enough to be visible "a hundred miles away." The plan was abandoned, however, when advisors objected to it as an extravagant display. Li Qingzhao's lines refer to the plan as if it had been fulfilled.

3 The traitor is Li Linfu 李林甫 (683–753), the grand councilor who had advanced the career of An Lushan but died in 752, too early to see the disastrous result of his patronage of that general. The language about Li's treachery is drawn from the biographies of him in the standard histories of the Tang.

4 Soon after the capitals fell to An Lushan, Xuanzong was forced to abdicate and flee to Chengdu (Western Shu). After the imperial forces retook the capital, the "retired emperor" was summoned back by the new emperor, his son, Suzong. At first,

- Who even knew the names of An and Shi?  
 Valiant warriors and fierce generals died peacefully in their sleep.<sup>1</sup>
- 12 Baoweng Peak is barely five feet short of Heaven,  
 on its summit they planned to carve the words “Kaiyuan.”<sup>2</sup>  
 How pitiful, the way power vanished as times changed,  
 the traitor’s wickedness was as precipitous as a steep cliff.<sup>3</sup>
- 16 The former ruler managed to return ten thousand miles from Western  
 Shu,  
 but once the southern enclosure was locked, it was never reopened.<sup>4</sup>  
 What a shame! Filial love as expansive as Heaven itself  
 eventually caused a general to inquire timidly, “Is everyone well?”<sup>5</sup>
- 20 How disgraceful! That slave could not mention Fuguo’s scheming with  
 Empress Zhang,  
 but still recalled shepherd’s-purse sold by the catty in Chang’an.<sup>6</sup>

---

Xuanzong was allowed to move back into his favorite palace, Xingqing Palace, but soon he was forced to move to another palace and not allowed to return.

- 5 The reference to filial love is sarcastic, implying that the filial devotion that the new emperor, Suzong, was expected to show to his father was wholly lacking. This is seen in, among other actions, the way Xuanzong was threatened by armed soldiers, under orders from Suzong’s powerful eunuch as he was moving from one palace to the other. Xuanzong’s trusted eunuch Gao Lishi 高力士 (684–762) at first denounced the soldiers, but soon was reduced to a show of polite submission (asking the soldiers confronting them “Is everyone well?”) before Xuanzong was allowed to pass unharmed.
- 6 The concluding lines concern the pathetic denouement of Gao Lishi. After Xuanzong’s abdication, Gao remained faithful to Xuanzong (as we see in the preceding couplet). But of course his power was just a shadow of what it had been before. He did not dare to object to the palace scheming between his replacement, Li Fuguo, and the empress who allayed herself with him. An “unofficial biography” of Gao Lishi reports that when he was finally stripped entirely of office in 760 and sent into exile in the south, he noticed the herb shepherd’s-purse growing there, which the locals did not know to eat, and wrote a poem about it, recalling how prized it was back in the capital. In Li Qingzhao’s poem, this becomes an act of nostalgia and self-pity.

## 1.4

## 分得知字

學語三十年  
緘口不求知。  
誰遣好奇士  
4 相逢說項斯。

## 1.5

## 感懷

宣和辛丑八月十日到棗，獨坐一室，平生所見，皆不在目前。几上有《禮韻》，因信手開之，約以所開為韻作詩。偶得「子」字，因以為韻，作《感懷》詩云：

寒窗敗几無書史  
公路可憐合至此。

- 
- 1 The title implies that this poem was written socially, as part of a group session, in which different persons were assigned rhymes to which to compose their poems. Such assignment makes the task of composing more difficult, and was often part of the competition and fun of poetic games.
  - 2 Xiang Si (fl. 830) was a late Tang writer who was quite unknown until Yang Jingzhi 楊敬之 (fl. 820) met him and, impressed by his talent, announced his intention to speak of Xiang to everyone he met.
  - 3 Writtten, as the poem's preface explains, in 1121, when Li Qingzhao went to join her husband in Laizhou (Shandong), where he had just resumed his official career, after

## 1.4

Written Upon Being Assigned the Rhyme “Zhi”<sup>1</sup>

I’ve studied poetic language for thirty years  
 but kept my mouth shut, not seeking to be known.  
 Whoever sent a gentleman fond of the marvelous and strange  
 4 to meet Xiang Si and spread word of him?<sup>2</sup>

## 1.5

Stirred by Feelings<sup>3</sup>

I arrived in Lai on the tenth day of the eighth month of the *xinchou* year of the Xuanhe period (1121) and found myself sitting alone in a single room. Nothing of what I was used to seeing my entire life was there before my eyes. A copy of *Rhymes for Rituals* was on the table, and I opened it randomly, having decided that I would use whatever rhyme I opened to write a poem. By chance I opened to the character “son” and used it for my rhyme, composing a poem titled “Stirred by Feelings.”

A cold window, a broken desk, and no books in sight,  
 now I know the pitiful condition that Gonglu endured!<sup>4</sup>

---

spending some fourteen years living in forced “retirement” in Zhao Mingcheng’s ancestral home in Qingzhou, Shandong.

4 Gonglu is the polite name of Yuan Shu 袁術 (d. 199), a warlord who came to power in the chaos of the last years of the Later Han. He proclaimed himself emperor and founder of a new dynasty in 195. He was then attacked by Cao Cao 曹操 (ca. 155–220) and other generals and suffered irreversible defeats on the battlefield, until he was isolated and running short of rations for his men. One day he asked his cooks for honey sauce to go with his ground wheat and was dismayed to hear that even that was unavailable. Sitting on his bed he cried out, “How could Yuan Shu have been brought to this!” He then collapsed and died.

- 青州從事孔方君  
 4 終日紛紛喜生事。  
 作詩謝絕聊閉門  
 燕寢凝香有佳思。  
 靜中我乃得至交  
 8 烏有先生子虛子。

## 1.6

## 曉夢

- 曉夢隨疏鐘  
 飄然躡雲霞。  
 因緣安期生  
 4 邂逅萼綠華。

1 Because of an earlier usage in *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (*New Account of Tales of the World*), “Qingzhou attendants” means good wine, or simply wine. Lord Square Hole is a fanciful designation of coins, personified, owing to a pun on *kongfang* 孔方, which describes a Chinese coin with its “square hole” in the middle and also sounds like a plausible personal name (since Kong is a standard surname). This couplet must be a complaint by Li Qingzhao that feasting and other expenditures, possibly connected to her husband’s new official position, have brought hardship upon her family. There may be a secondary meaning in line 3. Li Qingzhao and Zhao Mingcheng had just spent fourteen years living in Qingzhou (the same as in the *Shishuo xinyu* allusion), and the compound *congshi* may also function verbally

- Qingzhou wine attendants and Lord Square Hole  
 4 enjoy causing no end of trouble all day long.<sup>1</sup>  
 I shut my door, declining all inquiries, to compose poetic lines;  
 as incense suffuses the prefectural room, I find relief in elevated  
 thought.  
 In quiet and solitude I obtain perfect companions:  
 8 Lord No-such and Sir Vacuity.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.6

### Dawn Dream

- A dawn dream follows the fleeting drumbeats,  
 soaring it treads upon the colored clouds.  
 It is my fate to meet the immortal An Qisheng  
 4 by chance I encounter goddess Green Blossom too.<sup>3</sup>

---

as “to be in the service of”: thus “In Qingzhou we subjected ourselves to money.”  
 This too is a complaint.

2 Lord No-such and Sir Vacuity are punning names of imaginary persons in the Han dynasty rhapsody, “Sir Vacuity,” written by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (ca. 179–117 BCE).

3 An Qisheng is a legendary immortal who is said to have lived on the Penglai Islands. Some sources say that the first emperor of Qin (r. 221–210 BCE) met him and later launched his unsuccessful Penglai Islands expedition to contact him again. Green Blossom, a lesser-known divinity, was a mountain goddess who appeared in 359 to Yang Quan and presented divine gifts to him.

秋風正無賴  
吹盡玉井花。  
共看藕如船  
8 同食棗如瓜。  
翩翩座上客  
意妙語亦佳。  
嘲辭鬪詭辨  
12 活火分新茶。  
雖非助帝功  
其樂莫可涯。  
人生能如此  
16 何必歸故家。  
起來斂衣坐  
掩耳厭喧嘩。  
心知不可見  
20 念念猶咨嗟。

- The autumn winds truly cannot be withstood,  
 they blow all the flowers from Jade Well.  
 Together we view lotus pods the size of boats  
 8 and nibble on dates as large as melons.<sup>1</sup>  
 How graceful, the guests at the banquet,  
 marvelous their thoughts, excellent their words too.  
 Teasing each other, they vie in witty debate,  
 12 with rekindled fire we brew fresh tea.<sup>2</sup>  
 Although we do not assist the emperor doing good deeds,  
 the joy of this gathering knows no bounds.  
 If a person could truly live like this,  
 16 what need would there be of returning home?  
 Awakening, I sit up and straighten my robe,  
 then cover my ears, annoyed by raucous shouting.  
 Those who know me can no longer be seen;  
 20 sighing, my thoughts dwell on my dream.

---

1 Han Yu's 韓愈 (768–824) poem “Ancient Intentions” (“Gu yi” 古意) describes a magical Jade Well on top of Hua Mountain in which grow lotus plants that have seed pods as large as boats.

2 These lines recall descriptions in the *Han shu* 漢書 (*History of the Han*) of the witty exchanges between Emperor Wu and his court jester and writer Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (ca. 154–ca. 93 BCE), as well as language found in Dongfang's own “Response to an Interlocutor's Challenge.”

## 1.7

## 咏史

兩漢本繼紹  
 新室如贅疣。  
 所以嵇中散  
 4 至死薄殷周。

## 1.8

## 偶成

十五年前花月底  
 相從曾賦賞花詩。  
 今看花月渾相似  
 4 安得情懷似往時。

---

1 This is a poem on the theme of historical dynastic succession and legitimacy, and is probably a comment on contemporary politics. The “two Hans” are the Former Han (206 BCE–8 CE) and the Later Han (25–220 CE), which were split by the interregnum New Dynasty (9–25 CE) founded by the usurper Wang Mang 王莽 (45–23 BCE). The opening couplet insists that the Later Han was the legitimate successor to the Former Han, and that Wang Mang’s interregnum was an illegitimate excrescence. The second couplet jumps abruptly to the Jin dynasty scholar Ji Kang

**1.7**

## On History

The two Hans were the true dynastic lineage,  
the New Reign was like a blister.

That is why Courtier Ji

4 to his dying day disparaged the Yin and Zhou.<sup>1</sup>

**1.8**

## Written on Impulse

Fifteen years ago, beneath blossoms in the moonlight,  
I sat with friends writing poems on enjoying the blossoms.

Today, blossoms in the moonlight look much the same,

4 but how could my feelings ever be the same?

---

嵇康 (223–62), who opposed the usurpation of the Wei dynasty by the Sima clan, for which he was eventually put to death, and said apropos of that event that, unlike most historians, he did not approve of the Yin (Shang) overthrow of the Xia dynasty in antiquity nor the Zhou's overthrow of the Shang. This poem is thought to have been written soon after Liu Yu 劉豫 (1073–1143), a previous governor of Ji'nan who had defected to the Jurchen conquerors of the Northern Song, was installed by the Jin as the ruler of a puppet regime of the Great Qi in 1129.

## 1.9

## 烏江

生當作人傑  
死亦為鬼雄。  
至今思項羽  
4 不肯過江東。

## 1.10-11

上樞密韓公工部尚書胡公（二首）

## 1.9

## Wu River

In life be a hero among men,  
 in death be a champion among ghosts.  
 Down to today we still remember Xiang Yu,  
 4 who refused to cross east of the river.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.10–11

Presented to Lord Han of the Military Affairs Bureau and Lord Hu  
 of the Ministry of Works (Two Poems)

*This poem, written in 1133, is addressed to two court officials who had just been named as emissaries to the Jurchen Jin empire in the north. The Jin had invaded the Song dynasty in 1126, captured its reigning emperor and his deposed father (Qinzong and Huizong) along with hundreds of imperial clan members and taken them back deep into its own empire as prisoners. What little was left of the imperial clan and court hastily installed a new emperor, Gaozong, and fled south, where after some years of chaos and indecision, they eventually established a new capital at Hangzhou, renaming it Lin'an ("temporary haven"). So began the Southern Song, ignominiously, the second half of the dynasty that was to last until 1279. During the next fifteen years, the Song court vacillated between trying to mount a military campaign to retake the vast northern half of its empire*

---

1 This poem is thought to have been written in 1129, when Li Qingzhao and Zhao Mingcheng were traveling up the Yangzi River from Jiankang, looking for a place to settle. There is reason to believe that they paid a visit to the shrine honoring Xiang Yu, the great Chu general and claimant to the throne after the overthrow of the Qin dynasty, located on the Wu River (in modern Anhui, just up the Yangzi from Nanjing). This is another treatment of a historical theme with contemporary political meaning, given its reference to the choice Xiang Yu made in 202 BCE to die in battle against his rival claimant to the throne rather than to flee to safety by crossing the Wu River.

紹興癸丑六月，樞密韓公，工部尚書胡公使虜，通兩宮也。有易安室者，父祖皆出韓公門下，今家世淪替，子姓寒微，不敢望公之車塵。又貧病，但神明未衰落，見此大號令，不能忘言，作古、律各一章，以寄區區之意，以待採詩者云。

*that was now in Jurchen hands and negotiating a permanent peace with the Jurchen and accepting its newly reduced circumstances. The so-called "peace faction" eventually prevailed, and a permanent pact with the Jurchen was concluded in 1141. This poem was written during those early chaotic years when it was far from clear, at least to the Chinese leadership, what the eventual outcome of the hostilities between the rival empires would be. The mission that the two emissaries, Han Xiaozhou 韓肖胄 (1057–1150) and Hu Songnian 胡松年 (1087–1146), were about to embark on was one of many such diplomatic exchanges between the two empires during these years. Foremost among the goals they must have had was to negotiate the release of the two former Song emperors, which did not happen (the two eventually died in Jurchen captivity). Li Qingzhao's poem proudly maintains a Chinese-centered view of the conflict between the two empires, just as we would expect. But it also indirectly and sometimes sarcastically criticizes the Song court's weakness in its dealings with the northern enemy. That a woman would write any poem at all addressed to court officials on the eve of their departure on such a diplomatic mission would have been completely unexpected. That in the poem she presents diplomatic advice and broaches criticism of the current tendency at the court to accommodate the invaders makes her composition all the more remarkable.*

In the sixth month of the *guichou* year of the Shaoxing reign [1133], Military Commissioner Han and Minister Hu of the Bureau of Works were sent as emissaries to the northern barbarians, where they were to carry messages to the Two Palaces. Here is the woman Yi'an, whose father and grandfather were disciples of Lord Han's ancestors. Their family is in decline, and she as its younger member is lowly and insignificant. She would not presume even to look upon the dust from their lordships' carriages. Yi'an suffers, moreover, from poverty and ill health, yet her spirit and understanding are not the least bit diminished. Hearing of this august imperial commission and command, she could not fail to speak out. She has composed two poems, one each in the ancient and regulated styles, to convey her humble views, awaiting, now, the official Poetry Collector.

## 第一

三年夏六月  
 天子視朝久。  
 凝旒望南雲  
 4 垂衣思北狩。  
 如聞帝若曰  
 岳牧與群后。  
 賢寧無半千  
 8 運已遇陽九。  
 勿勒燕然銘  
 勿種金城柳。  
 豈無純孝臣  
 12 識此霜露悲。  
 何必羹捨肉  
 便可車載脂。  
 土地非所惜  
 16 玉帛如塵泥。  
 誰當可將命  
 幣厚辭益卑。

1 That the jade cap tassels are not swaying shows the depth of his concentration. The “Northern excursion” (or “hunting expedition”) refers euphemistically to the northern captivity of the two former emperors, Huizong and Qinzong.

2 This line and the next allude to ancient northern campaigns, in which heroic Chinese generals defeated enemies. It was the Han general Dou Xian 竇憲 (d. 92) who erected a stele at Jiluo Mountain, celebrating his defeat of the Xiongnu. It was

## I

- In the summer, the third year, the sixth month,  
 the Son of Heaven examined his court carefully.  
 He gazed at southern clouds through jade cap tassels that did not sway,  
 4 thought of the northern excursion, his robes hanging down.<sup>1</sup>  
 It seemed that His Majesty spoke these words:  
 “Titled lords, governors, and myriad officials:  
 A worthy man appears every five hundred years,  
 8 Our time has witnessed calamities for an eon.  
 Let us not celebrate victories with a Yanran Mountain stele,  
 Nor need we plant willows at Golden City.<sup>2</sup>  
 Is there no perfectly filial subject,  
 12 who understands this frost-and-dew grief?  
 Why must I set meat aside from the broth?<sup>3</sup>  
 Let us grease the carriage axles to quicken them.  
 Our lands, we do not cherish them;  
 16 jade and silk are like dirt to us.  
 Who is fit to convey our message?  
 Gifts increase as our words become more humble.”

---

the Jin period figure Huan Wen 桓文 (312–73) who planted willows on a northern campaign and returned years later to find them fully grown.

3 The appearance of frost in the autumn and dew in spring reminds the gentleman of the passing of the seasons and hence the aging of his parents, that is, Gaozong's mother and father in their northern captivity. When feasted by his duke, Ying Kaoshu 穎考叔 (d. 712 BCE) took the meat out of his soup, setting it aside for his mother, who had never had the chance to eat such a meal.

四岳僉曰俞  
20 臣下帝所知。  
中朝第一人  
春官有昌黎。  
身為百夫特  
24 行足萬人師。  
嘉祐與建中  
為政有臯夔。  
匈奴畏王商  
28 吐蕃尊子儀。  
夷狄已破膽  
將命公所宜。  
公拜手稽首  
32 受命白玉墀。  
曰臣敢辭難  
此亦何等時。  
家人安足謀  
36 妻子不必辭。  
願奉天地靈  
願奉宗廟威。  
徑持紫泥詔  
40 直入黃龍城。

- The feudal lords together said, “Yes,  
 20 Your Majesty knows his subjects well.  
 The best man in the central court,  
 is a Han Yu among the rites officials.<sup>1</sup>  
 His person stands out among one hundred,  
 24 his conduct makes him teacher to ten thousand.  
 During the Jiayou and Jianzhong periods  
 his ancestors managed policy as did Gao Tao and Kui.  
 The Xiongnu fear this Wang Shang,  
 28 the Turfan revere this Guo Ziyi.<sup>2</sup>  
 The barbarians have already lost their courage,  
 he is the one to receive the command.”  
 The lord made obeisance with hands and head,  
 32 he accepted the appointment below the white jade steps,  
 Saying, “How dare I shrink from hardship  
 when we live in a time like this?  
 What thought do I have of my family?  
 36 I need not take leave of wife and children.  
 I yearn to hold the spiritual power of Heaven and Earth  
 I yearn to hold the majesty of the ancestral shrine.  
 Grasping the decree sealed with purple powder  
 40 I shall proceed straight into Yellow Dragon City.<sup>3</sup>”

---

1 Han Xiaozhou is being compared to the great Tang statesman Han Yu, of the same surname.

2 Han's great-grandfather Han Qi 韓琦 (1008–1075) and grandfather Han Zhongyan 韓忠彥 (1038–1109), who were grand councilors during the named reign periods of the Northern Song. Gao Tao and Kui were high officials under the legendary sage kings Yao and Shun. Wang Shang was a Han dynasty grand councilor. His appearance and reputation intimidated the Xiongnu chieftan when he came to the Han Court.

3 The Jin capital, near modern Harbin, Jilin.

單于定稽顙  
侍子當來迎。  
仁君方恃信  
44 狂生休請纓。  
或取犬馬血  
與結天日盟。

胡公清德人所難  
48 謀同德協必志安。  
脫衣已被漢恩暖  
離歌不道易水寒。  
皇天久陰后土濕  
52 雨勢未回風勢急。  
車聲辘轳馬蕭蕭  
壯士懦夫俱感泣。  
閭閻嫠婦亦何知  
56 瀝血投書干記室。  
夷虜從來性虎狼  
不虞預備庸何傷。

The Khan will kowtow in receiving me,  
 his hostage sons will come to welcome me.  
 Our benevolent ruler relies on trust,  
 44 hot-blooded men need not ask for ropes.<sup>1</sup>  
 Perhaps we shall use the blood of horse and dog,  
 to sign a treaty bound by an oath to the sun in the sky.”

Lord Hu's pure goodness is rare among men,  
 48 of shared aim and virtue, his resolve is firm.  
 Having shed his jacket, he is warmed by Han's beneficence,  
 his farewell song complains not of the Yi River's chill.<sup>2</sup>  
 Lord Heaven has long been clouded over and Consort Earth wet,  
 52 the driving rain does not abate, the wind increases.  
 Carriage wheels creak and horses whinny sadly,  
 men of valor and cowards are both reduced to tears.  
 As a widow of the inner apartments, what do I know?  
 56 I write this in blood to submit to the Imperial Archives.  
 Barbarians have long had the nature of tiger and wolf,  
 what harm is there in preparing for the unexpected?

---

1 These lines fancifully imagine that the Jin ruler will send his sons, princes, back with Han Xiaozhou as tokens of his submission to the Song Court. The Han dynasty general Zhong Jun 終軍 (ca. 133–112) boasted that he would tie up the king of the rival state Southern Yue and deliver him to the Han emperor as prisoner.

2 Han dynasty founder, emperor Gaozu 高祖 (r. 206–187 BCE), was so solicitous of his minister Han Xin that he took off his own jacket to clothe him. As he set off on his suicide mission to assassinate the First Emperor of the Qin, Jing Ke 荊軻 (d. 227 BCE) sang a sad farewell song that mentioned the cold waters of the Yi River at their farewell.

衷甲昔時聞楚幕  
 60 乘城前日記平涼。  
 蔡丘踐土非荒城  
 勿輕談士棄儒生。  
 露布詞成馬猶倚  
 64 峻函關出雞未鳴。  
 巧匠何曾棄樗櫟  
 芻蕘之言或有益。  
 不乞隋珠與和璧  
 68 只乞鄉關新消息。  
 靈光雖在應蕭蕭  
 草中翁仲今何若。  
 遺氓豈尚種桑麻  
 72 殘虜如聞保城郭。  
 嫠家父祖生齊魯  
 位下名高人比數。

1 Although they claimed that they intended to sign a treaty with the Jin, men of the rival state of Chu in ancient times went to the ceremony wearing armor under their clothes, planning a surprise attack on the Jin representatives. A Turfan official treacherously ambushed the Tang official Hun Jian 渾瑊 (736–799) at Pingliang in 787, when the two met supposedly to sign a treaty.

2 Kuiqiu and Jiantu are places where famous treaties were signed during the Spring and Autumn period. Taken as a question, the line evidently means that the treaties concluded at those places had no lasting value or effect, and the places themselves have fallen into neglect and ruin.

- Armor was concealed under clothing in the ancient tent of Chu,  
 60 we know about defending the wall at Pingliang in days of old.<sup>1</sup>  
 Aren't Kuiqiu and Jiantu no more than ruins?<sup>2</sup>  
 Do not belittle advising gentlemen or reject scholars.  
 A victory report was written leaning against a horse,  
 64 Xiaohan Pass was left behind before the cock crowed.<sup>3</sup>  
 A skillful carpenter does not reject even inferior timber,  
 kindling gatherers sometimes supply sage counsel.  
 We do not seek Sui's pearl or He's jade disk,<sup>4</sup>  
 68 all we want is fresh tidings of our homeland.  
 Lingguang Palace still stands but must be desolate,  
 how fares the stone statuary, engulfed by weeds?<sup>5</sup>  
 Do our abandoned subjects still plant mulberry and hemp?  
 72 Do the routed barbarians still guard the city walls?

This widow's father and grandfather were born in Qi and Lu,  
 they counted men of renown among their followers.

---

3 This couplet, through the use of historical allusions, urges Han Xiaozhou to accept the assistance and counsel of lowly inferiors. Possibly Li Qingzhao means herself as well as attendants who will accompany him on his mission.

4 This line names two ancient treasures.

5 Lingguang Palace, belonging to Prince Yu of Gong, of the Former Han, was said to have survived the strife at the end of the Former Han, while the imperial palaces in Chang'an did not. In this line the ruins of the palace, still identifiable though engulfed in weeds, beckons the Song leaders in the south to return northward and reclaim their lost territory.

當年稷下縱談時  
 76 猶記人揮汗成雨。  
 子孫南渡今幾年  
 飄流遂與流人伍。  
 欲將血淚寄山河  
 80 去灑東山一抔土。

## 第二

想見皇華過二京  
 壺漿夾道萬人迎。  
 連昌宮裏桃應在  
 4 華萼樓前鵲定驚。  
 但說帝心憐赤子  
 須知天意念蒼生。  
 聖君大信明如日  
 8 長亂何須在屢盟。

1 The ancient state of Qi, in Li Qingzhao's native northeast (modern Shandong), was famed for its Jixia Academy, which attracted scholars from far and wide and fostered lively debate on philosophical and political issues.

2 East Mountain is a place in the northeastern state of Lu (again indicating Li Qingzhao's homeland).

In animated discussions at the Jixia Academy,  
 76 perspiration wiped from brows fell like rain, I still can recall.<sup>1</sup>  
 Their descendant crossed the river south years ago  
 to drift aimlessly now as a refugee.  
 Take my blood-stained tears to those hills and rivers,  
 80 and sprinkle them on a clod of East Mountain soil.<sup>2</sup>

## II

We imagine the envoys' splendor as they pass the two capitals:  
 vats of liquor line the highway as thousands rush to welcome them.  
 Peach trees must still blossom in Lianchang Palace,  
 4 magpies are startled before Flower Calyx Tower.<sup>3</sup>  
 Say only that our emperor cherishes his little children,  
 heaven is mindful, they must know, of our commoners.  
 His Majesty's great trust is as bright as the sun—  
 8 why must it be that frequent treaties prolong the strife?<sup>4</sup>

3 The two buildings were both part of the Tang palace complex in Chang'an, substitutes here for the Northern Song palace in Bianliang (Kaifeng). Lianchang was known for its many peach trees.

4 The language and the idea of a connection between too many treaties and protracted unrest derive from the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*) 198, "Clever Words" 巧言. In fact, many treaties were made with the Jurchen conquerors in these years, but they were quickly violated by one side or the other.

## 1.12

## 夜發嚴灘

巨艦只緣因利往  
 扁舟亦是為名來。  
 往來有愧先生德  
 4 特地通宵過釣臺。

## 1.13

## 題八咏樓

千古風流八咏樓  
 江山留與後人愁。  
 水通南國三千里  
 4 氣壓江城十四州。

---

1 Yan Rapids, on the Fuchun River upstream from Hangzhou, is named for the Han dynasty recluse Yan Ziling 嚴子陵 (1<sup>st</sup> c. CE). Li Qingzhao passed by this place in 1134, the threat of another Junchen incursion forced her and many others to flee the capital and seek refuge in the provinces. The fishing pier there that Yan Ziling supposed had used by subsequently named after him. There was a long tradition of literati poetic tributes to this famous recluse, who had turned his back on office to embrace the hermetic life.

2 The Tower of Eight Odes is located in Wuzhou (modern Jinhua, Zhejiang), where it sits on the top of a hill, providing a grand vista of the Yangzi River and the southern plains beyond it. The tower is so named because of eight poems that the

**1.12**

## Setting Out at Night from Yan Rapids

Large merchant barges go forth in search of profit,  
small boats drift by in a quest for worldly fame.

Coming and going, all are humbled by this gentleman's example,  
4 they deliberately pass close by his Fishing Pier all night long.<sup>1</sup>

**1.13**

## Inscribed on Tower of Eight Odes

Celebrated since ancient times, the Tower of Eight Odes!  
Yet its rivers and hills now bequeath sorrow to later generations.

The waters here flow through three thousand Southland miles,  
4 the tower's aura dominates fourteen Yangzi River prefectures.<sup>2</sup>

---

poet Shen Yue wrote when he visited the tower in 494. Many others visitors after him had followed suit. When the military threat of 1134 forced Li Qingzhao away from the capital, she ended up in Wuzhou and seems to have stayed there for several months before it was safe to return to Lin'an. The opening lines of the poem contrasts the grandeur and fame of the tower with the military crisis that was now ever-present in the minds of northern refugees to the south (like Li Qingzhao), which had transformed the way the landscape itself was viewed. Awareness of this "sorrow," as Li Qingzhao calls it, gives a darker meaning to the closing lines about the southern territory that could be half-glimpsed and half-imagined from atop the tower.

## 1.14

## 打馬賦

予性專博，晝夜每忘食事。南渡金華，僑居陳氏，講博弈之事，遂作《依經打馬賦》曰：

## 1.14

## Rhapsody on Capture the Horse

*“Rhapsody” translates fu 賦, a classical poetic genre known for epideictic elaboration on a chosen theme. Li Qingzhao was fond of a board game known as Capture the Horse (dama 打馬). No records of this game survive from after the Song dynasty, and what little we know about it today comes mostly from the various writings Li Qinghao left concerning it. The game was modeled on a contest between opposing armies and was evidently won when one player “captured” enough of the opponent’s “war horses,” represented by tiles moved about on the game board. Li Qingzhao produced three separate writings on this game: (1) this rhapsody; (2) a “preface” to a pre-existing handbook on the game, made up of textual descriptions of various dispositions of the game pieces, accompanied by diagram (translated in the “Prose” section of this volume); and (3) thirteen short verses (called mingci) on particular game strategies and outcomes. These game writings were produced in the final months of 1134, when as mentioned above Li Qingzhao was forced to abandon the capital once again due to the threat of another Jurchen incursion, and seek refuge some one hundred miles south in Wuzhou (modern Jinhua, Zhejiang). No doubt the board game and her writings about it constituted a kind of diversion from the grim political and military situation that had forced her to find a new haven. At the same time, her demonstration through these writings of her knowledge of military history and strategic considerations may also be taken as wry comment on the Song empire’s precarious condition.*

I am, by nature, fixated on board games. I can play morning and night without any thought of food. When I traveled south to Jinhua, I put up at the Chens’ house. Having spoken with my hosts about board games, I subsequently wrote this “Rhapsody on a Handbook for ‘Capture the Horse’.”<sup>1</sup>

---

1 This does not appear to be a real preface written for the rhapsody that follows but rather probably pieced together by an editor from lines in the *Handbook on Capture the Horse*, translated above.

- 歲令云徂  
 盧或可呼。  
 千金一擲  
 4 百萬十都。  
 樽俎具陳  
 已行揖讓之禮。  
 主賓既醉  
 8 不有博弈者乎。  
 打馬爰興  
 擣蒲遂廢。  
 實小道之上流  
 12 乃閨房之雅戲。  
 齊驅驥騶  
 疑穆王萬里之行。  
 間列玄黃  
 16 類楊氏五家之隊。  
 珊珊珮響  
 方驚玉鐙之敲。  
 落落星羅  
 20 忽見連錢之碎。

1 When Liu Yu 劉裕 (363–422), the future founding emperor of the (Liu) Song dynasty, was engaged in a chess match with his rival Liu Yi 劉毅 (?–412), he predicted that all five dice he threw would come up black. Four of the five did so promptly, but when the last one was still spinning Liu Yu shouted at it, and it came to a stop, showing black.

As the year draws to a close,  
 we seize the chance to shout “Black Eyes”!<sup>1</sup>  
 A thousand gold is wagered on a single throw,  
 4 a million cash rides on ten fists of tallies.  
 Wine cups and plates have been set out,  
 the ceremonious greetings have been performed.  
 After the host and guests are tipsy with wine,  
 8 isn’t there, after all, such a thing as chess?<sup>2</sup>  
 Once Capture the Horse caught on,  
*chupu* dice was no longer played.<sup>3</sup>  
 This is, in fact, the most cultured of trivial pursuits,  
 12 an elegant amusement in the women’s apartments.  
 Powerful steeds like Ji and Lu are yoked together,  
 recalling the ten thousand mile rides of Duke Mu.  
 Black stallions and sorrels prance in tandem,  
 16 just like the Yang clan’s five teams of mounts.<sup>4</sup>  
 The tinkling of gem pendants—  
 we marvel at jade stirrups struck together.  
 Arrayed like a constellation of stars—  
 20 we imagine bronze coins smashed to bits.

---

2 From *Analects* 17.22: “To eat to the full all day long and not apply the mind to anything, is it not depraved? Is there not such a thing as chess? To play chess is at least better than doing nothing at all.”

3 *Chupu* (derived from the Indian game *chaupar*) was a traditional dice game played since early times.

4 The references are to teams of horses kept by historical figures, Duke Mu of Qin in the Warring States and the Yang clan (of Prized Consort Yang) during Tang Xuanzong’s reign.

- 若乃吳江楓冷  
 胡山葉飛。  
 玉門關閉  
 24 沙苑草肥。  
 臨波不渡  
 似惜障泥。  
 或出入用奇  
 28 有類昆陽之戰。  
 或優游仗義  
 正如涿鹿之師。  
 或聞望久高  
 32 脫復庾郎之失。  
 或聲名素昧  
 便同癡叔之奇。  
 亦有緩緩而歸  
 36 昂昂而出。  
 鳥道驚馳  
 蟻封安步。  
 崎嶇峻坂  
 40 未遇王良。

1 These lines open a series of historical references to horses (or their riders), whose point is to emphasize the range and variability of horse behavior and the unpredictability of what transpires with them on the battlefield. It was Wang Ji's 王濟 (ca. 240–ca. 285) horse that balked at crossing a stream, and Wang Ji, a skilled horseman, discerned the reason it did so.

- When the maples turn chill along the Wu River,  
 leaves blow off the trees on the nomad hills.  
 When the border is closed at Jade Gate,  
 24 grasses are plentiful at Sandy Plain.  
 Approaching the waves, one steed would not cross the ford,  
 for fear of staining its mud-guards.<sup>1</sup>  
 Troops may be deployed with surprise,  
 28 as in the battle fought at Kunyang.  
 Or battlefield protocol may be scrupulously maintained,  
 as with the armies at Zhuolu.<sup>2</sup>  
 There are famed riders long known as outstanding  
 32 who fall to the ground like Master Yu.  
 There are men with no reputation for horsemanship  
 who perform as brilliantly as Shu the Fool!<sup>3</sup>  
 There are those who return home haltingly,  
 36 having set out brimming with confidence.  
 Some gallop over a steep trail fit only for crows,  
 while others trot gingerly around an ant hill.  
 Struggling to get through perilous terrain,  
 40 some horses have not met their Wang Liang.

---

2 Kunyang was where the armies of Later Han founder Guangwu 光武 (r. 25–57) used tactics of surprise to rout Wang Mang's troops. Zhuolu was where the legendary Yellow Emperor killed Chiyu 蚩尤 in battle.

3 Master Yu (Yu Yi 庾翼, 305–345) was a consummate horseman, yet one time, when asked to display his skill, he wheeled his horse around and fell to the ground. Shu the Fool is Wang Zhan 王湛, who had a reputation for being a half-wit. But his cousin one day was amazed to find that he was an elegant conversationalist and that he could also tame a horse the cousin lent to him known to be very difficult to ride.

跼促鹽車  
難逢造父。

且夫邱陵云遠

44 白雲在天。

心存戀豆  
志在著鞭。

止蹄黃葉

48 何異金錢。

用五十六采之間  
行九十一路之內。

明以賞罰

52 覈其殿最。

運指麾於方寸之中  
決勝負於幾微之外。

且好勝者人之常情

56 游藝者士之末技。

說梅止渴  
稍疏奔競之心。

畫餅充饑

60 少謝騰驤之志。

將圖實效  
故臨難而不迴。

Laboring to haul a salt cart,  
 others have yet to encounter their Zaofu.<sup>1</sup>  
 Moreover, the plateaus and hills stretch distantly,  
 44 white clouds cover the sky.  
 One nag is thinking only of its beloved bin of beans,  
 while a fine steed yearns for the sting of the whip.  
 Hoofs come to rest on yellow leaves,  
 48 the gold coins are just as many.  
 The tiles that are used number fifty-six,  
 the routes that may be taken amount to ninety-one.  
 Rewards and punishments are meted out unambiguously,  
 52 the lowest and highest merit are properly tallied.  
 Battlefield commands originate in the recesses of one mind,  
 victory and defeat are decided in advance of the portents.

Besides, fondness for victory is part of human nature,  
 56 though these minor arts are a gentleman's smallest skill.  
 Still, mention of the plum served to alleviate thirst,  
 so too this game may calm a mind obsessed with winning.  
 Drawing a pancake satisfied hunger,  
 60 this pursuit may relieve the ambition to vanquish others.<sup>2</sup>  
 If you aspire to get real results,  
 you must face danger and not retreat.

---

1 Wang Liang and Zaofu were famous horse trainers during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods.

2 General Cao Cao promised his thirsty marching troops that a plum tree grove lay ahead laden with sweet-sour fruit. This news made their mouths water so that they forgot their thirst. The idea of drawing a pancake (on the ground) to alleviate hunger usually means to engage in a futile sham, but here Li Qingzhao uses it in the sense of having a pretend substitute (i.e., the board game for real warfare) alleviate the impulse to vanquish others on the battlefield.

欲報厚恩

- 64 故知機而先退。  
 或銜枚緩進  
 以踰關塞之艱。  
 或賈勇爭先
- 68 莫悟穿塹之墜。  
 皆由不知止足  
 自貽尤悔。  
 當知範我之馳驅
- 72 勿忘君子之箴佩。  
 況為之賢已  
 事實見於正經。  
 用之以誠
- 76 義必合於天德。  
 牝乃叶地類之貞  
 反亦記魯姬之式。  
 鑿髻墮於梁家
- 80 溯許循於岐國。  
 故遶牀大叫  
 五木皆盧。

But sometimes to repay high honors conferred on you  
 64 you must interpret subtle signs and withdraw for a time.  
 Some go forward slowly with gags in their mouths  
 to penetrate the obstacles at mountain passes;  
 Others peddle their valor and strive to be first  
 68 only to fall into a pit they never saw.  
 That comes from not knowing when to stop,<sup>1</sup>  
 remorse was a result they gave themselves.  
 You must know the proper way to guide the chariot,  
 72 and not forget the warnings worn at the gentleman's waist.  
 Is this not better than doing nothing at all,  
 as the classic itself teaches?<sup>2</sup>  
 Each move must be rooted in utmost sincerity  
 76 the principles must accord with the way of Heaven.  
 The mare conforms to the constancy of earth,  
 the lady of Lu exemplified correct "returning."<sup>3</sup>  
 We learn from the fallen hair-knots of the Woman Liang,  
 80 we follow the curving riverbank in the state of Qi.<sup>4</sup>  
 Therefore, when one fellow shouted out as he circled the couch,  
 all five sticks came up black.

---

1 The wisdom of "knowing when to stop" is first invoked in the *Daode jing* 道德經 32.

2 This is the second allusion to Confucius' statement about chess, see n. 2, p. 37.

3 The description of the mare comes from the *Yi jing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*) explanation of the *kun* 困 hexagram (representing pure *yin*). The exact sense of line 78 is not clear, but the "going back" refers to the way the horses that pulled the carriage that brought Shuji as a bride to the state of Qi were kept in Qi for before being sent back, in case the marriage did not work out.

4 These lines clearly refer to the placement of the pieces on the board.

瀝酒一呼

84 六子盡赤。

平生不負

遂成劍閣之師

別墅未輸

88 已破淮淝之賊。

今日豈無元子

明時不乏安石。

又何必陶長沙博局之投

92 正當師袁彥道布帽之擲也。

辭曰：

佛狸定見卯年死

貴賤紛紛尚流徙。

1 These two couplets refer to two military leaders, Liu Yu (again) and Liu Xin 劉信 of the Southern Tang (10th c.), who beat rivals at board games by staking their game on a single risky throw, which turned out favorably for them.

2 It was observed about Jin general Huan Wen that he never played a board game unless he was certain of winning, and this was taken, correctly, as an indication that he was sure to win his campaign against the Cheng-Han kingdom in 341, despite the perception among some that his army was outmanned and was sure to lose. Right before his army engaged Fu Jian at the battle of Fei River in 383, the Jin general Xie An 謝安 (320–385) with great nonchalance played chess and did not even pause from the game when news arrived that his army had won a great victory.

3 Yuanzi was the courtesy name of Huan Wen, and Anshi was the courtesy name of Xie An.

4 Tao Changsha (Tao Kan 陶侃, 259–334), another Jin general, was a stickler for discipline. When he saw that his subordinates were spending their time drinking and gambling, he gathered up their cups and board games and threw them all into the river. Yuan Yandao (Yuan Dan 袁耽, fl. 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE), another Jin period chess

- When another cried out as he sprinkled wine on the ground,  
 84 all six dice showed red.<sup>1</sup>  
 One man never lost at board games his whole life,  
 thus his victory at Jiange was assured.  
 Someone else had not gambled away his mountain estate  
 88 when invaders were already defeated at Huai and Fei.<sup>2</sup>  
 Today how could we lack a commander like Yuanzi?  
 Our enlightened age is not short of leaders like Anshi.<sup>3</sup>  
 Why must we imitate Tao Changsha, throwing the chessboard away?  
 92 We should emulate Yuan Yandao, who flung down his cap.<sup>4</sup>

The concluding verse says:

Foli is sure to die in the *mao* year,  
 why are we all, high-ranking and lowly, still fleeing in chaos?<sup>5</sup>

---

master, agreed to help a friend extricate himself from a gambling debt, and entered a chess match even though he was in mourning for a parent. Yuan first disguised himself and hid his mourning cap inside his shirt. After he won the match, he took the cap out and threw it on the floor, asking his opponent, “Now do you recognize Yuan Yandao?”

- 5 The language of the first line of this verse is borrowed from a children’s ditty that predicted the death in 451 of Foli 佛狸, emperor Taiwu 太武 of the Northern Wei (r. 424–251), whose armies were then threatening the (Liu) Song dynasty. Foli here stands for the Jurchen ruler, emperor Taizong. Now, Taizong did die in a *mao* year, 1135, just as the line predicts. Li Qingzhao’s rhapsody is usually assumed to have been written in 1134, because her preface to the handbook for Capture the Horse writings (above) is explicitly dated to that year. Unless this rhapsody was actually written one year later and Li Qingzhao is referring to a death that already happened, in this line she appears to be accurately predicting a future event (a lucky stroke), or perhaps she had heard that Taizong was already ill and had reason to believe he would die, and therefore she quoted the line about Foli.

- 96 滿眼驂騮雜駉駉  
 時危安得真致此。  
 老矣誰能志千里  
 但願相將過淮水。

## 1.15

## 皇帝閣端午帖子

- 日月堯天大  
 璿璣舜曆長。  
 側聞行殿帳  
 4 多集上書囊。

1 Hualiu and Lu'er were celebrated horses of antiquity. The second line is quoted from a Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770) poem on a painting of horses, in which Du Fu expresses the wish that in his “dangerous times” war horses as magnificent as the painted ones could be obtained for the imperial army. Omitted here is a line following this one in some versions, with a reference to Mulan; see the Endnotes.

2 The language is taken from Cao Cao's song: “The old steed lies in the stable / But has ambitions one thousand miles away. / The heroic man is in his twilight years, / But his virile heart is unchanged.”

- 96 Great steeds like Hualiu and Lu'er fill my eyes,  
 in dangerous times where can we find real horses like these?<sup>1</sup>  
 Old now, who still has one thousand mile ambitions?<sup>2</sup>  
 All I want is to join with others to recross the Huai.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.15

Verse Inscription for the Emperor's Residence on the Double Fifth Festival

*On the Double Fifth Festival of 1143 (the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, popularly known today as the Dragon Boat Festival), Li Qingzhao was honored with an invitation to participate in the ritual of submitting inscriptions of celebratory poems to the palace. The invitation itself has some significance for Li Qingzhao's biography, because it suggests that she had regained her status as a "titled woman," which is the status she held as Zhao Mingcheng's wife and widow, but would have lost upon her remarriage to Zhang Ruzhou. It was only women of a certain imperial status who would have been asked to submit such poems. On this festival Li Qingzhao submitted three such poems (this one and the following two): to the emperor, the empress, and the imperial ladies (furen 婦人, one of the several ranks of palace concubines).*

- Vast as Yao's heaven traversed by sun and moon,  
 everlasting as Shun's calendar set by the astrological sphere.  
 The tent of his traveling palace, it is said,  
 4 has satchels full of memorials to the throne.<sup>4</sup>

3 The Huai River was the boundary between Southern Song and the territory of the Jin empire to the north.

4 The last couplet refers to the emperor's exemplary act of circulating through the empire to inquire about the condition of the realm (whether or not he actually did this). It further imagines that in the process of conducting these tours the ruler collected vast numbers of memorials from his subjects. This would reflect his interest in their viewpoints and suggestions.

## 1.16

## 皇后閣端午帖子

意帖初宜夏  
 金駒已過蠶。  
 至尊千萬壽  
 4 行見百斯男。

## 1.17

## 夫人閣端午帖子

三宮催解糶  
 妝罷未天明。  
 便面天題字  
 4 歌頭御賜名。

1 This line is said to allude to the habit the Tang palace lady and poet Shangguan Wan'er 上官婉兒 (664–710) had of critiquing and ranking poems the emperor's courtiers composed at his command. The Double Fifth occurred in the summer of the lunar year.

2 The Golden Colt is a euphemism for the sun. Silkworms were nurtured in the spring season. This line probably refers to a spring ritual the empress performed

**1.16**

## Verse Inscription for the Empress's Residence on the Double Fifth Festival

Summer is the time for evaluating poetic inscriptions,<sup>1</sup>  
 the Golden Colt has left the silkworm season behind.<sup>2</sup>

4 May the emperor enjoy longevity of a thousand years,  
 and witness the birth of a hundred sons.

**1.17**

## Verse Inscription for the Imperial Ladies' Residence on the Double Fifth Festival

The rice dumpling competition is played in the ladies quarters,<sup>3</sup>  
 their make-up is completed before the sun appears.

4 The Son of Heaven inscribes the fans that shield their faces,  
 His Majesty provides tune titles for the songs they sing.

---

involving silkworms, exemplifying her attention to that aspect of womanly responsibilities.

3 The eating of sticky rice dumplings (*zongzi* 粽子) was an indispensable part of the Double Fifth observances (as it is today). A game was made of guessing the size of the leaves in which the rice balls were wrapped for cooking, and the winner would only be determined when the dumplings were unwrapped.

**1.18**

佚句

第一

詩情如夜鵲  
三繞未能安。

## 1.18

## Fragments

*A few couplets and in some cases even single lines survive from lost shi poems by Li Qingzhao. These lines survive because they were quoted in early sources, lifted out of the complete poems in which they presumably originally existed, and they were quoted as outstanding poetic lines. It is a measure of the esteem in which Li Qingzhao's literary works are held that these stray lines are dutifully preserved and are even the object of scholarly commentary in modern editions of her works.*

## I

My poetic feelings are like a magpie in the night sky,  
circling three times, it still cannot settle on one branch.<sup>1</sup>

## II

*Fragments II and III are quoted in an early miscellany, completed in the 1130s, when Li Qingzhao was still alive, in a passage that cites several witty sayings of aphorisms that satirize the inept Song leadership for its loss of the northern half of the empire to the Jurchens, its inability to recover the lost land, and even being unable to stave off continued incursions by the Jurchen south of the Yangzi River. The compiler of this work, Zhuang Chuo 莊綽, saves Li Qingzhao's two couplets for the last in his list of witty criticisms, introducing them this way: "At the time, Zhao Mingcheng's wife, Li Qingzhao, likewise composed poems to disparage the scholar-officials." Zhuang is surely thinking of the irony that the mockery of the lack of*

---

<sup>1</sup> This couplet is derived from lines by Cao Cao: "The moon is bright, the stars few. / Magpies fly southward. They circle the tree three times, / Finding no branch to rest on." In this poem the magpies stand for the talented men to whom the poem is addressed, who have gone from one rival state to another, hoping to find a worthy ruler to serve. In Li Qingzhao's couplet, the bird becomes a metaphor for the restlessness of her poetic impulse and the high standards she has for finalizing her poetic lines.

## 第二

南渡衣冠欠王導  
北來消息少劉琨。

## 第三

南遊尚覺吳江冷  
北狩應悲易水寒。

## 第四

露花倒影柳三變  
桂子飄香張九成。

---

1 “Caps and robes” is metonymy for court officials. The two persons named in this couplet were both associated with the fourth-century Jin dynasty that, not unlike the Song, lost its northern half to invasion and had to withdraw southward to establish a new capital (at Nanjing). Wang Dao (276–339), as grand councilor under the first emperor of the Eastern (i.e., southern) Jin, stabilized the frantic court and chided those who gave up hope of recovering the north. Liu Kun (270–317) was a Jin loyalist general who fought valiantly for the Jin against its northern enemy, and eventually lost his life on the battlefield.

2 The Wu River (a different one from the one mentioned earlier) is near Jiangning, where Li Qingzhao and her husband found themselves during their southern flight in 1128. “The Wu River is chilly” is a phrase drawn from a Tang poetic anecdote, but in Li Qingzhao’s usage “chilly” reflects the state of mind of refugees from the

*stalwart leadership and martial valor at the Song court may even be found in lines written by a woman.*

The “caps and robes” fleeing south lack a Wang Dao,  
in news from the north there is no Liu Kun.<sup>1</sup>

### III

Traveling south we yet feel that Wu River is chilly,  
the northern expedition must be afflicted by the cold of Yi Stream.<sup>2</sup>

### IV

Dewdrops cast shadows: Liu Sanbian;  
the osmanthus sends its fragrance: Zhang Jiucheng.<sup>3</sup>

---

north, like Li Qingzhao, who ironically find that the southern landscape that they have been displaced into is, in their eyes, cold and unappealing. The second line refers euphemistically to the capture of the two Song emperors by the Jurchen and their northern captivity (their “expedition”). This line too contains a literary allusion, this time to the biography of Jing Ke, the would-be assassin of the First Emperor of Qin.

3 Li Qingzhao’s sharp tongue in poetry extended to other topics as well. These lines make fun of a young man who had just placed first in a special palace examination in 1132. The man was Zhang Jiucheng, and the object of Li Qingzhao’s satire was the essay he wrote that won him the top place in the exam. Li Qingzhao shows her disapproval by constructing a parallel between Zhang and Liu Sanbian (Liu Yong 柳永, 987–1053), a poet infamous, in Li Qingzhao’s mind, for his sentimental romantic songs. See Endnotes.

## 2. 文

### 2.1

#### 詞論

樂府聲詩並著，最盛于唐。開元，天寶間，有李八郎者，能歌擅天下。時新及第進士開宴曲江，榜中一名士先召李，使易服隱名姓，衣冠故敝，精神慘沮，與同之宴所，曰「表弟願與座末。」眾皆不顧。既酒行樂作，歌者進。時曹元謙，念奴為冠，歌罷，眾皆咨嗟稱賞。名士忽指李曰「請表弟歌。」眾皆哂，或有怒者。及轉喉發聲，歌一曲，眾皆泣下，羅拜，曰：「此李八郎也。」自後鄭衛之聲日熾，流靡之變日煩，已有《菩薩蠻》，《春光好》，《莎雞子》，《更漏子》，《浣溪沙》，《夢江南》，《漁父》等詞，不可遍舉。

## Chapter 2: Prose

### 2.1

#### On Song Lyrics

*This short essay presents a capsule history of the song lyrics (ci) genre. It may be viewed as Li Qingzhao's attempt to assert her special understanding of the poetic genre for which she would become best known. The essay is also remarkable for the outspoken criticism it contains of the most prominent writers in the form of her day. There is no other critical account of the song lyric (or, for that matter, of shi poetry) that is so harsh in its evaluation of all the leading writers, something for which the essay and its author were denounced by many later critics. We do not know when Li Qingzhao wrote this essay. But the lack of mention of Zhou Bangyan 周邦彦 (1058–1123), a song lyrics writer who came to prominence in the latter half of Huizong's reign, has led scholars to suppose that it must have been written before that time, that is, before circa 1110. For all we know, the essay might have been written early in Li Qingzhao's adult life.*

The complementary forms of Music Bureau songs and poems set to music reached their apogee during the Tang. During the Kaiyuan and Tianbao reigns, there was a certain Li Balang, who was the most talented singer in the entire empire. Once, when those who had just passed the *jinsshi* examination were being fêted at Serpentine River, among the honored guests was a gentleman of renown who, before the feast, had summoned Li and told him to change his clothes and disguise his name. The clothes he wore that day were particularly tattered, and he affected a mournful and dispirited expression as he accompanied the gentleman of renown to the feast. The gentleman announced to the other guests, "My younger cousin wants to sit at the end of the table." The others paid no attention to him. After the wine was passed around and music began, the singers entered. At the time, Cao Yuanqian and Niannu were the most celebrated singing girls in the capital. When they finished singing, the assembled guests all sighed with admiration and gave shouts of approval. The renowned gentleman suddenly pointed at Li and said, "Let's have my cousin sing." The guests looked at Li and sneered, and some even became angry. But Li cleared his throat and began to sing, and by the

五代干戈，四海瓜分豆剖，斯文道熄，獨江南李氏君臣尚文雅，故有「小樓吹徹玉笙寒，」「吹皺一池春水」之詞，語雖奇甚，所謂「亡國之音哀以思」也。

逮至本朝，禮樂文武大備，又涵養百餘年，始有柳屯田永者，變舊聲，作新聲，出《樂章集》，大得聲稱於世，雖協音律，而詞語塵下。又有張子野，宋子京兄弟，沈唐，元絳，晁次膺輩繼出，雖時時有妙語，而破碎何足名家。至晏元獻，歐陽永叔，蘇子瞻，學際天人，作為小

time he finished one song, the guests were all moved to tears. Gathering around him they bowed and exclaimed, “This must be Li Balang!”<sup>1</sup> Thereafter the “music of Zheng and Wei” became more popular by the day, and ornate new musical tunes multiplied.<sup>2</sup> These included the tunes “Bodhisattva Barbarian,” “The Spring Scene Is Lovely,” “The Katydid,” “The Waterclock,” “Sands of the Washing Stream,” “Dreaming of the Southland,” “The Fisherman,” and others, too many to fully list.

During the warfare of the Five Dynasties, the empire was sliced up like a melon and peeled apart like a bean, so that culture and learning were extinguished. Yet the Jiangnan kingdom ruled by the Li clan and its ministers still prized literary elegance.<sup>3</sup> They wrote songs that had such lines as “Played no more in the low tower, the jade flute is cold” and “Wind-blown ripples fill the whole pool of spring waters.” The language is certainly marvelous; still, these are what are known as “the sorrowfully nostalgic melodies of a realm going to ruin.”

When our present dynasty arose, the rites, music, literary learning, and military prowess were fully restored. After some one hundred years of beneficent influence, Liu Yong, the Military Farms officer, appeared. He rewrote old songs and composed new tunes, producing his *Song Lyrics Collection*, which was acclaimed by the age. Although his works meet the prosodic rules, his diction is down in the dirt. After him there was Zhang Ziyue [Xian 先, 992–1039], Song Zijing [Qi 祗, 998–1061] and his brother, Shen Tang, Yuan Jiang, and Chao Ciyang; and their kind appeared one after the other. Although here and there they too produced marvelous lines, yet their works are so fragmentary that they hardly could be considered major writers. Next came Yan Yuanxian [Shu 殊, 991–1055], Ouyang Yongshu [Xiu], and Su Zizhan [Shi]. Their learning plumbed the extremes of heaven and humankind. When they composed

---

1 The opening anecdote about Li Balang is lifted from the Tang dynasty miscellany *Tang guoshi bu* 唐國史補 (*Supplement to the History of the Tang State*). Li Qingzhao’s version of the anecdote contains some small but significant changes from the Tang source.

2 The “music of Zheng and Wei” alludes to sections of the *Classic of Poetry* featuring love songs that were traditionally associated with the degenerate customs of those states and licentious conduct. Li Qingzhao adapts the phrase to refer to the song lyric generally, known for the prominence it gives to romantic themes.

3 The reference here is to the Southern Tang (937–976), one of the ten kingdoms of southern China during the period of division between the Tang and Song dynasties.

歌詞，直如酌蠡水於大海，然皆句讀不葺之詩爾，又往往不協音律者。何耶？蓋詩文分平側，而歌詞分五音，又分五聲，又分六律，又分清濁輕重。且如近世所謂《聲聲慢》，《雨中花》，《喜遷鶯》，既押平聲韻，又押入聲韻；《玉樓春》本押平聲韻，又押上去聲韻，又押入聲。本押仄聲韻，如押上聲則協，如押入聲則不可歌矣。王介甫、曾子固，文章似西漢，若作一小歌詞，則人必絕倒，不可讀也。乃知別是一家，知之者少。後晏叔原，賀方回，秦少游，黃魯直出，始能知之。又晏苦無鋪敘，賀苦少典重。秦即專主情致，而少故實，譬如貧家美女，雖極妍麗豐逸，而終乏富貴態。黃即尚故實，而多疵病，譬如良玉有瑕，價自減半矣。

little song lyrics, it was like adding a gourd-full of water to a great ocean.<sup>1</sup> Still, what they wrote reads like nothing more than *shi* poetry that has not been properly polished, and frequently their lines violate the prosodic rules. Why is this? It is because while *shi* poetry distinguishes between “level” and “oblique” tones, the song lyric distinguishes five notes. It also distinguishes five tones, six musical modes, and the difference between “clear” and “turgid,” and “light” and “heavy” syllables. Moreover, the tunes known today as “Sound after Sound: Long Form,” “Blossoms in the Rain,” and “Enjoying the Darting Oriole” may, in addition to using the “level” tone rhyme, also use the “entering” tone rhyme. “Spring in the Jade Tower” originally required the “level” tone rhyme, but it may also use the “rising” or the “falling” tone rhymes, as well as the “entering” tone rhymes. Songs that require the “deflected” tone rhymes may accord with the rules if written to “rising” tone rhymes, but may become impossible to sing if a writer sets them to “entering” tone rhymes. The writing of Wang Jiefu [Anshi 安石, 1021–1086] and Zeng Zigu [Gong 鞏, 1019–1083] resembles the style of the Western Han period. But when they write little song lyrics, people fall down laughing because their songs simply cannot be recited aloud. We can see, therefore, that this form of writing is a field unto itself, and those who understand it are few. Later, Yan Shuyuan [Jidao 幾道, 1038–1110], He Fanghui [Zhu 鑄, 1052–1125], Qin Shaoyou [Guan], and Huang Luzhi [Tingjian 庭堅, 1045–1105] appeared, and they were the first to truly understand the genre. But Yan’s works suffer from lack of narrative exposition, and He’s suffer from inadequate substance and classical style. Qin cares only about emotions and has too few literary references. His works are like a beautiful girl from a poor family. Although she may be gorgeous and radiant, she will never have the bearing of a lady from an affluent and high-ranking clan. As for Huang, although he prizes literary allusions, his works have many defects. They are like jade that has blemishes, reducing its value by half.

---

1 That is, when they turned to the song lyric form they were using only a tiny fraction of their talent.

2.2

投翰林學士綦宙禮啟

## 2.2

### A Letter Submitted to Hanlin Academician Qi Chongli

*In 1129, when Li Qingzhao and her husband Zhao Mingcheng had still not settled on a place to live in their southern flight from the invasion, Zhao abruptly died of illness. Li Qingzhao, age 46, was suddenly left alone, with no family or grown children to care for her. This widow still had a considerable collection of artworks and books that her late husband and her had been seeking to keep intact as they fled. That collection now became a tempting prize in the eyes of onlookers, especially in this time of massive flight south, dislocation, and the breakdown of civil order that went with it. It is clear from Li Qingzhao's "Afterword" to her husband's scholarly notes on his collections of stone inscriptions (one small part of their collection) that all sorts of persons (Song military men, bandits, one of her temporary landlords, etc.) began to take advantage of her situation to pilfer or simply appropriate whatever portions of her extensive collection they could.*

*In 1132 Li Qingzhao remarried a man named Zhang Ruzhou, apparently at the urging of her younger brother. Three months later, she brought a lawsuit against her new husband, accusing him of having acquired his official post through illegitimate means. In the Song dynasty, a wife did not have legal standing to initiate a divorce. The suit that Li Qingzhao brought against Zhang Ruzhou for malfeasance in office must have been a tactic she used in lieu of a petition for divorce. Zhang was convicted for misconduct, stripped of his position, and sent into distant exile. The brief marriage was effectively annulled.*

*There is much about this whole disastrous episode in Li Qingzhao's life that we do not understand. What we can reconstruct about it comes almost entirely from this letter to Qi Chongli. During Zhang Ruzhou's trial, not only Zhang but Li Qingzhao herself were incarcerated. This may have been just a temporary measure, awaiting the outcome of the trial, or it may have been in accordance with a Song statute that prescribed two years of imprisonment for a husband or wife who sued their spouse. In either case, it is clear from this letter that Qi Chongli (who was a relative of the late Zhao Mingcheng by marriage) came in some way to Li Qingzhao's rescue. It is usually assumed that he somehow arranged to have her released from her incarceration, using his considerable power as a Hanlin Academician.*

*In this remarkable letter to her benefactor, Li Qingzhao reflects on the whole episode in her life, and tries to explain not only how it happened but*

清照啟：素習義方，粗明詩禮。近因疾病，欲至膏肓，牛蟻不分，灰釘已具。嘗藥雖存弱弟，應門惟有老兵。既爾蒼皇，因成造次。信彼如簧之舌，惑茲似錦之言。弟既可欺，持官文書來輒信；身幾欲死，非玉鏡架亦安知？僂俛難言，優柔莫決。呻吟未定，強以同歸。視聽才分，實難共處。忍以桑榆之晚節，配茲駟僮之下才。

*also how she views herself in its aftermath. There are passages in the letter, especially concerning the trial of Zhang Ruzhou, where the meaning is hazy, and we have no ancillary source to consult. But the general sense of what Li Qingzhao is saying is clear enough.*

*The letter is written in the “high” and densely allusive parallel prose style (as befit the gravity of the occasion). Virtually every line contains a learned literary allusion. The footnotes identify only those that may be needed to make sense of what is being said.*

Qingzhao reports: For a long time I have sought to learn right from wrong and have gained some crude understanding of the *Songs* and the *Rites*. Recently, an illness I contracted was nearly fatal. I could no longer distinguish oxen from ants,<sup>1</sup> and the ashes and nails for the coffin were made ready. Although I still had my brother to taste medicine for me, there was only one old soldier to answer our door. Being so hard-pressed, I became imprudent. I trusted words that were as melodious as the notes of a flute and was beguiled by speech as alluring as a piece of brocade. My younger brother was tricked into thinking that the letter of official appointment was genuine.<sup>2</sup> I myself was on the point of death; who would have thought it was not his jade mirror stand?<sup>3</sup> The quickness of it all would be hard to describe, and there was hesitancy and indecision. Then while I was still fraught and sighing, he forced me to go off with him as wife. But once my eyesight and hearing became clear, I realized it would truly be difficult to live together. To my dismay, I realized that at an advanced age, when the sun hung in the mulberry and elm, I had married a worthless shyster of a man.

---

1 This alludes to a story about Yin Zhongkan 殷仲堪 (?–399), who was once so ill and disoriented that when he heard ants crawling under his bed, he thought he was listening to oxen fighting.

2 Wang Shi 王適, according to the tomb inscription Han Yu composed for him, tricked the family of the girl he wanted to marry into believing that he already had an official appointment. He had the matchmaker claim that the document she held, but never opened for them, conferred an official appointment upon Wang.

3 Wen Jiao 溫嶠 (288–329) tricked his aunt into accepting betrothal gifts for her daughter. The betrothal gift of a jade mirror stand he “gave” in fact belonged to the aunt’s family.

身既懷臭之可嫌，惟求脫去；彼素抱璧之將往，決欲殺之。遂肆侵凌，日加毆擊。可念劉伶之肋，難勝石勒之拳。局天扣地，敢效談娘之善訴；升堂入室，素非李赤之甘心。

外援難求，自陳何害？豈期末事，乃得上聞。取自宸衷，付之廷尉。被桎梏而置對，同凶醜以陳詞。豈惟賈生羞絳灌為伍，何啻老子與韓非同傳。但祈脫死，莫望償金。友凶橫者十旬，蓋非天降；居囹圄者九日，豈是人為？抵雀捐金，利當安往？將頭碎壁，失固可知。實自謬愚，分知獄市。

- 
- 1 In the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo Commentary*), when Duke Zhuang of Wei, injured in a battle, sought refuge in the house of a man named Ji, he offered Ji a jade disk if Ji would save him. Ji replied, "And if I kill you, where do you think your jade is going to go?" Ji proceeded to kill the duke.
  - 2 Once when Liu Ling (221–300), the famous drinker, angered a brute who was about to beat him, he asked the man how his puny little frame ("chicken ribs") could ever withstand the bully's fists. Shi Le (274–333), founder of the Later Zhao (4th c.), was known as an avid boxer and wrestler in his younger days.
  - 3 The "woman who chattered to herself" was someone whose drunken husband regularly beat her, until she came out on the street to complain to anyone who would listen.
  - 4 In Liu Zongyuan's 柳宗元 (773–819) tale, Li Chi was beguiled by the ghost or demon of his privy, which appeared to him as his lovely wife. When he followed the ghost into the privy, he felt he was following his wife into their apartment. In the end, he fell into the privy and died.

Abhorring the stench that now clung to my body, I sought only to break away. But he held fast to the jade disk, determined to kill its owner.<sup>1</sup> He then began to abuse me freely, and his blows came down daily. It made one recall Liu Ling's chicken ribs; how could they have withstood Shi Le's fists?<sup>2</sup> Crouching under heaven and stepping timidly on the earth, I presumed to emulate the moving complaints of the woman who chattered to herself.<sup>3</sup> Advancing from the great hall to the inner apartment, I was not so eager as Li Chi.<sup>4</sup>

With no one to turn to for help, it seemed best to present my own case. Never did I expect that this trivial problem would be heard so high above. The Celestial Mind received my request, and the matter was turned over to the Office for Law Enforcement. We faced each other, bound in manacles; together with the vile one I put forth my case. Was it only Master Jia who was ashamed to associate with Jiang and Guan?<sup>5</sup> Are Laozi and Han Feizi the only incompatibles who have circulated together?<sup>6</sup> I prayed only that I escape death and had no expectation of cash compensation. My companionship of the wayward and vile one had lasted one hundred days; surely it was not a calamity sent down from heaven. Captivity in prison was to last but nine days; who could say it was all human doing?<sup>7</sup> If you spend a fortune to shoot down a sparrow, where is the profit to be found? But splitting one's head against a pillar

---

5 Li Qingzhao seems to have confused Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–168 BCE), the early Han statesmen and writer, for the general Han Xin 韓信 (230–196). It was Han Xin who is said to have been ashamed to associate with the Lord of Jiang (Zhou Bo 周勃 (d. 169 BCE) and Guan Ying 灌嬰 (d. 176 BCE) other of Han Gaozu's ministers.

6 When Wang Jian 王儉 (5th c.) found that he was to be seated together with a man he despised, Wang Jingze, he exclaimed, "I never thought I would see Laozi and Han Feizi circulate together" (referring to classics of the rival schools of thought, Daoism and Legalism). Li Qingzhao means that she and her former husband were similarly incongruous.

7 In these two sentences Li Qingzhao first shoulders some responsibility for the mess she got herself into, conceding that it was not a result of fate, and then credits her release from prison (i.e. Qi Chongli's help) as something akin to divine intervention.

此蓋伏遇內翰承旨，搢紳望族，冠蓋清流，日下無雙，人間第一。奉天克復，本原陸贄之詞；淮蔡底平，實以會昌之詔。哀憐無告，雖未解驂；感戴鴻恩，如真出己。故茲白首，得免丹書。清照敢不省過知慚，捫心識媿。責全責智，已難逃萬世之譏；敗德敗名，何以見中朝之士！雖南山之竹，豈能窮多口之談？惟智者之言，可以止無根之謗。

高鵬尺鷃，本異升沉；火鼠冰蠶，難同嗜好。達人共悉，童子皆知。願賜品題，與加湔洗。誓當布衣蔬食，溫故知新。再見江山，依舊一瓶一鉢；重歸畎畝，更須三沐三薰。忝在葭莩，敢茲塵瀆。

- 
- 1 The meaning of these two sentences seems to be that while her insignificant life was hardly worth anyone's trouble to save, to have taken her own life was a course that made no sense to her either. The language about the wasteful acquisition of a sparrow is derived from *Zhuangzi*, and that about smashing one's head with a jade disk to keep from having to give up the disk from *Shiji*.
  - 2 The perversity and obtuseness mentioned here are presumably not her own but those of the law court that treated her like a criminal.
  - 3 The meaning is that Qi Chongli's own literary service to the emperor, in the capacity of Hanlin academician, is as great as that of the Tang officials Lu Zhi (754–805) and Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850), the latter of whom drafted imperial decrees during the Huichang period [841–46] and left a collection of them so

will surely bring about a loss.<sup>1</sup> Truly there was perversity and obtuseness; both the good and bad commingle, after all, in the courts and the marketplace.<sup>2</sup>

It was then that I bowed before the palace writer and recipient of edicts [Qi Chongli], he the scion of an esteemed clan of the official tablet and sash, a man of impeccable background who has the cap and carriage insignia of high position. Under the sun he has no equal; among men he is number one. The imperial victory at Fengtian was rooted in phrases drafted by Lu Zhi; the pacification of Huai and Cai was actually brought about by the Huichang decrees.<sup>3</sup> He treated the pitiable person who had no one to appeal to with a degree of generosity like that of unbridling one of the team of horses.<sup>4</sup> His kindness was as lofty as the wild goose in flight, and he truly seemed to have personally accomplished the deed. So it happened that my white head was spared the vermilion writing brush.<sup>5</sup> How should I, Qingzhao, presume not to reflect upon my errors and feel a sense of shame, or not place my hand on my heart in acknowledgment of my disgrace? Measured against either common principles or good sense, my actions have made it impossible for me to escape the censure of ten thousand generations. My virtue ruined, my name ruined, how could I ever bear to meet gentlemen of the central court? All the bamboo on South Mountain, converted into writing slips, would be insufficient to record the insults that the crowd hurled at me. Only a wise man's words could put a stop to their baseless slander.

The towering *Peng* bird soars high above, whereas the little quail sinks to the ground. The fire mouse and the ice silkworm can hardly share the same preferences.<sup>6</sup> This is as obvious to little boys as it is to wise men.

---

named. It is fanciful to credit the imperial victories at Fengtian over the rebel Zhu Ci 朱泚 (742–784) and at Huaixi and Caizhou over the rebel Wu Yuanji 吴元济 (d. 817) to the two drafters of decrees, as important as they might have been.

4 It was Yanzi (Yan Ying 晏婴, 6<sup>th</sup> c. BCE) who untied one of his horses to buy the good man he encountered on the road, Yue Shifu, out of servitude.

5 In ancient times criminals were often marked as such by red ink applied to the face.

6 These two sentences clearly refer to pairs of animals of contrasting size, ability, and habitat (the fire mouse thrives in southern extremes and the ice silkworm thrive when caked in ice). But what are the intended referents? Probably the first pair is meant as a metaphor for the gulf between the greatness of Qi Chongli and Li Qingzhao's meekness, and possibly the second pair alludes to the incompatibility of Li Qingzhao and Zhang Ruzhou.

## 2.3

### 金石錄後序

I ask that you confer your evaluations upon me and that you share with me your purifying influence. I swear that dressed in plain cloth and eating vegetarian meals, I shall devote myself to “knowing the new by keeping the ancient fresh in my mind.” If ever I get to see the old rivers and mountains, it will be as before, with a single pitcher and a single rice bowl. Should I be able to return to our ancestral home, I will be sure to bathe and perfume myself three times before proceeding in. I have brought shame upon my distant relative and have presumed to defile his name.

### 2.3

#### Afterword to *Catalogue of Inscriptions on Metal and Stone*

*Aside from a few of her song lyrics, this is Li Qingzhao's most celebrated composition. Technically, it is her “afterword” to a catalogue of ancient inscriptions on bronze and stone compiled by Zhao Mingcheng, her first husband. The catalogue was in a sense Zhao's great devotion and his life work. It opens with a chronological list of two thousand inscriptions, dating from high antiquity down to through the Tang dynasty and Five Dynasties period, rubbings of which Zhao collected over several decades, from wherever he could. The bulk of the catalogue, which follows the list, presents Zhao's colophons or scholarly notes on some five hundred of the inscriptions, in which he comments on their provenance, contents, and historiographical value.*

*Li Qingzhao's “afterword,” probably written in 1134, takes as its subject something related but yet unexpectedly distinct from Zhao Mingcheng's epigraphical project. It presents a narrative of Li Qingzhao's and Zhao Mingcheng's life together as they built up a massive collection not only of inscriptions but also of books and other art works. The narrative carries down through Zhao's untimely death at age of forty-nine, during the chaotic years of their flight from the Jurchen invasion and Li Qingzhao's unsuccessful struggles thereafter to keep intact the couple's massive collection intact. Taken as a whole, the narrative stands out for its description of the idyllic early years of the marriage, before the invasion changed everything, and the inexorable process of the widow's loss of that collection that followed, bit by bit, as well as the lessons the author draws from that experience.*

*There was no tradition of writing such an extensive and intimate portrait of married life. That this composition came from the hand of the wife in that*

右金石錄三十卷者何？趙侯德父所著書也。取上自三代，下迄五季，鍾、鼎、甗、鬲、盤、匱、尊、敦之款識，豐碑大碣、顯人晦士之事蹟，凡見於金石刻者二千卷，皆是正偽謬，去取褒貶，上足以合聖人之道，下足以訂史氏之失者皆載之，可謂多矣。嗚呼，自王涯、元載之禍，書畫與胡椒無異；長輿、元凱之病，錢癖與傳癖何殊。名雖不同，其惑一也。

*marriage made it all the more exceptional, and it immediately attracted considerable attention. One naturally wonders about Li Qingzhao's motives in producing this work. We know that at some later date she undertook the very public act of presenting Zhao Mingcheng's Catalogue to the court, ostensibly as a contribution to historical knowledge, and presumably her afterword was attached to the copy she submitted. The afterword is normally read in a straightforward manner and assumed to be nothing more than the loving narrative, tinged with nostalgia and regret, that it first appears to be. I have discussed elsewhere the reasons to believe that such a reading is naive, overlooking what were probably the complex reasons Li Qingzhao wrote the piece and the unstated aims she had in doing so.*

What is this book, *Catalogue of Inscriptions on Metal and Stone*, in thirty chapters? It is a work written by Zhao Defu [Mingcheng]. Taking as his subject two thousand inscriptions carved on bronze vessels and stelae dating from the Three Dynasties of high antiquity all the way down to the Five Kingdoms of recent times, including both interior and exterior inscriptions on bells, *ding* tripods, steamers, *li* tripods, basins, water vessels, wine beakers, and grain containers, as well as those concerning the lives of both eminent officials and obscure scholars found on rounded or rectangular stelae, he corrected their errors, distinguished the authentic from the spurious, and evaluated their historical value. He composed colophons on all those inscriptions that suffice either to affirm the Way of the sages or to emend mistakes in the historiographical record. The contents are rich indeed. The calamities suffered by Wang Ya and Yuan Zai show that there is no difference between hoarding works of art and hoarding pepper.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, both Changyu and Yuankai were sick men. What does it matter that one was obsessed with money and the other with the *Zuo Commentary*?<sup>2</sup> Their sicknesses went by different names, but their delusion was the same.

---

1 Wang Ya (?–835) and Yuan Zai (d. 777) were grand councilors during the Tang dynasty who both came to disastrous ends. Wang Ya was a collector of paintings, and Yuan Zai hoarded pepper.

2 Changyu is He Jiao 和嶠 (d. 292), who was so parsimonious that he was said to have “an obsession with cash.” It was none other than Yuankai (Du Yu 杜宇, 222–285) who said this, the man who by his own admission had “an obsession with the *Zuo Commentary*,” which he spent his life annotating.

余建中辛巳，始歸趙氏。時先君作禮部員外郎，丞相時作吏部侍郎。侯年二十一，在太學作學生。趙、李族寒，素貧儉。每朔望謁告出，質衣取半千錢，步入相國寺，市碑文果實歸，相對展玩咀嚼，自謂葛天氏之民也。後二年，出仕宦，便有飯蔬衣練，窮遐方絕域，盡天下古文奇字之志。日就月將，漸益堆積。丞相居政府，親舊或在館閣，多有亡詩逸史、魯壁、汲冢所未見之書，遂盡力傳寫，浸覺有味，不能自己。後或見古今名人書畫，三代奇器，亦復脫衣市易。嘗記崇寧間，有人持徐熙牡丹圖，求錢二十萬。當時雖貴家子弟，求二十萬錢，豈易得耶？留信宿，計無所出而還之。夫婦相向惋悵者數日。

It was in the *xinsi* year of the Jianzhong period [1101] that I married into the Zhao family. At that time, my late father was serving as vice director of the Ministry of Rites, and the grand councilor [her father-in-law, Zhao Tingzhi] was vice director of the Ministry of Personnel. My husband, twenty-one years old, was a student in the National University. The Zhaos and Lis are undistinguished families that have always been poor. On the leave days of the first and fifteenth of every month, when he requested holiday leave, we would pawn some clothes to raise five hundred cash. Then we'd walk to Xiangguo Monastery to buy fruits and rubbings of inscriptions. We'd take them home, sit down together, and spread them out, savoring them. We felt that we were living in the harmonious era of Getianshi.<sup>1</sup> Two years later, my husband came out to serve as an official. We then resolved to eat vegetarian meals and wear clothes of coarse cloth, so that we might fulfill our intent to gather from every distant place and remote region as many of the empire's ancient inscriptions and rare engraved works as we could. As the days and months passed, our collection grew. The grand councilor stayed in the imperial city, and many of our relations worked in the palace libraries and archives. They had access to lost odes, little-known histories, and such books as those recovered from the walls of Lu and the tomb of Ji.<sup>2</sup> When we came upon such rare works, we exerted ourselves to make copies of them. Once awakened to the flavor of this activity, we could not stop. Later, whenever we came upon a piece of calligraphy or a painting by a celebrated artist, whether ancient or recent, or a precious vessel from the Three Dynasties, we would take off a layer of clothing to pawn for it. I remember that once during the Chongning period [1102–6] someone brought a peony painting by Xu Xi [10th c.] to show us. He was asking two hundred thousand for it. In those days it would have been hard even for young persons in eminent officials' families to come up with such a sum. The man left it with us for two days, but we finally decided we could not purchase it and returned it to him. Afterward, my husband and I looked at each other dejectedly for several days.

---

1 A legendary ancient emperor, whose people lived in blissful peace.

2 The reference is to two famous discoveries of ancient writings. The first took place in the second century BCE, when walls in the former residence of Confucius (in Lu) were found to contain texts long hidden there, and the second took place in the third century CE, when the *Bamboo Annals* and other works were recovered from a Warring States period tomb in Ji Prefecture (Ji County, Henan).

後屏居鄉里十年，仰取俯拾，衣食有餘。連守兩郡，竭其俸入，以事鉛槧。每獲一書，即同共校勘，整集籤題。得書、畫、彝、鼎，亦摩玩舒卷，指摘疵病，夜盡一燭為率。故能紙札精緻，字畫完整，冠諸收書家。余性偶強記，每飯罷，坐歸來堂烹茶，指堆積書史，言某事在某書某卷、第幾頁第幾行，以中否角勝負，為飲茶先後。中即舉杯大笑，至茶傾覆懷中，反不得飲而起。甘心老是鄉矣，雖處憂患貧窮，而志不屈。收書既成，歸來堂起書庫大櫥，簿甲乙，置書冊。如要講讀，即請鑰上簿，關出卷帙。或少損污，必懲責措完塗改，不復向時之坦夷也。是欲求適意而反取慄慄。余性不耐，始謀食去重肉，衣去重

Later, we lived in seclusion in our hometown for ten years.<sup>1</sup> By managing our expenses carefully, we had more than enough for food and clothing. Then my husband served successively as prefect in two separate places, and we devoted all of his salary to purchasing books and writing materials.<sup>2</sup> Whenever we obtained a new book, the two of us would collate together, comparing other editions, then produce a corrected copy with a new title page. When we obtained a calligraphic scroll, painting, or ritual bronze, we would also pore over it to amuse ourselves, identifying any defects we could find. Our custom was to limit ourselves to the duration of one candle per night. In this way, we were able to gather works with a quality of paper and completeness in their texts and brushwork that were superior to those of other collectors. It happens that I have a good memory, and in the evenings after dinner we would sit in our hall named Returning Home and brew tea.<sup>3</sup> We'd point to a pile of books and, choosing a particular event, try to say in which book, which chapter, which page, and which line it was recorded. The winner of our little contest got to drink first. When I guessed right, I'd hold the cup high and burst out laughing until the tea splattered the front of my gown. I'd have to get up without even taking a sip. Oh, how I wished we could grow old living like that! So even though our lives were fraught with apprehensions and poverty, what we valued and strove for was never compromised. When our books were complete, we built a library in Returning Home, with large cabinets marked with numbers. We arranged the books accordingly inside. Whoever wanted a book to read would have to get a key and record the book's number in a log before taking it out. If the borrower made the slightest mark or smudge on a page, it was his or her responsibility to repair or clean it. We were no longer as easygoing as at first. In this way, what had started as an amusement turned into a source of vexation. I couldn't stand it, so I decided that we would eat no more

---

1 This setback in Zhao Mingcheng's career was brought about by the fall from power and death soon thereafter of his father, Zhao Tingzhi, in 1107. The hometown they returned to was Zhao's ancestral home in Qingzhou (Qingzhou, Shandong).

2 From 1121 to 1126, Zhao Mingcheng held appointments as prefect of Laizhou and Zizhou (also Zichuan), both in modern Shandong.

3 Returning Home Hall, named after Tao Qian's 陶潛 (365–427) famous rhapsody, was in the Qingzhou ancestral home. Thus with this sentence Li Qingzhao apparently reverts in her narrative to the time before Zhao Mingcheng's two provincial appointments in the early 1120s.

采，首無明珠、翠羽之飾，室無塗金、刺繡之具。遇書史百家字不刊闕、本不訛謬者，輒市之儲作副本。自來家傳周易、左氏傳，故兩家者流，文字最備。於是几案羅列，枕席枕藉，意會心謀，目往神授，樂在聲色狗馬之上。

至靖康丙午歲，侯守淄川，聞金人犯京師，四顧茫然，盈箱溢篋，且戀戀，且悵悵，知其必不為己物矣。建炎丁未春三月，奔太夫人喪南來，既長物不能盡載，乃先去書之重大印本者，又去畫之多幅者，又去古器之無款識者，後又去書之監本者，畫之平常者，器之重大者。凡屢減去，尚載書十五車。至東海，連艫渡淮，又渡江，至建康。青州故第尚鎖書冊什物，用屋十餘間，期明年春再具舟載之。十二月，金人陷青州，凡所謂十餘屋者，已皆為煨燼矣。

than one meat dish per meal and dress in no more than one colored garment at a time. I wore no pearls or feathers in my hair and kept no gilded or embroidered article in my household. Whenever we came across a book of any kind whose text had no lacunae and was free of misprints, we would buy it on the spot to use as a back-up copy. Our family specialized in the study of the *Classic of Changes* and the *Zuo Commentary*, and so our collection was particularly complete with regard to scholarship on those two works. Eventually, books were scattered all over our desks and were stacked in piles on our pillows and mats. Our thoughts met with those in the books, and our minds communicated with their authors. Our eyes went forth among their pages, and our souls were enriched by them. Certainly the joy that they gave us was superior to that of dancing girls or raising dogs and horses.

In the *bingwu* year of the Jingkang period [1126], when my husband was serving as prefect of Zichuan, we heard that the Jin armies had attacked our capital. We had no idea what to do. We gazed at our overflowing boxes and brimming trunks with both fond attachment and distress. We knew they would not be ours for long. In the third month of the *dingwei* year of Jianyan [1127], we hurried south for my mother-in-law's funeral. Realizing that we could not take all those superfluous things with us, we first set aside the large printed books, then we set aside the paintings with multiple panels, and then we set aside the ancient vessels with no inscriptions. Finally, we set aside books in National University editions, ordinary paintings, and all heavy vessels. But even after these many reductions, we still traveled with fifteen carts of books. When we reached Donghai, we crossed the Huai River in a string of boats. Then we crossed the Yangzi River and arrived at Jiankang [Nanjing]. We had left under lock and key more than ten rooms of books and other items at our old residence in Qingzhou. We planned to return the following year and transport them south by boat. But in the twelfth month, the Jin sacked Qingzhou. The more than ten rooms of belongings were reduced to ashes.

建炎戊申秋九月，侯起復知建康府。己酉春三月罷，具舟上蕪湖，入姑孰，將卜居贛水上。夏五月，至池陽，被旨知湖州，過闕上殿，遂駐家池陽，獨赴召。六月十三日，始負擔，捨舟坐岸上，葛衣岸中，精神如虎，目光爛爛射人，望舟中告別。余意甚惡，呼曰：「如傳聞城中緩急，奈何？」戟手遙應曰：「從眾。必不得已，先棄輜重，次衣被，次書冊卷軸，次古器，獨所謂宗器者，可自負抱，與身俱存亡。勿忘也。」遂馳馬去。途中奔馳，冒大暑，感疾，至行在，病瘧。七月末，書報臥病。余驚怛，念侯性素急，奈何！病瘧或熱，必服寒藥，疾可憂。遂解舟下，一日夜行三百里。比至，果大服茈胡、黃芩藥，瘧且痢，病危在膏肓。余悲泣，倉皇不忍問後事。八月十八日，遂不起。取筆作詩，絕筆而終，殊無分香賣履之意。

In the ninth month of the *wushen* year of Jianyan [1128], my husband came out of mourning and was appointed prefect of Jiankang. His appointment ended in the third month of the following year.<sup>1</sup> We prepared a boat to take us to Wuhu and into Gushu, intending eventually to find a new place to live along the Gan River. But in the fifth month, when we had reached Chiyang, my husband received an imperial command appointing him prefect of Huzhou and was summoned for an audience before the imperial throne.<sup>2</sup> So we decided to make our home in Chiyang, with my husband going on by himself in response to the summons. On the thirteenth day of the sixth month, he was packed and, having left our boat, sat on the bank. Dressed in coarse clothes with a kerchief around his head, his mood that of a tiger on the prowl, his eyes darting and flashing, he looked toward our boat and bid farewell. I was in a terrible state of mind and shouted to him, "What shall I do if I hear the town is threatened?" He pointed at me and answered from afar, "Go with the crowd. If you must, discard the household belongings first, then our clothes, then the books and paintings, and then the ancient vessels. But the ritual vessels, be sure to take them with you wherever you go. Live or die with them. Don't forget!" With this, he galloped off. Hurrying toward his destination, he paid no attention to the summer heat and, as a result, fell ill. By the time he reached the traveling court, his sickness was serious. A letter from him at the end of the seventh month informed me that he was confined to bed. I was frightened, knowing that, as he was high-strung by nature, any illness would be dangerous. If he developed a fever, he was bound to take cooling medicines, and then his condition would become worse. I had our boat untied and sailed day and night to be with him, covering three hundred *li* a day. By the time I arrived, he had in fact taken large doses of bupleurum and scutellaria.<sup>3</sup> His fever was constant now, and he had also developed dysentery. His condition was

---

1 Li Qingzhao omits mention of the fact that her husband's appointment was terminated because he had disgraced himself by deserting the city when it was threatened by an armed uprising.

2 After Zhao Mingcheng's removal from office, the couplet traveled upstream on the Yangzi, intending to settle in Gan County (in modern Jiangxi). But Mingcheng was suddenly summoned back to the emperor in Jiankang (Nanjing) to receive a new appointment as governor of Huzhou. Naturally, Mingcheng jumped at this chance and made haste to return to accept his new commission.

3 Both herbal medicines were used in treating fevers.

葬畢，余無所之。朝廷已分遣六宮，又傳江當禁渡。時猶有書二萬卷，金石刻二千卷，器皿、茵褥，可待百客，他長物稱是。余又大病，僅存喘息。事勢日迫，念侯有妹壻任兵部侍郎，從衛在洪州，遂遣二故吏，先部送行李往投之。冬十二月，金人陷洪州，遂盡委棄。所謂連艫渡江之書，又散為雲煙矣。獨餘少輕小卷軸書帖、寫本李、杜、韓、柳集，《世說》、《鹽鐵論》，漢、唐石刻副本數十軸，三代鼎彝十數事，南唐寫本書數篋，偶病中把玩，搬在臥內者，巋然獨存。

上江既不可往，又虜勢叵測，有弟遠任勅局刪定官，遂往依之。到台，台守已遁。之剡，出陸，又棄衣被，走黃巖，雇舟入海，奔行朝，時駐蹕章安。從御舟海道之溫，又之越。庚戌十二月，放散百官，遂之衢。紹興辛亥春三月，復赴越。壬子，又赴杭。

beyond treatment. I wept bitterly and was too upset to ask what plans he had made for me after he was gone. On the eighteenth day of the eighth month [of 1129], he could no longer get up. He picked up a brush and wrote out a poem. When he finished the poem, he died. He had no final instructions regarding “dividing up the incense or selling sandals.”<sup>1</sup>

After I buried him, I had nowhere to go. The court had dispatched the empress and palace ladies to a separate location, and it was said that crossing the Yangzi River would soon be prohibited. At the time, I still had twenty thousand books, two thousand folios of inscriptions on metal and stone, and enough utensils and bedding to receive a hundred guests. My other superfluous things were comparable in quantity. I myself was very sick, and my breathing was extremely weak. I thought of my late husband’s brother-in-law [Li Zhuo], who was vice minister of the Ministry of War and was then protecting the empress at Hongzhou. I dispatched two trusted clerks to him, sending along a portion of our possessions with them for safekeeping. In the twelfth month of 1129, the Jin armies sacked Hongzhou, and everything I had sent was lost. The books that had been ferried across the Huai River in a string of boats were turned into smoke and clouds. All I had left were a few small, lightweight scrolls of calligraphy inscriptions; manuscript copies of the works of Li Bai, Du Fu, Han Yu, and Liu Zongyuan; *A New Account of Tales of the World* and *Discourses on Salt and Iron*; a few dozen mounted rubbings of stone inscriptions from the Han through Tang dynasties; some ten bronze vessels from the Three Dynasties; and a few cases of manuscripts from the Southern Tang. From time to time I would amuse myself with these during my illness. These were the only remnants I had left, as I lay sick in bed.

It was impossible to go farther up the Yangzi River, and moreover the invaders’ movements were unpredictable. My younger brother Hang was serving as reviser in the Law Code Office, and so I decided to go seek refuge with him. By the time I got to Taizhou, the prefect there had fled. When I got to Shan, I proceeded over land. I discarded my clothes and beddings as I hurried to Huangyan, where I hired a boat and set out to

---

1 The language is taken from Cao Cao’s deathbed instructions to his wife and concubines—quoted in Lu Ji’s 陸機 (261–303) dirge for him—the latter of whom were told they should, if they had nothing better to do, content themselves with making sandals and selling them to support themselves.

先侯疾亟時，有張飛卿學士，攜玉壺過視侯，便攜去，其實珉也。不知何人傳道，遂妄言有「頒金」之語；或傳亦有密論列者。余大惶怖，不敢言，亦不敢遂已，盡將家中所有銅器等物，欲赴外廷投進。到越，已移幸四明，不敢留家中，並寫本書寄剡。後官軍收叛卒，取去，聞盡入故李將軍家。所謂巋然獨存者，無慮十去五六矣。惟有書畫硯墨可五七簏，更不忍置他所。常在臥榻下，手自開闔。在會稽，卜居土民鍾氏舍。忽一夕，穴壁負五簏

- 
- 1 In the early months of 1130, when the Jin armies made another incursion into the Song capital region, the emperor himself was pursued to the Zhejiang coastline and forced to board a ship and sail out to sea to elude capture.
  - 2 The Jurchen armies had withdrawn northward at the end of 1131, making it possible for the emperor to return to the new capital of Lin'an early in the new year, and Li Qingzhao followed him.
  - 3 The language used here normally refers to an imperial gift of gold conferred by the emperor to someone who has performed meritorious service or made some other contribution to the throne. It is not clear what Li Qingzhao is referring to, or how the prospect of this imperial gift is related to the pitcher she has just told us about. What is clear is that she now heard a rumor that the court, which we know had attempted to "purchase" some of Li Qingzhao's collection of valuables shortly after

sea, hoping to catch up with the traveling court.<sup>1</sup> At the time the emperor had docked at Zhang'an. I followed the imperial ship to Wenzhou and from there went back to Yue. In the twelfth month of the *gengxu* year [1130], when the officials were dismissed, I proceeded to Quzhou. In the third month of the *xinbai* year of Shaoxing [1131], I went again to Yue. In the *renzi* year [1132], I returned to Hangzhou.<sup>2</sup>

Previously, when my husband was extremely ill, a certain Academician Zhang Feiqing came to see him bringing a jade pitcher that he then took away with him. The pitcher was actually made of jade-like stone. I do not know who started the rumor, but it was falsely said that there was talk of "an imperial behest of gold."<sup>3</sup> Some even said there was going to be a secret inquiry into the matter. I was terrified. I did not dare to speak out, but I also did not dare do nothing. I decided that I would take all my household's bronze vessels and other objects and present them to the traveling court. By the time I got to Yue, the emperor had already moved to Siming.<sup>4</sup> I did not want to keep those things in my house, and so I stored them all in Shan, together with the book manuscripts. Subsequently, when the imperial army was rounding up rebels, what I had stored there was all taken away. Later, I heard that it ended up in the household of the old general Li. Of "the remnants I had left," fifty or sixty percent was now lost. All that remained were some six or seven boxes of calligraphy, paintings, inkstones, and ink. I could not bear to put them anywhere else, so I kept them beside my bed, where I'd open them occasionally. At Kuaiji (Yue), I resided in a place owned by a local named Zhong.<sup>5</sup> One night, a thief broke in through a wall and carried five of my boxes off. I was so grief-stricken I thought I'd die, and I offered

---

Zhao Mingcheng died (only to be dissuaded from doing so by a memorial of protest about the unseemliness of this attempt), was about to start an investigation in her activities and wealth. This terrified her, as well it might have.

4 This sentence evidently refers to Li Qingzhao's arrival in Yue at the end of 1129. In fact, the narrative in this section of her frantic movement from place to place is difficult to follow or to plot on a map. Scholars have speculated that the text may be corrupt, making the list of places out of order, or that Li Qingzhao has misremembered her movements. Another possibility is that her movements were simply chaotic, as she crisscrossed the region, passing through certain places (e.g., Yue or Kuaiji) multiples times in search of a refuge from the fighting that swirled around her.

5 This may refer to her stay in Kuaiji late in 1131, when on her way back toward the capital.

去。余悲慟不得活，重立賞收贖。後二日，鄰人鍾復皓出十八軸求賞，故知其盜不遠矣。萬計求之，其餘遂牢不可出。今知盡為吳說運使賤價得之。所謂巋然獨存者，乃十去其七八。所有一二殘零不成部帙書冊，三數種平平書帖，猶愛惜如護頭目，何愚也邪！

今日忽閱此書，如見故人。因憶侯在東萊靜治堂，裝卷初就，芸籤縹帶，束十卷作一帙。每日晚吏散，輒校勘二卷，跋題一卷。此二千卷，有題跋者五百二卷耳。今手澤如新，而墓木已拱，悲夫！

昔蕭繹江陵陷沒，不惜國亡而毀裂書畫；楊廣江都傾覆，不悲身死而復取圖書，豈人性之所著，死生不能忘歟？或者天意以余菲薄，不足以享此尤物耶？抑亦死者有知，猶斤斤愛惜，不肯留人間邪？何得之艱而失之易也！

a handsome reward to get them back. Two days later my landlord, Zhong, brazenly produced eighteen scrolls, asking for the reward. So I knew the thief was not far away. I tried everything I could to recover the rest, but nothing would free it up. Today I know that eventually Wu Shuo, the assistant fiscal commissioner, bought everything for a low price. At this point, seventy or eighty percent of “the only remnants I had left” was lost. What remained were just one or two random and fragmentary volumes that did not make any complete title or set, together with just a few common calligraphy manuscripts. Yet I still treasured them as if they were my life itself. How foolish I am!

Today when I chance to open one of my books, it is like meeting an old friend. I remember when my husband sat in Quiet Governance Hall in Donglai.<sup>1</sup> Each folio of an inscription was mounted on scented paper and tied with a silken cord. Ten folios were bound together as a single volume. Every day in the evening, after the clerks had gone home, my husband would add editorial collations to two inscriptions and would write a colophon for one. Of the total of two thousand inscriptions, only 502 have colophons. Today the brush strokes in his colophons still look freshly made, but the tree trunks beside his grave are already thick. How sad it is!

Formerly, when Xiao Yi was conquered at Jiangling, he did not regret the loss of his kingdom, but he did destroy his books and paintings [so that his enemies would not obtain them]. When Yang Guang was overthrown at Jiangu, he did not bemoan his own death, but he did arrange to take his books and paintings with him into the afterlife.<sup>2</sup> Isn't it so that what a person naturally treasures he will never forget, even in death? In my case, is it that Heaven considers me too insignificant to possess these alluring things? Or is it that my husband has consciousness in the afterlife and still prizes these things so tenaciously that he won't let them remain behind in this world? Why else would they be so difficult to acquire but so easy to lose?

---

1 Donglai is Laizhou, where Zhao Mingcheng served as governor in the early 1120s.

2 Xiao Yi is Emperor Yuan of the Liang dynasty (r. 552–555), and Yang Guang is Emperor Yang of the Sui dynasty (r. 604–618).

嗚呼！余自少陸機作賦之二年，至過蘧瑗知非之兩歲，三十四年之間，憂患得失，何其多也！然有有必有無，有聚必有散，乃理之常。人亡弓，人得之，又胡足道。所以區區記其終始者，亦欲為後世好古博雅者之戒云。

## 2.4

### 打馬圖經序

慧則通，通即無所不達；專則精，精即無所不妙。故庖丁之解牛，郢人之運斤，師曠之聽，離婁之視，大至於堯舜之仁，桀紂之惡，小至於擲豆起蠅，巾角拂棋，皆臻至理

From the time I was two years younger than Lu Ji when he wrote his rhapsody until I was two years older than Qu Yuan when he perceived the error of his ways, that is, in thirty-four years, how numerous have been the worries and losses I have suffered!<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, possession is always followed by loss, just as the act of gathering always gives way eventually to dissolution. It is a fundamental principle of things. One man loses a bow; another man finds it. What does it matter? The only reason I have taken the trouble to record all this here is to warn persons of later generations who are learned and fond of ancient things.

## 2.4

### Preface to a Handbook for Capture the Horse

*The writings Li Qingzhao produced on the board game Capture the Horse are described earlier, in the note on the translation of her poetic rhapsody on the game. This “preface” was evidently written for what was probably Li Qingzhao’s expansion of a pre-existing handbook on the game, which she filled out with thirteen short verses on game strategies accompanied by diagrams that she had drawn (by a youngster, she says). Unfortunately, the handbook itself does not survive, and the verses she wrote are largely incomprehensible to us today, since they describe game strategies that we can only guess at.*

“Insight leads to penetrating understanding, and with penetrating understanding there is nothing to which the mind cannot reach”;<sup>2</sup> concentration leads to refined skill, and with refined skill everything one does will be at a level of marvelous excellence. Therefore, whether it be Cook Ding’s carving of oxen, the man of Ying’s wielding of the ax, the hearing of Musician Kuang, the eyesight of Lilou, matters of such great import as the humaneness of Yao and Shun or the wickedness of Jie and Zhou, or

---

1 Li Qingzhao means from the time she was eighteen, when she was married, to the time she was fifty-one, when she wrote this afterword. Lu Ji was twenty when he wrote “Wen fu,” and Qu Yuan was fifty when he realized that everything he had done in the preceding forty-nine years was in error.

2 Quoting from Ling Xuan’s 伶玄 (1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE) preface to the unofficial biography of the Han empress Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕. It is worth noticing that Li Qingzhao is here quoting from an early defense of male interest in a formidable (and beautiful) woman.

者何？妙而已。後世之人，不惟學聖人之道不到聖處，雖嬉戲之事，亦不得其依稀彷彿而遂止者多矣。夫博者，無他，爭先術耳，故專者能之。予性喜博，凡所謂博者皆耽之，晝夜每忘寢食。且平生多寡未嘗不進者何？精而已。

自南渡來，流離遷徙，盡散博具，故罕為之，然實未嘗忘於胸中也。今年冬十月朔，聞淮上警報，江浙之人，自東走西，自南走北，居山林者謀入城市，居城市者謀入山林，旁午絡繹，莫不失所。易安居士亦自臨安泝流，涉嚴灘之險，抵金華，卜居陳氏第。乍釋舟楫而見軒窗，意頗適然。更長燭明，奈此良夜何。於是博奕之事講矣。

matters of such little import as throwing beans and catching flies or moving chess pieces with the corner of a handkerchief, they all arrived at the ultimate principle of things.<sup>1</sup> Why? Because each attained marvelous excellence at what he did. But as for people of later ages, not only did they fail to reach the level of the sages in their learning of the sagely Way, even in amusements and games, most of them gave up their cultivation before ever achieving even a semblance of what earlier men had achieved. Now, board games can be reduced to this: techniques for striving to win. Anyone who gives them his concentration can master them. By nature I am fond of board games. I can lose myself in any of them so that I can play all night long without thought of food or sleep. My whole life I have won most of the contests I have played. Why? Because my level of refined skill.

Since crossing the Yangzi River southward, I have been separated from loved ones and forced to wander here and there. I have seen my board games lost and scattered, and so seldom have I had any chance to play. But in my heart I have never forgotten them. This year on the first day of the tenth month, winter, we heard that military emergencies were reported on the Huai River. Those who lived in the Yangzi River and Zhe River regions fled westward from the east and northward from the south. Those who live in the hills and forests made plans to flee into cities, while those who live in cities made plans to flee to hills and forests. In this protracted flight, with everyone hurrying this way and that, ultimately there was no one who was not displaced. I myself, the Resident Scholar of Yi'an, traveled upstream from Lin'an. I crossed the river amid the high terrain of Yan Rapids and proceeded to Jinhua, where I found a place to live in the home of the Chen family. Having recently exchanged the comforts of verandas and windows for the hardships of boat and oar, I feel quite content. But "the night watches are slow and the lamp burns bright"<sup>2</sup>—how can I pass the long night? So I resolved to write an account of board games.

---

1 The references are to legendary figures known for their mastery of crafts, or virtuous or benighted rulers. Also, it was Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226), emperor Wen of the Wei, who is said to have used his handkerchief to flip the playing pieces in the game Pellet Chess.

2 The line quoted is from a poem by Du Fu.

且長行、葉子、博塞、彈棋，近世無傳。若打揭、大小豬窩、族鬼、胡畫、數倉、賭快之類，皆鄙俚不經見。藏酒、擣蒲、雙蹇融，近漸廢絕。選仙、加減、插關火，質魯任命，無所施人智巧。大小象戲、奕棋，又惟可容二人。獨采選、打馬，特為閨房雅戲。嘗恨采選叢繁，勞於檢閱，故能通者少，難遇勍敵。打馬簡要，而苦無文采。

按打馬世有二種：一種一將十馬者，謂之「關西馬」；一種無將二十馬者，謂之「依經馬。」流行既久，各有圖經凡例可考；行移賞罰，互有同異。又宣和間人取二種馬，參雜加減，大約交加僥倖，古意盡矣。所謂「宣和馬」者是也。予獨愛「依經馬」因取其賞罰互度，每事作數語，隨事附見，使兒輩圖之。不獨施之博徒，實足貽諸好事，使千萬世後知命辭打馬，始自易安居士也。

時紹興四年十一月二十四日，易安室序。

Now, Long Walk, Leaves, Borderlands, and Pellets, these games are no longer known. Strike and Lift, Big and Little Pigpen, Ghost Clans, Barbarian Drawings, Storehouse of Numbers, and Fast Bets, these kinds of game are vulgar and not often seen. Storing Ale, Clutch the Reed, and Double Alert have been abandoned and forgotten in recent times. Pick the Immortal, Add and Take Away, and Insert the Flame are simple, dull games that depend on luck and leave no room for people to apply their knowledge or ingenuity. Large and Small Ivories and Weiqi can only be played by two persons at a time. It is only Selecting Colors and Capture the Horse that can be considered elegant games of the women's inner quarters. But I dislike how complicated Selecting Colors is, requiring so much looking up. Few people can really master it, and so it is difficult to find an able opponent. Capture the Horse, by contrast, is simple and straightforward, although it is somewhat lacking in color and style.

I note that there are two versions of Capture the Horse. One version uses one general and ten horses. It is known as Horses West of the Passes. The other version has no general but uses twenty horses. This one is known as Horses By the Handbook. Having been around for a long time, both versions have handbooks and rules that can be consulted. The two have some different moves, rewards, and punishments. There is also another version developed during the Xuanhe reign period [1119–25] that uses two types of horses in different quantities. This version depends more on luck, and the ancient flavor of the game is completely lost. It is known as Xuanhe Horses. The version I like is Horses By the Handbook. Here, I have made estimates of some scenarios for reward and punishment, and have composed a few lines on each one, which are appended to each of the named arrangement of the pieces on the board. And I have had a youngster draw a diagram of each. This work may be transmitted not only to players of the game, but also to other interested persons so that a million generations hence everyone who hears of Capture the Horse will know that writings about the game began with the Recluse Scholar Yi'an.

The twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month of the fourth year of the Shaoxing period [1134], by Lady Yi'an.

## 2.5

## 祭趙湖州文（斷句）

白日正中，嘆龐翁之機捷  
 堅城自墮，憐杞婦之悲深。

---

1 These are two matching couplets from an eulogy that Li Qingzhao wrote for her late husband, Zhao Mingcheng, probably soon after his death. Zhao is referred to in the title by the last official position that he was given, in 1129, but did not live to take up. The lines are written in the parallel prose or “four-six style” (referring to the alternation of four and six syllable lines), and quoted in an early source as an example of Li Qingzhao’s skill in that form. The entire piece would have been of considerable length. It is conventional for such a piece to be packed with literary allusions, as this fragment is.

2 The Buddhist hagiography of the layman Pangyun 龐蘊 (740–808) tells of how he predicted that his own entrance into nirvana (death) would occur at noon on a certain day, and asked his daughter to go outside and tell him when the sun reached

## 2.5

Eulogy for Zhao, Governor of Huzhou (fragment)<sup>1</sup>

...

The bright sun was just at its noontime height, we admire Pangweng's wit and quickness;<sup>2</sup>

The sturdy city wall abruptly collapsed, we pity Woman Qi for the depth of her grief.<sup>3</sup>

---

the highest point in the sky. She did so but tricked him by telling him that just then there was an eclipse. When Pangyun stepped outside to see for himself, his daughter promptly took his place on the meditation mat and herself entered nirvana (so that her father could go on living). When he realized what she had done, Pangyun praised his daughter for her "wit and quickness." Here, that praise is transferred to Pangyun (i.e., Zhao Mingcheng) himself. The sun at noontime likewise alludes to Zhao Mingcheng's untimely death, when he was still middle-aged.

3 In ancient times, Qi Liang 杞梁 died in a battle between his native state of Qi and its rival Ju. His wife, who had no children or relatives to go to (like Li Qingzhao), threw herself on his corpse below the city wall and wept grievously. Ten days later, the wall crumbled of its own accord.

### 3. 詞

#### 3.1

##### 南歌子

天上星河轉  
人間簾幕垂。  
涼生枕簟淚痕滋。

4 起解羅衣  
聊問夜何其。

翠貼蓮蓬小  
金銷藕葉稀。  
8 舊時天氣舊時衣。  
只有情懷  
不似舊家時。

## Chapter 3: Song Lyrics (Ci 詞)

*For the numbering of these pieces and the issues surrounding the reliability of their attribution to Li Qingzhao, see the Introduction.*

*The reader is reminded that the tune titles given for each song are the names of traditional musical melodies to which the words were set (and which determine the prosodic pattern for the words of each song, for example, the number of lines, the number of syllables per line, etc.). The tune titles have their meaning, naturally, but that meaning usually has nothing to do with the actual content of the new set of lyrics the poet set to that pre-existing tune. The reader will be misled if the tune title is taken as a key to unlock the meaning of the song attached to it.*

### 3.1

To the tune “Southern Song”

The River of Stars pivots in the sky,  
blinds and curtains hang down in the mortal world.  
Pillow and mat are chilly, the tear stains still moist.

- 4 I arise and untie my silken robe  
to ask about the progress of the night.

Turquoise stitching on lotus pods is fine,  
gold outline on lotus leaves is delicate.

- 8 The weather is of years gone by, even the clothes of years gone by.  
It's just that my feelings  
do not resemble those of years gone by back home.

## 3.2

轉調滿庭芳

芳草池塘

綠陰庭院

晚晴寒透窗紗。

4 玉鈎金鎖

管是客來吵。

寂寞尊前席上

惟愁海角天涯。

8 能留否

醅醱落盡

猶賴有梨花。

當年

12 曾勝賞

生香熏袖

活火分茶。

儘如龍驕馬

16 流水輕車。

不怕風狂雨驟

恰才稱

煮酒澣花。

### 3.2

To the tune “Fragrance Fills the Courtyard, Modulated Version”

A pond amid fragrant grasses,  
courtyard shaded in green,  
on a clear evening, coolness enters the window gauze.

- 4 Jade hook and golden lock—  
surely the guests have arrived!  
But lonely before wine cup and banquet setting,  
aware only of sadness at the sky’s edge and end of the sea.
- 8 Will they be willing to stay for long?  
The thornberry flowers have all fallen,  
at least the pear blossoms remain.

- In former years,  
12 we had the grandest pleasures.  
Honey-bush incense perfumed our sleeves,  
cakes of tea were broken over live coals.  
Prancing steeds like sleek dragons  
16 drew fluttering carriages swift as rushing waters.  
What did we care about blustery winds or driving rains?  
All the better for  
warming wine and inscribing flowery paper.

- 20 如今也  
不成懷抱  
得似舊時那。

### 3.3

#### 漁家傲

- 天接雲濤連曉霧。  
星河欲轉千帆舞。  
彷彿夢魂歸帝所  
4 聞天語。  
殷勤問我歸何處。  
  
我報路長嗟日暮。  
學詩謾有驚人句。  
8 九萬里風鵬正舉。  
風休住。  
蓬舟吹取三山去。

- 20 But as for today—  
 no feeling at all forms in the heart,  
 how could we ever be like that again?

### 3.3

To the tune “The Fisherman Is Proud”

- The sky joins billowing cloud-waves to morning mists.  
 The River of Stars begins to turn, a thousand sails dance.  
 My dreaming soul seems to have gone to the Lord of Heaven’s place,  
 4 where I hear Heaven speak.  
 What is your final destination, it asks, showing real concern.

- The road is long, I say, and the day already late.  
 I write poetry, but my startling lines are produced in vain.  
 8 A wind blows thousands of miles, the giant phoenix will soon take  
 flight.  
 Oh wind, do not slacken!  
 Blow my little boat to the distant Isles of Immortals.<sup>1</sup>

---

1 The third line of this stanza draws language from *Zhuangzi* 莊子, the Daoist classic, about a mythical giant bird that, when it flapped its wings preparing to fly, caused a wind to blow for thousands of miles. The Isles of Immortals, anciently believed to be located in the eastern ocean, were thought to be the dwelling place of beings who never aged or died.

## 3.4

## 如夢令

常記溪亭日暮。  
沈醉不知歸路。  
興盡晚回舟  
4 誤入藕花深處。  
爭渡。  
爭渡。  
驚起一灘鷗鷺。

## 3.5

## 如夢令

昨夜雨疏風驟。  
濃睡不消殘酒。  
試問捲簾人  
4 却道海棠依舊。  
知否。  
知否。  
應是綠肥紅瘦。

### 3.4

To the tune "As If in a Dream"

I often recall one sunset in a riverside pavilion.  
Having drunk too much, I forgot the way home.  
Knowing it was late, I started back in my boat at dusk  
4 but paddled by mistake into a thick patch of lotuses.  
Struggling to get out,  
struggling to get out,  
I startled a whole sandbar of egrets into flight.

### 3.5

To the tune "As If in a Dream"

Last night the rain was intermittent, the wind blustery.  
Deep sleep did not dispel the lingering wine.  
I tried asking the maid raising the blinds,  
4 who said the crab-apple blossoms were as before.  
"Don't you know?  
Don't you know?  
The greens must be plump and the reds spindly."

## 3.6

多麗

咏白菊

小樓寒

夜長簾幕低垂。

恨蕭蕭

4 無情風雨

夜來揉損瓊肌。

也不似

貴妃醉臉

8 也不似

孫壽愁眉。

韓令偷香

徐娘傅粉

12 莫將比擬未新奇。

細看取

屈平陶令

風韻正相宜。

16 微風起

清芬醞藉

不減醠醑。

## 3.6

To the tune “Gorgeous”

On the White Chrysanthemum

- The low tower was cold,  
 the night long, blinds and curtains hung down.  
 How unwelcome, souging on and on,  
 4 the uncaring wind and rain  
 that bruised their jadelike skin.  
 They do not resemble  
 Guifei's face flushed with wine,  
 8 nor do they resemble  
 Sun Shou's sorrowful eyebrows.<sup>1</sup>  
 The perfume that Director Han stole,  
 the powder that Lady Xu wore,  
 12 were not nearly so fresh and marvelous.<sup>2</sup>  
 When we look closely  
 it is Qu Yuan and Tao Qian  
 Whose graceful bearing befits theirs.<sup>3</sup>  
 16 As a slight breeze stirs,  
 their pure fragrance and refinement  
 equal those of the briar rose.

---

1 Stories about Yang Guifei include the emperor's special fondness for her face when flushed with wine. “Sorrowful eyebrows” was a seductive expression cultivated by Sun Shou, the wife of Liang Ji 梁冀 (d. 159) of the Later Han.

2 The daughter of Jia Chong 賈充 (217–282) wore a bewitching perfume, which stayed on her lover (Han Shou 韓壽, d. 300) after his secret visits to her room. Lady Xu was the beautiful concubine of Emperor Yuan of the Liang dynasty.

3 Major poets Qu Yuan 屈原 (3rd c. BCE) and Tao Qian are both associated with the chrysanthemum.

漸秋闌

20 雪清玉瘦  
向人無限依依。

似愁凝

漢皋解佩

24 似淚灑  
紈扇題詩。

明月清風

濃煙暗雨

28 天教憔悴度芳姿。

縱愛惜

不知從此

留得幾多時。

32 人情好

何須更憶

澤畔東籬。

- As autumn reaches its end,  
 20 their spotless snow and slender jade  
 gaze with endless longing toward us.  
 They seem filled with sorrow:  
 the pearl pendants untied on Han’gao Mountain.<sup>1</sup>
- 24 They appear to be shedding tears,  
 the white silk fan inscribed with a poem.<sup>2</sup>  
 In bright moonlight and chill winds  
 heavy mists and dark rains,
- 28 Heaven makes their fragrant beauty look haggard.  
 No matter how much we cherish them  
 it’s impossible to know, from this moment on,  
 how much longer they will last.
- 32 If a person truly cares for them,  
 why must one always think back to  
 Qu Yuan’s marsh and Tao Qian’s eastern hedge?

---

1 In ancient times, Zheng Jiaofu 鄭交甫 encountered two goddesses on Han’gao Mountain. They were wearing pendants with large pearls, which they took off and presented to him.

2 After Concubine Ban (Ban Jieyu 班婕妤) lost the favor of the Han emperor Cheng (r. 32–7 BCE), she inscribed a poem on a white silk fan, hoping to rekindle the emperor’s love for her.

## 3.7

## 菩薩蠻

風柔日薄春猶早。  
 夾衫乍著心情好。  
 睡起覺微寒。  
 4 梅花鬢上殘。

故鄉何處是。  
 忘了除非醉。  
 沉水臥時燒。  
 8 香消酒未消。

## 3.8

## 菩薩蠻

歸鴻聲斷殘雲碧。  
 背窗雪落爐煙直。  
 燭底鳳釵明。  
 4 釵頭人勝輕。

角聲催曉漏。  
 曙色回牛斗。

### 3.7

To the tune “Bodhisattva Barbarian”

The wind delicate, the sun pale—it’s still early spring.

I wore a lined jacket, my heart at ease.

Now arising from sleep, I feel a chill in the air.

4 The plum blossom in my hair has withered.

My homeland, where is it?

I can’t forget unless I’ve been drinking.

Aloeswood incense smoldered as I lay down.

8 The fragrance has dissipated, the wine has not.

### 3.8

To the tune “Boddhisattva Barbarian”

Migrating geese can no longer be heard, past broken clouds of  
cyan-green.

Snow falls outside the darkened window, the censer’s smoke rises  
straight.

A phoenix hairpin reflects the candle’s flame.

4 Cutout figures weigh nothing, inserted beside the pin.<sup>1</sup>

A garrison horn hurries the water-clock at dawn.

The day’s first light comes to Dipper and Ox.

---

1 On the seventh day of the first month of the year, it was a southern custom for women to make paper cutouts of human figures, which were displayed on screens and worn in the hair. This song is set in “early spring” (that is, the first lunar month of the new year). The migrating geese are already returning northward, but it is still cold enough to snow.

- 春意看花難。  
8 西風留舊寒。

## 3.9

## 浣溪沙

- 莫許杯深琥珀濃。  
未成沈醉意先融。  
疏鐘已應晚來風。  
4 瑞腦香消魂夢斷  
辟寒金小髻鬟鬆。  
醒時空對燭花紅。

## 3.10

## 浣溪沙

- 小院閑窗春色深。  
重簾未捲影沈沈。  
倚樓無語理瑤琴。  
4 遠岫出雲催薄暮  
細風吹雨弄輕陰。  
梨花欲謝恐難禁。

- Eager for signs of spring, it’s hard to look for blossoms  
8 when the west wind retains winter’s chill.

### 3.9

To the tune “Sands of the Washing Stream”

Do not decline a deep cup filled with luscious amber wine,  
before real drunkenness sets in, the mind is already numb.  
The sound of a distant bell answers rising evening winds.

- 4 The camphor incense burns down, my dream is interrupted,  
the warming-gold hairpin is small, my hair knot grows loose.<sup>1</sup>  
Sober now, I sit vacantly before the candle’s red glow.

### 3.10

To the tune “Sands of the Washing Stream”

A small courtyard and lattice window, the spring colors are vivid.  
The double blinds are not lifted, shadows gather deep inside.  
She leans on the balcony, saying nothing, plucking a pearled zither.

- 4 A distant cave emits clouds, hurrying the onset of dusk,  
a light wind brings rain, rippling the sparse shade.  
The pear blossoms will soon wither—no preventing it, I fear.

---

<sup>1</sup> The “warming-gold” hairpin is a hairpin either made in the form of a southwestern bird of the same name believed to shun the cold, or made of substance resembling the “gold” said to be secreted from the bird’s mouth.

## 3.11

## 浣溪沙

淡蕩春光寒食天。  
玉爐沉水裊殘煙。  
夢回山枕隱花鈿。

- 4 海燕未來人鬪草  
江梅已過柳生綿。  
黃昏疏雨濕鞦韆。

## 3.12

## 鳳凰臺上憶吹簫

香冷金猊  
被翻紅浪  
起來慵自梳頭。

- 4 任寶奩塵滿  
日上簾鉤。  
生怕離懷別苦  
多少事  
8 欲說還休。

### 3.11

To the tune “Sands of the Washing Stream”

Genial, the spring sunlight, in Cold Food Festival weather.<sup>1</sup>  
Aloeswood burns in the jade censer, a wavering trail of fading smoke.  
Returned from a dream, the pillow hides my inlaid flower hairpin.

- 4 The coastal swallows have not returned, people play the stalk guessing  
game;  
the southern plum has faded, willows shed their cottony fluff.  
A light rain at sunset moistens the garden swing.

### 3.12

To the tune “On Top of Phoenix Tower, Recalling Flute Music”

- Incense lies cold in the golden lion,  
the bedcover is tossed crimson waves,  
she arises, too languid to comb her hair.
- 4 The jeweled make-up case gathers dust,  
as the sun climbs to the curtain hook.  
She dreads now this longing for a distant one and parting pain,  
How many things have happened!
- 8 About to speak, she stops.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cold Food Festival, so named because cooking fires were not to be lit on that day, was a spring festival that occurred in the third lunar month, right before Tomb Sweeping Day (Qingming).

新來瘦  
非干病酒  
不是悲秋。

- 12 休休。  
這回去也  
千萬遍陽關  
也則難留。
- 16 念武陵人遠  
煙鎖秦樓。  
唯有樓前流水  
應念我
- 20 終日凝眸。  
凝眸處  
從今又添  
一段新愁。

She's grown thin of late,  
 not from sickness over wine,  
 nor from sadness over autumn.

- 12 No more, no more!  
 When he left this time  
 a thousand verses of “Yang Pass”  
 would not have detained him.<sup>1</sup>
- 16 The Wuling man is distant now,  
 clouds lock shut the tower in Qin.<sup>2</sup>  
 There's only the flowing river before the tower  
 that should remember me
- 20 staring transfixed, all day long.  
 To the spot I stand and stare,  
 from today on will be added  
 a layer of new sorrow.

---

1 “Yang Pass” was a famous parting song, often sung repeatedly at a farewell scene or banquet in an attempt to delay the inevitable departure.

2 Wuling, because of literary allusions to a site of romantic encounters, had become a common way for women to refer to their lover or husband. The tower of Qin is where Nongyu 弄玉 dwelled with her husband Xiao Shi 箫史 in the ancient state of Chu. The tower was also known as Phoenix Tower (as in this composition's tune title) because their flute playing attracted phoenixes to it. Eventually, one day, the couple sat astride one of those phoenixes and rode off into the sky.

## 3.13

## 一翦梅

紅藕香殘玉簟秋。

輕解羅裳

獨上蘭舟。

4 雲中誰寄錦書來

雁字回時

月滿西樓。

花自飄零水自流。

8 一種相思

兩處閑愁。

此情無計可消除

纔下眉頭

12 却上心頭。

**3.13**

To the tune “A Single Cutting of Plum Blossoms”

The scent of red lotuses fades in jade mat autumn.  
Lightly she unties her gauze robe  
to board the magnolia boat alone.

- 4 Amid the clouds, who sends a brocade letter?  
As the wild geese character comes back<sup>1</sup>  
moonlight fills the western tower.

Blossoms fall on their own, the water flows by itself.

- 8 One type of longing,  
idle sadness in two places.  
There’s no means to get rid of this feeling.  
As soon as it leaves the brow  
12 it surfaces in the heart.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 The wild geese “character” refers to the formation of geese in the sky, said to replicate the Chinese written character for “one” (*yi* 一) or “person” (*ren* 人). An ancient story told of migratory geese delivering letters from a distant relative or friend, so that this line is related to the question posed in the preceding one.

2 The closing two lines may be Li Qingzhao’s clever transformation of earlier lines in a song lyric by the statesman Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989–1052), which she would have known: “All in all, this loneliness, / On the brows and in the heart / Simply cannot be escaped.”

## 3.14

## 蝶戀花

晚止昌樂館寄姊妹

淚搵征衣脂粉暖。

四疊陽關

唱了千千遍。

4 人道山長水又斷。

蕭蕭微雨聞孤館。

惜別傷離方寸亂。

忘了臨行

8 酒盞深和淺。

若有音書憑過雁。

東萊不似蓬萊遠。

---

1 Donglai is another name for Laizhou, in modern Shandong, where Li Qingzhao's husband, Zhao Mingcheng, served as governor in the 1120s. Penglai is the legendary Isles of Immortals far out in the eastern ocean, as mentioned earlier. The last line puns on the shared character in the two place names. This piece is thought to have been written in 1121, when Li Qingzhao left Qingzhou to join her husband, who had gone before her to take up his new official post in Laizhou (also Shandong). The place mentioned in the subtitle lies on the road between Qingzhou and

### 3.14

To the tune “Butterfly Loves Flowers”

In the evening at Changle Station, sent to my sisters

Tears were brushed from my traveling coat, my powder and rouge  
warmed by them.

The four stanzas of “Yang Pass”  
were sung thousands and thousands of times.

- 4 People say the hills stretch far and rivers block the way.  
In the lone way station we listened to soughing rain.

My heart was in turmoil, regretting our separation.

Now I forget, as I made ready to set out,

- 8 how deep the wine cup was.

Letters you write can be entrusted to migrating geese.

Donglai is not as far, after all, as Penglai.<sup>1</sup>

---

Laizhou. The subtitle is not preserved in the earliest source that contains this poem, and until it was recently discovered it was assumed that Li Qingzhao wrote this piece to her departing husband on his way to Laizhou, even though the opening lines clearly identify the traveler as female. So strong is the assumption that all of Li Qingzhao's works and feelings expressed in them were rooted in her love for Zhao Mingcheng that lines have regularly been contorted to make them conform to that conception.

## 3.15

## 蝶戀花

暖日和風初破凍。

柳眼梅腮

已覺春心動。

4 酒意詩情誰與共。

淚融殘粉花鈿重。

乍試夾衫金縷縫。

山枕斜欹

8 枕損釵頭鳳。

獨抱濃愁無好夢。

夜闌猶翦燈花弄。

## 3.16

## 鷓鴣天

寒日蕭蕭上鎖窗。

梧桐應恨夜來霜。

酒闌更喜團茶苦

4 夢斷偏宜瑞腦香。

### 3.15

To the tune “Butterfly Loves Flowers”

Warm sunlight and pleasing winds, the ice begins to melt.  
Willow eyelids and plum-tree cheeks,  
the excitement of spring stirs in my heart.

- 4 A taste for wine and poetry—who will share it with me?  
Tears dry on fading powder, the inlaid hair-clasp heavy.

I try on a lined jacket with gold-thread embroidery.  
Resting my head on the mound-pillow,

- 8 my phoenix hairpin is dislodged.  
Alone I clutch dense sadness, no pleasant dream comes.  
Late at night I trim the lamp wick, toying with it.

### 3.16

To the tune “Partridge Sky”

The cold sun is bleak, climbing the lattice window.  
The paulownia tree must resent last night’s frost.  
After wine, the tea’s bitterness tastes even better;

- 4 my dream interrupted, the camphor incense smells just right.

- 秋已盡  
日猶長。  
仲宣懷遠更淒涼。  
8 不如隨分尊前醉  
莫負東籬菊蕊黃。

## 3.17

## 小重山

- 春到長門春草青。  
江梅些子破  
未開勻。  
4 碧雲籠碾玉成塵。  
留曉夢  
驚破一甌春。  
  
花影壓重門。  
8 疏簾鋪淡月  
好黃昏。  
二年三度負東君。

---

1 Zhongxuan is Wang Can 王粲 (177–217), a poet who, like Li Qingzhao, was driven to the south from his homeland in Shandong. Upon climbing a tower in Jingzhou and gazing in the direction of his home, he composed a rhapsody expressing his longing to return. The mention of chrysanthemums growing beside an eastern fence calls to mind Tao Qian, also a devotee of both chrysanthemums and wine.

Though autumn has ended,  
 the days are still long.  
 Missing his homeland made Zhongxuan more dispirited.

- 8 Better to get tipsy beside the jug whenever you want,  
 and not be untrue to yellow chrysanthemums along the eastern fence.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.17

To the tune “Low Rows of Hills”

Spring comes to Long Gate, spring plants are verdant.<sup>2</sup>  
 Red plum blossoms are beginning to open,  
 not yet in full flower.

- 4 Cyan clouds cover the grinder, jade slivers lie piled like dust.  
 My lingering dawn dream  
 is abruptly broken by a pot of spring.<sup>3</sup>

Blossom shadows press upon double doors.

- 8 Spaced blinds are covered with pallid moonlight,  
 what a fine evening it is!  
 Three times in two years I’ve betrayed the Lord of the East.<sup>4</sup>

---

2 Long Gate is the palace in which empress Chen was confined after she lost the favor of her husband, Emperor Wu of the Han (r. 141–87 BCE).

3 “Cyan clouds” are tea leaves, or imagined emanations from them, and the jade slivers are the powder produced by grinding the leaves, then infusing them in water. The “pot of spring” is a pot of newly brewed tea.

4 The Lord of the East is the god of spring.

歸來也

12 著意過今春。

### 3.18

憶王孫

湖上風來波浩渺。

秋已暮

紅稀香少。

4 水光山色與人親

說不盡

無窮好。

蓮子已成荷葉老。

8 清露洗

蘋花汀草。

眠沙鷗鷺不回頭

似也恨

12 人歸早。

- Now that he has returned again,  
12 let me set my mind on enjoying this spring.

### 3.18

To the tune “Remembering the Prince”

- Wind comes across the lake, waves stretch endlessly.  
At the end of autumn  
the red flowers are few, the fragrances slight.  
4 They befriend me, the water’s glimmer and the hues of the hills—  
impossible to describe,  
the infinite beauty of the scene.

- The lotus seeds are formed, the leaves droop.  
8 Pure dew washes  
duckweed flowers and islet grasses.  
Sleeping gulls on the sand do not turn their heads,  
as if they begrudge me  
12 going home so early.

## 3.19

## 臨江仙

歐陽公作《蝶戀花》有「庭院深深深幾許」之句，予酷愛之，用其語作「庭院深深」數闕。其聲蓋即舊《臨江仙》也。

庭院深深深幾許  
雲窗霧閣常扃。  
柳梢梅萼漸分明。

4 春歸秣陵樹  
人客建康城。

感月吟風多少事  
如今老去無成。

8 誰憐憔悴更彫零。  
試燈無意思  
踏雪沒心情。

**3.19**

To the tune “Immortal by the River”

Master Ouyang (Ouyang Xiu) wrote a song lyric to the tune “Butterfly Loves Flowers” with the line “Deep, the deep courtyard, how deep is it?” which I’m most fond of.<sup>1</sup> I have borrowed his line to write several “Deep, the deep courtyard” songs. In fact, the tune he used is the one formerly known as “Immortal by the River.”

Deep, the deep courtyard, how deep is it?  
 Cloudy windows and misty halls are forever locked.  
 Willow tips and plum buds can gradually be seen.

- 4 Spring returns to the trees of Moling,  
 this person is a sojourner at Jiankang city.<sup>2</sup>

Moved by the moon, chanting in the wind, so much has happened!  
 Today I’m old and have accomplished nothing.

- 8 Haggard and declining, yet who shows concern?  
 Lighting the lanterns holds no interest for me,  
 and I’ve no enthusiasm for treading on the snow.<sup>3</sup>

---

1 It is generally accepted now that the song Li Qingzhao thinks was written by Ouyang Xiu was actually written by the earlier writer Feng Yansi 馮延巳 (903–960).

2 The two places named in these lines are both alternate names for Nanjing, where Li Qingzhao spent several months in late 1128 and early 1129. But there are textual variants for the second place name and some uncertainty about the place intended.

3 Adopting the variant version of these two lines found in *Yuefu yaci*, the earliest surviving text of this composition.

## 3.20

## 醉花陰

薄霧濃霧愁永晝。

瑞腦銷金獸。

時節又重陽

4 寶枕紗廚

半夜涼初透。

東籬把酒黃昏後。

有暗香盈袖。

8 莫道不銷魂

簾捲西風

人比黃花瘦。

## 3.21

## 好事近

風定落花深

簾外擁紅堆雪。

長記海棠開後

4 正是傷春時節。

### 3.20

To the tune “Drunk in the Blossom’s Shadows”

Light mist, thick vapors, sad through an endless morning.  
Camphor incense turns to ash inside the golden beast.  
Again it’s Double Ninth Festival,<sup>1</sup>

4 to the precious pillow, within the gauze netting,  
a chill enters at midnight.

Holding wine after sunset by the eastern fence,  
a subtle fragrance fills the sleeves.

8 Don’t say she’s not heartbroken—  
as the west wind lifts the blinds,  
she’s more withered than the yellow flowers.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.21

To the tune “A Happy Event Draws Near”

The wind calms, fallen blossoms lie thick,  
outside the curtains, piles of reds and snowy mounds of whites.  
I always know, once the crab-apple blossoms,

4 it is truly the time to be pained by spring.

---

1 The Double Ninth Festival was the ninth day of the ninth lunar month.

2 In the second stanza we see again the association of “eastern fence,” wine, and chrysanthemums that we encountered in 3.16, but now with a very different meaning and mood.

酒闌歌罷玉尊空  
 青缸暗明滅。  
 魂夢不堪幽怨  
 8 更一聲啼鴉。

## 3.22

## 訴衷情

夜來沈醉卸妝遲。  
 梅萼插殘枝。  
 酒醒熏破春睡  
 4 夢遠不成歸。

人悄悄  
 月依依。  
 翠簾垂。  
 8 更掇殘蕊  
 更撚餘香  
 更得些時。

The wine finished, singing over, the jade goblet is empty,  
as the bronze lamp flickers dimly.

- My dreaming soul cannot stand the lone resentment,  
8 what's more, the isolated cry of the shrike.

### 3.22

To the tune "Telling My Deepest Feelings"

Drunk last night, I delayed taking off my make-up.  
A withered sprig of plum blossoms still sits in my hair.  
Sobering up now, their scent interrupts my spring sleep,

- 4 my distant dream did not carry me home.

No sounds of people now,  
the moon hangs longingly in the sky.  
The green blinds are lowered.

- 8 Again, I toy with the fading flowers,  
pinching out, again, what fragrance remains,  
to make it last, again, a little longer.

## 3.23

## 行香子

草際鳴蛩。  
 驚落梧桐。  
 正人間天上愁濃。

4 雲階月色  
 關鎖千重。  
 縱浮槎來  
 浮槎去  
 8 不相逢。

星橋鵲駕  
 經年才見  
 想離情別恨難窮。

12 牽牛織女  
 莫是離中。

---

1 The festival of Seventh Night or Double Seventh occurs on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, and celebrates the reunion of the Weaving Maid and Herd Boy stars and a familiar poetic theme. This is the one night of the year that the Herd Boy star (Altair) is able to cross over the River of Stars (the Milky Way) for its annual meeting with the Weaving Maid star (Vega). The two are lovers but are separated by the River of Stars on every other night of the year, when all they can do is gaze longingly at each other across the “river.” In some versions of the legend, on the Double Seventh a flock of magpies forms a bridge across the river, allowing the Herd Boy to get to the other side.

**3.23**

To the tune “Incense Offering”<sup>1</sup>

Chirping crickets in the brush  
 startle paulownia leaves off the branch.  
 This is a time of deep sadness, in the heavens as on earth.

- 4 A stairway of clouds to a moonlight terrain,  
 the thousand gates are locked shut.  
 Even if the raft comes floating by,  
 it drifts on by,  
 8 and never encounters Herd Boy.<sup>2</sup>

A bridge across the River of Stars, formed by magpies  
 meeting only once a year.  
 Their parting sorrows and regrets never come to an end.

- 12 Herd Boy and Weaving Maid—  
 all they know is separation.

---

2 Lines 4–5 describe the moon palace. Lines 6–8 are derived from a medieval story of a mortal who lived by the sea and regularly went out on a raft. One evening, in the seventh month, he came to a bank where he encountered a herd boy and weaving maids. (It was sometimes said that the celestial River of Stars connected to the worldly ocean at the edge of the sky.) He only realized later that his raft had that evening carried him into the sky. Li Qingzhao alters the story to use the raft as an image of a meeting that fails to take place.

甚霎兒晴  
 霎兒雨  
 16 霎兒風。

## 3.24

## 清平樂

年年雪里。  
 常插梅花醉。  
 挼盡梅花無好意。  
 4 贏得滿衣清淚。

今年海角天涯。  
 蕭蕭兩鬢生華。  
 看取晚來風勢  
 8 故應難看梅花。

## 3.25

## 漁家傲

雪里已知春信至。  
 寒梅點綴瓊枝膩。

Truly, theirs is a moment of clear sky,  
a moment of rain,  
16 a moment of wind.

### 3.24

To the Tune “Clear and Peaceful Music”

Year after year, in late snow  
I put plum blossoms in my hair and drink too much.  
Touching them only spoils them, bringing no pleasure.  
4 All I get is a blouse full of tear stains!

This year, at the edge of the sea and end of the sky,  
the hair at my temples shows streaks of grey.  
Watching now as the evening winds arise,  
8 it will be hard to look at plum blossoms anymore.

### 3.25

To the tune “The Fisherman Is Proud”

Amid snow we know spring’s messenger has arrived.  
The cold plum is adorned, its jeweled branches lustrous.

- 香臉半開嬌旖旎。  
 4 當庭際。  
 玉人浴出新妝洗。
- 造化可能偏有意。  
 故教明月玲瓏地。  
 8 共賞金尊沉綠蟻。  
 莫辭醉。  
 此花不與群花比。

## 3.26

## 孤雁兒

世人作梅詞，下筆便俗。予試作一篇，乃知前言不妄耳。

- 藤床紙帳朝眠起。  
 說不盡  
 無佳思。
- 4 沈香煙斷玉爐寒  
 伴我情怀如水。  
 笛聲三弄  
 梅心驚破
- 8 多少春情意。

The perfumed face is half visible, showing coy beauty.

- 4 At the edge of the courtyard,  
a jade beauty emerges from the bath, her make-up newly rinsed.<sup>1</sup>

The Creator must be biased in his intent  
to cause the bright moon to shine on this spot.

- 8 Together we enjoy the dark bubbles in the golden goblet.  
Do not decline to drink too much,  
this flower cannot be compared to any other.

### 3.26

To the tune “The Solitary Wild Goose”

People say that when writing songs on the plum blossom, as soon as your brush touches the page the piece is vulgar. I tried writing one, and discovered it’s true.

A rattan bed, paper curtain, awaking in the morning.  
I could never describe it,  
this mood with no pleasant thoughts.

- 4 The aloeswood incense no longer burns, the censer is cold,  
the despair that attends upon me is like a stream that never stops.  
Three tunes on the flute,<sup>2</sup>  
startle open the plum blossoms,  
8 but the excitement of spring—how much is there?

1 These lines echo the way the Tang poet Bo Juyi 白居易 (772–846) described Yang Guifei, as she emerged from her bath.

2 This must refer to the flute piece known as “Plum Blossoms, Three Tunes.”

小風疏雨瀟瀟地。  
 又催下千行淚。  
 吹簫人去玉樓空  
 12 腸斷與誰同倚。  
 一枝折得  
 人間天上  
 沒個人堪寄。

## 3.27

滿庭芳

殘梅

小閣藏春  
 閒窗銷晝  
 畫堂無限深幽。  
 4 篆香燒盡  
 日影下簾鉤。  
 手種江梅更好  
 又何必臨水登樓。  
 8 無人到  
 寂寥恰似何遜在揚州。

- A light breeze brings fine rain that moistens the ground.  
It also hastens the shedding of a thousand lines of tears.  
The flute-player has left, the jade tower is empty,  
12 with whom can my broken heart fly off?<sup>1</sup>  
A sprig of blossoms may be picked,  
but not in this world, nor in heaven,  
is there anyone to send it to.

### 3.27

To the tune "Fragrance Fills the Courtyard"

On Wilted Plum Blossoms

- This small building conceals the spring season,  
the lattice windows lock the morning inside,  
the painted hall is infinitely deep and secluded.  
4 Seal-character incense has all turned to ash,  
the sun's shadows move down the hooked curtain.  
The river plums I planted myself grow ever more attractive,  
why bother going to the river or climbing to the balcony?  
8 No one comes,  
the loneliness here is just like He Sun's in Yangzhou.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 Another reference to the legend of the flute-playing lovers, Xiao Shi and Nongyu.

2 He Xun 何遜 (d. 518) wrote poems on the beauty of plum blossoms in Yangzhou.

- 從來知韻勝  
 難堪雨藉  
 12 不耐風揉。  
 更誰家橫笛  
 吹動濃愁。  
 莫恨香消玉減  
 16 須信道  
 掃跡情留。  
 難言處  
 良宵淡月  
 20 疏影尚風流。

## 3.28

玉樓春

紅梅

- 紅酥肯放瓊苞碎。  
 探著南枝開遍未。  
 不知醞藉幾多時  
 4 但見包藏無限意。

From olden times, such outstanding beauty,  
 could hardly bear being pelted by rain  
 12 or tossed about by winds.  
 What’s worse is when the flute song being played somewhere  
 buffets it with such deep sadness!<sup>1</sup>  
 Do not regret the fragrance fading or the snow melting—  
 16 you must understand  
 the feeling lingers after the form is swept away.  
 Yet the hardest part is recalling these lines,  
 “On a fine evening in pale moonlight,  
 20 the delicate shadows retain their charm.”<sup>2</sup>

### 3.28

To the tune “Spring in the Jade Tower”

On the Red Plum

The red cream displays itself, the jeweled pod bursts.  
 I look to see if the southern branch is fully in blossom yet.  
 There’s no telling how long they were concealed in preparation,  
 4 all we see is the boundless feeling they contain.

---

1 This line probably alludes to the flute melody “Plum Blossoms Fall.”

2 The last two lines adopt language from Northern Song poet Lin Bu’s 林逋 (968–1028) celebrated poetic couplet on plum blossoms: “Its delicate shadows slant across the water, shallow and deep, / Its subtle fragrance hangs in the air in twilight moonlight.”

道人憔悴春窗底。  
 悶損闌干愁不倚。  
 要來小看便來休  
 8 未必明朝風不起。

## 3.29

## 念奴嬌

蕭條庭院  
 又斜風細雨  
 重門須閉。  
 4 寵柳嬌花寒食近  
 種種惱人天氣。  
 險韻詩成  
 扶頭酒醒  
 8 別是閑滋味。  
 征鴻過盡  
 萬千心事難寄。  
 樓上幾日春寒  
 12 簾垂四面  
 玉闌干慵倚。  
 被冷香消新夢覺  
 不許愁人不起。

The blossoms know the person beside the spring window is haggard,  
troubled beside the balcony railing, too sad to lean and gaze afar.  
If you want to come view them a while, please do!

8 There's no guarantee wind will not rise in the morning.

### 3.29

To the tune "Recalling Her Charm"

So deserted, the courtyard,  
what's more, a fine drizzle is blown by slanting winds,  
the double doors must be kept shut.

4 Oh, the beloved willows and lovely flowers, as Cold Food Day  
approaches,

it's the season that's unsettling in so many ways.

My poem set to a difficult rhyme is finished,

I sober up from strong wine

8 to a special flavor of idleness.

The migrating geese fly past,

but they could never transmit the countless concerns on my mind.

Spring chill has lasted several days in my upper-story room,

12 the blinds hang down on all four sides,

I'm too languid to lean on the jade balustrade.

My blanket is cold, the incense burned out, awake now from a dream,  
it's impossible with such sadness not to arise.

- 16 清露晨流  
 新桐初引  
 多少遊春意。  
 日高煙斂  
 20 更看今日晴未。

### 3.30

#### 聲聲慢

- 尋尋覓覓  
 冷冷清清  
 悽悽慘慘戚戚。  
 4 乍暖還寒時候  
 最難將息。  
 三杯兩盞淡酒  
 怎敵他  
 8 晚來風力。  
 雁過也  
 正傷心  
 卻是舊時相識。

- 16 See—pure dewdrops drift down in the morning air,  
new paulownia leaves are putting forth buds,  
perfect for a springtime outing!  
As the sun rises and the mist burns off,  
20 Let me look to see if the sky will be clear today.

### 3.30

To the tune “Note after Note, Long Song”

Searching, hunting, seeking, looking,  
so chilly and yet so clear.  
distressed, dismal, and forlorn.

- 4 Warm awhile then cold again, it's that season,  
the worst for taking care of yourself.  
How can two or three cups of weak wine  
hold up against  
8 the strength of the evening wind?  
The wild geese have flown past,  
truly saddening the heart,  
what's more, I recognize them from years past.

- 12 滿地黃花堆積。  
 憔悴損  
 如今有誰忺摘。  
 守著窗兒
- 16 獨自怎生得黑。  
 梧桐更兼細雨  
 到黃昏  
 點點滴滴。
- 20 這次第  
 怎一箇愁字了得。

## 3.31

## 永遇樂

## 元宵

- 落日鎔金  
 暮雲合璧  
 人在何處。
- 4 染柳煙濃  
 吹梅笛怨  
 春意知幾許。  
 元宵佳節
- 8 融和天氣  
 次第豈無風雨。

- 12 Yellow petals cover the ground, strewn in piles.  
 I’m so haggard and weakened now,  
 who bothers to pluck them anymore before they fall?  
 I sit beside the window, all by myself,
- 16 how could it have turned so black outside?  
 Paulownia trees and fine rain,  
 until dusk has fallen, I listen to  
 drip after drip, drop after drop.
- 20 This scene, this feeling—  
 how could the word “sorrow” ever suffice?

### 3.31

To the tune “Always Having Fun”

The Lantern Festival<sup>1</sup>

The setting sun is molten gold,  
 the clouds at dusk are a disk of jade.  
 and where am I now?

- 4 The willows dyed with dark mist,  
 “Plum Blossom” flutes are sorrowful,  
 how much springtime feeling is there?  
 The lovely time of the Lantern Festival:
- 8 the weather is balmy now,  
 but any moment there could be wind and rain.

---

1 The Lantern Festival fell on the fifteenth day of the New Year (hence also known as the Fifteenth, as in the second stanza), which was the first full moon of the year. It was one of the few times of the year that women were permitted to go out at night, to view the lanterns that were hung everywhere to celebrate the start of the New Year. This song is written in the persona of an older woman (already unusual in the song lyric form) recalling the way she and her female friends celebrated the festival back up north, before the fall of the Northern Song.

來相召

香車寶馬

12 謝他酒朋詩侶。

中州盛日

閨門多暇

記得偏重三五。

16 鋪翠冠兒

撚金雪柳

簇帶爭濟楚。

如今憔悴

20 風鬟霜鬢  
怕見夜間出去。

不如向

簾兒底下

24 聽人笑語。

### 3.32

憶秦娥

臨高閣。

亂山平野煙光薄。

They come to invite me out,  
in fragrant carriages drawn by festooned horses,  
12 but I turn them down, drinking buddies and poetry friends.

In the halcyon days back in the central provinces,  
there was much leisure in the women's apartments,  
I remember how we cherished the Fifteenth!  
16 We wore kingfisher feather caps,  
and snowy willows of plied gold,  
each trying to outdo the others in layered splendor!  
But today, gaunt and haggard,  
20 hair disheveled by wind and temples touched by frost,  
I'm embarrassed to go out at night.  
Better to sit behind  
lowered blinds  
24 and listen to others' talk and laughter.

### 3.32

To the tune "Remembering Qin E"

A high balcony overlooks  
jumbled hills and a level plain, as sunset mist fades.

煙光薄。

- 4 棲鴉歸後  
暮天聞角。

斷香殘酒情懷惡。  
西風催襯梧桐落。

- 8 梧桐落。  
又還秋色  
又還寂寞。

### 3.33

添字醜奴兒

窗前誰種芭蕉樹  
陰滿中庭。  
陰滿中庭。

- 4 葉葉心心  
舒卷有餘情。

傷心枕上三更雨  
點滴霖霖。

- 8 點滴霖霖。  
愁損北人  
不慣起來聽。

Sunset mist fades.

- 4 After the crows have gone to roost,  
in the evening sky comes the sound of a horn.<sup>1</sup>

The incense is burned out, some wine remains, but my mood is foul.

The west wind hurries the paulownia leaves to fall.

- 8 The paulownia leaves fall.  
Once more, an autumn scene—  
once more, loneliness.

### 3.33

To the tune “Vile Charmer, Long Version”

Who planted a banana tree in front of the window?

Its shade fills the central courtyard.

Its shade fills the central courtyard.

- 4 Leaf after leaf, heart after heart,  
folding and unfolding with an excess of feeling.

It grieves the heart, midnight rain heard from my pillow,  
dripping leaf to leaf, through a steady drizzle.

- 8 Dripping leaf to leaf, through a steady drizzle.  
The sadness overwhelms a northerner,  
who’s not used to awakening to this sound in the night.

---

<sup>1</sup> The horn is presumably from a military garrison, marking the sunset hour, and serves as a reminder of the ongoing military threat from the Jurchen and, by extension, their occupation of the Song heartland.

## 3.34

鷓鴣天

桂

暗淡輕黃體性柔。  
 情疏跡遠只香留。  
 何須淺碧輕紅色  
 4 自是花中第一流。

梅定妒

菊應羞。

畫欄開處冠中秋。  
 8 騷人可煞無情思  
 何事當年不見收。

## 3.35

長壽樂

南昌生日

### 3.34

To the tune “Partridge Sky”

The Osmanthus Tree

A pale wash of light yellow, gentle in substance and character.

Aloof by nature, yet its fragrance carries afar.

What need is there of light cyan or pale red blossoms?

4 This one ranks first among all the flowers.

The plum must be jealous,  
the chrysanthemum humbled.

Blossoming beside the painted railing, it is supreme in autumn.

8 How could the ancient poet be so unfeeling and careless?

Why did he omit this flower from his work?<sup>1</sup>

### 3.35

To the tune “The Joy of Long Life”

Nanchang’s Birthday

*There is disagreement among scholars concerning for whom this congratulatory birthday poem was written, some saying the recipient (Lady Nanchang, of the subtitle), was the mother of Han Xiaozhou, Li Qingzhao’s relative and benefactor, and others suggesting that it was the mother of Zhao*

---

<sup>1</sup> The last two lines refer to the ancient poet Qu Yuan, author of “Encountering Sorrow.” Li Qingzhao, like others of her time, thinks that the osmanthus or sweet-olive tree is not among the numerous plants that play such a large role in that long poem. In fact, the tree is mentioned briefly by Qu Yuan.

微寒應候。

望日邊

六葉堦萸初秀。

4 愛景欲挂扶桑

漏殘銀箭

杓回瑤斗。

慶高閔此際

8 掌上一顆明珠剖。

有令容淑質

歸逢佳偶。

到如今

12 畫錦滿堂貴胄。

榮耀

文步紫禁

一一金章綠綬。

16 更值棠棣連陰

虎符熊軾

夾河分守。

*Mingcheng, Li Qingzhao's first husband. The opening stanza alludes to the lady's birth on the dawn of a winter day, her parents' pride in the newborn child, her good marriage, and her offspring and descendants who now congratulate her on her birthday. The second stanza describes the distinguished official careers of her sons, the emperor's favor toward them, and the presents the family offers to their mother and matriarch on her birthday.*

A slight chill came with the season.

Beside the sun, we saw

six leaves of the auspicious step-bush were formed.

- 4 The genial winter orb hung in Mulberry Tree,  
the silver arrow was barely floating in the clepsydra,  
the handle pivoted on precious Dipper.

Blessed, this moment in the towering hall:

- 8 a pearl was opened in the palm of the hand.  
Favored as she was with comely face and gentle nature,  
in marriage a fine match was made.

And now, on this auspicious day,

- 12 Morning Brocade Hall is filled with high-ranking descendants.

Honored and glorified,

they stride into the Purple Palace

one by one wearing golden insignia and green tassels.

- 16 What's more, brothers like sweet-plums stand side by side, their shade  
intertwining,  
tiger seals and carriages with bear-carvings,  
serving as governors on both sides of the river.

況青雲咫尺

20 朝暮重入承明後。

看彩衣爭獻

蘭羞玉酎。

祝千齡

24 借指松椿比壽。

### 3.36

蝶戀花

上巳召親族

永夜厭厭歡意少。

空夢當時

認取長安道。

4 為報今年春色好。

花光月影宜相照。

隨意杯盤雖草草。

酒美梅酸

8 恰稱人懷抱。

醉莫插花花莫笑。

可憐春似人將老。

- Within inches of azure clouds high aloft,  
 20 morning and evening they repeatedly ascend the Palace of  
     Enlightenment.  
 See the colored silks his offspring vie to offer as presents,  
 together with tasty delicacies and jade cups of liquor.  
 They convey wishes for a thousand years,  
 24 the longevity of pine tree and fragrant cedar.

### 3.36

To the tune “Butterfly Loves Flowers”

Summoning Relatives on the Third Day Festival<sup>1</sup>

- The long night is oppressive, pleasant thoughts few.  
 In vain I dream of years past,  
 recognizing the roads of Chang’an.<sup>2</sup>  
 4 Spring’s colors this year, I’m told, are lovely.  
 Bright blossoms and moonlight must be illuminating each other.

- Though the cups and plates casually set out are not elaborate,  
 the richness of the wine and the sourness of plums  
 8 are a perfect match for our feelings.  
 When drunk, don’t put flowers in your hair, and flowers, don’t you  
     laugh.  
 How sad! Spring is getting old, just like the person.

---

1 A festival on the third day of the third month.

2 The Tang dynasty capital of Chang’an was regularly used in Song dynasty poetry as a substitute for the Northern Song capital of Bianjing (Kaifeng).

## 3.37

怨王孫

夢斷漏悄。

愁濃酒惱。

寶枕生寒

4 翠屏向曉。

門外誰掃殘紅。

夜來風。

玉簫聲斷人何處。

8 春又去

忍把歸期負。

此情此恨此際

擬托行雲。

12 問東君。

## 3.38

怨王孫

帝里春晚。

重門深院。

草綠階前

4 暮天雁斷。

### 3.37

To the tune “Resenting the Prince”

My dream interrupted, the water-clock is quiet.

Sadness is heavy, the wine annoying now.

From the precious pillow springs a chill.

4 The blue-green screen shows approaching dawn.

Who will sweep up the faded red blossoms outside my door  
blown down by tonight’s wind?

The jade flute melody has ended—where has the player gone?

8 Spring too is departing,

how can I have betrayed its return?

This mood, this regret: at this moment,

I should use the fleeting clouds

12 to ask the Lord of the East.

### 3.38

To the tune “Resenting the Prince”

The imperial city, late in spring.

Double doors, a secluded courtyard.

Grasses are green before the steps,

4 at dusk the wild geese no longer fly.

樓上遠信誰傳。  
恨綿綿。

多情自是多沾惹。

8 難拚捨。

又是寒食也。

鞦韆巷陌人靜

皎月初斜。

12 浸梨花。

### 3.39

#### 浣溪沙

樓上晴天碧四垂。

樓前芳草接天涯。

勸君莫上最高梯。

4 新筍看成堂下竹

落花都上燕巢泥。

忍聽林表杜鵑啼。

Who sends a distant letter to the person in the room aloft?  
Regrets stretch on and on.

People full of feeling have always been full of distress.

- 8 It's impossible to cast aside.  
And now, the Cold Food Festival again.  
The garden swing by the lane is deserted  
as the bright moon begins to set,  
12 suffusing the pear blossoms with light.

### 3.39

To the tune “Sands of the Washing Stream”

A clear aqua sky hangs over the tower on four sides,  
fragrant grasses below the building reach to the horizon.  
I urge you, my lord, not to climb the tower's high stair.

- 4 New shoots have grown into bamboo before the hall,  
Fallen blossoms are in the mud that now forms swallow nests.  
How can one bear to hear the cuckoo's call from the woods?<sup>1</sup>

---

1 In Chinese the cuckoo's call is often represented as the sound *buru guiqu* 不如歸去, which means “better to return home.” The call is often understood as a reminder to travelers to return home or, as here, as a reminder that the man who is far away has not yet returned to be reunited with the speaker. It is because the man is far away that the speaker wants to advise him, in line 3, not to ascend the tower and gaze afar, which would only increase his longing for home.

## 3.40

## 浣溪沙

髻子傷春慵更梳。  
晚風庭院落梅初。  
淡雲來往月疏疏。

- 4 玉鴨薰爐閒瑞腦  
朱櫻斗帳掩流蘇。  
通犀還解辟寒無。

## 3.41

## 浣溪沙

繡面芙蓉一笑開。  
斜飛寶鴨襯香腮。  
眼波才動被人猜。

- 4 一面風情深有韻  
半箋嬌恨寄幽懷。  
月移花影約重來。

### 3.40

To the tune “Sands of the Washing Stream”

My topknot suffers from spring, but I’m too weary to comb it again.  
Evening winds come to the courtyard, the plums blossoms first fall.  
As pale clouds come and go, the moon is barely visible.

- 4 In the jade duck censor, the camphor incense is sits unused,  
tassels hang from the cherry-red bed awning.  
Does antique rhinoceros horn still know how to dispel the cold?<sup>1</sup>

### 3.41

To the tune “Sands of the Washing Stream”

An embroidered lotus flower opens in a smile.  
Smoke from the duck censor brushes her fragrant cheek.  
As soon as her eyes move others can guess her mind.

- 4 Her face is full of feeling, with irresistible charm,  
coy sadness and secret longing are revealed on half a page:  
“When blossoms’ shadows move in moonlight, promise you’ll come  
back again.”

---

1 A Tang dynasty anecdote tells of a rhinoceros horn presented from a foreign land to the palace that had the property of warding off cold.

## 3.42

## 武陵春

風住塵香花已盡  
 日晚倦梳頭。  
 物是人非事事休。  
 4 欲語淚先流。

聞說雙溪春尚好  
 也擬泛輕舟。  
 只恐雙溪舴艋舟。

8 載不動  
 許多愁。

## 3.43

## 點絳脣

寂寞深閨  
 柔腸一寸愁千縷。  
 惜春春去。  
 4 幾點催花雨。

### 3.42

To the tune “Spring in Wuling”

When the winds stop, the ground is fragrant, the flowers all are down,  
as the day wears on I’m too lazy to comb my hair.

The objects are right, the people wrong, everything is over now!

4 About to speak, tears first flow.

I’ve heard spring is still lovely at Twin Streams,  
I’d like to go boating in a light skiff.

But I fear the little grasshopper boats they have

8 could not carry  
such a freight of sorrow.

### 3.43

To the tune “Dabbing Crimson Lips”

Lonely, deep in the women’s quarters,  
every inch of fragile innards has a thousand threads of sorrow.

I cherish spring, but spring departs.

4 Drops of rain hasten the blossoms.

倚遍闌干  
祇是無情緒。  
人何處。

- 8 連天芳樹  
望斷歸來路。

### 3.44

#### 浪淘沙

素約小腰身  
不奈傷春。  
疏梅影下晚妝新。

- 4 裊裊婷婷何樣似  
一縷輕雲。

歌巧動朱唇  
字字嬌嗔。

- 8 桃花深徑一通津。  
悵望瑤臺清夜月  
還照歸輪。

- Having leaned everywhere on the balcony’s railing,  
 I have no enthusiasm for anything.  
 Where is that person now?  
 8 Fragrant trees stretch to the horizon,  
 I gaze to the end of the road back home.

### 3.44

To the tune “Waves Scour the Sand”

- Her small waist, wrapped tight in white silk,  
 cannot prevent spring sadness.  
 Her evening makeup is fresh, in plum blossom shadows.  
 4 What does it resemble, her lithe swaying form?  
 A single thread of wispy cloud.

- Her crimson lips move as she sings skillfully,  
 Word after word, feigning a pout.  
 8 Peach blossoms on a hidden path lead to a river crossing.<sup>1</sup>  
 She gazes sadly at the clear moon over Jasper Terrace<sup>2</sup>  
 that shines on his departing carriage wheels.

---

1 This line alludes to the story of Liu Chen 劉晨 and Ruan Zhao 阮肇 (Han dynasty), who followed a mountain stream lined by peach trees to a love tryst with goddesses they encountered. When they returned to the mortal world, they discovered that the few months they had spent with their lovers had lasted several generations of worldly time.

2 Jasper Terrace was said to be located in the Kunlun Mountains land of immortals.

## 3.45

春光好

看看臘盡春回。

信息到

江南早梅。

- 4 昨夜前村深雪裏  
一朵花開。

盈盈玉蕊如裁。

更風清

- 8 細香暗來。  
空使行人腸欲斷  
駐馬徘徊。

## 3.46

河傳

梅影

香電素質

天賦與

傾城標格。

### 3.45

To the tune “The Spring Scene is Fine”

Look to see how spring returns after the twelfth month:  
its first messenger appears,  
the Southland’s early plum.

- 4 Last night in the village amid heavy snow in the village,  
a single bud first opened.

How delicate—the jade petals look cut by scissors.  
What’s more, borne by clear breezes,

- 8 its subtle fragrance silently arrives.  
To no end it nearly breaks the hearts of passersby  
who halt their horses and linger there.

### 3.46

To the tune “River Transport”

Plum Blossom Shadows

The fragrant bud is white of substance,  
Heaven itself must have endowed it with  
city-vanquishing beauty.

- 4 應是曉來  
暗傳東君消息。  
把孤芳  
回暖律。
- 8 壽陽粉面增妝飾  
說與高樓  
休更吹羌笛。  
花下醉賞
- 12 留取時倚闌干  
鬪清香  
添酒力。

## 3.47

## 七娘子

清香浮動到黃昏。  
向水邊  
疏影梅開盡。

- 4 It surely knows  
it is a silent harbinger of the Lord of the East,  
bringing its singular aroma  
returning us again to the warm musical mode.<sup>1</sup>
- 8 Shouyang’s powdered face was enhanced by its adornment,<sup>2</sup>  
tell those in lofty towers  
not to play the Tibetan flute melody anymore.<sup>3</sup>  
Let us drink under the blossoms and enjoy them,
- 12 or still savor them as we lean against the high railing,  
letting them vie with other pure fragrances  
and increase the power of the wine.

### 3.47

To the tune “Seventh Maiden”

The pure fragrance hangs in the air until sunset.  
At the water’s edge are cast  
the delicate shadows of the fully blossomed plum.<sup>4</sup>

---

1 The seasons had musical correlations, and the “warm mode” or note was that associated with spring.

2 Princess Shouyang 壽陽公主 (5th c.) once slept under a plum tree in bloom, and when one of its blossoms fell on her forehead it left an impression of its shape that could not be removed. The effect was so striking that it inspired a new vogue of “plum blossom makeup” that other ladies copied.

3 This is another reference to the flute tune “Plum Blossoms Fall,” seen earlier in song 3.27.

4 These lines echo Lin Bu’s famous plum blossom couplet, as in 3.27.

4 溪畔清蘂  
有如淺杏。  
一枝喜得東君信。

風吹只怕霜侵損。

8 更欲折來  
插在多情鬢。  
壽陽妝面  
雪肌玉瑩。

12 嶺頭別後微添粉。

### 3.48

#### 憶少年

疏疏整整  
斜斜淡淡  
盈盈脈脈。

4 徒憐暗香句  
笑梨花顏色。

羈馬蕭蕭行又急。

空回首

8 水寒沙白。  
天涯倦牢落  
忍一聲羌笛。

- 4 Beside the stream the limpid petals  
resemble those of the pale apricot.  
A branch is a letter gladly received from the Lord of the East.

When wind blows we only fear frost will harm it.

- 8 We think of breaking off a twig  
to tuck in the hair of a lady who's full of feeling.  
On Princess Shouyang's made-up face,  
it shone like jade on the snow-white skin.
- 12 A sheen of powder is added to the hilltop after parting.

### 3.48

To the tune "Recalling Youthful Years"

Delicate yet correct,  
slanting and pale,  
brimming, full of feeling.

- 4 How touching, the lines about subtle fragrance,  
that put the appearance of pear blossoms to shame.

The horse whinnies and gallops off quickly again.

In vain I turn my head,

- 8 seeing only a cold river and white sand.  
At the end of the earth, weary in loneliness,  
how can I bear the Tibetan flute's melody?

## 3.49

## 玉樓春

臘前先報東君信。  
清似龍涎香得潤。  
黃輕不肯整齊開  
4 比著江梅仍更韻。

纖枝瘦綠天生嫩。  
可惜輕寒摧挫損。  
劉郎只解誤桃花  
8 惆悵今年春又盡。

## 3.49

To the tune “Spring in the Jade Tower”<sup>1</sup>

Before the twelfth month the Lord of the East’s messenger arrives.

It’s as pure as dragon nectar incense, fragrant and moist.

The pale yellow blossoms refuse to open all at once—

4 compared to the river plum, it is more elegant by far.

The slender branches, thin and green, are naturally delicate.

Too bad they are readily harmed by even slight cold.

Master Liu only knew to be deluded by peach blossoms,<sup>2</sup>

8 how sad that this year’s springtime is already spent!

---

1 This is a poem on the “wax-plum,” not a real species of plum tree but rather a wintersweet (*Chimonasthus praecox*). It was called “wax” because of the light yellow color of its blossoms and also probably because *la* “wax” is cognate with *la* “the twelfth lunar month,” when the tree blooms.

2 Master Liu is the Tang literatus Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), who wrote poems about the peach blossoms in Xuandu Temple in Chang’an, only to find that fourteen years later when he returned to the city from exile the peach trees were no longer there.

## 3.50

## 新荷葉

薄露初零。

長宵共

永晝分停。

4 遶水樓臺

高聳萬丈蓬瀛。

芝蘭為壽

相輝映

8 簪笏盈庭。

花柔玉淨

捧觴別有娉婷。

鶴瘦松青。

12 精神與

秋月爭明。

德行文章

素馳日下聲名。

## 3.50

To the tune “New Lotus Leaves”

*This song is a birthday offering, congratulating an elderly and retired statesman on his birthday. It is thought by modern commentators to have been written for Chao Buzhi, a famous literatus who once praised the literary talent of the youthful Li Qingzhao, but that is just a guess, if indeed the song was written by Li Qingzhao at all (the attribution to her is from a fifteenth century text).*

When light dew first falls,  
the long night perfectly matches  
the persisting morning.

- 4 Pools wind around the storied buildings and watchtowers  
that soar aloft ten thousand feet, a Land of Immortals.  
Irises and orchids offer long-life felicitations,  
shining on each other,  
8 hatpins and tablets fill the hall.  
Delicate as flowers and pure as jade,  
holding goblets, they have a special feminine charm.<sup>1</sup>

- Thin as a crane and pine-tree green,  
12 his vitality of his spirit competes  
with the glow of the autumn moon.  
His virtuous conduct and literary talent  
have peerless repute in the imperial city.

---

<sup>1</sup> The first stanza describes the gentleman's birthday celebration, concentrating on the autumn time (when the *yin* and *yang* forces of day and night were said to be balanced), his great estate, his young followers (“irises and orchids”), the officials who pay their respects (“hatpins and tablets”), and beautiful serving girls at the banquet.

- 16 東山高蹈  
雖卿相  
不足為榮。  
安石須起  
20 要蘇天下蒼生。

## 3.51

## 點絳脣

- 蹴罷鞦韆  
起來慵整纖纖手。  
露濃花瘦。  
4 薄汗沾衣透。

- 見客入來  
襪鏜金釵溜。  
和羞走。  
8 倚門回首。  
却把青梅嗅。

- 16 Stepping aloft in the Eastern Mountains,  
 even ministers of state  
 do not impress him with their eminence.  
 Anshi must soon emerge from reclusion,  
 20 To bring new life to the commoners of the empire.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.51

To the Tune “Dabbing Crimson Lips”

- Getting off the swing  
 she straightens her clothes languidly, her fingers slender.  
 The dew is heavy, the blossom frail,  
 4 patches of perspiration stain her dress.

- Seeing someone come,  
 in her stocking feet, gold hairpin slipping,  
 she runs bashfully away.  
 8 At the door she pauses, turning to look back,  
 and sniffs the green plum in her hand.

---

1 The second stanza describes the birthday celebrant himself. The last five lines draw upon two virtues attributed to the statesman and general Xie An. When he retired to his estate in the Eastern Mountains, he paid no attention to the pleas from ministers of state to return to court service. Disappointed by his insistent reclusion, at one point the ministers asked him “What will become of the commoners of the empire if you do not return to serve?”

## 3.52

## 醜奴兒

晚來一陣風兼雨  
 洗盡炎光。  
 理罷笙簧。  
 4 却對菱花淡淡妝。

絳綃縷薄冰肌瑩  
 雪膩酥香。  
 笑語檀郎。  
 8 今夜紗廚枕簟涼。

## 3.53

## 浪淘沙

簾外五更風。  
 吹夢無蹤。  
 畫樓重上與誰同。  
 4 記得玉釵斜撥火  
 寶篆成空。

### 3.52

To the tune “The Vile Charmer”

This evening a storm of wind and rain  
washed away the blazing heat.

Having finished playing the flute,  
4 facing a caltrop mirror she lightly dabs on makeup.

Beneath purple thin silk her ice-like skin glimmers,  
luster of snow, milky and fragrant.

Smiling, she tells her beloved,  
8 “Tonight, the mat and pillow behind the gauze bed-curtain should  
be cool.”

### 3.53

To the tune “Waves Scour the Sand”

Outside the blinds, the wind at the last watch  
blows my dream away, leaving no trace.

Again I climb the painted loft, to be with whom?

4 I recall using a jade hairpin to tap the incense clean,  
until the precious seal character burned into nothing.<sup>1</sup>

---

1 Incense was commonly formed into ancient seal-script characters, and the fire that consumed it followed the joined strokes until only ash was left.

- 回首紫金峰。  
 雨潤煙濃。  
 8 一江春浪醉醒中。  
 留得羅襟前日淚  
 彈與征鴻。

## 3.54

## 木蘭花令

- 沉水香消人悄悄。  
 樓上朝來寒料峭。  
 春生南浦水微波  
 4 雪滿東山風未掃。  
 金尊莫訴連壺倒。  
 捲起重簾留晚照。  
 為君欲去更憑欄  
 8 人意不如山色好。

## 3.55

## 生查子

年年玉鏡臺  
 梅蕊宮妝困。

I look back toward the purple-gold peaks,  
as rains soak everything and the mist thickens.

- 8 The spring river waves flow between drunkenness and sobriety.  
The tears of former days, still left on my silken lapel,  
I would send aloft to the migrating geese.

### 3.54

To the tune “Magnolia Flowers”

Aloeswood incense has burned out, people are quiet now,  
atop the storied building it is chilly as dawn approaches.  
Spring appears on the southern bank, the water rippled,

- 4 snow covers the eastern hills—wind has not blown it away.

Don't decline emptying joined wine vessels into golden cups,  
let me lift the double blinds to detain the evening sun.

- For you, I want to go lean again on the balcony railing—  
8 my mood is not as pretty as the colors of the distant hills.

### 3.55

To the tune “The Quince”

Every year in the jade mirror on a stand,  
palace style plum-petal makeup wearsies.<sup>1</sup>

---

1 For this makeup style, see song 3.46.

今歲不歸來  
4 怕見江南信。

酒從別後疏  
淚向愁中盡。  
遙想楚雲深  
8 人遠天涯近。

## 3.56

## 青玉案

征鞍不見邯鄲路。  
莫便匆匆歸去。  
秋風蕭條何以度。  
4 明窗小酌  
暗燈清話  
最好留連處。

相逢各自傷遲暮。  
8 猶把新詞誦奇句。  
鹽絮家風人所許。  
如今憔悴  
但餘雙淚  
12 一似黃梅雨。

This year he still does not return,  
 4 she fears to see the Southland’s messenger of spring.

Wine has seldom been sipped since his parting,  
 tears have been used up in her sadness.  
 She imagines the dense clouds over distant Chu:  
 8 that person is so far the end of the sky seems near.

### 3.56

To the tune “Dark Jade Table”<sup>1</sup>

The sojourning saddle cannot see the Handan Road.  
 Don’t be in such a hurry to depart—  
 so bleak, the autumn scene, how can it be endured?  
 4 Sip some wine by the bright window,  
 chat gaily beside a low lamp,  
 these are the best ways to prolong his stay.

When we met we regretted it was already late spring.  
 8 Still we recited marvelous lines to new tunes,  
 our family is known for its “salt and willow fluff” tradition!<sup>2</sup>  
 Today we are haggard,  
 the remaining double lines of tears  
 12 resemble nothing but yellow-plum season drizzle.

---

1 This song is usually explained today as a farewell piece she wrote to her younger brother (because of what is said in the second stanza). But that is speculation. In any case, the opening line’s reference to Handan Road (in the distant north) seems out of place and difficult to account for.

2 “Salt and willow fluff” is an allusion to a charming story in *Shi shuo xinyu* about Xie An challenging his children to come up with poetic lines to describe a snowfall. “Salt flying through the air” and “willow fluff blown by the wind” are two of the metaphors they suggested. Thereafter, “salt and willow fluff” was used to describe such families with literary traditions.

## 3.57

## 臨江仙

庭院深深深幾許  
 雲窗霧閣春遲。  
 為誰憔悴損芳姿。

4 夜來清夢好  
 應是發南枝。

玉瘦檀輕無限恨  
 南樓羌管休吹。

8 濃香吹盡有誰知。  
 暖風遲日也  
 別到杏花肥。

## 3.58

## 山花子

揉破黃金萬點輕。  
 剪成碧玉葉層層。  
 風度精神如彥輔

4 太鮮明。

### 3.57

To the tune “Immortal By the River”<sup>1</sup>

Deep the deep courtyard, how deep is it?  
Cloudy windows and misty halls, late in spring.  
For whom are you so weakened, your fragrant beauty diminished?

4 Last night in my lovely dream you were fine,  
I thought you'd be filling the southern branches.

The jade is grown frail, the sandalwood hue faded, how sad!  
Don't let the Tibetan flute play its melody in the southern loft.

8 When your fragrance is blown away who will know?  
The wind is warm, the days of sunshine long,  
and the apricot blossoms plump.

### 3.58

To the tune “Wildflower Seeds”<sup>2</sup>

Yellow gold, as if torn apart, into myriad dots of blossoms.  
Green jade, shaped with scissors, the multiple layers of leaves.  
In style and spirit like Yanfu,

4 so fresh and bright!<sup>3</sup>

---

1 Another song on plum blossoms, the red plum this time.

2 This piece, like 3.34, is on the osmanthus or sweet-olive tree, known for its small yellow blossoms that bloom in autumn with a sweet, intense fragrance.

3 These lines paraphrase praise of the unworldly qualities of Le Yanfu (Le Guang 樂廣, d. 304) found in his official biography in the *History of the Jin*.

梅蕊重重何俗甚  
 丁香千結苦粗生。  
 熏透愁人千里夢  
 8 卻無情。

## 3.59

## 山花子

病起蕭蕭兩鬢華。  
 卧看殘月上窗紗。  
 豆蔻連梢煎熟水  
 4 莫分茶。

枕上詩書閑處好  
 門前風景雨來佳。  
 終日向人多蘊藉  
 8 木犀花。

Plum blossoms, row after row, how vulgar they are!  
The thousand-petal lilac is crude by comparison.  
But your perfume wakes the dreamer from her distant journey home—  
8 how could you be so heartless!

### 3.59

To the tune “Wildflower Seeds”

Arising in my illness, hair grown wispy and streaked grey at the temples.  
Lying down, I view the crescent moon through window gauze.  
I infuse joined sprigs of cardamom in boiling water  
4 instead of preparing tea.

Books in my bed make the leisure hours pleasant,  
the view outside my door is lovely in the rain.  
All day they face me with such elegance and feeling,  
8 the osmanthus flowers.

## 3.60

帶人嬌

後庭梅花開有感

玉瘦香濃  
檀深雪散。

今年恨

4 探梅又晚。

江樓楚館。

雲間水遠。

清晝永

8 憑欄翠簾低卷。

坐上客來

樽中酒滿。

歌聲共

12 水流雲斷。

南枝可插

更須頻剪。

莫直待

16 西樓數聲羌管。

### 3.60

To the tune “The Distressed Lady’s Charm”

Moved at the Sight of Plum Blossoms in the Rear Courtyard

The jade has grown frail but the fragrance is thick,  
the sandalwood hue is deep but the snow has begun to scatter.

This year I regret

4 being late once more to view the plum blossoms.

In the Yangzi building and Chu region hall,  
clouds are leisurely and the waters stretch afar.

The clear morning lasts forever

8 as I lean on the railing, the kingfisher blinds hanging down.

Guests arrive at the banquet,

wine fills the cups.

The sound of the singing

12 flows with the waters and halts the drifting clouds.

Southern branch blossoms can be tucked into topknots,

But they often must be trimmed.

Don’t wait until

16 the Tibetan flute melody plays repeatedly in the western tower.

## 3.61

慶清朝

禁幄低張  
雕欄巧護  
就中獨占殘春。

4 容華淡佇  
綽約俱見天真。  
待得群花過後  
一番風露曉妝新。

8 妖嬈態  
妒風笑月  
長殢東君。

東城邊

12 南陌上  
正日烘池館  
競走香輪。

綺筵散日  
16 誰人可繼芳塵。  
更好明光宮裏  
幾枝先向日邊勻。

**3.61**

To the tune “Celebrating a Fine Morning”<sup>1</sup>

Palace bed curtains hang down,  
carved railings ingeniously protect  
the flowers that alone guard the end of spring.

- 4 Pale and elegant in appearance  
their slender beauty displays their inborn innocence.  
Waiting until all the other flowers have faded  
Brushed by wind and dew, their morning makeup is fresh.
- 8 Their bewitching manner  
makes the wind jealous and mocks the moon,<sup>2</sup>  
delaying the departure of the Lord of the East.

- In the east of the imperial city,  
12 on the roads of the southern outskirts  
beside shimmering pools and halls on festival days  
where perfumed carriage wheels race,  
and colorful banquets while away the day,
- 16 Who can prolong their fragrant dust?  
Or, better yet, to Brilliant Palace,  
present several branches to face the Sun itself.<sup>3</sup>

---

1 Although it never mentions it by name, this song is about the peony, as we can tell from its use of several phrases applied to that celebrated flower, which blooms at the end of spring, after the season's other flowers.

2 These two lines pun on names of peony varieties, which include “Bewitching Red,” “Jealous Red,” etc.

3 These lines allude to Tang Xuanzong, whose Brilliant Palace had peonies in its gardens, which figure in well-known anecdotes about him and his consort Yang. The Sun refers to the emperor.

金尊倒

20 拚了畫燭  
不管黃昏。

### 3.62

減字木蘭花

賣花擔上。

買得一枝春欲放。

淚染輕勻。

4 猶帶彤霞曉露痕。

怕郎猜道。

奴面不如花面好。

雲鬢斜簪。

8 徒要教郎比並看。

So when the golden goblet is upturned,  
20 as painted candles are squandered,  
no one notices the onset of twilight

### 3.62

To the tune “Magnolia Flowers, Short Version”<sup>1</sup>

A street vendor with a pole was selling flowers.  
I bought a branch, just ready to put forth spring.  
Their tear-stained rouge is lightly brushed,  
4 still bearing traces of morning dew from crimson clouds.

Afraid he might say  
my face isn't as pretty as the flowers,  
I put some in my cloud-locks of hair,  
8 so he'd be forced to look at us together.

---

1 As usual, the tune title has no bearing on the song itself, which must be about plum blossoms that the speaker purchased.

## 3.63

瑞鷓鴣

雙銀杏

- 風韻雍容未甚都。  
 尊前甘橘可為奴。  
 誰憐流落江湖上  
 4 玉骨冰肌未肯枯。
- 誰教並蒂連枝摘  
 醉後明皇倚太真。  
 居士擘開真有意  
 8 要吟風味兩家新。

## 3.64

品令

- 零落殘紅  
 恰渾似  
 胭脂色。
- 4 一年春事  
 柳飛輕絮  
 筍添新竹。

**3.63**

To the tune “Auspicious Partridge”

On the Doubled Ginkgo<sup>1</sup>

It is elegant and genial, not especially enticing,  
 but the orange tree and tangerine are slaves by comparison.  
 Who pities them, laying strewn beside rivers and lakes?

4 Yet their bones of jade and skin of ice never wither.

Who told them to grow on a single stalk, to be picked as a pair?  
 After drinking, the Brilliant Emperor snuggles up to True One.<sup>2</sup>  
 Peeling one, the retired scholar had something in mind:

8 to sing of their charm, twin love ever new.<sup>3</sup>

**3.64**

To the tune “Rankings”

Faded reds lie scattered,  
 looking just like  
 the rouge on her face.

4 What’s left of this year’s spring?  
 The willows’ gauzy fluff has gone flying,  
 shoots have formed into small bamboos.

---

1 This song is about ginkgo nuts that grow two to a single stalk. The tree has long been prized in China, its nuts put to various culinary and medicinal uses. The song treats the double nuts as a symbol of conjugal love.

2 Another reference to anecdotes about Tang Xuanzong and consort Yang.

3 These lines are derived from lines that Su Shi (the “retired scholar of East Slope”) wrote not about the ginkgo nut but about lotus seeds (also eaten as a lovers’ ritual).

寂寞幽閨

8 坐對小園嫩綠。

登臨未足

悵遊子

歸期促。

12 他年清夢

千里猶到

城陰溪曲。

應有凌波

16 時為故人留目。

### 3.65

鷓鴣天

枝上流鶯和淚聞

新啼痕間舊啼痕。

一春魚鳥無消息

4 千里關山勞夢魂。

無一語

對芳樽

安排腸斷到黃昏。

Lonely now in the women’s quarters,  
 8 she sits facing the small garden’s tender green.

It’s not enough to climb high to look out—  
 she longs for the one traveling far away,  
 hoping the day of his return comes quickly.  
 12 Or perhaps some future day her clear dream  
 will cross a thousand miles even to  
 a hidden place beside the wall, a bend in the stream,  
 Where she, like the goddess who trod on waves,  
 16 will attract her lover’s fixed gaze.

### 3.65

To the tune “Partridge Sky”

From the branch she hears the flitting oriole’s cries through tears,  
 the stains of new cries mix with stains of old weeping.  
 All spring, neither fish nor bird bring any news,<sup>1</sup>  
 4 a thousand miles of hills weary the dreaming soul.

Without one word  
 she faces the fragrant wine cup,  
 trying to repair her broken insides, all day until dusk.

---

1 This line draws upon ancient stories about birds and fish delivering letters from distant loved ones.

- 8 甫能炙得燈兒了  
雨打梨花深閉門。

## 3.66

## 青玉案

一年春事都來幾。  
早過了  
三之二

- 4 綠暗紅嫣渾可事。  
綠楊庭院  
暖風簾幕  
有個人憔悴。
- 8 買花載酒長安市。  
爭似家山見桃李。  
不枉東風吹客淚。  
相思難表
- 12 夢魂無據  
惟有歸來是。

- 8 The lamp she just managed to light has burned out,  
rains strikes the pear blossoms outside the closed door.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.66

To the tune “Dark Jade Table”

How long does one spring season last?  
Before you know it, you’ve passed  
two parts in three.

- 4 Greens have darkened and reds faded, what does it matter?  
In the green willow garden  
as warm winds brush the blinds,  
a person sits, dispirited.

- 8 We buy flowers and wine in the Chang’an market.<sup>2</sup>  
How could it compare with viewing peach and pear blossoms in my  
hometown?  
Not in vain does the east wind blow the traveler’s tears.  
But this longing is hard to express,  
12 the dreaming soul finds no support—  
the only answer is to return home.

---

1 This line is borrowed from a Tang poem, although the original poem does not survive. A Song period source tells us that the great statesman and poet Wang Anshi (a generation older than Li Qingzhao) was particularly fond of the line, and Li Qingzhao works it into her poem.

2 Chang’an, the Tang capital, is here a substitution for one of the Song capitals, either Kaifeng (until 1127) or Lin’an (Hangzhou) afterward.



# Endnotes

## Chapter 1: Classical Poetry

### 1.7

l. 4: The philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200) remarked on the cleverness of this poem, noting how novel it was to suggest an equivalence between the Shang and Zhou conquests, conventionally taken in Confucian thought to be exemplary actions against rulers who had lost the Mandate of Heaven, with Wang Mang's usurpation, universally condemned in traditional historiography as unwarranted.

### 1.9

n. 1: At the end of Xiang Yu's long struggle with Liu Bang to be the new ruler and founder of the next dynasty, when it was clear that Xiang Yu would be vanquished, he was fleeing with a pitifully small band of soldiers before Liu Bang's pursuing troops when he came to the bank of the Wu River. A lone ferryman there offered to take Xiang Yu across the river, taking him to safety on the eastern (or southern) bank, which would have been to return him to the lands of Chu from which he originated. Xiang Yu famously refused the offer, saying the he could not bare to face the elders of his homeland, having led so many of their sons to their death in his failed campaign. In Li Qingzhao's day, the phrase "to cross the river" in such a context would immediately call to mind the decision of the Southern Song leadership to flee south of the Yangzi River before the Jurchen invasion a few years earlier, effectively giving up the dynasty's northern heartland. The poem implicitly contrasts Xiang Yu's principled choice of death over humiliation with the choice that contemporary leaders had made.

### 1.10

p. 29, ll. 63–64: When the Jin dynasty general Huan Wen (312–373) needed someone to draft a victory report of his northern campaign, the writer Yuan Hu, though in disgrace, did the job brilliantly, filling seven pages without pausing one time to think and doing it while leaning back against his horse. When Lord of Mengchang, famed for the number of retainers he kept, reached Xiaohan Pass (Hangu Pass), he managed to

obtain passage through it before dawn and thus elude capture by forces sent by the king of Qin only because one of his most lowly retainers knew how to mimic the cock's crow and thus tricked the guards into thinking that dawn had arrived, when travelers were allowed through the pass.

### 1.13

l. 4: One original touch in Li Qingzhao's poem is that she expands the contrast with the recluse to include not only those still in officialdom (who ride the small boats in line two, on their way to new provincial assignments) to include merchants as well. At least one modern commentator (Wang Yingzhi) finds irony in Li Qingzhao's poem, suggesting she intends to remind us that reclusion is not a respectable choice during times of dynastic crisis, and that those literati who clung to the traditional respect for recluses like Yan Ziling were misguided.

### 1.14

p. 36, n. 1: *Jinshu* 85.2210–11.

p. 38, n. 1: Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu* 20/4.

p. 39, n. 3: Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu* 6/24 (for Master Yu) and 8/17 (for Shu the Fool).

p. 47, l. 97: Some versions of the text have an additional line interpolated right after this one: "Mulan holds her lance crosswise, a fine warrior woman!" 木蘭橫戈好女子. This line is missing from early texts of the rhapsody, and it is unattested before the Qing dynasty. Many modern editions of the Li Qingzhao's works now include the line, as if its presence in the rhapsody were not problematic. Prosodically, the line is an anomaly, because it stands by itself and violates the couplet structure of the verse. In addition, the line is a strange intrusion of the first person voice into the piece and, beyond that, seems out of character for this author, to say the least. One wonders if the line did not originate as some commentator's note or marginalia that later became part of the text itself.

p. 44, n. 1: *Jinshu* 85.2210–11 and Zheng Wenbao 鄭文寶, *Nantang jinshi* 南唐近事 2.223.

p. 44, n. 2: Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu* 27/2.

p. 44, n. 3: For Huan Wen, see Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu* 7/20. For Xie An, see *Jinshu* 79.2074–75 and Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu* 6/35.

p. 44, n. 4: For Tao Changshu, see *Jinshu* 83.2170. For Yuan Yuandao, see Liu Yiqing, *Shishuo xinyu* 23/34.

p. 45, n. 5: For the children's ditty, see *Songshu* 74.1912.

### 1.18

l. 2: In response to a question put to the candidates by Emperor Gaozong himself, Zhang Jiucheng had written an ornate and fawning answer, in mellifluous prose, imagining how the emperor could not enjoy even the sweetest delights of the four seasons, the sumptuous dishes served to him, or his lavish palace rooms because, whenever a pleasure presented itself to him, he would invariably think of the hardships being endured by the former Song emperors (his father and older brother) in their harsh northern captivity. Gaozong is said to have been so impressed by the answer that he awarded Zhang top place in the examination. Li Qingzhao was unimpressed, evidently feeling that the lugubrious content and sycophantic tone of the answer were inappropriate in an exam paper that was supposed to be an objective analysis of court policy. One of the pleasures Zhang said that Gaozong could not enjoy was “the wafting fragrance of cassia blossoms at night.” Li Qingzhao proceeded to lampoon that line, pairing it with a line written by Liu Yong (Liu Sanbian), the songwriter notorious for his romantic song lyrics. The phrase Li Qingzhao selected from Liu Yong comes from a song lyric he wrote on an extravagant imperial boating party and banquet, filled with lavish displays and gorgeously dressed palace women. The implication of Li Qingzhao's couplet is that the newly awarded Number One Scholar is, in fact, as frivolous and sentimental as the man who epitomized, in literati eyes, the worst of such excesses in popular entertainment songs. This couplet must have circulated widely: it is quoted anonymously by Ye Mengde (1077–1148), who says that people considered the lines an apt and ingenious pairing. Later, it is Lu You (1125–1210) who identifies Li Qingzhao as their source.

## Chapter 2: Prose

### 2.2

Final line: The text closes with a date and the author's name, but that date (the eighth month of 1132) is suspicious and problematic. In fact, different texts of the Afterword give different dates. This issue has been

voluminously studied and argued over by scholars, because it has implications regarding the controversy over Li Qingzhao's remarriage. I adopt the conclusion of Xu Peijun (pp. 345–46, n. 1) that the variant version of the date as “the fourth year of the Shaoxing reign” (1134) is the most plausible, since that is the date given in the earliest account of the Afterword (by Hong Mai, in his *Rongzhai suibi* 4.5: 686) and it matches the internal references to Li Qingzhao's age in the Afterword itself.

### 2.3

p. 72, l. 5: Adopting the textual variant *shu* 蔬 in place of *shu* 疏.

## Chapter 3: Song Lyrics

### 3.1

Throughout this chapter, the full-stop punctuation marks (。) in the Chinese text designate rhymes in the original, which are irregular in *ci* unlike in *shi* poetry (where they always occur at the end of even-numbered lines). I have generally followed the rhyme markings found in Xu's edition, except where his markings seem to be incorrect (when compared with the rhyme markings in *Quan Songci*). Such rhymes usually correspond to full semantic stops (sentence ends) in the Chinese. But the English translation sometimes takes liberties with these stops, adopting more natural semantic breaks in English. Plus, there is no attempt in the translation to reproduce the rhyming in the original anyway.

### 3.3

l. 2: Adopting the textual variant *zhuān* 轉 for *du* 渡 (Xu, 133).

### 3.4

l. 7: Adopting the textual variant *tan* 灘 for *hang* 行 (which Xu, 44, also prefers).

### 3.8

l. 4: With Xu, 107, replacing *feng* 鳳 with the textual variant *cha* 釵.

### 3.14

Subtitle: Adding the variant *wanzhi* 晚止 at the head of the subheading (Xu, 91).

**3.15**

- l. 1: Replacing *yu* 雨 with the variant *ri* 日 (Xu, 89).  
 ll. 2: Replacing *shao* 梢 with the variant *sai* 腮 (which Xu, 89 also prefers).

**3.17**

- l. 5: Replacing *wan* 晚 with the variant *xiao* 曉 (Xu, 99).  
 l. 5: Adopting the variant *chun* 春 for *yun* 雲 (Xu, 99).

**3.19**

- l. 3: Replacing *an* 安 with the variant *kang* 康 (Xu, 110).  
 ll. 9–10: Adopting the *Yuefu yaci* 樂府雅詞 version of these last two lines of the song (Xu, 111).

**3.21**

- l. 4: Interpolating the variant *shi* 是 into the line (Xu, 138).

**3.22**

Some editions give this piece a subtitle: “Smelling Plum Blossoms Beside a Pillow” 枕畔聞梅香.

- l. 2: Adopting the variant *e* 萼 for *rui* 蕊 (Xu, 116).  
 l. 4: Adopting the variant *juan* 遠 for *duan* 斷 (Xu, 116).  
 l. 9: Adopting the variant *geng* 更 for *zai* 再 (Xu, 116).

**3.26**

- l. 11: Adopting the variant *ren* 人 for *yi* 一 (which Xu, 130, also prefers).

**3.27**

- l. 6: Replacing *jian* 漸 with the variant *geng* 更 (Xu, 118).

**3.28**

- l. 6: Replacing *xian* 閑 with the variant *men* 悶 (Xu, 29).

**3.33**

Xu's edition (101) provides a subtitle “Banana Tree” 芭蕉.

- ll. 7–8: Adopting the textual variant *linyin* 霖霖 for *qiqing* 淒清 in both lines.

**3.35**

l. 6: Adopting the textual variant *yao* 瑤 for *yao* 搖 (with Xu, 142).

**3.40**

l. 6: Adopting the textual variant *tong* 通 for *yi* 遺 (Xu, 74).

**3.52**

Some editions, including Xu (201), provide a subtitle: “Sense of Summer” 夏意.

**3.56**

Various editions provide various subtitles. The one given in Xu (102) is “Using the Rhymes of Huang Shan’gu” 用黃山谷韻.

**3.57**

l. 10: Adopting the textual variant *fei* 肥 for *shi* 時 (Xu, 114).

**3.64**

l. 12. Adopting the textual variant *qing* 清 for *hun* 魂 (Xu, 210).

## Major Sources

- Chen Zumei 陳祖美. *Li Qingzhao xinzhuan* 李清照新傳. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 2001.
- Egan, Ronald. *The Burden of Female Talent: The Poet Li Qingzhao and Her History in China*. Cambridge, MA: Asia Center, Harvard University, 2013.
- Deng Hongmei 鄧紅梅. *Li Qingzhao xinzhuan* 李清照新傳. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005.
- Huang Shengzhang 黃盛璋. "Li Qingzhao shiji kaobian" 李清照事跡考辨. *Wenxue yanjiu* 文學研究 1957.3. Reprinted in *Li Qingzhao yanjiu huibian* 李清照研究彙編. Ed. Zhou Kangxie 周康燮. Hong Kong: Chongwen shudian, 1974. Pp. 188–242.
- . "Zhao Mingcheng, Li Qingzhao fufu nianpu" 趙明誠, 李清照夫婦年譜. *Shandong shengzhi ziliao* 山東省志資料 1957.3. Reprinted in *Li Qingzhao yanjiu huibian* 李清照研究彙編. Ed. Zhou Kangxie 周康燮. Hong Kong: Chongwen shudian, 1974. Pp. 132–87.
- Nangong Bo 南宮搏. *Li Qingzhao de hou bansheng* 李清照的後半生. Taipei: Commercial Press, 1971, reprinted in 1996.
- Rexroth, Kenneth and Ling Zhong. *Li Ch'ing-chao: Complete Poems*. New York: New Directions, 1979.
- Wang Yingzhi 王英志. *Li Qingzhao ji* 李清照集. Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2007.
- Wang Zhongwen 王仲文. *Li Qingzhao ji jiaozhu* 李清照集校註. Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 1979.
- Xu Peijun 徐培均. *Li Qingzhao ji jianzhu* 李清照集箋注, rev. ed. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2013.
- Yu Zhonghang 于中航. *Li Qingzhao nianpu* 李清照年譜. Taipei: Commercial Press, 1995.
- Zhuge Yibing 諸葛憶兵. *Li Qingzhao shici* 李清照詩詞. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013.