

## Liu Yong (? - ?) and Dancing Renzong

Stephen Owen, Harvard University

The lyricist Liu Yong 柳永, originally named Liu Sanbian 柳三變, is a shadowy figure in history. His life has been largely pieced together from posthumous anecdotes, beginning around three decades after the date of his death.<sup>1</sup> Since neither the date of Liu Yong's death nor the date of the earliest anecdote is known, we are in a world of approximation.<sup>2</sup> These sources are all from *biji* or *shihua/cihua*; in other words, they are stories with no documentary source given. The solitary piece of documentary evidence, fragments of a purported funerary inscription by Liu Yong's nephew, has been thoroughly discredited by Xue Ruisheng.<sup>3</sup> Apart from the anecdotes and suppositions from the lyrics, the rest of our information is from much later gazetteers.<sup>4</sup>

For current purposes I will set aside information deriving from the early Qing gazetteers, and focus only on the earliest accounts in known Song sources. Even though some of the anecdotes contain information not in the others, most center on a story of the emperor Renzong's negative reaction to Liu Yong in some relation to his lyrics. Each of the four main versions is not only different from the others, each is, in its essential details, incommensurate with the others; only one could possibly be historically true, which is not to say that any of them is historically true. The date of passing the *jinshi* examination, usually a reliable piece of information, is given as 1037 in one anecdote and 1034 in others.<sup>5</sup> More significant, while most of his biographers

---

This article appeared in Chinese translation as "'Sanbian' Liu Yong yu qi wude Renzong" in Lin Baozheng 林寶正 and Jiang Yin 蔣寅, *Chuanhe Kangsan jiaoshou rongxiu jinian wenji* 川合康三教授榮休紀念文集. Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2017. pp. 241-263.

<sup>1</sup> The sources for Liu Yong's life are well known and have been repeatedly examined. James Hightower has thoroughly examined these sources for their plausibility. "The Songwriter Liu Yung: Part I" HJAS vol. 41.2 (Dec. 1981), pp. 323-332. [hereafter Hightower].

<sup>2</sup> I am using chronology here in a particular way. When we know the date of the text, I follow that; but often, as with the "earliest" here, I am using the generation of the author.

<sup>3</sup> Xue Ruisheng 薛瑞生, *Yuezhang ji jiaozhu* 樂章集校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994) [hereafter Xue], pp. 11-14.

<sup>4</sup> See final Note.

<sup>5</sup> Fu Xuancong ed, *Song dengke ji kao* 宋登科記考 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe 2005), p.167, takes the generally preferred date of 1034, but in his evidence he cites *Mianshui yantan lu*, the earliest source, which gives the date as 1037. 1034 may indeed be a preferable date because of the inordinately large number of *jinshi* that year, considering Renzong's edict to be more liberal to older scholars who had not passed the examination; see Xue p. 5.

believe that passing the *jinshi* examination came only later in his life, the earliest biographical anecdote (giving the *jinshi* date as 1037) suggests that examination success came earlier and that his delayed political career was due to problems in being assigned a post. Since the *jinshi* date and a substantial delay before he embarked on a usual civil service career are the center of a speculative narrative of his life, the question of whether the delay preceded or followed his examination success, combined with the difference in dates for that success, can lead to significantly different speculation on when he lived. To say that he was active in the second quarter through the middle of the eleventh century is a safe imprecision.

The vast majority of Liu Yong's song lyrics fall into one of three types: a minority celebrating the emperor and life in the capital; a large number of lyrics celebrating the entertainment quarter, both as observer and participant; and a substantial body of lyrics on travels away from the capital, sometimes praising a local dignitary and sometimes concluding with the wish that he were back in the capital and entertainment quarter. In some lyrics he is clearly speaking as Liu Yong; in some cases he is clearly adopting a persona who is clearly not Liu Yong; in many cases, we cannot know.

To so publicize one's engagement with the pleasures of the entertainment quarter was, even in Liu Yong's own lifetime, an unwise career move for an aspiring young civil servant; with the increasing scrutiny of moral conduct during the century after his death, giving such publicity to one's love-life, real or pretended, seemed inexplicable folly, begging for a narrative of the causes and consequences of such an act. For someone who has no real, independent historical record apart from his identity as a lyricist, the life cannot be separated from the lyrics, including the question regarding which lyrics were known and which were taken as representing the lyricist.

The early history of the collection of Liu Yong's song lyrics is even more shadowy than his life. One version of the collection (certainly manuscript) is mentioned first around the turn of the twelfth century in a colophon by the lyricist Huang Chang 黃裳 (1044-1130). The earliest extant text is in Wu Na's 吳訥 early fifteenth-century *Lyrics of a Hundred Masters*, *Baijia ci* 百家詞, a manuscript probably based in part on an early thirteenth century commercial series *Baijia ci*, noted in Chen Zhensun's 陳振孫 (ca. 1190-after 1249) *Zhizhai shulu jieti* 直齋書錄解

題. The great book collector, bibliographer, and sponsor of printing Mao Jin 毛晉 (1599-1659) claimed to have had Song edition(s) serving as the basis of his version of the collection. The base text or texts have been lost; but even if it were a Song edition or editions, that would not necessarily be a cause for confidence. Where we have two relatively early editions of Northern Song lyricists, it usually creates greater textual uncertainty rather than less.

The textual tradition of Northern Song song lyric was not like collections of writings in the “classical” genres in the Song dynasty. We know how collections of classical poetry and prose were made: usually the author had a copy of the works he wanted preserved; after his death a family member or disciple would organize it into a collection (not including song lyrics). By contrast, we know almost nothing of how Northern Song song lyric collections were first formed or the scholarly care taken in their early circulation. Zhang Xian 張先 wrote a preface to Yan Shu’s lyric collection, even though we don’t have that preface.<sup>6</sup> Yan Jidao also wrote a preface to a collection of his lyrics made in 1089, but this does not seem to be the same version of the collection that has survived. One passage in this preface should be sobering for those who have naïve confidence that the nicely printed editions we have today derive from a clear lineage of printed editions, which were in turn based on carefully prepared manuscripts that lead back to a known author holding his brush over a piece of paper. Speaking of lyrics he composed to be performed by the household singers of now deceased friends, he writes:

昔之狂篇醉句，遂與兩家歌兒酒使具流轉於人間。自爾郵傳滋多，積有竄易。七月己巳，為高平公綴輯成編。

. . . those wild stanzas and drunken lines drifted about in the world along with the singers and wine stewards of the two households. From that time on, these songs were transmitted at greater and greater degrees of remove, and textual errors accumulated. Then on the day *jisi* of the seventh month, the songs were assembled and placed in order by the Duke of Gaoping.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Zhang Xian died in 1078, at an advanced age. Since his collection contains lyrics with occasional subtitles datable to the 1070s, he probably compiled it toward the end of his life. By this period we know there was already at least one song lyric collection by an individual author (Feng Yansi), and there were probably others.

<sup>7</sup> The translation is by Robert Ashmore, “The Banquet’s Aftermath: Yan Jidao’s *Ci* Poetics and the High Tradition.” *T’oung Pao* LXXXVIII, p. 231.

The first and most striking thing we note is that Fan Chunren 范純仁 (1027-1101), the “Duke of Gaoping” and compiler of Yan Jidao’s lyrics, has gathered his texts of Yan’s lyrics from the repertoires of singers or from aficionados who have transcribed the songs of singers. Fan Chunren was apparently a friend of Yan Jidao (as their fathers had been friends), and Yan Jidao had the opportunity to peruse Fan’s manuscript, check the texts, and perhaps correct what had been changed in transmission. This leads to the question of why Fan Chunyan, in compiling the collection, did not simply ask Yan Jidao for copies of his lyrics; this leads, in turn, to the necessary conclusion that Yan Jidao had not kept copies—he seems to have written them out at the moment, handed them to the singers, and that was the end of it. Now those lyrics return to him, and they are coming back changed—if his memory is correct.

We cannot universalize such authorial insouciance to all lyrics before the lineage of Su Shi, but the testimony of a famous lyricist like Yan Jidao makes the compilation of a collection of lyrics from singers a serious possibility, supported by hints in other collections.<sup>8</sup> This may have been the norm. Our sources tell us of Liu Yong’s popularity and that his lyrics were circulated everywhere. His lyric collection may have been formed by just such a “gathering.” Insofar as the collection may have been gathered from singers or from literati writing down the words of singers as they remembered them, we have opened a space into the oral transmission of song, in which texts of lyrics were not only changed to suit the needs of singers, but also the probability that lyrics of unknown authorship might be attributed to famous lyricists because the attribution seemed “appropriate.” “Appropriateness” would be a function of the lyricist’s reputation at the time, and the addition of new lyrics by this criterion would, in turn, confirm such a reputation and weight it in a certain direction.<sup>9</sup> In short, we have a process by which the lyricist himself is “produced,” with songs and a lineage of popular anecdotes working together to create a cultural identity that may have been very different from the historical person.

In scholarship in many other literatures of this era outside China—and particularly scholarship on early popular literature—our “imprecision” regarding Liu Yong’s life and text

---

<sup>8</sup> Chen Shixiu 陳世修, in his 1058 preface to Feng Yansi’s collection of lyrics, speaks of “gathering” lyrics. I have discussed this in “Who Wrote That?: Attribution in Northern Song *Ci*,” in Paul Kroll ed., *Reading Medieval Chinese Poetry: Text, Context, and Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 202-220.

<sup>9</sup> Once we come to the mid-twelfth century, with song lyrics beginning to appear in printed editions, we can see commercial editions with a vested interest in including all attributions and scholarly editions that took pride in excluding what the editor considered false attributions, based on the problematic criterion of the author’s image. The most obvious case is the edition of Ouyang Xiu’s *Jinti yuefu* 近體樂府, where the editor left out lyrics inappropriate for a “famous Confucian.”

would be an adequate precision. The mutability of the text and knowledge that well-known authors were magnets for texts would be taken for granted. By a long tradition of literary scholarship that can be traced back at least to the Song itself, Chinese scholarship has sought a transparent relation between text, author, and history; Song classical literature often provides the scholar just that. However, in an emergent genre like song lyric, the “author” and the “text” may be an ongoing process rather than a moment of origin. If we are lucky, that process may leave us traces to follow.

I am not entirely skeptical. I believe that many of the lyrics in Liu Yong’s collection are indeed by Liu Yong; that belief must, however, be annotated. First, I am speaking of “belief,” not of “knowledge” in the same way I feel certain knowledge that Ouyang Xiu wrote particular classical texts; second, I don’t know which lyrics are by Liu Yong and which ones are not; third, insofar as lyrics may have been gathered from singers, I suspect that many are not exactly as Liu Yong composed them. The majority of lyrics from the generation before Su Shi leave enough room for doubt that we are on more secure grounds if we think of the Liu Yong “persona,” once a real historical person who has been swallowed by his reputation.

We know that beginning about three decades after Liu Yong’s death, toward the end of the eleventh century, there were stories circulating about him involving 1) Renzong’s displeasure with him because of a song or songs, 2) the subsequent interference with his official career, and 3) disagreement on the quality of his songs, either in diction or the morality of theme and diction. We do not know if any of the authors of these anecdotes (excluding Huang Chang) had read the whole collection. If they had heard Liu Yong’s songs, we cannot be sure which ones they heard or if the choice of songs to perform was influenced by his reputation at the time. Given the way Chinese authors have often been judged by a few widely known but unrepresentative texts, we cannot assume wide knowledge of the corpus of lyrics we now have.

The first anecdote here (maybe not the earliest) simply mentions Renzong’s displeasure because of a song (or songs) and the career problems that ensued; negative judgment of his songs is displaced to the lyricist Yan Shu 晏殊, then a minister and a favorite of Renzong. The source

is Zhang Shunmin's 張舜民 *Huaman lu* 畫墁錄, of uncertain date, but probably around the turn of the twelfth century.<sup>10</sup>

柳三變以調忤仁廟，吏部不能改官。三變不能堪，詣政府。晏公曰：「賢俊作曲子麼？」三變曰：「祇如相公亦作曲子。」公曰：「殊雖作曲子，不曾道綠絃慵拈伴伊坐。」柳遂退。

Liu Sanbian offended Renzong by a song, and the Ministry of Personnel was unable to promote him. Sanbian couldn't endure this and went to the Minister's office. Lord Yan said: "Do you write songs?" Sanbian replied: "As your excellency also writes songs." Yan replied: "Though I write songs, I would never utter a line like 'Idly fingering a green thread, I would sit beside him'." Liu then withdrew.

The first thing we should note about the offending song, to "Ding fengbo" 定風波, is that it has nothing to do with the world of the entertainment quarter and cannot be read as a personal experience of Liu Yong. Indeed, it is a respectable Tang poetry motif of the young wife in spring feeling desire and regretting allowing her husband to go off.<sup>11</sup> Hightower translates the *ban* 伴 as "nestle," but it is a far more neutral "accompany" ("sit beside him"). One might think that the offense is the intimate scene, but poetic voyeurism of the inner chambers was well-established in Tang poetry and in mid-eleventh century song.

Let me suggest that the lesson here, in the wake of Su Shi's 1080 "poetry trial" 烏臺詩案 (literally the "Censorate Poetry Case"), is the peril of literary composition, particularly of a popularity that allows one's words to circulate widely. The reader of this anecdote learns that song lyric, often erotically tinged, was not so "minor" that it was out of public scrutiny, but rather could be damaging to a career. The very uncertainty of precisely what is objectionable in this line contributes to the lesson to stay away from any topic that might seem "improper."

Zhang Shunmin's anecdote briefly refers to the offense given to Renzong, leaving unanswered the question of what happened. The answer comes in four different anecdotes. The author-informants form a reasonably clear generational sequence from the late eleventh century

<sup>10</sup> *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2006) series 2, volume 1, p.218. Hereafter, *Quan Song biji*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. "Boudoir Resentment" 閨怨, by Wang Changling 王昌齡.

to the mid-twelfth century. The first of these can be dated to 1095, the *Mianshui yantan lu* 澗水燕談錄 by Wang Pizhi 王闢之 (1033-?):<sup>12</sup>

柳三變，景祐末登進士第，少有俊才，尤精樂章，後以疾更名永，字耆卿。皇祐中，久困選調，入內都知史某愛其才而憐其潦倒，會教坊進新曲醉蓬萊，時司天臺奏：「老人星見。」史乘仁宗之悅，以耆卿應制。耆卿方冀進用，欣然走筆，甚自得意，詞名醉蓬萊慢。比進呈，上見首有「漸」字，色若不悅。讀至「宸遊鳳輦何處」乃與御製真宗挽詞暗合，上慘然。又讀至「太液波翻」，曰：「何不言『波澄』！」乃擲之於地。永自此不復進用。

Liu Sanbian passed the *jinsi* examination at the end of the Jingyou Reign (1037). In his youth he possessed superlative talent and was extremely skilled in verses for music. Later, due to an illness, he changed his name to Yong and his courtesy name to Qiqing. During the Huangyou Reign (1049-1054) for a long time he had difficulty in getting an assignment. A certain Shi, a eunuch Office Manager, was very fond of Liu's talent and pitied his down-and-out situation. It happened that the Music Bureau had presented a new musical composition "Drunk in Penglai" (at that time the Astronomy Bureau had announced to the throne the appearance of the Old Man Star). Shi took advantage of Renzong's good spirits and got Qiqing to write lyrics to imperial command. Then Qiqing had hopes for employment and, with great delight, composed it with all haste, calling the lyrics "Drunk in Penglai: Elaborated Version." It was soon presented. When His Majesty saw the word *jian* 漸 at the beginning, his look seemed displeased.<sup>13</sup> When he reached "On the royal outing where is the Phoenix Palanquin," it in fact unwittingly matched his own composition of "A Bearer's Song for Zhenzong" [a dirge for his father], and His Majesty was upset. Again when he read to "The waves toss on Taiye Pool," he said: "Why didn't he write: 'The waves are pellucid on Taiye Pool!'" Then he threw it on the floor. From this time on Liu Yong was never again presented for service.

This account of Renzong's displeasure makes no mention of Liu Yong's reputation as a rake and poet of the entertainment quarter and its courtesans. In this aspect it is similar to Zhang Shunmin's account and another early account, a colophon on Liu Yong's collected song lyrics by Huang Chang, a close contemporary of Wang Pizhi:<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *Quan Song biji* 2.4.90-91.

<sup>13</sup> *Jian* 漸 in the context of the lyric means "gradually," but it also means "an illness getting worse." It was a singularly inauspicious way to celebrate the longevity of the sickly Renzong.

<sup>14</sup> *Yanshan ji* 演山集 35 (SKQS); Wang Zhaopeng 164. The fact that Liu Yong's collection was known at the end of the eleventh or in the first third of the eleventh century does not necessarily mean that it was printed. The earliest printing we know was in the series "Song Lyrics of a Hundred Masters," *Baijia ci* 百家詞, printed in the first decade of the thirteenth century (completed in 1210).

予觀柳氏樂章，喜其能道熹[嘉]祐中太平氣象，如觀杜甫詩，典雅文華，無所不有。是時予方為兒，猶想見其風俗，歡聲和氣，洋溢道路之間，動植咸若。令人歌柳詞，聞其聲、聽其詞，如丁斯時，使人慨然有感。嗚呼。太平氣象，柳能一寫於樂章，所謂詞人盛世之黼藻，豈可廢耶？

I was reading the *Song Lyrics (yuezhang)* of Mr Liu, and was delighted by his ability to express the atmosphere of peace in the Jiayou Reign (1056-1063). It is like reading Du Fu's poetry, in every way replete with canonical grace and cultural splendor. At that time I was but a child, and I can still envision the customs then, with sounds of revelry and a mood of harmony flooding over the streets. If you have someone sing Liu's lyrics, hear the music and listen to the lyrics, it's encountering such times again. It makes a person moved by strong feeling. Ah, the atmosphere of peace, and Liu was able to write it all into his song lyrics! This is what is meant by lyricists being the adornment of an age of splendor—how can they be dismissed?

Not only is there no hint of Liu Yong's image as a rake, he is even compared to Du Fu and his songs are described as having "canonical grace," *dianya* 典雅. This was not an isolated judgment. Li Zhiyi 李之儀 (of the same generation as Wang Pizhi), writing a colophon on Wu Ke's song lyrics around 1115, comments:<sup>15</sup>

至柳耆卿始鋪叙展衍，備足無餘，形容盛明，千載如逢當日。較之花間所集，韻終不勝，由是知其為難能也。

When we come to Liu Yong, for the first time the exposition develops fully, replete and without surplus, describing the splendor of the era, and for a thousand years it will be like being in those times. But comparing his work to what is collected in the *Huajian ji*, he could not carry on their resonance. From this we can know how hard it is to be good at it.

Wu Ke was a follower of the *Huajian ji*, so Li Zhiyi uses that anthology for the beginning of his history. Like Huang Chang, Li Zhiyi sees Liu Yong's lyrics as embodying a lost age of peace; His weakness is a lack of "resonance," *yun* 韻. Chao Buzhi 晁補之 (1053-1110) praises his lyrics similar terms, while acknowledging that judgment of his style is contested. Even so, the judgment of his style carries no hint that this in any way reflects on his morality.

---

<sup>15</sup> Zhang Huimin 張惠民. *Songdai cixue ziliao huibian* 宋代詞學資料匯編 (Jieyang, Guangdong: Shantou daxue chubanshe, 1993). p. 200. The date is unknown, but Li Zhiyi wrote a colophon for Wu Ke's classical poetry dated 1115.

世言柳耆卿曲俗，非也。如《八聲甘州》云：『漸霜風淒緊，關河冷落，殘照當樓。』此真唐人語，不減高處矣。

People these days claim that Qiqing's songs are vulgar—this is not so. Consider these lines from “to Basheng Ganzhou”:

The frosty wind grows gradually sharp and heavy,  
passes and rivers cold and bleak,  
lingering sunlight in the upper story.

This is truly the language of Tang writers and in no way inferior to their best.<sup>16</sup>

Such praise is radically at odds with the assessment of Liu Yong by Chen Shidao 陳師道 (1053-1101) in *Houshan shihua* 後山詩話. Here Liu Yong's lyrics are describes as “languid, appealing to vulgar taste,” *weibei congsu* 骯髒從俗.<sup>17</sup>

柳三變游東都南北二巷，作新樂府，骯髒從俗，天下咏之，遂傳禁中。仁宗頗好其詞，每對宴，必使侍從歌之再三。三變聞之，作宮詞，號《醉蓬萊》，因內官達後宮，且求其助。仁宗聞而覺之，自是不復歌其詞矣。

Liu Sanbian visited the entertainment quarter in the capital. He composed new songs that were languid, appealing to vulgar taste. Everyone was singing them, and they were consequently transmitted into the palace. Renzong particularly liked his song lyrics. Whenever he was at a banquet, he would always have his attendants sing them again and again. When Sanbian heard of this, he composed lyrics for the palace called “Drunk in Penglai.” These reached the inner palace through a eunuch, and he [Sanbian] sought his assistance. Renzong heard of this and realized what was going on; and from that point on he didn't have his lyrics sung any more.<sup>18</sup>

Here we find the first indication of Liu Yong as at least something of a roué, spending his time in the entertainment quarter—but he is primarily just a lyricist trying to get ahead in the system. Here, remarkably, Renzong appears as a big fan of Liu Yong's lyrics, curtailing his appreciation only when he realizes that Liu was using his connections with the palace to seek advancement. “Drunk in Penglai” is again a focus of attention, but the phrasing suggests that while this particular lyric was composed for the palace, the other lyrics Renzong enjoyed so much were already popular outside the palace.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Wu Zeng 吳曾, *Nenggaizhai manlu* 能改齋漫錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1960). p.469.

<sup>17</sup> Chen Shidao's *Houshan shihua* must be used with caution, since it is known to have interpolations.

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Hu Zi 胡仔, *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua qianji* 苕溪漁隱叢話前集 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1962) p.407.

This Renzong, the fan of popular music, was to completely disappear as such in the twelfth century. Over three decades after Chen Shidao's death, this version of the story reappeared in the 1135 *Bishu luhua* 避暑錄話 of Ye Mengde 葉夢得 (1077-1148) with some significant modifications.<sup>19</sup> First, Ye Mengde specifies that when Renzong's displeasure occurred, Liu Yong was still an examination candidate, rather than someone seeking a promotion or a posting. Ye repeats Chen Shidao's mention of Liu Yong visiting the entertainment quarter, but it is rephrased to emphasize the frequency of such visits and to stress that the place was disreputable (多遊狹斜). Ye says that he was "good at writing lyrics for song," but he no longer comments on the style. Rather than Renzong liking popular songs from outside the palace, in Ye Mengde's version the palace musicians "always sought out Yong to write the lyrics" (必求永為辭) whenever they composed new music. Finally, Ye claims that Liu Yong's popularity was a consequence of his songs being used by the court musical establishment.

I hope it is clear that reasonably consistent forces are at work in reshaping retellings of Renzong's displeasure. A possible negative judgment of his style is being replaced by a general judgment of his behavior and character. At the other end of the social hierarchy, Renzong is being distanced from any possible approval of such a person. If Chen Shidao can still imagine the general popularity of Liu Yong's lyrics in the capital rising to the emperor, Ye Mengde can imagine only influence going in the other direction, from palace to the city. In the final versions of the anecdote, there is no longer any possible connection between these different worlds. As we will later see, this radical separation of the palace and the people is the very opposite of what Liu Yong himself celebrates.

We cannot date Yan Youyi 嚴有翼 and his *Yiyuan cihuang* 藝苑雌黃 beyond a rough floruit in the 1120s. It is unlikely as early as Wang Pizhi or Chen Shidao. In this version the anecdote undergoes a major transformation, with the issues suggested in Ye Mengde's revision brought strongly to the fore.

柳永喜作小詞，然薄於操行。當時有薦其才者，上曰：“得非填詞柳三變乎？”  
曰：“然。”上曰：“且去填詞。”由是不得志。日與儂子縱游倡館酒樓間，無

---

<sup>19</sup> *Quan Song biji* 2.10.285-86.

復檢約，自稱云：“奉聖旨填詞柳三變。”嗚呼，小有才而無德以將之，亦士君子之所宜戒也。

Liu Yong liked to write insignificant song lyrics, but was unsound in his behavior. At the time there was someone who recommended his talent. His Majesty said, “Isn’t this the Liu Sanbian who writes song lyrics?” The recommender said it was indeed, and His Majesty said, “Let him go off then and write song lyrics.” From this point on he [Liu Yong] felt failure in his public career and spent his days with wastrels visiting brothels and taverns, with no further moderation or restraint. He declared himself “Liu Sanbian With an Imperial Command to Write Song Lyrics.” Alas!—someone with a little talent and lacking the virtue to accompany it is something that should be a warning to the best sort of gentlemen. <sup>20</sup>

This is a very different account, hinging on Liu Yong’s reputation for loose morals and presuming that Renzong had already heard of him as a writer of song lyrics; however, the initial statement clearly separates his song lyrics from this bad reputation (柳永喜作小詞，然薄於操行). The account carefully points out that he had this reputation before he was recommended to Renzong (presumably the reason for Renzong’s witty rejection); but then imperial rejection is, in turn, given as the cause of Liu Yong giving up “moderation and restraint” in his behavior. The representations in his songs are taken as evidence of the person’s conduct, which is in turn both the cause and effect of his public failure. Liu Yong’s famous witty response to Renzong’s dismissal, “Liu Sanbian With an Imperial Command to Write Song Lyrics,” is an important turn in representing the lyricist, from merely a frustrated office seeker to someone who represents his counter-cultural role with defiant pride. We finally come to a summary condemnation of Liu Yong’s moral character, more explicit than anything earlier.

After this section Yan Youyi goes on to declare how much inferior Liu Yong was when compared to other famous lyricists, his popularity due to pleasing vulgar taste. He then retells Wang Pizhi’s anecdote, changing the phrasing and omitting the conclusion that Renzong finally threw the copy of the lyric on the ground, so that it seems like the anecdote above was Renzong’s response to his irritation at “Drunk in Penglai.” But this suture of the two anecdotes doesn’t work. Yan Youyi goes on to criticize “Drunk in Penglai” on other grounds and cites

---

<sup>20</sup> *Tiaoxi yuyin congshu* second series (1167) (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 1962) 319. Cited from Yan Youyi 嚴有翼 (early 12 century), *Yiyuan cihuang* 藝苑雌黃.

criticism of another of Liu's lyrics put in the mouth of Zhang Xian. The entry is an all-around condemnation of Liu Yong, first on moral grounds and then moving to aesthetic grounds.

The final version of the anecdote involves one of Liu Yong's most famous lyrics and presumes that Renzong already knew it well enough to quote it. This is to "He chong tian" 鶴沖天.<sup>21</sup>

黃金榜上。偶失龍頭望。明代暫遺賢，如何向。  
未遂風雲便，爭不恣遊狂蕩。何須論得喪。  
才子詞人，自是白衣卿相。

煙花巷陌，依約丹青屏障。幸有意中人，堪尋訪。  
且恁偎紅倚翠，風流事、平生暢。青春都一餉。  
忍把浮名，換了淺斟低唱。

On the golden board

I lost hope of seeing my name at the top.<sup>22</sup>  
Our glorious reign has just missed someone of worth—  
what'll I do?  
Not catching the wind to fill my sails,  
why not act as wildly as I please?  
Why should I reckon gain and loss?  
The talent, the writer of song  
is a minister in commoner's clothes.

In back alleys of misty flowers,  
faintly appearing past a painted screen,  
Luckily there's someone I fancy  
whom I can go visit.  
Cuddling the red and green for the while like this,  
lovers' business fulfilled in my lifetime.  
Green spring lasts only a moment.  
How could I bring myself to buy hollow fame  
at the cost of soft singing and a draught of ale?

---

<sup>21</sup> Xue 239, Hightower 120, collated with Wu Na, *Baijia ci* edition.

<sup>22</sup> The list of graduates in the examination.

In Wu Zeng's 吳曾 *Nenggaizhai manlu* 能改齋漫錄, with a postface dated 1157, we have our last significant variant of the anecdote:<sup>23</sup>

仁宗留意儒雅，務本理道，深斥浮艷虛薄之文。初，進士柳三變好為淫冶謳歌之曲，傳播四方。嘗有《鶴冲天》詞云：“忍把浮名，換了淺斟低唱。”及臨軒放榜，特落之，曰：“且去淺斟低唱，何要浮名！”景祐元年方及第。後改名永，方得磨勘轉官。

Renzong was concerned with Confucian decorum, stressing basics and morality; he strongly disapproved of writing that was merely playful and casually amorous. The presented scholar Liu Sanbian was fond of writing lewd and lascivious ditties, and these were circulated everywhere. He had a lyric to “He chong tian” that went:

How could I bring myself to buy hollow fame  
At the cost of soft singing and a draught of ale?

When His Majesty was reviewing the list of graduates of the examination in the forecourt, he singled him [Liu Yong] out and failed him, saying: “Let him go off to his ‘soft singing and a draught of ale.’ What does he want with hollow fame?”

He passed the examination only in the first year of the Jingyou Reign (1034). He had subsequently changed his name to Yong, and only then did he rise through the ranks.

This, the latest in the transformation of the stories of Renzong's rejection of Liu Yong, has gone from rejecting a mere recommendation to removing Liu Yong's name from the list of successful *jinshi* candidates (note how Ye Mengde had earlier transformed him into an examination candidate). Renzong has been transformed from a fan of Liu Yong's lyrics to a strict Confucian, watching over the moral reputation of his *jinshi* graduates. Renzong witty dismissal takes exactly the same form that we saw in the earlier *Yiyuan cihuang* version (each beginning *qie qu* 且去 “Let him go off then . . .). The song is, remarkably, both the cause and the consequence of Liu Yong's examination failure.<sup>24</sup>

The versions of Renzong's rejection of Liu Yong are all mutually exclusive, nor, in our wildest imagination, can we have Renzong dismissing Liu Yong and wrecking his career on four

<sup>23</sup> Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋, *Cihua congbian* 詞話叢編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shju, 1986), p. 135. Wu Zeng 吳曾, *Nenggaizhai manlu* 能改齋漫錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1960). p. 480. There are other versions later, but it is clear that they were working with the versions of the anecdote cited.

<sup>24</sup> We could, of course, resolve this striking contradiction by postulating an earlier examination failure or failures; however, in this case we would be inventing an otherwise unknown historical “fact” to sustain the credibility of a late version of an anecdote which can be reconciled with none of three earlier versions.

different occasions. What we clearly have is an anecdote that has been transformed in its continuous retelling, and the motive force in the transformations can only be the changing values and interests of the literati community over the course of more than a half century. In this interval Liu Yong goes from a good lyricist hoping for imperial favor to a disreputable roué, as manifest in his lyrics; at the same time Renzong goes from being a fan of Liu's lyrics to a stern moralist who disapproves of all such writing. The obvious thread of continuity is increasing moral judgment in the reception of song lyric occurring through the first part of the twelfth century, a phenomenon we see with other lyricists.

The assumptions that enable the moralizing reading are as important as the moralizing itself. Yan Shu's rebuke cited earlier is preposterous on any grounds other than a dislike of the style of *manci*. Liu was writing about a young wife wanting to sit with her husband and keeping at home; it had no reference to the entertainment quarter. Yan Shu's own lyrics strongly hint at clandestine assignations with girls who were probably about fifteen—household servants rather than elite courtesans. But the lyrics were clearly taken only as play—even if such assignations did occur. No one ever faulted Yan Shu's morality because of them. In the case of Ouyang Xiu we see an edge across which such lyrics could engender gossip even in the eleventh century. But, by and large, it seems that in the mid-eleventh century, when Liu Yong was active, song lyrics were not generally understood as the heartfelt disclosure of the author's inner life, to be read in relation to the author's biography or public image. In the 1070s this began to change, and the effects of such a change turned back on the reception of Liu Yong. In the 1070s we find more and more *manci* (long songs) with occasional subtitles.<sup>25</sup> While the feelings expressed may have been heartfelt by the lyricist, they still belonged to a performance context. The range of topics in song lyric, however, was beginning to spread beyond performance contexts. As an example of this major change, I might single out a 1074 lyric by Su Shi to “Xin yuan chun” 沁園春, with the occasional subtitle “Travelling early on horseback as I set off for Mizhou, sent to Ziyou [Su Zhe]” 赴密州早行馬上寄子由.<sup>26</sup> Though the lyric did become public (more likely in writing than in performance), it was composed when Su Shi was by himself, sent to his brother, who would have read it and would not likely have called in a singer and musicians to perform such a

---

<sup>25</sup> Liu Yong's collection has a number of earlier *manci* on social occasions, but they are not subtitled.

<sup>26</sup> Zou Tongqing 鄒同慶 and Wang Zongtang 王宗堂, *Su Shi ci biannian jiao zhu* 蘇軾詞編年較注, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002) p.131.

lyric for him. It is a lyric filled with diction and references that were not part of the song lyric tradition, to a tune that had first appeared in the 1070s (leaving open the question whether a singer in the provinces would know how to sing it). It was, in effect, a classical poem “translated” into a new form, working with the possibilities opened by that new form.

The towering figure of Su Shi and his influence of his song lyrics on some members of his circle contributed to a mode of composition and a mode of reading song lyric that was biographical. Many lyrics continued to be written in the earlier mode, but the assumption that a song lyric might represent the author’s true feelings, opinions, and character became widespread. This made song lyric open to the scrutiny and judgment of elite circles. In some cases, such as the case of Ouyang Xiu, a positive judgment of the author’s character was so firmly established that even lyrics of dubious morality circulating under the author’s name came to be generally dismissed as malicious attributions. In the case of Liu Yong, we see a shift from a negative stylistic judgment of his song lyrics to a negative moral judgment of the author. The moral character of the author must coincide with the ethical implications of the song lyric, whether that is accomplished by condemning the author or rejecting the attribution of the lyrics.

The sequence of the anecdotes of Renzong’s dismissal of Liu Yong can be read in this changing regime of interpreting song lyric. In Wang Pizhi’s *Minshui yantan lu* Liu Yong is not being judged for his behavior or bad reputation; rather, he is tactless in regard to the caution that is required when presenting a composition to the emperor. In Chen Shidao’s and Ye Mengde’s versions he is using improper channels to seek imperial favor. In Yan Youyi’s version he already has a bad reputation, which Renzong links with writing song lyrics. By the time we come to Wu Zeng’s version, Renzong is passing judgment because of a specific passage in a particular lyric (all too reminiscent of the kind of charges brought by the Censorate in Su Shi’s trial).

In a more profound way the Yan Youyi and Wu Zeng versions make this new way of reading song lyric the very form of the emperor’s judgment, confusing cause and effect. The lyricist creates lyrics, but the lyrics may also “create” the lyricist. In both cases Renzong says: “Let him go away and be what he claims to be or do what he claims to want to do.” The emperor is “rectifying names” 正名, not by getting the “names” right, but by commanding Liu Yong to go and be the person represented by his words.

In both the Wang Pizhi and Ye Mengde versions, Liu Yong wants only to advance on the standard bureaucratic path. Even in the Yan Youyi and Wu Zeng versions Liu Yong is represented as feeling despair at Renzong's rejection. Like all the readers of the anecdotes, Renzong knows that all Liu Yong really wants is to succeed in the bureaucracy. Renzong's command to "go off" and be the person you claim to be is obviously a punishment. It is an interesting lesson: one cannot play at song; one may have to become the person one claimed to be. Liu Yong's act of changing his "name" (*ming* 名, also "reputation") is central here. The change of Liu Sanbian's name to Liu Yong intervenes somewhere in the production of Liu Yong the hard-working civil servant, ever nostalgic for the pleasures he abandoned.

By the twelfth-century versions we are no longer dealing with the historical person who wrote song lyrics (and we are certainly not dealing with new, historically credible evidence); rather, we have changing stories with a growing anxiety regarding play and playing roles. There is a certain pathos in Ye Mengde's account of when Liu Yong held his first post in Muzhou.<sup>27</sup> The prefect and the intendant recommended him for promotion. Ye notes: "Originally in the procedure of recommendation for office, one was not constrained by 'completing an examination of conduct,' *chengkao* 成考."<sup>28</sup> This recommendation of Liu Yong seems to have caused a flurry of discussion, in which he was criticized for his "words" 言; i.e. the songs he had composed and which circulated under his name. The consequence was that the recommended reappointment was refused. Afterward, Ye tells us, the annual 'examination of conduct' became mandatory even for a first appointment. Once again Liu Yong has been placed in a pivotal role in a cultural narrative (as Ye tells us, "this began from Liu Yong" 自永始).<sup>29</sup>

In this case it is not the intervention of imperial displeasure, but moralizing "public opinion" (*gongyi* 公議), that blocks Liu Yong's career advancement. The admiration for talent is replaced by bureaucratically documented competence. An intemperate line of song can ruin a person's life, and the "examination of conduct" becomes necessary proof that the new official is a reformed person, not necessarily talented, but dutiful in the performance of his tasks.

---

<sup>27</sup> *Quan Song biji* 2.10.285-86.

<sup>28</sup> The "examination of conduct," as it came to be instituted, was a review of an official's conduct over the course of a year in office.

<sup>29</sup> Xue p. 6 shows that the examination of conduct was in practice much earlier. The change seems to have been the completion of at least one term of service and a formal examination of the official's competence.

But what then of the song “He chong tian?” Is it indeed by Liu Yong, telling us of his experience in failing the examination and his feelings? Or is Liu Yong simply playing a role? Is it a song that picked “Liu Yong” as an authorial name for a song Liu Yong “should have written,” and if so, at what point in changing cultural history? We cannot, of course, answer these questions with any certainty. We can, however, place this lyric side by side with another song by Liu Yong, the first of a pair of songs to the tune “Kan hua hui” 看花回, and compare the differences between the two songs to the differences among the anecdotes.

This “Kan hua hui” relates to “He chong tian” in ways remarkably similar to the way the Wang Pizhi anecdote about Liu Yong’s rejection by Renzong relates to the versions by Yan Youyi and Wu Zeng. To “Kan hua hui”:<sup>30</sup>

屈指勞生百歲期。榮瘁相隨。利牽名惹逡巡過，奈兩輪、玉走金飛。  
紅顏成白髮，極品何為。

塵事常多雅會稀。忍不開眉。畫堂歌管深深處，難忘酒盞花枝。  
醉鄉風景好，攜手同歸。

Count up your hundred-year span, weighed down with life.  
Glory and misery come in succession.  
Temptations of fortune, the lure of fame pass in a moment,  
and you can’t stop those two discs,  
the jade racing, the gold flying.<sup>31</sup>  
A rosy complexion becomes white hair,  
what’s the point to be on top?

There are always too many messy problems,  
fine gatherings are rare.  
How can you keep yourself from a smile?  
Deep, deep within the painted hall, piping and song,  
a goblet of ale and a spray of flowers I can’t forget.<sup>32</sup>  
The scenery’s fine in the land of drunkenness,  
hand in hand we will go there together.

---

<sup>30</sup> Xue p. 39; Hightower p. 60

<sup>31</sup> The jade hare is the moon, while the golden crow is the sun.

<sup>32</sup> The “spray of flowers” is the woman.

We might recall that there is no mention of an examination failure in the Wang Pizhi anecdote; the problem with his career comes in the “posting,” *xuandiao* 選調, apparently related to hostility from an unnamed source. “He chong tian” is animated by an examination failure; here in “Kan hua hui” the speaker chooses the moment of pleasure rather than trying to get to the “top,” *jipin* 極品, in the bureaucratic world. This could be the sentiment of someone who had already passed the examination, including members of the audience for such a song when performed, either in the capital entertainment quarters or in the putatively wide range in which it circulated. In “He chong tian” “Green spring lasts only a moment,” implying a young man; “Kan hua hui” makes a more general gesture to the passage of time in the figurative race of the sun and moon, appropriate to any age. The discursive “cuddling” of singers (“cuddling the red and green”) is replaced by holding hands, which could be two men as well as a man and a woman. Both songs include the party scene, with music, ale, and women (in “Kan hua hui” the spray of flowers).

In short, “Kan hua hui” is repeatable in the context of performance and includes in its sphere of reference almost any “guest” from the elite. The contextual variability of presumed pronouns could easily place it in the voice of a woman singer addressing a guest. “He chong tian,” by contrast, is the voice of a particular persona of a certain age with a specific experience; a guest in the entertainment quarter might enjoy its brashness, but would not necessarily personally identify with it, and the singer could only be assuming a male role rather than addressing a guest in her own voice. In short, “He chong tian” is in search of an author to have written those words.

We might imagine “Kan hua hui” as being no less appropriate for a strictly moralizing Renzong’s dismissal in Wu Zeng’s version of the anecdote (“then let him go off hand in hand to the land of drunkenness; he doesn’t care about getting to the top”). This is indeed “writing that is merely playful and casually amorous” 浮艷虛薄之文. The difference is that the Renzong of Wu Zeng’s anecdote clearly knows the rest of “He chong tian” in which the speaker says that the examination failed to identify someone of worth, but that he doesn’t care, being a “minister in commoner’s clothes.” The intensity of the song’s contemptuous resistance to conventional values is in direct proportion to the strictness of their application by the emperor: “He chong tian’s” defiance is the negative image of Renzong’s Confucian strictness.

“Kan hua hui,” however, does not come in isolation; it is the first of a pair of songs, the second of which places the sentiments of the song in a broader context. We suddenly see how Huang Chang and Li Zhiyi understood Liu Yong’s lyrics:<sup>33</sup>

玉城金階舞舜干。朝野多歡。九衢三市風光麗，正萬家、急管繁弦。鳳樓臨綺陌，嘉氣非煙。

雅俗熙熙物態妍。忍負芳年。笑筵歌席連昏晝，任旗亭、斗酒十千。賞心何處好，惟有尊前。

On the jade platform and golden stairs  
there dances the staff of Shun.  
Many are the pleasures of court and commons.  
On radiating avenues, in the three markets  
spring’s weather is gorgeous,  
as from ten thousand homes  
come shrill pipes and a flurry of strings.  
Phoenix Mansions look out on splendid roads,  
an auspicious aura, well-omened nimbus.

Gentlefolk and common folk united in delight.  
How could one ignore this flowering of the year?  
Parties with laughter and song  
continue from dusk to dawn,  
and in the alehouse let the ale  
cost ten thousand cash for a pitcher.  
What place is best to satisfy heart’s desire?—  
just here facing a flagon of ale.

After the ancient sage-king Shun had spread the blessing of culture to the empire, he danced with a feathered staff on the stairs. The opening allusion clearly stands for the Song emperor, whose benevolent rule brings all his subjects together in harmony and joy; he is the “dancing Renzong” 起舞仁宗 in the title of this article. Presumably he looks out from the palace (“phoenix mansion”) radiating an aura of blessings, while the folk celebrate an age of peace and hold parties through the night. Like the first lyric, the second “Kan hua hui” ends in drinking, but it is

---

<sup>33</sup> Xue p. 40.

“politically correct” drinking. We can scarcely imagine Renzong finding such a lyric offensive, and it is a very different vision of imperial rule than Wu Zeng’s sternly serious Renzong, keeping a watchful eye out for any sign of literary frivolity. Nevertheless, such a vision of an age of peace seems to have been the context in which Huang Chang nostalgically read Liu Yong’s lyric collection, with the songs of the entertainment quarter not as the “lewd and lascivious ditties” of a rake, but as celebration of a happy world. For Huang Chang Liu Yong’s lyrics recall the Jiayou Reign, Renzong’s last reign, when Huang Chang himself was in his teens. Perhaps Huang Chang knew something that Wu Zeng, writing a century after the Jiayou Rign, did not know.

We might also observe that first “Kan hua hui” belonged to a song type, versions of which appear among Liu Yong’s contemporaries and in the next generation. Du Anshi 杜安世 is an exceedingly shadowy character, about whom we know even less than we know about Liu Yong; but his collection of lyrics is one of the largest surviving from a mid-eleventh century lyricist. Du Anshi’s lyric to “Feng qi wu” 鳳棲梧:<sup>34</sup>

閑把浮生細思算。百歲光陰，夢裏銷除半。  
白首為郎休浩嘆。偷安自喜身強健。

多少英賢禪聖旦。一個非才，深謝容疏懶。  
席上清歌珠一串。莫教歡會輕分散。

Idly I take this drifting life  
and reckon it up carefully.  
A time-span of a hundred years,  
and I’ve spent half in dream.  
Cease to heave deep sighs  
at being a junior courtier with white hair.<sup>35</sup>  
Stealing some peace, I’m delighted  
that I’m still sturdy and strong.

So many sparkling men of worth  
assist our ruler’s birthday.  
A guy without talent  
is deeply grateful to be allowed to be lazy.  
Clear songs at the party,  
pearls on a string.

<sup>34</sup> Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋, *Quan Song ci* 全宋詞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965) p. 185.

<sup>35</sup> A reference to the Western Han figure Feng Tang 馮唐, who was asked why he was an old man still in an entry level court post.

Don't let this merry gathering  
disperse too casually.

It's not quite the same thing as Liu Yong's first "Kan hua hui," but it adds something of interest in "being a junior courtier with white hair." This is neither rejecting the imperial bureaucracy nor seeking to advance, but resigned contentment with a sinecure. That is, indeed, one possible solution to the conflict between service and those who scorn it. Moreover, it combines a polite bow to those who are on top with mild self-deprecation. If *shengdan* 聖旦 is indeed the emperor's birthday, then, like the second "Kan hua hui," Du Anshi links drinking and making merry to the celebration of good government.

Though he would never have admitted to it, the great Su Shi was, perhaps, Liu Yong's most devoted "reader." Anyone who compares the lyrics of these two masters of the genre cannot fail to recognize Liu Yong's large presence in Su Shi's lyrics, however much Su tries to hide that presence. Su Shi too has his version of this song-type, even if his genius overwhelms it. One of Su Shi's lyrics to "Manting fang" 滿庭芳 is a brilliant transformation of Liu Yong's "Kan hua hui." The most obvious transformation here is that Su Shi keeps the ale, but eliminates the woman.

蝸角虛名，蠅頭微利，算來著甚幹忙。事皆前定，誰弱又誰強。  
且趁閑身未老，盡放我、些子疏狂。百年裏，渾教是醉，三萬六千場。

思量。能幾許，憂愁風雨，一半相妨，又何須，抵死說短論長。  
幸對清風皓月，苔茵展、雲幕高張。江南好，千鐘美酒，一曲滿庭芳。

Hollow glories won on a snail's horn,  
on a fly's head some small advantage gained:  
when I think about it, why  
do we go to such pointless trouble?  
Everything that happens  
has been settled long before—  
no one comes out short,  
no one comes out ahead.  
So I'll make the most of my leisure,  
and the fact I'm not yet too old,

and indulge myself to my limit  
in a little wildness.  
In life's possible hundred years  
you should let yourself get drunk in total  
thirty-six thousand times.

I have considered it,  
and how much longer do we have—  
with gloomy winds and rain  
keeping us from half?  
Also why should we  
spend the rest of our lives arguing  
over what's better, what's worse?  
We are lucky to have cool breeze  
and also the silvery moon,  
a cushion of moss spread for us,  
a tent of cloud stretched high.  
The Southland is best,  
a thousand cups of sweet ale,  
and a song: "Fragrance Fills the Yard."

Let us return to our song, "He chong tian," and to the question we originally posed about how song lyric collections were compiled. Perhaps Liu Yong did compose it—though its tone is quite distinct from his other lyrics. As we have seen, his image gradually changed from the lyricist of an age of peace to the legendary roué, a lifestyle explicable only because he had lost all hope of advancement. If "He chong tian" were performed and someone asked the singer who wrote that song, "Liu Yong" would have been the natural name on which to hang the verse. And since "He chong tian," more perfectly suited this changed image of Liu Yong, the subject of continuous gossip, it became one of his most famous songs.

In this context we can say that it doesn't really matter whether Liu Yong was the author of "He chong tian." What matters is that the attribution of the song contributed to an image of the "minister in commoner's clothes," the talent who, on failing the examination, preferred the life of pleasure in the entertainment quarter.<sup>36</sup> Was this image specifically Liu Yong's property or

---

<sup>36</sup> This was not the Liu Yong of the earlier anecdotes or the vast majority of the lyrics—though there was a great deal of professed regret at having preferred an official career to staying in the capital and the entertainment quarter.

was it the image of a type? Since we don't have other extant Northern Song lyrics playing this role, it is impossible to say. But the image has an interesting future history that will finally return to Liu Yong.

The voice of the role-type returns about three centuries later in a song with a tone very reminiscent of “He chong tian.”

Qiao Ji 喬吉 (c. 1280-1354), to “Lüyaobian” 綠幺遍, Of Myself 自述<sup>37</sup>

不占龍頭選。不入名賢傳。時時酒聖，處處詩禪。  
煙霞狀元。江湖醉仙。笑譚便是編修院。留連。批風抹月四十年。

I didn't graduate at the top,  
I'm not in "The Lives of Famous Men."  
Now and then I'm Sage of Beer,  
I find Chan of poetry everywhere.  
A cloud and mist valedictorian,  
the drunken immortal of lakes and river.  
In conversation, witty and clever—  
my own kind of Royal Historian.  
After forty years I still endure,  
of life's finer pleasures,  
connoisseur.

Qiao Ji's “examination failure” is purely discursive, rather than a response to experience. Yet he offers the same defiance of conventional values that we see in “He chong tian,” claiming his proper rank not in the government but in a vernacular counterculture. It is not the world of the entertainment quarter, but the life of a free spirit who celebrates the private life, in which the marks of a successful public career are reproduced in a new mode. There is an interesting question here about the meaning of “minister in commoner's clothes,” *baiyi qinxiang* 白衣卿相, whether that should be understood as “someone who would have been a minister, but remains a commoner” or “a minister in the world of commoners.” The speaker in “He chong tian” probably

---

<sup>37</sup> Sui Shusen 隋樹森, ed., *Quan Yuan sanqu* 全園散曲 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), pp. 574-75. Li Xiusheng 李修生 ed., *Qiao Ji ji* 喬吉集 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1988), p. 253.

meant the former; but in vernacular discourse attested from the Southern Song on, it meant the latter,” as in “a cloud and mist valedictorian” 煙霞狀元. This is a counterculture with its own hierarchy parallel to the official world.

Qiao Qi enjoyed playing the countercultural hero, with a new nuance that attached itself to the role: the emphatic “forty years” that closes the song tells us that this is an aging bon vivant. The unanswerable question is whether Qiao Ji had “He chong tian” in mind and was in some way “imitating” it or was doing his version of a song role that had become common in the entertainment quarter. The song comes with the subtitle “On Myself,” which is an autobiographical claim.

The voice of the aging roué appears in probably the most famous of all song suites, Guan Hanqing’s 關漢卿 “Yizhi hua” 一枝花, subtitled “Not surrendering to old age” 不伏老.<sup>38</sup>

攀出牆朵朵花，折臨路枝枝柳。花攀紅蕊嫩，柳折翠條柔，浪子風流。憑着我折柳攀花手，直煞得花殘柳敗休。半生來弄柳拈花，一世裏眠花臥柳。

【梁州】我是個普天下郎君領袖，蓋世界浪子班頭。願朱顏不改常依舊，花中消遣，酒內忘憂。分茶擲竹，打馬藏鬪；通五音六律滑熟，甚閑愁到我心頭！伴的是銀箏女銀臺前理銀箏笑倚銀屏，伴的是玉天仙攜玉手並玉肩同登玉樓，伴的是金釵客歌《金縷》捧金樽滿泛金甌。你道我老也，暫休。佔排場風月功名首，更玲瓏又剔透。我是個錦陣花營都帥頭，曾玩府遊州。

【隔尾】子弟每是個茅草岡沙土窩初生的兔羔兒乍向圍場上走，我是個經籠罩受索網蒼翎毛老野雞躑躅的陣馬兒熟。經了些窩弓冷箭蠟槍頭，不曾落人後。恰不道“人到中年萬事休”，我怎肯虛度了春秋。

【尾】我是個蒸不爛、煮不熟、捶不匾、炒不爆響瑤瑤一粒銅豌豆，恁子弟每誰教你鑽入他鋤不斷、斫不下、解不開、頓不脫慢騰騰千層錦套頭。我玩的是梁園月，飲的是東京酒，賞的是洛陽花，攀的是章臺柳。我也會圍棋、會蹴鞠、會打圍、會插科、會歌舞、會吹彈、會嚙作、會吟詩、會雙陸。你便是落了我牙、歪了我嘴、癩了我腿、折了我手，天賜與我這幾般兒歹症候，尚兀自不肯休。則除是閻王親自喚，神鬼自來勾，三魂歸地府，七魄喪冥幽，天那，那其間纔不向煙花路兒上走！

I've plucked every bud hanging over the wall,

<sup>38</sup> Li Hanqiu 李漢秋 ed., *Guan Hanqing sanqu ji* 關漢卿散曲集 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990). pp. 26-33.

and picked every roadside branch of the willow.  
The flowers I plucked had the softest red petals,  
the willows I picked were the most tender green.  
A rogue and a lover, I'll rely  
on my picking and plucking dexterity  
'til flowers are ruined and willows wrecked.  
I've picked and plucked half the years of my life,  
a generation entirely spent  
    lying with willows, sleeping with flowers.

to "Liang-zhou"

I'm champion rake of all the world,  
the cosmic chieftain of rogues.  
May those rosy cheeks never change,  
    let them stay as they are forever.  
For among the flowers I spend my time,  
I forget my cares in wine;  
I can:  
    swirl the tea-leaves,  
    shoot craps,  
    play checkers,  
    do a shell-game.  
And I know whatever there is to know  
    about music in every key--  
nothing sad ever touches me.  
I go with girls with silver harps  
    on terraces of silver,  
    who play upon their silver harps,  
    and smiling, lean on silver screens.  
I go with jade-white goddesses  
    and take them by their jade-white hands,  
    then shoulder to jade-white shoulder,  
    we go upstairs in mansions of jade.  
I go with girls with pins of gold  
    who sing their songs of golden threads,  
    who raise their golden drinking cups  
    and golden flagons brimming full.  
You think I'm too old!  
Forget it!

I'm the best known lover anywhere,  
I'm center stage,  
I'm smooth,  
sharp too!  
I'm commander-in-chief  
of the brocade legions  
and garrisons of flowers.  
And I've played every district and province.

to *Ge-wei*

You boys are baby bunnies  
from sandy little rabbit-holes  
on grassy hills,  
caught in the hunt  
for the very first time;  
I'm an ol' pheasant cock plumed with gray;  
I've been caged,  
I've been snared,  
a tried and true stud  
who's run the course.  
I've been through ambushes, pot-shots,  
dummy spears,  
and I never came out second-best.  
So what if they say:  
"A man is finished at middle age"—  
you think I'm going to let  
the years just slip away?

Coda

I'm a tough old bronze bean  
that can still go "boing"  
steamed but not softened,  
stewed but not mush,  
whacked but not flattened,  
baked but not popped.  
Who let you boys worm your way in  
to the brocade noose  
of a thousand coils  
that you can't chop off  
and you can't cut down

and you can't wriggle out  
and you can't untie?  
The moon of Liang's park is what I enjoy,  
Kaifeng wine is what I drink,  
Luoyang's flowers are what I like,  
Zhangtai's willows are what I pick.  
Me, I can:

recite poems,  
write ancient script,  
play all stringed instruments—  
woodwinds too;  
and I can:

sing "The Partridge,"  
dance "Dangling Hands,"  
I can hunt  
play soccer,  
play chess,  
shoot craps.

You can  
knock out my teeth,  
scrunch up my mouth,  
lame my legs,  
break both my hands;  
but Heaven bestowed on me this gift  
for vice in each assorted kind,  
so still I'll never quit.  
Not till Yama the King of Hell  
himself gives me the call,  
and demons come and nab me,  
my three souls will sink to earth below,  
my seven spirits will float away  
into the murky dark,  
then, Heaven, that's the time  
I'll walk the lanes of misty flowers  
no more.

Guan Hanqing's lowlife world of Dadu provides a more colorful lexicon than "minister in commoner's clothes," but that is the pattern behind "chief in fame and deed in the stage of

romance” 排場風月功名首 and “commander-in-chief of the brocade legions and garrisons of flowers 錦陣花營都帥頭.<sup>39</sup>

Our series of associations here may seem to have taken us a long way from “He chong tian” and Liu Yong, but Guan Hanqing’s famous sequence returns to Liu Yong in a peculiar and problematic way. In modern editions of Liu Yong’s lyrics we find a lyric to the tune title “Chuan hua zhi” 傳華枝. This lyric has a number of peculiarities. The tune title appears nowhere else in Song dynasty song lyric (though tunes with a single example are not uncommon, especially in Liu Yong). This song is included neither in Wu Na’s manuscript edition nor in Mao Jin’s edition. Through one of the Ming manuscripts or some lost edition it made its way into twentieth century editions. In the second printing of Wu Zhongxi’s 吳重熹 edition (first printing 1901) editorial notes by Miao Quansun 繆荃孫 make reference to a “Song edition,” whose table of contents and a collation were incorporated into Wu’s second printing.<sup>40</sup> This table of contents includes “Chuan hua zhi,” as does Wu’s second printing.

The appearance of additional lyrics from the various manuscripts and printed editions in the tradition is common enough, testifying only to the fluidity of the corpus in earlier circulation and how lyrics appear and disappear in different editions. However, “Chuan hua zhi” itself is an anomaly, with Liu Yong’s commentators freely admitting that they do not understand certain usages. Neither do I. Even our imperfect reading, however, makes it clear that this is closely related to Guan Hanqing’s “Not surrendering to old age”:

平生身負，風流才調。口兒裏、道知張陳趙。  
唱新詞，改難令，總知顛倒。  
解劇扮，能哄嗽，表裏都峭。  
每遇著、飲席歌筵，人人盡道。可惜許老了。

閻羅大伯曾教來，道人生、但不須煩惱。  
遇良辰，當美景，追歡買笑。  
剩活取百十年，只恁廝好。  
若限滿、鬼使來追，待倩個、掩通著到。

<sup>39</sup> As Li Hanqiu notes, in *Xuanhe yishi* 宣和遺事 Li Banyan is called “Prime Minister of wastrels” 浪子宰相.

<sup>40</sup> See Xue 27.

All my life I've depended on  
 my playboy panache.  
 I can quip at the mention of Zhang, Chen, and Zhao.<sup>41</sup>  
 I sing the latest songs,  
 vary difficult tunes,  
 and know all about twisting the words.  
 I know about dressing smart,  
 good at yodeling,  
 cool in every way.  
 Whenever I come to a drinking party or song performance  
 everyone says so.  
 Too bad that I have become this old!

Uncle Yama once told me<sup>42</sup>  
 not to let human life bother me.  
 If I come on a nice day  
 in good scenery,  
 I'll take my pleasure and buy some fun.  
 If I get a hundred and ten more years,  
 I'll just please myself this way.  
 When my time is up,  
 and demon officers come for me,  
 I'll get my gatekeeper to let me know.

What do we have here? The style and tone is like nothing else in the Liu Yong corpus. It is certainly not “languid,” to use Chen Shidao’s characterization of Liu Yong. Is this a Northern Song text, either by Liu Yong or of unknown authorship, entering the Liu Yong corpus because his would have been the only name remotely “appropriate?” Did Guan Hanqing know of this lyric and do an expanded imitation, or was he doing his own version of a song type with a long history in the entertainment quarter, as it moved from Bianjing north to Dadu?<sup>43</sup> Is it, perhaps, a Yuan song, a *sanqu*, perhaps even a rewriting of Guan Hanqing’s suite to a two-stanza song? At some point Liu Yong’s name was hung on it. The one thing we can say with some confidence is

---

<sup>41</sup> No one is sure what these surnames suggest. Xue suggests “knight errants” (*youxia*) or skilled underlings. Gu takes the *dao* 道 as a word game.

<sup>42</sup> The King of the Underworld.

<sup>43</sup> Xie Taofang 謝桃坊 suggests that Guan Hanqing developed his suite from Liu Yong’s lyric. Cited in Gu Zhijing 顧之京, Yao Shoumei 姚守梅, and Geng Xiaobo 耿小博, *Liu Yong ci xinshi jiping* 柳永詞新釋輯評 (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2005), p. 108.

that for this lyric to be added to his corpus the image of Liu Yong had to have evolved from the lyric voice of an age of imperial peace to the defiant voice celebrating the entertainment quarters as a counterculture. In other words, “He chong tian” had to have first become one of the texts that defined Liu Yong. As “He chong tian” is a step beyond “Kan hua hui,” so “Chuan hua zhi” is a step beyond “He chong tian” in the evolution of Liu Yong’s image. In this final step we enter the world of the “Liu Sanbian” of later vernacular literature.

#### Additional Note

I begin by claiming that we do not know much about Liu Yong’s life, but Xue Ruisheng evidently knows enough to fill a three-hundred and fifty page biography, *Liu Yong biezhuàn* 柳永別傳 (Xi’an: San Qin chubanshe, 2008) . How do I explain this?

Let me say at the outset that I have learned an immense amount from Xue Ruisheng’s scholarship, as my notes show. His command of the sources is impressive. He is scrupulous in distinguishing what he thinks he can prove from what we cannot prove. We differ only on what constitutes proof.

The simplest explanation is that we have different standards of evidence. If I have a biographical subject with a rich array of classical texts, referencing specific people, places, and events, corroborated by historical sources and contemporaries writing to and of the subject, then a detailed biography is, of course, credible. In the case of Liu Yong, there is not a single mention in the reliable historical record. Even his brother Liu Sanjie 柳三接 has two contemporary appointment documents. The older brother Liu Sanfu 柳三復 is given a *jinshi* date in the gazetteer sources, but is otherwise utterly invisible. There is not a single contemporary letter to Liu Yong, not a single contemporary poem to him, not a single contemporary document that mentions him. He has one “Encouraging Study” 勸學文 in prose, preserved in a Japanese anthology, and three attributed poems all from later sources, none of which contributes much to a biography. We have anecdotes and judgments in later *biji* and *shihua/cihua*. We have a brief account in a late seventeenth century gazetteer, part of which comes from the *biji* sources, but which also includes the name of his father, brothers, and son. Gazetteers are made from older gazetteers, but accidents and motivated changes are far from unknown. In this case we are left with Liu Yong and one of his brothers passing the *jinshi* examination ninety-five years after their father’s birth. This is not impossible, but it is certainly unusual enough to give one pause. Finally we have the song lyrics themselves, with all the problems that attend the authenticity and textual integrity of lyricists active before the last decades of the eleventh century. A few are clearly for particular social occasions, but they do not have the occasional subtitles that help us historically place many occasional song lyrics from the 1070s on. If the argument of this paper has validity, it shows a gradual transition to a biographical reading of earlier song lyric. Such biographical reading continues. It is, however, on shaky ground.