

張宗櫛：詞林紀事

Behind the Lines:

Tz'u Poets and Their Private Selves

By Chang Tsung-su

Translated by Frederick C. Tsai

TZ'U LIN CHI SHIH 詞林紀事 (*Anecdotes of Tz'u Poets*), as the title suggests, is concerned exclusively with *tz'u*. In this collection are to be found amusing stories about *tz'u* poets, pithy sayings, and critical remarks by *tz'u* poets, and studies of authorship and textual differences. The work was edited by Chang Tsung-su 張宗櫛, a poet himself, well known in the eighteenth century. Also included in the book are perceptive comments by the editor. Entries about more than four hundred *tz'u* poets from the T'ang to the Yüan dynasties (618-1368) make it comprehensive enough to be regarded as an indispensable work of reference in the study of *tz'u* and *tz'u* poets.

The following is a selection of a few anecdotes which, perhaps no less than the lyrical grace and perfection shown by poets in their *tz'u*, helped to perpetuate their fame.

Yueh-fu Chi-wen 樂府紀聞:

In his middle age, as Chief Administrator of the Prefecture of Ying 穎州¹ Ou-yang Yung-shu 歐陽永叔 (courtesy name of Ou-yang Hsiu 歐陽修) styled himself Recluse Liu-i (Six-one), which, according to him, was derived from the fact that he had collected *one* thousand *chüan* 卷² of rubbings of ancient bronze and stone inscriptions, *one wan* (ten thousand) *chüan* of books, was in possession of *one ch'in* 琴,³ *one* set of chess, *one* bottle of wine, together with himself, *one* old man, growing old amidst the five things.

His works include a collection of his *tz'u* poems entitled *Liu-i Tz'u* 六一詞.

¹In modern Anhwei 安徽 Province.

²In ancient China books were copied on silk or paper to be rolled up for storage. Hence the classifier *chüan*. A modern volume may contain several *chüan*, that is, several parts or divisions.

³A seven-stringed zither.

Yao Shan T'ang Wai Chi 堯山堂外記:

One day, when His Excellency Ch'ien Wen Hsi (the Errant) 錢文僖⁴ entertained his guests in his garden, a state-owned courtesan and Ou-yang Yung-shu were late in arriving. Asked for the reason, the girl said, "I was suffering from the heat, so I went to sleep it off in a cool chamber. There I lost my gold hairpin which I haven't as yet found."

"If you can ask His Excellency Ou-yang, Assistant to the Governor-general, to write a *tz'u*," said Ch'ien, "you'll be compensated for it."

Thereupon Ou-yang composed impromptu a *tz'u* to the tune of *Lin-chiang hsien* 臨江仙.⁵ All those present applauded. The courtesan was told to pour Ou-yang a cup of wine. A sum of money was drawn from the public coffers to pay her in compensation for her lost gold hairpin.

I-yüan Tz'u-huang 藝苑雌黃:

Liu San-pien 柳三變 (Three Changes, courtesy name of Liu Yung 柳永) given to philandering, was fond of writing *tz'u* poetry. Some recommended him to the Emperor for his talent.

"Isn't he the *tz'u* poet, Liu San-pien?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"Then leave him to write *tz'u*!" said the Emperor.

This put paid to Liu's hopes of preferment. From then on he spent his days in the company of rakes in brothels and public houses, leading a life of total abandon.

"Here is Liu San-pien," he often declared, "who writes *tz'u* by Imperial command."

"While he was a candidate for the imperial examination," wrote Yeh Shao-yün 葉少蘊, "Liu Ch'i-ch'ing 柳耆卿 (another courtesy name of Liu Yung) used to frequent brothels and was good at writing songs. Whenever court musicians came across a new tune, they would not release it until they had got Liu to compose the lyrics. Consequently, his fame spread far and wide. When I was the magistrate of Tan-t'u 丹徒⁶ I met a government official returning from Western Hsia 西夏,⁷ who told me that 'wherever there is well-water there are people able to sing Liu's *tz'u*.'"

⁴Ch'ien Wen Yen 錢惟演, a noted man of letters as well as a minister in the Sung dynasty, with the posthumous title "The Errant", for his inglorious manipulations in politics.

⁵Please refer to the original of this *tz'u* poem and its translation by Teresa Yee-wha Yü on p. 116.

⁶The old name of Chenkiang, the capital of Kiangsu Province.

⁷State on the borders of China, destroyed by the Yüan dynasty in 1227.

Ch'ing-ni Lien-hua Chi 青泥蓮花記:

Liu Ch'i-ch'ing and his Excellency Sun Ho 孫何⁸ were friends when they were still living in obscurity. Later, when Sun became Chief Administrator of the Prefecture of Hangchow, the entrance of his official residence was so heavily guarded that Liu found it impossible to see him. Then having composed a *tz'u* poem to the tune of *Wang Hai-ch'ao* 望海潮, he went and called on a famous courtesan named Ch'u-ch'u 楚楚.

"I want," he said to her, "to see the Prefect, but I have no access. When there is festivity at his Excellency's would you do me the favour of singing this song with your beautiful voice in his presence? Should he ask who the author was, just say, 'A scholar named Liu.'"

At the celebrations on the evening of the Mid-autumn Festival, Ch'u-ch'u sang the song melodiously. Immediately Sun sent for Liu to join the party.

Ch'ui-chien Lu 吹劍錄:

When Su Tung P'o 蘇東坡 was a member of the Imperial Academy, one of the assistants there was a skilful singer.

"What do you think of my *tz'u* in comparison with that of Liu (Yung)?" asked Su.

"As far as the *tz'u* poems of Liu Lang-chung⁹ are concerned his line 'On the willow-fringed bank in the morning breeze under the setting moon' is fit only to be sung by a young lady of seventeen or eighteen, holding a pair of red ivory clappers. However, as for your Excellency's *tz'u* poems, your line 'Eastward flows the Great River' must be sung by a burly fellow from the west of the Han-ku Pass 函谷關 accompanied by a brass pipa and a pair of iron clappers."

On hearing these remarks, Su was immensely amused.

*Kui Erh Lu*¹⁰ 貴耳錄:

The Superior Taoist,¹¹ Emperor Huei 徽宗 of the Sung dynasty, once went to see Li Shih Shih 李師師. It happened that Chou Pang-yen 周邦彥 arrived there before the Emperor. On learning of the arrival of

⁸A famous scholar as well as a capable statesman in the reigns of the emperors Chen 眞宗 and Jen 仁宗 (998-1063) of the Sung dynasty.

⁹Liu had been *t'un-t'ien yüan-wai-lang* 屯田員外郎, an official supervising frontier guards raising crops on the border. By this title he was referred to as *lang-chung* 郎中.

¹⁰By Chang Tuan-i 張端義 of the Sung dynasty.

¹¹The Emperor Huei of the Sung dynasty was a devout Taoist, and styled himself the Superior Taoist.

the Emperor, he hid under the bed. The Emperor brought a fresh orange with him, saying that it had just arrived as tribute from the south of the Yangtze River. He joked and flirted with Shih Shih, and every word was overheard by Pang-yen.

Subsequently, the poet turned what he had heard into a *tz'u* to the tune of *Shao Nien Yu* 少年游. Then one day Shih Shih sang this song to the Emperor.

"Who is the author?" asked the Emperor.

"It is a *tz'u* by Chou Pang-yen."

The Emperor flew into a rage and instructed Ts'ai Ching 蔡京, the Prime Minister, to expel Chou Pang-yen forthwith from the Forbidden City under escort for neglect of duty.

A couple of days later the Emperor went to see Shih Shih again, and did not find her at home. Upon inquiry he was told by her family that she had gone to see Chou¹² off. The Emperor waited and waited until the last watch. When Shih Shih came back, she looked distressed, her eyelashes wet with tears, pathetically wan and sallow.

"Where have you been?" the Emperor demanded angrily.

"Your maid-servant deserves to die ten thousand times," said Shih Shih. "I learned that Chou had incurred your Majesty's wrath and was to be expelled under escort. I could not but go and offer him a farewell cup. I didn't know your Majesty were coming."

The Emperor asked if Chou had written any *tz'u*. Shih Shih told him that Chou had written a *tz'u* to the tune of *Lan-ling wang* 蘭陵王. (This is the poem that begins with the line "The shadow of willows was straight . . .")

"Sing it and let us see what it's like."

"Allow me to offer your Majesty a cup of wine, and sing this *tz'u* to wish your Majesty health."

When Shih Shih finished the song the Emperor was greatly pleased, and ordered Chou to be restored to the post of Chief Musician of the Ta Ch'eng Imperial Conservatoire.

*Random Jottings in Kuei-hsin*¹³ 癸辛雜識:

Lu Wu-kuan 陸務觀 (courtesy name of Lu Yu 陸游, 1125-1210) first married the daughter of T'ang Hung, who was his maternal uncle. In spite of their mutual affection the young lady did not find favour with her mother-in-law. When on account of this she was sent away, Lu Wu-kuan could not bear severing their relationship totally, so he housed her in a secret place where they could continue to meet. His mother, on discovering it, made a surprise raid on the hide-out. Although he got wind of it and had his wife taken away before his mother arrived, they could not continue to meet after their secret

¹²In the original, Chou is referred to as a revenue officer.

¹³Kuei-hsin, the name of a street in Hangchow, where this book by Chou Mi 周密 (1232-1298), poet, anthologist, and historian, was written.

became known. As a result, their separation became final. Later, Lu's ex-wife was married again, this time to Chao Shi-ch'eng of the same Prefecture, who was the eldest son in the family.

One spring day she met Lu during an outing at Shen's Garden 沈氏園, south of Yu-chi Szu 禹跡寺 (The Empire Temple). She told Chao of their former relations, and had wine and meat delivered to Lu. This left him in a pensive mood for quite a long time. Thereupon he composed a song to the tune of *Ch'ai-t'ou-feng* 釵頭鳳, which he wrote on the wall of the garden. It was in the year 1155.

In his later years living in Sanshan 三山 or The Three Hills, on Chien Lake 鑑湖, Lu made a point of visiting the temple each time he entered the city for sightseeing. In 1199, he wrote two *chüeh-chü* 絕句:¹⁴

*Since you disappeared from my dream forty years ago,
The willows of Shen's Garden have grown too old to
have catkins adrift.
Albeit my body will soon become earth on Mount
Chi,¹⁵
With heart-ache I still search for the footprints you left
behind.*

*The sun is setting over the city-wall when bugles wail.
In Shen's Garden the ponds and towers have gone.
O how the green spring ripples under the bridge
Once reflected your graceful but too transient image!*

Soon after the poems were written Lu's ex-wife died.

"Pai-shi Tao-jen 白石道人 (White-stone, the Taoist),"¹⁶ wrote Ch'en Ts'ang I 陳藏一, "looked as if he could not support the weight of his clothes, whereas his pen is so Herculean as to be able to raise a cooking vessel with a capacity of 100 *hu* 斛.¹⁷ He didn't have a speck of land, yet not a meal at his home was served without guests. His collection of books, historical records, paintings and masterpieces of calligraphy was so large as 'to weigh down the oxen transporting it and to fill a house to the rafter'. Generous and expansive, he was more of a man from the Chin and Sung dynasties (265-479), with his philosophical attitude to life. His speech was always meticulous and to the point. He is a man of noble character without consciously aspiring to nobility.

¹⁴A poem of four lines each containing five or seven characters, with a strict tonal pattern and rhyme scheme.

¹⁵That is, Mount Huei-chi 會稽山, in Chekiang Province.

¹⁶An alias taken by Chiang K'uei 姜夔 (c. 1155-c.1221).

¹⁷Equivalent to 1,000 decalitres.