

The Genesis of Yi'an Style (易安體) in Medieval Chinese Poetry

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Abstract. This article deals with the genesis of Yi'an style (易安體), the poetic style of the outstanding Chinese female poet of the Song dynasty Li Qingzhao (李清照, 1084–1155?). The empirical material for this research is her extant early 22 *ci* (1098–1108). The first part of the article briefly discusses the specific features of *ci* genre, which reached its heyday during the Song dynasty (宋朝, 960–1279). The second part examines the peculiar features of Li Qingzhao's early *ci*, which indicate her pushing the limits of writing traditional Chinese poetry. These features are 1) modification of the classical themes and images; 2) introduction of love and erotic *ci* from a female perspective; 3) experiments with the composition of *ci* and their rhythmic and melodic structure. She introduced the lyric element into conventional *ci*, composing the poems with strong personal engagement. Her genre innovations lie in overcoming the limits and conventions of the genre, legitimating the Self of a poet in her distinctive personal style – Yi'an style.

Keywords: Li Qingzhao; *ci* genre; theme; images; feelings.

Introduction

The outstanding female poet Li Qingzhao (李清照, 1084–1155?) occupies a leading place in Chinese literary and cultural history. Her talent for writing poetry was recognized by her contemporaries, and her *ci* lines, images and poetic devices were highly praised and borrowed by the prominent male poets. Nevertheless, the commentaries of her poetry are full of gender markers implying not quite definite but obvious differences from the male/universal/human poetic ingenuity. She is always described as “the first poetess”, “China's preeminent female poet”, “the most excellent female writer”, “the finest one”, etc. Nowadays she is still considered “The First Talented Woman through the Ages”

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(“千古第一才女”) and one of “Four Great Female *Ci* Poets of the Song Dynasty” (“宋代四大女詞人”)¹.

In spite of Li Qingzhao's place in Chinese literary and cultural history and popularity of her poetry in modern China, the evolution of her poetic style – Yi'an style (易安體²) – has never been the subject of comprehensive monographic research in China as well as outside it³. Although her *ci* were included in different collections even during her lifetime⁴, on the whole, Li Qingzhao's poetry was not a topic of extended or systematic research until the second half of the 20th century. Modern studies on her writing mostly deal with the reconstruction of her biography by analyzing her *ci* (Chen Zumei, 1995; Zhuge Yibing, 2004, etc.). The peculiarities of Yi'an style are mainly presented as a part of the more wide-ranging studies (Chen Zumei, 2004, pp. 108–112; Owen, 2019, pp. 383–384) or as the separate articles (Zhou Guifeng, 2002; Xiang Meilin, 2006, etc.). Some scholars use a biographical approach to study her poetry (Wang, 1989; Hsu, 1994; Pannam, 2009; Djao, 2010, etc.) or make an emphasis on the lyrical feminine voice of her *ci* (Idema, Grant, 2004; Samei, 2004; Blanchard, 2018, etc.).

All the mentioned studies have three common disadvantages: 1) the lack of historical and/or literary context while analyzing Li Qingzhao's writings; 2) the empirical material for most abovementioned studies are limited to 2–3 *ci* not allowing to speak about the representativeness of the findings, and 3) the avoidance of issues relating to genre peculiarities of her *ci*. Consequently, the very process in which Li Qingzhao's *ci* turned into something unique, extraordinary and beyond time and her significant contribution to the development of Chinese *ci* poetry have not been given meaningful and thorough consideration.

It should also be noted that Ronald Egan's book on Li Qingzhao (2013) is the only one in Western literary criticism that is entirely devoted to the study of Li Qingzhao's life

¹ Such lists of the great male masters in different fields (poetry, philosophy, prose, calligraphy, etc.) are traditional for Chinese culture, e.g. “Eight Great Prose Masters of the Tang and Song Dynasties” (“唐宋八大家”), “Four Great Calligraphers of the Song Dynasty” (“宋四家”), etc. The lists of outstanding women have appeared since the Tang dynasty.

² Yi'an style is derived from Li Qingzhao's studio name Yi'an jushi (易安居士) (Chen Zumei, 1995, p. 37).

³ The dearth of studies on Li Qingzhao's life and poetry outside China is indeed surprising. The first translations of her poetry into English did not appear until 1933 (by Clara Candlin). In 1960s, there were also two small books on her life and works published (Hu, 1966; Ho, 1968), but they had no academic impact as “interest in Li Qingzhao in the Western world turned to translate her small surviving corpus of song lyrics (*ci* 詞)” (Fong, 2015, p. 402).

⁴ Li Qingzhao's collection *Ci of Jades for Rinsing the Mouth* (漱玉詞) was widely circulated during the Southern Song (南宋, 1127–1279), but it was lost as early as the 14th century (Egan, 2013, p. 92). Only some of her *ci* (from 2 to 8) were introduced in poetry anthologies compiled by the late 16th century. Ming editor Chen Yaowen (陳耀文) was the first one to include her 44 *ci* in his anthology *A Refined Collection of Flowers and Grasses* (花草粹編, circa 1580). There was an active search of *ci* and their publication during the Qing dynasty. There were about 9,000 *ci* written to 1540 different tunes in *Ci through the Ages* (歷代詩餘, 1707) compiled by Shen Zhanyuan (沈展垣) and Li Qingzhao was introduced by 38 *ci*. In 1888 Wang Pengyun (王鵬運) tried to reconstruct Li Qingzhao's collection, where he presented her 57 *ci* (Egan, 2013, p. 98). Zhao Wangli (趙萬里) included 60 *ci* written by her in his anthology *Revised Collection of Ci from the Song, Jin and Yuan Dynasties* (校輯宋金元人詞, 1931). Tang Guizhang's (唐圭璋) anthology *The Complete Collection of Ci of the Song Dynasty* (全宋詞, 1940) is the greatest one as it presents more than 21,000 Song *ci* with 47 *ci* written by Li Qingzhao and 26 *ci* attributed to her. The first individual collection of Li Qingzhao's *ci* titled *The Collection of Jades for Rinsing the Mouth* (漱玉集) was compiled by Li Wenqi (李文椅) in 1927 with 78 *ci*.

and writings. His thorough study deals with a broad range of questions concerning her biography, authenticity and reception of her poetry from the Song dynasty to nowadays. He paid particular attention to the social, cultural and economic context and to the analysis of her writings in different genres. However, the peculiar features of Li Qingzhao's early *ci*, which laid the foundation for her distinctive personal style making her poems different from those written by her predecessors and contemporaries, escaped his field of vision.

The aim of this article is to study the genesis of Yi'an style based on her early *ci*. It will allow us to make some general theoretical observations on the development of *ci* poetry in medieval Chinese literature and to explore Li Qingzhao's creative evolution. This article is a part of a larger study devoted to the genesis and evolution of Yi'an style, which will contribute to a better understanding of relations between tradition and innovations in Li Qingzhao's poetry and their correspondence to cultural, social and gender aspects of medieval China.

Last but not least. Though not a single poem was dated by Li Qingzhao, the extant 60 *ci* written or attributed to her can be divided into several groups according to the information given in four reliable collections (Chen Zumei, 2003; Xu Beiwen, 2015; Xu Peijun, 2009; Ke Baocheng, 2009). I consider 22 *ci* as her early poetry written during the ten years (1098–1108). The demarcation line is 1108, when Li Qingzhao wrote *Essay on Ci* (詞論), the first theoretical treatise in Chinese literary tradition dedicated to *ci*. In this work, she tried to legitimate that *ci* is a genre of poetry by identifying the same features with official *shi* poetry. She also determined a core element of the genre and discovered its unique historical past⁵. Thus, this treatise is an important milestone in the development of Li Qingzhao's writing style singling out her early *ci* marked by following the tradition in the search for her style.

1. *Ci* genre and its specific features: a brief review

Many studies are devoted to various features of the *ci* genre (Shi Yidui, 1989; Rydholm, 1998; Wu Xionghu, 2003; Wu Zhangshu, 2016, etc.). This part will provide a brief review of its characteristics, which are essential for a better understanding of the genesis of Yi'an style.

The *ci* genre can trace its roots back to the late 6th century. From the very beginning, its connection with music was its core element as it was considered to be a continuation of *yuefu* (樂府), original folk songs or poems written in a folk song style. The first *ci* were composed to the so-called *Yanyue* music (宴樂, the banquet music), which was not originally Chinese but imported from India, Burma, Korea and other Central Asian countries in the late 6th century (Shi Yidui, 1989, p. 3). *Ci* with the first genre characteristics appeared at the end of the Tang dynasty (唐朝, 618–907), and during the Song dynasty (宋朝, 960–1279) this genre reached its peak and the highest level of prestige.

⁵ For the detailed analysis and the commentaries on Li Qingzhao's *Essay on Ci* see Egan, 2013, pp. 75–90; Dashchenko, 2016.

Ci were composed to the different tunes with different titles or *cipai* (詞牌). In early *ci*, the contents of the poem was related to *cipai* (Wu Zhangshu, 2016, pp. 60–61). For example, *ci* to the tune *A cut plum branch* (一剪梅) should definitely be dedicated to the plum blossom. By the late 11th century, there was a discrepancy between *cipai* and the contents of *ci*; that is why poets started to add the titles or *citi* (詞題) to their poems after *cipai* (Rydholm, 1998, p. 44). Thus, most *ci* composed during the Song dynasty have two titles: one is the title of the tune (*cipai*) – for example, *A cut plum branch* (一剪梅) – and the other is the title of the poem (*citi*) – for example, *Parting sorrow* (別愁).

Each tune had its own pattern or *cipu* (詞譜)⁶ and they completely predetermined the poetic structure of *ci*: the number of lines, the number of characters in each line, the balance between a level tone *ping* (平) and an oblique tone *ze* (仄), the place of rhyme (韻), the stanza divisions, etc. *Zhengti* (正體) is a “standard form” of *cipu* while *bianti* (變體) is an “alternative form” appeared as a result of a new idea or a creative twist by a poet. As almost all tunes had been lost by the late Southern Song (南宋, 1127–1279), poets had to compose *ci* by just using *cipu*.

Ci are traditionally divided into three forms or *citi* (詞體)⁷, where the number of characters is the key difference between them: *xiaoling* (小令), *zhongdiao* (中調) and *changdiao* (長調) (Wu Zhangshu, 2016, pp. 33–34). So, *xiaoling* ranges from 14 to 58 characters, *zhongdiao* contains from 59 to 90 characters, and *changdiao* varies from 91 to 240 characters.

Depending on the number of stanzas, *ci* can be divided into four groups: mono-tune or *dandiao* (單調), double-tune or *shuangdiao* (雙調), tri-tune or *sandie* (三疊) and quadrature or *sidie* (四疊) (Wu Zhangshu, 2016, pp. 35–38). *Shuangdiao* is the most commonly applied form. Its specific feature is that the upper stanza (上闕) and the lower stanza (下闕) can be composed to the same or different patterns: in the former case, both stanzas are identical in length, tones, rhymes, etc., while in the latter case they are different (Wu Zhangshu, 2016, pp. 36–37). Moreover, both stanzas are generally in a thematic opposition: the upper stanza depicts the nature or landscape outside while the lower stanza describes the feelings or thoughts of the lyrical persona (Xia Chengtao, Wu Xionghe, 2016, pp. 93–94). This way, the poets achieved the effect of approaching: we “are brought closer and closer to a woman alone in her room as the song progresses until, in the closing lines, the focus is entirely on her and her emotions” (Egan, 2013, p. 376)⁸.

⁶ The number of tune patterns is really stunning: *Kangxi Collection of Ci Tunes* (欽定詞譜, late 17th – early 18th century) contains 826 *cipu* and 2306 of their variants.

⁷ Some scholars use the other classifications. Thus, *ci* are sometimes divided into only two kinds or sub-genres: *xiaoling* and *manci* (Hu, 1966, p. 19). The former “contains not more than 62 characters” while the latter “ranges roughly from 70 to 240 characters” (Chang, 1980, p. 212). Sometimes researchers mention four kinds (令, 引, 近 and 慢) according to their affinity to the four major “melody categories” (Rydholm, 1998, p. 45; Xia Chengtao, Wu Xionghe, 2016, pp. 36–39). There is also a classification of nine *ci* forms (法曲, 大曲, 慢曲, 引, 近, 序子, 三台, 續令, 諸宮調) which is also directly connected to the kinds of *ci* melodies (Shi Yidui, 1989, p. 189; Rydholm, 1998, p. 46). Some modern Chinese scholars point out that dividing *ci* into types by the number of characters is not right, as a lot of *ci* do not fall under this classification (Wu Xionghe, 2003, p. 94).

⁸ Such composition (from describing what is happening outside to depicting the inner chamber and a woman alone) in Tang erotic poetry is considered as penetration, because “for the male poets there is no qualitative difference between exposing a woman’s bedroom, her body, and her mind” (Rouzer, 1993, p. 74).

Early *ci* were associated with female singers (娼妓) and the entertainment quarters, where these poems were composed and performed. It determined the thematic range of early *ci*: erotic feelings, romantic love, the mood of melancholy, female abandonment, sorrow for the lost love, transience of life, etc. In other words, *ci* primarily was focused on describing the inner world of a person and his/her romantic affairs and private feelings⁹.

However, even by the late Northern Song, the status of *ci* was relatively low in the hierarchy of literary genres. The first reason is that *ci* was considered by poets as a kind of template to be filled in with a certain purpose or for a certain event. They “were predominantly impersonal in the sense that they dealt with stock themes and situations: a portrait of a conventional person (e.g., the lovelorn woman in her room), reflections on the passing of spring and its beauty, or the sadness of an imminent departure” (Egan, 2006, pp. 282–283). Thus, the poet’s task was reduced to the following: “to devise words set to musical tunes that could be performed again and again in different times and settings but to retain enough universality to be usable in varied circumstances” (p. 283). The second reason is that *ci* genre “was still stigmatized for its closeness to the ‘vulgarity’ of popular entertainment” as it used “the themes of love, romance, and sexual desire” (p. 240).

The association of *ci* with the expression of such feelings and desires as well as its connection to female singers and the entertainment quarters led to that the whole genre was associated with femininity and classified as “feminine” (Samei, 2004, p. 2; Owen, 2019, p. 47). Male poets adopted a female voice while composing *ci*, so it is no wonder that the vast majority of *ci* were cast as female monologues describing the feelings of women experienced in love. As “male poets became accomplished masters of one form of female psychology and female impersonation” (Fong, 1990, p. 463), these *ci* were highly appreciated both by their contemporaries and modern scholars. The outstanding literati of the Southern Song significantly broadened the thematic range of *ci* by introducing themes on social matters, historical events, philosophy, mythology, patriotism, politics, etc.

2. The specific features of Li Qingzhao’s early *ci* (1098–1108)

In many respects, the peculiar features of Yi’an style can already be seen in Li Qingzhao’s early *ci*, but the commentators and scholars “limit” themselves by giving general remarks to these poems and describing them as “charming”, “lively”, “refreshing”, “with simplicity and striking vividness”, etc. They mostly depict her as a representative poet of the “delicate and restrained” or *wanyue* style (婉約) as opposed to the “heroic

⁹ This thematic division is very often pointed out as one of the distinguishing features between *ci* and the dominant *shi* genre (詩). Lena Rydholm emphasizes that it should be considered as the standard cliché where “*shi* express ideals, *ci* express emotions” (“詩言志, 詞言情”), but “this division is artificial, since there are many love-poems written in *shi*-form” (2011, p. 101). However, she agrees that “*ci*-poetry for the main part dealt with ‘private’ themes like love/eroticism, while *shi*-poetry often dealt with ‘public’ themes such as politics, ethics and philosophy” (2011, p. 101). Ronald Egan also mentions that “romantic love tends to be a marginal subject in *shi* poetry” because of the dominant paradigm, namely: “the traditional association between that form and the ideal of a poet ‘stating his intent’ as a Confucian scholar or official in service of the state (or as a recluse, a man who rebelled against that abiding model)” (2006, p. 239).

abandon” or *haofang* style (豪放) represented by Su Shi (蘇軾, 1036–1101) and Xin Qiji (辛棄疾, 1140–1207).

During these early years, Li Qingzhao gave preference to *xiaoling*: 15 *ci* (68.18%) are written in this short form¹⁰. These data can probably be explained by two reasons: (a) the popularity of *xiaoling* as it was “the dominant form in literati song lyrics” during the 11th–12th centuries (Egan, 2006, p. 303) and (b) her personal preferences as she considered some poets as the experts in composing *ci* and could take them as the example to follow¹¹.

Li Qingzhao’s *xiaoling* are relatively small (47 characters on average), and most of them are composed to one of three tunes: *Like a Dream* (如夢令), *Sand of Silk-washing Stream* (浣溪沙) and *Lamenting the Prince* (怨王孫). No matter what *ci* form was chosen, she used *cipu* of two stanzas with an equal number of lines but different patterns. Most of her poems (16 *ci* or 72.73%) have from one to five different *citi* depending on the collection they are included in. But as Li Qingzhao’s personal collection of *ci* was lost as early as the 14th century, now we do not know exactly if the existing *citi* were written by her or just added by the different compilers later.

While composing early *ci* Li Qingzhao relied on traditional Chinese poetry, particularly *Shijing* (詩經) and Tang *shi*. There are three peculiar features of her early poems: 1) modification of the classical themes and images; 2) introduction of love and erotic *ci* from a female perspective; 3) experiments with the composition of *ci* and their rhythmic and melodic structure. She began to master the “poetics of tradition”, and her lyric is mainly traditional and based on a system of conventional value.

2.1 Modification of the classical themes and images

One of the most apparent features of Yi’an style is the unusual use of classical themes and images. In most cases, the researchers try to explain it in impressionist terms. For example, describing the popular method of rewriting earlier lines, Ronald Egan compares Li Qingzhao’s *ci* with poems composed by other Song poets. He points out that poets traditionally practised one of two techniques: “to borrow an entire line from an earlier *shi* poem and incorporate it unchanged into a song lyric” or “to recast an entire earlier piece, originally written in another poetic form or even in prose, into a song lyric” (2013, p. 326). But Li Qingzhao made it in her own, original way: “rewriting the original and giving it a decidedly new thrust and direction” (2013, p. 326). It is rather difficult to understand by his further words what exactly this “new thrust and direction” is.

The first dominant feature of Li Qingzhao’s early *ci* are a modification of the classical themes and images characterized by (a) the transformations on the compositional and the

¹⁰ As to the other forms, there are 4 *zhongdiao* (18.18%) and 3 *changdiao* (13.64%). For the detailed quantitative analysis of Li Qingzhao’s *ci* see Dashchenko, 2019.

¹¹ In particular, a lot of *xiaoling* being in circulation at that time are linked to the names of Feng Yansi (馮延巳, 903–960) and Yan Jidao (晏幾道, 1030?–1106?) (Owen, 2019, pp. 11–13). In *Essay on Ci* (詞論), Li Qingzhao mentioned these poets as those who appreciated the elegant lines and their *ci* were considered unusually refined and original (Xu Peijun, 2009, p. 271).

stylistic levels and (b) the use of such literary devices as parallelism and personification. Her *ci* to the tune *Like a Dream* (如夢令) is a great illustration of those mentioned above.

Firstly, she easily switched between genres borrowing the words, images and storyline from *shi* and incorporating them into *ci* with some compositional and stylistic changes. This *ci* is an adaptation of the conventional theme of springtime lament: a young lady wakes up in the morning and begins to take an interest in haitang blossom (海棠花) after a rainy night. At first glance, it would seem that Li Qingzhao just borrowed idea and images from the poem *Too Tired to Rise* (懶起) written by Tang poet Han Wo (韓偓, 842–923), who was known for his dainty and elegant pieces about romantic love. However, after a close reading, it is clear that her *ci* is creatively different and much more complex. Using only 33 characters¹² she transformed this story both on the compositional and the stylistic level by introducing a dialogue between the lyrical persona and her maid. She managed to show the differences between these two women: the former is depicted as a very sensitive, and compassionate person and the latter is described as a careless and indifferent one.

Secondly, the heart of *ci* is the last line (應是綠肥紅瘦 “[She] should [have said: the] green [is] fat, [the] red [is] skinny”), which is considered as one of the most frequently cited and commented. Here Li Qingzhao used two literary devices – parallelism and personification – thus creating a brand new, fresh image. Parallelism is a specific feature of traditional Chinese poetry and the normative rule for *shi*. Poets achieved complex effects through it as its sophisticated use could intensify the focus on a certain stanza or line. They had to use strict antonyms, allowing no repetition of the same words (Liu, 1962, p. 146). In addition, the opposed words should be of the same grammatical category (noun against a noun, verb against verb, etc.) and the same semantic group (colour against colour, flower against a flower, etc.) (Liu, 1962, p. 148). In this line, the characters “綠” and “紅” refer to the green and red colours and, at the same time to the leaves and flowers. At that time, the characters “肥” (fat) and “瘦” (skinny) were used to describe human beings (Ke Baocheng, 2009, p. 4), but here they are the features of the leaves and flowers. This combination of literary devices, and the use of those characters, were new, original and very unusual at that time (Xu Beiwen, 2015, p. 37).

Li Qingzhao did not limit herself to stereotypical themes, especially lovesickness in separation, and composed *ci* on different themes and various occasions: praise of different flowers, admiration of spring or autumn nature, description of the landscape, felicitation, melancholy, sorrow and loneliness.

2.2 Introduction of love and erotic *ci* from female perspective

However, perhaps the most important feature of Li Qingzhao’s early *ci* is the introduction of the love theme and the expression of romantic sentiments from a female perspective¹³. According to the widespread practice at that time, love *ci* were composed

¹² Han Wo’s poem is almost twice as long as hers (60 characters).

¹³ *Ci* to the tunes *Dabbing Crimson Lips* (點絳脣), *The Vile Charmer* (醜奴兒), *Sand of Silk-washing Stream* (浣溪沙), *Short Version. Magnolia Flower* (減字木蘭花), *Waves Wash the Sand* (浪淘沙).

by male poets who usually wrote “about the intimate details of romantic assignations”, described “details of bedroom trysts in language that is replete with erotic overtones” and spoke “openly of sexual pleasure” (Egan, 2006, p. 339). In their *ci*, women are mostly presented as objects of erotic or sexual desire (Bossler, 2013, p. 37, p. 89) and their inner chambers or rooms “serve as a metaphor for a woman’s sexual organs, making them apt sites for the location of desire” (Blanchard, 2018, p. 68).

Li Qingzhao challenged the traditional practices of the restrained description of female feelings (as female poets were prescribed to do) and wrote love *ci* with erotic symbolism paving the way to a new attitude to expressing inner emotions and describing female love feelings and being considered as gender perverse these *ci* were sometimes indicated as those which “authorship is doubtful”¹⁴ and thus automatically attributed to different male poets. Even some modern scholars prefer to consider Li Qingzhao’s breaking out of conventional bounds “not as ‘subversions’ of male conventions of femininity, but as evidence that she was a good poet” (Samei, 2004, p. 73). R. Egan notes that “we today might not consider these poems erotic or sexually titillating, but they would have been considered so in their own day” (2013, p. 356).

The difference is rather obvious. Li Qingzhao, in her erotic *ci*, places greater focus on the description of a lyrical persona (her appearance, thoughts and feelings) than on “the intimate details of romantic assignations” as male poets do: this is a young woman with irresistible charm and full of grace (in four *ci*); it is she who is the driving force of the assignation (in two *ci*); she is full of feelings and expectations but does not directly tell her beloved one about her desires, she just drops hints and inflames his feelings.

Moreover, such a female perspective makes it possible to draw the distinction between Li Qingzhao’s love (romantic) and erotic poems. *Ci* to the tune *Dabbling Crimson Lips* (點絳脣) describes the first signs of a young girl falling in love. Chinese commentators consider that the idea of this *ci* was borrowed from Han Wo’s *shi* titled *Accidentally Saw* (偶見): a woman on a swing sees a visitor entering the house. Li Qingzhao did not just borrow the storyline and reinterpret it, but created a brand new image: an uninhibited, carefree, and frankly flirtatious woman pictured in Han Wo’s *shi* turned into a shy young girl with fluttering feeling of first love. This image is emotionally more complex: on the one hand, the girl is playful and carefree, but, on the other hand, she is shy, confused and curious. The difference between these two lyrical personas is emphasized by the image of mei (梅) used in the last line of each poem. Han Wo’s lyrical persona keeps the fruit

¹⁴ These *ci* are not “attested in any extant Song or Yuan source” and “it is not until the late Ming that their existence, one by one, gradually becomes established” (Egan, 2013, p. 358). All of them were included in different highly respected Qing poetry collections as those written by Li Qingzhao. In most cases, only modern commentators call the authorship of these *ci* in question. The reasons are the following: “it is unlikely that a woman with Li Ch’ing-chao’s status and family background would write such a poem” (Rexroth, Chung 1979, p. 97); “the content is unworthy of a woman of her moral status”, “the poet expresses her love boldly in defiance of the feudal shackles of her day” (Wang, 1989, p. 43); “此词过分轻薄”, “清照青年时, 不可能有此约会” (“this *ci* is too frivolous”, “it was impossible for her to have such a tryst”) (Ke Baocheng, 2009, p. 94); “<...> 明系男子之感受, 与女性之心态不同, 定非易安所作” (“it expresses the feelings of a man not of a woman, it was certainly not written by Yi’an”) (Xu Beiwēn, 2015, p. 140), etc.

of mei in her hands as an indication of her maturity and a hint at her being a woman from entertaining quarter¹⁵, while Li Qingzhao's female character has a sprig of blooming mei in her hands, symbolizing her youth and beauty. This fresh and unusual image of youth and the description of falling in love for the first time is in sharp contrast to the imitative *ci* written by Li Qingzhao's male contemporaries, who tried to describe the feelings in the female voice according to the established pattern. She did not compose her *ci* to entertain men as it was typical for Chinese *ci* culture before. She fundamentally revised the function of *ci* by expanding its thematic and stylistic range.

2.3 Poetic experiments

The modification of classical themes and images and as well as the introduction of love and erotic *ci* from a female perspective required the experiments with the composition of *ci* and their rhythmic and melodic structure to expand prosodic norms of this genre. Li Qingzhao made modifications in half of her early *ci*¹⁶, in particular, changing the balance between a level tone *ping* (平) and an oblique tone *ze* (仄), use of rhymes, the number of characters in a line and line divisions.

In Li Qingzhao's early *ci*, two stanzas are not in opposition shifting the reader's view from outside to inside as seen in *ci* composed by male poets. Instead of it, she used two different approaches to the composition of *ci*¹⁷. In one case, the first stanza mostly concerns a woman's room while the second stanza describes what is happening outside; thus, there is no standard effect of approaching and "the lyric concerns a woman's observations rather than the expression of her emotional state" (Blanchard, 2018, pp. 70–71). The second approach is overlooked by the researchers: there are some *ci* where the outside description changes into inside one (or vice versa) line by line, and it creates the effect of intertwined spaces at the same time correlating with a range of woman's emotions.

Regarding modifications concerning the balance between tones, Li Qingzhao changed *ping* to *ze* in 16 lines and *ze* to *ping* in 12 lines. In *Essay on Ci* (詞論) she pointed out the specific features of *ci* distinguishing it from *shi*: "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" ("Shi distinguishes [tones] *ping* and *ze*, but *ci* distinguishes five *yin*, five *sheng*, six *lü* as well as *qing/zhuo* and *qing/zhong* [sounds]") (Xu Peijun, 2009, p. 267)¹⁸. As she emphasized the importance of the right use of tones

¹⁵ This conclusion can be reached, firstly, by the contents and style of Han Wo's erotic poems, which are rather explicit and sensual, and, secondly, by the symbolic meaning of mei in Chinese culture: starting from *Shijing* (詩經) this fruit in girl's hands is considered as a symbol of female genitals and usually interpreted as flirting to a young man or lovemaking (Li Xiuyun, 2012, pp. 153–154).

¹⁶ I have used Huang Huatong, Cai Guoqiang, 2019 and Xu Beiwen, 2015 to compare *zhengti* with the patterns of her *ci*.

¹⁷ There are also some *ci* where both stanzas concern only outside description, but all of them deal with the praise of different flowers.

¹⁸ Modern scholars find it difficult to determine what Li Qingzhao meant by these rules and how exactly they should have been applied. Xia Chengtao and Wu Xionghe tried to find an explanation for some of these terms: five *yin* (五音) mean five classes of initials (glottal, dental, alveolar, lateral, labial); five *sheng* (五聲) mean five tones – "female" *ping* (陰平), "male" *ping* (陽平), *shang* (上), *qu* (去) and *ru* (入); *qing* (清) should be understood as a male

in *ci*, these numerous changes in their use may indicate her dissatisfaction with these *cipu* and attempts to change the standard for composing *ci*.

The next type of modification concerns the use of rhymes¹⁹. In most cases, the rhyme in *ci* corresponded to the musical pause (Xia Chengtao, Wu Xionghu, 2016, p. 8) and correlated with the expressing sentiments (p. 36). If the rhyming syllables are distributed too dense, the sentiments of *ci* are very fast and urgent; if they are very few, the sentiments are probably calm and slow (Rydholm, 1998, p. 80).

Ci to the tune *Manifold Little Hills* (小重山) is a good illustration of changing the sentiments in *ci* by changing the number of rhymes. According to *cipu* to this tune, there are 8 lines and 8 *ping* rhymes, so the rhymes are too dense, presupposing the expression of restless and anxious feelings. However, Li Qingzhao did not use a rhyme in the first line, thus changing not only *cipu* but also the sentiments of *ci*. If we compare her poem with *ci* to the same tune written by Xue Zhaoyun (薛昭蕴, 10th century), she borrowed the first line of his *ci* and did not use rhyme in it as he did. R. Egan points out that “the mood and substance of Li Qingzhao’s piece stands in sharp contrast to Xue Zhaoyun’s song” (2013, p. 383). In his *ci* “the loveliness of the spring night only intensifies the loneliness of the woman in her room” and “a sustained account of her misery and listlessness” (2013, p. 383). But woman in Li Qingzhao’s *ci* enjoys every moment of spring, she detects “how attractive everything is, both inside and outside” and focuses “on minute physical detail, and they are all pleasing” (2013, p. 383). However, R. Egan uses Li Qingzhao’s *ci* just as an example of various interpretations by different commentators, and the very way she achieved this effect has escaped his field of vision. However, it is precisely the absence of rhyme in the first line that leads to an emotional change in *ci*: Li Qingzhao’s *ci* is full of joy, and there is no hint of anxiety, loneliness and sorrow as in Xue Zhaoyun’s *ci*.

Conclusion

Unlike the majority of male and female poets of the Song dynasty, Li Qingzhao tried to go beyond traditional ideas about writing *ci*: she made changes not only in the use of conventional themes and images, introduced the love theme and romantic sentiments from a female perspective, but also revised the foundations of *ci* composition and their prosodic norms. Thus, she managed to create a new poetic language for *ci*, develop some rules for this genre and lay the foundation for her distinctive personal style – Yi’an style. The next articles will be devoted to the specific features of Li Qingzhao’s mature *ci* and the further evolution of her poetic style.

(closed) syllable and *zhuo* (濁) as a female (open) syllable (2016, p. 67). Regarding the other terms mentioned by Li Qingzhao the researchers did not make any assumptions.

¹⁹ There are three *ci* with rhyme modifications: in *ci* to the tune *Manifold Little Hills* (小重山) Li Qingzhao did not use rhyme according to *cipu*; in *ci* to the tune *Short Version. Magnolia Flower* (減字木蘭花) she changed the tone of the rhyme from *ze* to *ping*; in *ci* to the tune *The Auspicious Partridge* (瑞鷓鴣) she used two different types of *ping* rhymes, which “与词体不合” (“should not be done in *ci* genre”) (Xu Beiwen, 2015, p. 309).

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