HIGH VERSUS LOW: ELITE CRITICISM AND POPULAR LYRICS

by

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Abstract

Between the seventh and twelfth centuries, a new kind of popular song developed in China through the merging of Central Asian music with local folk tunes, enjoying widespread currency among urbanites, and then later among elite circles. Two strongly contrasting categories of song lyrics, or *ci*, emerged in the course of this development: the popular song, characterized by its directness, colloquialism, artistic simplicity and occasional “vulgarity,” and the elegant, refined pieces of most elite writers. Today many readers are misled by traditional elite criticism’s view of *ci* as primarily a “high” art, believing that emotional restraint is its fundamental characteristics. This dissertation attempts to redress this misconception by studying the genre in its original historical and cultural context and challenging the wholesale adoption of the elite aesthetics of *ci* criticism. While acknowledging the mutual influence of popular and elite lyrics, the thesis contends that the former served a different audience and had their own artistic functions, and thus a different aesthetic standard must be applied to their study and appreciation.

The dissertation is in four chapters. Chapter one compares the attitudes of Western and Chinese scholars toward popular art, suggesting that the class background of the artists should not be the sole yardstick for aesthetic value judgements, that we should not exaggerate the political implications of popular culture, and that “high” and “low” culture frequently influence each other. Chapter Two attempts to discern distinctive aesthetic qualities and stylistic features of the anonymous Tang and Song popular lyrics. The third chapter focuses on the “vulgar” lyrics of the elite writer Liu Yong (fl. 1034), asserting that popular art is accessible to audiences and cultural producers from all economic and intellectual classes. The last chapter is a study of three strategies that the elite critics used to elevate the status of the *ci*, especially their attempts to establish a reputable genealogy for the genre, their imposition of elite aesthetics on popular lyrics and their insistence on the practice of selecting refined lyrics for their anthologies.
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Inscription to My Ph.D. Dissertation

The elegant and the vulgar, which should one treasure?
And who can tell the aim of the Ying singer?
Should he hold "White Snow" alone superior,
Why sing "North Bank" still to please the commoners?
About writings, certainly there are high and low,
But emotions, hard to judge deep or shallow.
Thus Liu the Seventh was not a rake,
His true heart expressed, both gravity and lightness slake.

雅俗紛紜孰可珍
鄙中歌者誰為陳
既持白雪成孤詣
盍進陽阿悅眾賓
聘筆雖關高下別
言情難定淺深論
從知柳七非儉薄
並撮莊諧寫至真

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Introduction

The Ci 詞, or “song lyric,” was a new poetic genre developed between Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) China through the merging of music from Central Asia with local folk tunes. Initially, the cultural value of the ci was secondary to music, and entertainment was its primary concern, whether at court feasts, wine shops, pleasure quarters or private banquets. Later, in the Song dynasty (960-1279), as elite poets increasingly tried their hand at the new genre following regulated tonal and metrical patterns—the so-called “filling in words in accordance with musical notes” (yi sheng tian ci 依聲填詞)—emphasis shifted from oral performance to written text, and an effort to elevate the literary status of the ci took place. From then on, the form gradually became dissociated from music and the public audience. In the process of this status transformation, a major principle of ci writing was formulated: its content and modes of expression should be “elegant and orthodox” (ya zheng 雅正), directly resulting in the stylistic restraint and thematic narrowness of the elite lyric.

Ample evidence has shown that the ci lyric with its accompanying music was tremendously popular among urban commoners before its complete separation from oral performance. However, the attitude of elite ci critics, deeply influenced by Confucian literary aesthetics, was generally one of disapproval toward this popularity. For them, the more popular a work was, the lower its artistic value. The “faults” of the popular lyric were its colloquialisms, its commonplace and

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straightforward expressions, its “vulgarity,” or simply its open acceptance by too many uneducated people. Their attitude bears a striking similarity to that of Western scholars, especially those who witnessed the radical effects of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of mass culture. The aim of this dissertation is to criticize the habitual practice of imposing elite aesthetics on “lower” art through a comparison with similar reactions by Western and Chinese scholars to popular culture, and to redress the widely circulated present misconception, fostered by the dominant influence of traditional elite criticism, that ci writing was largely a “high art.”

Before we proceed to a comparison between Western and Chinese theories on popular culture, the definition of the term “popular” itself must be clarified. First, we will examine its Western origin, keeping in mind that these definitions are only tentative and are subjected to differing contexts and usages that vary from critic to critic.

“Popular” was originally a legal term derived from the Latin word *populus*, which means “the people” in general and “the people” in relation to law. The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s list of modern definitions includes the following:

1) pertaining to, or consisting of the common people, or the people as a whole as distinguished from any particular class; constituted or carried on by the people;
2) intended for or suited to ordinary people, [i.e.] adapted to the understanding or taste of ordinary people;
3) finding favour with or approved by the people; liked, beloved, or admired by the people, or by people generally; and
4) prevalent or current among, or accepted by, the people generally.

Clearly, the words “people” and “popular” are cognates. I will consider a cultural product—in this case, a *ci* lyric—“popular” only if it can meet at least one of the above conditions.

However, the word “popular,” when used in economic, social and political realms, is far more complicated than a specific definition given in a dictionary.

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3 *The Oxford English Dictionary.*
From the capitalist point of view, for example, the popularity of a product is measured by the quantitative index of sales. A typical Marxist, on the other hand, views popular culture as an ideological weapon of the common people to resist the cultural dominance of the ruling classes. But the word's meaning becomes most elusive and intricate when discussed in the field of cultural studies, where critics tend to present various denotations and immediately point out the problems of each, avoiding a fixed definition. Our discussion starts with four basic, currently influential definitions given by Raymond Williams (1921-1988). These include:

1) inferior kinds of work, such as popular literature;
2) work deliberately setting out to win favour, for example, popular journalism and popular entertainment;
3) work well-liked by many people; and
4) the recent sense that it is the culture actually made by people for themselves.\(^4\)

The first two definitions are obviously pejorative, and one can successfully use them to describe the general view of traditional criticism toward popular and vulgar lyrics. The flaws of these definitions are apparent. Some popular works are certainly not inferior: Canonized works such as Shakespeare's dramas and the Chinese classical novel *Journey to the West* were popular among the common people; undoubtedly, certain contemporary popular arts may also have the potential to be canonized by later generations. As well, some ultimately popular works are not produced solely for the purpose of winning popular favour. For example, Paul McCartney's "Hey Jude" was written for John Lennon's son. Definition three—that a popular work is a work well-liked by many people—seems acceptable, but Tony Bennett rejects it because it "permits of hardly any exclusions." He contends that if this definition is followed, anything—"high culture," or even products not in the cultural field—can justifiably claim to be "popular." According to Bennett, "popular culture" in the strictest sense should

\(^4\) Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 199.
exclude works which are categorized into the “officially sanctioned ‘high culture’.” In other words, “popular culture,” in Bennett’s opinion, is inherently similar to “low culture,” “vulgar culture,” or the “culture of common people.” Definition four, that it is a culture made by people for themselves, is also problematic for some: It excludes works produced by the elite for the people. The literati poet Liu Yong’s (fl. 1034) popular and “vulgar” lyrics clearly catered to popular tastes. Thus, only if we accept that the elite is also part of the group of “ordinary people” can this definition be valid. However, such a definition is currently widely acknowledged in the field of cultural studies, because it is said to clearly distinguish popular culture—that made by and for the people themselves—from mass culture, which is produced by the dominant classes such as capitalists for the people, allegedly in order to exploit and manipulate them.

In addition to Bennett’s argument above, he also finds three other commonly accepted definitions of popular culture unsatisfactory. The first definition sees popular culture as a “residual category consisting of those cultural forms that are ‘left over’ once the sphere of high culture has been defined.” This, he concludes, is arbitrary, as works may “be moved across [cultural] boundaries.” For example, he argues that many early Hollywood films originally categorized as popular culture products have been canonized through the application of the auteur theory (e.g. Hitchcock’s movies), precisely the upward mobility of Shakespeare’s dramas. But he ignores the question of who elevates them. He also rejects the remaining two definitions: forms “imposed from above” onto a passive populace, and works of the people that “emerge from below.” He claims these definitions still rely on a series of distinctions, thus focusing on one aspect at the expense of the other. Influenced by Antonio Gramsci’s (1891-1937) hegemony theory,
Bennett sees the field of popular culture as a specific area of resistance to dominant ideological forms, and suggests historicizing it—not seeing it as a set of particular types or forms of culture, but as a distinctive mode of organization of cultural relationships between classes. Though unwilling to commit to definition, he finally draws the following conclusion:

The concept [of popular culture] should be used to refer to the historically specific alignment of the relationships between the culture and ideology of the dominant classes and the culture of subordinated classes that is defined by the specific forms, means and mechanisms--principally commercial--through which the latter is penetrated by and articulated with the latter in industrial capitalist societies.9

Unfortunately, like many Neo-Marxist theorists, he seems to (deliberately?) complicate the issue rather than clarify it, drifting increasingly further away from the most common concept of “popular,” that is, “well-liked by many people.” In his conclusion, there is nothing that relates directly to the very meaning of “popular culture.” What it concerns are mainly politics and contentions contextualized exclusively within modern capitalist society. Popular culture as a cultural form itself and its relationship with other types of human societies are generally ignored.

One may recognize from the above discussion that the term “popular” does not necessarily connote “low” or “vulgar.” Some refined works by elite artists are indeed popular among ordinary people, while it should also be noticed that much material made for or by the populace never becomes popular at all.10 Beethoven’s symphonies, at certain times and places, could have been more popular than most

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9 Bennett 28.
10 Sales figures provided by Simon Frith show that about 80 per cent of popular music records actually lose money. Also, according to Paul Hirsch’s calculation, at least 60 per cent of singles released are never played. Quoted in John Storey, An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 107.
popular and folk music. Nevertheless, many cultural critics past and present tend to connect “low” and “vulgar” with popular culture, in order to distinguish it from the elite culture, while works categorized as “middle-brow” are regarded by some elite critics as debased forms of “high” art, and are equally allocated to the “low” and “popular” spheres. According to Dwight Macdonald, for example, “There is nothing more vulgar than sophisticated kitsch” (mass culture), such as the late Hollywood and Broadway productions, because, he claims, “they too have become standardized.”

He terms audiences and cultural producers who indulge in this kind of art the “midcult,” criticizing them for borrowing unconsciously from, and sometimes altering, “high culture” for their own interests but refusing to participate in “real” art. Therefore, from an elitist (and traditional ci critic’s) point of view, “middle-brow” is basically not much different from “low-brow,” except that the former disguises itself with certain borrowed characteristics of “high” art. People who attend Broadway musicals and listen to “pop” classical music, such as Rossini’s “William Tell Overture” or Bizet’s “Carmen,” can be so categorized. Cultural producers, such as Liu Yong, who waver between the two cultural strata, have also been reproved for lowering their artistic standards on occasion to please the public.

In retrospect, I realize when using the term “popular” to describe the numerous ci lyrics replete with “vulgar” and unrefined expressions, I was obliged to ask if all of them were generally “popular” in the sense that the populace liked them. The tendency of the Western critics to equate “low” culture with popular

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13 One may argue objectively that “middle-brow” should not be confused with “low-brow,” because clear distinctions still exist between them: the Broadway musical audience is still culturally more “sophisticated” than the “pop” music audience, though it is far from able to appreciate music of more “serious” type. But the fact is that such an approach was not seen in ci criticism. Chinese scholars, in their treatment of ci pieces or writers which could be categorized into the “midcult” sector, would generally either share Macdonald’s opinion or approve them from a populist standpoint. To avoid confusion, here I will arbitrarily divide scholars into two groups--proponents and opponents of popular culture, while realizing that some of them may adopt a “middle-brow” approach.
culture, however, has removed this doubt, though my dilemma regarding the term “popular” has at the same time been further aggravated by their arguments. I further realize that my studies of Dunhuang and Song anonymous lyrics and those of Liu Yong do not seem to contradict popular culture theory in general, since these works are widely acknowledged as not only “low” and “unrefined,” but also “popular.”

In China, before the term “popular” (liu xing 流行) came into existence in recent decades, scholars generally employed the word su 俗, usually translated as “common,” “ordinary,” or “vulgar,” to describe works widely accepted by the common people. Its combination with “culture” (wen hua 文化), or “literature” (wen xue 文学) in modern times is more or less equivalent to what we now call “folk culture” or “folk literature.” Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898-1958) defines su wen xue as follows:

What is su wen xue? Su wen xue is literature which is easily understood. It is folk literature, and the literature of ordinary people. In other words, what we call su wen xue is something which cannot enter the hall of great elegance, is not treasured by scholar-officials, and yet is popular among ordinary people who love and enjoy it. 什麼是『俗文學』？『俗文學』就是通俗的文學，就是民間的文學，也就是大眾的文學。換一句話，所謂俗文學就是不登大雅之堂，不為學士大夫所重視，而流行於民間，成爲大眾所嗜好，所喜悅的東西。14

Here the term su wen xue clearly denotes both “folk” and “popular” literature. Zheng also specifically includes literary forms widely accepted by ordinary people in ancient times, one of which is the ci lyric.

However, the ci lyric and ci music certainly are not just forms of folk culture in the modern sense. Although they might have “grown up from below” and possess many characteristics of folk songs (e.g. spontaneity, direct and simple expression, and a close relationship with oral performance), they are still different

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14 Zhongguo su wenxue shi 中國俗文學史 (History of Chinese Popular Literature) (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1954), 1. All translations are mine except where indicated.
from folk songs in several respects. First, unlike most folk songs in the past, which flourished in rural areas, ci and its music were produced alongside the rise of urban culture and economy in the Tang and Song periods. Second, it was used by professional entertainers to make a living, and was thus considered by some as a commercial product, aimed chiefly at profit rather than mutual or self-amusement (except when later elite poets took up the ci form to develop it into an independent literary genre). Third, and most importantly, is the difference in the nature of performance between the two genres. Performance of folk songs was regarded as more spontaneous, and the feelings of the performers more genuine while the routine, profit-oriented ci music performance was relatively standardized. Zheng's indiscriminate categorization of both the ci and folk songs into the same group uses too broad a definition, though it is true that both may have been practiced and enjoyed by the common audience. To distinguish the two forms properly, the current terms “popular culture” (liu xing wen hua 流行文化) and “folk culture” (min jian wen hua 民间文化) are used. The former term mainly refers to mass-produced, commercial works, while the latter to folk arts, religions and customs, which are relatively less commercialized. But since both literary forms were viewed by the elite class as “low” culture in the past, it will be practicable for the moment to lump them together (along with the

15 According to Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1970), standardization is the essential distinctive quality of popular songs. See his “On Popular Music,” in Storey, Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 205-208. His theory will be discussed in chapter one. One may argue that there is abundant evidence of ci songs moving listeners to tears, but we should be aware that most of these were non-public performances within elite circles. The singing girls were either concubines or close friends of the listeners, and usually shared the same feelings with their patrons. This kind of activity had in fact already become part of the elite culture.

16 In Macdonald’s opinion, folk art “was a spontaneous, autochthonous expression of the people shaped by themselves,” while mass culture “is fabricated by technicians hired by businessmen; its audiences are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying.” Macdonald, 60. It should be noticed that in talking about mass culture, Macdonald specifically refers to mass-produced cultural forms, while the term “popular culture” is more inclusive. When Zheng wrote his book, the term “popular culture” still had not appeared in China. All cultural forms popular among ordinary people were simply defined as “su culture,” no matter if they were ancient or contemporary. Thus, a popular novel, that is a novel which is “easily understood,” would be called tongsu xiaoshuo 通俗小说.
so-called "middle-brow" culture) as a group in contrast to "high" culture.\textsuperscript{17}

In addition to the terminological problem of the term "popular," another difficulty in using the theory of popular culture is that its origin and referent are connected entirely and inextricably to modern Western society. Modern cultural forms, such as the romance novel, magazine, newspaper, television, cinema, as well as the study of mass production and advertising, are generally the theory's principal topics. These highly commercialized cultural forms are greatly distanced from those in the Western past, including its folk culture, let alone those in ancient China.

Nevertheless, my intention in adopting and selecting particular comments from Western cultural theorists (especially in chapter one) is to demonstrate the striking similarity between Western and conventional Chinese scholars' attitudes toward popular and folk arts, and to show that cultural elitism is a common phenomenon in both the East and the West in any given period. The positive comments made by modern Western cultural critics can also be used to support the formation of my theoretical framework in challenging the elite ci criticism. For example, Pierre Bourdieu's "popular aesthetics" is borrowed in chapter two to help establish an aesthetic distinction between elite and popular lyrics, so as to enable myself to analyze popular lyrics without relying on traditional ci aesthetics. In doing so, I will compare two lyrics, one by a prominent elite writer and the other by an anonymous writer of lower literacy and will quote Bourdieu's theory to illuminate why these two pieces and their readers are aesthetically different. Raymond Williams's theory is mentioned in chapter one as well as in chapter four because he is the most representative theorist who speaks in favour of the "familiar art" and studies it from a socioeconomic point of view, which is also my approach in studying the popular lyric. His theory is applicable in two

\textsuperscript{17} I do not mean that we should neglect the distinction between folk art and popular art. In fact, modern cultural critics and Confucian scholars adopt different attitudes toward each of them. But both groups are often internally contradictory and inconsistent. Worst of all, due to the lack of viable records, we now find it difficult to distinguish which was "genuine" folk art and which was commercial product. It is also possible that a particular work might have comprised characteristics of both.
aspects. First, he claims that “familiar art” can be great art as well, although he
does not, like Bourdieu, clarify the different functions and aesthetics of “strange
art” and “familiar art” in detail. Second, his discussions of selective tradition and
the different levels of culture provide an insightful hint to my criticism of the
elite editors’ practice of purifying *ci* anthologies. Stuart Hall and Paddy
Whannel’s proposition to categorize “popular art” within popular culture initiates
an argument that not all artistic works in popular culture are inferior. Gans takes
this argument further by contending that culture is not an invariable unchanging
phenomenon; rather, it can be produced and consumed by people from all classes
and is subject to mobility. However, the theory of cultural populists like John
Fiske’s is questioned because it tends to exaggerate the political sensibilities of
the ordinary consumers, an approach very similar to the Han exegetes’ allegorical
interpretations of folk poems.

In chapter one, “High Versus Low,” the long-standing debate between
proponents of elite and popular (or folk) arts will be presented. This chapter also
touches on how certain Western cultural theories can be related to my criticism of
elite *ci* aesthetics. The reason for my choice of Western critics has been explained
above, whereas the selection of the opinions of Chinese scholars concerning
popular art is based on whether they are critical in shaping, or supporting and
following, traditional Chinese literary theory, which is in fact the basis for the
formation of elite *ci* aesthetics. For example, the criticism of Zheng and Wei
music is the fountainhead of all Chinese elite strictures on popular art. Also, Liu
Xie’s 劉勰 (ca. 466-520) condemnation of *Yuefu* poetry typically represents the
cultural nostalgia shared by most of the conventional Chinese scholars, including
many of the *ci* critics, who strenuously attempted to establish a reputable
genealogy for the *ci*, deriving it from ancient canons such as the *Book of Songs*
and *Elegies of Chu*. The Chinese scholars’ celebration of popular art, such as the
satirical poems by Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) and the “new novels” of Liang
Qichao 梁啓超 (1873-1929), though ostensibly meant to favour colloquial
writings, nevertheless betray these two authors’ obsession with the educative and
moralistic function of literature.

The discussion of Chinese elite criticism in this chapter is presented in a more or less historical order, stretching from the first to the twentieth century, showing that the attitudes of Chinese elite critics toward popular arts are consistently in accord with Confucian aesthetic theory; whereas the discussion on Western cultural critics is mainly used as a supportive framework with materials largely drawn from the twentieth century. The reason is that Western popular culture theory was not developed until the modern period, and most critical works on popular culture theory deal with modern Western society. A more thorough comparison between the attitudes of Western and Chinese scholars concerning popular art must await a specific study which will involve many difficulties that this dissertation cannot possibly handle, such as the historical and cultural contexts which generated these attitudes and how the Western and Chinese popular arts can be historically related to each other. Readers are, therefore, suggested to use Western popular culture theory mainly as a reference to assist their understanding of traditional Chinese literary theory, in preparation for a detailed discussion of traditional ci criticism in the next three chapters.

Chapter two will focus on the anonymous Tang and Song popular lyrics which I take as popular art made by and for the ordinary people. In this chapter, as mentioned above, I will attempt to establish the aesthetic distinction between the "elite" and "popular" lyrics and to examine the latter's stylistic features. Chapter three will analyze the causes which led to the elite poet Liu Yong's devotion to lower taste and the popular elements in his "vulgar" lyrics. Liu's case testifies to the fact that cultural producers of different social backgrounds can be influenced by arts of higher or lower levels. The elite critics' strictures on him will also be criticized through the study of the class attributes of these Confucian scholars. Chapter four will first present the ci's disrepute in its early stages, based mainly on anecdotes found in Song sources. The core of this chapter points out the fallacy of traditional ci criticism in its rejection of the popular origin of the genre by focusing on three strategies the elite critics used in their attempt to elevate the
literary status of the ci, and their promotion of an elegant and orthodox ci aesthetic. In chapters two to four, Western theory of popular culture will still be used to support my argument wherever possible, during which one should also bear in mind the overall picture of “high versus low” explored in the first chapter.
Chapter One: “High Versus Low”

A man who sang in [the Chu capital] Ying, first moved thousands to sing along to his songs “Rustic Lane” and “People from Ba.” Next he sang “Northern Bank” and “Dew on the Shallots,” and several hundred joined in. Then, with “Sunny Spring” and “White Snow,” no more than a few dozen responded. Finally, starting from the note shang, he accentuated the note yu, mingling them with the flowing sound of the zhi note. Only a few persons in the capital could follow him. This was because the more elegant the song, the fewer people were able to respond. 

This story is narrated in “Reply to the Inquiry of the King of Chu” ascribed to Song Yu (ca. third century BC). Song, who was then a literary attendant in the Chu court, used it to justify himself when the king queried, “Why do all the people not praise you highly?” He replied that it was because the commoners did not have the ability to appreciate his superior personality and moral conduct. Originally not intended for aesthetic debate, this anecdote gradually became a locus classicus in literary and art criticism, with the songs “Sunny Spring” and “White Snow” representing refined, but unappreciated works, like “caviar to the general,” while “Rustic Lane” and “People from Ba” became the paradigms for lower class art.

Similar messages have been expressed by Western scholars. William Hazlitt (1778-1830), who regarded the rise of public taste as a threat to individual creativity and a decay of the arts, believed that in any given society, the judges of art should always be small in number.

The highest efforts of genius, in every walk of art, can never be understood by the generality of mankind. There are numberless beauties and truths

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which lie far beyond their comprehension.  

With the blossoming of democracy and the onset of the Industrial Revolution, many Western scholars increasingly feared that the cultural standard of the elite class would undergo a levelling. They were also concerned about the degeneration of moral standards, which they saw as the inevitable result of the growing number of diversions the "inferior arts" made accessible with the increase of leisure time. In the following section, I will first examine how certain Western scholars viewed popular culture from the late nineteenth to the twentieth century, which was the period of the rise of Western popular culture theory. These anxieties to a certain extent resemble those of the Confucian scholars, though they posit their opinions in very different historical and cultural contexts, and are partly applicable to our study of elite ci criticism as well as Confucian literary theory. This will be followed by a discussion of liberal and populist opinions.

**Part 1: Cultural Elitism**

I. Western Cultural Pessimists in the Modern Periods

Popular culture theory was developed mainly in nineteenth-century England. The English cultural arena, which used to be entirely dominated by the elite, began to undergo a fundamental change. Knowledge became more available in urban areas, and its patent was no longer held by the select few. As urban folk, especially female readers, became more conscious of and eager to advance their learning, taking active parts in leisure and other activities, the growth in consumption of popular literature, such as novels, magazines and newspapers, reached  

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3 The discussion of popular culture in the Western intellectual world, though certainly practiced prior to the nineteenth century, flourished widely at this time, ushering in the theoretical foundations of its present form. Many contemporary studies thus set the nineteenth century as the initial stage of popular culture theory, notably John Storey’s *An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (1993) and Dominic Strinati’s *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture* (1995).
unprecedented levels. With the increase in size of the reading public came the emergence of circulating libraries, “bluestocking clubs” (women’s reading groups) and clubs of readers in coffee houses. Theatres also resorted to “spectacular” operas and a variety of sensational devices to attract audiences. All these were thought to be symptoms of cultural degeneration and causes of political instability by cultural pessimists.

1. Matthew Arnold The first important Western scholar who specifically holds popular culture as the prime culprit for causing political instability is Matthew Arnold (1822-1888). His epoch-making book *Culture and Anarchy* formed the key tenets for the modern theory of popular culture. As an Inspector of schools, Arnold was particularly concerned with the question of morality. For him, culture was the pursuit of total “perfection,” a perfection which could bring harmony, or “sweetness and light,” to all parts of human society. He severely criticized those who tried to give the masses “an intellectual food prepared and adapted to the way they think proper for the actual condition of the masses.” This “food,” he points out, is ordinary popular literature. He contends that “culture” does not try to win the favour of inferior classes with ready-made judgements and watchwords, rather, “it seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere.”

Arnold’s fear of an uprising among the populace was provoked by the Hyde Park affair of 1866. Following the defeat of the Reform Bill and the Liberal government, a huge crowd burst into the popular middle-class Londoner “pleasure garden” and trampled the flower-beds. According to Arnold, this intrusion not only symbolized an encroachment on the prerogatives of the well-to-do citizens,

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6 Arnold 70.
7 Dover Wilson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *Culture and Anarchy*, xxv-xxvii.
but more importantly signalled a tendency toward anarchy. In *Culture and Anarchy* he argues that the assertion of personal liberty in the modern democratic system only encourages the uncivilized Englishman to “do what he likes, enter where he likes, hoot as he likes, threaten as he likes, smash as he likes.” Even worse, this Englishman strives to set his foot in the affairs of state. But he is “too undeveloped and submissive hitherto to join the game,” and “when he does come, he comes in immense numbers, and is rather raw and rough.”⁸ For this reason, Arnold stresses that a powerful State authority, supervised by the select few, is needed to defend against anarchy, acting as an organ for the propagation of “sweetness and light.”

It is in this credo of central authority that Arnold’s disparagement of popular culture and democracy is rooted. Since “culture” in his view is fundamentally authoritarian in nature, when he says “too many cooks spoil the broth,”⁹ we understand that this broth is of one single flavour, a flavour which suits a minority taste and is presumed to be the finest. Other people cannot voice their dislikes, because, in Arnold’s opinion, they possess neither the right nor the skill to take part in the “cookery.” He reiterates in another passage:

> The highly-instructed few, and not the scantily-instructed many, will ever be the organ to the human race of knowledge and truth. Knowledge and truth, in the full sense of the words, are not attainable by the great mass of the human race at all.¹⁰

Such an opinion, widely echoed by cultural critics in the first half of the twentieth century, reminds us of the messages put forward by Hazlitt and Song Yu.

Arnold’s emphasis on cultural authority is strikingly similar to Confucian scholars’ opinions regarding cultural order, which will be explored in detail in chapter three when we discuss why Confucian critics are so hostile to Liu Yong and his popular lyrics. In short, both contend that without cultural order, political order will not be successfully achieved.

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⁸ Arnold 76, 81.
⁹ Arnold 81.
2. The Leavisites

The publication of three important works in the early 1930s by F. R. Leavis (1895-1978) and his followers continued the Arnoldian evaluation of popular culture. Whereas Arnold criticizes popular culture for its purported threat to political stability, the Leavisites perceive it as the major cause of cultural degeneration. To F. R. Leavis, for example, "culture has always been in minority keeping." The majority in a given society is bereft of the right to possess it.

In any period it is often [on] a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is . . . only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgment. They are still a small minority, though a larger one, who are capable of endorsing such first-hand judgment by genuine personal response. The accepted valuations are a kind of paper currency based on a very small proportion of gold.

However, the rise of popular culture, especially popular literature, in the modern period threatened the privilege of the minority and lulled away many artists from the pursuit of high art to the production of commercial art. Therefore, to Leavisites, popular culture is a culture of "standardization and levelling down" which contributes to an increasing cultural decline in the twentieth century. In order to continually keep culture in "minority keeping," they contend that, even if the cultural minority can no longer dictate deference to its values and judgments because of the collapse of traditional authority, it still has the responsibility to preserve the literary tradition and human civilization. For this reason, they propose to "introduce into schools a training in resistance [to the influence of popular culture]," and outside schools, to have the form of resistance taken "by an armed and conscious minority." In other words, they consider education and collective resistance of the elite class the only ways to protect their small cultural garden.

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11 These works include: F. R. Leavis's *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*, Q. D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public*, and F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson's *Culture and Environment*.


The Leavisite dislike of popular culture is chiefly engendered by their persistent longing for an imagined cultural golden age, "a mythic rural past,"\textsuperscript{15} which refers to pre-industrialized England when urbanization and public education were still undeveloped. For example, F. R. Leavis claims that "what we have lost is the organic community with the living culture it embodied."\textsuperscript{16} In this rural community, he believes, people were able to produce art in accord with the natural environment and their life experiences. The use of machines and the coming of the new era, however, violates this harmonious pattern of life. The problem of this theory is its failure to discern the backwardness and evils of the old rural cultural system. As Raymond Williams contends,

\begin{quote}
\begin{quote}
it is foolish and dangerous to exclude from the so-called organic society the penury, the petty tyranny, the disease and mortality, the ignorance and frustrated intelligence which were also among its ingredients.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

The Leavisites' strong attachment to the past is also caused by their belief that before the Industrial Revolution, there was a "common culture" in England which was uncorrupted by commercial interests and was shared by both the elite and ordinary people. The most significant example, according to Q. D. Leavis, is Elizabethan drama. She believes that though the spectator "might not be able to follow the 'thought' minutely in the great tragedies," he "was getting his amusement from the mind and sensibility that produced those passages, from an artist and not from one of his own class."\textsuperscript{18} Ultimately, what the Leavisites insist on is the absolute dominance of a culture guarded by the select few, so that all others are subordinated to their taste and effectively prevented from penetrating its power structures. Their nostalgic longing for rural England is also reminiscent of the viewpoint of Confucian scholars, that art and literature in antiquity were

\textsuperscript{15} Storey, \textit{An Introductory Guide}, 31.
\textsuperscript{16} Leavis, \textit{Culture and Environment}, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{18} Q. D. Leavis, \textit{Fiction and the Reading Public}, 264. A similar phenomenon can be found in traditional Cantonese opera, which was very popular in Canton in the first half of this century. The general audience, however, did not always seem to fully understand the texts, as it was replete with classical language and allusions.
always superior to the present. In order to elevate the literary status of *ci* lyric, Confucian critics also endeavour to establish for the *ci* a reputable genealogy from the ancient canons. Such a practice, or strategy, will be dealt with in chapter four.

3. The Frankfurt School and Antonio Gramsci

For Arnold and the Leavisites, popular culture is a genuine threat to cultural and social authority. The relationship between high and low culture takes the form of psychological resistance and incursion. An alternative viewpoint is put forward by the Frankfurt School and cultural critics influenced by Antonio Gramsci’s (1891-1937) hegemony theory. The Frankfurt School was formed by a group of German left-wing intellectuals in 1923. Their theory is built upon the question of why the working-class’s revolutionary overthrow of capitalism had not happened. The reason, they conclude, is that the dominant class maintains its control over the subordinated classes not only by means of suppression, but also through negotiations and concessions. It provides a culture industry for the masses that produces commodities to gratify their “false, material needs,” whereas their real needs, such as a better way of life, democracy and freedom, remain unfulfilled. Yet, the masses, numbed by the culture industry, are not aware that what they have fulfilled are only their material needs. In other words, these theories regard popular culture as a means of underpinning the status quo instead of impairing the existing capitalist social authority.¹⁹

Antonio Gramsci’s hegemony theory does not focus particularly on popular culture, but still shares some similar viewpoints with the Frankfurt School. For example, he contends that the prevailing power wins the passive or active consent of the dominable classes by making some economic concessions, given that such concessions would not touch the essential social and political order. Like Arnold, he also conceives of the State as the “educator.”

¹⁹ One of the most representative theorists of the Frankfurt School is Theodor Adorno. For a better understanding of his theory, see his “On Popular Music,” in Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, 202-214.
Every State is ethical inasmuch as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes.\(^\text{20}\)

In Gramsci's theory, the State "educates" the "subordinated" people to accept that the interests and cultural, moral values of the leading group are rational and universally valid. It also struggles to assimilate and to conquer "ideologically" the traditional intellectuals, making them the "deputies" of the leading group.\(^\text{21}\)

Private initiatives and activities, such as schools and religious organizations, perform an educative function similar to the state, helping to solidify the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes. But when all these fail, coercive power, or a repressive and negative educative apparatus such as law, will be used to enforce discipline on groups who do not "consent" to the prevailing ideology.\(^\text{22}\)

Plainly speaking, Gramsci perceives all these acts as a "conspiracy" of the ruling class to sustain its power.

The Frankfurt School and Gramsci's theory gives rise to many problems in studying the actual cultural forms in the West, such as that the political function of popular culture is all too easily exaggerated. It is also unconvincing if one applies it to popular cultures other than that of capitalist society. In imperial China, the obvious example is the "popular" ci lyric. It was produced specifically for ordinary people, but most do not seem to have the primary intention of "educating" them to support the ruling classes. Rather, it provoked severe attack from Confucian scholars, whose ideology had been always the fundamental guiding force for Chinese political institutions. It was the elegant ci (including those about romantic love) that contained most of the features of Confucian aesthetics, such as emotional restraint, and embodied its moral and cultural values. But the elegant ci generally did not make concessions to ordinary taste at all. Nevertheless, hegemony theory provides an alternative viewpoint in explaining why Confucian


\(^{21}\) Gramsci 218, 219.

\(^{22}\) Gramsci 219, 220, 221.
scholars vigorously advocated an "elegant and orthodox" style in *ci* writing. Chapter three will return to this theory with the discussion of the cultural attributes of the Confucian critics and their criticism of Liu Yong's "vulgar" lyrics.

II. The Chinese Traditionalists

Confucian scholars did not formulate a set of specific and systematic theories of popular and folk art. Their comments are chiefly formed on the basis of Confucian aesthetics, especially the exegesis of the *Shijing*, or the *Book of Songs*, the earliest collection of Chinese poetry. They thought that since poetry—or more precisely the folk song—was the expression of a person's state of mind, it could in a broader sense reflect the genuine conditions of ordinary people and the state of government affairs in a particular period and place. It also had the practical function of moral edification and keeping a society in "harmonious order." For this reason,

> The former kings relied on [poetry] to regulate the duties of husband and wife, to effectively inculcate filial obedience and reverence, to secure relations among people, to adorn the transforming influence of instruction, and to transform manners and customs. 先王以是經夫婦，成孝敬，厚人倫，美教化，移風俗。  

Resembling Arnold's assertion in *Culture and Anarchy*, that "the idea of beauty and of a human nature perfect on all its sides" is "the dominant idea of poetry," the above statement, however, refers only to poetry or folk songs deemed morally correct. Emotionally "licentious" pieces, according to Confucian scholars, should

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24 "The Great Preface," translation by Legge with my own modifications. Basically I will "consult" an existing translation if I have found one. However, adjustments may be made if the translation does not effectively bring out the original meaning, or does not conform syntactically with the original texts. For example, in this passage Legge's translation goes, "The former kings by this regulated..." is not as direct as "relied on [poetry] to regulate..."

25 Arnold 54.
be censored, because their pernicious content could encourage immorality in the audience and corrupt social values.

1. The Criticism of the Zheng and Wei Folk Songs

The most conspicuous—and probably earliest—examples of "licentious" pieces are the Zheng and Wei folk songs (Zheng Wei zhi yin 鄭衞之音) popular in the Eastern Zhou (770 BC-256 BC). The Han historian Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) offered the following explanation for their place of origin:

In the region of Wei there was the natural barrier of Sangjian at the upper reach of the Pu river, where men and women often gathered together. Music and sensual pleasures flourished there. Thus, it was commonly called the music of Zheng and Wei. 衛地有桑間濮上之阻，男女亦亟幽會，聲色生焉，故俗稱鄭衛之音。26

Zheng and Wei were two small neighbouring states. Their folk songs probably resembled each other in style and content, and were very different from the "elegant music" (ya yue 雅樂) highly esteemed by Confucian scholars.

Confucius once commented, "[If one intends to govern a country, one should] banish the songs of Zheng, and keep far from specious talkers; [because] the songs of Zheng are licentious, [and] specious talkers are dangerous." He also said, "I hate the way in which the songs of Zheng confound the elegant music."27

Another important comment on the Zheng and Wei folk songs can be found in the Liji 禮記 (Records of Rites). In the "Yueji" 樂記 ("Records of Music") section it says:

The music of Zheng and Wei was the music of a turbulent period. It was close to the lengthened sound. The music of Sangjian at the upper reach of Pu river was the music of the destruction of the state. The government fell apart, and its people became homeless. Slanders and acts of selfishness could not be checked. 鄭衛之音，亂世之音也，比於慢矣；

26 Ban Gu, Han shu 漢書 (History of the Han) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), vol. 4, 1665.
That the music contributed to "the destruction of the state" is largely based on the fact that Wei, in particular, was a politically unstable state, and its rulers were reputedly lewd and extravagant. From this statement we see that in Confucian aesthetic theory, there is no clear distinction made between arts and politics, and they are indiscriminately criticized together. When blaming the ruler, the entertainment and art he is fond of are also made scapegoats of social and political instability.

According to the "Yueji," "lengthened sound" (man sheng 慢 声 ) means that the five notes of the pentatonic scale (gong 宫 , shang 商 , jue 角 , zhi 徵 and yu 羽 ) are cacophonious, each breaking down the other. Only when they are put in order will "dissonance or ruined sound" (tie zhi zhi yin 堕 憂 之 音 ) be extinguished. It also stresses that there is an inseparable relationship between music and rites. The best music (de yin 德 音 , literally "virtuous sound") should be that which can facilitate moral edification, social harmony, and peaceful, benevolent administration. Music not in accord with these principles should be discouraged or banned.

The "Yueji" also records a conversation between Marquis Wen of Wei 魏 文 侯 (not the Wei state which produced "licentious" music) and Confucius's disciple Zi Xia 子 夏 in order to denounce "licentious" music. The Marquis confesses that when he listens to ancient "elegant" music, he will fall asleep; but when he listens to the music of Zheng and Wei or new music, he is delighted. Zi

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28 Sun Xidan 37: 23. The same texts can be found in Sima Qian 司 馬 遲 (ca. 140 BC--?), Shiji 史 記 (Records of the Historian) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), vol. 4, 1179-1225.
29 五 者 皆 亂 , 迭 相 陵 謬 之 慢 . Sun 37: 22. Zheng Xuan's 鄭 玄 (127-200) commentary states that though the music of Zheng "indulges in licentiousness and dissipates the will" (hao lan yin zhi 好 滅 惡 志 ), and Wei's is restless and annoying (cu su fan zhi 促 連 煩 志 ), they are not as pernicious as the "lengthened sound." Sun 37: 23.
30 Sun 37: 21.
31 Sun 38: 51-59.
Xia then compares ancient to new music, stating that the latter is morally corrupt. He defines the music of Zheng, Song, Wei and Qi as having *ni yin* (addictive tones), and contrasts it with “virtuous sound.” This music, he says, is licentious (*yin* 淫) and overindulgent (*ni* 惑); it can disturb (*fan* 煩) one’s will and make one arrogant (*jiao* 骁). He implicitly admonishes the Marquis to discard the new music, but whether or not his advice was heeded is not mentioned.

The distinction made by the “Yueji” between orthodox music and popular songs henceforth established an aesthetic standard which was later applied equally to literature and other forms of art. For example, Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531-590?) used the term “Zheng and Wei music” to explain why the literary works of his family were not appreciated by Xiao Yi 蕭繹 (502-557), the prince of Liang:

> The compositions of our family were exceptionally refined and correct [in principles]. They did not follow the prevalent style. When Emperor Yuan of Liang was still a prince, he edited the *History of New Literary Works of the West Office*. None of ours was collected in it. This was because they were not in accord with the world, and consisted of no tones of Zheng and Wei. This was what failed to be in accord with the world, and consisted of no tones of Zheng and Wei. Hence, neither of them was collected in it. This was because they were not in accord with the world, and consisted of no tones of Zheng and Wei.

Zheng and Wei music in this case denotes a literary style catering to contemporary, fashionable tastes represented by flowery language and delicacy. From the viewpoint of an elite like Yan, contemporary literature was never as excellent as the past. Their exclusion from the collection only indicated that they were far too

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32 Sun 38: 55; See also Zheng Xuan’s commentary in Sun, 38: 56.
33 According to the *History of Former Han*, the Duke did not accept Zi Xia’s advice. See Ban, *Han shu*, vol. 3, 1042. This conversation is comparable with Blaise Pascal’s (1623-1662) idea on diversion. In *Pensées* he questions if the king must be diverted from contemplation like ordinary folks and asks, “Would it not be a deprivation of his delight for him [the king] to occupy his soul with the thought of how to adjust his steps to the cadence of an air, or of how to throw [a ball] skillfully, instead of leaving him to enjoy quietly the contemplation of the majestic glory which encompasses him?” Pascal, *Pensees: The Provincial Letters*, trans. W.F. Trotter (New York: Modern Library, 1941), 53.
34 Yan Zhitui, *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (Family Instructions of the Yan Clan) (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 196-), *SBCKCB*, 21a-b.
good to be understood by ordinary people.

2. Liu Xie's Criticism of Yuefu Poetry

A new poetic genre called Yuefu shi 楊府詩, or Music Bureau poetry, was developed in the Han (206 BC-220 AD) dynasty. Its name was derived from a government music institution established around 120 BC. The duty of this bureau was to provide sacrificial music for ritual ceremonies and to collect folk songs from provincial areas and music from abroad for court entertainment. Among the major categories of the genre, the folk ballad is particularly worth noting: it not only vividly delineates the life of the Han people through its forthright expressions and simple language, but also its style greatly influenced major poets of later dynasties, especially Li Bai 李白 (701-762) and Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846). The characteristics of the ballad are summarized by Ban Gu as follows:

All of them are in response to joys and sorrows, and originate from [true] events. One may also observe from them the social customs and manners, and be able to distinguish the pure and honest from the mean. 皆於哀楽，緣事而發，亦可以觀風俗，知薄厚云。³⁵

Ban Gu’s remark emphasizes the spontaneity and realism of the ballad, and bestows on it an educational function corresponding to Confucian literary theory.

Though Ban Gu’s opinion toward Yuefu poetry was widely shared by ancient poets and scholars, Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 466-520), in his important work of literary criticism, the Wenxin diaolong 文心雕龍 (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons), expresses his general disapproval of the genre and compares it to the Zheng and Wei folk songs. Such a disapproval very possibly developed from Liu’s rejection of the prevailing ornamented literary style of his time, typified by the parallel rhyme-prose. It is partly for this reason that his Wenxin diaolong was written, with an attempt to revive the Confucian literary theory in a period

³⁵ Ban Gu, Han shu, vol. 4, 1756.
renowned for pleasure-seeking and renunciation of traditional values.  

Liu Xie first traces the origin of and comments on the Music Bureau in the following passage in the chapter “Yuefu”:

When Emperor Wu Di [r. 140 BC-87 BC] promoted rituals, the Music Bureau was first established. The music of Dai and Zhao was then collected, and the airs of Qi and Chu were brought together. [Li] Yannian composed lengthened tunes and harmonized them; and Zhu [Maichen] and [Si]ma [Xiangru, 179BC-117BC] wrote songs in the style of sao mode. The mixed melody of “Osmanthus Flowers” was beautiful but not classic; and the “Red Goose” and other pieces were high-flown but not refined. Liu Xie disapproves of both the folk ballads and the pieces composed by court musicians and poets because of their heterodox nature; and does not limit his disapproval to music, but also includes the lyric and its content. For example, he criticizes the Yuefu poetry of Cao Cao 曹操 (155-220), Cao Pi 曹丕 (187-226) and Cao Rui 曹叡 (205-239) as follows:

The three rulers of the Wei [220-265], quick-witted and richly endowed, cut up words and tunes to form sensuous music and commonplace rhythm. In their “Going Up North,” “Autumn Wind,” and so on, the themes are either convivial banquets or complaints against military campaigns; their meanings are no more than inordinate pleasures, with their language not exceeding mournful thoughts. Although their work is consistent with the

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36 For a detailed study on Liu Xie’s classicism, see Vincent Yu-chung Shih, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons: A Study of Thought and Pattern in Chinese Literature* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1983), xi-xlvi. Although Yu does not quite agree that Liu was a genuine classicist and argues that Liu’s “view of the scope of literature is broad,” he nevertheless points out how Liu incorporates Confucian literary theory into the *Wenxin diaolong*.

The Yuefu poetry of the Caos, especially of Cao Cao, is now valued as one of the best examples of the genre. Helping establish the “Jian’an” 建安 style, they borrowed titles from traditional Yuefu pieces and described turbulent current events, giving free rein to their feelings with rugged poetic language and vigorous expressions. The “Going Up North” and “Autumn Wind” denounced by Liu Xie had long been widely acknowledged as two excellent pieces, the former depicting the hardships suffered by the soldiers during a Northern expedition, and the latter about a solitary woman in her chamber longing for her wandering lover or husband. Poems on such themes certainly cannot avoid being emotional. But if in Liu Xie’s opinion they are too “excessive,” then in what kind of style should one write?

According to Liu Xie, since music is an art “originating from the devices of the mind,” and its influence can “penetrate one’s very fibre and marrow,” ancient sage-kings took great pains to check its excesses. But Yuefu music had lost the “even-tempered and harmonious sound” (zhong he zhi xiang 中和之 韻), the essential feature of “orthodox” music. It was merely an “addictive sound” much as the “Yueji” criticizes. Just as popular culture lures the general audience away from the “common culture” in the Leavisites’ theory, Liu also contends that Yuefu music and poetry are pernicious because they lure people away from the ancient, elegant work:

As for love songs, tender and sentimental, expressing resentful moods and the decision of final separation, they overflow with licentious words. How,

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38 Zhan 243. Translation based on Shih, 81. “Going Up North,” or “Bei shang,” is the first two words of the “Suffering From the Cold” 苦寒行, a song written by Cao Cao; “Autumn Wind” is the first two words of Cao Pi’s “Ballad of Yan” 燕歌行. See Guo, vol. 2, 496, 469. The “three modes of the Han” include the Ping 平, Qing 淸 and Se 瑟 modes. “Shao” and “Xia” were music of the ancient sage-kings Shun 尧 and Yu 舜, paradigms for virtuous music.
39 Zhan 229; Shih 79.
40 Zhan 232.
then, is it possible for legitimate sound to emerge? However, the popular
tastes of music prevail swiftly, indulging in competing with each other with
novel and strange [elements]. [When listening to] elegant chants, which are
gentle and full of dignity, people surely will stretch and yawn; but [when
they listen] to extraordinary language, as [their expressions] are extremely
intimate, they will slap their thighs and jump for joy. From then on both
poetry and music are directed towards the Zheng style. 

From here, we see the deep-rooted influences of Confucian aesthetics:
Contemporary popular art is inferior and licentious, because its language and
expressions are “extremely intimate” to human affections (qie zhi 切至), and its
major objective is merely to exploit “novel and strange” (xin yi 新异) devices
for a common audience like the theatre-goers in Goethe’s comments. The two
poems of the Caos mentioned above possess all these qualities of a “licentious”
work: both are intimate to human affections, and Cao Pi’s poem was written in the
unusual heptasyllabic form. For Liu Xie, it is only by rejecting this emotionally
excessive and unconventional poetry (and art) that a proper artistic style can be
regained. Yet, his primitivism is only a fancy nourished by a nostalgia for a
legendary period, an attitude commonly shared by ci critics of the later dynasties.

3. The Tradition of Folk Song Refinement
Since the folk song was thought to
be inferior in craftsmanship and occasionally immoral in content, Confucian
scholars had from the start the intention to “improve” its quality by expurgating its
“vulgar” elements and modifying it to fit their moral and aesthetic standards. This
refining process was sometimes done alongside a rigorous selection of the
collected folk pieces.

The earliest and most significant example of the selective tradition was the
compilation of the Shijing. According to Sima Qian’s Shiji,

41 Zhan 255. Translation based on Shih, 85. The love song about final separation probably refers to
the Han Yuefu piece “White Head Lament” 白頭吟, in which a woman declares her decision to
There were more than three thousand poems in ancient times. By the time of Confucius, the duplications had been eliminated, and those which could be applied to rites and righteousness were selected. Of the three hundred and five poems [he chose], Confucius set all of them to songs, in order to fit them to the music of “Shao,” “Wu,” “Ya” and “Song.”

To say that the original number of ancient poems was more than three thousand may be just conjecture, and that Confucius edited the Shijing simply fictitious. Nevertheless, it is highly possible that plenty of folk songs were excluded from the collection either because of their “licentious” content or unrefined qualities. Whatever happened, it is still certain beyond any doubt that the Shijing we read today had been screened by one or more ancient editors.

The practice of refining the literary quality of folk songs by a specific elite writer is first clearly indicated in Wang Yi’s Chuci zhangju (Commentaries on the Songs of Chu). The Chuci, or the Chu Elegies, emerged in south China in the Warring States period (475-221 BC), was originally used in shamanistic rituals for the purposes of rain-making, fortune-telling, the summoning of wandering souls and the treatment of illness. Abundant

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42 Sima Qian, vol. 6, 1936. “Wu” was a piece of music ascribed to King Wu of Zhou; “Ya” and “Song” were two categories of music in the Shijing. Together with “Shao,” they were all said to be elegant music.

43 In the Zuo Biographies it is recorded that in 544 BC, Ji Zha, the Prince of Wu, listened to a performance of the poems in the State of Lu, and the arrangement of the order of those poems was quite similar to the present Shijing version. In that year, Confucius was only eight years old, thus would have been impossible for him to compile and edit the poems. Du Yu (222-284), Chunqiu zuozhuan jijie (Collected Exegeses of the Annals of Spring and Autumn Period and the Zuo Biographies) (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1977), vol. 3, 1120-1122.

44 However, note that some pieces in the collection, especially those about romantic love, are not completely in accord with the Confucian morals of later periods. They are simply, as Confucius says in the Analects, “having no depraved thoughts” and that is all. No hidden or exalted meaning is contained. But the Han exegetes over-interpreted this statement and various others in the Analects, and thus moralized all the pieces allegorically, saying, for example, the “Guanju” is about the virtue of a certain prince or princess, and the “Qin wei” satirizes the debauchery of the people of Zheng. The ancient editor(s) of the Shijing might have approached their selective process from a moral standpoint, but their interpretations of the pieces and their reasons for selecting them could have been very different from the Han exegetes.
material in the collection, particularly the “Jiu ge” 九 歌 (“Nine Songs”), is about courting and love trysts: a shaman (or shamaness) quests for a goddess (or god) in order to win her (or his) favour. For this reason, the religious practices and their ritual songs were criticized as at best erotic and at worst vulgar and lewd. The refinement of the Chu folk songs, Wang Yi claims, was largely due to the efforts of Qu Yuan 屈 原 (ca. 340 BC-278 BC), the “first great poet” of China.

In the old days the people of Chu who lived in the area around Ying, that is, the southern capital of Chu, and the lands lying between the rivers Yuan and Xiang were a superstitious folk much addicted to a kind of religious rite in which they entertained various gods with singing, drumming and dancing. After his banishment, when Qu Yuan was living in hiding in this area, he would sometimes emerge to seek distraction from the burden of grief and care which oppressed him by observing the villagers at these religious festivals, singing and dancing to delight the gods. Seeing that the words of these songs were vulgar and uncouth, he then wrote the “Nine Songs” for the people.

Although Qu Yuan’s authorship of the “Jiu ge” is still a contentious issue, it does not rule out the possibility that a certain literatus had rewritten the shamanistic songs. The style and content of the song cycle probably remains very much the same as the folk pieces, but the literary language might have changed radically. Unfortunately, no folk song similar to this type is passed down for us to compare with the “Jiu ge.”

45 Wang Yi, Chuci zhangju (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1939), CSJC, 2: 24. Translation by David Hawkes with modifications, The Songs of the South (London: Penguin, 1985), 96. Wang’s statement is further elaborated by Zhu Xi 朱 熹 (1130-1220) in his Chuci jizhu 楚 辭 集 注 (Collected Commentaries on the Songs of Chu), in which he says, “The “Nine Songs” were composed by Qu Yuan... The customs of the barbarous region of Jing [i.e. South China] were rustic. Not only were the words [of the songs] inferior and vulgar, but the worship of yin and yang, as well as human beings and ghosts, was also not without a mixture of profanity, rudeness and licentiousness. As [Qu] Yuan was banished, when he saw these he was deeply moved. Therefore, he altered quite a few of the words, and removed the excessive elements... See Zhu, Chuci jizhu (Hong Kong: Jingzi yanjiushe, n.d.), 2: 29.
The influence of Wang Yi’s statement has been far-reaching. Elite poets of later times, particularly those who were banished from court and had the chance to hear the local folk tunes where they governed, often took Qu Yuan as a model when rewriting folk verse. Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772-842) and Su Shi 蘇軾 (1036-1101) are two good examples. In the following prefaces to their folk style poems, each clearly expresses his intention to refine “vulgar” songs.

In the first month, I came to Jianping. Children in the village sang “Bamboo Branch” together. . . . Though the rustic could not be distinguished [from other songs?], they were deep in emotion and lovely, resembling the love song “Qi Yu” [i.e., a piece in the Shijing]. In the old days, when Qu Yuan lived around Yuan and Xiang, he saw that the words of the songs which the villagers used to please the gods were inferior, and thus composed the “Nine Songs.” They are still played in Jing and Chu to this day. Therefore I also write nine pieces of the “Bamboo Branch” for those good at singing to spread far and wide. I attach these pieces at the end of my collection. Those of later generations, when they listen to the folk songs of Sichuan, will know where these modified tunes came from.

On a trip to the Mountain of Nine Immortals, I heard children in the village sing “Flowers on the Field Paths.” . . . So deep in emotion and lovely is the tune that when I heard it I felt sad. But the words are vulgar and unrefined, and thus I change them as follows . . .

One may notice that the approach of these prefaces is strikingly similar to Wang Yi’s statement on the “Jiu ge.” They all describe the words of folk verse as “vulgar” and “inferior” (bi lou 庶陋 or bi ye 庶野). From their point of view, this is the very reason that these folk verse should be rewritten (Liu even cites the

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example of Qu Yuan to support his desire to rewrite the “Bamboo Branch”). Such a snobbish attitude toward popular or folk art, as well as the fastidious selective practice, are also evident in conventional *ci* criticism and the process of anthologizing *ci* lyrics.

### Part 2: The Moderate and Optimistic View

#### I. The Western Moderates and Optimists in the Modern Period

Moderate and optimist opinions on popular culture were never lacking in the Western intellectual world, though they were rather dimmed by “the Pascalian condemnation of all entertainment.” In recent decades, when the more analytical, socioeconomic approach was adopted into the field and popular culture was increasingly accepted as an inseparable part of Western civilization, they finally succeeded in balancing the conservative attitude and now occupy the dominant position.

1. Raymond Williams and his “Long Revolution”  

The defensive stance the elite takes in regard to its own culture results in an aesthetic theory largely absorbed in the internal activities of the creative mind. Such a theory states that the artists are specially inspired, and that their task is to discover a “superior reality,” which is the direct expression of their purely “aesthetic” experience. It is not their fault if the meanings of their works are not successfully transmitted to others, but that of the others, who are advised to be patient in the process of understanding so as to accept them eventually. This opinion, that valuable art is “new” (different from the

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48 The ways in which these poets came into contact with folk songs were very much in common: they heard these songs from the villagers in remote regions during their banishment. But in their prefaces, Liu and Su did not reveal the fact that they were demoted. Instead, their unhappy situations were implied by their comments which described the folk songs as “deep in emotion,” again similar to Wang Yi. It is plausible, therefore, to say that the practice of refining the folk song does not merely stem from aesthetic conventions. Within it there are strong political overtones.

49 Lowenthal 45.

"new" elements in popular art which aim to please the commoners) and entirely creative, is rejected by Raymond Williams in his *Long Revolution*. To him, the creative activity of art is verified by "our new understanding of perception and communication . . . in terms of a general human creativity."\(^{51}\) Without sufficient communication between the artist and society, or between the offered meanings and the common meanings, a work of art is difficult to accept. Thus, he disapproves of J. Z. Young's argument that

the creative artist is an observer whose brain works in new ways, making it possible for him to convey information to others about matters that were not a subject for communication before.\(^{52}\)

According to Williams, "communication is the crux of art."\(^{53}\) He finds that despite the fact that Young's words may be true for "the usual run of art," actually "the really bad art" is also created in this way; for the artist who believes in this fails to notice his relationship with the recipient and thus fails to communicate.

Though not totally in disagreement with the importance of the artist's individual experience, Williams states that some experience of art, including great art, is not "new" at all, but derived from the shared values of the society. Also, to be a successful artist a person is not bound to isolate himself from the crowd. He looks back at the history of art and says,

In many societies it has been the function of art to embody what we can call the common meanings of the society. The artist is not describing new experiences, but embodying known experiences. There is great danger in the assumption that art serves only on the frontiers of knowledge. . . . It is often through the art that the society expresses its sense of being a society. The artist, in this case, is not the lonely explorer, but the voice of his community. Even in our own complex society, certain artists seem near the centre of common experience while others seem out on the frontiers, and it would be wrong to assume that this difference is the difference between "mediocre art" and "great art." Not all "strange" art, by any means, is found valuable, nor is all "familiar" art found valueless.\(^{54}\)

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\(^{51}\) Williams 28.
\(^{52}\) Quoted in Williams, 28.
\(^{53}\) Williams 29.
\(^{54}\) Williams 30.
In other words, great art is not defined by how distant the art is from the crowd. Familiar art, which is closer to “shared societal meanings” than high art, can be great art as well. But what kind of “community” is referred to, and how exactly a great art is defined, is not clearly explained by Williams. It seems that in his opinion, the value of art is mainly determined by social acceptance, while aesthetic factors are secondary.

Williams does not directly connect the “familiar” art to popular art, but one can still easily sense that it is an art which is appealing to common taste (whether it is vulgar or decent is another matter). His preference for familiar art is further displayed by the following argument:

... in the process of communication, the exact degree of relation between his [i.e. the artist’s] personal meanings and the common meanings will be of vital importance. Where the relation is very close, he will be able to draw in a direct way on practised means of communication, with which his audience will be familiar. So far from this being simply “conventional” art, with the implication that it is less likely to be valuable, it is probably that most great art has been made in these conditions.\(^{55}\)

Williams further emphasizes that not only should art be made to communicate, but it should be made in such a way that it can be “actively re-created—not ‘contemplated,’ not ‘examined,’ not passively received”--by those to whom it is offered.\(^{56}\) Williams agrees that some offered meanings might be rejected initially, but they are gradually “composed into new common meanings” and can be finally accepted. This is the process of change in art and the evolution of human culture (e.g. Stravinsky’s music and Piccaso’s painting). However, he also points out that, “beyond a certain point, a new meaning could hardly be communicated at all, or perhaps even described.”\(^{57}\) Williams seems to suggest that since “conventional” art can be actively re-created by a majority of the audience, it can become “great art” more easily than the “strange” variety. Thus, to conclude his theory, “great art” is

\(^{55}\) Williams 32.
\(^{56}\) Williams 34.
\(^{57}\) Williams 32,33.
art which is well accepted by many people; and so to a certain extent is “popular.”

Williams’s attitude toward “familiar” art is based on his belief that the study of culture is “the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life.” 58 He overtly rejects Arnold’s definition, which perceives culture as the pursuit of human perfection, as inadequate. In his opinion, the three categories in the definition of culture—namely 1) the “ideal,” in which culture is a state or process of human perfection; 2) the “documentary” records, that is, the recorded texts and practices of culture; and 3) the “social” definition of culture, in which culture is a description of a particular way of life—should all be included in any viable theory of culture. 59 The value of art, therefore, should also be considered in the wider context of the human community. The assumption that art should be separated from ordinary living is as erroneous as “the dismissal of art as unpractical or secondary.” 60

Though Williams tries in different places to balance his views and remain neutral in his discussion of high and “familiar” art, it is clear that he is speaking in favour of common taste. As a cultural critic, he focuses chiefly on the social function of art, and touches on its actual evaluation relatively infrequently; this is perhaps the most common defect in the field of the study of popular culture. Cultural theorists analyze art basically from a political and socioeconomic point of view, but generally neglect the aesthetic value of art itself. Perhaps they think this is the job of literary criticism. However, any study of art will be inadequate without taking into account the analysis of artistic features. Even more erroneous are those opinions which judge the value of art solely on the class background of the producer. The theory of popular culture, from its inception in the nineteenth century, has been troubled precisely by these shortcomings.

2. Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel    Instead of indiscriminately condemning popular culture as “bad art,” cultural critics in the sixties began to consider it

58 Williams 46.
59 Williams 41.
60 Williams 37.
worth studying, partly because popular culture had been increasing become an inseparable part of Western, especially American, culture. Their reason was that since it is a lived culture of ordinary persons, it provides the essential cultural texts and practices for reconstructing the "structure of feeling," or shared values of a society.\(^{61}\) The *Popular Arts* by Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel is one of the most influential works which discusses popular culture in a relatively positive manner. Its concern is no longer the traditional conflict between high and popular culture, but a conflict within the mass media about what kind of popular culture should be produced.

The main thesis of the book consists of two parts. The first is to advocate "a critical method for handling . . . problems of value and evaluation" in the study of popular culture. It argues that not all popular culture is detrimental. What is mostly important is "to train a more demanding audience" who will require "good" popular culture rather than "bad."\(^{62}\) Hall and Whannel especially emphasize the necessity of this training in discrimination in classroom teaching, since young people are most likely to be influenced by popular culture. They also suggest that, though there is a difference of value between high and popular culture, one must judge them separately, "recognize [their] different aims, . . . [and] assess varying achievements with defined limits."\(^{63}\)

Like Williams, Hall and Whannel evidently try to reject the conservatism and pessimism of the Leavisites.

The desire to return to the organic community is a cultural nostalgia which only those who did not experience the cramping and inhuman conditions of that life can seriously indulge.\(^{64}\)

But in essence they still remain within the shadow of Leavisism, as they propose in the second part of their thesis that within popular culture there is a distinct category called "popular art" which is qualitatively close to "high art." The

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63 Hall and Whannel, 38.
64 Hall and Whannel, 53.
examples they provide include music hall performance, Charlie Chaplin’s movies and jazz music. They also condemn the contemporary “mass art” as the Leavisites and other mass culture critics do, seeing it as a corrupt version of the “popular art.” The difference is, they insist, that “popular art” is an art found within popular culture itself, not the “folk art” celebrated by Leavisism, and it is a kind of valuable popular culture they argue for.

Popular art . . . is essentially a conventional art which restates, in an intense form, values and attitudes already known; which reassures and reaffirms, but brings to this something of the surprise of art as well as the shock of recognition. Such art has in common with folk art the genuine contact between audience and performer: but it differs from folk art in that it is an individualized art, the art of the known performer. The audience-as-community has come to depend on the performer’s skills, and on the force of a personal style, to articulate its common values and interpret its experience.

Hall and Whannel’s concept of “popular art” is obviously derived from Williams’s “familiar” or “conventional art.” It is not an art which consciously aims at creating its own conventions or breaking the conventions already made, but is rather “confirming known experiences and values.” It is not “folk art” either, but a remarkable affinity between it and “folk art” still can be found. According to Hall and Whannel, in music hall performance, “certain ‘folk’ elements were carried through.” Its presentation of shared values and communal experiences—those brought about by “folk art”—reestablished a “rapport” between the performer and audience. So as Chaplin’s movies, for his art was also derived from music hall performance. This rapport is not to be found in the corrupt, highly manipulative and impersonal “mass art.” But a problem arises when Hall and Whannel confess that “a great deal of the music hall was poor and second-rate.” One might be then prompted to question whether all the art forms they define as “popular art” are superior, and others they generally disapprove of—for example, pop music—are

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65 Hall and Whannel, 68-9.
66 Hall and Whannel, 66.
67 Hall and Whannel, 57, 59, 61-65.
68 Hall and Whannel, 56.
Hall and Whannel’s proposition of training aesthetic discrimination within popular culture is a major contribution to popular culture theory. But their attempt to categorize popular culture ignores the wide variation in quality within any given genre. Moreover, their idea of training “a more demanding audience” in school, as John Storey comments, seems to “suggest that because most school students do not have access . . . to the best that has been thought and said, they can instead be given critical access to the best that has been thought and said within the popular arts of the new mass media.” One might also ask who will provide this training and decide for these students what is the best. The answer is very likely not the students themselves but the teachers who are trained to comply with the aesthetic standards of the cultural critics like Hall and Whannel.

3. Herbert J. Gans Compared to Williams, Hall and some others, Herbert Gans’s theory of popular culture has gone relatively unnoticed, yet his Popular Culture and High Culture provides some perceptive insights. His first important thesis is that since both high and popular culture consist of certain similar characteristics, “the differences between [them] as economic institutions are smaller than suggested.”

Both cultures encourage innovation and experimentation, but are likely to reject the innovator if his innovation is not accepted by audiences. High culture experiments that are rejected by audiences in the creator’s lifetime may, however, become classics in another era, whereas popular culture experiments are forgotten if not immediately successful. Even so, in both cultures innovation is rare, although in high culture it is celebrated and in popular culture it is taken for granted.

A number of studies have indicated that creators are communicating with an audience, real or imagined, even in high culture, and that the stereotypes of the lonely high culture artist who creates only for himself or herself, and of the popular culture creators who suppress their own values and cater only to an audience, are both false.

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70 Gans 21, 22-23.
Gans’s theory is, in Williams’s diction, that individual meaning which fails to reflect the common meaning of a society or a social group will often be initially or even indefinitely rejected, and that communication is essential at every level of art. This point is well taken; however, it must be pointed out that though communication is needed in both arts, high art still differs from popular art in the size of audience it provides for. Some forms of high art, say, avant-garde music, usually aim at a small coterie to transmit for them an esoteric message, which ordinary people would not easily understand or appreciate. Even so, I assume that many elite artists would be happy to see their works accepted by more people (this is why Arnold wishes to “make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere”). It is extremely rare for an art to be created for no one but the artist himself.

An awareness of the similarities between different cultures and audiences leads Gans to criticize mass culture theory. He condemns mass culture critics for imposing their own cultural values on other forms of culture “which not only ignores other people’s private evaluations but seeks to eliminate them altogether.” Also, like Williams, he argues that cultural nostalgia has ignored the backwardness and unfavourable social conditions of ordinary people. On one hand, “high culture advocates [are] self-serving,” and “mask their self-interest as the public interest.” On the other hand, they exaggerate the harmfulness of popular culture, not aware that, “popular culture has played a useful role in the process of enabling ordinary people to become individuals, develop their identities, and find ways of achieving creativity and self-expression.”

Gans further points out that the boundaries between different “taste cultures” and their audiences are quite flexible and frequently overlap.

In the real world, many items of culture can be classified as being part of two cultures, and may in fact be shared by two publics. Moreover, some people regularly choose from more than one culture and thus can be classified as being in more than one public.

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71 Gans 121, 56, 62, 57.
72 Gans 72.
According to Gans, “taste cultures” often borrow from one another. Their “content is often transformed to make it understandable or acceptable to different publics.” Producers of different social backgrounds will also, occasionally, choose materials “from a much higher or lower culture.” This downward or upward mobility he calls “cultural straddling.” It requires us to consider that the definitions of specific cultural forms and tastes are always subject to change, and the process of production and consumption, as well as the relationship between them, can also be displayed in variable patterns. Therefore, in cultural studies, especially the study of popular culture, one should avoid using the yardstick of only one particular cultural and aesthetic system to make value judgements. On the other hand, it should not abandon standards altogether, leading to the uncritical relativism and aesthetic uncertainty characteristic of postmodernism.

4. Cultural Populism

Cultural populists consciously refute cultural elitism, arguing that popular culture cannot be interpreted as a culture made use of and produced by the dominant class to exploit and manipulate the thoughts and actions of consumers. John Fiske, the most prominent figure of cultural populism, makes the following statement:

> Popular culture is made by subordinated people in their own interests out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant. Popular culture is made from within and below, not imposed from without or above as mass cultural theorists would have it. There is always an element of popular culture that lies outside social control, that escapes or opposes hegemonic forces. Popular culture is always a culture of conflict, it always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and that are not those preferred by the dominant ideology.  

Fiske rejects the view that consumers are “cultural dopes . . . a passive, helpless mass incapable of discrimination and thus at the economic, cultural, and political

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73 Gans 110, 108-9. To support his theory, he further quotes Susan Sontag’s statement which points out that “taste tends to develop unevenly. It’s rare that the same person has good visual taste and good taste in people and good taste in ideas.” Quoted in Gans, 110.
74 John Fiske, Reading the Popular (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2.
mercy of the barons of the industry.” In his scenario of “semiotic guerrilla warfare,” these consumers, like “guerrilla fighters,” constantly resist and evade the homogenizing, incorporating force of the dominant ideology in capitalist society with their social and cultural heterogeneity. Such an opinion, however, not only ignores the fact that many popular cultural forms are produced from above, but also overestimates the political and aesthetic sensibility of the ordinary consumers. It might be applicable to intellectuals like Fiske himself, but most of the consumers of popular culture, I believe, are still unable to “excorporate” cultural goods, using them in their own “oppositional or subversive interests.”

Overall, Fiske’s conception of popular culture is extremely political. He claims that culture is “centrally involved in the distribution and possible redistribution of various forms of social power,” and popular culture has a “political potential” which is “progressive” rather than “radical.” Its resistance to dominant ideology, in his opinion, “[does] have a social dimension at the micro level . . . [and will] act as a constant erosive force upon the macro, weakening the system from within so that it is more amenable to change at the structural level.” In other words, in contrast to hegemony theory, Fiske contends that popular culture, through its subversive and oppositional use by the subordinated classes, can gradually and ultimately transform the social structure of capitalism. But his opinion is no more than “an over-reaction to the elitism of theories of popular culture.” For general audiences, the main purpose of watching a movie, for example, is always to have fun, to obtain pleasure and relaxation. It is only a secondary wish for them to be inspired and educated by the message of the film, which is constantly received in an unexpected, passive situation. How can such a

76 Quoted in Storey, Introductory Guide, 186.
77 Fiske, Television Culture, 501. It is for this reason that Jim McGuigan rejects Fiske’s ordinary human, recasting them as “tricky customer[s], negotiating and manoeuvring the best out of any conceivable situation.” Jim McGuigan, Cultural Populism (London: Routledge, 1992), 73.
78 Fiske, Reading the Popular, 1,11.
kind of consumer activity be conceived as “inherently political”? 

Jim McGuigan, who is unhappy with the current uncritical celebration of popular culture, defines cultural populism as “the intellectual assumption, made by some students of popular culture, that the symbolic experiences and practices of ordinary people are more important analytically and politically than Culture with a capital C.” He reproves the prevalent, non-judgmental attitude to ordinary tastes and pleasures, particularly Fiske’s theory. This attitude, he claims, has made “‘high or bourgeois art’ . . . too easy a target, and perhaps something of a straw man, for a new generation of intellectual populists to attack.” He thus blames postmodern skepticism and the conception of “consumer sovereignty” for producing a crisis of qualitative judgment, and advocates a return to Arnoldian certainties.

[Mass culture critics] were confident in their capacity, usually legitimated by academic position and participation in the networks of ‘serious’ culture. They felt able to pass judgement on mass cultural consumption, to denounce it comprehensively or to make evaluative discrimination between the authentically popular and the usual rubbish foisted upon most people.

McGuigan’s point of view signals the completion of a cycle in the debate on popular culture. It brings us back to the cultural elitism of Arnold and the Leavisites, the difference being that their nostalgic and pessimistic sentiments are now replaced with a more analytical, socioeconomic approach. Nothing is wrong with it so far as it does not reject popular culture “uncritically.” But Storey, alarmed by McGuigan’s statement above, warns that “those who insist on a return to absolute standards are saying little more than that it’s too confusing now: I want back my easy and unquestioned authority to tell ordinary people what it’s worth

\[\text{80 Fiske, Reading the Popular, 1. Personally I agree with Gans’s opinion regarding the political awareness of the common people. He states that most people “pay only a limited amount of attention to politics, . . . [and] while it is correct to argue that all culture is political, that argument is politically relevant only for people for whom politics is of major importance, for the rest of the population is not likely to care--or even notice--the political values which are implicit in their taste cultures.” Gans 108.}\]

\[\text{81 McGuigan 4.}\]

\[\text{82 McGuigan 75.}\]

\[\text{83 McGuigan 79-80.}\]
and how it's done.\textsuperscript{84} This kind of rejoinder, again, seems to be an over-reaction. Nevertheless, it shows that the conflict between “high” and “low”—more on politics than on direct judgment of cultural goods—will never come to an end.

II. The Chinese Celebration of the Folk Song and Popular Literature

Traditionally, Confucian scholars celebrated the folk song and popular literature not only for their natural and straightforward style, but even more so for their function as educational tools, where commentators at times fabricated political allegory and satire to indoctrinate cultural and moral values.

1. From the Shijing to the Han Yuefu Ballads  The pro-folk song tradition was first established by the influential commentaries on the \textit{Shijing} in the Confucian \textit{Analects}, and was further concretized by Han exegeses. The practical functions of the \textit{Shijing} are listed in the \textit{Analects} as follows:

   The poems may serve to stimulate the mind. They may be used for purposes of self-observance, to teach the art of sociability, and to show how to regulate feelings of resentment. From them you learn the more immediate duty of serving one’s father, and the remoter one of serving one’s prince. From them we become largely acquainted with the names of birds, beasts, and plants. 詩，可以興，可以觀，可以群，可以怨。遠之事父，遠之事君；多識於鳥獸草木之名。\textsuperscript{85}

Confucius’s authoritative but oversimplified judgment on the overall theme of the collection, that all the three hundred songs “have no depraved thoughts,”\textsuperscript{86} had left ample room for the Han exegetes to elaborate. For example, the “Great” and “Little Preface” of the Mao school explain the allegorical meaning of \textit{feng} 風, the most important section in the \textit{Shijing}, in the following passages:

Superiors used the \textit{feng} to transform their inferiors, and inferiors to satirize their superiors. The principal thing in them was their literary style, and reproof was cunningly insinuated. There is no offence done in voicing them,

\textsuperscript{84} Storey 183.
\textsuperscript{85} Legge, \textit{The Four Books} (17.9), 231; with modifications.
\textsuperscript{86} Legge, \textit{The Four Books} (2.2), 71.
Scrutinizing the two prefaces, one will notice that they are almost entirely concerned with social criticism and moral edification. Aesthetic features of the songs are seldom discussed, reminiscent of cultural critics’ treatment of popular culture in the previous section.

From a different perspective, one may say that the canonization of the Shijing folk songs was a device of the Han court and the elite class to secure their domiant position: some of the folk songs, originally used by the common people to express their disappointment with a corrupt government, were borrowed to educate and remind these upper classes of the misconduct of their predecessors, thus avoiding the mistakes of the past, while the panegyrics of ancient benevolent rulers and officials were utilized to extol the regnant power. This kind of argument resembles the Gramscian hegemony theory. However, regardless of the motives behind this canonization, happily a certain number of these folk songs, even if bowdlerized, were preserved and highly esteemed as classics of poetry that generations of elite poets incessantly commended, studied and imitated.

After the Shijing, the most praiseworthy folk song category was the anonymous Han Yuefu ballad. The historian Ban Gu’s comment, that “one may also observe from [the ballads] the social customs and manners, and be able to distinguish the pure and noble from the mean,” indicates that the elite critics of the time still emphasized the educational functions of the ballad more than its

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87 Legge, *She king*, prolegomena, 35, 37; with modifications. Today we generally accept that the feng section mostly contains “airs,” or folk songs, from villages and backways of different states, as Zhu Xi interprets in his Shijizhuan (Collected Commentaries on the Book of Songs) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), Preface, 2. But the explanation of the “Prefaces” still cannot be totally dismissed, for the word feng 諷, “to insinuate,” phonetically and ideographically resembles the word feng, or “wind.”
aesthetic values. Similarly, Liu Xie’s disapproval of the genre is also based on a purely moralistic point of view. Direct discussions of the literary merits of the Yuefu ballads (as well as those of the Shijing poems) were, surprisingly, not seen until a much later period. The most oft-quoted comment is the Ming scholar Hu Yinglin’s 胡應麟 (1551-1602) in his Shi sou 詩薮 (The Swamp of Poetry).

The Han Yuefu ballads were collected from villages and backways and were not embellished [by literary craftsmanship]. However, their simple and unadorned style is not vulgar, their straightforward expression can convey deep meaning, and their content of everyday life can have far-reaching influence. None of the excellent works of literature under Heaven can surpass them (my italics). 唯漢樂府歌謠，采摭閑閱，非由潤色，然質而不俚，淺而能深，近而能遠。天下至文，靡以過之。89

Hu’s comment points out several distinct aesthetic features of the ballads. But his appreciation of them is still based on the condition that they are not “vulgar” (li 俚). This conservative attitude accords perfectly with the tradition of refining the folk song as discussed before. Its similarity to Liu Xie’s comment on the Nineteen Ancient Poems is also apparent:

Looking into their structure, they are like prose. Their language is straightforward but not coarse. They tactfully adhere to external objects and closely relate to human affections with a melancholic mood. They are indeed the crown of five-character poetry (my italics). 視其結體散文，直而不野，婉轉附物，悱惻切情，實五言之冠冕也。90

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88 However, he contradicts himself by viewing the Shijing folk song as one of his quintessential types of poetry, and dismissing the Yuefu ballads as “licentious,” which are in fact not much different in themes and content from the Shijing. In the chapter “Yuefu,” Liu Xie says, “Ji Zha examined the minute transformation from the rise and fall [of a state]; that is exceptionally perceptive.” 季札呂微於興廢，精之至也。What this passage means is that, by hearing the Shijing folk songs, Ji Zha was able to ascertain the political and social conditions of a state. See also note 43. Zhan Ying, Wenxin diaolong yizheng, 226. This practical function of the Shijing poems can in fact be performed by the Yuefu ballads as well, as the latter are also about the daily life of the common people and their joys and sufferings.
89 Hu Yinglin, Shi sou (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 3.
90 Zhan Ying 193.
Some of the *Nineteen Ancient Poems* evidently evolved from *Yuefu* ballads,\(^{91}\) and were probably written by literati about second to third centuries. They were viewed as the prototype of five-character poetry. Hu’s comment resembles Liu’s in that poetry with a straightforward style is welcomed, provided that it does not descend to vulgarity and coarseness. Anything “indecorous” found in these folk songs was inevitably refined and altered. Also, the description of the *Nineteen Ancient Poems* as “tactfully adher[ing] to external objects and closely relate[d] to human affections with a melancholic mood” clearly refers to the aesthetics based “firmly in[sic] the oldest definition of poetry in the Chinese tradition: ‘poetry expresses intent’(*shih yen chih* 詩言 志").\(^{92}\)

Such a definition emphasizes the lyrical mode of poetry which expresses the writer’s inner emotion through a restrained description of external objects. The elite elegant *ci* style which will be discussed in chapter four also closely conforms to this principle.

2. *Bai Juyi and his “New Yuefu Poems”*  Because of the pervasive and profound influence of the *Shijing* exegeses, ancient Chinese elite writers deeply believed that the folk song could be used as a vehicle of moral education and political satire. They hoped that their superiors would adopt benevolent policies by reading and comprehending the veiled criticism in their folk style poetry. Among these writers, the most significant one was the Tang poet Bai Juyi. Together with Yuan Zhen 元禎 (779-831) and some others, Bai advocated resuming the admonitory functions of poetry following the *Shijing* and *Yuefu* traditions, and writing poetry about current events in plain and simple language. His fifty “New *Yuefu* Poems,” from which the “New *Yuefu* movement” derived its name, were thus written. In his preface to this group of poems, Bai clearly expresses his intention as follows:

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91 For example, no. 15 is a modified version of “West Gate Ballad” 西門行 (long version). See Guo Maoqian, *Yuefu shiji*, 549; and Sui Shusen 隋樹森, *Gushi shijiu shou jishi* 古詩十九首集 釋 (*Collected Explanations on the Nineteen Ancient Poems*) (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 22.

The first lines [of these poems] indicate the titles, the last sections manifest my intent: This is the practice [yi] of the three hundred poems [of the Shijing]. Their language is unadorned and direct; so that the reader can easily understand them. Their expressions are straightforward and closely related [to daily life], so the audience can be thoroughly counselled. What they recorded is complete and verifiable; it is because of this that the collectors can spread the truth. The form is smooth and unrestrained, so they can be applied to music and songs. In sum, they are written for the rulers, the officials, the common people, external objects and current events. They are not written for the sake of literature. 首句標其目，卒章顯其志，詩三百之義也。其辭質而徑，欲見之者易諭也。其言真而切，欲聞之者深誠也。其事覈而實，使采之者信也。其體順而肆，可以播於樂章歌曲也。總而言之，為君、為臣、為民、為物、為事而作，不為文而作也。93

Under the title of each poem, Bai follows the practice of the “Little Preface” of the Shijing, appending a short passage to each to elucidate his satire or eulogy. His imitations of folk songs, therefore, can be said to take a strong moral and political standpoint, not originating simply in an aesthetic concern.

Obviously, however, these “New Yuefu Poems” were not as well accepted as were his other popular style compositions, such as the well-known “Song of Everlasting Regret” 長恨歌, “The Pipa Tune” 琵琶引 and other miscellaneous regulated verses written for friends and relatives on occasions of parting and gathering.94 In a lengthy letter to Yuan Zhen, Bai said,

Today people treasure only my miscellaneous regulated verse and those listed after “Song of Everlasting Regret.” What our times cherish I despise. As for those poems of veiled criticism and admonishment, their expressions are vehement and their language unadorned. ... no wonder people do not like them. 今僕之詩，人所愛者，悉不過雜律詩與長恨歌已下耳。時之所重，僕之所輕。至於諷諭者，意激而言質。...宜人之不愛也。95

This statement regretfully acknowledges that his attempt to use folk style poetry as

93 Gu Xuejie 顧學誠, Bai Juyi ji 白居易集 (Collected Works of Bai Juyi) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 3: 52.
94 For the two poems, see Gu 12: 238-9, 241-3.
an educational tool was not that successful. He could not, as a “cultural producer,” control the ordinary readers’ like or dislike of his “product” once out of his hands, or persuade or force them to accept the cultural and aesthetic values he embraced. The vehement, didactic tones and unembellished language of his “New Yuefu Poems” were in general not suited to common taste, even though they bear a strong folk song style. Thus they were less appreciated than poems like the sentimental “Song of Everlasting Regret” and the intimate, “extemporary” (shuai ran 率然) miscellaneous regulated poems.

No matter how often Bai reiterated his Confucian concept of poetry, his image as a literati writer who deliberately catered to popular taste left a far deeper impression on the minds of his readers and critics than did his actual aim of moral instruction. His popular image was solidified by an anecdote which describes that whenever he finished a poem, he would ask an old lady to read it, making adjustments until she finally understood the whole piece.  

From Chang’an to Jiangxi, a distance of three or four thousand li, there were often inscriptions of my poems on the walls of village schools, Buddhist monasteries, inns and traveler’s boats; and they were frequently chanted by scholars, commoners, Buddhist disciples, widows, women and young girls. 自長安抵江西三四千里，凡鄉校、佛寺、逆旅、行舟之中，往往有題僕詩者。士庶、僧徒、孀婦、處女之口，每每有詠僕詩者。 

Bai then expresses his low esteem for these “popular pieces” (a defensive stance to

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96 Wei Qingzhi 魏慶之 (fl. 1244), Shiren Yuxie 詩人玉屑 (Jade Chips of the Poets) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), vol. 2, 345.  
97 “Yu Yuan Jiu shu,” Gu 45: 963. Bai’s words are supported by Yuan Zhen. In his preface to Bai’s collection, Yuan says, “... within twenty years, no wall of the imperial palace, temple, monastery and post house was without inscriptions [of Bai’s poems]; no poem of his was not on the lips of imperial members, noble ministers, concubines, women, herdboys and grooms. As for copies and prints [of them], everywhere they were sold with great pomp at markets, or used to exchange for wines or tea.”  ... 二十年間，禁省、殿寺、衙候牆壁之上無不書，王公、妾婦、牛童、馬走之口無不道。至於書寫模勒，衒賣於市井，或持之以交讌茗者，處處皆是。“Baishi Changqing jixu” 白氏長慶集序 (“Preface to Bai Juyi’s Changqing Collection”), Gu 1.
avoid moral attack?), describing them as a literary skill of no high order, or the “sport of carving insects” \( (diao~chong~zhi~xi)\), remorsefully hoping that one day someone would expunge them from his collection.\(^98\) Yet it was precisely these trivial, casual pieces that were favoured by the public. Less attention was paid to his moral message than to the pleasure, novelty, and emotional sentiments which were equally or even more abundant in his poetry.

Though Bai despised his own “popular pieces,” plenty of examples from his collection convince us that he deliberately wrote poetry in simple language to make it accessible to general readers. Other evidence comes from the fact that he was one of the first to try his hand at the \( ci \) lyric.\(^99\) His attraction to this new genre is easily understood: As he advocated a straightforward and unadorned poetic style, the newly emerging popular songs naturally drew his attention. He was among the participants of the “New \( Yuefu \) Movement” most sensitive to the contemporary popular literature, and found in it the simplicity and straightforwardness perfectly in accord with their ideal type of poetry, though at times they still could not stand its “vulgarity.”\(^100\)

Bai’s popular poetic style is held in high esteem by critics such as the Qing (1644-1911) scholar Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727-1814),\(^101\) but was severely criticized by others. One of the earliest and most acrimonious remarks was made by Li Kan 李戡, recorded in his epitaph by the distinguished late Tang poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852):

\begin{quote}
I detested how the poetry style of Yuan [Zhen] and Bai [Juyi], developed since the period of Yuan He [806-821], was frail, erotic and without vigour. Most of the people who were not solemn and elegant were corrupted by them. They spread among the populace and were inscribed on screens and walls. Parents one after another taught their children to read them. Licentious and indecent language penetrated into the flesh and bones of
\end{quote}

\(^99\) Bai has thirty-seven \( ci \) lyrics in total collected in Zhang Zhang 張瓊 and Huang Yu’s 黃㝢 \( Quan~Tang~Wudai~ci\) 全 唐 五 代 詞 \( (Complete~Ci~of~the~Tang~and~the~Five~Dynasties)\) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 119-139.
\(^100\) For example, Liu Yuxi’s refinement of “Bamboo Branches.”
\(^101\) See Zhao Yi, \( Oubei~shihua\) 趙 北 詩 話 \( (Oubei’s~Remarks~on~Poetry)\) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1963), 36.
people year in and year out, and was ineradicable. I did not hold an
important position, otherwise I would have regulated it by law.

Here in the eyes of Li, Yuan and Bai’s poetry is viewed as being as large an
immoral influence as the licentious “Zheng and Wei music.” Curiously, without
making any argument, Du Mu implies his agreement. But Du himself was in fact
no less a sometime writer of “trivia” than Bai, and many frequently found fault
with his pursuit of romance and sensual pleasures.

3. Liang Qichao and “New Novels” The late Qing reformer Liang Qichao’s 梁
啟 超 (1873-1929) attitude toward popular literature was basically not much
different from Bai Juyi. The “New Novels” he advocated played virtually the same
educational role as Bai’s “New Yuefu Poems,” except that Liang’s were intended
for a much more radical, thorough transformation of the political system and social
manners of modern China instead of reinforcing its traditional value system.

Deeply inspired by the success of Japan’s Meiji Reformation and
modernization, Liang and a group of Chinese intellectuals actively promoted the
establishment of a constitutional monarchy in China to supplant the corrupt and
ossified autocracy, which they thought was the only way to save China from being
carved up and constantly humiliated by the Western imperialists. The failure of
this constitutional movement caused Liang to believe that mere reform of the
political structure would not fundamentally alter the fate of his country, since the
minds of his countrymen were still not enlightened, and the deep-rooted social
evils handed down from ancient China still could not be eliminated. A reformed
political system would not last long if the minds of the ignorant masses of the

102 “Li fujun muzhi ming” 李府 君 墓 誌 銘 (“Epitaph to Li Kan’s Father”), in Du Mu,
Fanchuan wenji 樊 川 文 集 (Literary Collection of Fanchuan) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji
chubanshe, 1978), 137.
nation were not reformed accordingly. Liang thus proposed a bottom-to-top transformation, claiming that educating the masses was the most urgent task of Chinese intellectuals of the age. 103 He suggested that the most effective teaching medium is the novel, which is simple in language and is readily accessible to a wide range of readers, particularly those—as his mentor Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) said—who are not learned enough to read the classics. 104 Unlike orthodox literati who despised the novel as a minor literary form, Liang elevated it to an unprecedented status and endowed it with the function of a panacea for the ailing Chinese society. According to his “General Debate on Reform” 變法通議 (1897), the novel has the following social effects:

Now we should especially use colloquial language, writing a variety of novels in great quantities. Most importantly, they can be used to illuminate Confucian doctrines; secondly, they can narrate various historical events. Locally, they can arouse our national humility; abroad, they can touch upon foreign affairs. Even the ugliness of officialdom, the scandals in the examination hall, the obstinate addiction [of people] to opium, and the cruel torture of foot-binding, can all be depicted down to the last detail, [thus by reading novels we can] revitalize the dregs of society. How immeasurable are their benefits! 105

Such a passage shows that what Liang celebrates is not at all the literary values of the novel, but its potential as a political and educational tool, one of the sacrosanct tasks of poetry in the opinion of Confucian critics.

In order to make the novel an effective vehicle for transforming the minds of

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104 Liang, “Yiyin zhengzhi xiaoshuo xu” 譯印政治小說序 (“Preface to Translations of Political Novels”) (1898), in Yinbing shi wenji 飲冰室文集 (Literary Collection of the Drinking Ice Studio) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1926), vol. 4, 7b.

the common people, Liang specifically promoted a “novel of politics” (*zheng zhi xiao shuo* 政治小說), in which the author would “make use of it to express the political ideals he embraced.” On the other hand, he excoriated traditional novels in his early years, such as those imitating the *Outlaw of the Marsh* and the *Dream of Red Mansions*, for exerting “extremely harmful” effects on Chinese readers. In his opinion, these novels only “propagate promiscuity and banditry” (*hui yin hui dao* 謡淫賊道), and their production was in the hands of “flowery writers and bookshop owners” (*hua shi fang gu* 華士坊賈). He thus demanded a reform of the novel, appealing to “elegant gentlemen” (*da ya jun zi* 大雅君子) to take part in novel writing. “The people of a country can be reformed,” he claims, “only when the novel of that country is first reformed.”

This utopian belief in the social effect of the novel contributed directly to both the failure of Liang’s creative writing and the “New Novel Movement.” Liang’s own novels, for example, are replete with political and legal discourses, but their artistic quality is so poor that even Liang himself confessed later that they “do not look like any literary genre,” and are “lengthy, tedious and totally insipid.”

Although numerous writers of the time responded to Liang’s appeal, it is difficult to assess how great the influence of the “new novels” was on the common people. But obviously, none of these compositions can compare with certain traditional (now classical) novels in either quality or popularity. The reading public seemed to continue to favour romance and banditry novels more than the insipid “novels of politics,” just as the Tang people preferred Bai Juyi’s popular pieces to his “New Yuefu Poems.” However, there was still no significant evidence...
that readers of traditional novels were morally corrupt. The rise of the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies” (yuán yāng hú dié 鸭塢蝴蝶) novel in the 1920s and 1930s further proved that Liang’s reform did not fundamentally change popular taste. This type of vernacular novel is mainly about romantic love and is criticized for its frivolity. The unpopularity of Liang’s “new novels” (and perhaps also Bai’s “New Yuefu Poems”) was due precisely to his deliberate attempt to impose a set of elite sociopolitical values on the common reader; and this attempt unavoidably resulted in a dry, heavily didactic tone which not only greatly diminished their political and social impact but also reduced their literary value. This failure, however, does not mean that popular literature must be produced from within or below, but rather indicates that when an elite writer intends to write for the common people, he certainly has to write in their voice, speak on their behalf and cater a little, at least, to their taste. Only by these measures can he successfully communicate with them and gradually influence (or on the contrary be influenced by) them.

4. The Promotion of Colloquial Literature in the 1910s  Liang Qichao’s “New Novel Movement” and his promotion of a new writing style (xin wen ti 新文體, mixing colloquial and classical language together) can be seen as the first attempt to reform classical writing. But it still could not alter the disparaging attitude of the elite toward colloquial literature (bai hua wen xue 白话文学), largely because it was not coupled with a successful political and social reform, and Liang himself was not entirely committed to vernacular writing.

With the collapse of the absolute monarchy in 1911, more favourable political and social conditions facilitated a second literary wave, and this time a much more radical—even furious—sentiment accompanied it. It aimed at a wholesale replacement of classical writing by establishing a vernacular literature.109 The

cause was highly political, yet was also practical from a linguistic point of view. According to the advocates of the "New Literature Movement," as classical writing was divorced from the daily spoken language, it had ultimately become a hindrance to textual communication, public education, as well as political and social advancement. In order to reject classical writing and elevate the literary status of colloquial literature, Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), the most important figure in this movement, in his "Humble Opinion on Literary Reform" 文学改良 言論 (1917) frequently--and not without exaggeration and lopsidedness--stresses that only the colloquial novel can compare with first-rate foreign literature, and that colloquial literature, instead of parallel prose and regulated poetry, is the "legitimate literary genre" (wen xue zheng zong 文学正宗) of Chinese literature. The main fault of classical writing, Hu claims, are its formalistic use of parallelism, allusion, and primitivism; and that it is a "dead" language, thus creates a "dead" literature.

Using a dead classical language can never produce a lively, valuable literature. For more than a thousand years, not one of the literary works of genuine literary value has been without colloquial features. Neither have any of them not relied on the help of this "colloquialism" [to become valuable literature]. 用死了的文言决不能做出有价值的文学来。这一千多年的文学，凡是有真正文学价值的，没有一种不带有白话的性质，没有一种不靠这个「白话性质」的帮助。

He cites examples from novels, poetry, and other literary forms to support his argument. In short, any work which is written in, or close to, the colloquial language and is simple and direct in expression, is generally valued more highly than others; and he avers that only when writing praxis is closely integrated with spoken language (yan wen he yi 言文合一)，can a living literature be created.

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110 Hu 11, 21, 23. See also "Lishi de wenxue guanlian lun" 歷史的文學觀念論 (Historical Perspective of Literature) (1917). Hu 45-49.
111 "Jianshe de wenxue geming lun," Hu 81.
112 Hu 23.
If Hu Shi promotes colloquial writing largely from a literary point of view, then Chen Duxiu's 陈独秀 (1879-1942) tone is obviously more political. Chen’s “On Literary Revolution” 文学革命论 (1917) was written to support Hu’s “Humble Opinion.” At the beginning of his essay, Chen points out that the incomplete political revolution in China was mainly caused by the “traditional moral principles and literary and artistic values which obstinately occupy our spiritual realm.”

He thus puts forth his well-known three ideals of literary revolution, which aim at overthrowing 1) the ornate, adulatory aristocratic literature; 2) the stale, extravagant classical literature; and 3) the pedantic, abstruse “mountain and forest” literature (shan lin wen xue 山林文学). These three types of literature, according to Chen, all have the same shortcomings: they are divorced from reality, amoralize the people, and feed off each other’s corruptive influence. Meanwhile, he advocates establishing 1) a smooth, expressive national literature; 2) a fresh, truthful realistic literature; and 3) an understandable, popular societal literature. But he fails to provide suggestions as detailed as Hu Shi’s regarding the actual procedures for developing this new literature. Nevertheless, his proposal of a literary revolution greatly stimulated the promotion of vernacular literature. By the 1920s, colloquial writing almost completely dominated the press, and the younger generation no longer used classical language in writing.

In retrospect, the literary revolution in the 1910s, no doubt, raised the general educational level of the Chinese people and greatly facilitated the spread of Western culture in China. However, its destructive impact was also apparent. An erosion of popular knowledge of classical forms and Chinese traditions occurred,

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113 陈独秀 文学革命论 (1917). Chen Duxiu, Duxiu wen cun 獨秀文存 (Literary Drafts of Chen Duxiu) (Shanghai: Yadong shuju, 1923), 135.

114 Chen 136. The last category is specifically directed at hermit writers whose literary works are “not beneficial to the majority of people.”

115 In 1920, the Educational Council promulgated a decree which required all primary schools to start using textbooks in colloquial language. See Huang Xiuji 黄修己, Zhongguo xiandai wenxue fazhan shi 中國現 代文學發展史 (History of the Development of Modern Chinese Literature) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1991), 40.
partly because the advocates of the literary revolution adopted a wholesale, uncritical rejection of traditional cultural values. Different opinions voiced by scholars, such as Lin Shu 林籽 (1852-1924) and major contributors to the “conservative” journal *Xue Heng 学衡* (*The Measure of Learning*), were excoriated or ridiculed as incorrigibly obstinate; and classical literature was rashly dismissed as stale, obsolete, useless to cultural advancement, and pernicious. As a result, traditional culture and literature gradually became almost universally despised.

“Dead” as classical literature may have been, there was no evidence to prove that in order to adopt a new skill or technology, the long-practised has to be forsaken (at least not at the initial stage). Human culture is composed of the commonly-accepted and consistently-practiced traditions of a given society; and individuals unfamiliar with such traditions, lack a distinct national identity. On the whole, the literary revolution of the 1910s lacked a long-term agenda. Well before a mature, new, fully-tested literature could be established, classical literature had already been “executed” for “amoralizing” the Chinese people.

Ostensibly, the literary revolution had brought down elite literature, supplanting it with the previously subordinate popular literature. However, this positional change did not mean that the elite culture had completely vanished, nor that all popular tastes were indiscriminately welcomed. A new elite culture, tightly controlled by political powers, gradually emerged from academic institutions, filling in the void left by the loss of the imperial examination system. At the same time, popular tastes which mainly pursued sensual pleasure and entertainment were still severely condemned. Popular novels, such as *Jin ping mei* 金瓶梅 (*Plum Blossom in the Golden Vase*), were criticized by Hu Shi as “solely about bestial, carnal desire” and with no literary value at all.\(^\text{1} \) Evidently, the types of popular culture he favoured were still those deemed elegant, morally correct, and beneficial to society and the human mind. The only difference was that the

\[\text{1} \] 全是獸性的肉慾 ... 即以文學的眼光觀之，亦殊無價值。“Da Qian Xuantong shu” 答錢玄同書 (“A Reply to Qian Xuantong’s Letter”), Hu 59, 60.
educational role of "legitimate literature" had now shifted to popular literature.

**Conclusion**

In summary, I would like to present my views on the various arguments discussed in this chapter. First, the value of an artistic work should not be judged solely by the class background of the artist. Whether it is produced by or for the elite or the ordinary people should not affect our appraisal of its quality, though it is commonly held that the former is superior to the latter. The class background of the artist and audience may help us reach a better, social aesthetic, understanding of a particular work, but background biographical information should not be used as a sole reference point for value judgements. Bai Juyi's "Song of Everlasting Regret," for example, cannot be deemed a great piece simply based on the fact that it was written by an eminent elite poet. Similarly, the Han Yuefu ballads are fine poetry not just because they were produced from below. It is the artistic merits of a particular work itself--such as its emotional attractiveness and literary creativity--not the class background of the artist, that leads us to call it "great art." This theory should have been widely known and well accepted, but in aesthetic criticism and the study of popular culture, we are still too often blinded by personal or trained tastes that belong to our social status. Mass culture critics reject popular culture precisely because it is produced for the common people and thus argue that it will lower the general cultural standard of a society. Cultural populists, on the other hand, celebrate its purported resistance to elite culture and seldom focus on its aesthetic aspects. Both of them, however, neglect the fact that there are good and bad in the high and the low: for example, not all serious music is worth listening to, and not all popular songs are inferior.

Secondly, although classes of culture endure in both Western society and imperial China, the reason for their existence is not primarily political, but to give voice to the genuine nature and flavour of the people’s tastes. A certain amorous Shijing folk song may have nothing to do with politics. Its political innuendo was not originally from below, but insinuated by Han exegetes from above. A similar
re-interpretative practice is seen among theorists of Western popular culture. In order to distinguish popular from high culture, they tend to portray it politically, as a heterogeneous force of the common people resisting the hegemony of power bloc. Or, according to neo-hegemony theorists, popular culture is a tool of the ruling class for tightening its control. Consequently, we have Stuart Hall’s claim that popular culture “is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured.” In some forms of popular culture, certainly we need to recognize political values. However, we should also avoid exaggerating the role of popular culture in determining or transforming (even if progressively) political, economic and social structures. True, consuming and listening to popular music might help us express our resentment toward our sociopolitical environment, but in reality it is not the major force for improving or securing a capitalist society. If we still insist on addressing all forms of popular culture politically, we are no more headed along the right path than the Han exegetes were on their allegorical excursions interpreting the *Shijing* poems.

We should see folk and popular culture as the natural expression or representation of the values and experiences of the common people in their way of life. The songs and dances they welcome are more an entertainment than a political instrument. They may occasionally use these cultural forms to express their discontent with the predominant class or to protest social injustice. But these are not the major subjects about which the common people are concerned. Diversion, sensational delights, novelty all which have been criticized by Romanticists and Confucian scholars, are also what they look for in “low” art; and we should accept that such pursuits are natural and sometimes necessary. The common people, therefore, are not as politically self-conscious as the cultural theorists assume. Instead, most of the time they show little interest in politics. It is the elite critics, in their adoption and study of “low” culture, who purposely stress its alleged sociopolitical function. This practice is particularly evident in Chinese traditional

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literary criticism. Based on what we have discussed in the previous sections, perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to say that, from the *Shijing* commentaries to the advocacy of colloquial writing in the twentieth century, the history of Chinese literary criticism is characterized by relentless attempts of the elite to impose its moral and aesthetic values on whatever literary forms it borrowed from below. In the case of *ci* criticism, this attempt is even more obvious.

Finally, it must be noted that the boundary between "high" and "low" arts should not be arbitrarily marked, though each of them do possess its own aesthetic features. Frequently they and their producers profoundly influence each other. A similar theory was put forward by Robert Redfield (1897-1958) in the 1930s. He states that in certain human societies, there were two cultural traditions: the "great tradition" (or "high culture") of the educated few, and the "little tradition" (or "low culture") of the non-elite. These two traditions, though generated by different social contexts, were not totally unrelated.

The great tradition is cultivated in schools or temples; the little tradition works itself out and keeps itself going in the lives of the unlettered in their village communities . . . The two traditions are interdependent. Great tradition and little tradition have long affected each other and continue to do so... Great epics have arisen out of elements of traditional tale-telling by many people, and epics have returned again to the peasantry for modification and incorporation in local cultures.

It is not difficult to find corresponding examples of this kind of cultural interdependence in Chinese literature. Some of the *Shijing* folk songs were produced from the "little tradition." Its profound influence on the elite literature has been repeated often in this chapter; while the literary diction, allusions and also moral values which originated in the elite culture were frequently borrowed by popular *ci* lyrics, the Yuan *qu* 楚 dramas as well as traditional Cantonese operas. In contemporary society, mutual influence between the "great" and "little" traditions, is even more salient. Nigel Kennedy, for example, reinterpreted Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" in a punk-rock style, while Paul McCartney wrote his

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classical-style "Liverpool Oratorio" (1991) in collaboration with the conductor Carl Davis. Based on this evidence, there is no reason for us to insist on an absolute demarcation between "high" and popular culture and to reject either of them simply because they are produced for or originate in a specific social, intellectual class.

It is also necessary to reemphasize that the social status of certain cultural forms, as Gans argues, do not invariably remain unchanged. Given time, they can be elevated or demoted from their original status. The canonization of the *Shijing* folk songs and early Hollywood movies are significant examples of the upward mobility of "low" cultural products. Downward mobility, on the other hand, may appear when "high" culture products are popularized and commercialized.\(^{119}\) The tastes of cultural producers and audiences also do not constantly correspond to their cultural backgrounds (it seems that people of "higher" social positions would have a greater range of choice in tastes than those of "lower" positions). Thus, we have numerous elite writers catering to popular tastes, and people from "lower" cultural backgrounds attending concerts of classical music. We might contend that these are all exceptional cases, and that most of the people still cling to their own class cultures. But history reminds us that, it has been when interaction between "high" and "low" arts has taken place—no matter how infrequently—that new kinds of literary forms and styles have been created and flourished. The *ci* lyric was precisely a product of this joint effort—if unintentional—of the elite and the common people.

\(^{119}\) In 1990, Pavarotti successfully took Puccini's "Nessun Dorma" to number one in the British chart. A student then complained to John Storey about "the way in which the song had been supposedly devalued by its commercial success." Moreover, he "found it embarrassing to play the song for fear that someone should think his musical taste was simply the result of the song being 'The Official BBC Grandstand World Cup Theme'." Storey, *Introductory Guide*, 8.
Chapter Two: The Anonymous Tang and Song Popular Ci Lyrics

The realm of poetry is the broadest: some scholars read thousands of books thoroughly, utterly exhausting their life and efforts, yet still cannot acquire its essence, while some women, village fellows and persons of meagre knowledge would certainly make Li [Bai] and Du [Fu]—should they be restored to life--bow their heads in revere nee when they hear them utter one or two lines. This is why poetry is so great [an art].

A good literary work does not have to be sophisticated. Some elite compositions fail to be excellent precisely because their scholarly writers are fettered by erudition and formalism, unaware that at times naturalness and directness are also important in creative writing. Since popular literature aims at appealing to a wider range of readers, its depth of emotional expression and focus on immediacy rather than rhetoric and form occasionally can contribute to its greatness. It has its own distinct artistic excellence, composed of characteristics uncommon in elite oeuvre. The anonymous ci lyrics written in the Tang and Song periods are significant examples of popular literature.

In the following discussion, we will first see how popular and elite lyrics differ aesthetically. After doing so, we will examine the major features of the anonymous Tang and Song popular lyrics. In the third section, the problems of emendation made by modern scholars to the Dunhuang lyric manuscripts, which introduce the traditional elite aesthetics of those scholars, will be dealt with.

---袁枚 (1716-1798) 1


2 Here I exclude a large quantity of anonymous lyrics written in elegant style, particularly those on plum blossoms collected in the Song scholar Huang Dayu’s Mei yuan (The Plum Garden, preface dated 1129) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1976), SKQS.
I. The Aesthetic Distinction Between the Popular and the Elite Ci Lyric

Popular art used to be produced “from within or below;” in other words, by and for the ordinary people themselves (domination by the upper class, that is, cultural managers and manufacturers, is only a modern phenomenon). Consequently, its aesthetic is in accord with the people’s tastes and greatly different from, though also influenced by, that of high art. It is necessary to point out the aesthetic differences between these two types of art, while being careful not to arbitrarily mark a cultural boundary between them.

The anonymous Tang and Song popular lyrics are characterized chiefly by a colloquialism, formal irregularity, artistic simplicity and directness, all of which serve their practical function as a form of entertainment, and contrast strongly with the “delicate restraint” (wan yue 妩 約 ) of elite lyrics. This difference in style and taste, if not quality, is mainly caused by the disparity in educational level and social status between the writers and audience of the two types of the ci. Obviously, popular lyric writers lacked the thorough education of the elite, and the language and imagery they use suggest their relatively humble origins. Their semiliterate or illiterate audience, usually, also demanded these works be amusing rather than intellectually challenging. The following example significantly demonstrates the artlessness and immediacy, or supposed “superficiality,” of the popular lyric.

Tune: “Qing bei le” 頌 盃 樂 (“The Joy of Drinking a Toast”) (P. 2838)

Gentle and graceful,
Her looks are hard to beat,
surpassing even the state toppler’s beauty.
Fine silk draped all over her body.
Who can tell if she’s from heaven?
Her flower-like face beguiles so naturally.
The tinted kingfisher blue,
moth-fine willow wands of her eyebrows.
The sidelong ripple of her glance, like autumn water’s.
Her skirt births the red of pomegranates.
Her silk blouse, dyed as red as blood.
Take in her loveliness:
From her soft voice, her tender words.
White tassels dangle from the jade hairpin on her
black-cloud chignon.
She is sixteen, hanging on in her fragrant bedroom;
Loves to lead her puppy and her parrots in playing games.
Fingers slim as scallions, white as jade,
Through her silk dress, you can see her figure,
soft as the silvery snow.
Fit for a nobleman's sons,
A young man from Five Tombs
would make her a perfect match.

This lyric is taken from the *Yunyao ji 雲 謠 集 (Songs of Clouds Anthology)* discovered in Dunhuang with other manuscripts. Compiled in the late Tang period, the *Yunyao ji* consists of thirty lyrics set to thirteen tunes; most of them are believed to have been written or polished by writers of higher literacy. The example above suggests the writer was either from the lower order of society or deeply influenced by popular taste; yet, the author must have acquired an

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3 Pan Chonggui 潘 重 章, *Dunhuang Yunyao ji xinshu 敦煌雲謠集新書 (New Book of the Dunhuang Manuscripts: Songs of Clouds)* (Taipei: Shimen tushu gongsi, 1977), 186; Ren Erbei 任 二 北 (Styled Bantang 半 塘, 1897-1991), *Dunhuang geci zongbian 敦 煌 歌 辭 總 編 (Compiled Edition of Dunhuang Lyrics, hereafter DHGCZB)* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), vol. 1, 210-211; also in Ren, *Dunhuang qujiaolu 敦 煌 歌 曲 數* (Compiled Edition of Dunhuang Lyrics, hereafter DHQJL) (Shanghai: Wenyi lianhe chubanshe, 1955), 21. The Dunhuang manuscripts are full of scribal errors and corrupt, ancient and unofficial characters, which has resulted in many textual discrepancies in different printed editions. Readers are invited to check and compare.
The meanings of ci tune titles do not necessarily correspond with their content. Very often, especially from the Song onward, writers, keeping the original titles, simply borrowed the old tune patterns to fill in new words. Conventionally, all ci lyrics are known by their original tune titles, and are differentiated by their first lines.
All lyrics discovered in Dunhuang will be provided with the Stein (S) and Pelliot (P) manuscript number. Marc Aurel Stein (1862-1943), a British archaeologist, and Paul Pelliot (1878-1945), a French sinologist, went to Dunhuang in 1907 and 1908 respectively and brought thousands of valuable manuscripts back to London and Paris. For detailed descriptions of their activities in Dunhuang, see Aurel M. Stein, *Ruins of Desert Cathay: Personal Narrative of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China* (London: MacMillan, 1912); Marsha L. Wagner, *The Lotus Boat*, 15-33; and Zhang Xihou 張 錫 厚, *Dunhuang wenxue 敦 煌 文 學 (The Dunhuang Literature)* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1980), 8-18.
4 Ren Erbei argues that the collection was compiled about 922, see *Dunhuang qu chutan 敦 煌 曲 初 探 (Preliminary Study of Dunhuang Songs)* (Shanghai: Wenyi lianhe chubanshe, 1955): 204. For a list of other arguments concerning its date of compilation, see Murakami Tetsumi, 162-168.
awareness of classical literature. For example, *qing guo* 傾國 (line 2) refers to the sister of Han musician Li Yannian 李延年, whose beauty was said to be great enough to “topple a state”; and Five Tombs (*wu ling* 五陵, last line) was where the Han nobles resided. The concluding lines of the piece clearly state a desire for upward social mobility through marriage. Although the writer also advises that “preparation” is necessary to have a happy ending, he or she focuses only on external, rather than on mental, inner and spiritual assets: a clear mark of his or her lack of cultivation.

Aesthetically, the piece intermingles elegant diction and commonplace, daily language. Words like *hun shen* 渾身 (line 3, “all over the body”) and *xue ran* 血染 (line 9, “blood-dyed”) are coarse and colloquial enough to blot the refinement of the silk blouse. The repeated accenting of fine clothing and female beauty also makes it gaudy. Such a random, facile and tautological description of appearance and attire takes up almost the whole piece. This no doubt will easily arouse the sensual delight of the audience, but it does not invite them to delve into her soul or personality. Speech and behaviour are only lightly sketched in the first line of the second stanza, and her vivaciousness exhibited in her sporting with her pets (line 13). In the end, she is represented as an idealized woman of nobility whose material wealth and beauty can only be touched fictionally, while her other sophistications remain far beyond the writer’s—and the audience’s—imagination.

However, it is precisely this easy and unsophisticated representation of an artistic object (in this case, a woman) that the common people favour most. They will unconditionally take the woman as “real” though the depiction is obviously an invention. This does not mean that they are inferior in taste by nature, but their meagre education and social conditions restricts their ability to decode more complicated artistic intentions. This “incompetence” in higher aesthetic

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5 Such a facile description of the physical beauty of woman is also seen in the elite “Palace Style” Poem (*gong ti shi* 宫体诗) prevailing in the Southern Dynasties (420-589). The influence of elite literature is therefore also significant in this lyric. But, carelessly written, its artistic quality certainly cannot compare with the elite poetry.
discrimination, according to the French cultural critics Pierre Bourdieu, essentially distinguishes the ordinary audience from the elite one.

A work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded. A beholder who lacks the specific code . . . cannot move from the ‘primary stratum of the meaning we can grasp on the basis of our ordinary experience’ to the ‘stratum of secondary meanings’, i.e. the ‘level of the meaning of what is signified’, unless he possesses the concepts which go beyond the sensible properties and which identify the specifically stylistic properties of the work.  

According to Bourdieu, beholders who merely rely on their “sensible properties” in viewing a work of art tend therefore to be drawn mainly by its surface expression rather than by its hidden intimations. Certainly, the classical allusions and allegory are too abstruse, and the intricate rhetoric in literati poetry, too perplexing, for the common reader, but even a lyric with simple diction like the following can infer much more to the informed reader than the vulgar, who seeks glitter and spectacle.

Tune: “Pu sa man” 婆 萊 超 (“Bodhisattva Barbarian”)

On the gold screen, the folds of small hills are glimmering.  
A cloud of hair about to cross the scented snow of her cheek.  
Lazily, she gets up to paint her mothlike eyebrows,  
And too late in the day puts on her makeup.

From the front and from behind, the mirrors reflect a flower.  
Face and flower shine one on the other.  
Stitched into the silk of her bright new coat  
Are pair after pair of gold partridge.

Written by the late Tang poet Wen Tingyun 溫 庭 筠 (812-ca. 870), the lyric on the surface is no more than an objective description of a woman who wakes up late one morning in her bedchamber and dresses lazily. Compared to the Dunhuang

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lyric “Qing bei le” above, the woman in Wen’s piece is never fully visualized; one catches only a glimpse of her in action or posture. Her “charming face” only reflects incidentally in the mirrors, which she holds up to see whether the flower is properly set in her hair (line 5-6). Rather than crudely stating that “her face is like flower,” as in the Dunhuang lyric, Wen’s line demands that the reader ponder and savour their “shining one on the other.” She may not be as high in the social order as the woman in the Dunhuang lyric (in fact, based on our knowledge of Wen’s “dissipated” life, she is probably a female entertainer8), but the avoidance of raw imagery, such as blood and scallions, refines her. Contrarily, the woman in the Dunhuang lyric, though decked out in all her finery, lacks the subtle graces of a noblewoman.

Wen Tingyun’s indirect and restrained portrayal and psychological insinuations sets his work apart from the straightforward popular lyric. Even so, the ordinary reader will still be able to grasp the sensual delight of the woman’s languor and perceive her loneliness, if he or she can read the abandonment implied by the partridges and sympathize with the woman’s tardiness. However, an elite reader well-versed in—sometimes oversensitive to—classical allusions and artistic codes of poetry will perceive more implicit messages from the lyric than others, sometimes even when these are not the writer’s original intention. He or she will move to the “stratum of secondary meanings” and interpret the piece allegorically. The Qing scholars Zhang Huiyan 張惠言 (1761-1833) and Chen Tingzhuo 陳廷焯 (1853-1892), for example, both claim that Wen’s “Pu sa man” series was written to lament his own unsuccessful political career.9 In their

9 See Zhang Huiyan, “Zhang Huiyan lun ci” 張惠言論詞 (“Zhang Huiyan’s Discourse on the Ci”), in Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋 (1901-1990), CHCB, vol. 2, 1609; and Chen Tingzhuo, Baiyu zhai cihua 白雨齋詞話 (White Rain Studio Ci Remarks), in which he comments, “Feiqing’s [Wen Tingyun] ci are all modeled on the ‘Li sao.’ This is why they will be incomparable for a thousand generations” 飛卿之詞全祖離騷，所以獨絕千古，CHCB, vol. 4. 3777. Mou Huaichuan supports Zhang and Chen’s viewpoints in his Ph.D. dissertation. He thoroughly scrutinizes the imagery and codes in Wen’s “Pu sa man” series and links them with Wen’s life, providing them with possible allegorical meanings. See Mou, 318-348.
opinion, Wen was following the literary tradition initiated by Qu Yuan’s “Li Sao” (Encountering Sorrow), in which the poet borrowed a woman’s voice to express his loyalty to the court and his frustrations at being rejected. As Zhang Huiyan interprets it, the woman’s action of putting on makeup in Wen’s piece resembles Qu Yuan’s self-depiction in the “Li Sao” where his virtues shine through his attire:

Having from birth this inward beauty,  
I add to it fair outward adornment;  
I dressed in selinea and shady angelica,  
And twined autumn orchids to make a garland.

Apart from the content of the piece, words borrowed from the “Li Sao” also invite allegorical interpretations. The “mothlike eyebrows” (e mei 娥 眉) in Wen’s piece (line 3), for example, is used in the “Li Sao” as a metonymical symbol for a virtuous and beautiful woman who invokes the jealousy of other consorts, who in turn represent deceitful ministers. Using Roman Jakobson’s semiotic theory to study traditional ci criticism, Professor Chia-ying Yeh states that images like “mothlike eyebrows” are well-established codes in Chinese classical poetry. She therefore clarifies how experienced readers like Zhang Huiyan and Chen Tingzhuo would readily identify these codes and connect one piece to the other where they find the same codes, though many times their references are forced and farfetched. Based on her study, one may assume that had Zhang and Chen read the Dunhuang lyrics in their lives, they might also have interpreted them allegorically, suggesting that the action of painting eyebrows (line 6) implies the cultivation of one’s virtue. But for ordinary readers, painting eyebrows in both lyrics is no more than a physical feature to emphasize the beauty of the women.

This difference between the elite and ordinary reader’s observing an artistic

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11 Zhu Xi, Chuci jizhu, 3; David Hawkes, trans., The Songs of the South, 68.
object may confirm Bourdieu’s dictum:

An art which ever increasingly contains reference to its own history demands to be perceived historically; it asks to be referred not to an external referent, the represented or designated ‘reality’, but to the universe of past and present works of art... the ‘naive’ spectator cannot attain a specific grasp of works of art which only have meaning--or value--in relation to the specific history of an artistic tradition. Intellectuals could be said to believe in the representation--literature, theatre, painting--more than in the things represented, whereas the people chiefly expect representations and the conventions which govern them to allow them to believe ‘naively’ in the things represented.\(^\text{13}\)

Zhang Huiyan and Chen Tingzhuo are precisely the kind of intellectuals who frequently perceive poetry historically and refuse to read it “naively.” Ordinary people, on the other hand, tend to relate what they see in a work of art to their daily experiences rather than historical or intertextual references. They demand that art should have a practical function, be it entertainment or emotional expression; whereas the elite audience will ask for more than “facile” functionalism, say, its aesthetic details, stylistics, and coded allusions. Again, Bourdieu insists:

It is as if the ‘popular aesthetic’ (the quotation marks are there to indicate that this is an aesthetic ‘in itself’ not ‘for itself’) were based on the affirmation of the continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function. This is seen clearly in the case of the novel and especially the theatre, where the working-class audience refuses any sort of formal experimentation and all the effects which, by introducing a distance from the accepted conventions (as regards scenery, plot, etc.), tend to distance the spectator, preventing him from getting involved and fully identifying with the characters... the ‘popular aesthetic’ ignores or refuses the refusal of ‘facile’ involvement and ‘vulgar’ enjoyment, a refusal which is the basis of the taste for formal experiment.\(^\text{14}\)

Bourdieu’s theory is basically correct in observing the “continuity between art and life” in popular aesthetic, but seems to ignore its concern with experimentation. In fact, it was among the populace that the nuances of the \textit{ci} lyric was originally developed.\(^\text{15}\) For such a new kind of entertainment to appear, formal

\(^{13}\) Bourdieu 3, 5.
\(^{14}\) Bourdieu 4.
\(^{15}\) For the popular origin of the \textit{ci} lyric, see Wagner.
experimentation must have been clearly taking place at the same time. The
difference between high and low art in experimentation is that the main objective
of the latter is to delight the common audience, to give it a sense of novelty, to
surprise it, and to win its favour. According to Herbert Gans, “popular arts are, on
the whole, user-oriented, and exist to satisfy audience values and wishes.”\(^\text{16}\)
Experimentation is therefore equally necessary if demanded by the common
audience, provided that it helps and does not hinder a fuller apprehension of the
real life it represents.

It must be pointed out that the above analysis only outlines the general
aesthetic distinction between the elite and popular \(ci\) lyrics. Thematically, in the
early stages of the evolution of the \(ci\), elite compositions like those in the *Huajian
ji* \(花間集\) (*Among the Flowers*)—a \(ci\) anthology compiled in the Five dynasties
(907-960)—are very similar to the Dunhuang lyrics in prizing romantic feelings
and feminine beauty above other loftier ideals and ideas. At times, lyricists such as
Wei Zhuang \(韋莊\) (834?-910) and Ouyang Xiu \(歐陽修\) (1007-1072) also
adopt the straightforwardness and artistic simplicity of the popular lyric.\(^\text{17}\) For
example, a famous lyric by Wei Zhuang reads:

Tune: “Si di xiang” 思 帝 郊 (“Longing for the Capital”)

On a spring day’s stroll,
Almond blossoms drift all over my head.
Who’s that young man on the pathway?
How suave he is!
I would like to be married to him
My whole life long.
Should I be thoughtlessly abandoned,
I would feel no shame.

\(^{16}\) Gans 62.
\(^{17}\) For a detailed study of Wei Zhuang’s \(ci\) style, see John Timothy Wixted, *The Song-Poetry of
translations of Wei Zhuang’s lyrics, see Robin D. S. Yates, *Washing Silk: The Life and Selected
For the influence of popular lyrics on Ouyang Xiu, see Ronald C. Egan, *The Literary Works of
Such an influence of the popular aesthetic on elite writers is especially pronounced in Liu Yong's lyrical practice, which I will study in detail in the next chapter. Collectively, these individual examples verify that artists can choose working materials from higher or lower levels of a culture and that a categorical demarcation between high and low is inadmissible.

II. The Characteristics of the Anonymous
Tang and Song Popular Ci Lyrics

Bourdieu's "popular aesthetic," affirming "the continuity between art and life" which demands a strong practical function of art, is highly applicable to our study of popular ci lyrics. In the following analyses, I will concentrate on several of their stylistic features, namely their 1) signs of oral performance; 2) close relationship with daily life; 3) straightforwardness and use of colloquial expressions; and 4) unrefined qualities and "marketplace aura."

1. Popular ci lyrics as a form of oral performance
Among those works written by Tang and Song anonymous writers, the most noteworthy bear the distinct marks of oral performance, in particular the Dunhuang lyrics. These pieces not only manifest the feelings of the common people at that time, but also remedy our deficit of information on how the ci lyric was used to entertain. The following is a good example:

Tune: "Que ta zhi" 雀 直 枝 （"A Magpie Steps On the Branch"")

“It’s unbearable that this magpie lies so much. He brings glad tidings, but has he ever had proof? Many times he has flown by, now I have him live, And in a cage of gold, shut him up and share no words.”

“If I just wanted to bring glad tidings with a good heart, Who’d ever know she’d shut me up in a cage of gold? I hope her journeying husband comes back soon;
Then she'll free me to leap into the cloudy blue.”

The abrupt shift in the second stanza of this short piece indicates that there would be two singers, or two characters played by one singer, during the performance. Possibly a simple costume or mask was used to introduce the magpie’s presence on stage. This dramatic prop certainly could surprise and amuse the audience, but the theme (also common in elite poetry) behind this humorous play was not in the least happy. It relates the historical reality of the thousands of Tang dynasty husbands and wives who endured unending separation due to military service. Constantly grieved over her husband’s absence, the woman in the song vents her frustration on the magpie, the bearer of good news according to popular belief. The bird’s occasional visits to the woman’s home, of course, prove nothing about her husband’s return, and thus annoy her.

The rough artistry of the song is apparent in its repetition of rhymes (line 1 and 4, *yu* 語, literally “to say”; line 6 and 8, *li* 裏, “within”). But the repeated phrases—“to bring glad tidings” (line 2 and 5) and “shut up in the golden cage” (line 4 and 6)—cannot be counted as technical flaws. For these are key phrases connecting the two contrasting and dialogical stanzas. This kind of repetition is usually taboo in literati poetry, but in popular songs, it is an essential, emphatic device used to dramatize the audience’s recall of the preceding lines. The following two sequential pieces provide us with another significant example.

**Tune: “Nan ge zi” 南歌子 (“Song of the South”) (P. 3836)**

(1)

You stand hidden behind the red curtain,


Who have you had in?
The finger marks on your face are clearly fresh.
The love knot in your silk belt, who has tied it?
What man trod on, then tore your skirt?

Your cicada braids, why tousled?
Your gold hairpin, how did it get split?
With that smeared red face dripping tears, who are you thinking of?
Now, out front in the hall, tell all.
Don’t hold back a thing.

(II)
Ever since you left,
I have no interest in any other man.
The fresh finger marks on my face got there in a dream.
The love knot in my silk belt I tied up myself.
And my skirt was trodden on and torn by a monkey.

The red curtain made my cicada braids tousled,
My gold hairpin split on an old crack,
The smeared red face dripping tears, from weeping for you.
Like the pine or cypress on South Mountain,
I have no interest in any other man.

This series, replete with sexual innuendoes (lines 3-7), was very likely performed by two singers. Using the same tune pattern and rhyme scheme, the woman in the second piece gives a witty retort to each corresponding question of the man in the first, and several lines are almost repeated verbatim as if in daily conversation. In performance, the spectators, whether they knew these dialogical pieces or not, would be predictably amused by the intensified dramatic effect brought about by this familiar and somewhat jocular conversation. They were taken in precisely because such a situation was also possible in their own lives, and because of their inclination towards “frivolous talk” and “petty gossip.” It does not aim to educate them, or to leave a haunting message in their mind for them to contemplate, but brings them instant joy and an immediacy of impact, evanescent and un-intellectual.

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21 DHGCZB, vol. 2, 638; DHQLJ 78 (#121-122).
The two “Nan ge zi” are categorized by Ren Erbei in his Dunhuang geci zhongbian as “simple song cycles” (putong lianzhang 普通聯章).22 According to Ren, this category consists of songs which have no fixed number of pieces or passages, but can be grouped together as they illustrate a story or a particular theme in the same tune pattern. Despite the extreme rarity of this form in extant Song ci collections, a set of excellent anonymous song cycles is included in the Yuefu yaci 樂府雅詞 (Music Bureau Elegant Ci Lyrics) compiled by Zeng Zao 曾慥 (d. ca. 1155):

Tune: “Jiu zhang ji” 九張機 (“The Nine Looms”)

On loom one.
Along the mulberry lane spring clothes are tried on.
A-lazing in the calm warm weather.
On peach blossom twigs,
The trills of the warbler’s song
Keeps folk from going back home.

On loom two.
Leaving, the traveler hesitates, stopping his horse.
Not bearing to let him go so easily,
I turn my head and smile,
Then go back in among the flowers,
Afraid only that they might know.

On loom three.
The silkworms age, the young swallows fly.
With the east wind, the banquet
at the long isle garden is over.

22 Ren, Dunhuang qu chutan, 316. Ren further divides other song cycles into four categories. They are: 1) song cycles with reduplicative lines (chongju lianzhang 重句聯章); 2) song cycles in fixed patterns (dingge lianzhang 定格聯章); 3) extended song cycles in fixed patterns (changpian dingge lianzhang 長篇定格聯章) and 4) grand songs (da qu 大曲). But how many of them—including the educative pieces and Buddhist hymns in the “simple song cycles”—can be categorized as ci lyrics is a highly contentious issue. For example, Jao Tsung-yi 高漱石 remarks, “The song sequences in fixed patterns are almost all Buddhist hymns. These kind of hymns should not be all viewed as ci lyrics. Ren’s theory seems too indiscriminate” 定格聯章幾全佛曲，此類佛曲，不能概目為詞，任説似嫌泛濫. Jao Tsung-yi and Paul Demieville, Airs de Touen-houang (Touen houang K’siu 敦煌曲) (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1971): 207. Marsha Wagner also points out that Ren’s “numbering system is sometimes dubious and misleading because he tends to assign a new number to each consecutive stanza of a linked series of verses.” Wagner 33.
The lightness of the silk drives me to seize the chance.
For now, the Guan Wa palace ladies,
Change their dresses for the dance.

On loom four.
At its creak and squeak, my eyebrows secretly knit.
Turning the shuttle I weave a hanging lotus.
Easy to piece the coils of a flower together,
But hard mend a broken heart.
It is as tangled and delicate, delicate as silk.

On loom five.
I have cross woven Shen Yue’s love poem.
The line in the middle, no one understands.
It speaks not of sorrow or regret.
It speaks not of wan looks.
Of love, only.

On loom six.
Row after row is playing with flowers.
Among them there are pairs of butterflies.
Stopping the shuttle for a while,
Under the light, by the quiet window,
I watch long upon them alone.

On loom seven.
The weaving of the lovebirds is done, I pause,
Afraid someone may carelessly cut them asunder.
Flying to two different places,
A solitary scene of sorrowful separation.
How will they ever follow one another again?

On loom eight.
Don’t know who wrote this palindrome.
What I have woven turns into tiers of desolate feelings.
Line by line I read it through.
Sick and tired--unable to say a thing,
Unable to bear the thought of it again.

On loom nine.
Dual flowers, dual leaves on dual twigs.
A fickle lover is always fast to leave.
From head to toe,
I sew hearts together
By passing a silk thread through.

In Zeng Zao’s collection, there is another “Jiu zhang ji” series. Song cycles like these strongly testify that the *ci* was a performed literature. However, the rarity of this category in the Song *ci* collection also suggests its relative unpopularity, or simply that much of it was lost.

The “Jiu zhang ji” series, though defined as an “elegant” sequence by Zeng Zao, resembles the colloquial and amatory Wu folksong popular in the Southern Dynasties, both thematically and stylistically. In the first three stanzas, the mulberry lane, the calm and warm spring weather and the Guan Wa Palace (built by the ancient state of Wu) recalls for the reader the typical atmosphere of Jiangnan where Wu folksong originated. The allusion to Shen Yue 沈 約 (441-513) and his love poem in the fifth stanza (line 2) makes a further temporal association with the Southern Dynasties. Although Shen was an elite poet, he and his colleagues, as well as emperors and princes, also assiduously transformed Wu folksong and developed it into the erotic “Palace Style” Poem. The song cycle’s description of a woman’s longing for her separated and perhaps fickle lover is notably one of the most common, if not banal, themes of Wu folksong. It distinguishes itself, however, by successively reiterating the work of weaving stanza after stanza, creating an effect which seems to imply that the woman’s longing will never cease. Stylistically, the series not only preserves the straightforward and colloquial flavour of Wu folksong, but also inherits from it a number of images which symbolize love, such as lovebirds, butterflies and flowers on twigs; all of which are in pairs, strongly contrasting with the woman’s loneliness. Also noteworthy is its use of homophonic characters as puns, which is an exceptionally salient feature of Wu folksong. For example, *lian zi* 蓮 子 (“lotus”) in line 3, stanza 4, is pronounced like “cherishing you” ( 憐 子 ); and *si* 絲 (“silk”) in line 6, stanza 9,

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24 *Yuefu yaci*, vol. 1, 15-17; *QSC*, vol. 5, 3649b-3650a.
like “longing for” (思).

The distinctive marks of oral performance demonstrated by the above anonymous lyrics are seldom presented in elite oeuvre, largely because elite writers, deeply influenced by the Confucian aesthetic, tended to use poetic form mainly as a vehicle for “expressing one’s aspirations” (言志). For this reason, their lyrics are, as Kang-i Sun Chang points out, almost exclusively characterized by the lyrical mode. Popular ci, on the other hand, had to rely on a variety of stylistic modes—including lyrical, narrative and dramatic—in order to amuse and attract relatively uneducated audiences and satisfy their demand for instant pleasure of a tangible story or play within a poem, rather than a solo of spiritual questing. This difference in style is also generated by the economic and social factors discussed in the following section.

2. The continuity between popular ci lyrics and daily life

Meditating on the passage of time and subtle expressions of personal melancholy are the main themes of the Tang and Song elite ci lyrics. Popular lyrics are more varied in subject matter. The soldier’s complaints of war, the sing-song girl’s misery, traveling merchant’s nostalgia, the city-dweller’s humble life, the hermit’s insouciant manner and even the doctor’s prescriptions are intermingled with the most common theme of romantic or erotic love. Although differences in function and aesthetic are certainly the main factors which contribute to this thematic (as

25 Despite its straightforward content, the series is interpreted allegorically by Chen Tingzhuo. Seizing upon a tenuous analogy, he comments, “The Song anonymous ‘Nine Looms’ consists of the words of a banished minister and an abandoned woman. Sad and delicate, intricate and elegant, they are excellent pieces [like the] ancient Yuefu poems . . . They are simply derived from the ’Lesser Elegantiae’ [’Xiao ya,’ a section in the Shijing] and the ’Li Sao.’ Ci lyrics like these have already reached their pinnacle.

26 Chang 19.
well as stylistic) distinction, the disparity in economic and social conditions also play a part. Pierre Bourdieu insists that the conditions of existence for an elite are basically

characterized by the suspension and removal of economic necessity and by objective and subjective distance from practical urgencies, which is the basis of objective and subjective distance from groups subjected to those determinisms.  

These preconditions enable the elite to acquire “all learning of legitimate culture.” Its obsession with “aesthetic distance” in high art (e.g. Post-Impressionist painting) and its distance from the common people are thus allowed to take shape. Bourdieu further emphasizes how the elite constitutes its specifically “aesthetic disposition”:

The aesthetic disposition, a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function, can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves, such as scholastic exercises or the contemplation of works of art.

Nourished by an abundance of time and money, such an “aesthetic disposition” despises works of art which merely offer easy gratification and accessibility. Maintaining an aesthetic distance between the object represented and the “ordinary sensibility” is considered by the elite to be more intellectually challenging, or interesting, than seeing the object as it actually is. But the “ordinary disposition,” generated from the commoner’s material deficiency and lack of leisure, tends to demand a practical function for art. It would like to see how art can be related to life and how art can speak for the audience.

Based on Bourdieu’s theory, the literati poets, freed from material urgencies and possessing this “aesthetic disposition,” incline to present the imagery, content, language and other facets of their works indirectly. Among the various Song ci

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27 Bourdieu 54.
28 Bourdieu 54.
lyricists, the most immediate example of this kind of poet is the prime minister Yan Shu 晏殊 (991-1055). Yan is known for his precocious and successful public career, and a life of comfort and affluence. His work is characterized by its ambiguous voice, balanced emotion, subtle references to luxury and wealth, and frequent detachment between the object described and the poet himself. For example, one of his most famous lyrics goes:

Tune: “Huan xi sha” 漣溪沙 ("Silk Washing Creek Sands")

A new song, a single cup of wine,
Last year's weather, the same pavilions and balconies.
The sun sets in the west, when will it return?

The flowers will fall for all you can do.
And the swallows that look familiar return.
On the scented garden path I pace to and fro.

This lyric meditates on the passage of time. Although it expresses a certain sense of loss aroused by the memory of last year's experience and the setting sun, the solace comes in the fifth line, reaching that something familiar will always return. From the last line, the reader gets the impression that Yan is in a state of contemplation and that his emotion is in a well balanced condition after acquiring the philosophical perception of the previous couplet.  

Bourdieu's theory may not apply absolutely to all literati poets (especially Song shi writers) or elite readers, for some still inherently or deliberately maintain an "ordinary disposition." However, in general it is undeniable that most common

\[29\] QSC, vol.1, 89a; Trans. Egan, 143.
\[30\] For this reason, Professor Chia-ying Yeh labels him an "intellectual poet" and gives the following definition: "The intellectual poet is always reflecting on his experience, trying to understand it, or examining his own feelings and keeping them under control." "An Appreciation of the Ts' u of Yen Shu," trans. James R. Hightower, in Song Without Music: Chinese Ts' u Poetry, ed. Stephen C. Soong (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1980), 84.
\[31\] Song shi poets are particularly known for their exploration of greater range of themes and subject matter than writers of any previous period, and are fond of describing "petty" things, such as insects, and quotidian affairs. They also employed a large amount of colloquial language in their work. However, their attitude to ci writing differs sharply from their treatment of the shi, thus Bourdieu's criticism is highly applicable here. For more detailed discussions of elite ci aesthetics, see the later sections in this chapter and passim. For a study of Song shi poetry, see Yoshikawa Kojiro 吉川幸次郎, Introduction to Sung Poetry, trans. Burton Watson
readers demand that poetry have a close relationship with ordinary life. An anonymous lyric written in the Song provides a good example.

Tune: "Xing xiang zi" 行香子 ("Song of Presenting Incense")

At Huating in East Zhe,
The price of goods is cheap.
There was a time I bought three pints of wine.
Opened the bottle,
Strong, mellow; bouquet, good.
It made you drink it right away,
Drunk right away and right away sober.

I heard [Tao] Yuanming

talk to Liu Ling:
This bottle of wine weighs three catties.
If you still don’t believe,
Take a scale and weigh them.
There is one catty of wine,
One catty of water, and one catty of bottle.

Selling watered-down wine was probably quite common in Song China, but is of course a minor mischief next to the rife civil wars, extortion, famine and penury. This explains why the above piece was written in an offhand tone. The piece talks about how a man was deceived by a cunning wine seller. Only after he drank the wine did he realize the truth (line 6-7). Here the two well-known poets and great drinkers, Tao Yuanming 陶 潤 明 (365-427) and Liu Ling 劉 伶 (third century), are used as models for the wine connoisseur and wine addict, respectively. A sense of humour is revealed through the conversation about the wine’s "ingredients" (lines 13-14). Though the allusion suggests the piece’s author was of higher literacy, the colloquial expression (line 3, *yi dao hui* 一道會 and line 5, *hua la guang qing* 滑辣光馨) also indicates his predilection for the rough edge of the tongue.


32 In Chen Shichong 陳世崇 (fl. thirteenth century), *Suiyin manlu* 隨隱漫錄 (Informal Records of the Leisurely Hermit) (Shanghai: Jinbu shuju, 1910), 2: 5a; also *QSC*, vol. 5, 3682a.
Whereas elite aesthetic, usually, requires poetry to focus on life’s serious aspects, popular aesthetic tends to indulge in its most ordinary and does not, for example, repudiate a “silly” and “frivolous” lyric such as the following:

Tune: “Lang tao sha” 浪 淘 沙 (“Waves Washing the Sand”)

You “mushy rice” my sworn foe!
And a wee touch of ginger and melon.
Head on with a bottle, I’m just about to drink some wine.
But you come, right so, to stop me.
Oh! how boring.

I can only spoon you into my mouth,
Just like swallowing sand.
If the host wants someone to praise him,
Then don’t begrudge pouring three or five cups,
Adding flowers to this brocade.

A guest was invited to a meal, but the niggardly host served only cheap dishes. “Mushy rice” (shui fan 水 飯) was probably common folk’s daily fare, thus the guest calls it his “sworn foe” (line 1). In a book which records in detail the hustle and bustle of the Northern Song capital Kaifeng 開 封 (in present Henan province), there is an entry about “mushy rice”:

From Vermilion Bird Gate, go straight down to Dragon Ford Bridge. Turn south from the bridge, [and you will find] mushy rice sold right on the street. 出 朱 雀 門，直 至 龍 津 橋，自 州 橋 南 去，當 街 水 飯.

Food “sold right on the street” was almost certainly of poor quality. Also, its literal meaning indicates that it was perhaps made of boiled water and cooked rice only. Based on this evidence, we can tell that the guest was a lower class city-dweller.
His strong dislike of the food is vented by personifying it as a “foe” (line 1), from which the audience also enjoys comic relief.

When life is difficult, pursuing higher goals becomes a luxury which only the wealthy can afford. The above example shows that a good meal is a basic goal of the common people, simply because they can rarely have one. It would be a very unpleasant experience for them if even this simple goal could not be approached, but it is a mouthful the elite would consider too infra dig.

While the “mushy rice” poem humorously expresses the common people’s aspiration for a better material life, the following soliloquy voices their hope for a sincere romantic relationship.

Tune: “Nan ge zi” 南 歌 子 ("Song of the South") (P. 3836)

How can I not think it over? 争不教人憶
I fear your heart lies elsewhere. 怕郎心自偏
Recently I’ve heard things, and I feel uneasy. 近來聞道不多安
Night after night my dreams are uncontrolled, 夜夜夢魂鬱鬱
Always keep going to visit you. 往往到君邊

In the daytime we always see one another. 白日長相見
At night, we lie in different places. 夜頭各自眠
I constantly think of you all day, 終朝盡日意懸懸
Wishing I were a love knot, 願作合歡裙帶
Bound across your breast, for always. 長繫在你胸前

Upon hearing the rumour that her lover is seeing someone else, the woman feels uneasy (line 2-3). Even though they are seeing each other constantly, she still cannot be sure he stays faithful (line 6-7). The piece repeatedly stresses the woman’s thinking about the man (line 4-5, 8), and ends with her unfeasible wish to control him.

Popular culture has been charged with escapism. For example, Ernest Van den Haag states, “Arts can deepen the perception of reality. But popular culture veils it, diverts from it, and becomes an obstacle to experiencing it. It is not so much an

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35 DHGCZB, vol. 1, 377; DHQJL 80 (#124).
escape from life but an invasion of life first, and ultimately evasion altogether.”

However, popular lyrics such as the above examples affirm a convergence on problems in art as in life. They effectively display the perhaps “insignificant,” but also the most genuine, expressions of the common people, demonstrating to us the fact that life is sometimes serious, sometimes not; and it is quite often in a trivial, laughable matter that we discover its true implications. The unveiled simplicity of articulation in popular lyrics is perfectly in accord with the “ordinary disposition,” which is manifested in a desire to see the things and persons as they are; a desire, as Bourdieu defines, “to enter into the game, identifying with the characters’ joys and sufferings, worrying about their fate; espousing their hopes and ideals” and also “living their life.”

3. Straightforward and colloquial expressions

The style of the popular lyric is most notably demonstrated in its frequent use of straightforward expressions and daily language which is relatively rare in elite compositions. These characteristics, like the variety of different subject matter discussed in the previous section, are closely connected with the lyric’s “ordinary disposition.” They are formulated chiefly in response to the demands of the public, who accept pieces expressed in its own idiom most easily.

By and large, the popular lyric ignores the subtle ambiguities treasured by the elite and substitutes a strong statement and a clear-cut message for it. Some of the earlier examples also contain these elements. For example:

It’s unbearable that this magpie lies so much
You “mushy rice” my sworn foe!
Wishing I were a love knot,
Bound across your breast, for always.

37 Bourdieu 33.
Lines like these focus on the emotional state of the subject who expresses his or her like or dislike in respect to the second person (ni 你) or object. Unlike some of the literati ci, such as Wen Tingyun’s “Pu sa man,” in which the personae’s feelings are always ambiguous, popular lyrics tend to state explicitly the identities or feelings of the persons represented, enabling its audience to directly relate its own experiences and sentiments to specific characters. Sometimes, even if the identity of the character is vague, their state of mind is still explicit. The following Dunhuang lyric is perhaps the most conspicuous example:

Tune: “Pu sa man” 菩薩蠻 (“Bodhisattva Barbarian”) (S. 4332)

Across the pillow I made a thousand vows: 枕前發盡千般願
Not until green mountains crumble 要休且待青山爛
then will I stop, 水面上秤錘浮
Not until a weight can float on top of water, 直待黃河徹底枯
Not until the Yellow River is dried completely to its bottom. 白日參辰現
Not until Orion appears in broad daylight, 北斗回南面
Not until the Big Dipper turns south; 休即未能休
Stop loving you—I yet cannot, 且待三更見日頭
Not until we see the sun in the third watch of the night.

Whether this piece is a creation of a man or a woman, its statement is still strong and clear. In this short lyric, six out of the eight lines are given to the lover’s pledge of fidelity. There are no deviations from its linear progression; no other sophisticated emotions are involved. It is so strongly and frankly expressed that the reader need only follow the message offered, and conjecture as to its meaning is hardly necessary. The lover’s vows, through the use of “the trope identified as ‘impossibilia’,” is probably influenced by the Han Yuefu folksong “Oh Heaven!” ("Shang ye" 上邪):

Oh Heaven!
I wish our love 上邪
Would hold forever and be never undone 我欲與君相知

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38 DHGCZB, vol. 1, 326; DHQIL 34 (#041).
39 Wagner 34.
Till slopes from the mountains are gone,
Till water in the river runs dry,
Till summer snow falls, winter thunders boom and thump,
Heaven and earth merge into one,
Then would I dare break off from you.

Such a direct and explicit statement is generally repudiated in literati ci criticism. For example, the late Song scholar Shen Yifu 沈義父 holds that “[One] cannot [express] romantic feelings too explicitly.” Still, it is not uncommon to find literati such as Wei Zhuang in the Tang (not to mention the obviously “vulgar” lyricist Liu Yong), closely imitating this distinctive feature of the popular lyric.

Straightforwardness couples with colloquialism in popular ci. From an elite critic’s point of view, however, the use of colloquial language (liyu 俚語) is tantamount to vulgarity. Zhang Yan 張炎 (1248-1320?), a late Song lyricist and critic, for example, bemoans that even an elegant poetess such as Li Qingzhao 李清照 (1084-1151) occasionally uses colloquial expressions in her lyrics.

The “Yong Yu le” [“Always Having Fun”] by Li Yi'an [Qingzhao] says, “It would be better to lean against the wee curtain / To listen to other people’s laughter.” This lyric itself is not bad. But to sing in colloquial language during a banquet by the flowers and under the moon would seem like hitting the clay instrument fou while performing the elegant “Shao” music. Truly it is a pity!

In ancient and modern colloquial Chinese, it is common practice to add the suffix er 兒 (familiarizing “wee” or “little” in English) after a noun. But in formal occasions or belles lettres, this suffix is supposedly avoided. Li Qingzhao’s use of it after the noun “curtain” (lian 簾) quoted in the above comment, therefore, was

40 Guo Maoqian, Yuefu shiji, vol. 1, 231.
41 如 說 情，不 可 太 露。Yuefu zhimi 楽 府 指 迷 (Yuefu Guidebook), CHCB, vol. 1, 280.
42 Ci yuan 詞 源 (The Origin of the Ci), CHCB, vol. 1, 263. For Li’s lyric, see QSC, vol. 2, 931b.
considered by Zhang Yan as inappropriate. A similar opinion on the use of the vernacular in the *ci* lyric is proffered by Shen Yifu. An entry in his *Yuefu zhimi* says,

Words such as *zen* (how), *ren* (such as this), *nai* (unbearable), *zhe* (this) and *ni* (you), though [common] diction of *ci* lyricists, should not be used too often. One should also treat these words carefully and not use them unless it is unavoidable. 如 怎 字、恁 字、奈 字、這 字、你 字之 類，雖是 詞 家 語，亦 不 可 多 用，亦 宜 斟 酌，不 得 已 而 用 之。^{43}

Whereas Shen thinks that colloquial diction such as *zen, ren, nai, zhe* and *ni* will “vulgarize” elite poetry, it is not only a common and natural, but also an essential element in popular lyrics. At times, a popular *ci* writer would deliberately play with the suffix *er* for effect:

Tune: “Yuan lang gui” 冤 郎 歸 (“The Return of Mr. Yuan”)

Modish make-up, fashionable knots
in a wee gossamer garment(er),
Gilded with gold is the wee mugwort tiger(er),
Lapel of painted silk, wee belted skirt(er),
Its design is of little potted lotus(er).

A small bag of fragrance,
A wee thread-bound purse(er),
The wee pair of them over the chest(er).
Post toilette, from behind the embroidered curtain
she comes out,
Asking if she is presentable or not.

As if flaunting Zhang Yan’s theory, this lyric consistently uses the suffix *er* for its rhyme (ending six out of the poem’s eight lines), also violating the sacrosanct poetic rule that rhymes should not be repeated in the same piece. Such a crude device, however, helps compound the innocence of the girl, who makes a

^{44} Chen Yuanjing 陳 元 親, *Suishi guangji* 歲 時 廣 記 (*Extensive Record of Times and Seasons*) (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1968), BBCS, 21: 12b; QSC, vol. 5, 3673b.
tremendous effort to dress herself up but still lacks confidence in the result of her work. In addition to this distinctive feature, the piece is also an animated record of the customs of the Dragon Boat Festival in the fifth day of the fifth month. According to popular belief, the mugwort tiger (ai hu 艾虎) and small bag of fragrance (xiang dai zi 香袋子) can dispel evil spirits and inauspicious omens particularly troublesome in the summer months.\(^{45}\) The thread-bound purse (xu qian 擻錢) is prescribed to proscribe “red mouth and white tongue” (chi kou bai she 赤口白舌), that is, slanderous talk and gossip.\(^{46}\) It is through the use of colloquial language and simple diction that the acuteness of popular remedies and sayings can be rubbed so potently together with the naivete of the principal character.

4. Unrefinement and “marketplace aura”  The popular lyric’s lack of refinement results partly from its emotional immediacy and use of colloquial diction, and partly from the mediocre skills of the writers. The common notion of the popular ci as subordinate to music also contributed to its comparative artistic inferiority as a lyric. Many modern scholars believe that professional entertainers, though well-trained in music, did not take the quality of the lyrics too seriously, an attitude contrasting sharply to the literati poets. Professional entertainers merely demanded singable texts from the lyricists; whether or not they were well written was secondary. Shen Yifu advances the following opinion on the popular lyric’s literary defects and their causes:

Poets of elder generations wrote many excellent lyrics. But very often they did not fit the [musical] tunes, thus, no one sang them. Most of those lyrics performed in entertainment quarters and courtesan houses were written by professional musicians and writers who made their living in marketplaces. Many people sang them simply because they did not deviate from the tunes. However, the words and diction they used are completely unreadable. This was done to the degree that when chanting of the moon, rain is mentioned;

\(^{45}\) For a detailed study about these customs, see Huang Shi 黃石, Duanwu lisu shi 端午禮俗史 (History of the Rites and Customs of the Dragon Boat Festival) (Hong Kong: Taixing shuju, 1963), 177-182, 193-199.

\(^{46}\) Chen Yuanjing 21: 12b.
when chanting of spring, an autumn scene is also presented. Lyrics such as “Hua xin dong” [“The Romantic Heart is Restless”] are ridiculed as “consisting of four seasonal phenomena in a single piece.” Also, within a given lyric, things are [likely to be] disordered and repetitious. For example, a certain “Qu you chun” [“Spring Outing by the River Bank] reads, “My face is too frail to hide the tears.” In the second stanza, it says, “I cry until I am exhausted.” Then it concludes, “My sleeves are filled up with red tears.” There are very many like these. They are serious defects.

Shen’s statement exemplifies the basic disparity between elite and popular lyrics: the former usually value literary quality above music, while the latter do the opposite. The modern scholar Cai Songyun’s 蔡嵩 雲 (1892-?) commentary on Shen’s work reaffirms this phenomenon:

Probably it was because the common practice of the time that, whereas literary writers did not think highly of [musical] rules, professional musicians cared little about texts; so they moved down opposite paths. This is one of the critical reasons which has resulted in the severance of music from lyrics. 蓋 當時 風 氣，文 士 不 重 律，樂 工 不 重 文，兩 者 背 道 而 鬥，此 詞 之 音 律 與 辭 章 分 離 之 一大 關 鍵 也。49

47 CHCB, vol. 5, 281. The hodgepodge-like “Hua xin dong” is recognized as an anonymous piece. However, the “Qu you chun” is ascribed to the elite poet Kang Yuzhi 康 與 之 (fl. 1147-1158). The lyrics can be found in QSC, vol. 5, 3679b and vol. 2, 1303b.

48 For example, Su Shi was particularly known and criticized for his inexpertness in music. See Li Qingzhao’s discourse on the Ci, in Hu Zi 胡 仔 (fl. 1082-1143), Tiaoxiyuyin conghua 同 翔 漁 隱 談 話 (Collected Sayings of the Fishing Hermit of Bignonia Stream) (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984): houji 後 集, 33: 254; also, Peng Cheng 彭 雞 (fl. 1080-1086), Moke huixi 墨 客 梧 梓 (The Literary Writer Flourishing his Brush) (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965), BBCS, 4: 6a.

However clear Shen and Cai's point may be, it does not adequately explain why professional musicians did not treat words and text seriously.

Preceding sections emphasize the use of *ci* lyric in oral performance, and that the common audience demanded it be closely associated with daily experience. For this reason, the illiterate or semi-literate audience's role in determining the *ci* repertoire should be addressed. Too elegant and intellectual lyrics were ill-suited for men who frequented the entertainment quarters or courtesan houses in pursuit of sensual pleasures. This is probably why Cai Songyun states that "even when elegant lyrics were well blended with tunes, contemporary performers still did not want to sing them."[^50] The lyrics most welcomed by the common audience as well as professional musicians were apparently those replete with "marketplace aura" (*shi jing qi* 市井气), the term frequently used by elite critics to show their contempt for "vulgar" or unrefined lyrics. In metropolises like the Northern and Southern Song capitals Kaifeng and Lin'an 臨安 (present Hangzhou), that "aura" was ubiquitous.

Also, there were low-level prostitutes who came without invitation to sing in front of the banquet tables. [People might] casually give them a little money or some things to send them away. These prostitutes were called "inferior guests," or *da jiu zuo*. 歌女不呼自来，筵前歌唱，臨時以些小錢物贈之而去，謂之『賤客』，亦謂之『打酒坐』。

On the streets or in marketplaces there were musicians in groups of three or five, propping up one or two girls to dance and sing short *ci* and doing business, particularly along the streets. 街市有樂人三五為隊，擎一二女童舞旋，唱小詞，專沿街趕趁。[^51]

Songs sung in these contexts would be full of "marketplace" elements, such as the straightforward and colloquial flavours. They were also identifiable by their ordinary or "shallow" sentiments, and redundant, "artless" representations.

[^50]: Cai 71.
The "marketplace aura" is especially remarkable in jocular and erotic pieces. Two jocular lyrics, "Xing xiang zi" and "Lang tao sha," have been examined earlier. The following example is even more derisive and mischievous.

Tune: "Qing yu wan" 青玉案 ("Green Jade Bowl")

Hobnailed rain shoes wear down their soles and the Xiangfu road.
Like white egrets, one after another they disappear.
Who can spend the day with examination boxes and scholar's hat?
Warriors from the Eight Wings Sector,
Two Invigilators in the hall,
And nowhere for cribs to be hidden.

Time up, it was just about dusk.
Clutching an ink-brush
he crammed the space with scribbles.
If one asks how great his glum idleness is: like
Two candlesticks of fat,
A half bowl of rancid rice,
A brief fall of evening rain.

This piece mocks the candidates who went to take the advanced imperial examination held in Xiangfu, another name for the Northern Song capital Kaifeng. Only after passing was a candidate qualified for an official position or to enter central government. The competition was intense. Each time, only a few candidates won the title of "Advanced Scholar" (jin shi 进士), but thousands still hankered after the fame and gain it offered. Therefore, both in and out of the examination hall, bribery and scandals were common. Some, neither intelligent enough to answer the questions correctly, nor wealthy enough to pay off the examination officers, would try to cheat. The inveterate corruption became the subject of gossip and even a laughingstock for both the common folks and scholarly class. The derision and jocularity of "Qing yu wan" is amplified by its

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52 See the pieces about watered-down wine and "mushy rice," p. 84-86.
parodies of the tune pattern, rhymes, diction and structure used by the Song poet He Zhu 賀鑄 (1052-1125) in his solemn and well-known romantic lyric.

Her wave of tiny steps did not cross
Sideways Pond road.
I could only see their fragrant dust evaporate.
Brocade zither, flowering years,
with whom can I spend my days?
Moon bridge, flowered courtyard,
Carved window frames, vermilion door,
Only spring knows where she is hidden.

Flying clouds lift little by little,
on the bank of asarum it was dusk.
A coloured ink-brush
scrawls anew a broken-hearted scribble.
If one asks how great is my idle feeling: like
A river bank of misty grass,
A city full of blowing catkins,
The plum going yellow--a season of rain.

Compared with He’s piece, doubtlessly, the “Qing yu wan” parody is artistically inferior and inelegant. But poetic refinement was not the imitator’s primary aim. Rather, wordplay and satirical barbs concerned him more. By making fun of both the candidates, the whole examination system, and a celebrated literatus poet He, he could easily delight both the common listeners and the elite (if the former knew of He’s piece and the latter remained unoffended).

Implicit or explicit erotic descriptions can be easily found in the anonymous Tang and Song popular ci lyrics. Most probably, this type of lyric was performed in brothels or courtesan houses to entertain the “johns,” or more specifically, to stimulate their sexual fantasies. From the following two records, we know that prostitution flourished particularly in the Tang and Song capitals.

In Chang’an there was a Pingkang Lane, the place where the female entertainers lived and bravos and young men in the capital gathered together. Also, every year the new advanced scholars would visit, lingering there with red invitation cards and name cards in their hands.

54 QSC, vol. 1, 513a.
Contemporaries called this lane the “Swamp of the Dashing Young Men.”

... after entering the gate of Ren’s Restaurant, all along the more than a hundred-step long main corridor were small pavilions on the two sides of its north and south courtyards. Toward evening, lamps and lanterns were brilliantly illuminated and shone upon the upper and lower storeys. Hundreds of female entertainers with rich makeup gathered at the door of the main corridor, waiting to be hired by the customers. Looking at them one would think they were immortals.

Female entertainers in the Tang and Song did not merely provide sexual services for their male customers. Many were also excellent entertainers and musicians, or even talented poets or lyricists. There are abundant anecdotes about their elegant compositions and close relationships with the elite writers. Still, it is certain that the majority of prostitutes had no choice but to sell sex and sing erotic lyrics such as the following to jolly their customers:

(1)
My snowy white breast,
Will let you bite as you will,
For I’m afraid you might spend thousands to buy a smile.

(2)
How listless am I,
How listless am I,
Lately I let men bite as they will.
Totally forgetting what I had at heart.

56 Wang Renyu 78-103, 123-144.
57 Tune: “Yu ge zi” 魚歌子 (“Fishing Song”), Pan Chonggui 162-3.
If the above examples, in addition to their erotics, also reveal the helpless situation and despair of some women in a patriarchal society, the following would be considered blatant objectification of women.

Tune: “Jie pei” 解佩 (“Untying a Pendant”)

Her wee face(er) is shapely and fine,
Her wee heart(er), charming and smart.
Her eyebrows(er) are a wee bit long,
The wee eyes(er) fringed by hair at the temples.
Her wee nose(er) stands out,
Wee small mouth(er),
wee soft and sweet tongue(er),
her wee ears(er) inside are pink and glossy.

Her neck is like precious jade,
Her hair, like cloud.
The eyebrows look finely trimmed,
The hands, like spring shoots of bamboo.
Her titties(er) are sweet and succulent,
Wee slim waist(er),
wee tiny feet(er),
and that other wee place(er) won’t bear mention.

Making abundant use of the colloquial suffix er, this piece portrays a woman as a small piece of merchandise assayed by the whims of men: perfectly suitable for those who frequent entertainment quarters or brothels to pursue sensualities. From the moralist’s viewpoint, it would be viewed simply as “vulgar and licentious.” Yet strangely, the song was presented as a gift to the king of Korea by the Royal House of the Northern Song, about the beginning of the twelfth century, together with sixty-nine other elegant and vulgar ci. According to Xie Taofang’s study, it seems that on one hand the Song emperor officially censured the performance of vulgar

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60 For these lyrics, see Zheng Linzhi, 452a-464b. For a more detailed study of these pieces, see Xie Taofang 謝桃坊, “Gaoli shi yuezhi suochun songci kaobian” 高麗史·樂志存宋詞考辨 (“A Study and Diagnosis of the Extant Song Ci Lyrics in the ‘Music Records’ in the History of Korea”), Wenxue yichan 文學遺產 (Literature Legacy), 2 (1993), 70-78.
or licentious lyrics, both in court and in public, but on the other hand allowed these pieces to be sung at palace banquets.\textsuperscript{61} It shows that the taste of the court and ruling class was also infected by the "marketplace aura," since their ardour for sensual pleasure was little different from, and perhaps even stronger than, the commoners.

**III. The Formal Irregularity of the Popular Lyric and the Emendation of the Dunhuang Manuscripts**

Popular lyrics, especially those found in the Dunhuang manuscripts, were less formally standardized than the elite \textit{ci} lyrics. Compared with the compilation of \textit{ci} patterns officially sanctioned in the \textit{Qinding cipu} (Imperial Authorized Ci Manual, 1715), for example, tonal and metrical violations and interpolations (\textit{chen zi}) can be frequently found in Dunhuang lyrics. This phenomenon shows that formal regulation of the \textit{ci} at its initial stage was flexible, possibly because it was treated as literature performed rather than literature read. It was in the hands of the literati that lyric patterns eventually became more standardized. The Dunhuang piece "Pu sa man" (previously cited) demonstrates the formal flexibility of popular lyrics.

Across the pillow I made a thousand vows:
Not until green mountains crumble then will I stop,
Not until a weight can float on top of water,
Not until the Yellow River is dried completely to its bottom,
Not until Orion appears in broad daylight,
Not until the Big Dipper turns south;
Stop loving you--I yet cannot,
Not until we see the sun in the third watch of the night.

The syllabic scheme of this lyric for each line is 7767, 5557, within two stanzas,

\textsuperscript{61} Xie 77-78.
while those composed by elite lyricists usually follow the pattern 7755, 5555.62 The “excess” syllables in the third, fourth and last lines are most likely interpolations, or perhaps the musical pattern, which this piece is based on, is different from the later literatus version. Also, its tonal pattern violates the received regulations. For example, in the *Qinding cipu*, the tonal pattern of the first two lines in the second stanza is + O O O O , + O O O O (+ either level or oblique tone, O level tone, O oblique tone).63 However, in the *Dunhuang* piece the second syllable of the first line is an oblique tone. Similar kinds of metrical and tonal violations can be found in the “Que ta zhi” (p. 70-71, also called “Die lian hua” 蝶 懷 花, or “The Butterfly Loves the Flower”) and the several “Nan ge zi” (p. 71-72, 81). None of the official versions in the *Qinding cipu* is identical to any of the above-cited popular examples.64

Musical change might have been an important factor contributing to the tonal and metrical discrepancies between the lyrics sung in the Tang and those sung in the Five Dynasties or the Song. In such spans of hundreds of years, a tune or its method of performance never remained completely unchanged, particularly when it was transmitted orally. Unfortunately, we cannot trace how the music of a specific tune pattern evolved from the Tang to the Song due to insufficient documentation. However, based on Shen Yifu’s statement, we can tell at least that interpolations, generally rejected by the elite writers, were commonly applied to the popular lyric.

In ancient music there were many discrepancies which could be varied to such an extent that a specific tune would vary in length by two to three syllables, or its number of syllables per line would be irregular. These alterations were made by professional musicians. There was also a singing style called *piao chang*, which frequently pegged the suffix *liao* [to the tune]. 古 曲 譜 多 有 異 同 ， 至 一 調 有 兩 三 字 多 少 者 ，
或 句 法 長 短 不 等 者 ， 蓋 被 教 師 改 換 。 亦 有 唄 唱 一 家 ， 多 添 了 字 。65

The practice of using interpolations was viewed by Shen as an inelegant singing style, and he proposed that one should not write in the popular style of *piao chang*. This elitist opinion was taken to its extreme when some even argued that the *ci* lyric should not admit any interpolation at all. The Qing scholar Wan Shu (fl. 1680-1692) in his *Ci lü* (Ci Regulations, 1687), for example, claims “I do not know where the saying that the *ci* can use interpolation comes from. How can the *ci* be interpolated?” For this reason, instead of taking interpolations into account, he categorizes tune patterns that do not perfectly comply with the sanctioned versions as variant forms (*you yi ti* 又一體). His argument, however, is challenged by another Qing scholar Jiang Shunyi 江順誥, who in his *Cixue jicheng* (Collected Ci Studies, 1881) stresses that the *ci* definitely shows evidence of interpolation. Jiang’s theory is that, just as in the *qu* song, interpolations are made when the regular metrical pattern of a particular tune cannot sufficiently enable a lyricist to write a complete line, or when two lines are not connected to each other. He thus criticizes Wan for not understanding the origin and musical evolution of the *ci*, and disapproves of his categorization of irregular tune patterns as variants.

From a historical point of view, current scholars may say with confidence that the standardization of the *ci* patterns marks the evolution of the *ci* from a literature performed to a literature read. The use of interpolation in popular lyrics provides important proof of the origin of the *ci* as a literary form for oral performance. This theory has been reinforced with the discovery of the Dunhuang manuscripts. The modern scholars Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927) and Zhao Zunyue 趙尊嶽 (1898-1965) draw the following conclusions:

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67 *CHCB*, vol. 4, 3233.
68 *CHCB*, vol. 4, 3234, 3238. For further studies on interpolation in the *ci*, see Zhou Yukui 周玉魁, “*Ci de chenzi wenti*” 詞的 概 字 問 題 (“The Problem of Interpolation in the Ci”), *Ci xue* 詞 學 (Ci Studies), 10 (1992), 137-144.
The sentence structures and rhyming patterns of the two ["Feng gui yun"] are different from each other, but on the whole they are alike. [From this] one can see the flexibility of the ci pattern in the Tang. [凤归云] 二首，句法 與 用 韻 各 自 不 同，然 大 體 相 似，可 見 唐 人 词 律 之 寬。 69

Also, these songs were [written] for the convenience of singers, and based on the music, their singers usually cut down notes or reduced words; therefore, the tunes were the same, but the versions different. As for the works by literati writers, [if] they followed the tune patterns and presented regularized pieces to female songsters, they could be called experts in music. But ultimately there was a gap, which they had yet to straddle. Thus, although following the patterns to look for [suitable] tones, they were afraid of deviating for even one syllable or line. They could not compete with the singers' practice of trimming words and notes, following the instruments, and going along with the rhythm. This was enough to make [the singers] household names and popular in the marketplace. 亦 惟 其 僅 便 歌 者，而 歌 者 往 往 就 謳 以 爲 偷 聲 減 字 也，故 又 擇 同 調 而 異 謳。蓋 文 人 之 作，按 付 紅 牙，即 號 知 音，終 有 一 間 之 未 達。 故 雖 按 謳 尋 聲，一字 一句，惟 恐 失 之，乃 不 如 歌 者 之 減 字 偷 聲，循 弦 赴 節，轉 足 以 遍 行 闔 閣，家 喻 戶 歲。 70

Opinions like these are generally well-accepted. Nonetheless, the abundant formal irregularities, corrupt or unofficial characters and scribal errors found in the Dunhuang manuscripts have created new problems with the emendations and study of these early lyrics, particularly when one applies the received ci patterns to them.

Evidently, certain modern scholars peruse the Dunhuang pieces with conventional notions of the ci lyric in mind. They use the metrical and tonal patterns found in works by literati poets of later generations as their standards, claiming that the discrepancies between the Dunhuang pieces and later tune patterns must be due to scribal error or musical variations. Though these did

70 Zhao Zunyue, “Yunyao ji zaquzi ba” 云 譯 集 雜 曲 子 跋 (“Colophon to the Songs of the Clouds”), in Chen Renzhi 陳 人 之 and Yan Tingliang 顏 廷 亮 eds. Yunyao ji yanjiu hulu 雲 譯 集 研 究 彙 錄 (Collected Studies of the Songs of Clouds) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), 58-9.
of the scribes, or seem to exaggerate the flexibility of a number of ci patterns without considering that these patterns might have belonged to completely different tunes.

The most prominent of these scholars is Mao Guangsheng 冒廣生 (styled Heting 鶴亭, 1875-1959). In his emendation of the Yunyao ji, Mao places all the lyric texts compiled in this collection alongside literati works of the same tune titles or of different titles but similar formal patterns. The result is extremely discordant. Long tunes such as “Feng gui yun” and “Qing bei le” are particularly at odds. Insisting on a close formal affinity between the Dunhuang pieces and literati works, Mao attempts to eliminate the discordances by reducing the size of the “excess” syllables he takes to be interpolations and inserting blank spaces to indicate lacunae (see Figure 1, p. 98).71 Some textual alterations he makes are indeed quite reasonable, but many others seem farfetched. Even more misinformed is his contention that, since the Yunyao ji consists of many long tune titles found in Liu Yong’s ci collection, it must be a manuscript written in the Song, instead of a Tang production, as universally acknowledged.72

Mao’s methodological failing lies mainly in this blind adherence to the approved pattern of the ci tune and his denial of any evolution of ci music itself between the Tang and Song period. Though he realizes that tunes could vary from lyric to lyric, resulting in different versions of a particular ci pattern, he seems to be too unwilling to accept the possibility that certain tunes could be varied so drastically that their metrical or tonal patterns would also change fundamentally and only faintly resemble their original forms; or that tunes of the same title might not be formally related. For example, the four “Feng gui yun” and the two “Qing bei le” in the Dunhuang manuscripts are very different from Liu Yong’s pieces. One may therefore regard them as distinct and independent tunes; even if Liu’s were derived from the Dunhuang versions, they shared little or nothing in

71 Mao Guangsheng, “Xinjiao Yunyao ji zaquzi 新校云謠集雜曲子 (“New Collation of the Songs of Clouds”), Chen and Yan, Yunyao ji yanjiu huilu, 45-56.
72 Chen and Yan, Yunyao ji yanjiu huilu, 42.
Mao’s orthodox approach to emendation is criticized by Ren Erbei. He states that the two Dunhuang lyrics entitled “Dong xian ge” (Song of the Grotto Immortals) are basically unrelated musically and metrically to the Song versions, while simultaneously pointing out the inappropriateness of Mao’s attempt to eradicate the discordances between lyrics composed in different periods.

When he edited the Songs of the Clouds, Mao Guangsheng arbitrarily unified the two Dunhuang lyrics [i.e. “Dong xian ge”] with ones in the Northern Song, painstakingly fixing up [patterns] on both sides: He deleted the original texts, or interpolated blank spaces, or put in additional words beside the lines. As a result, there is naturally no aim that one cannot attain. Basically, the validity [of this practice] needs no debate, but because of it one will find numerous texts which don’t make sense. Ren is one of the leading advocates of eschewing the conventional concept of the ci pattern in studying the Dunhuang songs. However, he is at times still limited by traditional ci aesthetics, tending to accept refined versions instead of the commonplace ones without confronting more immediate and credible evidence.

Based on the microfilm taken by Pan Chonggui in London, the last line of the piece “Liu qing liang” (The Lass of Green Willow), for example, reads: “Why is he ungrateful to the young lass?” (see Figure 2, p. 100). Yet, without seeing the original manuscripts, Ren arbitrarily favours Luo Zhenyu’s version: “Why he is ungrateful to the lass who leans against the balustrade?”

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73 Chen and Yan, Yunniao ji yanjiu huitu, 46, 51-52.
74 Ren, Dunhuang qu chutan, 93. For the two “Dong xian ge,” see Pan, 95-96, 100-101; DHGCZB, vol. 1, 150, 157; DHQLJ, 13-14 (#010, 011). For a Song version, see Long Muxun 龙 沐勤 (Yusheng 楚生, 1902-1966), Dongpo yuefu jian 東坡樂府箋 (Commentary on Dongpo’s Yuefu) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1995), 2: 8a-8b
75 因何辜负少年人, Pan 201a.
Ren's reason is that Luo's copy is probably a third version (jia ben 甲本) discovered in Dunhuang, the other two are preserved in London and Paris (which Ren calls yi ben 乙本 and bing ben 丙本 respectively); also, the words “youthless” are too “hackneyed” (lan diao 兰调) and “familiar” (shu tao 熟套), whereas Luo’s version is “especially excellent” (you miao 尤妙) and its “implication more profound” (han yi shen hou 含意深厚). The problem is that not even Luo—let alone Ren—had seen the original manuscripts. The version he owned was actually the London copy (yi ben) sent to him by Pelliot. In other words, the jia ben never existed; it is only Luo’s modified version of the London copy. Thus, Pan Chonggui comments:

Having read Pan’s study, however, Ren still holds inflexibly to the “refined” version in his newly published edition of Dunhuang songs, and he even questions the authenticity of Pan’s microfilm version.

Indeed, the untidiness of the Dunhuang manuscripts has made the matter of emendation extremely tricky. Many characters are hardly recognizable due to corruption of the copies, scribal errors, or the use of ancient or unofficial ways of handwriting. But these should not be taken as a license to freely alter or “refine” the original texts, otherwise, the artistic simplicity, spontaneity and formal flexibility of the Dunhuang lyrics is “violated” or “destroyed.”

This inaccurate emendation of the Dunhuang lyrics is also a result of the difficulty in acquiring materials firsthand. Among the many Chinese scholars who

77 DHQJL, 19; DHGCZB, vol. 1, 197.
78 See Pan 12-13; also Lin Meiyi 林玫儀, Dunhuang qu yanjiu 敦煌曲研究 (A Study of the Dunhuang Songs) (Master’s thesis, National Taiwan University, 1974), 10n.5.
79 Pan 14.
took part in the study, apparently only Dong Kang 童 康 (1867-?), Liu Fu 劉 復 (1891-1934), Wang Chongmin 王 重 民 (1903-1975), Jao Tsung-yi, and Pan Chonggui had seen the original manuscripts. Others have had to rely heavily on second-hand versions, unaware that further scholarly adjustments and errors have already been made in certain copies, and that some—such as Mao Guangsheng—even make additional alterations based on conjecture and personal preference.

In order to preserve the authentic style of the Dunhuang lyrics, particularly the Yunyao ji, Pan Chonggui proposes to faithfully follow the original manuscripts in the course of emendation. He also points out that many characters which scholars took as scribal errors are in fact written in an ancient but commonly practiced script. For example, the character zào 早 (“early” or “soon”) is written as 昼, and zhōng 終 (“at the end”) as 中. These “borrowed characters” (tòng jiā 通假), he argues, should be clearly distinguished from the “wrongly written words” (wù zì 誤 字). 81 He further stresses this point for the handling of emendation in another article:

Many scholars thought that since Songs of the Clouds is full of wrong characters, there is no harm in correcting them at will, even correcting them as much as possible. I know that these are not wrong characters; thus, I hold the texts of the original manuscripts in great respect, and will never change them lightly. 諸 多 學 者 以 為 雲 雲 皆 溝 塊 皆 是 影 字, 自 然 不 妨 任 意 的 改, 多 多 的 改。我 知 道 這 些 文 字, 並 非 影 字, 所 以 非 常 尊 重 卷 子 本 來 的 文 字, 決 不 輕 易 改 動。82

Pan contends that one should have a clear understanding of the people’s common practice of handwriting in a given period in order to correctly emend the manuscripts passed down. 83 Failure to do so means “the more emendation, the more drifting away from the original.” 84

81 Pan 20-25.
82 Pan, Dunhuang cihua 敦 煌 詞 話 (Dunhuang Ci Remarks) (Taipei: Shimen tushu gongsi, 1981), 69.
83 Pan, Dunhuang cihua, 70.
84 愈 校 而 愈 失 其 本 真。Pan, Dunhuang Yunyao ji xinshu, 27.
Conclusion

This chapter has endeavoured to study the artistic features of popular ci lyrics from the viewpoint of “popular aesthetics,” and to point out the inappropriateness of using only elitist analytical methods and aesthetics to evaluate these works. It does not, however, intend to overestimate the literary merits of the popular ci, or to place them uncritically above their literati counterparts. Though mutually influential, the two types of works are inherently different from each other. They served different audiences, had different artistic and practical functions, and as a result, formulated their own stylistics. A thorough comparison between the two must be made with these distinctions in mind.

As the earliest extant pieces found in the Dunhuang manuscripts show, the so-called “original colour” (ben se 本 色) of the ci lyric emphasized and promoted by conventional elite critics is not necessarily “delicate restraint,” nor is it limited to the lyrical mode of expression. Straightforwardness and even vulgarity, often expressed in narrative mode, are also major ingredients. Compositions like these should not be deemed unorthodox or “variant forms” (bian ti 變 體). To insist on the elitist artistic definition of the ci is not only historically erroneous, but also limits the genre’s thematic and stylistic scopes. However, certain contemporary scholars, who should have known the Dunhuang lyrics well, still clearly show a strong attachment to traditional ci aesthetics. For example, Miao Yueh 繆 銳 (1904-1994) takes elusiveness as the “very nature” of the genre by stating that

[t]he world of the lyric is like a mountain viewed through the mist, or a flower seen in the moonlight. Its beauty resides in its elusive ambiguity, and if we insist on bringing it out into the light we are acting contrary to the very nature of the form, and will only end up with something shallow and crude. 詞 境 如 霧 中 之 山，月下 花，其 妙 處 正 在 逃 離 隱 約，必 求 明 顯，反 傷 淺 露，非 詞 體 之 所 宜 也。\(^5\)

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His attitude significantly betrays the elite scholar's obsession with the "aesthetic distance" between art and its object represented. Because of this fixation on the conventional approach, he also disparages as "inappropriate in lyric verse" philosophical and narrative lyrics such as those written by Su Shi and Xin Qiji (1140-1107), insisting that "lyric verse can only be lyrical or descriptive." By making this comment and brutally excluding lyrics which are allegedly "shallow and crude" from the "very nature of the form," he seems to rashly ignore the existence of the popular lyric.

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86 惟能營情寫景，而說理敘事絕非所宜。Miao, Shici sanlun, 59-60; Soong 33-35.
Chapter Three: Liu Yong and His "Vulgar" Lyrics

It has often happened that those who have been best received in their own time have also continued to be acceptable to posterity.

-----Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)

In 1822, the publisher Archibald Constable remarked on the immediate success of Scott’s *Fortunes of Nigel*, “I was in town yesterday, and so keenly were the people devouring my friend Jingling Geordie, that I actually saw them reading it in the streets as they passed along. I assure you there is no exaggeration in this.”

This remark is reminiscent of the enthusiastic welcome the Northern Song elite poet Liu Yong’s *ci* lyrics received from the general public:

When [Liu Yong] was a candidate of the Advanced Scholar examination, he frequented the pleasure quarters and brothels. He was skilled at writing song lyrics. Whenever professional musicians got a new tune, they had to ask him to fill in the words, only after which it became popular. For this he was well-known at the time. . . . When I was serving in Dantu, I once met a Xixia official who had paid a tribute to court, saying that wherever there was a well where they would drink water, [people] would sing Liu’s songs. This shows how widely they circulated. 

Records like the one above are common and have aroused much debate on the question of whether an elite writer should cater to popular taste. Liu Yong’s example (as well as Scott’s) also proves that the recent concept of popular culture,

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which Raymond Williams terms “the culture actually made by people for themselves,” is not strictly-speaking correct. If elite writers can write in the voice of the people, not deliberately setting out to “exploit and manipulate” them, then their works can be genuinely defined as “popular art” as well. Before discussing what popular elements can be found in Liu’s work and the causes of Liu’s heterodox habit of writing in the common idiom, I will first briefly recount the economic and cultural prosperity of the Northern Song capital Kaifeng, where Liu spent his early “dissipated” years, to demonstrate why popular success regaled songwriters like Liu in a period almost eight hundred years earlier than the heyday of North Britons, Sir Walter Scott or Robert Burns (1759-1796).

I. The Economic and Cultural Background of Liu Yong’s Popularity

Song Kaifeng was unquestionably a metropolis in both demographic and economic terms. Before it was lost to the Jurchen in 1127, the capital’s total population had soared to more than one million. Even in Liu Yong’s time (i.e., about 1034), it numbered no less than five hundred thousand, of which, there were large numbers of bureaucrats, civil servants and garrisons with their families, as well as members from the royal house, merchants, craftsmen, labourers, and folk from all walks of life and different regions of the country. This rapid growth led to—and was also largely facilitated by—a fundamental change in the economic morphology of Song cities. The old system of officially-controlled markets and the “legal restrictions which confined merchants and artisans to specified quarters” (fang shi 坊市) of Kaifeng started to collapse in the early years of the Northern Song, finally breaking down during the Jing You 景祐 era (1034-1037).

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4 Williams, *Keywords* 199.
6 According to Wu Tao’s calculation, the urban population of Kaifeng in Zhen Zong’s 真宗 [997-1022] reign was around five hundred fifty thousand. See Wu, 37. The number would not be very different in Liu’s time.
Merchants were then able to carry on trade freely both inside and outside the city walls. The hustle and bustle of the city is vividly portrayed in the Northern Song painter Zhang Zeduan’s 張擇端 “Qingming shanghe tu” 清明上河圖 (“Going Up the River on the Qingming Day,” see Figure 3, p. 108). Along with this relaxation and growing commercial activity in general, the law that markets could remain open only during the daytime was rescinded. According to the Song huiyao jigao 宋會要輯稿 (Song Digest Draft), in 965, the government decreed that the “night market in the capital shall not be prohibited until the third watch [i.e., about midnight].” In the busiest districts, or on special days such as the Mid-autumn Festival, markets would be open even until dawn.

The economic boom of a city and the increasing demand for diversions from its inhabitants naturally bring about a flourishing of its entertainment industry. Kaifeng was particularly notable in this. Public amusement grounds called wa zi 瓦子, or wa she 瓦舍, “a kind of vast covered market,” were spread throughout the capital. In these places, musical performances, singing, drama, dancing, story-telling, acrobatics, and magic were given in shed-like “theatres” called gou lan 勾欄, or peng 棚; some, said to be large enough to accommodate an audience of several thousand strong. Divers commercial activities, including medicinal drug selling, divination, gambling, catering and a wide panoply of games were equally available in the wa zi. Similar to the night markets, a number of such street enterprises (and also some restaurants) appeared

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9 Meng Yuanlao, Dongjing menghua lu, 3: 21 (“Mahangjie puxi” 馬行街鋪席), 8: 50 (“Zhongqiu” 中秋), “Morning markets” (xiao shi 晝市), and “ghost markets” (gui shi 鬼市) also appeared; they operated after midnight and sold luxury goods. See also Meng, 3: 23 (“Tianxiao zhuren rushi” 天曉諸人入市), 2: 15 (“Pan loudong jieshi” 潘樓東街市).
10 Gernet 222.
11 Meng 5: 29 (“Jingwa jiyi” 京瓦伎藝).
12 Meng 2: 14 (“Dongjiaolou jiexiang” 東角樓街巷).
Figure 3: Zhang Zeduan’s “Qingming shanghe tu”
to have acquired the tacit consent from authorities to operate all night. Needless to say, these were gathering places for all walks of society, including its dregs. The following account describes the *wa she* in detail.

The word *wa* means “to meet on open ground so people can scatter easily.” When [the *wa she*] came into existence is not known. But in the capital, it was often a place where scholars and common people could let themselves be profligate and unrestrained, and also where young people loitered and made trouble. 瓦者，野合易散之意也，不知起於何時；但在京師時，甚為士庶放蕩不羈之所，亦為子弟流連破壞之地.

It was also in the *wa zi* where certain artisans and entertainers—-and popular lyricists like Liu Yong—achieved fame. Quite a few such entertainer’s names merit a mention in Meng Yuanlao’s *Dongjing menghua lu*. Apart from the *wa zi*, the Kaifeng city-dwellers could also seek entertainment at the restaurants, tea-houses, private banquets and temporary sheds (*peng* 棚 ) set up at marketplaces on special days. “Low-rate” musicians, buskers and entertainers, who sought work in restaurants, were always on call.

Prostitution was also a significant sector of Kaifeng’s entertainment industry. Countless brothels, or *ji yuan* 妓院, and pleasure quarters of various sizes and levels of sophistication were situated in different corners of the capital. Not only were sex services offered there, but frequently talented sing-song girls well-versed in poetry danced and gave musical performances. Elite writers were among the *ji yuan’s* habitués. Quite often, they would compose poems for and with the sing-song girls, a literary practice already common by the Tang hundreds of years before.

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13 In the *Dongjing menghua lu* there is an entry which says, “In general, the restaurants and entertaining quarters were all busy like that through the year, whether it was day or night, good or bad weather.” 大抵諸酒肆瓦市，不以風雨寒暑，白晝通夜，轟闐如此。Meng 2: 16 (“Jiu lou” 酒楼).

14 Nai Deweng 耐德翁, *Ducheng jisheng 都城紀勝 (Records of the Splendours of the Capital), in Meng 95.

15 Meng 2: 14 (“Dongjiaolou jiexiang” 東角樓街巷); 5: 29-30 (“Jingwa jiyi” 京瓦伎藝).

16 Meng 2: 16 (“Yinshi guozi” 飲食果子).

17 Meng, *passim*.
As many scholars acknowledge, it was precisely through this protracted practice that the *ci* was ingrained in the culture as a literary genre and its standard of writing elevated. The case of Liu Yong can be used to explain the calibre and success of these developments since he had both an exceptionally close working relationship with sing-song girls and was also a key figure in enhancing the technique of *ci* writing.

The burgeoning of commerce—which underpinned the development and promotion of *ci* lyrics (and music) and its popular reception—would coalesce with political stability in the Northern Song regime to safeguard and sustain it. In order to prevent the recurrence of the military separatism rampant during the late Tang and the Five Dynasties (907-960), the Song court on the one hand consciously undermined the power of its military officials and adopted a series of "benevolent" policies, and on the other promoted art and literature overtly, and encouraged pleasure-seeking covertly. With this mix of legislation and laissez-faire, a peaceful and joyful ambiance was created within the court and throughout the country. One quite frequently detects intimations of it in Liu Yong’s *ci* collection, the *Yuezhang ji* 樂章集 (*Collected Musical Pieces*):

Tune: “Kan hua hui” 看花回 (“On Returning from Flower-Viewing”)

On jade steps and golden stairs
the Shield Dance of Shun is performed.
The joys of the court and environs are many.
Scenes in the nine streets and three markets are marvellous.
Together, the rich strings and lively pipes
of ten thousand families, playing.
From Phoenix Tower, which overlooks the mesh of lanes,
An auspicious air and propitious smoke appears.

*玉城金階舞舜干*
*朝野多歎*
*九衢三市風光麗*
*正萬家、急管繁絃*
*鳳樓臨繚陌*
*嘉氣非煙*

So a-bustle are high and low, beautiful, the things on show.
How could one bear to waste good years?
The banquet songs and laughter go on night and day.
Let a peck of wine cost ten thousand at Banner Post.
Where is it best to feast one’s heart

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18 See Wagner 79-91; and Wang Shunu 131-144.
But in front of a bottle?

After this fashion the Song people were given more opportunities and leisure to enjoy the *ci* music. The practice of writing *ci* also spread among the elite writers; some, such as Mao Pang 毛滂 (1060-ca. 1124) and Zhao Qi 趙企 (fl. 1107-1119), were even said to have been promoted simply because of their fame as lyricists. They became another main force behind *ci* writing, many, like Liu Yong, being particularly favoured by common audience.

Having briefly presented the economic and cultural conditions under which Liu Yong achieved popularity, next we will discuss these incentives which diverted him, as an elite, into the composition of “vulgar” lyrics and away from the “high” cultural prerogatives of his own class.

**II. Liu Yong: An Elite “Alien”?**

Liu Yong, also named Sanbian 三變, was descended from a prestigious family of Fujian province. Like other children of similar family background, he was inculcated with Confucian doctrine from an early age, and was expected to

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19 Xue Ruisheng 薛瑞生, *Yuezhang ji jiaozhu 樂章集校注*, hereafter *YZJ (Collation and Annotation of the Collected Musical Pieces)* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 40; *QSC*, vol. 1, 18b. The “Shield Dance” of Shun is used to refer to a peaceful period. It was said that the ancient sage-king Shun, instead of sending expeditions to conquer tribal peoples, performed a dance of the shield and spear in the court. Because of this benevolent act, they submitted to his rule.

Liu Yong’s lyrics, especially those about city life, were praised by some for their vivid descriptions of the temper of the peaceful times. One of these compliments is seen in Xie Weixin’s 謝維新 *Gujin hebei shilei beiyao houji 古今合璧事類備要後集* (Sequel to the Essential References to Ancient and Present Joint Categorized Subject Matters), in which a certain Fan Zhen 范鎮 comments, “During the forty-two peaceful years of Emperor Ren Zong’s reign [1022-1063], as a historiographer I was unable to eulogize it. But [Liu] Qiqing could describe it to the last detail” 仁廟四十二年太平，吾身為史官二十年不能贊述，而耆卿能盡形容之. In Ding Chuanjing 丁傳靖 ed., *Songren yishi huibian 宋人逸事彙編* (Collected Anecdotes of the Song People) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1958), 10: 427.

attain the title of Advanced Scholar and to have a successful public career, following in the steps of his two uncles and his father Liu Yi 柳 宜 (fl. 985).\(^{21}\) The Confucian moral influence on Liu Yong is substantiated in those of his extant works in forms other than the *ci.*\(^{22}\) For example, his “Song of Boiling Sea Water” 震海歌, written during his tenure as administrator at the Xiao Peak Salt Works 曉峰鹽場, is a heptasyllabic *shi* poem in ancient form which criticizes the oppressive officials and laments the suffering of the salt workers.\(^{23}\) Both its tone and style closely follow Bai Juyi’s didactic “New Yuefu Poems,” and markedly contrast with his own sensual, amorous *ci.*\(^{24}\) Even more noteworthy is his only surviving prose work, “Quanxue wen” 勸學文 (“To Encourage Studying”), a typical sententious piece resembling those by other eminent Confucian scholars.

Parents who raise their children but do not educate them are neglecting them. Even if they educate them, but not stringently, it is the same as neglecting them. Children who are educated by their parents but do not study neglect themselves. Even studying, but not diligently, is the same as self-neglect. Therefore, to bring up children one must educate them; to educate them one must be stringent. Be stringent, and the children will be diligent; be diligent, and they will accomplish. If willing to study, a commoner’s son can become a nobleman; if unwilling, a nobleman’s son

\(^{21}\) Liu Yi, formerly an official of the Southern Tang (937-975), attained his highest position as Vice-Minister of Public Works 工部侍郞 in the Song. Liu Yong’s two brothers also passed the Advanced Scholar examination. For a detailed study of Liu Yong’s family history, see Winnie Lai-fong Leung 梁 麗芳, *Liu Yong ji ji ci zhi yanjiu* 柳永及其詞之研究 (*A Study of Liu Yong and his Ci Lyrics*) (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 1985), 3-6; appendix, 121-123.

\(^{22}\) Only three *shi* poems and one prose piece by Liu Yong are preserved. These are collected in Yao Xue Xian 姚雪賢 and Long Jianguo 龍建國, *Liu Yong ci xiangzhu ji jiping* 柳永詞詳注及集評 (*Detailed Commentary and Collected Criticism of Liu Yong’s Ci*) (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1991), 224-225. In his *Summer Vacation Chat*, Ye Mengde says Liu Yong “was also skilled at other kinds of writing, but it so happened that he first got a reputation for this [i.e., lyrics]. He then came to regret that he was so involved, and later changed his name to Sanbian. Yet it still could not save him [from trouble]. [Therefore,] one must be careful in choosing one’s art.” 永亦善為他文辭，而偶先以是得名，始悔為己累。後改名三變，而終不能救。擇術不可不慎．Bishu luhua, juanxia 卷 下, 49. Trans. Hightower, I: 328 with modifications.


\(^{24}\) Liu Yong’s use of the *ci* lyric to write about amorous feelings and sensual delights effectively shows that it was at that time a less formal and reputable literary genre than the traditional *shi* poetry.
The Liu Yong who wrote this piece rings totally untrue to the one we know as a rakish lover and erotic lyricist. Here he appears to be a morally correct, self-disciplined and aspiring person. In reality, he was a truly diligent and persevering scholar, engaged in ceaseless attempts at passing the civil service examination. As a government official, he was also known for competence and virtue, though never rising above the lower echelon throughout his life. The conventional, pejorative description of Liu as a social and moral eccentric is unmistakably incomplete and misleading. Despite his “frivolity,” he still maintained the essential virtues of a traditional Confucian scholar in his striving after superior status (i.e., the title of Advanced Scholar) to acquit his family duty and serve the state, his later exemplary performance of official tasks, and his writing of didactic works to design a morally upright model for the world and bring to it “harmonious perfection.”

What led Liu Yong, primarily, to become a “notorious rake” is uncertain. Some scholars conjecture—and it is probably the case—that relaxation of family restrictions and the attractiveness of the capital’s entertainment industry enticed

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25 Huang Jian 黃堅 (fl. thirteenth century), Guwen zhenbao 古文真寶 (True Treasures of Ancient Prose), ed. Hoshikawa Kiyotaka 星川清孝 (Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1963-67), 13. We do not know under what circumstance and in which period of Liu’s life that his Quanxue wen was written, but probably it would not be a composition of his “dissipated” years in Kaifeng.
26 We are not certain how many times Liu failed the examination. It was highly possible that it took more than twenty years for him to pass it. For detailed studies of his attempts at the examination, see Leung 10-13.
27 Liu is listed in the “Biography of Prominent Officials” in the Changguo zhou tuzhi, 6: 6b-7a. See also Zhang Ji’an 張吉安 et al., Yuhang xianzhi 餘杭縣志 (Yuhang County Gazetteer) (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1970, Jiaqing maochen ban 嘉慶戊辰版), 21: 6a. The highest position Liu attained was State Farm Assistant Director 屯田員外郎. For his official career, see Leung 13-17, 19-20; and Hagiwara Masaki 萩原正樹, “Ryūei no kōhanshō to sono shi” 柳永の後半 生涯とその詩 (“The Later Life of Liu Yong and his Ci”), Gakurin 學林 12 (1989), 37.
Liu, a young country man, to suspend his Confucian morals and indulge.\(^\text{28}\) His unrestrained life in Kaifeng is represented abundantly in lyrics such as:

**Tune: “Xuan qing” 宣清 (“Xuan qing”), excerpt**

Secretly I dwell on  
Those old outings and old chases,  
Tapestry-like ambiance and scenery in the great capital.

Thinking of friends whom women would shower with fruit,  
And banquets where tassels were cut off caps.\(^\text{29}\)  
I drank endlessly in those days.  
We bade the swallow dancers flutter  
And sing strings of pearly notes.  
Coming before the turtoise-shell banquet tables  
They were all from the ranks of immortals.  
The later it got,  
The wilder we grew.  
And one by one  
We sped into the lovebird rooms behind the phoenix curtains.\(^\text{30}\)

Such antics and his doubly close relationships with sing-song girls resulted directly in the production of many “vulgar,” but formally vigorous and stylistically innovative lyrics.\(^\text{31}\) They won him high regard as a gifted lyricist in the

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\(^{28}\) See Zeng Daxing 謝大興, *Liu Yong he tade ci 柳永和他的詞 (Liu Yong and his Ci Lyrics)* (Guangzhou: Zhongshan University Press, 1990), 6-7.

\(^{29}\) “Throwing fruit” is an allusion to the Western Jin (265-316) poet Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300). Because of his good looks, whenever Pan was on the street, old women would throw fruit onto his carriage. See Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., *Jinshu Jinshi (History of the Jin)* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), vol. 5, 1507. “Cutting tassels” refers to a story about the Duke of Chu. At a banquet, the lights suddenly went off. One of the Duke’s subordinates grasped the clothes of his concubine. She then cut off his tassels and showed them to the Duke. But the generous Duke forgave the impropriety of his subordinate. See Liu Xiang 劉向 (ca. 77 BC-BC), *Shuo yuan 說苑 (Garden of Fables)* (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1965), *WYWK*, 6: 52. Liu uses these two allusions to describe his joyful and unbridled days.

\(^{30}\) *YZJ*, 117; *QSC*, 29b.

\(^{31}\) Many tunes in the *Yuezhang ji* seem to have originated with Liu Yong. But scholars’ opinions on the number of new tunes are divergent. For example, James J. Y. Liu ascribes one hundred and fifteen pieces as Liu’s inventions, or “at least new variations on existing meters.” See his *Major Lyricists of the Northern Song A.D. 960-1126* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 98. Zeng Daxing finds that fifty-five are of Liu’s innovation. See Zeng 96. Winnie Leung, the most conservative, believes that only twenty-six tunes are new. See Leung 38. Liu Yong was also the first elite lyricist who extensively used the *man ci* 慢詞 (slow tune) or *chang diao* 長調 (long tune) form to write lyrics, and explored the *ling zi* 領字 (leading word) technique in *ci* writing.
entertainment quarters. He even became a “professional,” composing lyrics for money, as the following anecdote suggests.

When Qiqing resided in the capital, he visited all the brothels in his spare time. Wherever he went, he was welcomed by the sing-song girls because of his fame as a lyricist. He was good at changing the mode of tunes and composing songs. Once he mentioned a sing-song girl [in a lyric], her reputation would increase ten-fold. For this reason, many sing-song girls supported him with money or gifts. 

In reference to this passage, scholars such as Xue Ruisheng believe that since Liu’s father had already died during Liu’s long stay in the capital, he probably could not have obtained adequate financial support from his uncles—especially if they knew about his unorthodox behaviour. It was only when he could make a living by writing “vulgar,” commercialized lyrics that he was able to secure and prolong his stay in Kaifeng. In order to tailor to the professional needs of sing-song girls and thus profit from them, his lyrics inevitably advertised their physical beauty, talents and charming personalities, simultaneously garnering favour from the popular, mostly male, audience. “[T]he public favor” had thus become his “only lottery.”

Repeated failure in the imperial examination is another widely accepted explanation for Liu Yong’s “degeneration.” After one unsuccessful attempt, he wrote the following well-known lyric to vent his frustration.

Tune: “He chong tian” 鶴 沖 天 (“A Crane Leaps Into the Sky”)

On the gold metal board, 黃 金 榜 上
It so happened I failed to top the list. 偶 失 龍 頭 望
In this enlightened age, the worthy are temporarily neglected— 明 代 暫 遺 賢
Where am I to turn? 如 何 向
My ambition to seize wind and clouds, unrealized, 未 逢 風 雲 便

Why not let myself go profligate and wild?
What need to weigh the gains and losses?
A talented lyricist is nature’s
White-robed minister.

Back lanes of misty flowers,
The painted screen blurs.
I am happy there is someone close to my heart
Worth paying a visit.
For the moment let me rest on red and green--
Amours:
The pleasure of a lifetime,
Verdant spring is but a moment.
How can I bear to trade
My fleeting name for a low-sung song and small sip?

Or, according to one anecdote, it was actually because of seeing the lyric before reviewing the result of the examination that a disgusted Emperor Ren Zong removed Liu Yong’s name from the list of successful candidates. A strong partisan of “refined elegance” (ru ya 儒雅) in conduct, the emperor is said to have remarked, “Let him go to have a low-sung song and small sip. Why does he need a fleeting name?”36 Another anecdote goes further and says that, rejected and so hidden by the emperor, Liu spent the whole day gallivanting with prostitutes, ironically naming himself “Liu Sanbian, Lyricist by Imperial Decree.”37 Although anecdotes such as these cannot be taken at face value, certainly Liu Yong’s “rebellious” behaviour--aside from his indisputable hedonism, was a means to comfort himself. The same intention can be deduced from his lyrics of contempt for personal fame:

Tune: “Ru yu shui” 如 魚 水 (“Like Fish to Water”), second stanza

I will strive to quit my floating

35 YZL, 239; QSC, 51b-52a.
36 且 去 浮 名 低 唱 , 何 要 浮 名 . See Wu Zeng 吳 曾 (fl. 1127-1160), Nenggaizhai manlu 能 改 藝 漫 錄 (Casual Records of the Remedial Studio) (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1939), CSJC, 16: 418.
37 奉 春 以 詞 楊 三 變 : Yan Youyi 楊 有 翼 , Yiyuan cihuang 藝 圓 雕 黃 (Criticism of Artistic Circles), in Hu Zi, Tiaoxi yuyin conghua, houji 後 集 , 39: 319.
profit and fame.
Don't take its rights and wrongs to heart.
How can a man control honours and riches?
The right time high ambition shall requite.
Don't be sad and idle.
Stay side by side with the blush of rouge
and green bubbles of wine.
Step up to the embroidered curtain,
Get drunk, lie and sleep by that fragrant body.
With these, what more do you want?

Such lines should not be taken too seriously, however, for though an avowed
indulger in pleasure-quest, the title of Advanced Scholar was still his ultimate
goal.

Tune: “Chang shou le” 長 壽 樂 (“The Joy of Longevity”), second stanza

As our love deepens,
I aim to let the evening rain go on in morning cloud.\(^{39}\)
Once, in the depth of spring,
I go to the court of the Immortal.
Where incense curls from the Imperial censer,
To be closely examined in His Presence,
In the face of the Celestial Countenance,
Surely I will place first, top of the list.
Until then,
You can wait for my return, to congratulate me.
Be good,
And I will bring you, my dear, the lucky money.

Even if cavorting with prostitutes, passing the examination always occupied his
mind. But his promised return to the woman at the end of “Chang shou le” also
implies that the boon of his social elevation would not end his consorting with or
nostalgia for the sing-song girls.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{38}\) YZJ 179; QSC, 40a.
\(^{39}\) “Evening rain and morning cloud” means making love, an allusion taken from Song Yu’s
“Gaotang fu” 高 唐 賦 (“Rhyme Prose on the Tower of Gaotang”). See Li Shan, Wen xuan, 19:
471-476.
\(^{40}\) YZJ 167; QSC, 39a-b. Trans. Hightower, “The Songwriter Liu Yung: Part II,” HJAS, 42.1(1982),
39 with modifications.
\(^{41}\) In fact, Liu apparently cut back on his visits to brothels after he finally passed the imperial
Liu Yong's contradictory attitude toward the title of Advanced Scholar was shared by many Confucian scholars. The title was certainly a highly valued, if not vague ideal for most of them, and the barriers were many. Failing repeatedly to become an official, they habitually would express a contempt for or questioning of the value of personal fame and worldly pursuits. Liu Yong was one among many in this respect, but they differed from him in their behaviour and expression. Whether "demoralized," or conversely "enlightened," a typical literatus who had failed the examination and been unaccepted by the court would probably take the path of virtuous ancient scholars such as Tao Qian and retreat to the country, proclaiming in his verse that a rustic insouciance was what he really treasured. Because of this lofty unworldliness, he would be much esteemed by other elite scholars. Liu Yong, however, neither conformed to conventional standards of propriety, nor maintained his Confucian integrity through this pastoral withdrawal. Instead, his behaviour and "vulgar" poetry appalled his own class.

Because of this non-conformism, was Liu Yong then truly an elite "rebel," or the first of a new "rebel elite"--an "alien"?

In the zone of "dual personality," a person's conduct in one situation can contrast sharply to his response in another. Whether he or she be of high or low class origin, as Matthew Arnold notes in *Culture and Anarchy*, very often both an "ordinary self" and a "best self" exist concurrently. According to Arnold, the "lighter side" of the "ordinary self" usually instinctually pursues pleasures, while its "severer side" seeks profit and gain. But the "best self" has a higher goal that tends to transcend class attributes altogether.

... in each class there are born a certain number of natures with a curiosity about their best self; with a bent for seeing things as they are, for disentangling themselves from machinery, for simply concerning themselves with reason and the will of God, and doing their best to make these prevail; --for the pursuit, in a word, of perfection.

examination in 1034, probably because of official obligations. But in his lyrics, he still recurrently expressed his nostalgia for the joyous and unrestrained years and his regret at leaving behind the women with whom he once had intimate relations.


43 Arnold 108.
Arnold dubs such persons “aliens,” redefining the term in a positive sense, because it is only these people—whether from the “Barbarian” aristocratic class, the middle class “Philistines,” or the “Populace”—who can bring “harmonious perfection” to human society.

... when we speak of ourselves as divided into Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace, we must be understood always to imply that within each of these classes there are a certain number of aliens, if we may so call them,—persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general humane spirit, by the love of human perfection; ... 44

Arnold seems to suggest that the “aliens” from the three classes will form into a new kind of “elite class,” one which would most effectively embody the spirit of the collective “best self.” Only these “aliens” can run the government properly and “make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere.” But whether they can unswervingly maintain their “best selves” and forever dispose of their “ordinary selves” is a question Arnold does not ask, yet it is essential to understanding situations and people in the real world.

In imperial China, the elite class was composed almost exclusively of Confucian scholars. Assuming inborn moral and intellectual superiority, they were generally acknowledged as the legitimate supervisors of state authority and the social educators responsible for bringing “harmonious perfection” to society. Strong emphasis on the “best self,” or the “public side” of a Confucian scholar was therefore deeply implanted, while the “ordinary self,” or the “personal side,” was usually suppressed. Certain aberrant behaviours such as drunkenness, unbridled bohemianism, and eremetism became conventionalized as tolerable expressions of the “ordinary self.” For these were not seen as intrinsically conflicting with Confucian morals, but were rather thought to be a means of passive resistance to

44 Arnold 109. Strikingly similar to Arnold’s opinion, Jose Ortega y Gasset also states that within the upper and lower classes, “there are found mass and genuine minority,” the “qualified” and the “disqualified.” Though generally against the growing power of the twentieth-century Spanish working class, he agrees that “it is not rare to find today amongst working men, who before might be taken as the best example of what we are calling ‘mass’, nobly disciplined minds.” “The Coming of the Masses,” in Rosenberg and White, eds., Mass Culture, 44.
tyranny, social injustice and political corruption. It was never acceptable, however, to overindulge in one’s *most debased form* of the “ordinary self”—or even express it too explicitly and honestly in verse—let alone celebrate it, as did Liu Yong. In this sense, Liu was an “alien” of the elite class, a true “alien” opposite to Arnold’s definition, who conducted a continued traffic in verse and life between the outer edges of his personality and social norm.

Yet judging from his writings in other genres and his performance in office, Liu Yong’s “best self” was never lacking. Even among his lyrics, especially those written in the later period of his life, there are also many so-called “elegant” pieces that reveal his “severer” side:

Tune: “An gong zi” 安公子 (“The Young Gentleman, An”)

On the long river the waves are a-shimmer.  
The landing at Huai, and my hometown in Chu, far away.  
In an instant, the rain has passed over the misty islet.  
As green as if dyed is the fragrant grass.  
I press on, press on, packing books and my sword.  
Here, facing this fine day and fine vista,  
I feel my sorrows are many, my ailments many.  
Heartsick of travelling.

There, I see unbounded wilderness,  
Dark and gloomy evening clouds.  
My trip intrudes into the hues of night,  
Again, the oar bends to make landing at a village inn.  
Realizing the destination is near,  
The boatmen call to one another,  
Pointing at the fishing lantern, a dot in the distance.

Poems like “An gong zi” were particularly well-received in elite circles. Chiefly narrating his sorrowful experiences as a sojourner distressed by life’s hardship and his unsuccessful official career, their style and themes conform well to the

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45 See Hagiwara Masaki, 40-46. Zeng Daxing divides Liu Yong’s *ci* career into three periods. The first two are from 983 until he attained the advanced scholar degree, during which most of his “vulgar lyrics” were written. The last period is mainly comprised of the “elegant” lyrics. Zeng 3-18.

46 *YZJ*, 161; *QSC*, 38a.
Confucian literary tradition long established by the virtuous Qu Yuan in his poetry of exile. But it should also be noted that Liu’s “elegant” works are less celebrated because they lament impediments to personal advancement or fulfillment instead of, like those by Qu Yuan, the excesses of a corrupt, decaying state.

Liu’s choice of using the *ci* to express his personal sentiments and the *shi* his public concerns simply reveals the low esteem for the *ci* in his time, and might support Gans’s theory that producers of different social backgrounds will occasionally choose a much higher or lower medium to express themselves. Popular art, habitually defined as the art produced *by* the common people *for* themselves, is thus in fact “open” for production as well as consumption from all classes, so long as elite individuals can “lower” themselves and adapt to the ordinary taste. To a large extent, it is much more open or accessible than high art; and as a result, is therefore easily manipulated by artists hired by the popular culture industry such as that of our time, to allegedly exploit the common people. But judging from Liu Yong’s life experiences and the emotions expressed in his lyrics, one can be certain that he is truly influenced by the popular aesthetic and in many cases is able to represent the people’s genuine feelings. The following section will examine how his works are influenced by popular lyrics and what makes them genuinely popular.

**III. The Popular Elements in Liu Yong’s “Vulgar” Lyrics**

Like the anonymous Tang and Song lyrics, Liu’s “vulgar” work is similarly characterized by its practical function as a form of entertainment, its close relationship with ordinary feelings (chiefly amorous sentiments in Liu Yong’s case), its straightforward and colloquial expressions, and above all, its “marketplace” sentiments. Formal flexibility is also occasionally seen in his...

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47 It is largely for this reason that Jiang Zuyi 蔣祖怡 labels him the “people’s singer” 人民的歌手. *Zhongguo renmin wenxue shi* 中國人民文學史 (*History of the Literature of the Chinese People*) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1991), 103.
collection, largely because, unlike most *ci* lyrics written by other elites, Liu treated them more like literature performed than literature read.

_The provenance of Liu’s “vulgar” style_  

We know that most of Liu Yong’s “vulgar” works were written as a result of his close connections with the entertainment quarters. However, since neither his literary discourses nor documents on his literary thought are extant, exactly how and through what process he formulated his popular *ci* style is unclear. Only one anecdote touches upon the question:

A Song anonymous lyric called “The Emerald Peaks of Her Eyebrows” reads, “She knits those emerald eyebrows till they wear out / Once more, I take hold of her slender hands / For us to look at one another, a whole day isn’t enough / How can I bear to turn her into a lone lovebird? Dusk approaching, I lodge at the village post house / All night through the winds and the rain sadden / The banana tree, outside the window; and inside, the man / The rain on the leaves drops clear into the heart.” When the young Liu Yong from Zhenzhou was a student, he inscribed this lyric on a wall. Later [from this] he apprehended the technique of writing lyrics. A prostitute told others that Liu said, “I am quite versatile in the ways of this [i.e., writing lyrics].” Thus the “Tuantian Method [of *ci* writing]” was formed. 吴无名 氏 眉 峰 盲 词 云：「蹙损 眉 峰 翡，綢 手 返 重 執。篷 日 相 看 未 足 時，企 便 使 鳳 鶯 際。薄暮 役 村 驿，風 雨 悲 通 夕。窗外 芭 蕉 窗 裏 人，分 明 葉 上 心 頭 滴。」具州 柳 永 少 讀 書 時，遂 以 此 詞 題 壁，後 優 作 詞 章 法。一 妓 向 人 道 之，永 曰：「吾 於 此 亦 頗 變 化 多 方 也。」然 遂 成 屯 田 跋 徑。48

Regardless of the authenticity of this anecdote, it is possibly right in its suggestion that Liu was already fascinated and influenced by “popular” lyrics before he came to the capital. The theme of separation, the emotionalism and the structural smoothness of the “Emerald Peaks of Her Eyebrows” resemble Liu’s nostalgic lyrics quite closely. However, it is rather “elegant” in tone and diction, and

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48 Wang Yiqing 王奕淸 (fl. seventeenth century) et al. _Lidai cihua_ 歷代詞話 (*Ci Remarks of Past Dynasties*). Quoted in Yang Shi 楊 滋 (fl. twelfth century), _Gujin cihua_ 古今詞話 (Past and Present Remarks on the *Ci* Lyrics). In CHCB, vol. 2, 1164. **Tuantian** 屯田, or “State Farm,” was the short form of Liu’s official title. See note 27.
therefore does not seem to be the source of Liu’s “vulgar” style.

The discovery of the Dunhuang manuscripts in the early twentieth century provides some hints of Liu Yong’s stylistic inheritance. Pieces found in the *Yunyao ji*, such as the “Qing bei le,” “Feng gui yun” and “Nei jia jiao” ("Lovely Palace Lady"), are generally acknowledged as having an influence on Liu’s long tunes and popular style. For example, part of the following lyric by Liu closely resembles “Qing bei le,” a Dunhuang piece focusing exclusively on a woman’s physical beauty, which has been studied in detail in chapter two (p. 62-63).

*Tune: “Yu chi bei” 鞕 連 杯 (“Yuchi’s Cup”)*

My favourite beauty,  龍 千 留
Certainly no rough procured  算 九 藝 紅 粉 盡 難 比
on the nine highways can equal her.  天 然 嫩 臉 修 奧
Soft face and slim moth-like eyebrows are natural,  不 假 施 朱 描 翠
Repliant on no smears of red nor painted black.  盈 盈 秋 水
Her eyes, lucid and clear, like autumn waters.  懶 雅 態
She is free with elegant looks,  欲 言 先 嬌 媚
Before uttering a word she enchants already.  每 相 逢
Each time we meet—on days of flowers  月 夕 室 朝
and evenings of moon—  自 有 憐 才 深 意
Deep down in her heart she simply adores my genius.

On the phoenix pattern pillows and lovebird quilt,  綢 繆 鳳 枕 駕 被
we hug close.  深 深 處
In a deep, deep place  瓊 枝 玉 樹 相 倚
The jasper tree and coral branch lean one upon the other.  困 極 數 餘
Exhausted after pleasure,  芙 蓉 帳 暖
The hibiscus curtain warms.  別 是 懷 人 情 味
A further feeling of vexation.  風 流 事
An amour,  難 達 異 美
Difficult to be perfect for both.  況 已 斷
Besides, for a pledge, you have snipped  香 雲 爲 盟 誓
A lock of fragrant cloud.  且 相 將
Together, let us enjoy life

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49 For a detailed comparison between Liu’s lyrics and those of the *Yunyao ji*, see Ren Erbei, *Dunhuang qu chutan*, 339-348. Overall, Liu’s indebtedness to Dunhuang lyrics is largely confined to the “brothel songs.” The thematic diversity found in the Dunhuang manuscripts is unseen in his *ci* collection.
For now.
Disinclined to part the twined branches, lightly.

Like the Dunhuang lyric, the first stanza of Liu’s piece also centres on the beauty of a woman, stressing that it surpasses all others (line 2). But the “unrefined” imagery in the Dunhuang lyric, such as “blood-red blouse,” is avoided. Also, tautological descriptions are replaced by a series of sequential movements: after the opening presentation of the woman’s beauty, Liu turns to her charming manner, which sensuously and inevitably (like most of the erotic novels) leads to a passage of highly suggestive description in the second stanza, ending at last with a *carpe diem* statement. Most of Liu’s pieces about sing-song girls consist of these seize the day or damsel themes (coupled on occasion with the regret at separation) and the formulaic progressions above.

Apart from stressing the physical beauty of sing-song girls, a “vulgar” lyric may also boast about their musical or other talents. Such an element is already seen in the *Yunyao ji*:

Tune: “Nei jia jiao,” first stanza, (P. 2838)

Two eyes, keen as knives,  
Her whole body: jade.  
She is the number one beauty.  
Clothes a la mode,  
Hair styled for the capital,  
Her natural qualities charming, her sentiments like spring.  
With ear skilled at distinguishing the modes in music,  
Adept at tuning silken strings and bamboo pipes.  
Her ditties, sharp and new.  
Even citing the tale of the Luo Riverbanks  
and Sunny Terrace,  
No way to compare the goddesses there with her.

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50 YZZJ, 64; QSC, 21b.
52 Pan, *Dunhuang yunyao ji xinshu*, 188; DHGCZB, vol. 1, 239; DHQJL, 24 (#023).
Quite a number of Liu Yong’s “vulgar” lyrics also boast the talents of sing-song girls alongside their beauty. If we compare the following piece by Liu with “Nei jia jiao,” his indebtedness to the Dunhuang songs is even more apparent.

Tune: “Zhou ye le” (“Happy Days and Nights”), first stanza

Xiu Xiang’s home is on Peach Blossom Lane.
Only an Immortal Fairy might keep up with her.
Bright eyes finely cut from tiers of waves.
Her white neck, moulded from round, glazed jade.
Feasting, she likes to show her singing throat,
Halting the restless clouds,
Sad and frozen on the horizon.
Her speech is like a charming warbler’s,
Every note worth listening to.

Although Liu’s piece is obviously more refined and skilful in its use of parallelism (lines 3-4) and contrast (lines 3-4, 8-9), its facile and unsophisticated description of the sing-song girl’s beauty and talent differs little from the Dunhuang piece. They both cater solely to base “sensual properties” in the common male audience, providing them with a ready physical projection of the woman’s beauty and artistry which spares them the effort of deeper comprehension.

Yet, Liu Yong’s “vulgar” works still differ dramatically from the Dunhuang songs in one major aspect. As “Yu chi bei” demonstrates, although Liu uses the formulaic compliment to a sing-song girl, he heightens the sensual intensity of his lyric by introducing an even more daring, explicit image of erotic sentiment, while those in the Dunhuang manuscripts merely recapitulated the woman’s physical beauty and charms. This structural pattern is again seen in the second stanza of Liu’s “Zhou ye le,” which continues with these lines:

After drinking, the curtain is stock still
in the secluded bedroom.
We hug the scented quilt to sate our hearts’ joy.
From the musk in the gilt incense burner,
blue smoke curls up.

53 YZJ, 21; QSC, 15b.
Examples like this show that the structure of some of Liu's "vulgar" lyrics is highly standardized. Along with the formulaic content and structural progression, these pieces are also replete with set phrases, stereotyped imagery and conventional idioms: very often, the women's slim waists are "soft as willow twigs," their eyes "as bright as autumn waters," and skins "smooth like jade." Beauty and talents are routinely incomparable, their manner gentle, and charms seductive. Above all, their faithfulness to their lovers (or more precisely, customers) is unswerving. These are all prerequisites in the "vulgar," perhaps commercialized, lyric. As a writer sensitive to popular taste, Liu Yong potently applied them to his work with a refined literary skill.

In addition to the above features, Liu's "vulgar" pieces are also characterized by the following popular elements.

1) Formal flexibility  The musical skills of most elite lyricists of Liu Yong’s time were relatively inferior to their literary talents, whereas Liu possessed both in abundance. He not only could compose songs and rearrange old tunes, but modify metrical patterns of the ci lyric to fit new melodies. For example, none of the patterns in all four "Man jiang hong"  The Whole River is Red" lyrics in the Yuezhang ji is identical. The first piece shows the normal syllabic pattern of the third line of the first stanza:

Overlooking the islets, the smartweed mist is thin and light;

The corresponding line in the fourth piece is reduced by two syllables:

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54 YZJ, 186-190; QSC, 41b-42a.
Watching the setting sun light the west;

Also, the first and second stanzas should have one heptasyllabic couplet each. However, in Liu’s third “Man jiang hong,” he adds an extra character to three lines.

Sad, too many pillow promises,
Now we two let them go nowhere.

I regret making so many promises on the pillow
Are in the end so hard to be rid of.

Such interpolation and technique of word reduction are seen in the Yuezhang ji more often than in the ci collections by other lyricists. Although we can no longer hear the music of these ci lyrics, in light of the above examples, we can ascertain that in actual oral performance the metrical (if not tonal) patterns of Liu’s ci were not as rigid as the sanctioned versions indicate.\(^5\)

2) Narrative expression and psychological revelation

Dramatic effects in the Yuezhang ji are not as pronounced as in the Dunhuang manuscripts, where the lyrical mode, intensified through narrative situation and psychological insights, both modulates a majority of its pieces. Occasionally, a lyric such as the following may remind us of the prevailing theatrical atmosphere in some of the Dunhuang songs.

Tune: “Jin tang chun” 錦 堂 春 (“Spring in the Brocade Hall”)

Too tired to comb the fall of her hair,
Too lazy to paint the mournful moth eyebrows--
The heart strings are not disposed to anything.

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\(^5\) The several existing “Man jiang hong” in the collections of other elite lyricists around Liu’s time are overall not as flexible in metrical pattern as Liu’s versions. Also, probably because it is a long tune, elite writers of this time seldom filled in words for it, as short lyrics were more popular among them. This rarity indicates that Liu Yong was one of the most innovative writers of his time. For “Man jiang hong” of others, see QSC, vol. 1, 83b (Zhang Xian 張 先, 990-1078), 111a-b (Zhang Bian 張 䇚, 992-1077), 280b (Su Shi), 428a (Chao Duanli 趙 端 麟, 1046-1113), 471a (Qin Guan) and 562a, 563a (Chao Buzhi 趙 補 之, 1053-1110).
Lately I feel my looks are worn out with care,  
And my dress of gold thread has gone loose.  
I realize what this rake wants,  
He mocks in front of the others, as if I’m nothing.  
But when I tidy up my petal-scented appearance,  
See if he ignores me still!  
How can he bide easy?

As usual, he’s late for our date again.  
Why did he take advantage of me, then,  
To get me secretly to cut a lock of cloudy hair for him?  
Watch when he finally comes back,  
My scented bower shall be shut tight.  
When he wants to nuzzle the cloud and the rain,  
I shall wrap the embroidered quilt about me,  
And share no joy with him.  
Not until the darkest watch of night,  
Then shall I ask him, gentle and slow,  
“After this, do you dare be bad again?”

The women in Liu Yong’s lyrics are seldom passive subordinates to men; rather,  
they frequently voice their resentment at male frivolities and their leading separate  
lives—outbursts very much characteristic of the folk song and strongly contrasted  
to the lachrymose female characters in elite lyrics.

The main objective of a narrative lyric like “Jin tang chun” is to realistically  
describe the mind sets, emotional states and experiences of the personae in order  
to arouse immediate sympathy in the common audience. Allusion and  
circumlocution are simply anathema. In a like manner, because of the limited  
length of the ci form and the audience’s demand for instant pleasure, at times even  
scenic description, conspicuous in the elegant lyrics of both Liu and elite writers,  
must give way to the mounting of sensational excitement. Such a focus on  
narrative devices and psychological impact was probably influenced by the art of  
contemporary story-telling. Similarly, Liu’s lyric inspired the later qu ballad. In

56 YZJ, 118; QSC, 29b.
57 For the relation between Liu’s lyric and story-telling, see Uno Naoto,  
宇野直人, Liu Yong lungao--Ci de yuanliu yu chuangxin 柳永論稿：詞的源流與創新 (A Study on Liu  
regard to the absence of scenic description in the romantic *qu* pieces, the Ming scholar Wang Jide 王驥德 (?-ca. 1623) makes this cogent remark, which may be also applicable to Liu’s “vulgar” lyrics:

By his use of many scenic descriptions to write *qu* about boudoir feelings, I know that this writer has run out of ideas. To a master-hand, he [simply] grasps the word “emotion,” thoroughly explores [its meanings] and incisively expresses them. [The meanings of the word], so rich and expansive, are just then inexhaustible for him to draw and write about. How can he have the leisure to care about the flowers, birds, mist and clouds which are in front of his eyes but are unrelated [to his feelings], letting them drown his true temperament, and confuse his tiny brush? "作 闭 情 曲 而 多 及 景 語，吾 知 其 寫 而。此 在 高 手，持 一 情 字，撿 索 洗 發，方 指 之 不 盡，寫 之 不 窮，淋 漓 渺 漫，自 有 餘 力，何 偽 及 眼 前 與 我 相 二之 花 鳥 煙 雲，侶 掩 我 真 性，混 我 寸 管 約?" 59

In traditional elite literary theory, scenic description is used to help accentuate, simulate, or symbolize one’s innermost feelings. 60 Wang may be too extreme when he claims that its use hinders the ability to express genuine emotions, but certainly a song can engage romantic or erotic feelings more palpably and explicitly, instantly gratifying the sensual expectation of its audience without getting lost in the surrounding scenery. Liu’s “Jin tang chun” has not a word about external phenomenon. All it deals with is the woman’s thoughts and longings. Such a device also contributes directly to the forthright style of Liu’s lyric.

2. *Straightforwardness and colloquial expressions*   In respect to thematic
narrowness, Liu Yong closely resembles the *Huajian* poets such as Wen Tingyun and Wei Zhuang of the late Tang and the Five Dynasties.\(^\text{61}\) Whereas the *Huajian* poets, especially Wen, prefer elusive diction and maintain an "aesthetic distance" from the "objects" (women) represented, Liu specifies his passion, regret and longing in simple and colloquial language. For example, a piece pinpointing the pain of a recent love reads:

Tune: "Mu lan hua ling" 木 蘭 花 令 ("Short Version of the Magnolia Flowers")

There's a certain person truly worth admiring,
But when you ask her, she acts shy and looks away.
If you do not feel for me,
How in my dreams could we see each other so often?

Better surrender to my desire forthwith,
So as not to craze my soul mad for naught.
This fond heart of mine is not so immured,
I'm afraid it will tear apart because of you.

To say that the woman is always in his dreams or he is broken-hearted because of her cruelty is to a certain extent banal and lacking in imagination. But by admitting it succinctly, Liu cuts directly to the point, giving her--and the audience--the exact message he intends; for these common people, in Bourdieu's diction, would neither have the required time and energy, nor the aesthetic disposition to decode and savour allusions or abstruse metaphors.

With the intensely autobiographical tone throughout his work, Liu also distinguishes himself from the earlier *Huajian* poets as well as the anonymous Tang writers, whose romantic lyrics were mostly written in the feminine voice, highly impersonal, and seldom in the first person.\(^\text{63}\) Liu replaced affected ventriloquism with direct speech, clear-cut statements and rhetorical questions, unashamedly expressing his longing for a woman. These devices are effectively

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\(^\text{61}\) For a detailed study and translation of the *Huajian* lyrics, see Lois Fusek, *Among the Flowers*.

\(^\text{62}\) *YZJ*, 209; *QSC*, 46a.

\(^\text{63}\) Though one should avoid taking Liu's lyrics as faithful accounts of his life story, it is still plausible that most of them are based on his own experiences.
demonstrated in the “Mu lan hua ling.” Here is another notable example of straightforward, direct expression, ending in a rhetorical question.

Tune: “Ying chun le” 迎春樂 (“The Welcoming Music of Spring”)

Lately my haggard look frightens folk—
’Cause I think of you oh so much since we parted.
In a past life I must have owed you some debt of sorrow,
For this I suffer and can’t be quit of it.

This fine night lasts long—I can’t help but think of you.
Under the brocade quilt, your perfume is still there.
How could I, under the lamplight,
Delight in your charms as I please, as before?

Besides lyrics like this, autobiographical lines such as the following also suffuse the Yuezhang ji (note the use of a rhetorical question in ii, also).

(i)
I only hope my Chong Chong in her heart,
Will treat me always
As when first we met.

(ii)
I ask when I can be with you,
Deeply love and dearly care for each other as we did before?

(iii)
I won’t regret even if the belt on my dress grows looser,
For you it’s worth being wan and haggard.

In Confucian China, women were thought of as mentally weak, excessively emotional, and lacking in ambition; hence, in ci lyrics of the Tang and early Song, they are typically afflicted by separations or unrequited loves. In addition, a female persona is habitually assumed by the male poet to voice his own suffering. It would be unusual and especially improper for an elite male to confess that he is

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64 YZJ, 123; QSC, 30b.
66 Tune: “Qing bei le,” YZJ, 30; QSC, 17a.
67 Tune: “Feng qi wu” 凤棲梧 (“Phoenix Perched on a Wu Tree”), YZJ, 87; QSC, 25a.
“lovesick”; for according to the traditional concept, he must espouse higher political and moral aspirations that transcend personal affliction. But Liu Yong disregards this social norm. His lyrics realistically voice his all-too-human frailties and “frivolity,” continuously immersing him in his tidings of common, emotional excess. This “ordinariness,” which prompted the late Song lyricist and theorist Zhang Yan to deem him as “enslaved by emotion,” also led directly to Liu’s huge acceptance by the common audience.68

This accompanying excess of popularity was further enhanced by extensive and conspicuous use of colloquial idioms, various instances of which are underlined below.

See if he ignores me still!
How can he bide easy?
Lately my haggard look frightens folk--
’Cause I think of you oh so much since we parted.

The second stanza of one of the four “Man jiang hong” is especially notable in this aspect.

A-growing go my hurt feelings.
About that, what can I do?
I just feel flat-out fed up and tired of this.
With no one around I ponder it over,
And often let drop a tear.
I regret making so many promises on the pillow
Are in the end so hard to be rid of.
At long last,
I can only ask her
About how to handle it.

68 粉情所役. Ci yuan, CHCB, vol. 1, 266. Regarding Liu’s popularity, the Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao 四庫全書總目提要 (Synopsis of the Four Imperial Libraries) comments, “the ci was originally a kind of seductive music, and Liu Yong’s work was charming and intimately emotional, allowing people easy access to it, so though it is quite flawed by its vulgarity, there has been no end to those who delight in it.”

69 YZJ, 189; QSC, 42a. According to Winnie Leung’s statistics, in the Yuezhangji, the colloquial...
Colloquial diction also exacerbated the “vulgarity” of Liu’s lyrics and thus became a major target of elitist criticism. The commonest terms used to reprove Liu’s colloquialism are bi li 鄙俚 or bi su 鄙俗 (vulgar, colloquial, common).

Referring, for example, to Liu Yong and another lyricist Kang Yuzhi’s 康與之 (fl. twelfth century) works, Shen Yifu sniffs,

The tones of both Kang Boke [Yuzhi] and Liu Qiqing’s ci are very harmonious, and their sentence structures are also not bad in many places. But they can’t avoid using vulgar diction. 康伯可、柳耆卿音律甚協，句法亦多有好處。然未免有鄙俗語。70

Shen Yifu’s statement corresponds well with traditional scholarly commentary on folk verse: Wang Yi on the Chu folk songs, and Liu Yuxi’s preface to his “Bamboo Branch” poems (see Chapter one, p. 30-32). The difference is, while “vulgarity” is deemed somewhat natural and unavoidable in the folk song, in an elite poet’s work it is not just unacceptable but outrageous. Should he try his hand at a lower literary genre, he was expected to eradicate unseemly language.

4. “Marketplace aura” and eroticism

As already noted, proof of the immortalization of the “marketplace aura” of Liu Yong’s lyrics comes in Ye Mengde’s record that “wherever there was a well where they could drink water, people would sing Liu’s songs.”71 Another Song scholar, Huang Sheng 黃昇 (fl. 1240-1249), also affirms this with the following statement:

[Liu Yong] excelled in writing delicate and amorous lyrics. But very often he verged on a colloquial and vulgar style (li su), and therefore is favoured

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adverbs ren 恰 (like this, in this way) appears fifty-eight times, zheng 爭 (how) thirty-six times, chu 處 (where, place) more than twenty times and zen 怎 (how) over ten times. As for verbal and adverbial suffixes, de 得 is employed forty-nine times, cheng 成 over twenty times and liao 了 over ten times. Other types of colloquial diction, such as the pronouns yi 伊 (you) and wo 我 (I), or measure words yi chang 一場 (once) and yi xiang 一晌 (a while) are also numerous.


70 Shen, Yuefu zhimi, in CHCB, vol. 1, 278.

71 See note 3. The word shijing 市井 (marketplace), literally “market and well,” probably indicates that in the marketplace, there was usually a well for water supply.
Along with colloquial expressions, this "marketplace aura" is especially redolent in Liu’s erotic pieces. Definitely, he was by no means the only--nor the first--elite poet who dealt with eroticism in the *ci*. For example, the *Huajian* lyricist Ouyang Jiong (896-971) had already written the following infamous couplet long before:

In the faint orchid and musky fragrance I heard your moan. Underneath the light gauze and fine silk I saw your skin.

Under Liu’s influence, eminent literati such as Huang Tingjian (1045-1105) and Zhou Bangyan (1056-1121) also wrote quite a few erotic pieces. For example, the second stanza of Huang’s “Qian qiu sui” (*A Thousand Autumns*) goes:

The pleasure over, lovely and listness Jade turns soft, flowers droop to fall. The hairpin dangles on my sleeve, Cloudlocks pile on my arm. The lamp shines on her lovely eyes, Perspiration-soaked, intoxicated. “Go to sleep darling, Sleep darling, go to sleep.”

Even the elegant poetess Li Qingzhao, who is known for her candid rejection of Liu’s *ci*, could not avoid imitation with her “Red waves are seething under the

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72 Hua’an cixuan 花庵词选 (*Flower Hut Selected Ci*) (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 5: 93.
74 For example, see Huang’s “Hao ni’er” 好女儿 ("The Good Girl") no. 2, in CSC, vol. 1, 408b; and Zhou’s “Yu tuan er” 玉团儿 ("The Jade Ball") no. 2, “Hua xin dong,” CSC, vol. 2, 619a, 623b
Nonetheless, no extant collection of elite lyrics (though there surely are many lost ones) possesses so many candidly erotic images as Liu's. In our previous examples, several such passages have been cited. While those are mixed with other themes and emotions, the one below is unabashedly about the sheer bliss of sexual love.

Tune: “Ju hua xin” 菊花新 (“The Chrysanthemum Blossoms Anew”)

Unhappy at the short night, before the perfumed bed curtain has been pulled, She knits her moth-like eyebrows to discuss love: She urges the young man, “Go in first and warm the lovebird quilt.”

Soon she puts down the undone needlework, And takes her silk dress off. They are as wild as can be. He leaves the light in front of the curtain on, So that always, He can look upon her charming face.

In lines portraying carnal pleasure, like “And takes her silk dress off” and “They are as wild as can be,” the principle of “aesthetic distance,” by definition, does not hold. Because of the aesthetic contradiction, elite Chinese literature eschews such a topic, or only mentions it obliquely, always failing to provoke a striking effect. Only in lower art, where this aesthetic principle is ignored, can it be daringly and realistically explored.

Liu Yong’s “Ju hua xin” and other highly erotic pieces show that he still treated the *ci* as a lower art form. He thus not only shocked and offended many conventional critics as an elite writer, but also presented himself as the main

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76 被翻紅浪. Tune: “Feng huang tai shang yi xiao” 鳳凰臺上憶吹簫 (“Recalling Flute Playing on Phoenix Terrace”). *QSC*, vol. 2, 928a. This line is an imitation of Liu's “Feng qi wu,” which has a line that reads, “Under the brocade lovebird quilt, red waves are seething” 鴛鴦縧被翻紅浪. *YZJ*, 88; *QSC*, vol. 1, 25a.

77 *YZJ*, 162; *QSC*, 38a.
IV. Elite Criticism of Liu Yong: Purge of the "Alien"

As is already well-documented, Liu Yong’s lyrics can be divided into two distinct types: the “elegant” and the “vulgar.” It is on this antithetical classification that divergent viewpoints form, and contradicting opinions held by the same critic are not infrequent. Those of Su Shi, the greatest writer of the Song, are probably the most representative. For example, the following remark attributed to Su commends an “elegant” lyric by Liu.

People claim that Liu Qiqing’s songs are vulgar. This is not so. As his “Ba sheng gan zhou”[“Ganzhou in Eight Rhymes”] says, “The frosty wind is chilly and pressing / the passes and rivers, quiet and desolate / dwindling light is now on the tower.” These words in verse are not inferior to a Tang poet’s excellence.

Because of Su’s preeminent status, this passage has become an authoritative and oft-quoted defense of Liu. Yet according to various records, as Su deliberately advocated a “masculine and heroic” style of the ci, he also frequently held Liu’s feminine and amorous lyrics in contempt. For example, on one occasion he derides his disciple Qin Guan for imitating Liu:

Qin Shaoyou [Guan] came to the capital from Guiqi and met up with Dongpo [Su Shi]. Dongpo said, “I did not expect that after we parted, you would imitate Liu the Seventh’s [Liu Yong] style in writing ci!” Shaoyou replied, “Though I am not a learned person, I wouldn’t stoop to that.”

Dongpo said, “Out of my mind at this moment--’ Is this not Liu the Seventh’s diction?” Shaoyou said: ‘The frosty wind is chilly and pressing / the passes and rivers, quiet and desolate / dwindling light is now on the tower.’ This is an elegant lyric.  

78 Zhao Lingchi 趙令畤 (1051-1107), Houqing lu 侯鲭錄 (Finely Minced Fish Records) (Changsha: shangwu yinshuguan, 1939), CSJC, 7: 69-70.
The line Su Shi refers to is in Qin’s well-known piece “Man ting fang” (Courtyard Full of Fragrance). However, it only tends towards emotionalism and is still far from Liu’s “vulgar” eroticism. Whether or not Su’s remarks are authentic, they illustrate beyond a reasonable doubt the general attitude toward Liu’s ci shared by the elite critics: Liu’s “elegant” ci are laudable, but his amorous (and “vulgar”) works should be scorned. A similarly equivocal but somewhat sympathetic statement is made by the Qing scholar Zhou Ji 周濟 (1781-1839):

Qiqing has been reproved by the world for a long time, but the way he narrates and elaborates on things is tactful. While his words are familiar, the meaning is profound. The delightful quality of richness, delicacy and quiet simplicity goes deep into the bones of his lyrics. His works are many, therefore, there are many which are detestable, hackneyed and laughable. Had he exercised more control, he would be a master of the Northern Song.

Zhou’s mixed response clearly refers to Liu’s “elegant” works as a compliment, while his criticism, that many are “detestable, hackneyed and laughable,” is directed at his “vulgar” pieces.

If the opinions of Su Shi and Zhou Ji are based largely on aesthetic discrimination, and therefore are relatively objective and unaffected by ad hominem bias, more than a few scholars insist on a more moral function for poetry and obstinately choose to see only Liu’s rakish side. Despite commonly acknowledging his musical talent and writing skills, they simply deem all his lyrics unacceptable. The following comments are typical examples of this outright

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80 QSC, vol. 1, 458a.
81 Zhou Ji, Jiecun zhai lunci zazhu 介存齋詞話雜著 (Jiecun Studio Miscellaneous Ci Talks), CHCB, vol. 2, 1631.
dismissal.

i) Liu Yong’s Yuezhang ji was often appreciated and admired by common people. The narration progresses naturally; there is a beginning and there is an end. At times refined diction is presented. Also, he can choose harmonious tones and employ them. The only problem is that the words are shallow and vulgar. They constitute a different style which the illiterate especially delight in. I once compared him to the fops of the capital, and though they are divorced from the rustic manner of the village people, their tones and looks are still detestable. 柳耆卿樂章集，世多愛賞該洽，序事聞暇，有首有尾，亦間出佳語，又能擇聲律諧美者用之，惟是淺近卑俗，自成一體，不知書者尤好之。予嘗以比都下富兒，雖脫村野，而聲態可憐。82

ii) And then there was a certain State Farm Assistant Director called Liu Yong, who varied the old tunes and made new tunes, producing the Yuezhang ji. He was highly extolled in his time. Yet, though his ci fit the musical rules, his language is as low as the dust. 始有柳屯田永者，變舊聲，作新聲，出樂章集，大得聲稱於世；雖協音律，而詞語俚下。83

iii) Many commoners esteem Liu’s musical pieces. But generally, if they are not words about detainment in strange lands and the sorrow of abjection, then they have lewd bedchamber language. The chasm between Liu and writers like Ouyang Xiu, Yan Shu, Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, Zhang Xian and Qin Guan is extremely wide in comparison. The reason his name was so widespread is simply that his words verge on the commonplace, and the commoners readily delight in them. 柳之樂章，人多稱之。然大概非羞旅窮愁之詞，則閨門淫狎之語，若以歐陽永叔，晏叔原，蘇子瞻，黃魯直，張子野，秦少游輩較之，萬萬相遠。彼其所以傳名者，直以言多近俗，俗子易悅故也。84

iv) The ci Liu wrote are about nothing more than the lost souls and broken hearts of the entertainment quarters. There is not one iota of pure spirit in them. 其為詞無非舞館魂迷，歌樓腸斷，無一毫清氣。85

v) Qiqing’s ci are well elaborated and narrated. Those about detainment in

82 Wang Zhuo 王灼 (fl. 1149), Biji manzhi 碧雞漫志 (Casual Notes of the Blue Rooster Lane), CHCB, vol. 1, 84.
83 Li Qingzhao’s discourse on the ci, in Hu Zi, Tiaoxiyuyin conghua, houji, 33: 254.
84 Yan Youyi, Yiuyuan cihuang, in Hu Zi, houji, 33: 319.
85 Qian Peizhong 錢斐仲, Yuhua’ an cihua 雨華盦詞話 (Rain Flower Hut Ci Remarks), in CHCB, vol. 4, 3015.
strange lands and journeys on official services are especially skillful. Yet the range of his poetic ideas is not lofty, and its course of thought is slightly unorthodox. His *ci* have completely lost the [spirit of] Wen Tingyun and Wei Zhuang’s *loyalty and uprightness* (my italics).

In the third statement, the Song critic Yan Youyi clearly rejects even the so-called “elegant” pieces on travelling esteemed by Su Shi and others, probably seeing them as too downhearted. The Qing critic Chen Tingzhuo in the last quotation also attacks Liu’s work as excessively nostalgic (i.e., “not lofty” and “unorthodox”) and lacking in the political concern he finds in the *ci* of Wen Tingyun and Wei Zhuang.

As mentioned in chapter two, Chen Tingzhuo is known for his predilection in reading *ci* lyrics allegorically. In addition, he is also a vigorous advocate of the “elegant” *ci* style, which if followed would elevate the *ci* to a status he and others believe as respectable as *shi* poetry. Hence, in another passage he asserts

> When one starts learning [how to write *ci*], he must first distinguish the elegant from the vulgar. Once the elegant is set apart from the vulgar, then he can turn toward [the spirit of] *loyalty and uprightness*. After he grasps [the spirit of] *loyalty and uprightness*, next he should search for [the style of] gravity and solidity. Within this gravity and solidity, a modulated tone should be applied. Only such can be in the highest order of *ci* writing (my italics).

As Liu seldom holds back his feelings in his lyrics, and that for the most part these lyrics are only about romantic infatuations and reminiscences, it is impossible for an interpreter with the elitist “pure gaze” of a Chen Tingzhuo to detect in them—or even fabricate for them—any allegorical meanings. Also, Liu’s often vulgar, “frivolous” and too commonplace expressions contrast sharply with the style of “gravity and solidity” (i.e., seriousness and intensity) advocated by Chen.

Therefore, on the whole, his work does not reach Chen’s “highest order” of *ci*.

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87 Chen, *CHCB*, vol. 4, 3943.
writing and, not surprisingly, is disparaged by him.

The demand for a spirit of "loyalty and uprightness" (zhong hou 忠 厚) in ci composition, advocated by Chen and indeed by almost all critics, accords perfectly with the Confucian concept of poetry: that it should be endowed with a political and educative function. Yet this proposition completely negates the ci's original function as a form of popular entertainment and seeks to impose an aesthetic tenet of elite ideology on the genre so as to monopolize it, repudiating the emotionalism found in the popular lyric's expressions of amorous feelings, and seeing these elements as the main cause of moral degeneration in both writers and readers. Thus, the Song critic Zhang Yan says,

It dallies with the "wind and moon" [i.e., romantic feelings], shaping and expressing one's sensibility and emotions, [so] the ci is more delicate than the shi poetry. As its sound is produced from the tongues of the sing-song girls, it is acceptable to be closer to [romantic] feelings. But if it neighbours the Zheng and Wei music, how is it different from the chanling [a type of storytelling in song form]? ... If one can shun frivolous and erotic sentiments and enjoy [romantic feelings] without being excessive, then one would [conform to] the ideal passed down by the Han and Wei Yuefu ballads.

Kang [Yuzhi] and Liu [Yong]'s ci are also derived from chanting at the wind and describing the moon. The notion of "wind and moon" should be given free rein, but these two are enslaved by the "wind and moon" 康 柳 詞 亦 自 批 風 抹 月 中 來 ， 風 月 二 字 ， 在 我 發 揮 ， 二 公 則 爲 風 月 所 使 耳。 88

In Zhang's opinion, what Liu's work lacks is a long-standing major principle of Confucian literary aesthetics first presented in the Great Preface of the Shijing: emotional restraint.

The variant airs of the states, though produced by the feelings, do not go beyond the rules of propriety and righteousness. That they should be produced by the feelings was in the people's nature; that they did not go

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88 Zhang Yan, Ci yuan, CHCB, vol. 1, 263-4, 267.
beyond those rules was due to the beneficent influence of the former kings.

In short, a writer who cannot restrain his feelings violates "the rules of propriety and righteousness," and his words will harm the minds of his readers. Therefore, Zhang Yan and the vast majority of critics believe that since Liu Yong always completely surrenders himself to emotional excess, his *ci* are as licentious as the Zheng and Wei music and should be severely censured.

However different the critics who categorically reject Liu's work are from those who renounce only his "vulgar" pieces, their intentions are basically the same. Apart from the desire to establish an "elegant" tradition in *ci* writing, they also seek to purge the elite of the "alien" Liu. We have mentioned that Liu's "ordinary self" contrasts sharply with that of the Confucian scholars, and that his catering to popular taste also smacks of an elitist's mission to improve the quality of low art. Now we should turn our attention to Confucian ideology and the class attributes of elite critics to see how their antagonism to Liu and his "vulgar" work is formulated.

The elite class in imperial China had been the *de facto* administrative body of the state since the Han dynasty. Although rulers originated from a variety of social backgrounds, be they commoners, warlords, nobles or ethnic minorities, without exception they had to use Confucian ideology to varying degrees in order to legitimate and secure their power. This ideology was first formulated in the pre-Qin period by Confucius and his disciples, and was continuously modified, augmented and amplified in succeeding dynasties. Its basic feature, according to the renowned historian Yu Yingshi 余英時, is an emphasis on cultural unification (*wen hua tong yi* 文化統一) and cultural order (*wen hua zhi xu* 文化秩序). Yu points out that it is precisely because cultural unification can

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89 Translation by Legge with modifications, *The She King*, prolegomena, 36.
greatly enhance and facilitate political unification (zheng zhi tong yi 政治统一) that Confucianism was vigorously supported and promoted by the Han court, and remained so throughout imperial China. One of the various ways to achieve cultural unification was to “transform [incongruous] social customs and manners” (yi feng yi su 移风俗) through the “edification of ritual and music” (li yue jiao hua 禮樂教化), but before these transformations could be carried out, the cultural phenomena that did not conform to Confucian doctrine had to be suppressed. It is no wonder, therefore, that Confucian scholars saw collecting folk songs as an initial and important step in preparing for social transformation.  

Naturally, the “vulgar” in song was one of the “cultural incongruities” that needed to be eliminated. 

Yu further asserts that, to Confucians, political order (zheng zhi zhi xu 政治秩序) could be attained only after cultural order was established. Penal law was a coercive apparatus that might temporarily check and suppress social or cultural aberrations, but it could not fundamentally transform the minds of the people. 

Hence the Analects warn prospective rulers:

If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame. If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good. 道之以政，齊之以刑，民免而無恥；道之以德，齊之以禮，有恥且格。 

Based on this emphasis on cultural order, Confucian scholars assigned themselves a special task apart from maintaining political order. According to traditional concepts established in the Han dynasty, a virtuous official did not just govern the state properly and efficiently, but also educated his subordinates to bring “harmonious perfection” to society. In his study of Han “upright officials”

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90 Yu Yingshi, Shi yu zhongguo wenhua 士與中國文化 (Scholar-officials and Chinese Culture) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 134-136.
91 Yu 145.
(xun li 循吏), Yu specifies their two basic duties: one was to act as the actual administrator (li 吏, "official") of state affairs, and the other—not specifically assigned by the court—as social educator (shi 師, "teacher"). For Confucians, the second duty was even more essential than the first. In other words, how they could successfully promote moral edification was a priority over implementing the laws. Those who merely followed state policy and relied on "laws and punishment" to govern their subjects were no more than "common functionaries" (su li 俗吏). 93

This role of social educator generated a sense of "self-esteem" (zi zhong 自重) among Confucian scholars. 94 They deeply felt that their deeds and words should always follow Confucian "virtue" and "propriety," for how they acted and what they said would become examples for the common people to follow; and this was an arduous, life-long task requiring exceptionally staunch commitment, as stated by the Analects:

> The scholar cannot be without breadth of mind and vigorous endurance. His burden is heavy and his course is long. Perfect virtue—the burden he considers his to sustain—is it not heavy? Only with death does his course stop;--is it not long? 士不可以不弘毅，任重而道遠。仁以佛己任，不亦重乎？死而後已，不亦遠乎？95

This characteristic--and indeed, prerequisite--of Confucian scholars essentially set them apart as a special class. 96 Yet the task's extraordinary demands and the commitment to it lacked any "substantial binding force." 97 Thus it is not surprising that at times some--such as Liu Yong--might not always be able to sustain their integrity and fail to accomplish their moral mission. Nevertheless, whether they

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93 Yu 175, 176-177.
94 Yu 121.
95 Legge with modifications, 129.
96 Ortega y Gasset takes a similar stance when he defines two classes in twentieth century: the intellectuals are "those who make great demands on themselves, piling up difficulties and duties," and the common people are those "who demand nothing special of themselves, but for whom to live is to be every moment what they already are, without imposing on themselves any effort toward perfection; mere buoys that float on the waves." "The Coming of the Masses," in Rosenberg and White, eds., Mass Culture, 43.
97 Yu 108.
could put this into practice or not, the sense of “self-esteem” and role as social educators remained strong, even while they were not employed as government officials.

Yu also points out that the attitude of Confucians toward “this world” (ci shi 此世) was definitely not just to adapt themselves to it, but to actively transform it in accordance with their principles of “virtue” and “propriety.”98 This attitude is especially prominent in the theories of the Song Neo-Confucians. High officials such as Fan Zhongyan 范仲淹 (989-1052) amplified the undertaking that “perfect virtue is the burden he considers his to sustain” into “taking the world as one’s own burden” (yi tian xia wei ji ren 以天下为已任), and to attempt a realization of their ideal through political reforms. Some others, such as Cheng Hao 程颢 (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi 程颐 (1033-1107), though not employed by the court, still followed the model of the Han “upright official” and saw themselves as social educators. They were highly conscious of their duty to “enlighten the less enlightened” (jue hou jue 覺後覺) or the “unenlightened” (wei jue 未覺), believing that anyone, provided that he was willing to learn, could be transformed into a virtuous person.99 Prominent scholars like the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi, and Lu Jiuyuan 阂九淵 (1139-1193) were all well-known educators of the time, and one of their lasting major contributions to general education was the establishment of private academies (shu yuan 書院).100

According to Yu, another distinctive feature of the Song Neo-Confucians is that they were particularly concerned about the “negative forces” of “this world” and considered the evil (e 惡) elements in human nature even stronger than the good (shan 善). In order to combat these “negative forces” and “evils” both in society and in individuals, they stressed the importance of spiritual cultivation and

98 Yu 487-8.
99 Yu 502, 501.
100 For detailed studies of these academies, see Linda Walton, “Scholars, Schools, and Shuyuan in Sung-Yuan China,” in W. Theodore de Bary and John W. Chaffee, eds., Neo-Confucian Education: The Formative Stage (University of California Press, 1989); and Walton, Academies and Society in Southern Sung China (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999).
the continuous collective action of the intelligentsia. For this reason, they often “intensified the tension between themselves and ‘this world’ to its utmost limit.”

This attitude, together with their emphasis on cultural order and social education, may help explain why critics from the Song on were exceptionally hostile toward Liu Yong and his “vulgar” lyrics. For them, the “alien” Liu was devoid of a sense of “self-esteem,” and his work represented no doubt one of worldly “negative forces” that would hinder the attainment of cultural order.

The animus of Confucian critics toward Liu may also be interpreted from a Marxist viewpoint, in that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.” Confucian critics, who belonged to the actual ruling class in imperial China both practically and ideologically, seem to have been constantly attempting to reinforce their aesthetic as the literary paradigm. Works which do not fulfill the criteria are condemned as licentious, unorthodox or frivolous. To make their aesthetic “current everywhere” and prevail in every period, they were, therefore, “compelled . . . to represent [their] interest as the common interest of all the members of society,” and “give [their] ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.”

The state was also willing to let these critics promote their literary aesthetics, such as “loyalty and uprightness,” since it would certainly help stabilize the status quo. For Gramsci, elitists and intellectuals are assimilated by the class in power. In his words, they are the unofficial “deputies” of the state, and the educators of the “great masses of the population” in order to win their “spontaneous consent” to the hegemonic rule of the dominant class. Because of their long-established status as social educators, the ideology they imposed on the people would be highly authoritative and the consent of the majority would be easily secured. As Gramsci states,

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\text{this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and}
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Yu 490.


Marx 65-66.

function in the world of production.\textsuperscript{105}

Such production is, of course, intellectual and moral. By incorporating their ideology into the ruling ideologies and entrusting the educative role to the Confucians as their proxies, the state had in fact "become an 'educator'" and cultural controller.\textsuperscript{106}

It is out of this conscious status as "social educators," as well as their desire to "represent their [literary] interest as the common [literary] interest of all the members of society" that traditional Confucian scholars generally reject Liu Yong's "vulgar" lyrics and try to purge him from their coterie. The following anecdote effectively demonstrates their antagonism:

[When Liu Yong] went to the government office [to request a promotion], His Excellency Yan [Shu] asked, "Do you, sir, write songs?" Sanbian replied, "As does your Excellency, I also write songs." His Excellency said, "Though I write songs, I never write lines like 'I will sit by your side, green thread held idly in my fingers [to do needlework],'" whereupon Liu withdrew. [永] 諡 政 府 , 晏 公 曰 ： 「 賢 俊 作 曲 子 麼 ？」 三 變 曰 ： 「 歳 如 相 公 亦 作 曲 子 」 公 曰 ： 「 殊 雖 作 曲 子 ， 不 曾 道 「 綠 線 惣 拇 伴 伊 坐 」。 柳 遂 退 。\textsuperscript{107}

Yan Shu is acknowledged as a high official of noble character, and his \textit{ci} can be taken as representative of the refined elite \textit{ci} style. In contrast, Liu’s lyrics and rakish conduct were deemed indifferent to Confucian morality, if not an audacious, overt challenge to it. However implausible this story may be, as Murakami Tetsumi points out, if elite writers like Yan accepted Liu, it would be tantamount to disapproving of their own class privilege and ideology.\textsuperscript{108} Thus Liu's rejection had to be, at least in part, ideological, and not merely a contention over aesthetic principles.

\textsuperscript{105} Gramsci 219.
\textsuperscript{106} Gramsci 220.
\textsuperscript{107} Zhang Shunmin 張 舜 民 (ca. 1034-ca. 1100), \textit{Huaman lu} 畫 墙 錄 (Mural Records) (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1965), \textit{BBCS}, 1: 30b. Trans. Highetower, 1: 332 with modifications. The line Yan Shu refers to is in Liu's "Ding feng bo" 定 風 波 ("Settling Wind and Waves"). For the lyric, see \textit{YZJ}, 119; \textit{QSC}, 29b-30a.
\textsuperscript{108} Murakami 272.
Though inherently a rebellion against conventional aesthetics and social norms, Liu Yong’s production of “vulgar” lyrics should also be interpreted, partially, as an outcome of his failed public career and subsequent material deprivation. Had he attained Yan Shu’s status early on, Liu certainly would have honoured his calling and never risked his reputation by writing “vulgar” pieces. Therefore, his “dissipation” began more likely as a reaction to his ostracization rather than an act of self-alienation. Thus in the end he grew fond of the people whose company and culture he was forced into, and with whom he shared the popular solace of song. Ultimately this very failure to live up to the Confucian integrity expected of him in his times of personal hardship and disappointment put him beyond condoning by most self-respecting elite critics.

**Conclusion**

It is necessary to point out that Liu Yong was not the only elite writer influenced by the popular lyric in the Song dynasty. Prominent lyricists such as Ouyang Xiu, Huang Tingjian, Qin Guan, Zhou Bangyan and Li Qingzhao, not to mention numerous less famous ones, all to varying degrees adopted colloquialism, eroticism and straightforwardness in their poems. However, none of them can compare with Liu Yong in his boldness as well as the quantity of lyrics written in the popular style. His peculiar life experiences and his genuine devotion to popular culture also clearly distinguish him from others such as Huang Tingjian, who was known for his “vulgar” lyrics as well but seemed to treat them only as literary games, showing off his versatility with the colloquial idiom. Huang’s attitude toward “vulgarity” is also ambivalent when we recall the fact that he was one of the strong proponents of the scholarly “elegant” quality in the Song.\(^9\) Yet, some

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\(^9\) Huang once said, “A scholar-official can behave in whatever way he likes in the world, so long as he is not vulgar. Once vulgar, he cannot be cured” 士大夫處世可以百為，唯不可俗，俗便不可醫也. “Shu zengjuan hou” 書繚卷後 ("Postscript to the Silken Scroll"), *Yuzhang Huang xiansheng wenji* 豫章黃先生文集 (Collected Literature of Master Huang of Yuzhang) (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 196-), *SBCKCB*, 29: 326a-b. See also the discussion on his opinion on “elegance” in Sun Keqiang 孫克強, *Yasu zhibian 雅俗之辯* (Debate on Elegance and Vulgarity) (Beijing: Huawen chubanshe, 1997), 35-38.
of his lyrics are even more "vulgar" than Liu's. Insincere and written offhandedly, they are truly frivolous works.\textsuperscript{110}

Unlike Huang, Liu's wide acceptance is mainly due to his unashamed attachment to and thorough understanding of the feelings and experiences of the common audience. He did not come to them as a pedagogue from the elite circle, but as one who grumbled and rejoiced as they did. Through his straightforward and easily accessible lyrics, their most ordinary joys, afflictions, and even "debauched" sentiments were effectively expressed in their own idiom. Since his works functioned in a completely different domain from the elite lyrics, and were written to serve a different audience with a distinct artistic language and expression of its own, one should, therefore, avoid reading them with the "pure gaze" of the elite.

Sun, however, only mentions Huang's "elegant" quality, and completely ignores his "vulgar" lyrics.\textsuperscript{110} For example, see Huang's "Liang tong xin" 兩 同 心 ("Two with One Heart") (no. 2) and "Gu di ling" 鼓 簫 令 ("Song of Drum and Pipe") (no. 1). \textit{QSC}, vol. 1, 401, 407.
Chapter Four: Elevation and Expurgation—Elite Strategies in Enhancing Ci Reputation

Mountain songs and woodcutter's tunes, as well as backlane ditties and children's songs, are not necessarily worthless for anthologizing. But they in the end cannot avoid "colloquialism and vulgarity," and thus can hardly be accepted in the grand hall of elegance. People who are curious often favour this type of song, thinking that their style is rather close to antiquity. This is indeed a heterodox approach. The arias [i.e., the Shijing] and elegies [i.e., the Chuci] have their own gateways, and are inexhaustible sources for people to derive methods of writing as they like. Why is it necessary to seek these from village fellows and herdboys?!

The disparaging attitude of Chen Tingzhuo toward folk songs is typical of an elite critic's egotism. His belief that high literature, including the ci, has its own uncontaminated source and no need to be nourished by low art, however, is historically incorrect. As shown in preceding chapters, the ci in its early stages was no product of high culture. But to Chen and conventional critics, as the ci became welcomed into the elite circles, it was increasingly necessary to sever its unwelcome connection with popular culture. Otherwise it would never be accredited an elite art and would sully the prestige of those who practice it. One of the most effective strategies adopted by these critics was to fabricate a "legitimate" genealogy connecting the ci with the canonized Shijing arias and Chu elegies—however farfetched and untenable the argument for inclusion in this finer lineage might be—not to mention the fact that these canons they refer to and take as the provenance of elite poetry had evident and inextricable kinship with folk songs. This strategy was coupled with two others: first, the promotion of "elegance" as the orthodox style, and second, selective elimination of "vulgar" pieces from ci.

----- Chen Tingzhuo¹

¹ Chen Tingzhuo, Baiyu zhai cihua, CHCB, vol. 4, 3934.
anthologies and the literary collections of individual authors. After centuries of persistent "elitization," by the late Qing the genre could virtually--though not perfectly--share equal footing with shi poetry. This upward mobility provides an excellent illustration of the proposition noted in the first chapter: that the status of a certain cultural form does not invariably remain unchanged, especially if it is actively promoted or censured by an influential social group or institution. Yet in the case of the ci, the cost of this process should not be underestimated, for in elevating it the origin of the genre was obscured, and an unaccounted number of lyrics eventually were lost.

This chapter will chiefly focus on the ci criticism in the Five Dynasties and the Song, with occasional reference to that of later dynasties. Before we proceed to the discussion of elite strategies for elevating the ci's literary status, first let us review the "disrepute" of the genre in its early stages.

I: The Low Esteem for the Ci in its Early Stages

At the opening of his Ci zong 詞 綜 (Ci Compilation), the Qing scholar Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) writes: "Ever since the Tang and Song, long-and-short verse [i.e., the ci] was seen as a different category by writers and was not included in their collections. For this reason, it was the most easily lost." Although he does not give any explanation for this exclusion and subsequent loss, quite a few scholars have pointed out that it was due to the fact that the ci was simply not considered a respectable genre from the Tang through the early Song period. The low esteem for the genre in the Northern Song is further evidenced by

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2 Zhu Yizun, 唐宋以来，作家長短句每別為一編，不入集中，以是散佚最易。"Introduction"發凡, Ci zong (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, Kangxi sanshi nian ben 康煕三十年本), 6a.
3 See Long Muxun, "Xuanci biaozhun lun" 選詞標準論 ("On the Selection Standards of Ci"), Cixue jikan 詞學季刊 (Ci Studies Quarterly), 1.2 (August 1933), 1. Long's observation is also quoted by Pauline Yu, "Song Lyrics and the Canon: A Look at Anthologies of T'z'u," in Pauline Yu, ed., Voices of the Song Lyric in China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 72.
the lack of prefaces or colophons—"the channels normally used to confer and sustain literary prestige"—for ci collections. While this silent evidence of omission may not be easily observed, a more visible record of "disrepute" is found in miscellaneous contemporary notes. The following section focuses specifically on this anecdotal evidence.

As a newly emerging literary genre more flexible and interesting in its tonal and metrical patterns than the regulated shi, the ci was ardently practiced and enjoyed by the Tang and Song elite. But this enjoyment was always accompanied with a certain amount of disrespect. The ambiguous attitude of the scholar-officials is captured vividly in the following anecdote:

Though Qian Sigong [Weiyan, 977-1034] was born in a rich and noble family, he had only a few hobbies. When he was in Luoyang he once told his colleagues and subordinates that all his life he only liked reading. When sitting he would read classics and histories, lying down he would read novels. In his privy he would glance over the little ci. So there was probably never a moment in which he put a book down. This anecdote is highly credible, since the writer, Ouyang Xiu, was once Qian's assistant. Significantly, it reveals that the "little" ci was considered merely "privy reading," at the bottom of Qian's order of choice.

Not surprisingly, because of its unabashedly sentimental and amatory content, in its early stages certain Confucian moralists regarded the ci as "licentious" as the notorious Zheng and Wei music. If Qian Weiyan read the ci only in private and in a disrespectful manner, and therefore was praised as a diligent scholar, those who sang it in public or achieved fame by writing it naturally would invoke censure. Another anecdote records that the Five Dynasties lyricist Xue Zhaowei 薛昭緯

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4 According to Ronald C. Egan, there are only two ci prefaces written in the Northern Song extant. Egan, “The Problem of the Repute of Tz'u During the Northern Sung,” in Yu, 192.
5 Ouyang Xiu, Guitian lu 鄕田錄 (Record of Returning to the Fields) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1958), 14: 97.
(fl. 890-910) was fond of playing with his official tablet and singing the *ci* “Huan xi sha” (Silk Washing Creek Sands) on his way to the court. When one of Xue’s disciples was about to return to his hometown, he courteously admonished his mentor and said, “My Gentleman Attendant [Xue’s official title] is a man of high virtue, and I am your humble student. It would be my good fortune if you did not play with the tablet and sing ‘Huan xi sha’ anymore.”6 From the disciple’s point of view, Xue’s fondness of singing the *ci* was an act as indecorous as toying with the official tablet and would damage his scholarly reputation.

Yan Shu, the prominent Song lyricist known for his elegant and restrained *ci*, was not spared criticism either. One day when Wang Anshi (1021-1086) was reading Yan Shu’s lyrics, he wondered if Yan, as a former prime minister, should be writing the “little” *ci*. His liberal-minded brother Wang Anguo (1028-1074) thought that this was only a pastime and there was no evidence of it damaging Yan’s public career. But Wang’s assistant Lü Huiqing (1032-1111) immediately disagreed and said, “To govern a country one must first banish the Zheng music. How could he himself practice it?”7 Yan Shu’s son Yan Jidao (ca. 1030-ca. 1106), another outstanding lyricist, experienced similar disapproval from his superior. In an attempt to impress the governor of his prefecture, Han Wei (1017-1098), Yan presented him with copies of his own lyric compositions. But Han responded in a letter which said, “You probably have a surplus of genius, but your virtue is deficient. I hope that you can give over this excess in your genius to remedy your deficient virtue.”8 The lyrics must have

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7 爲政必先放鄭聲, 況自為之乎? Wei Tai 魏泰 (d. 1110), Dongxuan bilu 東軒筆錄 (Written Records of the East Veranda) (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1939), CSJC, 5: 31.
8 盖才有餘而德不足者, 愿郎君捐有餘之才, 補不足之德. Shao Bo 邵博 (d. 1158), Shaoshi weijian houtu 郡氏聞見後錄 (Sequel to Shao’s Notes of Personal Experiences) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), CSJC, 19: 125. It must be pointed out that Han himself was also a lyricist, but apparently he was not considered overly indulgent in the activity.
been too amatory and feminine for Han, even if they were elegant in both tone and
diction as in Yan’s now extant works.

Although frequent attacks from moralists did not prevent or discourage elite
writers from continually trying their hand at the ci, the genre was still viewed by
many, including those who took great delight in it, as a “lesser path” (xiao dao 小
dao) of literary activity. Lyricists thus commonly avoided making their works
public, or when challenged sought excuses for their writings. Hu Yin 胡寅
(1098-1156) explains this ambivalent attitude in his “Jiubian cixu” 酒邊 詞 序
(“Preface to The Ci Sung Beside Wine”).

Men of letters who are endowed with unrestrained spirit frequently entrust
their thoughts to this genre. But immediately they will cover their own
tracks, saying that this is merely a sport or a game. 文章豪放之士，
鮮不寄意於此者，隨亦自掃其跡，曰諸遊戯而已也。9

Hu’s statement stems from the situation in the Northern Song, but the attempts by
lyricists to “cover their own tracks” can already be observed by the Five Dynasties.
The simplest but also costliest tactic was to destroy them. An entry in Sun
Guangxian’s Beimeng suoyan records and comments:

He Ning [898-955], the prime minister of Jin [936-946], was fond of
writing ci in his youth, and they spread widely in the Bian and Luo regions.
After he became the prime minister, he sent people specifically to collect
and burn them as quickly as possible. Yet, although he was honest, prudent
and virtuous, he was in the end disgraced by writing erotic ci. When a
Khitan envoy came to Yimen [presently Kaifeng], he addressed He as the
“Prime Minister of Ditties.” This is what we call “good things not going far
from home, while evil conduct is known for a thousand li.” How can
scholars and gentlemen not be cautioned by this? 書 相 和 緯，少 年
時 好 爲 曲 子 詞，布 於 行 市。泊 入 相，專 託 人 收 拾 毁
不 暇。然 相 國 厚 重 有 德，終 爲 豔 詞 砧 之。契 丹
入 夷 門，號 爲 曲 子 相 公。所 謂 好 事 不 出 門，惡 事 行
千里，士 君 子 得 不 戒 乎？10

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9 Mao Jin 毛 晉 (1599-1659); Song liushi mingjia ci 宋 六 十 名 家 詞 (Ci of the Sixty
Song Masters) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1989), 220a.
10 Sun 6: 51.
He Ning's defensive action demonstrates that elite lyricists of the time, perfectly aware of the disrepute of the *ci*, would censor their own works. Ironically, the critic Sun Guangxian himself was also a well-known lyricist whose works resemble He's quite closely; both are listed in the *Huajian ji*, the earliest elite *ci* collection notable for its amatory style. Sun would not have been unaware of their similarity. Possibly, his criticism of He was an attempt to make a clean break with the *Huajian* lyricists, and to regain for himself the rectitude of moralist and scholar.

A similar self-defensive attitude was still seen in the Southern Song. For example, the great poet Lu You (1125-1210), confesses the "sins" of his youth in the preface to his *ci* collection:

> When I was young, I followed the custom of the world and wrote quite a few [lyrics]. At a later age I regretted it. However, it was too late to stop sing-song girls from performing my works. Now I have stopped writing them for several years. Thinking that eventually my former writings cannot be eradicated, I therefore write this at the beginning to acknowledge my wrongdoing. 

However, judging from his approval of the *ci* in one of his two earlier colophons to the *Huajian ji*, that it was "simple, archaic, and lovely" (*jian gu ke ai*), it is impossible to tell whether the above preface was an attempt to save himself from possible posthumous disgrace, or if his attitude toward the genre had really changed over time.  

Another common defensive tactic of the elite lyricists, as Hu Yin points out,

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12 Lu, “Colophon to the *Huajian ji*” 跋 花 間 集, *Lu Fangweng quanji*, vol. 1, 30: 186. In his “Colophon to Chen Shidao’s Long-and-Short Verse” 跋 後 山 居 士 長 短 句, Lu You also claims that “At the end of the Tang, the *shi* poetry became increasingly shallow, while the *ci* lyric was lofty, archaic and refined” 唐 末，誇 益 卑，而 樂 府 词 高 古 工 妙. *Lu Fangweng quanji*, vol. 1, 28: 168.
was to claim that they were not serious about *ci* writing. According to an anecdote, when the monk Yunxiu 雲秀 tried to discourage Huang Tingjian from writing *ci*, Huang replied that they were only fictitious “words in the air,” and for this reason believed that he would not be “sentenced to an evil fate.”\(^{13}\) In reality, however, quite a number of his lyrics correspond to real incidents in his life. Yunxiu further warned that his “wicked words” would encourage promiscuity and moral degeneration, and therefore he would be severely punished after death. Contrary to the anecdote, which says Huang thereupon reduced his production of *ci*, he took no heed of Yunxiu’s warning and wrote even more in his later years.\(^{14}\) This anecdote is corroborated by Huang’s “Preface to *Little Hill Collection*” 小山集 序, the *ci* compilation of Yan Jidao, in which he again rebuts the monk’s criticism and proclaims that Yan’s (perhaps also his) works indeed deliberately run counter to orthodox literary practice.\(^{15}\) This preface evidences that his reply to the monk in the anecdote is no more than evasion.

Whether elite writers like Huang thought of *ci* writing as a game or not, the common denominator remains that they treated the *ci* less seriously than other literary genres—in particular, *shi* poetry. While they might be unashamed of dabbling in the *ci*, and even expressed their most private and ordinary feelings in it, they obviously paid the *shi*, burdened with an educative function and a much longer literary history, the obligatory higher respect. Huang, the founder of the Jiangxi School of *shi* poetry, apparently devoted substantially more effort to the art and theory of the *shi* than to that of *ci*. As for thematic treatment, this difference in attitude is also notable. The *Huajian* writer Ouyang Jiong, for example, was notorious for his erotic lyrics, but he is also said to have presented the court with fifty satirical *shi* poems modeled on Bai Juyi’s political, didactic “New Yuefu

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\(^{14}\) Egan 197-201, 202.

\(^{15}\) Huang, *Yuzhang Huang xiansheng wenji*, 16: 163a-b. A complete translation of this preface is in Egan, 221-222.
Poems.” His contrasting roles as a moralistic shi poet on one hand and a rakish lyricist on the other is very similar to the case of Liu Yong.

It is certainly not just coincidental that all of the above lyricists were both criticized and that they tried to avoid criticism for the same moralistic reasons. Apart from the abuse elitists habitually heaped on any new literary form associated with popular or low culture, in the Northern Song the influential Neo-Confucian or li xue 理 學 (Study of Principles) teachings might also augmented this shared attitude of disapproval. Cheng Yi, the leading li xue master, especially emphasized the Confucian literary theory that “literature is to transmit the Dao” (wen yi zai dao 文 以 载 道), carrying the matter to its extreme apogee by contending that all literary activities were deleterious to Confucian teachings.

Is not literary writing harmful to the Dao? I say it is. Generally speaking, if in writing literature one is not devoted, then it will not be excellent. But if devoted, then one’s aspiration will be confined. How can one share the greatness of heaven and earth? The Book of History says, “Playing with things saps one’s aspiration.” To write literary work is also playing with things... Ancient scholars only aimed at cultivating their dispositions and studied nothing else. Now literary writers work specially on phrases and lines to please the eye and ear. As they aim at pleasing people, how are they any different from comedians? 閱 作 文 廢 道 否？曰：書 也。凡為文 不 專 意 則 不 工，若 專 意 則 志 局 於 此，又 安 能 與 天 地 同 其 大 也。書 云：玩 物 廢 志，為 文 亦 玩 物 也。... 古 之 學 者 唯 務 養 情 性，其 它 則 不 學。今 爲 文 者 唯 務 章 句，悅 人 耳 目；既 務 悅 人，非 俳 優 而 何？

In Cheng’s opinion, after successfully cultivating the Confucian principles, what one expresses in writing will naturally take the form of refined works; therefore, literary skill needed no training. This radical view leads him to dislike even the shi poetry and also the Tang great poet Du Fu.

I usually do not write poetry. It is not that I forbid myself to write it, but only because I do not want to work on those idle words. Even Du Fu, who is

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16 Tuo Tuo 脫 脫 (1314-1355) et al., Song shi 宋 史 (History of the Song) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), vol. 40, 13894.
17 Cheng Yi, Henan Chengshi yishu 河 南 程 氏 遺 書 (Posthumous Works by the Chengs of Henan) (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1965), WYWK, 18: 262.
now deemed the most skilful poet, has written such lines, “Crossing the flowers, the butterfly appears in the deep deep place / Touching water, the dragonfly gently, gently flutters.” Why must one say idle words like these?

The feminine and amatory ci lyric is larded with even more “idle words” than the shi, so Cheng’s opinion must have been very negative indeed. The following anecdote is thus not entirely groundless: It is said that on one occasion when Cheng Yi met Qin Guan, he asked whether Qin had written a ci line which went, “If Heaven has feelings, Heaven too would be sad for people.” Qin thought that Cheng meant to praise his genius, cupping his hands to thank him. But Cheng reproved him with “Heaven is solemn and venerable, how can you change [its disposition] and offend it?” From Cheng’s point of view, a cultivated scholar should not write such a silly, sentimental and presumptuous line about Heaven, which was, to a great extent, the perfect emblem of Confucian principles.

According to Cheng, Qin Guan’s “fault” lay in that he failed to separate ethical propriety from emotional excess; and indeed, this characteristic was shared by a majority of the earlier and contemporary lyricists. While their works strongly appealed to the general audience due to their artistic immediacy in exploring the innermost human feelings, to Cheng and other moralists they would also easily distract people from their moral betterment. Although Cheng himself wrote no

18 Cheng 18: 263. The couplet he refers to is in Du Fu’s “Drinking Wine by the Qu River” 曲江對酒, see Qiu Zhao’ao 仇兆鰲 (1638-after 1713), Dushi xiangzhu 杜詩詳注 (Detailed Commentary on Du Fu’s Poems) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 6: 449.

19 天若有情，天也為人煩惱。Yuan Wen 袁文 (1119-1190), Wengyou xianping 窈窕閒評 (Idle Comments in the Unadorned Window) (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1939), CSJC, 5: 49. Qin’s line can be found in CSC, vol. 1, 469b. Yuan Wen probably misquotes it. In Qin’s “Shui long yin” 水龍吟 (“Chant of the Water Dragon”), a line says, “If Heaven were sentient, Heaven too would grow thin” 天還知道，和天也瘦. CSC, vol. 1, 455b-456a. The same anecdote was recorded by Chen Gu 陳鵠 (fl. early thirteenth century) in Xitang ji qijiu xuwen 西堂集耆舊續聞 (Sequel to Old Sayings of the West Hall Collection) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), CSJC, 8: 54. For a translation of Chen’s version, see Egan 203-204.

20 仰穹尊嚴，安得易而侮之. Yuan 5: 49.
discourse on the *ci*, based on his literary theory, to even participate in *ci* writing—let alone to devote oneself to it—must be looked on as an activity greatly “harmful to the *Dao.*” This phalanx of negative opinion against “idle words” most likely would exacerbate the already widespread disparagement of the *ci* among the moralists, even if many literary writers, such as Huang Tingjian, did not take it to heart.

**II: Strategy One—The Establishment of a Reputable Genealogy for the Ci**

In light of the above critique, once the elite became involved in writing *ci*, they realized the need to elevate its literary status. But setting out to “cover one’s tracks,” or passing *ci* writing off as one of their leisure activities, proved to be nearsighted strategies; for these could only hark back again to the lax and low status of the genre. In order to legitimize their literary practice, a series of attempts to enhance the reputation of the *ci* took place. A core tactic of the *ci* apologists in this became the establishment of a respectable genealogy.

The compilation of the *Huajian ji* in the Five Dynasties by Zhao Chongzuo is generally viewed as the first major—though not entirely successful—attempt. It consists of five hundred lyrics by eighteen writers, notably the late Tang poet Wen Tingyun. Others, including Wei Zhuang, mostly served in the Former (907-933) or Later Shu (933-965). As a *ci* collection written *by* and *for* the elite class, the *Huajian ji* marks the first step in the gradual dissociation of the *ci* from popular culture. However, as it is permeated with amatory and hedonistic expressions, and was mainly used as a repertoire for banquet performance, the *Huajian ji* has never been considered a reputable anthology.21

21 Although Wen Tingyun’s *ci* are esteemed by Zhang Huiyan as comparable to the “Li sao,” they were generally denounced in the Song. For example, the Retired Scholar of Zhouyang 鈐陽居士 described them as “licentious, voluptuous, obscene and intolerable to the ear” 淫穢猥褻不可聞. “Preface to the *Song lyrics of Restoring the Elegant Style*” 復雅歌詞序, in Zhu Mu 祝穆, *Xinbian gujin shiwen leiju* 新編古今事文類聚 (*New Edition of the*...
The original intention to use the collection for entertainment and not canon formation is suggested in the 940 preface, a florid piece of parallel prose written by Ouyang Jiong. Ouyang, also a contributor to the collection, only mentions the “licentiousness” of the Palace Style Poetry of the Southern Dynasties in passing and makes no further discourse on moral edification, probably because he knows the “debauched” contents of the collection all too well. Instead, he focuses on the origin of song, manifesting a strong desire to distinguish the elite lyric from the popular, and in doing so, commences a theoretical tradition linking the ci with ancient and respectable literary genres. Unlike later ci critics, however, he excludes the most esteemed from his genealogical list: the canonized Shijing and Chuci—either because he did not consider the two classics among the true historical origins of the song form, or did not dare imply potential canonization of the Huajian ji. Still, his list consists of elegant pieces such as the “White Cloud Tune” 白雲謠, which as legend says was sung to King Mu by the mythic Queen Mother of the West, the “White Snow” mentioned by Song Yu in his reply to the king of Chu, and Yuefu poetry which had long been practiced and well-received by elite writers since the late Han and Southern Dynasties.22

After tracing the provenance of the song form to these reputable pieces (or genre) and expressing contempt for the “inelegant” Palace Style Poetry, Ouyang briefly alludes to the ci’s popularity among common people in the Tang, but stresses quickly that the genre also had a close connection with elite literature:

Since the Tang dynasty, across the country, every household has had its own beauty of Yue on the fragrant paths amid spring breezes. And wherever the evening moon shone on the red towers, there a Chang’e [the goddess of moon, here refers to singing girls] was found. In Emperor Xuan Zong’s reign [r. 713-756], Li Taibai [Bai] under imperial order wrote the four

Compilation of Ancient and Contemporary Categorized Affairs and Works), quoted in Zhang Huimin 張惠民, Songdai cixue ziliao huibian 宋代詞學資料匯編 (Collected and Edited Materials of Ci Studies in the Song) (Shantou: Shantou University Press, 1993), 249. Judging from this lack of “moral correctness” as well as Zhao’s disordered system of arrangement (works by individual authors are seen in different fascicles), it seems that “although the anthology,” as Pauline Yu contends, “might have hoped to establish the writing of [ci] as an acceptable literati activity, it did not aspire to claim for it the canonical function of shi.” Yu 76 22 Ouyang, in Huajian ji, Preface, 1.
“Qingping Songs.” More recently, there is the Jinquan ji [Golden Weir Collection] by Wen Feiqing [Tingyun]. Present-day writers are not inferior to their predecessors.

The logic goes: since eminent poets of older generations, such as Li Bai and Wen Tingyun, had already practiced ci writing, the ci is therefore, as the passage suggests, an acceptable literary genre. In his conclusion, Ouyang maintains that their “elegant” works will be performed at elite banquets and eventually oust the scurrilous popular lyrics:

In ancient times in the city of Ying, they sang “Sunny Spring,” and it was praised as the most exceptional of lyrics. It is with this in mind that I name this book Among the Flowers. It will add to the pleasure of those distinguished sages [i.e., the elite class] who ramble in their carriage in the West Garden. And the ladies from the south can stop singing songs about the lotus boat.

Songs about “the lotus boat,” emotional and straightforward, were originally sung in the Southern Dynasties; here the term simply refers to contemporary popular lyrics. By implying a distinction between “us” and “them,” as well as the “elegant” and the “vulgar,” Ouyang therefore roughly defines an elite ci tradition, even if the influence of the popular lyric is still very significant in the anthology.

However clearly Ouyang’s preface shows the attempt of the Huajian lyricists to promote the ci as an acceptable genre, their lack of desire to alter its function as entertainment and their indulgence in the feminine and amorous style essentially did not help change its disrepute. So long as their model was still followed—and indeed it was generally followed by the early Northern Song lyricists--the genre

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23 Ouyang 1. Translation based on Lois Fusek, Among the Flowers, 35.
24 The West Garden refers to the Bronze Sparrow Terrace of the Three Kingdoms Period. It was the place where the Cao Zhi, his brother Cao Pi (Emperor Wen of the Wei) and their literary friends frequently held banquets.
25 Zhao, Huajian ji, Preface, 1. Translation based on Fusek, 36.
was doomed to be continually despised by the moralists. With the rise of the “heroic abandon” (hao fang 豪 放) style of ci writing around the eleventh century, the genre was more or less rescued from opprobrium. Vigorously advocated by Su Shi and his followers, who were unhappy with the “unmanly” and lachrymose Huajian lyrics, the “heroic abandon” mode is mainly characterized by its masculinity, its use of shi writing techniques (yi shi wei ci 以 詩 爲 詞) and its wider range of subject matter and stylistic devices. This group of writers no longer treated the ci as just a form for banquet revels and entertainment, but expanded its poetic scope, making it functionally comparable to the shi. In fact, they were innovative in all forms of literature, such as the shi and fu rhyme-prose, setting themselves decisively apart from their predecessors. One could, justifiably, call this innovation the central characteristic of the school. Such a transformation of fundamental themes and techniques proved to be much more effective in ennobling the ci’s status than Ouyang Jiong’s strategy. Thus Hu Yin makes the following well-known pronouncement on Su Shi’s achievement:

It was not until the emergence of Su [Shi] of Meishan that the preoccupation with the silks and perfumes of feminine charm was cleansed once and for all, and the overtly sentimental and elusive feelings discarded. One is thus able to ascend high places for a distant view, and stroll with one’s head up and sing aloud. One’s unworldly aspirations and noble spirit can thus soar above the mundane world. Huajian poets are thus but attendants and Liu [Yong] but a sedan chair carrier. 25.

Gradually, it became accepted practice for Northern Song scholars to associate the ci with the shi. Although Su Shi’s existing literary collection contains only one

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27 In Mao Jin, Song liushi mingjia ci, 220b. Translation by Ying-hsiung Chou with modification, in Soong, 151.
specific comment about using *shi* technique to write *ci*.²⁸ His disciples did make some relevant remarks. For example, in his preface to Yan Jidao’s *ci* collection, Huang Tingjian, even if not entirely accurate, notes that Yan “borrows the techniques of *shi* writers” in his lyrics.²⁹ Zhang Lei 张耒 (1054-1114) also compares He Zhu’s lyrics with poems by Qu Yuan, Song Yu, Su Wu 蘇武 (d. 60 BC) and Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BC) (the latter two are said to be great *shi* poets of the Han).³⁰ Comments like these may partly aim to defend and legitimize the activity of *ci* writing. But as Huang and Zhang were both deeply influenced by Su Shi, it is very likely that they also intended to minimize the generic distinction between the two genres.

Innovative as Su Shi’s *ci* are, doubts and disapprovals were voiced by *ci* “fundamentalists,” who counter-criticized his violation of the delicate feminine style—the so-called “original colour” (*ben se* 本色)—of the *ci*.³¹ His lyrics were considered unorthodox and too unsuitably masculine for sing-song girls to sing, and some of them do not conform with tonal regulations.³² This dilemma of

²⁸ In a letter to Chen Zao 陈慥 (fl. eleventh century), Su Shi comments on Chen’s *ci*: “Every line in the new lyrics you sent to me is extraordinary. They are as magnificent as the poem of a *shi* poet, and not in the style of the *ci*. But I am afraid that the Creator would not let you be so happy as to [write with such] excessive heroic abandon” 又惠新词，句句警拔，诗人之雄，非小词也。但豪放太过，恐造物不容人如此快活。Su Shi, “Letter Answering to Chen Zao” 答陈季常书, *Su Shi wenji* 蘇軾文集 (Literary Collection of Su Shi) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 53: 1569. One can see that Su’s comment is not in regard to his own lyrics. Furthermore, it is somewhat reserved about the “heroic abandon” style.

²⁹ Huang, *Yuzhang Huang xiansheng wenji*, 16: 163a.


³¹ Typical examples of the delicate feminine *ci* can be seen in collections of Wen Tingyun, Yan Shu and Yan Jidao.

³² Chen Shidao 陈师道 (1053-1102) criticizes Su’s *ci* with, “Zizhan [Su Shi’s style] uses *shi* technique to write *ci*. It is like the dance of Ambassador Lei of the Palace Academy, and though it represents the most excellent technique in the world, ultimately it is not the original colour of the *ci” 子瞻以诗为词，如敷福雷大使之舞，虽极天下之工，要非本色。*Houshan shihua* 后山诗话 (Poetry Remarks of the Retired Scholar of Houshan), in He Wenhuan 何文焕 ed., *Lidai shihua* 历代诗话 (Poetry Remarks of Past Dynasties) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), vol. 1, 309. The poetess Li Qingzhao expresses similar disapproval, saying Su’s lyrics are “*shi* poetry in irregular lines” 句讀不葺之詩。See her “Ci lun,” in Hu Zi, *Tiaoxi yuyin conghua*, houji, 33: 254. Regarding Su’s inexpertness in music, see Peng Cheng, *Moke huixi*, 4: 6a.
establishing a clear generic identity for the *ci* has already been well-studied by scholars. What needs to be reemphasized here is that, by dismissing the “heroic abandon” style as an illegitimate style, or more broadly, by refusing to use *shi* techniques to write *ci*, conventional critics were obliged to seek exclusively within the domain of the “original colour” the tactics of elevation (mainly by promulgating the use of elegant and elusive expressions). This is certainly not an easy task. “Delicate restrained” lyrics cover a very limited poetic scope, and slip back easily into the feminine, lachrymose *Huajian* mode. Even more problematic is that, while these critics always accentuate the distinction between *ci* and *shi* writing, they are unable to control their obsession with tracing the *ci*’s origin to the *shi* or their propensity to apply the *shi* aesthetic to *ci* criticism, and thus very often find themselves wallowing in self-contradiction.

Thematically, the *ci* of “heroic abandon” conformed to the Confucian aesthetic’s emphasis on the moral correctness and political function of poetry, whereas the amatory *Huajian* lyrics did not. The works of Su Shi and his followers, abounding in scholarly interests and classical allusions, are actually even further distinguished from the popular lyric than those delicate pieces of previous writers. This stylistic and qualitative transformation not only helped elevate the *ci* to an unprecedentedly high position, but also provided a stronger theoretical basis for critics to link the *ci* with reputable ancient genres. In fact, after the rise of Su Shi’s innovative *ci* style, there was significant growth in the number of prefaces to individual *ci* collections. Also, critics overtly traced the origin of *ci* to the canonized *Shijing* and *Chuci* that Ouyang Jiong excluded from his genealogical list, regardless of how they commented on the school of “heroic abandon.”

The *ci*’s purported relationship with the *Chuci* has been mentioned in Zhang Lei’s comparison of He Zhu to the two most important Chu writers, Qu Yuan and Song Yu (p. 162). An example of its “affinity” to the *Shijing* is given in Cai Kan’s

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33 For example, see Shuen-fu Lin, “The Formation of a Distinct Generic Identity for *Tz’u,*” in Yu, 3-29. See also Yu, “Song Lyrics and the Canon,” 71-79.
蔡戡（b. 1141）preface to the ci collection of Zhang Yuangan 張元幹 (1091-ca. 1170), a poet known for his lyrics of “heroic abandon.” In reference to Zhang’s famous piece “He xin lang” 賀新郎 (“Blessing the Groom”), Cai comments “[it is subtle yet [the implication is] observable. It is sad but not too distressed, and deeply in accordance with the satirical principle of the three hundred pieces [i.e., the Shijing].” The lyric was written on the occasion of seeing off Hu Quan 胡銓 (1102-1180), who was banished from court because of his daring petition to decapitate the powerful, wicked minister Qin Gui 秦檜 (1109-1155). This type of ci, endowed with a political function similar to that of the shi, had broken away from its roots in banquet entertainment. It is only in this vein of political satire that the ci can tentatively be linked to the Shijing and Chuci, but there is neither argument nor evidence for a generic connection (regular tetrasyllabic Shijing lines are as unlike the varied line lengths of the ci as is one fixed set of railroad tracks to multiple village trails). Neither is there any chronological evidence for ci developing from these canonized anthologies of the previous millennium.

Nevertheless, looking for a reputable Confucian genealogy to dignify the ci was a bold undertaking. Indeed, what could be more powerful than the support of the Confucian canon itself to counter the attacks of Confucian moralists? This careful contrivance of historical disinformation was an effective tool, especially in a period when almost all scholars, whether they favoured the genre or not, were influenced by the Confucian aesthetic. As the opinion that writing ci was not a “lesser path” spread in the Southern Song, this strategy was, naturally, increasingly adopted in prefaces and colophons--two of the most often used channels of the time for dignifying the genre. Zhang Zi’s 張鎰 (b. 1153) preface to the ci collection of Shi Dazu 史達祖 (fl. 1205-1207) is a notable example:

35 Wang Mingqing, 王 明 清 (1127-ca. 1215), Huizhu houlu 捲軀後錄 (Sequel to the Records of the Waving Whisk) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), CSJC, 10: 653-660.
“Guan Ju” and the other three hundred [Shijing] pieces are the song lyrics of ancient times. The sage master [Confucius] revised them and compiled them into a classic. People of later generations applied music to poems, performing them with percussion, string and wind instruments. Qu [Yuan], Song [Yu], Ban [Gu] and Sima [Xiangru] came forth thus. If [ci lyrics] can be extraordinary, aphoristic, pure and elegant, and do not fall into imtemperness, dirtiness and licentiousness, then those literati and men of genius of the world who sport their brush and ink with long-and-short verse cannot be lightly said to be [practicing] an insignificant art.

Zhang’s passage clearly demonstrates the change of attitude of the Southern Song scholars toward the ci. But his widely-held argument that the ci can only be called a reputable genre when it conforms to traditional aesthetics is essentially conservative. However much it may defend ci writing, this new attitude still does not break out of the elite criteria. It was a change which both actively stimulated, and was in turn fostered by, the production of a considerable number of “elegant” lyrics by writers like Jiang Kui 姜夔 (ca. 1155-1221) or Shi Dazu, and was closely associated with the contemporary penchant for scholarly elegance framed in delicate, refined artistic style (Zhang Zi was notable for his elegant and luxurious lifestyle).37

Known for his ci of “heroic abandon,” Liu Kezhuang 劉克莊 (1187-1269) should therefore depart from the aesthetic Zhang Zi and most Southern Song critics cherished, yet somehow he shares Zhang’s attitude in his colophon to the collected ci of Huang Xiaomai 黃孝邁 (fl. early thirteenth century). In the opening salvo, he reviews how the genre was denounced by the Northern Song moralists.

Those who followed the Luo School [i.e., the Neo-Confucian school of

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36 Zhang Zi, “Preface to The Ci Collection of Plum Blossom Stream” 梅溪詞序, in Mao Jin, Song Liushi mingjia ci, 196a-b.
Cheng Yi and his brother Cheng Hao all upheld [the Neo-Confucian doctrine of] inherent nature and principles, and suppressed art and literature. The ci is especially low among arts and literary genres. It emerged in the Tang and flourishes in the present dynasty. Qin Guan’s line, “Heaven too would grow thin,” was derived from Li He’s poem, yet Yichuan [Cheng Yi] censured it as profaning heaven. Yichuan was not alone: Master [Yun]xiu found Luzhi [Huang Tingjian] guilty of encouraging promiscuity. Feng Dangshi [Jing, 1021-1094, here an error, actually Han Wei] hoped that Yan Jidao could lessen his genius so as to increase his virtue. For this reason, men of elegance and scholars of cultivation admonished each other not to write them. 

By quoting several well-known strictures on the ci, Liu clearly manifests his intent to contest the moralists. But again, like Zhang Zi, his arguments rest solely on the authority of the Shijing. Then he continues to comment on the lyrics of Huang Xiaomai.

In the past, Confucius wanted his son to study “Zhou nan” and “Shao nan,” and did not want him to “face the wall.” When Confucius sang with other people, if he found that they sang well, he would make them to repeat the song, while he sang in response to them. Since the origin of Huang’s work is “Zhou nan” and “Shao nan,” Confucius, should he be reborn, will certainly sing in response to his excellent pieces. How can one banish them because they are “little ci”?  

38 Liu Kezhuang, Houcun xiansheng daquan 後村先生大全 (Complete Collection of Master Houcun) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 196-), SBCKCB, 106: 922b.  
39 This story is recorded in the Confucian Analects. Confucius once asked his son Kong Li 孔鲤, “Have you studied ‘Zhou nan’ and ‘Shao nan’?” A man who has not studied them is like one who stands with his face right against a wall [and is not aware of it], is he not?” 
30 This passage is also found in the Confucian Analects, see Legge, The Four Books, 231.  
41 Liu 106: 923a.
As Liu was well aware that the *ci* developed in the Tang, his contention that Huang’s lyrics are derived from the *Shijing* comes more from the aesthetic than generic consideration. For him, connecting the *ci* to the Confucian canon not only justifies its elevation, but demands an elegant style of *ci* writing.

Despite strenuous scholarly efforts to enhance the *ci’s* reputation, after the Song its literary position still stood several notches lower than the *shi*, so scholars continued with their stratagem to legitimize it. The Ming scholar Yu Yan 俞 彥 ("Advanced Scholar" 1601), for instance, reemphasizes the *ci’s* antiquity to consolidate its status.

Among the immortal [literary] activities, writing *ci* is the "lowest vehicle." But as we trace its origin, [we find] it was, like the others, derived from the primeval era of remote antiquity. 詞於不朽之業，最為小乘。然溯其源流，咸自洪濛上古而來。42

Similar opinions were frequently echoed in the Qing as well. The Changzhou 常州 school of *ci* criticism is particularly known for its stress on the *ci’s* aesthetic lineage to the *Shijing* and *Chuci*.43 In order to promote an “elegant” and “orthodox” *ci* style, Zhang Huiyan, the founder of the school, claims that Wen Tingyun’s amorous lyrics are modelled allegorically on Qu Yuan’s “Li sao.” His theory is closely adhered to by Chen Tingzhuo, who also takes both the *Shijing* “arias” and the *Chuci* as the aesthetic origin of the *ci*, and insists that since “propriety and temperance are the orthodox teachings of the *shi*, they must be the basis of the *ci* as well.”44 By explicitly and decisively placing the two genres into the same aesthetic tradition, Chen and the Changzhou critics firmly construct an orthodox platform for the *ci* and grant it equal standing with the *shi*. Finally, with the dominant influence of the Changzhou school in late Qing *ci* studies, the initially

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42 Yu Yan, *Yuanyuan cihua* 愛園詞話 (Yuan Garden Remarks on Ci Lyrics), CHCB, vol. 1, 399.

43 For a detailed study of the Changzhou school, see Professor Chia-ying Yeh Chao, “The Ch’ang-chou School of *Tz’ u* Criticism,” *HJAS*, 34 (1974), 101-132.

III: Strategy Two—The Promotion of the “Elegant” Style in Ci Writing

In ci writing, the vigorous promotion of the “elegant” style had already started during the Song; the immediate proof of which was the vogue for integrating the word “elegant” into the titles of ci collections.\(^{45}\) However, the word “elegant” in titles may mislead the reader, for compilers or writers may have different or inconsistent concepts of “elegance” as well as criteria for it. To cite one: in his preface to the Yuefu yaci, Zeng Zao claims that “those [pieces] touching on jocularity will be excluded.”\(^{46}\) Nevertheless, a number of jocular efforts are found in his collection.\(^{47}\) The large but now lost Fuya geci, which included over 4,300 pieces in fifty fascicles, also appears, as Pauline Yu perceives it, to “have precluded any really rigorous selectivity.”\(^{48}\) It is likely that publishers added “elegant” to titles for readership appeal.\(^{49}\)

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\(^{45}\) This phenomenon has been noticed by the Qing scholar Shen Xianglong 沈祥龍 (fl. 1898). His Lun ci suibi 論詞隨筆 (Informal Comments on the Ci) states that “the Song people often named their ci selections with the word ‘elegance’.” 宋人選詞，多以雅名. CHCB, vol. 5, 4055. Examples include the two ci anthologies, Zeng Zao’s Yuefu yaci 和 the Retired Scholar of Zhouyang’s Fuya geci 復雅歌詞 (Song Lyrics of Restoring the Elegant Style), as well as several other individual ci collections, such as Zhao Yanduan’s 趙 彈 端 (1121-1175) Baowen yaci 寶文雅詞 (Elegant Lyrics of Valuable Literary Works), Zhang Xiaoxiang’s 張 孝 祥 (1132-1169) Ziwei yaci 紫微雅詞 (Elegant Lyrics of the Ziwei Star), Cheng Gai’s 程 埚 (fl. 1186-1194) Shuzhou yaci 書舟雅詞 (Elegant Lyrics of the Boat of Books) and Lin Zhengda’s 林 正 大 (fl. 1205-1207) Fengya yin 風雅遺音 (The Legacy of Sounds of the airs and Elegantiae). See Fang Zhifan 方智範 et al., Zhongguo cixue piping shi 中國詞學批評史 (History of Chinese Ci Criticism) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1994), 77-78; also Zhao Wanli 趙 萬 里 (1905-1980), Jiaoji Song Jin Yuan ren ci 晁 介 宋金元人詞 (Collated Ci of Writers of the Song, Jin and Yuan) (Beijing: Guoli zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1931), Preface, 2b.

\(^{46}\) 諸 諸 者 則 去 之. Zeng, Yuefu yaci, Preface, 1.

\(^{47}\) She Zhi 舍之 (Shi Zhicun 施 貞 存), “Lidai cixuan ji xulu” 录代詞選集續錄 (“Recorded Accounts of Ci Collections of Past Dynasties”), in Ci xue 詞 學 (Ci Studies), 1 (1981), 285.

\(^{48}\) Yu 82.

\(^{49}\) For example, Zhang Xiaoxiang’s Ziwei yaci was originally named Yuhu xiansheng changduanju 余 乎 先 生 長 断 語.
So in order to promote the “elegant” style more successfully and minimize discrepant criteria for selectivity, Song critics clarified the essential features of the “elegant” that distinguished it from the “vulgar” lyric. Although different opinions were voiced on this problem of quality definition and control, some principal features in their concept of “elegance” can be studied through three of the most important extant Song discourses on the *ci*, namely, Wang Zhuo’s *Biji manzhi* (Casual Records of the Emerald Rooster Lane), Shen Yifu’s *Yuefu zhimi*, and Zhang Yan’s *Ci yuan*. The demerits of “vulgar” lyrics that accompanies the exposition of the value-set for the “elegant” can be grouped into three major categories, each with several “offensive” components.

First, for all these critics, it is beyond dispute that lyrics with emotional excess should be marked for censure and exclusion. The most severe censure is certainly reserved for Liu Yong’s “vulgar” work. Similar criticism is leveled against other lyricists who follow or resemble Liu’s style. For example,

Shen Gongshu [Tang, fl. eleventh century], Li Jingyuan [Jia, fl. 1098-1100], Kong Fangping [Yi, fl. eleventh century] and his nephew Chudu [Ju], as well as Chao Ciying [Duanli, 1046-1113] and Moqi Yayan [Moqi Yong, fl. 1135] all have composed excellent lines. Among them Yayan is particularly outstanding. However, the origin of these six is Liu [Yong], and their defect is in their lack of poetic resonance. 沈公述 [唐]、李景元 [甲]、孔方平 [夷]、处度 [端] 寇姬、晃虔膺 [端] 禮]、万俟雅言 [詠]，皆有佳句，就中雅言又絕出。然六人者，源流從柳氏來，病於無韻。50

This “lack of poetic resonance” Wang Zhuo mentions probably refers to the suspension of full comprehension the reader should experience when reading good poetry, or forfeiting immediate sensory impact in favour of guiding subtle detail.

into prolonged, thoughtful repercussion through balanced and restrained expressions. Liu Yong’s work is constantly criticized as too immediately gratifying, straightforward and emotionally explicit, with no deeper meanings beyond the pleasures and performance of the words. For this reason too, Wang Zhuo rejects the above six lyricists; popular elements in the *ci* (frequently seen in Liu’s work as well) are also condemned. In Shen Yifu’s *Yuefu zhimi*, two entries complain:

Shi Meichuan [Yue, fl. thirteenth century] . . . had read many Tang poems. Therefore, the words [in his lyrics] are elegant and refined. But occasionally there is some vulgarity, probably because he also gradually acquired the practices of entertainment quarters. 施梅川 [岳] . . . 謳唐詩句，故語雅澹。間有些俗氣，蓋亦漸染教坊之習故也。52

Sun Huaweng [Weixin, 1179-1243] has some good lyrics, and is also adept at executing his ideas. But among their elegance and propriety, all of a sudden there is a word or two of marketplace chatter. What a pity! 孫花翁 [惟信] 有好詞，亦善運意。但雅正中忽有一兩句市井語，可惜。53

“The practices of entertainment quarters” and “marketplace chatter” evidently indict the colloquial and erotic idioms prevailing in the popular lyric which, here, Shen Yifu would exorcize by generously exercising his pity on them. In another entry, Shen stresses that Zhou Bangyan’s 周邦彥 (1056-1121) works “do not have even a tiny bit of marketplace aura,” because he borrows diction and meaning from eminent Tang and Song poets.54 On the contrary, Shen singles out the popular

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51 The *Ershi si shipin* 二十四詩品 (*Twenty-Four Categories of Poetry*) by the Tang critic Sikong Tu 司空圖 (837-908) is especially influential in Chinese poetics for its emphasis on restrained and balanced expressions. In his “Letter to Mr. Li Discussing Poetry” 與李生論詩書, there is also a passage regarding poetic rhyme, or poetic resonance, which says, “One can speak of affect beyond the rhyme only when the piece is close at hand without being frivolous or far-reaching without exhausting the meaning” 近而不浮，遠而不盡，然後可以言韻外之致耳. See Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 352-353.
52 Shen Yifu 278.
53 Shen 278.
54 無一點市井氣. Shen 277-278. For a detailed study of Zhou’s lyrics, see James J. Y. Liu, 161-194.
style as the nefarious influence on Shi Yue and Sun Weixin, who like Liu Yong fail
to maintain the required "elegance."

Even celebrated lyricists are not exempt from criticism if they practiced the popular style. Zhou Bangyan, though highly esteemed by most critics for the structural coherence and refined diction of his *ci*, is faulted by Zhang Yan:

The *ci* has to be elegant and morally correct, and is where one's aspirations are expressed. Once one is enslaved by emotions, the tone of elegance and moral correctness will be lost. Qiqing [Liu Yong] and Boke [Kang Yuzhi] need not be mentioned; sometimes even Meicheng [Zhou Bangyan] cannot avoid it. 詞 欲 美 而 正，志 之所 之，一 為 情 所 役，則 失 其 雅 正 之 音。耆 卿，伯 可 [ 康 與 之] 不 必 論，雖 美 成 亦 有 所 不 免. \(^{55}\)

Some of Zhou Bangyan's lyrics are clearly influenced by Liu Yong and contrast strongly with his widely acclaimed elegant works;\(^{56}\) they are excessively emotional, and as erotically colloquial as Liu's pieces. But it is the sentimentalism, particularly, that Zhang Yan singles out for criticism.\(^{57}\) Wang Zhuo similarly disapproves of Li Qingzhao's lyrics for their "popular" borrowings:

She writes at will with the licentious language of the back alleys and streets.
There has never been a woman with literary talent from a good gentry family as inattentive to taboos as she. 間 巷 荒 淫 之 語，肆 意 落 筆，自 古 擔 續 之 家 能 文 婦 女，未 見 如 此 無 顧 忌 也. \(^{58}\)

Even if the sentimental predominates, Wang certainly exaggerates the "vulgarity" of Li's lyrics, but his opinion does reiterate the rejection by other *ci* critics of

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55 Zhang, *Ci yuan*, CHCB, vol. 1, 266.
56 For example, see his "Yu tuan er" and "Hong chuang jiong" 紅 窗 迩 ("The Red Window is Deep"), CSC, vol. 2, 618b, 619a.
57 This "defect" in Zhou's works is also noticed by Chen Tingzhuo, who comments in his *Baiyu zhai cihua* that "Shaoyou [Qin Guan] and Meicheng are leaders of the *ci* circle. All they can be criticized for is that they are fond of writing erotic lines and do not avoid vulgarity" 少 游，美 成，詞 瑩 領 袖 也， 所 可 譏 者， 好 作 色 語， 不 免 於 耳。*CHCB*, vol. 4, 3808.
patent surfeit of emotion.\textsuperscript{59}

The second category of “inelegant” \textit{ci} consists of those written in a jocular vein. In Wang Zhuo’s \textit{Bi ji manzhi}, an entry marks the popularity of the humorous lyric and also demonstrates the author’s obvious disdain.

Wang Qisou (Yanling) in the Yuan You era [1086-1093] and Cao Zu (Yuanchong) [fl. 1121] in the Zheng He [1111-1117] were both skilled at literary writing. Whenever they produced long-and-short verse, it became popular. Wang, with his comical words, gained his fame around the northern region of Yellow River. Cao Zu, penniless and without achievements, wrote the “Red Window is Deep” and several hundred miscellaneous songs. Those who heard these roared with laughter. He was the head of comical and frivolous [lyricists]. . . . Afterward, many writers followed their style. This kind of farcical, dirty and cheap piece had never been written in the past. . . . Recently, I have heard that it has been decreed that Yangzhou should destroy its printing block [i.e., Cao Zu’s \textit{ci}]. . . .

Possibly due to this imperial decree, Cao Zu’s small collection retains only three or four jocular pieces.\textsuperscript{61} Indeed, very few jocular lyrics have been preserved, suggesting they were accounted too unworthy and defective to pass down.\textsuperscript{62}

The rationale behind disqualifying the “heroic abandon” style, the third category of the “inelegant” lyric, varies the most from critic to critic. Those who favour this style credit Su Shi and his followers with broadening the poetic scope of the \textit{ci}, and naturally show a distaste for the \textit{Huajian} school. Wang Zhuo is one of the proponents of Su Shi’s \textit{ci}:

\textit{Master Dongpo was not preoccupied with musical regulations. Yet the

\textsuperscript{59} For an English translation of Li’s lyrics, see Kenneth Rexroth and Ling Chung, \textit{Li Ch’ing-chao: Complete Poems} (New York: New Directions, 1979). For a more detailed study on her work, see Wixted, 145-168.

\textsuperscript{60} Wang 84.

\textsuperscript{61} Cao Zu’s \textit{ci} can be found in \textit{CHCB}, vol. 2, 801-807.

\textsuperscript{62} For a detailed study of the characteristics and development of the jocular lyric, see Liu Yangzhong 劉揚忠, “Tang Song paixie ci xulun” (“On the Tang and Song Jocular Lyric”), \textit{Cixue}, 10 (1992), 53-71.
songs he wrote once in a while pointed out the path upward, and refreshed
the ears and eyes of the world. From then on writers started realizing that
they should revitalize themselves. 東坡先生非醉心音律者，
偶爾作歌，指出向上一路，新天下耳目，弄筆始
知自振。63

Yet critics who insist on preserving strict generic distinctions consider the “heroic
abandon” style “unorthodox” and—by dint of its masculine voice and tone being
inappropriate to conventional feminine personae and performance—“inelegant.”
On this account, Zhang Yan rejects the lyrics of Xin Qiji and Liu Guo 劉過
(1154-1206), two of the most outstanding successors to Su Shi’s ci.

The heroic lyrics of Xin Jiaxuan [Qiji] and Liu Gaizhi [Guo] are not
elegant. They played with their ink and brush when composing at leisure,
writing long-and-short verse in the shi style. 辛稼軒、劉改之作
豪氣詞，非雅詞也。於文章餘暇，戲弄筆墨，為長
短句之詩身。64

For Zhang and like critics, the style of “heroic abandon” is too blunt in expression,
too masculine and wanting in the emotional balance and delicate elegance they
take as the “original colour” of the ci. Furthermore, they also charge the school
with negligence or ignorance of ci prosody—a charge best represented by Li
Qingzhao’s well-known criticism of Su Shi’s lyrics as merely “shi poetry in
irregular lines.”65 Regarding this alleged problem of the school, Shen Yifu comes
up with a more reasonable statement.

Lyricists of recent times do not know musical regulations and thus
deliberately write in the tone of heroic abandon, taking eminent writers like
Dongpo and Jiaxuan as models to absolve themselves. Indeed, the lyrics of
eminent writers are of heroic abandon. But when they are not composing in
the style of heroic abandon, they never once violate the prosody。近世作
詞者，不曉音律，乃故為豪放不羈之語，遂借東
坡、稼軒諸賢自譏。諸賢之詞，固豪放矣，不豪放
處，未嘗不守律也。66

63 Wang 85.
64 Zhang, Ci yuan, CHCB, vol. 1, 267.
65 See note 32, p. 169.
66 Shen 282.
Apologies similar to Shen’s were occasionally voiced. However, later critics, under the strong influence of Li Qingzhao and Zhang Yan, still disparaged the “heroic abandon” style, continuing to categorize it as an “inelegant” lyric. This deep-rooted conservatism is evidenced in the modern scholar Miao Yueh’s excoriation of Su Shi’s and Xin Qiji’s ci, mentioned in the concluding section of chapter two.

In his postscript to his mentor Zhang Huiyan’s Ci xuan, Jin Yinggui 金應珪 (ca. 1800) sums up three faults of the “inelegant” lyric. The first two are as itemized in categories one, two and three, relating to the erotic, jocular and unrestrained ci, while his third “fault” is assigned to pieces “devoid of real content and sincere feelings.”

[Those which] suggest bedroom affairs and sully the women’s quarters are called “licentious” ci, and it is the first fault [of vulgar ci writing]. To start a piece violently and to finish it forcefully, breaking up phrases and explicating words, joking and teasing in the way of the pettiest actors and comedians, shouting and clamouring like the arrogant philistines; this is the same as the commoners from Ba who raised their voices attempting to sing in response to the “Sunny Spring,” or as frogs and toads cracking their throats to sing with the scattered sound holes of the se instrument. This is called the “vulgar” ci, and it is the second fault. To closely describe external objects and to write for entertainment, but with joys and sorrows not in accord with one’s temperament, and with sighs and worries unrelated to the feelings; if all pieces repeatedly talk of flowers and birds, and descriptions and implications are but for the purpose of writing in response to each other’s work; though elegant and not erotic, they have good lines but on the whole fail. This is called the “frivolous” ci, and it is the third fault.

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67 For example, Tian Tongzhi 田同之 (fl. 1720) states that both the “delicate restrained” and “heroic abandon” styles are the “original colours” of the ci. Xipu cihua 西圃詞話 (West Garden Ci Remarks), CHCB, vol. 2, 1455.

68 Liu Tiren 劉體仁 (1612-1677) contends that some of Xin Qiji’s lyrics are like rhyme-prose, and therefore do not have the “original colour” of the ci. Qisongtang ciyi 七頌堂詞話 (The Hall of Seven Acclamations Explication of the Ci), CHCB, vol. 1, 619.
Lyricists in the Southern Song were fond of forming ci societies and writing lyrics in response to each other “in a cooperative and competitive spirit.” These ci usually describe particular external objects (thus called yongwu ci “Lyrics Singing of Things”) and use the same rhyming patterns. Although on one hand literary activities of the ci societies did enhance the art of elite ci writing, on the other they also led to the production of many lyrics bereft of content and meaning: banquet fillers and extemporaneous works composed at such gatherings. For this reason, Jin Yinggui proposes the third fault of the ci, partly to purge these Huajian style lyrics, used in banquet entertainment, of insincerity, and partly to target work produced solely for the superficial purpose of social intercourse.

Having examined the “flawed” characteristics of the “inelegant” lyric, we shall discuss the laudable features of the “elegant” next. Disregarding the individual preferences of particular writers, conventional critics of the Song (as well as their successors) recommend that the “elegant” style of ci writing should follow tonal regulations and preserve a “delicate restraint.” At the outset of the Yuefu zhimi, Shen Yifu reenumerates the four principles of ci writing listed by the lyricist Wu Wenying (ca.1200-ca.1260), and suggests that these be used as criteria for the “elegant” lyric:

The tones of words should be in harmony with the music, or they would become shi poetry in long and short lines. The diction should be elegant, otherwise it would resemble that of the popular song. The use of words

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70 Shuen-fu Lin 9.
72 Zhou Ji also contends that “in the Southern Song there are meaningless ci written in response to the activities of the ci societies” 南宋 有 無 謂 之 词 以 應 社 . Zhou, Jiecun zhai lunci zazhu, CHCB, vol. 2, 1629.
should not be too explicit, as explicitness is blunt and abrupt and lacks deep and lingering flavour. The expression should not be too lofty, for loftiness would lead to wildness and eccentricity and would lose delicacy.

Shen’s *ci* theory rests on these four principles. As mentioned elsewhere, he often rejects straightforwardness, the use of colloquial and “vulgar” diction, and any discordance between words and music. Zhang Yan, who dislikes the dense structure (*zhì shí* 質實) and ornateness of Wu’s work, nevertheless endorses many aspects of Wu’s four principles. For example, he disapproves of Li Qingzhao’s use of colloquial language, Xin Qiji’s heroic compositions and Liu Yong’s emotional excess. This aesthetic conformity among the Southern Song critics verifies that Wu’s four principles characterize the contemporary, as well as the later, concept of the “elegant” lyric.

The emphasis on musicality was first initiated by Li Qingzhao and reached its apex with Zhang Yan. Zhang’s obsession with tonal precision is evidenced in the entire first chapter of his *Ci yuan*, in which he discusses musical theory in a cryptic manner, suggesting that, for example, a certain musical mode should be used on the particular day and month to which it corresponds in the Chinese cosmological system. An entry in the second chapter also recollects how Zhang’s father changed the meaning of a *ci* line to fit the melody, stressing that “harmony between words and tone is the primary principle of *ci* writing.”

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74 Shen, *CHCB*, passim, 277-284.
75 He ridicules Wu’s lyric as “a many-jewelled tower which dazzles the eye, but when taken apart no structural unity is found” 如七寶樓台，眩人眼目，碎拆下來，不成片段. Zhang, *Ci yuan*, *CHCB*, vol. 1, 259.
76 Zhang, *Ci yuan*, *CHCB*, 263, 266, 267.
77 Li in her *Ci lun* stresses that *ci* diction should correspond to musical tones and modes. The qualities of words, such as “pure, impure, light and heavy,” 清濁輕重，should be distinguished as well. She also mentions what category of rhyme scheme should be used in a particular tune pattern, for certain rhymes cannot be sung. In Hu Zi, *houji*, 33: 254.
78 *CHCB*, vol. 1, 239-240.
79 詞以協音為先. *CHCB*, vol. 1, 255-256.
Zhang Yan also demands an elusive and ethereal quality in *ci*, which he terms “purity and emptiness” (*qing kong* 清 空). According to Zhang, the lyricist who displays this most effectively is Jiang Kui, whose work is like “the cloud in the wilderness that drifts alone, leaving no trace where it comes and goes.” Jiang’s “Lyrics Singing of Things” (*yongwu ci*) always achieve a balanced and elevated effect by sustaining an “aesthetic distance” between the object presented and the writer’s subjective emotions, and by using allegorical associations to link the inherently hardy and solitary virtues of these objects (mainly the plum blossom) to the writer’s own. A similar pattern of powerful restraint in pure otherworldliness infuses Su Shi’s work. Consequently, Zhang Yan’s disapproval of the *ci* of “heroic abandon” does not mar his appreciation of Su Shi; rather, his comments on Su are exceptionally laudatory.

Zhang finds in the *ci* of both Su Shi and Jiang Kui another quality which he vaguely calls “interesting delight” (*yi qu* 意 趣). At first glance this quality seems to denote the original creativity of a writer, as Zhang states at the beginning of an entry that “the primary principle of *ci* writing is [to embody] an ‘interesting delight,’ not to follow what early writers have said.” Yet, based on the examples he cites, this quality apparently refers to flights of elevated and ethereal (*gao yuan* 高 遠) feeling. Therefore, it is basically a variant of his term “purity and emptiness.” At the end of this entry he comments that “these *ci* all have ‘interesting delight’ within ‘purity and the emptiness’.” His predilection for such qualities is further evidenced in his criticism of Zhou Bangyan’s *ci*. While he acknowledges the refined skill and diction of Zhou, he also finds that his “interesting delight” does not become “elevated and ethereal” enough.

Although Zhang Yan’s definition of “elegance” may not be entirely

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80 野雲孤飛，去留無跡. *CHCB*, vol. 1, 259.
81 For a detailed study of Jiang Kui’s *yongwu ci*, see Lin, 142-182.
82 詞 以 意 趣 爲 主，要 不 錯 覆 前 人 語 意. *Ci yuan*, *CHCB*, vol. 1, 260. Here, by viewing “interesting delight” as the primary principle, Zhang seems to contradict the earlier passage where he contends that musicality is the most essential quality in *ci* writing. See note 78.
83 此 歷 詞 皆 清 空 中 有 意 趣. *CHCB*, vol. 1, 261.
84 意 趣 卻 不 高 遠. *CHCB*, vol. 1, 266.
representative of critics in general, contemporary opinions did make Jiang Kui’s work a measure of the quintessential “elegant” lyric.\textsuperscript{85} A poet-recluse of the time, who was also renowned for his talent in music and calligraphy, Jiang successfully portrayed himself as the ideal scholar, elegant and insouciant, through descriptions of pure tranquillity and withdrawal (as a lotus on a secluded pond); an itinerant floating on the small otherworlds of his lyrics.\textsuperscript{86} His best known are about quiet sadness and nostalgia, found most often in his “Lyrics Singing of Things.” Particularly notable are his two allegorical lyrics on plum blossoms, “An xiang” 暗 香 ("Secret Fragrance") and “Shu ying” 疏 影 ("Dappled Shadows"), in which the ethereal imagery of the flower and cold, secluded environment suggest the poet’s austere loneliness and elegance.\textsuperscript{87}

Jiang Kui’s retreat from the world into his elegant ci style was not exceptional for his troubled time. A surplus of employable scholars, intense factional conflicts in court and the loss of hope to recover the Jurchen-occupied North drove many elite writers to pursue an eremetic vocation.\textsuperscript{88} Their principal model was Lin Bu 林 逋 (968-1028), a Northern Song poet-recluse celebrated for his unaffected lifestyle and superior personality, whom Jiang Kui also endeavoured to emulate. Lin’s influence on them is evidenced in their production of a considerable amount of ci lyrics solely on the plum blossom, the emblem of scholarly elegance and virtue Lin repeatedly wrote of in his shi poems.\textsuperscript{89} The ci anthology Mei yuan 梅

\textsuperscript{85} For example, Huang Sheng claims that Jiang’s ci “are extremely refined and dexterous, not inferior to Zhou Bangyan’s work. At his best, at times even Zhou cannot be compared with him” 詞 極 精 妙，不 渺 渠 業，其 間 高 處，有 美 成 所 不能 及. Hua’an cixuan, 279.
\textsuperscript{86} For his life, see Lin, 48-58. Jiang wrote a short essay in memory of his late patron Zhang Jian 張 鑒 (d. 1203). It provides a list of Jiang’s friends (all were eminent poets or officials of the time) and can be taken as a brief autobiography. The essay is in Zhou Mi 周 密 (1232-1298), Qidong yeju 齊 東 野 語 (East Qi Rural Talks) (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1939), CSJC, 12: 145-6. For a complete English translation of the essay, see Lin 55-56.
\textsuperscript{87} See CSC, vol. 3, 2181b-2182a. For a translation, see Lin 137-8, 172.
\textsuperscript{88} For a brief study of Lin Bu’s poetry, see Jonathan Chaves, Mei Yao-ch’en and the Development of Early Sung Poetry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 57-59. For Lin’s poems, see Wu Zhizhen 吳 之 振 et al., Song shichao 宋 詩 鈔 (Song Shi Poetry Manuscripts) (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 1988, 1914 edition), 74c-78a.
Plum Garden, edited by the retired scholar Huang Dayu, is an accumulation of fond eulogies to this flower. It consists of five hundred lyrics (many by anonymous writers) on the plum written from the Tang through the Song. In his preface to the collection Huang particularly elucidates the allegorical station of the plum, comparing it with the “fragrant plants” (fang cao, i.e., virtuous persons) in Qu Yuan’s “Li sao.” The narrow focus on this flower in such a weighty tome clearly suggests Huang’s strong desire to promote a finely-hewed, petal-elegant quality in both the ci and disposition of scholars.

Through the Southern Song elite’s vigorous advocacy of the “elegant” style in ci writing, an acceptable literary status of the ci was cinched. But with the increasing emphasis on artistic craftsmanship and balanced emotion also came a shrinkage in creative vitality and contraction of poetic subject matter and approaches. The lyrics of the school of “delicate restraint,” represented by Jiang Kui, Wu Wenying and others, led to a retreat into formalism, self-centredness, and allegorical self-absorption in the microcosm of small objects, plants and insects. They are elusive, bookish in tone and languid in spirit, elegant and lofty enough but lacking passion, which was most needed in this period of national calamity. By the end of thirteenth century, the genre’s association with its popular origin had been almost completely severed because the elite aesthetic reigned absolute and ci music suffered a decline in popularity among commoners.

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90 Wang Dayu, Mei yuan (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1976), SKQS, Preface.
91 Thus, Wang Guowei criticizes Jiang Kui’s lyric as “having [an elegant] quality but no emotion” 有格而無情 Renjian cihua 人間詞話 (Ci Remarks of the World), CHCB, vol. 5, 4249.
92 With the Jurchen invasion, the once prosperous, popular ci culture received a severe blow. A large amount of the orally transmitted ci music was probably lost with the dispersion of hundreds of professional entertainers. New forms of musical performance gradually replaced the ci as popular entertainment. For the decline of the ci’s popularity, see Wu Xionghe 吳熊和, Tang Song ci tonglun 唐宋詞通論 (General Discussion of Tang and Song Ci Lyrics) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1985), 148-151.
Among the three categories in his definition of culture—namely, the “ideal,” the “documentary” and the “social”—Raymond Williams specifically points out the significance of the “documentary,” the recorded texts and practices of culture, for the preservation of a *structure of feeling.* This *structure of feeling,* or the living culture of a particular period and society, is according to Williams a “very deep and very wide possession” shared by “the many individuals in the community,” and “it is on [its possession] that communication depends.” Though he emphasizes the equal importance of the three categories, asserting that any adequate theory of culture must include the other two areas, he nevertheless stresses that once the “living witnesses” of a *structure of feeling* “are silent,” it is only through their documentary culture that their particular “sense of life” in their time and society can be directly transmitted to posterity. The same can be said for *ci* and any literary studies, for our knowledge of past attitudes towards the genre and the cultural conditions under which these attitudes were generated is largely reconstructed from historical documentary evidence such as miscellaneous selections, individual collections and critical discourses.

Certainly, as Williams contends, some elements—especially documentary—of past culture are “always irrecoverable.” The most immediate example of irretrievable documentary evidence in *ci* studies is its music, which is almost completely lost. Efforts to recover the original meaning of the only existing musical materials, Jiang Kui’s notation of seventeen *ci* songs, have also proved unsatisfactory. However, the crucial problem in both cultural and literary studies

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93 For a detailed definition of these three categories, see Williams, *Long Revolution*, 41.
95 Williams 43, 46, 49.
96 Williams 47.
97 There are several attempts to explicate Jiang Kui’s musical notation, but none of them seems to produce a convincing result, and scholars hold very divergent interpretations. For detailed studies of Jiang’s music, see Yang Yinliu 楊 蕙 濤 and Yin Falu 陰 法 魯, *Song Jiang Baishi chuangzuo gequ yanjiu 宋姜 白 石 創 作 歌 曲 研 究 (Studies of the Songs Composed by Jiang Baishi of the Song)* (Beijing: Yinyue chubanshe, 1957); Qiu Qionsun 邱 磯 蕾, *Baishi*
is that even the recoverable, explicable documentary evidence at best provides a far from comprehensive picture of past cultures and attitudes. Further, Williams remarks, "even those that can be recovered are recovered in abstraction." For example, we do not know --in the actual social and cultural context--to what extent the Dunhuang songs represent the limited collection of the Tang popular *ci*, or exactly what Liu Yong's personality was like even with the notable evidence of his "vulgar" lyrics and the scathing critiques levelled against him.

Aware of such a problem of documentary evidence, Williams divides "culture" into three levels: first, "the lived culture of a particular time and place, only fully accessible to those living in that time and place;" second, "the recorded culture . . . from art to the most everyday facts;" and the third, "the culture of the selective tradition," in which a certain "sense of life" of that particular time and place is "selected for value and emphasis." It is always impossible for posterity to recover much--if any--of the lived culture, just as we are unable to share the joys of the Tang and Song people in their appreciation of *ci* performance.

Theoretically, Williams explains, the recorded culture of a period and place can more or less remedy this lost "sense of life." But in practice, "this record is absorbed into a selective tradition":

[It] creates, at one level, a general human culture; at another level, the historical record of particular society; at a third level, most difficult to accept and assess, a rejection of considerable areas of what was once a living culture.

In other words, this selective tradition can reveal the broadest sense of a "lived culture" shared by "the many individuals," but in a more limited sense, the culture

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98 Williams 47.
99 Williams 49.
100 Williams 50, 51.
of a given group of people in a given society, and this group, though not specified, is obviously the elite. Thus Williams contends that this tradition is usually "governed by many kinds of special interest, including class interests." Similarly, we find that in the case of *ci* studies, the selective tradition is basically represented by two practices. One, Williams's third level, is the acceptance of only the lyrics conforming to the restrictive elite aesthetic; the other, resembling the first and second levels of selective tradition, is the preservation of commonly favoured material from any or all of the social strata. However, elite *ci* discourses effectively show that from the Five Dynasties to the Qing, the first selective practice always prevailed.

The first practice in *ci* selection, that is, the expurgation of "vulgar" or "licentious" lyrics from *ci* anthologies, was a strategy related to the attempt of conventional critics to elevate the genre’s literary status and to promote an "elegant" style in *ci* writing. Zeng Zao, for example, excludes jocular pieces from his *Yuefu yaci* and even feminine and amorous works by Yan Shu, Yan Jidao and Qin Guan, probably viewing them as indecorous. In the preface to the *Fuya geci*, the intention to advocate an "elegant" style in *ci* writing is also very clear. Recall that though Pauline Yu doubts the quality of this sizable selection, its compiler, the Retired Scholar of Zhouyang, maintains a strong belief in a link between the *ci* and reputable genres of antiquity, stressing the aesthetic quality of *sao ya 頌雅*, or elegance in the style of "Li sao." The *Juemiao Haoci* 絕妙好詞 (*Extraordinarily Excellent Ci Lyrics*) compiled by Zhou Mi 周密 (1232-1298) is especially celebrated for its careful selection. Comparing its quality with that of two other less discriminating *ci* selections of the Song, Zhang Yan remarks:

Many lyricists of recent generations were diligent. For example, the *Yangchun ji* [*Sunny Spring and White Snow Collection*] and the *Juemiao cixuan* [*Extraordinarily Excellent Selected Ci Lyrics*] are quite impressive in their own right, but what they have selected is impure and inconsistent. How can they be as refined as Zhou Caochuang’s [Zhou Mi] selection in

101 Williams 51.
102 See Zhang Huimin, 249.
Zhang Yan's criticism of the unrefined quality of the other two \textit{ci} selections represents the attitude of disapproval of later \textit{ci} critics toward "careless" selective practice. In the preface to his \textit{Ci xuan}, Zhang Huiyan claims that his selection is intended to "block inferior trends [of \textit{ci} writing], and steer it towards its original sources" thus dignifying the form.\footnote{Zhang, \textit{Ci yuan}, CHCB, vol. 1, 266. \textit{Sunny Spring and White Snow Collection} was compiled by Zhao Wenli 趙聞禮 (fl. 1250). The title of Huang Sheng's \textit{Juemiao cixuan} is easily confused Zhou Mi's \textit{Juemiao haoci}, so it is commonly named \textit{Hua'an Cixuan}. It is divided into two parts, \textit{Tang Song zhuxian juemiao cixuan} (Extraordinarily Excellent Selected \textit{Ci} Lyrics by Eminent Tang and Song Writers), and \textit{Zhongxing yilai juemiao cixuan} (Extraordinarily Excellent Selected \textit{Ci} Lyrics Since the Resurgence). For detailed descriptions of these \textit{ci} selections, see Wu Xionghe, 342-345; See also She Zhi, "Lidai cixuan ji xulu, in \textit{Ci xue}, 2 (1983), 228-229.} His disciple Jin Yinggui further points out the faults of inferior \textit{ci} selections:

Judging from the vogue of the times, those who selected \textit{ci} in the past, including the [compilers of] \textit{Huajian} of the Shu, \textit{Caotang} of the Song, and more than ten others from the Yuan down to the Ming, have their own merits and demerits. But all of them fail to distinguish between the elegant and the [vulgar tunes of] Zheng, stringing vermilion and purple [i.e., different tastes] together. Therefore, scholars who had lost the direction of \textit{ci} writing are unable to discriminate the good from the bad. \footnote{Zhang, "Preface to \textit{Ci xuan}," CHCB, vol. 2, 1617.} His disciple Jin Yinggui further points out the faults of inferior \textit{ci} selections:

The \textit{Huajian ji} and the \textit{Caotang shiyu} 草堂詩餘 (\textit{Thatched Hut Shi Surplus}, compiled by a certain He Shixin 何士信), both containing quite a large amount of "inferior" or "vulgar" lyrics, were commonly acknowledged as the two most notorious \textit{ci} anthologies.\footnote{Jin, "Postscript to \textit{Ci xuan}," CHCB, vol. 2, 1619.} Their infamy is confirmed by Chen Tingzhuo, who echoes Jin Yinggui's criticism and states that the two anthologies as well as the...
Zunqian ji 尊前集 (In Front of the Cup Collection) are “heterodox and erroneous beyond words.”

For the above elite critics, the main purpose of compiling a ci anthology was clearly not to preserve as large an “area of past culture” as possible, but to exemplify and consolidate the validity of what they promoted as the “orthodox and elegant” style, excluding all elements not in accord with their aesthetic. Chen Tingzhuo, for example, makes the following contention:

Writing ci is difficult; selecting ci is even more difficult. . . . Zhucha’s [Zhu Yizun] Ci zong is complete but not refined, while Gaowen’s [Zhang Huiyan] Ci xuan is refined but not complete. However, it is better to be incomplete than to be unrefined. 作 詞 難 選 詞 尤 難 . . . 竹 圄 詞 綜 備 而 不 精。鼻 文 選 精 而 未 備。然 與 其 不 精 也，寧 失 不 備。

Chen finds that selecting ci is difficult precisely because his aesthetic taste (as well as that of other critics), though certainly elevated, is exceedingly confined in its range of acceptable qualities. He does not concern himself with whittling down the stylistic diversity of the ci or purging the genre of its “vulgar” elements, instead he is ignorant of the importance, to the field of ci studies, of a more comprehensive selection and its potential to reconstruct a lost “sense of life.” This indifference directly results from his opinion that compiling a comprehensive collection of Song ci is an exercise in the unnecessary.

A friend once said to me, “There is a complete collection of Tang shi poetry;

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107 背 謬 不 可 言。Chen Baiyu zhai cihua, CHCB, vol. 4, 3970. The Zunqian ji is an anthology compiled about the Northern Song. It consists of two hundred and sixty lyrics of the Tang and Five Dynasties selected for banquet entertainment, resembling the Huajian ji in purpose. See Wu Xionghe, 333-334.

108 Williams 52.

109 Chen, CHCB, vol. 4, 3970. Zhu Yizun’s Ci zong, consisting of more than two thousand lyrics, is a far larger compilation than Zhang Huiyan’s Ci xuan, which includes only sixty-three pieces by twelve Qing writers. However, even Zhu’s anthology is not prejudiced. He obviously favours Southern Song lyricists, especially Jiang Kui, over those of the Northern Song, and generally ignores the “heroic abandon” ci. Like Chen Tingzhuo, he also criticizes the “inferiority” of the Caotang shiyu. Wang Sen 汪森 (1653-1726), Zhu’s co-compiler, also expresses the hope that their compilation will “wash away all at once the vulgarity of the Caotang; writers will then know from whom they should learn” 一洗 草 章 之 陋，而 倚 聲 者 知 所 宗。Zhu, Ci zong, preface, 5a-5b; “Fafan” 發 凡 (“Introduction”), 6b.
we can’t do without a complete collection of Song ci lyrics. One who could accomplish this task would be marvelous, and he need not be afraid that it could not be passed down.” I said, however, that it is fine to pass down one’s name to posterity by doing this, but certainly not to show the world and later generations how to write ci. . . . As for the ci [anthologies], we already have Zhu’s [Yizun] Ci zong. The cream of the Song ci is more or less included in it, yet Gao An [Zhuang Yu, 1830-1878] still faults its untidiness [i.e. unrefined quality]. To further compile a complete collection of Song ci lyrics would do nothing more than make the book shelves look more splendid. It has nothing to do with searching for its sources or principles, and therefore is unnecessary. 余友曾语余云：「有全唐詩，不可無全宋詞。有能為是舉者，固是大觀。且不患其不傳也。」然余謂藉以傳一己之名則可，欲以數天下後世之為詞者則不可。…依所一途，既有朱氏詞綜，兩宋精華，約略已具，而莊悔[莊際]猶病其蕪。更欲集全宋詞，則亦不過壯觀槩架，於本原無涉，亦可不必。

The most refined ci lyrics of the Song are no more than five hundred or so pieces. This number is big enough to study. There is no need to look for more. 兩宋詞，精絕者約略不過五百餘首。足備揣摩，不必多求也。¹¹

Partly due to this fastidiousness, and partly due to the relatively low status of the ci, it was not until 1940, through the enormous effort of Tang Guizhang, that the Complete Collected Ci of the Song was compiled—more than two centuries after the 1706 completion of the Complete Collected Shi of the Tang.

The efforts of compilers like Chen to suppress “vulgar” lyrics are not only seen in their rigorous method of selection in the “refined” anthologies, but are also demonstrated in their “polishing” of many individual ci collections. The eradication of hundreds of Cao Zu’s jocular lyrics in the Song is a notable example (see p. 172). Even the ci collection of the celebrated statesman and literary figure Ouyang Xiu can hardly be called complete. It is highly probable that quite a few of his “vulgar” lyrics were expurgated by Song compiler-editors because they believed that a respectable Confucian scholar like Ouyang would not have written such “inappropriate” pieces, and these must have been fabricated by his political enemies in an attempt to ruin his reputation. For example, Zeng Zao, in his preface

¹¹ Chen, CHCB, vol. 4, 3961.
to the *Yuefu yaci* makes the following statement:

Lord Ouyang was a venerable Confucian of his time. He considered himself a person of gaiety. His lyrics are graceful and charming, a style that all the world came to emulate. However, during his lifetime certain scoundrels might have composed erotic songs and falsely attributed them to him. Now I have expurgated all such songs.

The Song scholar Luo Mi also believes that these "shallow" (*qian jin* 浅近) pieces are forgeries written by Liu Hui, an Advanced Scholar degree candidate whom Ouyang failed in the imperial examinations, and so deleted all these contested pieces from Ouyang's *ci* collection. From a modern cultural theoretical perspective, whether these are forgeries or not is a secondary question. What is regrettable is the fact that some *ci* lyrics attributed to Ouyang are irrecoverable. Indeed, because of their instinctive response to the genre as disreputable, many lyricists even censored their own *ci* collections to protect themselves from the attacks of moralists. An anecdote quoted earlier, for example, mentions that when He Ning became prime minister, he ordered people to collect his own lyrics and burn them (see p. 153). Thus, though factors such as the passage of time and sociopolitical turbulence have contributed to the current incompleteness of the *Complete Collected Ci of the Song*, procurstean selective practices may be held the prime culprit. Based on the above evidence, therefore,

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112 See Egan 164.

113 Luo Mi, "Ti Liuyi ci" 題六一詞跋 ("Preface to The Ci of Scholar 'Six-one'") (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1973), Preface, 1. Scholars have since proved that not all the "vulgar" lyrics now included in Ouyang’s *ci* collection are forgeries. Egan contends that “the critics knew full well Ou-yang Hsiu wrote the more colloquial songs but chose to discredit them anyway.” For detailed discussions about the characteristics and authenticity of Ouyang’s “vulgar” lyrics, see Egan, 161-195; and Ruth W. Adler, “Confucian Gentleman and Lyric Poet: Romanticism and Eroticism in the Tzu’u of Ou-yang Hsiu,” in Soong, ed., *Song Without Music*, 121-142.

114 Why Liu Yong’s *Yuezhang ji* survived is an interesting question. My conjectures are: 1) Liu’s lyrics were so popular among common readers that book publishers and compilers were obliged to include them; 2) It was a tradition to preserve a prominent figure’s literary collection, for though severely censured, Liu was still a lyricist from the elite class; and 3) His “vulgar” lyrics were
this 20,000 lyric collection can be considered a complete record of the selective tradition of the past.

The second method in the practice of selecting ci is more concerned with audience demands and the practical function of the genre as entertainment. As a result, however “unrefined” as they may be, anthologies such as Huajian ji and Caotang shiyu proved to be the most popular and frequently published from the Song to the Ming. The detailed categorization of lyrics under various rubrics such as festivals and seasons in Caotang shiyu suggests that the anthology was mainly compiled as a song book for professional singers. From an “elevated” aesthetic point of view, the construction of these anthologies was certainly in want of a careful selective process. It was, however, precisely because of the relatively undiscriminating attitude of the compilers of these anthologies that a considerable number of lyrics have been transmitted to us. Realizing this characteristic of the selective practice of the “unrefined” anthologies, Tan Xian 譚獻 (1832-1901) comments on the Caotang shiyu:

... the original selection just does not taboo vulgarity, probably its purpose was only to collect all the songs circulated and sung at the time. 原選正不諱俗，蓋以盡收當時傳唱歌曲耳。从 an “elevated” aesthetic point of view, the construction of these anthologies was certainly in want of a careful selective process. It was, however, precisely because of the relatively undiscriminating attitude of the compilers of these anthologies that a considerable number of lyrics have been transmitted to us. Realizing this characteristic of the selective practice of the “unrefined” anthologies, Tan Xian 譚獻 (1832-1901) comments on the Caotang shiyu:

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At the same time, Tan still emphasizes that it is better to eliminate “vulgar” works by writers such as Liu Yong and Huang Tingjian from the anthology.

The opinion of the modern scholar Chen Feishi 陳匪石 (1884-1959) is less prejudiced. In his comments on Huang Sheng's Hua'an cixuan, he refutes Zhang Yan’s charge (see p. 182-183) and claims that the “unrefined quality” of the selection is actually a merit: passed down just because they were frequently cited as “unrefined” examples of ci writing.

115 Song Xiangfeng 宋翔鳳 (1776-1860) states in his Yuefu yulun 楊府餘論 (Extraneous comments on Yuefu poetry) that the anthology was designed for singing at banquets and for the convenience of singers. “From the viewpoint of literati class, it deserved only a laugh. But for singers of the time, they certainly needed to have it” 以文人觀之，適當一笑，而當時歌伎，則必需此也。CHCB, vol. 3, 2500.

116 Tan Xian, Futang cihua 復堂詞話 (Futang’s Ci Remarks), CHCB, vol. 4, 4001.
... this selection of Huang does not complacently aim to establish the theory of one particular school. There is no writer since the Tang and Five Dynasties that it excludes, and it can preserve the genuine style of the individuals quite well. ... Yutian [Zhang Yan] is prejudiced to begin with, therefore, he dislikes its impure and inconsistent qualities. However, its being accepted or not depends on the reader. What harm will there be even if it is impure and inconsistent? In my humble opinion, the merit of the Extraordinarily Excellent Selected Ci Lyrics lies precisely in its impure and inconsistent qualities. ... 黃氏此選，非妹姝為一家之言。唐五代以來，千門萬戶，無所不收，頗能存各人之真面目。... 玉田原有成心，故嫌其不精一。然取舍在讀者，不精一庸何傷。愚以絕妙詞選之佳處，正在其不精一也。117

Chen’s approach toward ci selection is generally shared by most modern and contemporary scholars, even though some of them, unlike Williams, may not be fully aware of the importance of the fact that a comprehensive selection best preserves the elements of the past “lived culture.” Among them Long Muxun is perhaps the most distinguished.

In his article, “Xuanci biaozhun lun” 選詞標準論 (“On the Selection Standards of Ci,” 1933), Long Muxun divides the selective agendas of traditional compilers into four categories, namely 1) to facilitate singing (bian ge 便歌); 2) to transmit the writers’ names (chuan ren 傳人); 3) to establish a stylistic school (kai zong 開宗) and 4) to dignify the genre (zun ti 尊體). The former two cater to public taste, while the latter centre around the self-interest of the ci critics. None is immune to the vogue of the times.118

Long points out that in the early stages of the ci’s development, anthologies like the Yunyao ji, Huajian ji and the Caotang shiyu were mainly compiled for singers to use in performance; the elegance of style and diction in the lyrics is secondary.119 This practice resembles the less discriminating method in the above discussion. Later in the Southern Song, Long continues, as elite writers who took part in the activity of ci writing became numerous, compilers started to list as

117 Chen Feishi, Sheng zhi 聲執 (Tonal Tenacity), CHCB, vol. 5, 4957.
119 Long 1-11.
many lyricists as possible in their selections in order to transmit their names to
posterity. These selections include Huang Sheng’s *Hua’an cixuan* and Zhou Mi’s
*Juemiao haoci*.

But Long also stresses that Zhou’s book, more discriminating in its selective
process so as to include only the lyrics of “delicate restraint,” inspired the third
and the fourth selective practices, which came to prevail in the Qing.¹²⁰ For Long,
Zhu Yizun’s *Ci zong* represents the third, which has its aims the formation of a *ci*
school. This anthology, like Zhou Mi’s selection, particularly promotes the
Southern Song “elegant” style and deems Jiang Kui the greatest lyricist.¹²¹
However, Zhang Huiyan and the Changzhou school still criticize it for its
“undiscriminating” quality. Zhang thus advocates the fourth practice, which seeks
to dignify the form by stressing the aesthetic link between the *ci* and the *Shijing*
and *Chuci* (note that this approach had been already adopted by various Song
scholars).¹²² This practice is further developed by Zhou Ji in his *Song sijia cixuan*
宋 四 家 詞 選 (*Selected Ci of the Four Masters of the Song*), in which a
“correct” step-by-step method of learning to write *ci* is set down. Zhou proposes
that students of *ci* writing should start with reading Wang Yisun’s 王 沂 孫 (fl.
thirteenth century) poems, for his are “free from the bad habits of robustness and
arrogance.”¹²³ Next they should study the two contrasting styles of “sparseness and
compactness” (*shu mi* 薄 密 ) from Xin Qiji and Wu Wenying respectively, thus
finally attaining the stylistic perfection (*hun hua* 渾 化 ) of Zhou Bangyan.¹²⁴
Long concludes that it is through such theoretical contributions and the
concomitant selective practice of the Qing critics that the *ci*’s reputation was
finally acknowledged and consolidated.

¹²⁰ Long 11-14.
¹²¹ Long 15-20.
¹²² Long 20-23.
Long's study successfully demonstrates a historical evolution of the selective practice of the *ci*, a change consistent with a gradual shift of emphasis from the form as entertainment to literature and the accompanying strong desire of elite critics to elevate its status.¹²⁵ He also manifests his desire to "recover the original appearance of the *ci*," in order to recognize the distinctive styles of the individual writers and to impartially judge their merits and demerits.¹²⁶ Yet at times his thesis still betrays the deep-rooted influence of traditional criticism and his own bias, a result of his discipleship under his mentor Zhu Zumou 朱祖謀 (Qiangcun 彌村, 1857-1931). He regards Zhu's *Three Hundred Song Ci Lyrics* 宋詞三百首 (1924) as the quintessential *ci* selection and claims that no later compiler could exceed Zhu's achievement in dignifying the genre.¹²⁷ Moreover, Long obviously fails to stress the fact that "stylistic elegance" and "moral correctness," as well as the establishment of a reputable genealogy for the *ci*, had always been the driving force behind the Song elite compilers and critics, and were adhered to by their critical and scholastic posterity. Based on our previous discussion of *ci* criticism in the Song, therefore, it is more appropriate to conclude that the attempt to impose elite aesthetic values on the genre can be observed throughout the entire history and development of the genre, with the selective practice of the compilers also changing over time with the *ci*’s change of function. The main difference between the Changzhou critics and their predecessors is that, under the influence of a *ci* revival during the Qing, their efforts became even more vigorous, persistent and systematic than before.

As the promotion of refined and scholarly style in *ci* writing did in fact

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¹²⁵ Long also points out the fact that as no music for the *ci* was extant, it was all too natural for elite critics to stress the refinement of texts, and for the purpose of improving the *ci*’s repute they were obliged to establish a link to the reputable ancient genres. See "Xuanci biaozhun lun," 16. His study seems to support Williams's contention that different generations will have their own selective tradition and aesthetic standards. According to Williams, who takes English novels of the 1950s as an example, although "certain general characteristics" of a literary form would "have been set down" and an "agreed short list" of it had been made by specialists of the time, "another selective process will be begun" by posterity. Williams, *Long Revolution*, 51.

¹²⁶ 他一個本來面目. Long 28.

¹²⁷ 後來者無以復加矣. Long 27.
stimulate the production of many excellent lyrics, we should not single out all elite critics as the culprits and completely reject their elevation of the literary status of the ci. What is regrettable, however, is the judgements these critics enforced. They distorted a great deal of what did not conform to their aesthetic tradition, as if the admission of the ci's lower origin would sully their ci writing and studies. They also erroneously believed that elevation could not be attained without simultaneous expurgation, thus while collecting many they also eliminated many. The three strategies discussed above elaborate the elite conservatist mission and the harms it brought to ci writing.

This chapter attests to the fact that any cultural form, once it is taken up by the elite class, all too naturally adopts an upward mobility, for the refinement of taste and artistic quality has always proved to be an inevitable process in the evolution of human culture. But in the course of elevation, it is all too easy—especially considering the misunderstanding and prejudice cultural distance can create—to ignore or denounce the primitive source that brought the cultural form into being. This attitude not only leads directly to a failure to preserve documentary records of what was once a “sense of life,” but also results in a deficient understanding and even a contempt for the culture passed down to us. The study of culture and art, therefore, should not be just to transmit a particular value system, or Arnold's “best that has been said and thought.” In a broader sense, it should also aim to explore the causes which gave birth to this culture and art, to analyze the processes through which it evolved, and to define and recognize the contributions of the many individuals and groups in the course of its development. It is only through such a comprehensive approach that we are able to give our cultural heritage the appreciation, recognition and respect it deserves.
Conclusion

In many respects our ways of thinking, manners and behaviours are strongly influenced by popular mass culture, and we should all know too well that these influences on us cannot be ignored. However, when we talk about popular culture, very often we, especially those who have received extensive academic formal training, still tend to marginalize it, seeing it secondary to more “serious” and officially sanctioned subjects. This elitist attitude may be directly results in the relatively inadequate study on the popular ci lyric. The fact is that the study of popular culture can also be serious, so long as we do not preclude the fact that some of it may also indeed be guilty as charged: frivolous and inferior, and yet dear to the heart of the times. It is the most effective way to understand the prevailing “sense of living” of the people in a particular society. Despite the fact that popular culture in the present is mostly controlled by cultural “tycoons,” and is not directly in the hands of the masses, we still cannot deny that it is in popular cultural forms, such as pop music and movies, that the values, hopes, joys, fears and resentment of the ordinary people are most naturally expressed and represented.

The popular lyrics studied in this dissertation are excellent examples which can be used to construct a “sense of living” of the common people in the Tang-Song periods. From the magpie song (“Que ta zhi,” p. 70-71) we can sense a theatrical atmosphere expressed in the dialogue between the bird and the woman. The work also presents us a realistic picture of how Tang husbands and wives suffered from separation due to military service. “Lang tao sha” (p. 80), describing a commoner complaining about mushy rice, dramatically reflects the desire of the ordinary people for a better material life. Their artistic merits may not compete with the elite lyrics, but it is precisely through the people’s own idioms and language that their “sense of living” is vividly transmitted to us. Thus, popular culture is not simply an essential subject of study for cultural theorists, or artists who wish to win recognition of the general audience, but also for moralists or social thinkers. The reason is that, as the elitists may have discerned, without
sufficient understanding of the prevailing “sense of living,” any social transformation or education cannot be effectively carried out. As far back as the Han dynasty, Confucian scholars stressed the importance of collecting folk songs precisely for this reason.

Yet, there is also a danger that we too often exaggerate the political implications of popular art, and ignore its artistic significance or see it as secondary. Certainly, much modern popular culture is designed in many ways to exploit the taste and financial resources of the common people, and is even used by some as political propaganda. However, as many popular cultural forms are in the end still a genre of art—a representation of the feelings of ordinary people—we do not have to study them for any literal, practical or political reasons, but simply for the sake of art, for fun, for our own interests, or to share the sentiments and insights into the largest segment of our society, and thereby into unadulterated human nature itself. The jocular verse we studied in chapter two, such as the one ridiculing a candidate of Advanced Scholar (p. 89), is partly a satire on the corruption of the Song examination system. But it is also aimed at delighting the audience through its mischievous parody of an elite piece. We may notice its satirical message, but certainly we are also taken in by its word play and comic effect. Lyrics like “Yuan lang gui” (p. 85), delineating a young girl dressing herself up for a traditional festival, also do not seem to contain any social or political intent.

The *ci* originally came from popular culture. It was mainly used to entertain common urbanites in market places, shed-like theatres, pleasure quarters, brothels and restaurants. This fact is repeatedly mentioned in my dissertation and is supported by ample evidence. As chapter two and three demonstrate, popular elements, such as straightforwardness, colloquialism, “debauched” sentiments as well as formal flexibility are frequently presented in the *ci*. The repetitive use of the suffix *er* in “Yuan lang gui” (p. 85), and the highly suggestive descriptions in Liu Yong’s various erotic lyrics, are all typical examples to prove the *ci*’s low origin. But in order to transform it into a legitimate elite literary practice,
traditional *ci* critics attempted to obscure this popular background of the *ci* by
fictitiously linking the genre with ancient canons. They also strove to impose on it
a whole set of elite aesthetic standards, such as emotional restraint and rhetorical
elegance, through the condemnation of its popular elements. As a result, the
thematic and stylistic range of the *ci* greatly narrowed. The restrictive selective
practice of conventional *ci* compilers was also be responsible for the violation or
loss of a large quantity of lyrics. As seen in chapter two, some modern scholars
freely altered the flexible metrical patterns of the Dunhuang lyrics, or replaced
unrefined diction with a more elegant one. Chapter four also mentioned that not a
few lyricists' collections were bowdlerized and certain types of lyrics were
expurgated from the *ci* anthologies. The coarseness and frivolous content
sometimes found in the popular *ci* certainly cannot be counted as artistic merits,
but it is equally erroneous to ignore and deny the fact that popular elements are
fundamental features of the genre. Our understanding of the *ci* has been distorted
for far too long, and it is time to redress our misconceptions caused by the fallacy
of traditional *ci* criticism and place the genre back in its original historical and
cultural context.

In the evaluation of the popular lyric—or indeed any popular art form—not
only do we need to avoid using the yardstick of the elite aesthetic, we also have to
consider the educational and social background of the general audience—the very
reasons that lead to their relatively simple, but sincere and straightforward
response through art (this explains why the study of popular culture can be a
serious academic subject). This argument is explored in chapter two with an
attempt to establish an aesthetic distinction between popular and elite lyrics. Such
a distinction, I believe, will enable us to avoid using ready-made elite aesthetics to
evaluate the popular *ci*, and will make us aware of the social and educational
differences between the Tang-Song elite and the common people.

The case of the *ci*, as well as that of many modern products of popular culture,
also demonstrate to us that popular culture does not necessarily belong to a
particular class or social group, though habitually we see it as the "art by and for
the commoners.” In fact, its consumers and producers can be from any class. The most conspicuous example in our time is pop music, which is generally welcomed by people from different social backgrounds, and of which much is actually produced by “elite” artists hired by the culture industry. Our study of Liu Yong’s “vulgar” lyrics, as well as those written by Huang Tingjian, Zhou Bangyan and others, also shows that in the past, elite writers were not only deeply influenced by, but also actively took part in the production of popular art, even if they were not controlled by the modern form of culture industry. Thus, popular culture is quite “open” and is accessible to any member of the society provided that he or she does not see it only from the vantage point of high culture. Also, those who practice and consume popular arts, whether they are elite or common people, should not be judged unfavourably. Liu Yong’s rejection by the elite critics, as chapter three argued, was at least in part ideological and not only on the ground of aesthetic values. This rejection testifies to the fact that traditional *ci* criticism is highly constrained by Confucian moral and social values, which always emphasize the educational and political functions of a literary genre.

My dissertation also (unintentionally) shows that the artistic status of certain cultural forms would not remain eternally unchanged. Given a certain period of time, under the promotion or rejection by certain cultural groups or institutions, it could be elevated or demoted. The *ci* (and in fact, many high culture products) had undergone an obvious upward mobility. It is thus inaccurate to claim that elite art is naturally high-born or to neglect its former ties to popular or folk art. To recognize its popular origins does not necessarily mean that its artistic status cannot be elevated, just as the peasant background of an outstanding poet, like Burns, would not necessarily ruin his or her reputation. Once we can bring to light this cultural mobility of high and low art and rediscover the many artistic and social values shared between them, I am sure that we can soften the long-standing antagonism between proponents of specific cultures, and can also appreciate art with a much broader mind.
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Abbreviations

BBCS Baibu congshu jicheng 百部叢書集成 (Complete Anthology of the Hundred Categories).


CSJC Congshu jicheng chubian 叢書集成初編 (Preliminary Edition of the Complete Anthology).

HJAS Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies.


SBCKCB Sibu congkan chubian suoben 四部叢刊初編續本 (Preliminary Abridged Edition of the Four Categories of Published Collections).


WYWK Wanyou wenku huiyao 萬有文庫叢要 (Anthology of the All-Inclusive Library of Literature).

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