

ROMANCE, POETIC VOICE AND LITERATI IDENTITY

IN LI SHANGYIN'S LOVE POEMS

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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My dissertation explores the relationship between the literary, religious and entertainment culture of mid to late Tang and the voices in Li Shangyin's romantic poems that reinvented the literati romantic identity. By comparing to historical poetic representations of women and romantic love as well as the mid-to-late Tang romantic poetry fervor, I argue that Li was the sole poet in the mid to late Tang who went as far as using romantic sentiments as a means of literary innovation to build literati identity by his reinvention of the voices in romantic poetry that comes with a solid lyrical tradition. His exploration of unconventional representations of romantic relation conditioned the refined confessional voice of male longing in romantic poetry as the expression of emotional sincerity that was the core value of *shi* from the beginning, and surpassed the romantic persona that only addressed the male part and included female subjectivity into this dialogue that contributes to the authentic sophistication of the male literati's romantic subjectivity. The dissertation then puts Li's romantic poetry into the background of the entertainment culture of the literati poetry as the lyrics for music to see how his reinvention of romantic subjectivities provide ideological and stylistic conditions for the development of romantic *ci* poetry in the poetic transition from the Tang to the Song.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Tang literature corpus indicates a critical turn in Chinese literary history when there arose a new openness toward romance. Stephen Owen called it “the culture of romance” as represented by the prosperity of *chuanqi* 傳奇 in the mid-Tang.¹ Daniel Hsieh also spotted a beginning of a key turn in Chinese culture signaled by the emergence of the narrative genres *zhiguai* 志怪 and *chuanqi* in the Six Dynasties and Tang when “women appeared in all manner of often sympathetic roles.”² His study of *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* shows that in the narrative genres, beginning from the mid-Tang, “the image of the lover begins to occasionally become part of the literati identity.”³

During the mid and late Tang, the romantic side of the literati persona is increasingly visible. Bai Juyi 白居易 (722-846 AD), Yuan Zhen 元稹 (779-831 AD), Li He 李賀 (791-817 AD), Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813-858 AD), Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852 AD) and Han Wo 韓偓 (842-923 AD) are among the famous figures whose poetry depicts their passions and their romantic emotions. Romantic poems in the late Tang were especially prosperous and retrospectively named *Qi Liang ti* 齊梁體 because of its relationship with the late Southern Dynasties Palace Style poetry.⁴ This trend was suppressed in the following Song Dynasty because of the rise of Neo-Confucianism, but

¹ See Stephen Owen, “Romance,” in *The End of the Chinese “Middle Ages”: Essays in Mid-Tang Literary Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 130-148.

² Daniel Hsieh, *Love and Women in Early Chinese Fiction* (Hongkong: Chinese University Press, 2008), 112.

³ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁴ See Yinan Zhang, “Wantang Qiliang Ti Yanjiu” 晚唐齊梁體研究 (Beijing University, 2011), 2-6.

the influence was never diminished and the momentum was maintained for future developments. By interacting with contemporary culture, this literary phenomenon played an important role in redefining the romantic side of literati identity. Considering that “Tang people from all walks of life expressed themselves in verse on any occasion, private or public,”⁵ my starting question is: how was this cultural and literary trend reflected in poetry, the dominant literary genre in the Tang and one that is most closely related to the literati identity in the Tang?

The intense moment of writing romantic *shi* poetry from the mid Tang to the end of the Tang has indeed been identified by researchers.⁶ Li Shangyin, who later became a representative of the late Tang poets, was a leading participant in this trend of writing about *qing* 情 or romantic/erotic sentiments, which was labeled as the style of *Qi* 齊 and *Liang* 梁 or *Qi Liang ti* 齊梁體 by later commentators and modern researchers.⁷ The name of *Qi Liang ti* 齊梁體 immediately recalls *Qi* and *Liang* of the Southern Dynasties, the period before the Tang when the subject of women and romantic love were unprecedentedly flourishing in poetry. Was the late Tang *Qi Liang ti* 齊梁體 just an extension of the Palace Style of an earlier time that used women and romantic love as an important subject if not the dominating theme? Was Li Shangyin a willing participant in the poetic fervor on the subject of romance that is categorized as the late Tang *Qi Liang ti*

⁵ Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth, *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual* (University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 103.

⁶ See Zhang Mingfei 張明非, “Lun zhongtang yanqing shi de boxing” 論中唐艷情詩的勃興, *Liaoning daxue xuebao*, no. 1 (1990): 8-12; Liao Yi 廖怡, “Tangmo yanqing shi yanjiu” 唐末艷情詩研究 (Master’s thesis, Guangxi Normal University, 2009); and Zhang Yinan, “Wan Tang Qi Liang ti yanjiu.”

⁷ Zhang Yinan, “Wan Tang Qi Liang ti yanjiu,” 2-6.

齊梁體 while his poetic representation of romance has been comprehensively recognized as distinctively profound?

Li Shangyin was born into a gentry family of little wealth or influence in the late Tang period when the glorious Tang dynasty (618–907) was in decline. He was introduced to the canonical studies early and displayed a prodigious talent. His political career was chaotic, to say the very least, and can even be considered disastrous, which might have played a role in the limited circulation of his literary works in his own time. He was a master of parallel prose as shown in his prose anthology compiled by himself, and his poetry of approximately 600 pieces was not collected into an anthology until in the Northern Song by the scholar-official Yang Yi 楊億 (974-1020 AD) even though the mid-Tang was the time when many poets started to compile their own poetry anthologies. Even so, his poetry was famous in his time, especially his romantic poems. He once said in a poem that “The multitude who were present all admired my romantic compositions” 眾中賞我賦高唐, referring to his poetic image in the eyes of the literati circle.⁸ One proof of his contemporaries’ love of him is Bai Juyi who was born almost a generation before him but lived at the same time when he rose to fame. He loved Li Shangyin so much that he wanted to be Li’s son in his next life,⁹ and his epitaph was written by Li as requested by his family, very likely out of his wish.¹⁰

⁸ The line comes from the poem “Oucheng zhuanyun qishi'er ju zeng si tongshe” 偶成轉韻七十二句贈四同舍, see *Li Shangyin shige jijie* 李商隱詩歌集解, comp. Liu Xuekai 劉學鍇 and Yu Shucheng 余恕誠 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 1078.

⁹ *Song shihua jiyi* 宋詩話輯佚, comp. Guo Shaoyu 郭紹虞 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 388.

¹⁰ *Li Shangyin wen biannian jiaozhu* 李商隱文編年校注, ed. and annot. Liu Xuekai 劉學鍇 and Yu Shucheng 余恕誠 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 1807.

His poetry, with an outstanding feature of exploring romantic relations and emotions in profound and evocative poetic languages and allusions, has both fascinated and frustrated generations of commentators. Li Zeng in 2008 pointed out that the pre-modern commentaries and later studies of Li Shangyin's poems are mostly "founded upon two reigning criteria in the tradition of exegesis: *zhi ren lun shi* 知人論世 and *yi yi ni zhi* 以意逆志," which "ignore intrinsic, artistic mechanisms of Li Shangyin's textual composition" that "usually play a very important role in signifying poetic meaning."¹¹ He advocated for an aesthetically based interpretation that is not dominated by political considerations.¹² Li Shangyin's romantic poetry has received plenty of studies since his own time. Other than the voluminous commentary by premodern, especially Qing scholars collected in *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, one can find numerous journal articles, M.A. theses, Ph.D. dissertations and books in Chinese. The problem of over-emphasizing the sociopolitical aspects of Li's poems has a recent example in the renowned scholar Ye Jiaying's 葉嘉瑩 new book *Miren de shi mi* 迷人的詩謎, where she argues that "if we want to understand the authentic meaning of Li Shangyin's poetry, we need to understand his life experience."¹³ The Japanese scholars also have had a great interest in Li Shangyin, especially his love poems, but they have not been able to jump out of the same hermeneutical traps as seen in the works of the Chinese researchers.¹⁴

¹¹ Li Zeng, "Ambiguous and Amiss: Li Shangyin's Poetry and Its Interpretations," *Southeast Review of Asian Studies* 30 (2008), 146.

¹² *Ibid.*, 137.

¹³ Ye Jiaying 葉嘉瑩, *Miren de shimi* 迷人的詩謎 (Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 2010), 18.

¹⁴ Wang Pengfei 王鵬飛, "Haiwai Li Shangyin yanjiu: Yi Wutishi wei zhongxin" 海外李商隱研究—以無題詩為中心 (Master's thesis, Huadong Normal University, 2012), 144-148.

Liu Xuekai 劉學鐸 and Yu Shucheng 余恕誠, two major Li Shangyin specialists in Chinese academia, have done foundational works on Li Shangyin's poetry by assembling traditional commentaries and providing their own interpretations. Yu recently published an article exploring specifically the relationship between Li's romantic poetry and narratives including contemporary *chuanqi*.¹⁵ In English-language scholarship, Ao Wang's article "Poetry Matters: Interpretative Community, *pailü*, and 'Yingying zhuan'" touches upon the important question of how to define poetry's role in the culture of romance through its complicated relationship with *chuanqi*.¹⁶ Chinese and Japanese scholars also did some research on the study of Li's romantic poetry in relation to religion, mostly Daoism. A general consensus has been reached that Li was a Confucian scholar, not a real Daoist, and that his relationship with Daoism was only artistic. Li's poetic innovation in relation to the influence of religion has seldom been studied from the perspective that concerns the poet's self-identification. Although those Chinese scholars contextualizing Li's romantic poems and studying the relationship between Li's poetry and *chuanqi* fiction have touched upon the question of the relationship between Li's poems and entertainment culture, few have related his poetry to the problems of literati identity.

Li Shangyin study in Western academia as a whole can be said to be limited. Ever since James J. Y. Liu's *The Poetry of Li Shangyin* came out in 1969, a major work that

¹⁵ Yu Shucheng 余恕誠, "Lun xiaoshuo dui Li Shangyin shige chuanguo de yingxiang" 論小說對李商隱詩歌創作的影響, *Wenxue yichan*, no. 3 (2009): 48-59.

¹⁶ Ao Wang, "Poetry Matters: Interpretative Community, *pailü*, and 'Yingying zhuan,'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 71, no. 1 (2011): 1-34.

contains translations of a number of Li's poems and an overview of his poetic art,¹⁷ the study of Li Shangyin has been sporadic and has not ventured too far out of the old hermeneutical tradition of searching for his authorial intentions or the pure aesthetic values of his works. Three decades later in 1998, Wu Fusheng in his *The Poetics of Decadence* defines decadence literature as "a 'falling away' from 'previously recognized' conditions and standards of excellence about the nature of 'canon' in a literary tradition"¹⁸ and includes Li Shangyin in the representative poets from the late Southern Dynasties and the late Tang. Stephen Owen in an article about Li's Yan Terrace poems has explored the gender voices of Li's Yan Terrace poems and their relation to "the culture of romance" and especially how Li Shangyin saw himself through his direct interaction with his female readers and other expected readers.¹⁹ Owen's study was a breakthrough not only in that he placed the poems in their cultural and historical contexts but also because he linked the romantic elements in this set of poems to Li's perception of himself as a poet-literatus in the society. More recently, Owen in his book on late Tang poetry devoted four substantive chapters to Li Shangyin. He points out that the "Hermetic Poems" (as he calls Li Shangyin's obscurest poems) that are closely related to the "Left Untitled" poems cannot be explained either by immediate context or by tradition, because

¹⁷ James J. Y. Liu, *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin: Ninth-Century Baroque Chinese Poet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

¹⁸ Fusheng Wu, *The Poetics of Decadence: Chinese Poetry of the Southern Dynasties and Late Tang Periods* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 9.

¹⁹ Stephen Owen, "What Did Liuzhi Hear? The 'Yan Terrace Poems' and the Culture of Romance," *T'ang Studies* 13 (1995): 81-118.

their “force” seems to derive from “his private images.”²⁰ “Private images” and poetic craft are the central terms Owen used to define the ambiguity of Li’s hermetic poetry that has the closest relation with the subject of romance. Paul Rouzer also has an interesting perspective of a similar argument in the afterword “Lost in a Sea of Coral” to his book *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese texts*. He argues that Li’s poetry is undermining the “sociable eroticism” and assuming the “privacy from the very world that produces most poetry, that produces informal social relations,” which was revealed by his concealing language as a “constant distancing” of “the theme of desire” to achieve “sublimation through the act of poetry.”²¹

Very recently, in 2015, Emily Bowden in her master’s thesis about Li Shangyin’s poetry also talked about the problem of poet-reader relations. Not content with James Liu and Owen’s basic methodology of seeing poetry as communications, she argues that “Li Shangyin intentionally writes concealed poetry, ... [which] flies in the face of what traditional Chinese poetic theory says about poetry always being a means of uncovering, of communicating.”²² She is also unsatisfied with the ideological interpretations of Li’s “decadent poetry” as “an open critique of canonical poetic standards,”²³ and proposes that we see Li’s poetry “as strategic embodiments of certain themes that run throughout his

²⁰ Stephen Owen, *The Late Tang: Chinese Poetry of the Mid-Ninth Century (827-860)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 526.

²¹ Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 296.

²² Emily Bowden, “A Failure to Communicate: Li Shangyin’s Hermetic Legacy” (Master’s thesis, University of Kansas, 2015), 23.

²³ Bowden, “A Failure to Communicate,” 39.

poetry, specifically the themes of frustration, impermanence, and loss,”²⁴ which is nothing new among Chinese scholars. Bowden thinks that she is developing her new interpretation on top of Wu Fusheng’s theory of seeing Li’s gestures of concealment as acts of resistance and defense and suggests that “by paying attention to the recurring themes in his poems, we can see that he does not pursue ambiguity for its own sake, but as a component of a larger agenda, a tool for exposing the truths of his worldview.”²⁵ It is true that “Western interpreters are particularly prone to falling into the trap of aestheticism when interpreting Chinese poetry.”²⁶ Bowden thinks that even Owen’s interpretation based on the theory of communication is only examining the possibility of multiple interpretations, including different voices, aesthetically. This is partly true and yet Owen’s contextualization of Li’s poetry as a poetic representation in contemporary culture, not a source for his biography or defiant poetic gestures toward the canonical tradition in line with the late Southern Dynasties “decadent” poetry, laid the foundation for the approach of combining cultural studies with the study of poetic reinvention and innovation. Additionally, Paul Rouzer raised the question of “a discourse of private subjectivity” Li created against the “erotic tradition” even though he considers the poems to be intended for “communication directly between poet and addressee, without relying on mediating social conventions and expectations.”²⁷

²⁴ Ibid., 35.

²⁵ Ibid., 34.

²⁶ Ibid., 28.

²⁷ Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies*, 294.

My methodology is based on all the previous studies but I do not intend to address the poems that are not about romance in this dissertation. Wu's theory about resistance and defense is taking only the generic factors into account but not the innovations in Li's poems compared to the previous "decadent poems" of the late Southern Dynasties, which were influenced by the culture changes (including religious culture) in the Tang. And Li Shangyin's world view as revealed in his poetry is certainly more than just themes of frustration, impermanence, and loss, but a new way of representing the poetic self that is defined by his acceptance of the culture and reinvention of the lyrical poetic tradition. In Li Shangyin's case, the ideological changes are not only destructive but constructive as well, because of his great influence on later poetic representations.

According to Peter K. Bol, the ninth century was the time when the aristocracy was no longer the prevailing conception of *shi* 士, that scholar-officials selected by the civil service examination that valued literary talent started to be the dominant *shi*, and that the late Northern Song was the time when *shi* became none other than the literatus.²⁸ Therefore, the ninth century was a transitional time for the identities of *shi*. In the ninth century, when we speak of the ideal these scholar-officials held, we speak less of the *junzi* 君子 ideal, and more of one that also incorporates poetic and other artistic accomplishments. This has made the study of Li Shangyin's romantic poems especially difficult. To avoid the "intentional fallacy" as Ye Jiaying suggested,²⁹ my method in this

²⁸ Peter K. Bol, *"This Culture of Ours": Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 33.

²⁹ Ye Jiaying, *Miren de shimi*, 36.

dissertation is to identify the voices of Li Shangyin's romantic poetry and its representations of authentic subjectivities other than its authorial intentions.

My dissertation focuses on Li's romantic poems, poems with the explicit theme of romance, including those that have been interpreted as allusive to other themes. This focus pertains to my larger concern of the history of romantic poetry in Chinese poetic history. More specifically, two aspects are of great importance: first, the influence of the late Southern Dynasties poetry on Li's romantic poetry, and second, the influence of Li's romantic poetry on later romantic *ci* poetry. For these two aspects, my main methodology of studying the poetic voices is based on Anna Shields's exploration of the voices of *Huajian ji* poems in her book *Crafting a Collection: The Cultural Contexts and Poetic Practice of the Huajian ji*. I also take into account Maija Bell Samei's *Gendered Persona and Poetic Voice: The Abandoned Woman in Early Chinese Song Lyrics* and Xiaofei Tian's *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502-557)*. The former is important also in that it suggests that the complicated and indetermined voices of the representation of the female in the Chinese lyrical tradition give room to "a more 'genuine' female subjectivity."³⁰

Li Shangyin liked to use romantic allusions and elements whenever possible and earned a reputation for it in his own time. The female images of his romantic poems range from girls in his neighborhood, singing girls and courtesans at entertaining circumstances, his friend's lover, his wife, goddesses from mythical legends, Daoist

³⁰ Maija Bell Samei, *Gendered Persona and Poetic Voice: The Abandoned Woman in Early Chinese Song Lyrics* (Lexington Books, 2004), 17.

goddesses and Daoist nuns, to the celestial maid accompanying a bodhisattva. His poetic representations of the theme of love disperse throughout his hermetic poems, history poems, poems on things and poems on occasion.³¹ The use of romantic elements in his poems also contributed to the creation of the “wu ti” 無題 (“Left Untitled”) poems that were highly artistic and valued in poetic history. The way he uses the romantic allusions and images significantly troubles later interpreters of his poems, but it does not always seem confusing to his contemporaries. Instead of finding the stories behind the poems, linking them to his political career or seeing them as pure poetic art craft as most commentators and researchers did, my study starts from the belief that Li Shangyin’s heavy use of romantic elements in his poems is critical to our understanding of his self-identification as a literati poet in this transitional and richly innovative period of Chinese literary history, which played an important role in the transformation of the literati poetic romantic persona. I argue that Li was the sole poet in the mid to late Tang period who went as far as using romantic sentiments as a means of literary innovation to build literati identity by using a refined confessional voice of male longing to appropriate the impression of emotional sincerity into the authenticity of *shi* 詩; he also surpassed the romantic persona that only addressed the male part and included female subjectivity into this dialogue that contributes to the authentic sophistication of the male literati’s romantic subjectivity.

³¹ I use Stephen Owen’s categorization in the chapters on Li Shangyin in *The Late Tang*, 335-526.

The basic questions I am going to ask in this study are: What prompted and conditioned the rise of the enthusiasm about love and romance in mid-to-late Tang literature? What was the cultural drive, including literary and religious factors, behind it? How was mid-to-late Tang romantic poetry affected formally, aesthetically and ideologically by contemporary culture? And how did this literary phenomenon negotiate with long-established poetic and cultural conventions while at the same time maintaining the momentum for the new development?

The enthusiasm about women and romantic love in the poetry of the Southern Dynasties was the most important predecessor of the late Tang fervor of romantic poetry. The gentry poets of the Southern Dynasties were obsessed with imitating poems of *yuefu* that actually includes subjective voices of both genders;³² however, they chose to only imitate *yuefu* almost exclusively in a female voice in the theme of romantic love. Their indulgence in the fervor of poetic representation of women, together with their enthusiasm on “poems on things,” promoted the Palace Style poetry that started from the Liang and prospered to the early Tang, in which the male poets hide their personal desire and subjective romantic emotions behind their vision of the female body and its decorations as well as the impersonated female voice of love emotions. The best explanation of this poetic taste of the Southern Dynasties gentry poets was that they were writing the poems of this subject as poems of things, influenced by the Buddhist way of

³² Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star: The Literary Culture of the Liang (502-557)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 359-362.

looking at the phenomenal world.³³ While they could use the voice of the poet as the lyrical subject or impersonate a common male from *yuefu* in romantic poems at a time when literature had a relatively loose relation with politics, they instead used a “looking” perspective exclusively targeted at the females that were usually completely objectified.

Romantic love poetry in male literati’s first-person voice only started to become a significant part of literati’s poetic persona beginning from the mid-Tang, best evidenced by Yuan Zhen who was a leading writer of both romantic *shi* and romantic *chuanqi*, the latter representing the culture of romance identified by Stephen Owen. The representation of personal experiences of romance from the male literati’s perspective by Yuan marked the beginning of the change of voices in literati romantic poetry. Li Shangyin was an inheritor of Yuan Zhen’s legacy in that they both were extraordinary figures who engaged deeply in the “decidedly uncanonical, though deeply conventional, subject matter.”³⁴ However, unlike Yuan Zhen who was still struggling with the legitimacy of the subject of romance as literati’s personal experience, Li Shangyin, who embraced romantic *qing* 情 as the core value of his ideas of life and the world, invented his own way to represent romance from male literati’s subjective voice in poetry with a solid socially justified lyrical convention. Liu Xuekai have found that Li’s romantic poems were influential on some poets in the late Tang, including Han Wo, whose romantic poetry collection *Xianglian ji* was claimed by Han to be a reproduction of the romantic

³³ Xiaofei Tian gives interpretations of some poems on women from this perspective in Chapter Four in *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star*, 243-244.

³⁴ Anna Shields, “Defining Experiences: The ‘Poems of Seductive Allure’ (Yanshi) of the Mid-Tang Poet Yuan Zhen (779-831),” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 1 (2002): 62.

Palace Style poetry of the Southern Dynasties while in fact the first-person male literati as “I” was unprecedentedly prominent and boldly announced.³⁵ However, although *Xianglian ji* contains some poems directly expressing male longing, these poems are either superficially addressing only male sexual desire, or are coarse in the poetic representation of male longing and sentiments. Most importantly, in these representations, women are still deprived of subjectivity in the expression of romantic/erotic relations and the aesthetic rendering is also problematic in the lyrical tradition of literati poetry. I will argue that only Li Shangyin’s reinvention of romance in poetry between literati identity and contemporary literary and religious culture created poems in dialogical voices between both genders to establish a confessional voice of male longing of emotional sincerity in male literati’s romantic subjectivity, which bears enduring literary and intellectual values by laying the conditions for male literati’s romantic poetry to establish the subjective lyrical voice as in the later *ci*.

Centering on Li Shangyin’s romantic poems, the current study will examine the significant moment in the poetic-cultural transition from Tang to Song, roughly from the beginning of the ninth century to the end of the Northern Song. It is the basic approach of this study to put Li’s romantic poems, both as romantic expressions and as poetic practices, into specific contexts in which romantic poetry became the major element to designate Li’s poet-literatus identity. At least four kinds of contexts are of particular relevance, which consist of the four chapters as the main body of my dissertation.

³⁵ Liu Xuekai, *Li Shangyin shige jieshou shi* 李商隱詩歌接受史 (Hefei: Anhui daxue chubanshe, 2004), 414-429.

Chapter II, titled “The Intense Moment of Romance: Li Shangyin and Mid-to-Late Tang Poetry of Romance,” is about the context of romantic poetic composition as a cultural phenomenon that originated in the mid-Tang and rose to its peak at the end of the Tang. I chose Yuan Zhen in the mid-Tang, Han Wo who lived to the end of Tang and Li Shangyin himself as the middle generation to represent the successive changes in the period from mid to late Tang. I also place this moment of mid-to-late Tang literary phenomenon into the larger literary history, especially the romantic poetry convention, to see its distinction and possible enduring values. I will argue that Yuan Zhen in the mid-Tang started exploring male literati first-person romantic subjectivity by his profound thinking of and struggle with his own literary legacy, and that Li Shangyin’s further experiment of the subject and form, much more innovative and inventive than his younger follower Han Wo, broke through the conventional male-impersonating-female voice and the late Tang eroticized male-exclusive voice by rendering romantic poetic voices inclusive and dialogical.

Chapter III, titled “Li Shangyin’s Love Poems and the Culture of Romance,” is about the context of the “culture of romance” as defined by Stephen Owen based on his study of romantic *chuanqi* fiction. As Owen points out in “What did Liuzhi hear?,” the discourse of romance in the early ninth century indicates that “the demimonde achieved an unprecedented level of publicity.”³⁶ *Chuanqi* as a literati composition was greatly influenced by poetry, and conversely, the creation of *chuanqi* and the culture it promoted

³⁶ Stephen Owen, “What Did Liuzhi Hear?,” 86.

also got manifested in contemporary poetry as a new reference. Many scholars' works have shed light on this mutual influence.³⁷ Li Shangyin by using fictional references in romantic poetry not only shows his acceptance of *chuanqi* as a reader but also that he incorporated *chuanqi* elements in his writing of romantic poetry to explore new poetic voices in romantic representations. The influence of the culture of romance on love poems lies in the fact that in some romantic *chuanqi*, women's subjectivity is revealed by women's autonomic behaviors narrated, communicating with the authorial male voice. By reviving the cultural background and specific circumstances of romantic events associated with the poems either by poetic preface or the contextualization of the creation circumstances, how Li Shangyin used *chuanqi* and the culture of romance to reinvent in romantic poetry is closely examined.

Chapter IV, titled "The Religious Perceptions of Love: Li Shangyin's Love Poems in the Daoist and Buddhist Contexts," is about the context of Daoism and Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty, especially in the late Tang. Li Shangyin's early years of learning was deeply branded with Daoism and his relation with Buddhism also started early in his life and prevailed in his late years. Moreover, his acceptance of Daoism was not confined to his early learning experience and writing poems of Daoist nuns, but was imprinted deeply in his ideas and practiced throughout his life. His learning of Buddhism was also throughout his life but the total subjection to Buddhism in his late years was facilitated by

³⁷ An overview of the current scholarship on this can be found in the introduction of Qiu Changyuan 邱昌員, "Shi yu Tangdai wenyan xiaoshuo yanjiu" 詩與唐代言言小說研究 (PhD diss., Shanghai Normal University, 2004), 2-12.

the death of his wife and only female companion at least in most of his real life. Previous studies of religious influence on Li Shangyin's poetry were centered on the linguistic and rhetorical aspects. Few studies on the ideological influence can be found, let alone of romantic poetry specifically. Zhong Laiyin's research on the enigmatic language borrowed from Daoism in Li Shangyin's love poems is an exception but his argument about Li's liberal ideas of sexuality fails to explain how Li's open mind toward sex, which many literati poets of his time and later also had, helped the reinvention of romantic poetry.³⁸ My study of Li's poetic representation of Daoist nuns and non-traditional Daoist images in romantic poetry reveals that Li created specific methods of inclusively representing the relationship between men and women based on the arrangement of gender relations in the Daoist celestial world and by using specific Daoist images. Li's representations of traditional Daoist goddesses and their love emotions show a more direct relation to the reinvention of traditional romantic poetry, therefore I will also use a substantial part of this chapter to discuss the difference of the representations of traditional Daoist goddesses in Li's poems from the conventions in general and the work of his contemporaries. Li's turning to Buddhism in his late years and his direct discussion of *qing* in poems in light of Buddhist thinking show that *qing* became the key point for him to form his own ideas of life and the world.

Chapter V, titled "From Romance to Sentimentality: Li Shangyin's Love Poems in the Context of the Tang-Song Poetic Transition," is about the context of the musical

³⁸ Zhong Laiyin 鐘萊茵, *Li Shangyin aiqing shi jie* 李商隱愛情詩解 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1997). The book has a heavy focus on the perspective of enigmatic language and Li's liberal ideas of sexuality.

entertaining culture involving poetry as the lyrics and its influence on the transformation from romantic *shi* 詩 to romantic *ci* 詞 in the period from mid Tang to Northern Song. In the late Tang and Five Dynasties, *shi* for singing and the inchoate form of *ci* (*quzi ci* 曲子詞) existed at the same time, both of which were for the Party Music or *yan yue* 燕樂.³⁹ Li Shangyin's romantic poems, especially his "Left Untitled" poems, were indirectly and directly borrowed by *shi* and *ci* in this time. The direct and near-direct borrowing by *ci* was especially remarkable. However, the transformation from Li's literary reinvention of romantic poetry to his romantic poems being used in *ci* as lyrics for music contains much more information than just literal influence, which was largely overlooked by previous studies of the influence of Li Shangyin's poetry on *ci*. Most of the borrowings of Li's poetry by *ci* happen in *ci* with male confessional voice and voice of uncertain gender of romantic sentiments that can be read from a male perspective. The refinement of love poems by *Huajian ci* 花間詞 poets, from the aspect of the influence of the late-Tang romantic poems, is formalizing the romantic poetry within the literati taste and aesthetics, from which Song *ci* with sentimentality as the key character of lyrical voice derived. Even though the male-impersonating-female view still persisted in *ci*, male literati's confessional voice became unprecedentedly common in romantic *ci* poetry. Li Shangyin played the most significant role in the process of constructing the literati's romantic identity in the process of the transformation from romantic *shi* to romantic *ci* by his

³⁹ See Zhang Yuzi 張煜梓, "Tangdai yanyue de yanjiu" 唐代燕樂的研究 (Master's thesis, Hebei University, 2008).

construction of the lyrical sincerity of male literati's romantic persona in poetry beyond his time.

There are undoubtedly other factors that affected the writing of Li Shangyin's romantic poems, especially his personal experience and the larger poetic tradition. By concentrating on literati romantic poetry's generic development historically and the culture background the poet lives in, including the culture of romance and the religious culture for the specific mid-to-late Tang time, I hope to provide a more culturally contextualized perspective in understanding Li Shangyin's romantic poetry and on the basis to examine its enduring influence on later romantic lyrical literature. By situating his romantic poems in these contexts, especially in the transformational period from the mid-Tang to the Song, I also hope to provide a framework of understanding how literati in this period viewed themselves through the representation of their relationship with women in their poetic works. As shown above, this study consciously resists the retrospective generic study of poetry as a convention-oriented genre and the presumption of poet and lyrical subject as one based on a tradition that unavoidably leads to politicized interpretations of Li's romantic poems. I put the main emphasis on contemporary poetic innovations that re-evaluate and reinvent tradition and the influence these poetic innovations have had on later generations.

CHAPTER II

THE FANATICAL MOMENT OF ROMANCE:

LI SHANGYIN AND MID-TO-LATE TANG POETRY OF ROMANCE

In this chapter, I put Li's romantic poetry into the context of romantic poetic composition as a cultural phenomenon that originated in the mid-Tang and rose to its peak at the end of the Tang. I argue that Yuan Zhen in the mid-Tang started exploring male literati first-person romantic subjectivity by his profound thinking of and struggle with his own literary legacy, and that Li Shangyin's further experiment of the subject and form, much more innovative and inventive than his younger follower Han Wo, broke through the conventional male-impersonating-female voice and the late-Tang eroticized male-exclusive voice by rendering romantic poetic voices inclusive and dialogical.

In mid to late Tang, an intense enthusiasm for the subject of romance and love among the literati gradually formed, and more importantly, the romantic side of the literati persona is increasingly visible. By incorporating romantic sentiments as an important subjectivity into the literati persona, poetry writing has to cross several boundaries: first, the male poets' romantic subjectivity in poems needs to be justified in the Tang when the relationship between literature and politics were becoming rigid; second, the private nature of the romantic subjectivity has to be articulated by a set of different poetic languages as opposed to the conventional ones that center on objectifying the female side of love relations; third, the nature of poetry in the context of Chinese literati literature asks for new aesthetics that will render this new kind of poetry meaningful in the

construction of literati identities. Yuan Zhen in the mid-Tang started this quest by his profound thinking of and struggle with his own literary legacy. Li Shangyin's further experiment with the subject and form, much more innovative and inventive than his younger follower Han Wo, rose to the highest level in the late Tang, which played a vital and unique role in the influence of *shi* poetry on *ci* poetry in the larger background of Tang-Song poetic transition.

Justifying Romance as the Subject Matter

The definition of literati romantic poetry needs to be differentiated from stories of romance that prospered in mid Tang in that it is not only about extramarital affairs. Under the reign of Confucianism, not only relations with women outside of marriage are forbidden to be talked about, but because Confucianism asks literati to center their minds on *zhi* 志 that is more sociopolitical so marital emotional bonds are also marginalized. Therefore, in literati's representation of love relations, the literati seldom appear as the lyrical subject as usually in poems of other themes, starting from the Nineteen Ancient Poems or *Gushi shijiu shou* 古詩十九首.⁴⁰ That being said, literati as the lyrical subject expressing subjective love emotions toward the other gender did exist in literati composition in Han, Wei and Jin Dynasties, including Sima Xiangru's 司馬相如 (179-

⁴⁰ Nine of the Nineteen Ancient Poems are in the subject of love relations, of which eight are in a female voice in the imagination of the male literati poet, meaning the poet assumes the impersonated voice of a female. The other one is in the voice of the male poet who expresses his empathy with a female singing a lament of her dead husband on a high tower. See *Xianqin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩, ed. Lu Qinli 遼欽立 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 329-334.

118 BC) *Qin'ge ershou* 琴歌二首,⁴¹ Zhang Heng's 張衡 (78-139 AD) *Si chou shi* 四愁詩,⁴² Qin Jia's 秦嘉 (130-170 AD) several poems for his wife,⁴³ Jia Chong's 賈充 (217-282 AD) "Yu qi Li furen lianju shi" 與妻李夫人聯句詩,⁴⁴ Pan Yue's 潘岳 (247-300 AD) "Neigu shi" 內顧詩 and "Daowang shi" 悼亡詩,⁴⁵ and Ji Han's 嵇含 (263-306 AD) "Kangli shi" 伉儷詩.⁴⁶ The following one from Qin Jia's poems for his wife is a good example because the male poet himself sitting in an empty room lamenting his wife's absence contrasts with the later literati obsession of featuring women in empty rooms waiting for men in romantic poetry:

人生譬朝露，
居世多屯蹇。
憂艱常早至，
歡會常苦晚。
念當奉時役，
去爾日遙遠。
遣車迎子還，
空往復空返。
省書情悽愴，
臨食不能飯。

⁴¹ *Xianqin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi*, 99-100.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 180-181.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 185-187.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 587.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 634-636.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 726.

獨坐空房中，
誰與相勸勉？
長夜不能眠，
伏枕獨輾轉。
憂來如循環，
匪席不可卷。⁴⁷

Life is like the morning dew,
living in the world I always meet with adverse circumstances.
Worries and hardship usually come first,
while happy reunion always comes bitterly late.
I was concerned that I was going to serve a seasonal official duty,
and would be far away from you.
I sent a cart to pick you up,
which went empty and came back empty too.
I read the letter you sent me and felt so sorrowful,
that I couldn't eat in front of the food.
I sat in the empty room,
and who would exhort me?
I couldn't sleep in the long night,
leaning on the pillow I tossed about in bed all by myself.

⁴⁷ *Xianqin Han Wei Jin nanbeichao shi*, 186.

Worry came and recurred endlessly,
but my love for you will never change.

The first couplet “Life is like the morning dew, living in the world I always meet with adverse circumstances” begins the poem with the lament of the shortness of life and the hardship of living. The second couplet goes on with the same lament, making it even more intense. Why does the poet have to be so sorrowful? It is because he is going to serve a seasonal official duty and to leave his beloved wife. In order to see her before he leaves, he sent a cart to pick her up (from her parents home). Unfortunately, she was ill and couldn’t come back to him. He couldn’t help complaining about life and the world as even his wish to unite with his wife was not granted. His wife sent a plaintive and moving letter that made him so sorrowful after reading it that he couldn’t eat or drink. The last three couplets describe the situation of Qin being alone after his wife was not coming. Only an empty room and an empty bed were with him. In the past, although life was hard, he had someone by his side to accompany and encourage him, which made life easier. Now all by himself, he was sleepless all night. Adding to his insomnia, his melancholy was accumulating endlessly. Only by referring to the couplet from “Bai zhou” 柏舟 in *Shijing* 詩經 “My heart is not like the mat, / it cannot be rolled up,” or *wo xin fei xi, bu ke juan ye* 我心匪席，不可卷也，⁴⁸ and seeking the company of the ancient poet of the couplet was he able to pass the long night.

⁴⁸ *Shijing yizhu* 詩經譯註, trans. and annot. Zhou Zhenfu 周振甫 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 36.

The poet Qin Jia lived in the Eastern Han. He was a prefectural official during Emperor Huan's reign. When he was about to go to Luoyang to report his work, his wife Xu Shu 徐淑 (fl. 147 AD), a poetess later recognized in literary history, was ill at her parents' home, and the two of them did not have the chance to say goodbye in person. When Qin died on post away from home, Xu Shu's brother forced her to remarry. She refused and destroyed her face, and got sick for mourning. She died a widow.⁴⁹

The first big transformation is when the recent-style began to sprout in literati literature in the Southern Dynasties. The literati poetry of the Southern Dynasties started to prosper on the representations of women and romantic love along with the development of the literary theories on “describing things,” or *ti wu* 体物, and “representing emotions,” or *yuan qing* 缘情, both of which put the things or emotions in objectified positions.⁵⁰ The gentry poets of the Southern Dynasties were obsessed with imitating poems of *yuefu* 樂府 that actually include subjective voices of both genders,⁵¹ however, they chose to only imitate *yuefu* almost exclusively in a female voice in the theme of romantic love. Xiao Yi's 蕭繹 (508-555 AD) “*Xi zuo yanshi*” 戲作豔詩 is the

⁴⁹ Liu Zhiji 劉知幾, *Shitong xin jiaozhu* 史通新校注, annot. Zhao Lüfu 趙呂甫 (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1990), 529.

⁵⁰ Zhang Yinan, “Wan Tang Qi Liang ti yanjiu,” 312-315, 335-339.

⁵¹ See Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star*, 359-362. The imitating poems of *yuefu* by the gentry poets more often objectify the imitated things or emotions because their imitating is for “imagining and playing out the social and cultural other” as “a way for constructing and confirming their own cultural identity” (Xiaofei Tian, 365), and their own skills and aesthetics of “describing things” and “representing emotions” were often used. When they made new songs of *yuefu* by themselves, the simulation of the dialogical voices of both genders did exist in a few occasions, but in this situation, the gentry poets were assuming the role of song makers rather than literati as their own identity.

best example to examine the gentry poet's attitude toward the subject of romantic love, and his original use of the term *Yanshi* 豔詩 was constantly mentioned in the Tang.⁵²

She met the new wife when entering the hall,
saw her former husband when going out of the door.

Words under the tongue unsaid,
she twisted her sleeves, hesitating.

Shaking the moon-like fan,
hiding the tears like pearls.

Her waves of emotion now is already endless,
let alone adding the old sentiments.

入堂值小婦，出門逢故夫。

含辭未及吐，絞袖且踟躕。

搖茲扇似月，掩此淚如珠。

今懷固無已，故情今有餘。⁵³

Even though it was not a typical imitation of *yuefu* in the same title, it was still an imitation of *yuefu* in terms of the content of the lyrics if we set the music form aside. What *yanshi* meant to Xiao Yi was clearly shown in his transformation of the original subject. While the Han *yuefu* “Shangshan cai miwu” 上山采蘼蕪 was addressing the

⁵² See Xiong Xiao 熊嘯, “Tangren suo shu yanshi gainian” 唐人所述豔詩概念, *Huabei dianli daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)*, no. 1 (2017): 97-101. *Yanshi* 豔詩 was a term with negative meanings in the Tang and it originated in the gentry poets' imitation of *yuefu* in the Southern Dynasties that was not really love poems. And Li Shangyin never called his romantic poems *yanshi*.

⁵³ Xu Ling 徐陵 ed., *Yutai xin yong jianzhu* 玉台新詠箋注, annot. Wu Zhaoyi 吳兆宜 and Mu Kehong 穆克宏 (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1985), 305.

relation between the abandoned woman and her former husband within the Confucian norms concerning the responsibility of women in the family,⁵⁴ Xiao Yi's poem foregrounded the woman's emotional reaction in the encounter that was always there but not especially emphasized in the Han version. However, while the Han version uses the form of dialogue at the end that not only shows the woman's voice but also the man's answering voice to reveal their mutual emotional connection, Xiao Yi's imitation only represented the detailed description of the woman's emotional reaction, indicating that the poet had no intention to write about romantic love with his subjective attitude that would concern male romantic subjectivity, but to objectify the woman's emotion for his poetic appreciation.⁵⁵ This scenario can cover the characteristic of most of the gentry poets' imitation of *yuefu* except for just a few exceptions, besides the well-known characteristic of describing a lot of women's body and its decorations. Their indulgence in the fervor of poetic representation of women, together with their enthusiasm for "poems of things," promoted the Palace Style poetry that started from the Liang and prospered to the Early Tang, in which the male poets hide their personal desire and subjective romantic emotions behind their vision of the female body and its decorations as well as the impersonated female voice of love emotions.⁵⁶ The best explanation of this

⁵⁴ Xu Ling 徐陵 ed., *Yutai xin yong jianzhu*, 1.

⁵⁵ The Chinese scholars criticize poets of the Palace Style poetry in the late Southern Dynasties for their exclusive interests in women as a vision but not their inner emotions, which was partly true but not completely the case. Obviously, the poets did write poems focusing on women's emotion other than appearances. Yet women's love emotion was objectified because the male poets detach not only themselves but also the target of women's love from the emotion, thus excludes male confessional voice, and only the vision induced desire that was fundamentally empty in Buddhist ideas exists.

⁵⁶ It needs to be noted that women and romantic love as a subject is only part of Palace Style poetry. We cannot equal Palace Style poetry with the gentry poets' poems on women and romantic love.

poetic taste of the Southern Dynasties gentry poets was that they were writing the poems of this subject as poems of things, influenced by the Buddhist way of looking at the phenomenal world.⁵⁷ While they could use the voice of the poet as the lyrical subject or impersonate a common male from *yuefu* in romantic poems at a time when literature had a relatively loose relation with politics,⁵⁸ they instead used a “looking” perspective exclusively targeted at the females including the feminized catamites, no matter of their bodies or emotions, which were usually completely objectified.⁵⁹

In literati literature, romantic love in male literati’s first-person voice in poetry only started to become a significant part of literati’s poetic persona beginning from the mid Tang. Yuan Zhen and Bai Juyi represented the most significant transformation that happened at the turn of the ninth century. Li Shangyin grew up to a teenager at the end of this period when he had begun studying. Yuan and Bai’s big transformation was not only shown in their plain poetic language but also the fundamental opening up of the boundaries of poetic subject, in which the representation of personal experiences of romance in the male literati’s perspective greatly influenced the change of voices in literati romantic poetry. The poems that brought Yuan and Bai to the foreground of romantic poets were *pailü* 排律, or long pentasyllabic regulated verses, and *zashi* 雜詩,

⁵⁷ See Chapter Four and Chapter Five of Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star*, 162-259.

⁵⁸ Xiaofei Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star*, 173.

⁵⁹ Even female gentry poetess at the time was writing romantic poems in this style. For example, Shen Manyuan 沈滿愿 had the poem “Xi Xiaoniang shi” 戲蕭娘詩 in exactly the same style. See *Yutai xin yong jianzhu*, 209. This is not saying that all the poems of the theme on women and romantic love in this period are written in this style. But this was the new trend at the time and many participated in it, and the majority of poems with the theme were in this style.

or “miscellaneous poems,” which were labeled *yuanhe ti* 元和體, or “Yuanhe style.”⁶⁰ They were imitated by young poets, most of whom were practicing their poetic skills in hope of passing the civil service examination, not only because of Yuan and Bai’s leading roles in the literary circle but also for the tastiest subject -- romance -- that can be gossiped. The “Yuanhe style” poems with subjects on women and romance, especially those by Yuan Zhen, were most widely spread, most talked about and most influential among imitators. Yuan Zhen was the initiator not only of the poetic forms but also of the newly defined subject.⁶¹ His “Dreaming about Wandering in Spring” 夢遊春, “Poem of Yingying” 鶯鶯詩, “Ancient Romantic Poem” 古豔詩, “Ancient Breaking-up Poem” 古決絕詞, “For Shuangwen” 贈雙文, poems that were mainly about his first love Shuangwen, were either long pentasyllabic regulated verses or “miscellaneous poems,” both in the subject of romance and love. There were so many imitators that Yuan found it annoying to know that some people were using his name to write licentious poems that might destroy his name and he had to defend himself.⁶² Bai Juyi also had many poems of this kind, but unlike Yuan Zhen’s, which were mainly about one person, Bai’s were about different females he met at entertaining circumstances or those privately belonged to him.

⁶⁰ In the preface to *Baishi Changing ji* 白氏長慶集 by Yuan Zhen, Yuan mentioned “regulated verses with a hundred rhymes and miscellaneous poems” 百韻律詩及雜詩 that were imitated by younger students in the upper and middle Yangzi areas and Chang’an, who called their imitations “Yuanhe shi” 元和詩. See *Yuan Zhen ji* 元稹集, ed. Ji Qin 冀勤 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 554.

⁶¹ As revealed later in this chapter, Yuan’s rendering of romance, a conventional subject, is very different from that of his predecessors.

⁶² In “Responding to Letian I Had Extra Thoughts and Added the Six Rhymes” or “Chou Letian yusi bujin jia wei liuyun zhizuo” 酬樂天餘思不盡加為六韻之作, there is a note by Yuan himself: “Younger poets liked to fake my poems, which spread to many places. When I arrived in Kuaiji, someone had already written a hundred palace poems and two scrolls of ‘miscellaneous poems’ in my name. Not one of them was my own work when I saw them myself.” *Yuan Zhen ji*, 247.

Bai's poems were also quite popular. For example, his poem for Ah Ruan, a courtesan from the capital Chang'an, was seen by Yuan Zhen in Tongzhou 通州 that is in today's Sichuan province fifteen years later after Bai wrote it when he passed his civil service examinations.⁶³

These poems about the romantic relationship between literati men and their women in male literati's own subjective voice were beginning to spread widely in literati circles and beyond, even though they got harsh criticism all the time. This kind of representation of romantic love was a problem ever since the Han Dynasty because Confucianism values male cumulative sociality that overshadows any individuality and private emotions. Even though the Six Dynasties was a time when literature and politics became relatively loosely related, the values based on social hierarchy persisted and the gentry's literary taste on romantic love, including male and female, was shaped by the Confucian hierarchical power relations between the two genders, in which women were the represented desired and men were the authoritative desirer. We can imagine what impact the new "Yuanhe style" poetry from male first-person voice about romance and love, sometimes represented as powerless or overwhelmed, had on their contemporary world. People spread, imitated, criticized or laughed at them. They caused controversial debates and criticism at their time and afterward.

Different from the many "Gongci" 宮辭 at that time, including those written by Yuan himself, the long pentasyllabic regulated verses by Yuan were not only new in form

⁶³ *Bai Juyi ji* 白居易集, ed. Gu Xuejie 顧學頡 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 310.

but also, and more astoundingly, new in content and ideology compared to earlier poetry on women. The male part in predominantly male literati poet's romantic poems was no longer a "vantage point of an anonymous third person observer" that renders the "description of the captive boudoir women... plainly voyeuristic" as in the "conventions of Southern Dynasties palace-style poetry and Tang boudoir verse,"⁶⁴ but an individual subjectivity with expressed feelings and the conscience of self-reflection. Many of these poems were in the first person voice of the poet as the lyrical subject. Yuan was claiming the poems as his personal experiences even though he was reinventing something in between the traditions of boudoir poetry (*yuefu*) and poetry in pursuit of goddesses in order to possess yet distance himself from the experiences of his romantic encounters.⁶⁵

Yuan labeled his poems of this kind "poems of seductive allure" or *yan shi* 豔詩 when he first compiled them into *Yuanshi Changqing ji* 元氏長慶集 for his friend. According to Shields, these poems were "pushing the boundaries of poetic topical decorum," were new not only in its unorthodox topic "but also the private depths."⁶⁶ Yuan's deliberate attempt to incorporate such romantic texts into his larger literary oeuvre indicates his strong literary and personal reasons, which engaged him in "rethinking the boundaries and capacities of [literariness or] *wen* [文]."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Anna Shields, *Crafting A Collection*, 223.

⁶⁵ See Anna Shields, "Defining Experiences," 73. Boudoir poetry refers to *yuefu* and the literati poets' imitations in the theme of women in boudoirs. It is different from the romantic Palace Style poetry, but those written by the gentry poets are similar in representations because of the skills and aesthetics based on "describing things" and "representing emotions."

⁶⁶ Shields, "Defining Experiences," 62.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Li Shangyin was apparently an inheritor of this rethinking of *wen*, an even bolder one in fact. In his “Presented to His Excellency the Grand Councilor, Duke of Jingzhao” 獻相國京兆公啟, he expressed his theory of literature:

A human person is endowed with the beauty of the five elements and complete with the seven emotions, so he/she is bound to escalate to express his/her natural dispositions and intelligence. Therefore, adverse circumstances are bleak and favorable ones are soothing, and they have different ways to be expressed; happiness and sorrow, their sources are in the thousands.

人稟五行之秀，備七情之動，必有詠嘆，以通性靈。故陰慘陽舒，其途不一；安樂哀思，厥源數千。⁶⁸

Compared to Yuan’s emphasis on writing poetry on anything “different from usual” in everyday life,⁶⁹ Li’s is more centered on any emotions and sentiments a person can generate from his natural disposition and intelligence. In the aspect of exploring and expanding the territory of poetry, Li is an inheritor of Yuan in that they both were extraordinary figures who engaged in the “decidedly uncanonical, though deeply conventional, subject matter.”⁷⁰ What they did in reinventing this subject matter was revolutionary, exerting a longterm impact on the transformation of literati ideas and identities.

⁶⁸ *Li Shangyin wen biannian jiaozhu*, 1911.

⁶⁹ For the complete text by Yuan on this, see *Yuan Zhen ji*, 351. Shields elaborated that Yuan Zhen’s “capacious definition of poetry-worthy topics” is also based on the same text that ended with “every time I encountered something different from usual, I want to make a poem (about it).” See Shields, “Defining Experience,” 68.

⁷⁰ Shields, “Defining Experience,” 62.

Yuan marked his poems of seductive allure only for special audiences, those “who know me” (*zhi wu zhe* 知吾者), and very likely excluded them when he recompiled his poetry anthology.⁷¹ About a generation later, Li Shangyin was not ashamed but in fact quite explicitly proud that “The multitude who were present all admired my romantic compositions” 眾中賞我賦高唐. The heptasyllabic autobiographical poem that has this line is an ancient-style *gexing* 歌行, narrating his experiences mostly from his public life, in which the above-quoted line refers to his poetic fame in the eyes of his literati and poet friends.⁷² Li Shangyin was quite aware that his poetic reputation counted on his romantic poems. It can be speculated that this self-consciousness might have prompted him to use romantic elements in many conventional subject poems that he might have expected to spread in his name as well, like his history poems that often incorporated romantic elements.⁷³

When it comes to the time of Han Wo, who was a generation later than Li Shangyin, he almost performatively compiled the *Xianglianji* 香奩集,⁷⁴ writing a preface to be apologetic but in fact only to disclaim guilt.

⁷¹ *Bai Juyi ji*, 292.

⁷² The line comes from the poem “Oucheng zhuanyun qishi'er ju zeng si tongshu” 偶成轉韻七十二句贈四同舍, see *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1078. According to Owen, Li's romantic poetry, as part of his complete work, was likely circulating in the form of small collections in a small circle in his lifetime. See Owen, *The Late Tang*, 335. But it is also possible that his romantic poetry had already spread to larger audiences other than a specified literati circle at the time.

⁷³ Owen pointed out that “Li Shangyin's vision of excess and the breakdown of boundaries -- between the sexes and between levels of hierarchy” often leads to “an absorption in the moment and loss of a larger perspective.” See Owen, *The Late Tang*, 424.

⁷⁴ “Xianglian” 香奩 is the toilet case used by aristocratic women in ancient China.

I have indeed drowned myself in chapters and verses for some years. I sincerely know that this was not what a male scholar-official should do. But I can't forget my 'qing,' which was determined by my nature.

余溺於章句，信有年矣，誠知非丈夫所為，不能忘情，天所賦也。⁷⁵

Han's claim was obviously influenced by Li, who was his uncle and a poetic model. The "qing" 情, here mostly about romantic sentiments if not all, was getting announced forcefully, even when it was given the status of unorthodoxy.

Yuan Zhen labeled his romantic poems as didactic pieces when he initially anthologized them into *Yuanshi Changing ji*, which he "may indeed have disavowed later in life."⁷⁶ Han Wo made a special collection of his romantic poems separated from his personal poetry anthology with a distinct title that refers to the perfumed toilet case used by women, and alluded the poems to the late Southern Dynasties Palace Style poetry in the preface.⁷⁷ Li Shangyin did neither. Instead, he used romantic subjectivity as an element in almost all categories of his poems, unlike Yuan Zhen who only went as far as blurring "the subgeneric conventions of Palace Style poetry and of poetry describing the pursuit of goddesses"⁷⁸ to create romantic scenes in the realm of private memory. As Owen pointed out, Li Shangyin's poetic corpus "contains a core of poems [of different categories] that are perhaps more 'one-sided' or 'extreme' than any other Late Tang

⁷⁵ *Tang Song ci huiping Tang Wudai juan* 唐宋詞匯評唐五代卷, comp. Wang Zhaopeng 王兆鵬 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004), 224.

⁷⁶ Shields, "Defining Experience," 63.

⁷⁷ *Tang Song ci huiping Tang Wudai juan*, 224. "[When I compiled the *Xianglian ji*], I think about the Palace Style poetry, of which Yu Xin's were not necessarily good; I jest at *Yutai* [*xin yong*], and wonder why must it have the preface by Xu Ling" 遐思宮體，未降稱庾信工文；卻誚玉臺，何必倩徐陵作敘。

⁷⁸ Shields, "Defining Experience," 72.

poet,⁷⁹ in which “the passionate excessive speaker” in hermetic poems, “the excessive emperors” in history poems, and the personified peonies in poems on things share the “excess” in poetic aesthetics.⁸⁰ The excess is often manifested by “erotic figuration” in his poems which is linked to “the contemporary poetic discourse of romance”⁸¹ rather than conventional poetics of politics. Based on the identification of the innovative romantic/erotic representation on the level of overall poetic aesthetics of Li’s poetry, my focus on the voices of Li’s rendering of romantic love reveals its fundamental difference from the conventional romantic poems and also poems of his contemporaries in the voices, because his serious literary engagement with the culture of the time involved both the culture of romance and the religious culture, both of which were grappling with the discourse of the Confucian gender hierarchy in literary representations. His dialectical engagement with the contemporary poetic discourse of romance in a large portion of his poems is not only having artistic but also ideological influence on the representation of women and romantic relations in his poetry and poetry of later times, as I will further explain in the following chapters.

The Making of Personal Poetry Anthology(s) of the Three Poets

During the mid to the late Tang, poets began to anthologize their poetry by themselves in consideration of circulation and preservation. The authorial attitude of

⁷⁹ Owen, *The Late Tang*, 494.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 458.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 341.

romantic poetry is shown in its position in the anthologizing behavior and process. Li Shangyin has a number of playful romantic poems that could not be counted as serious, which he might not have thought of including in his poetry anthology. But many of his poems that contain romantic elements or have romantic love as the main subject are very serious. Li Shangyin was the only poet whose experiment with romance in poetry imposed ideological changes and affected the identification of the poet as the author of poetry. There is no record of Li Shangyin compiling his own poetry anthology, even though he anthologized his own proses. He might have missed compiling his complete personal poetry anthology because of his relatively early death. It is reasonable to speculate that he would not exclude the serious romantic poems if he had gotten the chance to make a complete poetry anthology because that would have involved too many of his poems, even the most thematically conventional ones. Unlike Yuan Zhen before him who was still struggling with the legitimacy of the subject of romance as literati's personal experience, Li Shangyin had already invented his own way to justify the representations of romance from male literati's subjective voice,⁸² which was not inherited by Han Wo who did not see romantic poetry as serious a course as Li Shangyin saw it even though he compiled *Xianglian ji*. The deliberate division of his romantic poems that either lacked poetic value or were just reproductions of the Palace Style poetry from his other more serious poems started the commentarial tradition of separating *ci* 詞 from *shi* 詩 in the Song and the idea that *ci* was trivial.

⁸² See my discussions in Chapter III and Chapter IV.

Anna Shields pointed out in “Defining Experiences” that Yuan Zhen attempted to integrate his romantic poems into his corpus by “defending them as didactic pieces -- poems that could stimulate moral reform by their negative example.”⁸³ As a means of handing down canonical teaching as anthologizing is, even though Yuan’s romantic poems are more than didactic because of their representation of personal experiences and blurring of generic conventions, claiming them as didactic pieces seemed to be the only way for Yuan to safely place them in his public literary corpus. Even though these poems of seductive allure might have been later excluded by himself from his personal anthology and other anthologizers of his poetry, they were “published” by Yuan himself in the first place and circulating within and outside the orthodox anthologizing system since.⁸⁴ Yuan’s inclusion of them in his *Yuanshi Changing ji* was a breakthrough considering many poets of his time and earlier might had never thought of handing down this kind of work or seeing them as a part of the whole picture of their public personality.

Two generations later, Han Wo started anthologizing *Xianglian ji*, which he labeled as Palace Style poetry, but in fact a great portion of the poems are distinct from the romantic Palace Style poems of the late Southern Dynasties because the objectified content is substituted by literati’s subjective inner emotions and desires as expressed in the voice of personal experiences. Obviously, when he wrote the preface, he was quite proud of the popularity of the poems among the literati scholar-officials and beyond:

⁸³ Shields, “Defining Experience,” 69.

⁸⁴ See *ibid.*, 62-66.

I wrote no less than a thousand poems, among which there are hundreds that have the character of decorativeness and sensuousness that I am proud of. They spread among the mouths of the officials or scholars, or were used as lyrics for songs by the musicians. Written on white and fragrant walls, they were secretly recited by numerous people.

所著歌詩不啻千首，其中以綺麗得意者數百篇，往往在士大夫之口，或樂官配入聲律，粉牆椒壁，斜行小字，竊詠者不可勝計。⁸⁵

These poems were so widely spread by chanting and copying and very likely sung by singers at the time that they even survived two wars, during which Ha Wo lost almost all the manuscripts of his poems but was nonetheless able to anthologize these poems by coming across his own works when having drinks with old friends at the remotest corners of the land.⁸⁶

Han Wo admitted that these poems were non-canonical and labeled them as unorthodox for a male scholar-official, even though he anthologized them because he did not have the heart to abandon them.⁸⁷ *Xianglian ji* was circulating wildly as a “trivial” anthology nonetheless. It was printed and reprinted many times in the Song, which promoted their publicity and probably helped to spread them to larger audiences.⁸⁸ What

⁸⁵ *Tang Song ci huiping Tang Wudai juan*, 224.

⁸⁶ Ibid. “When I met old friends in remote places and recited poems as we got drunk, my pieces were often mentioned. I anthologized them since then and got one hundred pieces” 或天涯逢舊識，或避地遇故人，醉詠之暇，時及拙唱。自爾鳩集，復得百篇。Han Wo might have written more romantic poems than what we have now, but those anthologized by himself in *Xianglian ji* and that were handed down are only about one hundred poems.

⁸⁷ Ibid. “I did not have the heart to abandon it, and compiled it and included new ones constantly” 不忍棄捐，隨時編錄。

⁸⁸ Cao Lifang 曹麗芳, “Lun Han Wo shige zai Tangsong shiqi de chuancun yu jieshou” 論韓偓詩歌在唐宋時期的傳存與接受, *Nanjing shifan daxue wenxueyuan xuebao*, no. 2 (2013): 108.

we now know is that Han Wo compiled *Xianglian ji* and wrote the preface himself.⁸⁹ This important fact indicates two things. First, Han Wo when compiling his individual anthology was more conscious of the private nature of his own poems than mid-Tang poets. Anthologizing individual poetry had become less constrained by the sociopolitical morality of the canonical tradition. Han was indeed apologetic when he anthologized such an unorthodox work as *Xianglian ji*, but there was no obvious mental struggle as to whether he should claim the authorship of it and hand it down to later generations. Second, Han anthologized *Xianglian ji* separately, which may mean that he thought Xianglian poems were different from his other poems. He did not think that Xianglian poems were to destroy his reputation in his days and in later generations, but still, he knew they were different, or he admitted their triviality.

The facts that he anthologized *Xianglian ji* himself and wrote responsorial “Left Untitled” 無題 poems with the literati poets revealed his active consciousness of seeing romance and love as a part of literati’s public persona.⁹⁰ He was no longer afraid of being seen as a literatus that writes poems about personal love experiences. However, this part

⁸⁹ Even though there have been debates on the authorship of *Xianglian ji* following its completion, until recently *Xianlian ji* had been accepted as Han Wo’s personal anthology of romantic poetry. Commentators from Song on attributed it to other authors and some modern scholars even say that it is a collection of romantic poems by different poets. See Yang Wenjuan 楊文娟, “*Xianglianji yanjiu*” 《香奩集》研究, (Master’s thesis, Guangzhou University, 2007), 7-10. Whether it was recorded in the official catalogs immediately after its compilation is not clear. In the Five Dynasties, Wei Hu’s 韋穀 *Caidiao ji* 才調集 only included Han Wo’s “Xiao yin” 小隱, “Zeng yibu Cui Jiang chushi” 贈易卜崔江處士, “Canchun lüshe” 殘春旅社, “Shen ye” 深夜 and “Ji lingzhuang daolü” 寄鄰庄道侶, among which only “Ye shen” 夜深 was from *Xianglian ji*. *Caidiao Ji* was famous for its inclusion of many sensuous and decorative poems. However, he obviously did not take Han’s *Xianlian ji* so seriously as it perhaps should have been. The official catalog *Congwen zong mu* 崇文總目 that was compiled in 1041 has only one scroll of *Han Wo shi* 韓偓詩, but if the poems in *Xianglian ji* were included in it or not is unknown. Twenty years later in 1060 when *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 was compiled, the *Yiwen zhi* 藝文志 in it recorded “one scroll *Han Wo shi*, one scroll *Xianglian ji*.”

⁹⁰ Liu Xuekai, *Li Shangyin shige jieshou shi*, 421-422.

was a trivial part of the literati persona that does not concern the poetic identity that defines literati's poetic self, which therefore could be treated casually. However, even though Han declared that he knew his romantic poems were non-canonical, his reputation was still threatened by it from the Song to the Ming Dynasties when Neo-Confucianism became dominating. This led to the intriguing phenomenon that some commentators disclaim his authority of *Xianglian ji* in order to maintain the image of him as a patriarchal political model.⁹¹ Nonetheless, evidence not only indicates that *Xianglian ji* was indeed compiled by Han Wo, but also that the anthologizing process was as long as twenty years. Han Wo continued writing romantic poems and compiled them into his *Xianglian ji* until he was seventy years old.⁹²

As far as we know, Li Shangyin's poetry anthology was compiled by Yang Yi, who collected around six hundred Li's poems of various poetic forms, which almost has all Li's poems that are handed down today. Yang's collection started with "a copy of Li Shangyin's poetry containing just over 100 poems" he got hold of in Bianjing, the capital of Northern Song, and he supplemented it with "many editions of Li Shangyin's poetry circulating in the lower Yangzi region" at the end of the Tang that very possibly contained or consisted of romantic poetry as mentioned before.⁹³ Evidence shows that Li's romantic poems were so famous in the second half of the ninth century that "men and women in the 'blue mansion' or *qinglou* 青樓 reciprocated poems, using Li

⁹¹ Cao Lifang, "Lun Han Wo shige zai tangsong shiqi de chuancun yu jieshou," 109.

⁹² Yang Wenjuan, "*Xianglianji* yanjiu," 11-12.

⁹³ Owen, *The Late Tang*, 337.

Shangyin's techniques, and they even used his poems directly,"⁹⁴ and some of Li's poems were being sung in the late or toward the end of the Tang.⁹⁵ Li Shangyin was not only a poet famous for heaping up quotations and allusions from a large number of books when writing poetry. He was also a poet consciously and innovatively using contemporary idioms and anecdotes to write poetry. Even though Li's poetry has the overall character of high register language, his imagery-rich romantic poetry would have been largely understandable by non-literati people, as in the case of Liuzhi who was a daughter of a merchant, if we trust Li's own testimony.⁹⁶ Li must have thought about the posthumous fate of his romantic poetry when he spread them, possibly through oral transmission and written manuscripts in his circles,⁹⁷ which did not prevent them to spread further to larger audiences within and outside of the literati circles. In the case of Liuzhi, he also intentionally had his 'Four Poems of Yan Terrace' inscribed on Liuzhi's courtyard wall for transmission.⁹⁸ Many of his romantic hermetic poems that might have originated in his personal experiences or observations, including the famous "Left Untitled", might have been made known like this. Whether Li made those collections of his romantic poems is not known. As will be explored further in the following chapter, Li was intentionally drawing elements from the culture of romance to reinvent romantic poetry for public circulation. Li was spreading his romantic poems in his name and by his hand,

⁹⁴ Zhong Laiyin, *Li Shangyin aiqing shi jie*, 406. See the examples and my discussion in Chapter IV.

⁹⁵ See Chapter IV.

⁹⁶ See Stephen Owen, "What Did Liuzhi Hear?," 81-118.

⁹⁷ Owen, *The Late Tang*, 346. Owen mentioned that "a selection of Li Shangyin's poems was in circulation in his lifetime".

⁹⁸ Owen, "What Did Liuzhi Hear?," 89.

but not as a collection of his personal memories as in the case of Yuan Zhen or as a reproduction of the romantic Palace Style poetry based on personal experiences in the case of Han Wo. Even though people participating in the culture of romance favored poems of romance of all kinds, as in all the three poets' case, only Li Shangyin's reinvention of romance in poetry between literati identity and contemporary culture created poems that were influenced by contemporary culture but also bore enduring literary and intellectual values.

Comparing Li Shangyin with Han Wo in the commentary history of their romantic poetry could be very interesting. The commentary history of Han Wo since the Song Dynasty separated his role as a loyal minister and as a poet. The commentators could not find him to be a coherent traditional patriarchal poet so they went to the extremes denying his authorship of *Xianglian ji*. Li Shangyin had no eminent political experiences as Han Wo. Nonetheless, he was treated with the same traditional criteria. His poetry was used to prove his "tainted political character".⁹⁹ This powerful commentary tradition was exactly the origin of the prevalence of interpreting Li's poetry with a preset political perspective that culminated in the Qing Dynasty and actually lasted throughout the premodern period. Luckily, thanks to Yang Yi, Li's romantic poems were preserved as part of his "complete" poetry, which had a critical influence on the Tang-Song poetic transition from immediately after their circulation to when the aesthetics of *ci* was finally established in the Song.

⁹⁹ Liu Xuekai, *Li Shangyin shige jieshou shi*, 11-13.

The Poetic Voices in the Romantic Poems of the Three Poets

Beautiful women appear in the romantic poems of all three poets, Yuan Zhen, Li Shangyin and Han Wo, as the main characters. But how the women are represented by them is different enough to create distinct subjective voices in their poems. Romantic Palace Style poetry often features a female main character under a collective male gaze that lacks any “colloquial frankness” that began to appear in the Five Dynasties in the Huajian poets’ *quzi ci* 曲子詞. According to Shields’s study of *Huajian ji* poets, “by using a confessional voice of male longing, the poets appropriated the impression of emotional sincerity and authenticity of *shi* -- for song lyrics as a literary genre”.¹⁰⁰ Shields is concerned with matters of gender, voice, and genre formation in these statements, but also that these poets were engaged in appropriating the impression of sincerity and authenticity imputed to the *shi* genre in a period when the distinction between *shi* poetry and *ci* poetry were not yet formed.¹⁰¹ The reinvention of convention based on the experiment of the plurality of voices as the most enduring legacy of the *Huajian ji* has a predecessor that has largely been overlooked: the exploration of subjective voice of uncertain gender, confessional first-person male voice, and dialogic

¹⁰⁰ Shields, *Crafting A Collection*, 228.

¹⁰¹ Although literati poetry of impersonated women appeared, broadly speaking, at the very start of the Chinese literati poetic tradition, the conventional view of poetry always tended to see the poet and the lyrical subject of the poem as one represented by the hermeneutic tradition of the *Odes* or *Shijing* 詩經 as “poetry expresses one’s aims” (*shi yanzhi* 詩言志). A big problem in it is that the orthodox themes of poetry led to confined self-expression and rendered the sincerity and authenticity of the poetic voice problematic. It seems that only through gender can we question the monopolizing view of the poet as the lyrical subject, which is not necessarily the guarantee of sincerity and authenticity if we think of the performative elements in Bai Juyi’s poems.

voices of the two genders and female subjective voice in Li Shangyin's romantic poems. The redefinition of poetic lyrical subjectivity points to "sentimentality" as a significant idiosyncrasy of Chinese literati that extends to late imperial times. Gender here is not really an issue of sexuality but represents the dialogism in male literati's self-fashioning by incorporating its always dispensable other.

In the mid Tang, Han Yu and his peers' promotion of ancient-style prose may be seen as an effort to reconstruct a common cultural identity through the reinvention of an ancient discourse. While Li Shangyin followed the poetic tradition to express one's aims in his many poems, his romantic poems responded to the historical condition of his time as well. Owen's argument that Li was letting the "immediacy of personal experience trump historical knowledge"¹⁰² could bear more significance if looked from this perspective. After the mid-Tang, the historical condition walked in the path of falling and the literary trends reflected the literati sense of crisis and challenge. Yuan Zhen, Bai Juyi, Li He and Du Mu all built their own stylish poetic language but still largely worked within the theoretical framework of the poetic canon to explore hidden desires and fears of the collective and individual self that may not be fully resolved by the revival of Confucian orthodoxy.

From the mid-Tang on, the romantic poems of Yuan Zhen started to describe the romantic encounter in male poets' perspective and opened up the writing of love poems of his own experiences and his reflections on them, which was completely new. In the

¹⁰² Owen, *The Late Tang*, 476.

seventy-couplet-long pentasyllabic regulated verse “Dreaming about Wandering in Spring” 夢遊春七十韻, the first twenty-eight couplets were about the lyrical subject’s as well as the poet’s encounter with a beautiful woman before he got married. Even though the romantic encounter is depicted in a dream frame and a grotto setting, and the inherited “describing things” influence is shown, the “I” was directly announced and “my” feelings are described in detail following “my” romance-searching movements. And the first-person self-reflection on “my” experiences of romantic encounter is present.

昔歲夢遊春，夢遊何所遇。夢入深洞中，果遂平生趣。Long ago, I dreamed of wandering in Spring; And in my dream of wandering, what did I encounter?

I dreamed I entered a deep grotto. And there fulfilled a lifelong wish.

清泠淺漫流，畫舫蘭篙渡。過盡萬株桃，盤旋竹林路。Limpid and cool flowed the shallow stream waters; In a painted skiff with orchid oars I crossed over. After passing by myriads of peach trees. I wound my way along a bamboo-lined path.

長廊抱小樓，門牖相回互。樓下雜花叢，叢邊繞鴛鴦。A long arcade enclosed a small building. Where gates and doors stood one upon another. Below the building, scattered flowers in bunches; Circling the flowers, mandarin ducks and drakes.

池光漾霞影，曉日初明煦。未敢上階行，頻移曲池步。A pool’s light rippled with colored mists. As the morning sun began to shine on the scene. Not yet daring to climb the steps. I paced back and forth beside the winding pool.

烏龍不作聲，碧玉曾相慕。漸到簾幕間，裴回意猶懼。 “Black Dragon” made no sound. Since “Azure Jade” had long admired me. Slowly I went within the shades and blinds. Yet faltered-intent but still anxious.

閑窺東西合，奇玩參差布。隔子碧油糊，駝鉤紫金鍍。 I wandered around to see the east and west chambers. Rare playthings line up here and there. Frames were covered by the green oiled cloth. Curved hooks were plated with a purple gold.

逡巡日漸高，影響人將寤。鸚鵡饑亂鳴，嬌娃睡猶怒。 A short while later the sun rose high. The shadow and sound indicated that the sleeper was about to wake up. The parrot was hungry and crying. The beautiful maid got mad even in sleep.

簾開侍兒起，見我遙相諭。鋪設繡紅茵，施張鈿妝具。 The curtains were lifted and the maid got up. Seeing me, she greeted from afar. The embroidered red quilt was laid on the bed. The case of makeups with pearl inlay was opened.

潛褰翡翠帷，瞥見珊瑚樹。不辨花貌人，空驚香若霧。 I sneakingly pulled the emerald curtain. I caught sight of the coral tree. I could not see the flower-like one. I was only startled by the mist of her fragrance.

身回夜合偏，態斂晨霞聚。睡臉桃破風，汗妝蓮委露。 Her body as she turned: a magnolia bloom drooping; Her carriage as she bent: dawn auroras gathering; Her sleepy face: peach blossoms wrecked by the wind; Her sweat-laden makeup: lotus covered with dew.

叢梳百葉髻，金蹙重臺屨。紕軟鈿頭裙，玲瓏合歡袴。A cluster of combs held her “many-storied shoes.” Carefully stitched, her “filigreed” robes; Fine and delicate, her “shared-joy” trousers.

鮮妍脂粉薄，暗淡衣裳故。最似紅牡丹，雨來春欲暮。Fresh and fair, her rouge and powder faint; Darkened and faded, her attire looking worn. She most resembled a red peony. When the rains come and spring is almost over.

夢魂良易驚，靈境難久寓。夜夜望天河，無由重沿溯。The dreaming soul is easily startled – It’s hard to lodge for long in numinous realms. Night after night, I gazed at the River of Heaven. With no way again to trace back the stream.

結念心所期，返如禪頓悟。覺來八九年，不向花回顧。When you’ve focused your thoughts on what your heart longs for. Then returning is like the “sudden enlightenment” of Chan. It’s been eight or nine years since I awoke. And I’ve never again looked back on the flowers.¹⁰³

Seen from the content and language, Han Wo’s *Xianglian* poems were closer to Yuan Zhen’s romantic poems such as this “Dreaming about Wandering in Spring,” but were completely free of the dream structure and self-reflection that indicate the restraint by the moral evaluation of the canonical poetic tradition. Compared to Yuan, Han Wo’s *Xianglian ji* in the late Tang cultural background was more freely depicting male literati’s romantic emotions and desires without using any dream frame or unreal grotto settings to

¹⁰³ Most of the lines I used here are translated by Shields in, “Defining Experience,” 73-75. Translations of the couplets from the eleventh to the seventeenth are my own. The layout of the text in the original language and the English translation of this poem is different from the other poems I cite because I’m following Shields’s layout in the single case.

serve the purpose of disguising and distancing. But they were astoundingly filled with pleasure seeking and self-indulgence.¹⁰⁴ The collection had a large portion of poems similar to romantic Palace Style poems that were just imitations with no change of voices seen, but there was also the first-person male literati as “I” that was unprecedentedly prominent and boldly announced, which was obviously distinct from the absent collective male literati’s gaze. In the late Tang atmosphere, we can imagine that literati writing this kind of poems in private or in entertainment settings was not a rare phenomenon. But Han was the representative as he compiled his romantic poetry into an anthology and explicitly traced it back to the Palace Style poetry of the late Southern Dynasties.¹⁰⁵ The blunt voice of first-person male desire is best exemplified by “After Occasionally Seeing Her Back, That Night I Dreamed” 偶見背面是夕兼夢, in which the speaker accidentally saw the back of the woman and became so lost in the desire that he dreams of her that night.

Your back white as milk and shoulder as jade,
like a white lotus covered with delicate red silk.
Tonight you clearly come to my dream,
though I have been sleepless for you.
Your eyes shine to me,

¹⁰⁴ As I will show later in Chapter III, Li Shangyin also wrote about sexual encounters in realistic details but created refined symbolic languages for it with both sides of the relation included, not as vulgar as Han Wo’s direct description of sexual desire with a male dominating voice.

¹⁰⁵ *Tang Song ci huiping Tang Wudai juan*, 224. “[When I compile *Xianglian ji*], I think about the time that Yu Xin was skilled at words when Palace Style was prosperous; I jest at *Yutai* why must it have the preface by Xu Ling” 遐思宮體未降，稱庾信工文；却諛《玉台》，何必倩徐陵作叙。

and arouse my heart of desire.

Don't say that paring up is difficult to realize,
there are coupled immortals in the tower of Qin.

酥凝背胛玉搓肩，輕薄紅綃覆白蓮。

此夜分明來入夢，當時惆悵不成眠。

眼波向我無端豔，心火因君特地然。

莫道人生難際會，秦樓鸞鳳有神仙。¹⁰⁶

The first couplet concentrates on depicting the woman's body and clothing, which is explicitly erotic like the Palace Style poetry but distinctly from the subjective male view with explicit strong male-centered sensations. In the second couplet, the male subjectivity appears, and in the third, the "I" (我) is physically announced and directly articulated. It is because of the "*jun*" 君 used here to address the woman that I translated the woman into "you" throughout the poem. The last couplet goes further by giving a suggestion to "pair up." Because of the "you," this suggestion is like asking for a lover's rendezvous. In the late Tang, this might have been normal but not normal to put this kind of work into a personal anthology. Even when only seeing it as a private love letter, it is not likely a good or a successful one but represents hormone-manipulated youth. The same problem happens in "Before Dawn" or "Wu geng" 五更 even though the sexual encounter depicted in the first three couplets is put in the frame of recollection.¹⁰⁷ There is an effort of rhetoric in "Before Dawn" but it seems so clumsy and non-effective.

¹⁰⁶ *Han Wo shiji jianzhu*, 277.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Li Shangyin has similar poems possibly as records of his own love life, in which he invented a set of metaphors for sexual encounters and centered his confessional voice more on the spiritual side of the love relations. He also has many romantic poems that are much more like real love letters that can be used by any male in a love relationship besides himself. The voices in his romantic poems are very complicated, including the traditional voice of impersonated female subject under the male gaze, the male first-person voice, the strong first-person voice of uncertain gender, the dialogic voices of the two genders, and the subjective female voice. Li's male first-person voice in love poems is well known to be emotion-oriented and thoroughly introspective. The most innovative voice is the strong first-person voice of uncertain gender. Some poems of the kind that went as far as can be read in a subjective female voice, together with a few unique poems written explicitly in the subjective female voice, form the most direct sharp contrast with the representation of women in the romantic Palace Style poems. For the purpose of comparison, his Yan Terrace poems in the voice of uncertain gender are closest to the romantic poetry convention because of its ancient style, yet are much more refined and sophisticated than the male confessional poems of Han as shown above. I use "Spring" of "Four Poems of Yan Terrace" translated and studied by Owen to show the change of voices:

The bright weather moves gradually along the east-west paths,
for how many days has the charming soul sought but not found?

The honeycomb's winged visitor is like the loving heart,

seductive leaves, courtesan twigs recognize him everywhere.
 Warm and hazy the glow moves slowly west of peach trees,
 her high chignon stands at the level of the chignon of peach tree.
 Male dragon, hen phoenix, where, faint in the distance?
 in floss in tangles, the strands profuse, even Heaven loses the way.
 Rising drunk, the faint sunlight is like first dawnlight,
 it shines on the curtains, the dream breaks off, the fading words are heard.
 In sorrow taking an iron net to draw in coral,
 the sea is vast, the heavens broad, nowhere to be found.
 The gown's sash lacks all feeling, it may be loose or tight;
 spring mists are naturally sapphire, the autumn frosts are white.
 Grind cinnabar, split stone—Heaven does not know—
 would that Heaven's Jail lock up the wronged soul!
 The lined clothes are cast off in the chest, the unlined silks brought out
 her fragrant flesh, chill, placed between, the tinkling pendants.
 This day the east wind cannot bear it,
 it turns into a hidden light entering the Western Sea.¹⁰⁸

風光冉冉東西陌，幾日嬌魂尋不得。

蜜房羽客類芳心，冶葉倡條遍相識。

暖藹輝遲桃樹西，高鬟立共桃鬟齊。

¹⁰⁸ The translation is Owen's, in "What Did Liuzhi Hear?," 81-82.

雄龍雌鳳杳何許，絮亂絲繁天亦迷。
醉起微陽若初曙，映簾夢斷聞殘語。
愁將鐵網罥珊瑚，海闊天翻迷處所。
衣帶無情有寬窄，春烟自碧秋霜白。
研丹擘石天不知，願得天牢鎖冤魄。
夾羅委篋單綃起，香肌冷襯瑤珮。
今日東風自不勝，化作幽光入西海。¹⁰⁹

Owen's translation goes with no definite gendered lyrical subject exactly because this poem has a voice of uncertain gender or the readings from lyrical voices of both genders are possible.¹¹⁰ According to Owen, the poem can be read as "the impassioned poet pouring out his heart for his lost beloved," and it also "can easily be read with a woman as the protagonist."¹¹¹ This poem has the inclusiveness of genders also in its wording and structuring of figurations as the imageries address male and female in a love relation in parallel, as in the couplet "Male dragon, hen phoenix, where, faint in the distance? / in floss in tangles, the strands profuse, even Heaven loses the way" 雄龍雌鳳杳何許，絮亂絲繁天亦迷. The parallel of Dragon, or *long* 龍, and Phoenix, or *feng* 鳳, can be considered an invention in Li's romantic poems to inclusively represent both genders in the description of love emotions and even sexual encounters.¹¹² This is the poem that allegedly enchanted Liuzhi and made her eager to have a romantic relationship

¹⁰⁹ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 85.

¹¹⁰ Owen, "What Did Liuzhi Hear?," 99-101.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹¹² See Zhong Laiyin, *Li Shangyin aiqing shi jie*, 416-422. I will elaborate it in Chapter IV.

with the poet Li Shangyin. As Owen pointed out, Li Shangyin is imitating Li He in this set of poems. However, it is not the self-revealing style of language and figuration that is most important here but the new subjective voices that indicate changes in poetic ideology, which are studied in a broader cultural and literary context of the Tang-Song transitional period in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III

LI SHANGYIN'S LOVE POEMS AND THE CULTURE OF ROMANCE

Stephen Owen identified the context of “a discursive culture of romance” for Li Shangyin’s Yan Terrace poems “with understanding guided by contemporary poetic usage and contemporary images of love and desire,” where “the poet is not ‘pouring out his heart’ but demonstrating a sensibility.”¹¹³ While Chapter Two has discussed the poetic representations in the contemporary romantic discourse, this chapter is about the context of “the culture of romance” defined by Stephen Owen based on his study of *chuanqi* fiction. Li Shangyin by using fictional references in romantic poetry not only shows his acceptance of *chuanqi* as a reader but also that he incorporates *chuanqi* elements in his writing of romantic poetry to explore new poetic voices in romantic representations. By reviving the cultural background and specific circumstances of romantic events associated with the poems either by poetic preface or the contextualization of the creation circumstances, I examine how Li Shangyin uses *chuanqi* and the culture of romance to reinvent romantic poetry.

Owen in his article about Li Shangyin’s “Spring” of “Four Poems of Yan Terrace” describes how the female subjective perspective of the poem leads to a better understanding of the cultural context of the time. The preface of “Five Poems on Liuzhi” by Li connects the Yan Terrace poems to Li’s love story with Liuzhi, who perfectly represents a marrying-age girl deeply affected by the culture of romance in Li’s time.

¹¹³ Owen, “What Did Liuzhi Hear?,” 111.

According to Owen, “Spring” can definitely assume a female perspective with a subjective voice. Li Shangyin by writing Yan Terrace poems is presenting himself as the “young talent” to primarily male audiences interested in supporting talent as well as presenting himself as someone “with the sensibility of a lover to participants in a discursive culture of romance.”¹¹⁴

As Owen points out in “What Did Liuzhi Hear?,” the discourse of romance in the early ninth century indicates that “the demimonde achieved an unprecedented level of publicity.”¹¹⁵ The culture of romance in the Tang Dynasty was mundane and shared by the community. Most renowned writers of *chuanqi* were not the best poets at the time but still, the creation of *chuanqi* and the culture it promoted was closely related to the writing of poetry.

What kind of attitude did Li Shangyin hold toward this culture of romance? Li Shangyin was a writer mainly of parallel prose and poetry and a scholar busy in the pursuit of officialdom. However, under the influence of the prosperity of *chuanqi* and the culture of romance in the early ninth century, although he was not among those who put their main efforts in writing *chuanqi*, he wrote fictional work as most scholars did at that time. For example, he allegedly wrote a piece of *fu* 賦 of three fictional monsters.¹¹⁶ He also wrote a book of miscellaneous narrative notes named *Za zuan* 雜纂.¹¹⁷ As a poet who likes to write love poems or at least likes to use romantic allusions in his poems, the

¹¹⁴ Owen, “What Did Liuzhi Hear?,” 117.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 86.

¹¹⁶ *Su Shi Wen Ji* 蘇軾文集, ed. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 2618-2619.

¹¹⁷ See the English translation of it, *Derangements of My Contemporaries: Miscellaneous Notes*, trans. Chloe Garcia Roberts (New York: New Directions Books, 2014).

influence of *chuanqi* on his poetry was almost a certainty. The Chinese Li Shangyin specialist Yu Shucheng found that while other poets in the Tang Dynasty uses *Shiji* 史記 and *Hanshu* 漢書 much more than *Jinshu* 晉書, Li Shangyin instead uses *Jinshu* as much as *Shiji* and *Hanshu*.¹¹⁸ In addition to that, “he also uses *Nanshi* and *Beishi* compiled in the early Tang frequently, which was a rare phenomenon among previous poets.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, he also uses plenty of references from historical and contemporary fictions in his poetry.¹²⁰ Li Shangyin made a confession in “Letter to Cui Huazhou” 上崔華州書: “There is no difference between the contemporary and the classical in expressing Dao. I do not just cite from the classics and histories and discard contemporary works when I write. How could one rank the innumerable books, including the rare and strange ones, arbitrarily at all?” 行道不系今古，直揮筆為文，不能攘取經史，諱忌時世。百經萬書，異品殊流，又豈能意分出其下哉。¹²¹ Li Shangyin’s use of this kind of allusions shows his great interest in fictional references.

More unconventional than using references from unofficial histories is his inclination to use allusions from contemporary literary works and *chuanqi* fictions. How were Li Shangyin’s romantic poems related to *chuanqi* in his unique use of references and allusions and his reinvention of romantic poems? His unique uses of religious, mostly

¹¹⁸ Yu Shucheng, “Lun xiaoshuo,” 48-59.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 50. Premodern historians and contemporary scholars all agree that the eight histories compiled in the early Tang (that is *Jinshu* 晉書, *Liangshu* 梁書, *Chenshu* 陳書, *Beiqishu* 北齊書, *Beizhoushu* 北周書, *Suishu* 隋書, *Nanshi* 南史 and *Beishi* 北史) draw from literary sources. They not only recorded a large amount of literary works such as poetry and *fu* 賦 but also incorporated fictional materials from folk tales and legends as well as unofficial histories.

¹²⁰ Yu Shucheng, “Lun xiaoshuo,” 51-56.

¹²¹ Ibid., 50.

Daoist, references that could seem anecdotal and even fictional will be discussed in the following chapter. Here I will discuss the influence of *chuanqi* as the representative of the culture of romance on the representation of love relations in Li's romantic poetry concerning the construction of poetic texts and the reference to fictional works. I will also discuss how the culture of romance as the lively cultural context prompted his reinvention in the representation of romantic love in poetry.

The Consorting Culture in the Mid and Late Tang and the Culture of Romance

Owen in his collection of essays about the mid Tang, *The End of the Chinese Middle Ages*, pointed out that mid-Tang poetry “broke away from the focus and restriction of genre” and the poetic history of the mid Tang “is no longer poetry’s history alone.”¹²² At this time when “poetry, classical tales, and nonfictional prose share common concerns,”¹²³ a culture of romance identified by Owen, represented by *chuanqi* 傳奇, had profound influence on romantic poetry, as most obviously evidenced by Yuan Zhen, who was a leading writer of both genres.¹²⁴

Li Shangyin does not have any romantic *chuanqi* story preserved, but there is a poetic preface similar to the Tang *chuanqi*. A poetic preface is a literary form that the poets of the Tang Dynasty loved. According to statistics, there are more than 900

¹²² Stephen Owen, *The End of the Chinese “Middle Ages,”* 3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹²⁴ Owen had two essays on the culture of romance and “The Tale of Yingying” (by Yuan Zhen) that elaborated the relation between poetry and narrative in the *chuanqi* stories, see Owen, *The End of the Chinese “Middle Ages,”* 130-173.

prefaces by Tang poets recorded.¹²⁵ As a literary form, poetic prefaces experienced the influence of parallel prose in the early Tang and the influence of prose in the high Tang and mid Tang. In the late Tang, although the parallel prose language was rejuvenated, the poetic preface was largely influenced by *chuanqi*. Its form remained prose, but the content changed from the previous documentary characteristics to the pursuit of legendary and romantic elements seen in *chuanqi* with an anecdotal nature.¹²⁶ Du Mu's "Poem of Du Qiuniang with a Preface" 杜秋娘詩並序¹²⁷ and "Poem of Zhang Haohao with a Preface" 張好好詩並序,¹²⁸ Liu Yuxi's 劉禹錫 (772-842 AD) "Song of Tainiang with a Prelude" 泰娘歌並引,¹²⁹ and similar works represented the enthusiasm of the literati for topics related to women's lives in the late Tang period. The content and style of *chuanqi* naturally affected the style of poetic prefaces and poetry itself. The fact that poetic prefaces were mostly written in prose despite the prevalence of parallel prose also shows that the language of *chuanqi* had a profound influence on poetry.

A number of existing poetic prefaces in the mid and late Tang are related to women, most of which are stories about women's lifetime encounters from the third-person viewpoint. This was not seen in previous poetic prefaces. According to Zhang Hongyun, there are twenty-two poems handed down in the Tang Dynasty about the singing girls, dancers, and the wives and concubines that involve some level of romance.¹³⁰ Fang

¹²⁵ Zhang Hongyun 張紅運, "Tangdai shixu yanjiu" 唐代詩序研究" (PhD diss., Shaanxi Normal University, 2007), 55.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 59-65.

¹²⁷ *Quan Tang shi*, 全唐詩, ed. Peng Dingqiu 彭定求 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 5938-5939.

¹²⁸ *Quan Tang shi*, 5940-5941.

¹²⁹ *Quan Tang shi*, 3996-3997.

¹³⁰ Zhang Hongyun, "Tangdai shixu yanjiu," 117.

Qianli's 房千里 (around 840 AD) "Sent to My Concubine Ms. Zhao" 寄妾趙氏 is writing about the conjugal relationship between husband and concubine from the second-person perspective.¹³¹ Shen Yazhi's 沈亞之 (781-832 AD) "Dreaming of Mourning Nongyu of Qin" 夢挽秦弄玉 is about the dreamed conjugal relationship between husband and wife in the second person.¹³² Luo Qiu's 羅虬 (around 874 AD) "Poems of Comparing Hong'er with Others" 比紅兒詩 is in the third person but the poet has a romantic relationship with Hong'er.¹³³ All of the others are written in the third person so the narrated content does not directly involve the poet.¹³⁴ Li Shangyin's preface to "Five Poems on Liuzhi" is the only preface written in the first person where the poet is a participant in the romantic relationship, which is unprecedented.

From the hermeneutical tradition, the commentators of the past generations described the literati's sympathy with the singing girls as one in which the feeling of being ignored on their talent prompts them to identify with those singing girls abandoned by the society. However, although the Tang was a culturally and socially liberal dynasty compared to the other dynasties in Chinese history, there was still a wide gap between the status of men and women. From the poetic prefaces, it can be seen that the women lamented by the literati were often those ruthlessly abandoned by men and had the least social status. Even if the literati felt suppressed and even abandoned by the ruling class, the rhetoric of

¹³¹ *Quan Tang shi*, 5900.

¹³² *Quan Tang shi*, 5581.

¹³³ *Quan Tang shi*, 7625.

¹³⁴ See the list of the poems in Zhang Hongyun, "Tangdai shixu yanjiu," 117. All of the poems can be easily found in *Quan Tang shi*.

comparing themselves to the singing girls does not make much sense. As Owen pointed out:

It has been suggested that erotic figuration was a private mode of expression of problems with a patron or frustration in a career. In a very general way the *Chuci* tradition might sanction that, but in Tang poetry, this usually occurs through direct reference to the *Chuci* 楚辭 tradition. To borrow the contemporary poetic discourse of romance for such an end would have few precedents.¹³⁵

These poetic prefaces in which the literati express their sympathy with the singing girls are better seen as influenced by the contemporary literary culture where women's voice was given unprecedented opportunities to be heard, especially in the *chuanqi* narratives.¹³⁶ The poets use them to enrich the meaning of literariness or *wen* 文 by showing their ability to represent these artistically talented women in a genre that had the convention of lyrical authenticity. The intense lament by the literati shows the intense enthusiasm for *wen* as their defining characteristics.

Li Shangyin was famous for his parallel prose in the late Tang. The majority of his prose anthology *Fannan wenji* 樊南文集 was written in parallel prose. However, Li was already prestigious for his ancient prose when he was only sixteen years old.¹³⁷ That being said, clearly, the prose language used in the preface for "Five Poems on Liuzhi" is not in the ancient style but with contemporary language not only in the dialogues between

¹³⁵ Owen, *The Late Tang*, 341, n. 11.

¹³⁶ For example, "The Tale of Yingying" is "unique among Tang tales in sustaining two opposing points of view" in which Yingying was given the opportunity to show her voice. See Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages,"* 149.

¹³⁷ *Li Shangyin wen biannian jiaozhu*, 1713.

Rangshan and Liuzhi but also in the narrative part. The detailed narration is also imitating *chuanqi* in general other than the ancient prose that pursues simplicity. Although Li Shangyin did not leave behind any *chuanqi*, the prose style of *chuanqi* in the late Tang period did have an important influence on him in this preface. It as his only poetic preface is written in prose and almost equivalent to a *chuanqi* prose story. This is the preface to “Five Poems on Liuzhi”:

Liuzhi was a girl of Luoyang who lived in the same ward as I. Her father had been a quite successful merchant, who died in a storm on the lakes. Her mother had no care for her sons, but gave all her attention to Liuzhi. At seventeen when making herself up and coiling her hair, she would never complete her toilette, but would instead get up and go off. She would blow shrill notes on leaves, [her sweet breath as if] chewing the stamens of flowers; she would ply the zither strings and finger the pipes, making melodies of wind and billows on the sea, notes of hidden remembrance and intense grievance. Those living close around her, on familiar terms with her family and frequenting the household, heard that after ten years she was still consorting [with men], and it seemed to them that she was a dreamer in a drunken sleep, and they broke connections with her and made no offers of marriage.

My cousin Rangshan lived right next to Liuzhi. On a previous day in spring’s thick shade Rangshan dismounted beneath Liuzhi’s southern willow tree and

intoned my “Yan Terrace Poems.” Liuzhi was amazed and asked, “Who could feel this? Who wrote it?” Rangshan replied, “He is a young cousin of mine.”

The next day I went on horseback with him to her street. Liu-zhi finished getting made up and had her hair done in a forked coil; arms folded, she stood by the door, hiding her face with a sleeve. She said to me directly, “Are you the cousin? Three days from now we in the neighborhood are due to go to the riverside to wet our skirts [in a lustration ceremony]; I’ll meet you there, waiting with a *boshan* incense burner.” I agreed.

It happened at the time that I was to go with a friend to the capital, and as a practical joke he had stolen my bedding and gone on ahead, so I couldn’t stay. It was snowing when Rangshan came and said, “An eastern grandee has taken her.”

The next year Rangshan was returning east. We parted by the Xi, whereupon I entrusted these poems to him to write on her former dwelling.¹³⁸

柳枝，洛中里孃也。父饒好賈，風波死湖上。其母不念他兒子，獨念柳枝。生十七年，塗妝縮髻，未嘗竟，已復起去，吹葉嚼蕊，調絲擲管，作天海風濤之曲，幽憶怨斷之音。居其旁，與其家接故往來者，聞十年尚相與，疑其醉眠夢物斷不媧。余從昆讓山，比柳枝居為近。他日春曾陰，讓山下馬柳枝南柳下，詠余燕臺詩，柳枝驚問：“誰人有此？誰人為是？”讓山謂曰：“此吾里中少年叔耳。”柳枝手斷長帶，結讓山為贈叔乞詩。明日，余比馬出其巷，柳枝丫鬢畢妝，抱立扇下，風鄣一袖，指曰：“若叔是？後三日，鄰

¹³⁸ Translated by Stephen Owen, in “What Did Liuzhi Hear?,” 89-90.

當去濺裙水上，以博山香待，與郎俱過。”余諾之。會所友偕當詣京師者，戲盜余臥裝以先，不果留。雪中讓山至，且曰：“為東諸侯取去矣。”明年，讓山復東，相背於戲上，因寓詩以墨其故處云。¹³⁹

Put in the group of poetic prefaces handed down, Li Shangyin's preface for "Five Poems on Liuzhi" is singular and astoundingly unique. It is neither in a third-person view outside the romantic relationship nor an illusory first-person view of dreaming about oneself in a romance. It is a first-person narration of the real-life experience of the poet himself, which is presented as a real story yet subjective from the poet's view. The difference between stories like "The Tale of Yingying" and "The Tale of Huo Xiaoyu" 霍小玉傳¹⁴⁰ and the tales about mortal men encountering goddesses is that the latter puts the secular romance into the unrealistic background of the world of the immortals. The former is given as completely real romantic relationships under the scrutiny of social morality that is supposed to reflect the real social culture of the time. The preface of Li Shangyin's "Five Poems on Liuzhi" is also supposedly completely based on reality. Yet what is more interesting is although it is written in the first-person view of the male poet, it is Liuzhi who weighs more in the two romantic protagonists, emphasizing the acceptance of romantic poetry by female audiences (or readers if the poems are read) as one crucial and even initiating force of real romance that was the basis of the culture of romance at that time.¹⁴¹ In this preface, Li's participation in the culture of romance, like

¹³⁹ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 112-113.

¹⁴⁰ See Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages,"* 178-204.

¹⁴¹ See Owen, "What Did Liuzhi Hear?," 96-111, for the analysis of Liuzhi's acceptance of "Spring" of the Yan Terrace poems as an audience.

those of the other authors of poetic prefaces with the theme of women and romantic love, shows the ability to appreciate the personality and artistic talent of the female protagonist. Li's *Liuzhi* also has the quality of romantic sensibility with a much more salient female subjectivity that was emphatically appreciated. However, the poet enters the documentary-style narrative to become the male protagonist, endowing the romantic interaction in the narrative as well as the poems with lyrical authenticity. The subjective consciousness of the female protagonist is made prominent through the interaction with the male protagonist who is none other than the poet. This female subjectivity interacting with male has rarely been seen before in literati poetry, which endows the poetic preface with the same ability to represent romantic culture as the romantic *chuanqi* at the time. As shown by Owen in his book, the culture of romance in the Tang is a chorus composed of a male perspective and the representation of a female view attempting to control the story.¹⁴² The female voice and the interaction between male subjectivity and female subjectivity were the fundamental factors that promoted the emergence of the new literary culture in the transitional period starting from mid-Tang.

In his research of "The Tale of Yingying," Owen argues that there are two readings of the story, a lesson of Confucian morality and an encounter between the authentic feelings of two persons with free will, fighting with each other.¹⁴³ Therefore, the expression of the culture of romance in the romantic *chuanqi* reflects the struggle that prose as the most important representative of the orthodox literary form has to make

¹⁴² Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages,"* 160.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 152.

when incorporating romantic elements into the literati subjectivity. Then what about the other orthodox form “poetry”? What was it like when romantic poetry that truly represents the private subjectivity of an individual person appeared?

Late Tang Romantic Poems and Tang *Chuanqi*

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the different representations in romantic poems by Yuan Zhen, Li Shangyin and Han Wo and their attitude toward romantic poetry. Before reconstructing the details of the cultural background in Li’s creation of some of the most famous romantic poems, we should first subvert the former image of Li Shangyin as a lonely and sentimental poet. In fact, in addition to participating in the romantic culture directly related to women as illustrated in the preface discussed in the previous section to “Five Poems on Liuzhi,” Li Shangyin was also an active participant in the romantic culture of the male literati circle. This is reflected in his contacts with Li Ying 李郢 (817-880 AD), Wen Tingyun 溫庭筠 (812-870 AD), Duan Chengshi 段成式 (803-863 AD) and others,¹⁴⁴ and also reflected in many of his entertainment poems.

Among Li Shangyin’s entertainment poems, there are the following that are related to romantic affairs: “Playfully Presented to My Roommate on the Banquet” 飲席戲贈同舍, “Two Poems to a Singing Girl” 贈歌妓二首, “On a Banquet with Singing Girls” 妓席, “Two Poems Responding Playful Works Sent Me by a Friend” (another title “Playfully Responding to Linghu the Eighth”) 和友人戲贈二首 (一作和令狐八戏题),

¹⁴⁴ Cui Jiying 崔際銀, *Shi yu Tang ren xiaoshuo* 詩與唐人小說 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2004), 37.

“Playfully Presented to Scholar Ren after Writing the Two Poems” 題二首後重有戲贈任秀才, “Playfully Written on a Friend’s Wall” 戲題友人壁, “Written on a Banquet” 席上作, “Presented to His Excellency Grand Councilor Linghu (Lord Tianping) in a Banquet at His Residence” 天平公座中呈令狐相公. And he also had those impersonating poems: “Presented to the Two Secretaries on behalf of an Official Entertaining Girl at a Drinking Party” 飲席代官妓贈兩從事, “Responding on behalf of Someone” 代應, “Two Poems Presented to Someone on behalf of Someone else” 代贈二首, “Asking the Bride to Take off the Wedding Veil on behalf of Scholar Dong” 代董秀才卻扇, “Mocking Princess Xu on behalf of a House Entertaining Girl of Lord Yue” (another title “Responding on behalf of Princess Xu” 代越公房妓嘲徐公主 (一作代公主答)).¹⁴⁵ Most of these poems follow the customs of romantic poems generated in public entertaining circumstances at that time by being playful and showing little real affection, but some also have certain characteristics typical of Li’s poems, such as the allusion to the goddess of Wu Mountain in “Written on a Banquet,” which rhetorically embellishes the popular poetic game of praising the beauty of the host’s entertaining girls with the ancient mystery that makes the poem susceptible to being allusive.¹⁴⁶ The depiction of the psychology of the official entertaining girl sending off the old master and welcoming the new in “Presented to the Two Secretaries on behalf of an Official Entertaining Girl on a Drinking Party” is much in line with the customs at that time, and is extremely

¹⁴⁵ All poems can be easily found in *Li Shangyin shige jijie*.

¹⁴⁶ Li’s “Presented to His Excellency Grand Councilor Linghu (Lord Tianping) in a Banquet at His Residence” 天平公座中呈令狐相公 is a representative of the poetic game of praising the beauty of the host’s entertaining girls.

inconsistent with the affectionate style of Li's poems with detailed description of romantic sentiments, which can be regarded as ironic. All these show that Li Shangyin's poems reflect that he had close contact with the romantic culture at his time, which was just inevitable in his official life.

Li Shangyin, as special as he is, implies his own attitude about romantic relations even in poems for purely entertaining circumstances. Reasonably, his poems in the voice of lyrical subjectivity with the theme of romantic love should bear more associations with his personal views and experiences on the culture of romance. However, Li Shangyin did not "get the name of a rakish man in the Blue Mansion" 贏得青樓薄倖名 as Du Mu did.¹⁴⁷ He even refused to accept the singing girl given by his supervisor to be his companion after the death of his wife. He did not keep many concubines at home like Bai Juyi either, not even one. There is no doubt that many of Yuan Zhen's romantic poems were written for one "Shuangwen" 雙文. Some commentators believe that Scholar Zhang in his "The Tale of Yingying" is Yuan himself and Yingying is "Shuangwen."¹⁴⁸ Li Shangyin's love poems are obscure, of which the most difficult to understand are the poems left untitled. Some scholars believe that most of his love poems were written for his first love who was a Daoist Nun, but there has been no conclusive evidence.¹⁴⁹ My argument holds that although the relationship between Li Shangyin's romantic poems and romantic culture is not as closely related to his private life as Yuan Zhen's and Bai Juyi's,

¹⁴⁷ *Quan Tang shi*, 5998.

¹⁴⁸ The argument receives a big boost after Chen Yinke's 陳寅恪 research in his *Yuan Bai shi jianzheng gao* 元白詩箋証稿 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001), 110-120.

¹⁴⁹ Liu Xuekai 劉學鐸, "Ben shiji Zhongguo Li Shangyin yanjiu shulue" 本世紀中國李商隱研究述略, *Wenxue pinglun*, no. 1 (1998): 42-43.

it plays nonetheless the most important role in making romantic love one of the literati's identity symbols and in reinventing the art of romantic poems by transcending the traditional poetic teachings and the convention of romantic poems, especially the biased impersonated gendered view, to achieve a fundamental change in the representation of romantic love in poetry.

Tang *chuanqi* had a great influence on the romantic poems in the Tang dynasty. The characters in Tang *chuanqi* extensively appear in the romantic poems in the late Tang, such as Cui Yingying 崔鶯鶯, Chui Hui 崔徽, Huo Xiaoyu 霍小玉, and other famous figures. Luo Qiu's 羅虬 (fl. 874 AD) set of poems "Poems of Comparing Hong'er with Others" 比紅兒詩 compare Cui Yingying with Hong'er in the seventy-seventh and Cui Hui in the fifty-sixth poems of the set:

Deep affections (expressed by poems) are booked for the human world,

Hong'er is resurrected for this after her death.

Unlike (the irrelevant) Minister Li of the previous era,

who spent his talent on Yingying.

人間難免是深情，命斷紅兒向此生。

不似前朝李丞相，枉拋才力為鶯鶯。¹⁵⁰

A long song brings an ocean of bitterness and regret,

my endless sorrow floats with the water that couldn't be held back.

I wonder how pretty was Cui Hui (compared to Hong'er),

¹⁵⁰ *Quan Tang shi*, 7689.

was she worth the words of the talented Weizhi (Yuan Zhen).

一首長歌萬恨來，惹愁漂泊水難回。

崔徽有底多頭面，費得微之爾許才。¹⁵¹

The first of Wang Huan's 王渙 (859-901 AD) "Twelve Poems of Melancholy" 惆悵詩十二首 reproduces a scene from the *chuanqi* narrative of "The Tale of Yingying" by Yuan Zhen:

Under the eight-layered silk quilt with the pattern of mandarin duck,

Head by head they slept in the midnight of lovers' rendezvous.

The bell rang and Hongniang the maid called her to return,

She wept before him as she picked up her inlaid golden hairpin.

八蠶薄絮鴛鴦綺，半夜佳期並枕眠。

鐘動紅娘喚歸去，對人勻淚拾金鈿。¹⁵²

In the sixth poem of Wang Huan's same set, he uses the story from "The Tale of Huo Xiaoyu":

Overwhelmed by sickness in the cold spring night,

Thinned, and crying like the flowers, her everything is unpromising.

Her fickle lover has cut off all response,

She woke up from the dream of the shoes of lovers' rendezvous and sighed.

夜寒春病不勝懷，玉瘦花啼萬事乖。

薄幸檀郎斷芳信，驚嗟猶夢合歡鞋。¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ *Quan Tang shi*, 7687.

¹⁵² *Quan Tang shi*, 7989.

There are still much more cases of poetry using *chuanqi* story as the subject or as allusions.

One can imagine that under the influence of the culture of romance and the contemporary poetic discourse of romance, this might have become a fashion at the time and the poets might have had practical personal interest in the function of the poem, either to ingratiate themselves with political patrons who also loved *chuanqi* or to win a singing girl's favor.¹⁵⁴

The incorporation of *chuanqi* characters and stories into the imagery, allusion, and even the entire poem is also seen in Li Shangyin's poems, most of which are associated with romance. His famous "Palace of Sui" 隨宮 has the couplet "If the last king of Chen were met in the afterworld, how could bringing up again the song of 'Flowers on Jade Trees in the Palace Backyard' be appropriate?" 地下若逢陳後主，豈宜重問後庭花， which was not his invention but was based on the plot in the *chuanqi Records of Lost Stories of Sui* or *Sui yi lu* 隨遺錄, written at the beginning of the Tang.¹⁵⁵ "Revisiting the Goddess Temple" 重過聖女祠 contains the couplet "E Lühua descends to no permanent residence, Du Lanxiang knows no set time when she will return to heaven" that uses the story of Du Lanxiang in *Searching for the Deities*, or *Sou shen ji* 搜神記, by Gan Bao 干

¹⁵³ *Quan Tang shi*, 7990.

¹⁵⁴ See the discussion of shared interests of *chuanqi* in factious relations in the late Tang in Nie Shijia 聶時佳, "Li Shangyin wutishi yu Tang chuanqi guanxi xinzheng" 李商隱無題詩與唐傳奇關係新證, *Zhongguo shixue* 16 (2012): 148.

¹⁵⁵ *Tang Song chuanqi ii ananvi* 唐宋傳奇集全譯 ed. and trans. Lu Xun 魯迅 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2009) 294. This *chuanqi* has another name *Lost Pieces in the Era of Dave* or *Dave shi yi ii* 大業拾遺記. It is generally believed to be written by Yan Shigu 顏師古 at the beginning of the Tang, but it has also been attributed to Du Bao 杜寶, who lived before Li Shangyin's time. See Zhang Peiheng 章培恆 and Luo Yuming 駱玉明, *Zhongguo wenxue shi* 中國文學史 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1996), 174.

寶 (282-351) in the Eastern Jin,¹⁵⁶ which appears in Du Guangting's 杜光庭 (850-933) *Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City*¹⁵⁷ or *Yongcheng jixian lu* 墉城集仙錄, which was later than Li's time, as one of the Daoist transcendents.¹⁵⁸ Li's "Written at the River of Lizhou" 利州江潭作 has the line "In the future nobody will be sending the swallow jerky" 他時燕脯無人寄 that uses the story about the brothers of Luo Zichun to allude to the male lovers of Empress Wu of Tang, which was from the *chuanqi* story "The Legends of the Four Men of Liang Dynasty," or "Liang si gong ji" 梁四公記.¹⁵⁹ The line "there must be Cui Luoshi in the mortal world" 人間定有崔羅什 in "The Goddess's Temple" 聖女祠 uses the name from Duan Chengshi's *Miscellanies of Youyang* or *Youyang za zu* 酉陽雜俎.¹⁶⁰ In "Mocking Princess Xu On Behalf of a House Entertaining Girl of Duke Yue," Li as the poet was impersonating the house courtesan of Princess Lechang to mock the princess's predicament after the reunion with her former husband Xu Deyan. The story of the princess's separation in the downfall of the Chen Dynasty and then the reunion with her husband was from the *chuanqi* collection *Records of the Singular* or *Du yi zhi* 獨異志 by Li Kang 李亢 in the Tang.¹⁶¹ These are only some examples of Li's uses of women- and

¹⁵⁶ Gan Bao 干寶, *Sou shen ji* 搜神記, annot. and trans. Huang Diming 黃滌明 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1991), 39-40.

¹⁵⁷ The translation is by Susan Elizabeth Cahill in her book *Divine Traces of the Daoist Sisterhood: Records of the Assembled Transcendents of the Fortified Walled City* (Magdalena, NM: Three Pines Press, 2006).

¹⁵⁸ *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, comp. Li Fang 李昉 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 387.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3404-3405.

¹⁶⁰ Yu Shucheng, "Lun xiaoshuo," 50. Yu discussed the possibility of Li Shangyin to have read *Miscellanies of Youyang*, and mentioned the book as Cui Luoshi's origin in a footnote on the same page.

¹⁶¹ Li Rong 李冗, *Du yi zhi* 獨異志, ed. Zhang Yongqin 張永欽 and Hou Zhiming 侯志明 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 386.

romance-related *chuanqi* allusions in his poetry, indicating that Li Shangyin is greatly influenced by *chuanqi*. As Yu Shucheng concludes from his statistics, Li's favor of fictional references is shown in his use of them on a much larger scale as compared to Du Fu and Han Yu who also use a lot of such references in their poetry.¹⁶² Li is greatly influenced by *chuanqi* as do the other poets in the mid-to-late Tang period, but his case is especially important because his poetic involvement with *chuanqi* played an important role in his poetic reinvention.

“Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge”: Li’s Rendering of a Literati Friend’s Romance

The relation of Li Shangyin’s romantic poetry to Tang *chuanqi* has impact on the change of his ideas of literati identity also in that he integrates his serious perception of love with poetic writing about other literati’s love stories, where he utilizes his technique of fictional references to intentionally make a poem on occasion into a hermetic poem of romance that is distinct from traditional romantic poems. He not only expands the capacity of romantic poetry in literati first-person view by combining the narrative with the lyrical as in the preface to “Five Poems on Liuzhi” to highlight the interaction between the two genders, but also renders the story of literati and their lovers as the protagonists of his poetry of romance. He has many playful poems on romantic matters, which he does not identify with. But he also has written poems for literati friends he can

¹⁶² Yu Shucheng, “Lun xiaoshuo,” 49-50.

identify with that demonstrates his very serious poetic pursuits. One best example is his poetry responding to Li Ying 李郢 (819-880), a romantic poet of his time and his friend.

In the Tang Dynasty, famous poems about other people's romantic love include the following: Li Shangyin's own poems playfully presented to his friends as discussed previously in this chapter; similar poems by other poets; long narrative poems about contemporary figures like Bai Juyi's "Song of Everlasting Sorrow" 長恨歌; poems about historical figures that contain romantic elements; and poems about mystic legends and immortals that often contain romance the poet does not participate in. The poem studied here, "Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge" 板橋曉別 is about the love between the poet's friend and his lover from the perspective of the third-person view of the poet, and the poet was also a participant in the actual parting event, thus a witness to it. Similar works were extremely rare in Tang poetry. Because the tradition of Chinese poetry is quite different from that of the West, Chinese poets have a much closer relationship with the lyrical subjects in their works. In addition, since romantic love is not the orthodox theme of literati poetry, the poems with romantic love as the theme in most cases appear in impersonated perspectives as in the imitation of *yuefu* by the male poets, meaning male literati before the mid Tang usually had to take the role of a woman as the lyrical subject to write poems about their understanding of real-life love relations. There were very limited exceptions before the Tang, which began to change in the middle and late Tang, as described in Chapter one. However, the theme of romantic love is unique because male poets easily come to treat this theme in the first-person view in a solo of male

consciousness, just like when they impersonate a female. As we will see more in Chapter Four, Li Shangyin also has love poems that can be read in imitation of a female voice, in which unlike the conventional objectified female under the male gaze, the imitated female voice expresses subjective feminine consciousness and naturally forms a dialogical relationship with the male poet as the author. The dual consciousness of the two genders establishes the consciousness of love. The influence of the culture of romance on love poems lies in the fact that in some romantic *chuanqi*, women's subjectivity is revealed by women's autonomic behaviors narrated, communicating with the authorial male voice. As Owen puts it, "the culture of romance depended on a fiction of continuing free choice" by both the male and the female in the romantic relationship.¹⁶³

In "Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge," both the woman and the man are present in the poetic scene. The poet is a witness of the parting event as well as the emotional connection of the two lovers. After looking back at the previous happy meeting in the "high city," the hero and the heroine who were about to part were both taking up the roles of the "parting person," and the tension of sorrow was created by the heart-felt participations of both. This was very likely not a private event that happened at the Wooden Bridge but at least the poet Li Shangyin was also a participant and witness. The potential other male and female who may have been present were also witnesses if not poetic recorders of the event. The equal presence of men and women in the poetic scene

¹⁶³ Owen, *The End of the Chinese "Middle Ages,"* 133.

in and out of the poetic text was in contrast with the overall social normality inherited from the convention at the time, which means this poem and its creation background was bearing revolutionary new cultural elements.

The poem is a unique one among Li Shangyin's fascinating creation of heptasyllabic quatrains, a very special farewell poem describing his friend Li Ying's 李郢 parting with his lover. This poem has not been thoroughly studied by scholars but received high praises by traditional commentators and was still seen as one of the best of Li Shangyin's heptasyllabic quatrains. It is no doubt a poem about romance and was obviously under the influence of the culture of romance in the Tang. Considering the fact that the prosperity of the creation of Tang *chuanqi* was earlier than the peak of the writing of romantic poetry in the Tang, the influence of Tang *chuanqi* on romantic poems was very likely. Some scholars studying this poem pointed out the influence but did not try to dig out the poetic and ideological innovations and the importance of the circumstances in which the poem was created under this influence.

Looking back at the high city walls, you see the Heavenly River set at dawn;
the windows of the post-pavilion overlook the tiny ripples.

The Water Sprite is about to leave, riding on a carp;
all night long, many red tears have been shed on the lotus flowers.¹⁶⁴

回望高城落曉河，
長亭窗戶壓微波。

¹⁶⁴ The translation is by James Liu, in *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, 117.

水仙欲上鯉魚去，
一夜芙蓉紅淚多。¹⁶⁵

According to Liu Xuekai and Yu Shucheng's commentary in *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, Li Shangyin was following Lu Hongzhi to leave Xu Military Office for Bian Military Office, and Li Ying was leaving Bian Military Office for his home in Suzhou. They met in Bianzhou and stayed in touch for several days. Then they saw each other off by the Wooden Bridge at the west of Bianzhou city. Judging by the description “cheeks as red as ripe peaches” 露桃塗頰 in “Seeing Li Ying off to Suzhou at the Bank of Bian River” 汴上送李郢之蘇州 and “red tears [that] have been shed on the lotus flowers” 芙蓉紅淚 in the poem above, the time was about in the sixth lunar month when peaches get ripe and lotus flowers blossom. Besides “Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge,” four other poems by both Li Shangyin and Li Ying on the same farewell event were written around the same time, within a few days. The year was the 4th year of Dazhong reign (851).¹⁶⁶

The poem describes the parting of Li Ying with his lover by the Wooden Bridge. “Looking back at the high city walls, you see the Heavenly River set at dawn” indicates that the time is dawn and implies that the meeting of the two lovers is coming to an end as the allusion used here is the folk tale of the Cowherd and Weaver Girl. “Looking back at the high city walls” suggests that they have had a good time there thus memories flood back as the time of parting comes near. “The windows of the post-pavilion overlook the

¹⁶⁵ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1121.

¹⁶⁶ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1114-1117. I base my discussion on the careful dating of these poems by the editors.

tiny ripples” is describing the place where the two lovers stayed together last night. The word “overlook” indicates that the window is close to the water, which precludes the mythical allusions relying on the display of water-related images in the following couplet: “The Water Sprite is about to leave, riding on a carp; /all night long, many red tears have been shed on the lotus flowers.”

“Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge” has some striking characteristics as follows. First, the short poem uses three mythical tales as allusions, which was not common in the literati heptasyllabic quatrains after the high Tang when poets writing in the poetic form started to extensively imitate *yuefu*, an originally folk literature that usually uses few allusions, and the poems were more frequently written for singing.¹⁶⁷ The first verse uses the familiar folk tale of Cowherd and Weaver Girl implicitly without pointing out the names, alluding them to the two lovers’ parting. The third line uses the story of “Qingao” 琴高 in the warring states period from *The Tales of All the Transcendents* or *Lie xian zhuan* 列仙傳, who practiced immortality.¹⁶⁸ He dived into the water to seize the son of the dragon after telling his disciples to build a temple beside the water with clean tribute provided. Later he came back as expected riding on a red carp and stayed for a month and came back to the water again. The last line uses the story of “Xue Lingyun” 薛靈芸 in *Records of Picking up the Lost Pieces* or *Shiyi ji* 拾遺記, in which the protagonist used a jade spittoon to hold her tears as she left her parents for the

¹⁶⁷ Xiao Ruifeng 肖瑞峰 and Xiang Hongqiang 項鴻強, “Ousan Liubian Yu Shengtang Qijue Fanshi de Xingcheng” 偶散流變與盛唐七絕范式的形成, *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰線, no. 5 (2018): 173-74.

¹⁶⁸ Liu Xiang 劉向, *Lie xian zhuan jiaojian* 列仙傳校箋, annot. Wang Shumin 王叔岷 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 60.

capital to be a palace lady.¹⁶⁹ The tears in the spittoon coagulated and turned into the blood when she arrived at the capital. All these stories come from folk tales or privately compiled historical tales and miscellanea, with only the story of Weaver Girl and Cowherd having possible Daoist implications because of the deification of Weaver Girl starting from the Southern Dynasties.¹⁷⁰ *The Tales of All the Transcendents* as the source of the allusion of Qingao was much more possibly seen as mythical stories until the Ming Dynasty but not Daoist histories.¹⁷¹ The story of “Xue Lingyun” was not recorded in official history but was in *Shiyi ji*. It was later recorded in *Extensive Records of the Taiping Era* or *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 in the Song Dynasty¹⁷² and *Stories of Seductive Allure and Strange Things* or *Yan yi bian* 艷異編 in the Ming Dynasty,¹⁷³ both of which are anecdotal stories of a literary nature. This corresponds to the overall artistic style of Li Shangyin’s romantic poetry but is unusual in the late Tang and even his own farewell poems.

Second, it is a farewell poem in which we see the shadows of similar parting scenarios in the *chuanqi* stories. The theme of the poem is farewell but the poet’s

¹⁶⁹ Wang Jia 王嘉, *Shiyi ji yizhu* 拾遺記譯注, trans. and annot. Meng Qingxiang 孟慶祥 and Shang Weishu 商微姝 (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1989), 194.

¹⁷⁰ Zong Lin 宗懷, *Jingchu suishi ji* 荆楚歲時記, annot. Song Jinlong 宋金龍 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), 53-54.

¹⁷¹ The allusion of Qingao here, though surely having the mythical temperament, is unlikely to have Daoist meaning. Even though *Lie xian Zhuan* 列仙傳 was cataloged in *Zhengtong daoze* 正統道藏 compiled in the Ming Dynasty, scholars until today have not reached an agreement on whether it is a collection of mythical tales or a Daoist classic that shaped the development of Daoism because the compilations of Daoist classics in previous dynasties were mostly lost. See Wei Peipei 韋珮珮, “*Lie xian zhuan yanjiu*” 列仙傳研究 (Master’s thesis, Shandong University, 2015), 10.

¹⁷² *Taiping guangji*, 2139-2140.

¹⁷³ Wang Yanzhou 王弇洲 comp., *Yan yi bian* 艷異編, ed. Sun Baozhen 孫葆真 et al. (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1988), 111-112.

perspective is detached from the scene described in the poem, and the whole poem is about the story of the two lovers. Although it uses mythical tales in high density, the post-pavilion image corresponds to the title of the poem and sets the poem in the human world. It is an improvisation impromptu, not the kind of creation with a lot of abstruse historical references that usually require deliberate composition. Therefore the allusions must be popular and well-known ones that were easy to recognize, at least familiar to Li Ying and his lover.

This poem is created in the context of a set of farewell events between friends probably with other people presented, which was set in the larger background of the culture of romance in the Tang Dynasty. So considering its particular characteristics stated above and its high artistic achievement, we need to examine its causes from three aspects: the creation context of this poem and the cause of Li Shangyin's writing of it; what role Li Ying plays as the one to write for and the responder to Li Shangyin; and what Li Shangyin expects to achieve by this poem.

Based on the five poems written successively by Li Shangyin and Li Ying on their parting, we could imagine what happened during the few days they stayed together in Bianzhou. First, Li Shangyin and Li Ying wrote, respectively, "Seeing Li Ying off to Suzhou on the Bank of Bian River" 汴上送李郢之蘇州 and "Seeing Li Shangyin the Censor-in-Attendance off on a Diplomatic Mission into the Pass" 送李商隱侍禦奉使入關 for each other, both heptasyllabic regulated verses on the theme of

farewell.¹⁷⁴ Then, judging by the title of Li Shangyin's second poem, "Li Ying Parted with His Lover at the Northeast Hall of Marquis Wei's Mansion, I Use What I Saw to Write This Poem" 魏侯第東北樓堂郢叔言別，聊用書所見成篇, it was obviously written at the time when Li Ying was holding a banquet with his friends in Lord Wei's (the head of the military office) mansion because he was leaving soon. No matter if the poem was written at the banquet and read out loud there or written after the banquet, it is probably based on what Li Shangyin actually saw at the banquet. No matter how big the banquet was and who attended it, at least from this poem by Li, it was a public event involving romantic situations. Based on our understanding of the culture of romance in the Tang Dynasty, this was just a common scenario. What makes Li Shangyin's poem unusual is that he was writing for a special literati friend as a main character of the event and because of the public nature of the romance.

Finally, when Li Shangyin and Li Ying parted by the Wooden Bridge, they again wrote for each other farewell poems featuring the bridge as the parting place. Other people present at the scene, except for Li Ying's lover mentioned in the second poem, might include other friends of Li Ying's as is the situation in Li Shangyin's second poem. "Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge" was created at the end of the series of the farewell events, so the audience present might have at least included Li Ying, Li Ying's lover, and perhaps some other participants.

¹⁷⁴ Li Ying's "Seeing Li Shangyin the Censor-in-Attendance off on a Diplomatic Mission into the Pass" has this couplet: "We met for several days, treating each other with sincere hearts: at the gatherings of the guests and military staff one after another we were as drunk as butterflies" 相逢幾日虛懷待，賓幕連期醉蝶同. Quoted in *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1114.

From the three poems Li Shangyin wrote for Li Ying, there is obviously a changing tendency from conforming to the convention to totally inventing. The initiating poem is Li's "Seeing Li Ying off to Suzhou at the Bank of Bian River".

A hardship-chanting poet with high self-esteem as you are,
the old garden of Duke Liang will be tens of thousands of miles away.
By the misty curtain, you should recall the song of Baizhu,
but who will be my company to chant at dusk (after you go)?
Cheeks as red as ripe peaches by the mossy well,
waists as slender as willows in the villages by water.
Is the grave of Su Xiaoxiao still there?
summon her soul as you enter the road covered by purple orchids.

人高詩苦滯夷門，萬裏梁王有舊園。

烟幌自應憐白紵，月樓誰伴咏黃昏。

露桃塗頰依苔井，風柳誇腰住水村。

蘇小小墳今在否，紫蘭香徑與招魂。¹⁷⁵

The first couplet is saying that being a poet with great talent but experiencing hardship, Li Ying was taking up temporary residence in Bian County and working in the Bian Military Office without being promoted for a long time.¹⁷⁶ It sets the

¹⁷⁵ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1110.

¹⁷⁶ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1111, n. 3.

background of the farewell and shows the author's sympathy for his poet friend. Then the following three couplets imagine the situation of Li Ying back in Suzhou, specifically his pleasure in appreciating the beautiful women and scenery there, and lament the loss of a great literati friend's company. The last couplet especially uses the allusion of Su Xiaoxiao to imply Li Ying's frustration over his unrecognized talent, resonating with the first couplet.

This is a very conventional farewell poem, both in form and content. But obviously, maybe because of the close relationship between Li Shangyin and Li Ying, and Li Shangyin's acknowledgment of Li Ying as a romantic person, it is not hard to trace the elements of romance in this poem. Focusing on the pleasure of appreciating dancing and visiting courtesans so prominently in a farewell poem was already unconventional. Other than that, the phrase "cheeks as red as ripe peaches" alludes to the *Beishi* 北史.¹⁷⁷ According to Zhu Xi 朱熹, the *Beishi* and *Nanshi* 南史 by Li Yanshou 李延壽 are just anecdotal fictions except for the part that was later taken up by *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑.¹⁷⁸ As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Li was very conscious of his unconventional favoritism over contemporary references.

The second poem Li Shangyin wrote for the parting events was titled "Li Ying Parted with His Lover at the Northeast Hall of Lord Wei's Mansion, I Use What I Saw to Write This Poem" 魏侯第東北樓堂郢叔言別，聊用書所見成篇. Other than the poem itself, the title is worth our attention as well. First of all, it refers to a specific location,

¹⁷⁷ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1111, n. 6.

¹⁷⁸ Yu Shucheng, "Lun xiaoshuo," 49.

namely the northeast building of Lord Wei's mansion. Second, Li Shangyin states that he was writing about what he actually saw, which means he was writing about the love story from the perspective of a witness of the parting event. In addition, this parting event happened at the farewell banquet when possibly many people were present in a public place as it happened in Lord Wei's mansion. The people present at the banquet could have only been literati officials as Li Shangyin was. From Li Shangyin's naming of the poem, we can see that he was writing it as a poetic recording of a romantic event that might have been public.

The dark building connects to the night pavilion, no need to wait for the dusk.

Reunion to stop the tears might not happen, but it won't prevent reunion in the dreams.

Discursive like going through garden path, warm like approaching the fireplace.

There is no water on the bottom of the sea, where the immortals reside.

Window hooks lock in fragrance; people drunk, by the human-shaped wine cup.

Old love fades like dust; the new year will run ahead like the lightning.

Rosy clouds remain only pieces, mountain peaks above clouds have no roots.

Your barge will travel thousands of miles, the lamplight looming between the reeds.

暗樓連夜閣，不擬為黃昏。

未必斷別淚，何曾妨夢魂。

疑穿花逶迤，漸近火溫磨。

海底翻無水，仙家卻有村。
鎖香金屈戌，殢酒玉昆侖。
羽白風交扇，冰清月映盆。
舊歡塵自積，新歲電猶奔。
霞綺空留段，雲峰不帶根。
念君千里舸，江草漏燈痕。¹⁷⁹

As Stephen Owen pointed out, “there was nothing earlier to compare with the discursive culture of romance that appeared early in the ninth century -- in poems (sometimes with prefaces), in tales and in anecdotes. Such written works make frequent reference to another important component of the culture of romance, public gossip. In this period the demimonde achieved an unprecedented level of publicity.”¹⁸⁰ In the form of pentasyllabic regulated verse that prospered starting from the Southern Dynasties, setting the title aside, the poem is obviously imitating the *Qi Liang ti* 齊梁體 poems, but the usual mode of “woman being gazed” is substituted by the romantic relation, so the usual “poem on things” becomes substituted by a “poem on occasion” with the trait of “poems on things,” specifically a romantic occasion that has a public nature. This poem was generated in the larger context of the culture of romance with Li’s preference of alluding to images of the immortal world to distance the usual gaze in the mode of “describing things” and “representing emotions,” and framed with meticulous descriptions of romantic emotions. At the same time, it also reflects Li

¹⁷⁹ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1117.

¹⁸⁰ Owen, “What Did Liuzhi Hear?,” 86.

Shangyin's particular habits of using references and allusions. More unconventional than the use of references from *Beishi*, he uses "Jade Kunlun" from contemporary literary sketches and *chuanqi* fictions.¹⁸¹ However, even though the influences of *chuanqi* and the culture of romance were obvious, it was still not enough to motivate Li Shangyin to write a distinctively unique masterpiece of a love poem in which he as the poet completely detach himself from the poetic scene to highlight the romantic interaction between Li Ying and his lover.

"Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge" was set in the last scene of this series of farewell events with a clear romantic focus. Because no other related poems are found, we tentatively assume that at least Li Shangyin, Li Ying and Li Ying's lover were present. From the two poems that feature the Wooden Bridge in their titles by Li Shangyin and Li Ying, it is reasonable to say that they met at the Wooden Bridge, a generic, symbolic place in the culture of romance,¹⁸² and that when Li Ying wrote another farewell poem to Li Shangyin, "Parting Again at the Wooden Bridge" 板橋重送, the latter responded by "Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge." The "parting" in the latter shifts from Li Shangyin's parting with Li Ying to the parting between Li Ying and his lover while Li Shangyin was still using this poem as a response to Li Ying's "Parting Again at the Wooden Bridge", in which the "parting" is between Li Ying and Li

¹⁸¹ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1117, n. 9.

¹⁸² Bai Juyi has a poem titled "The Road to the Wooden Bridge" 板橋路 ending with the scene of parting with a lover, see *Bai Juyi ji*, 423. "Twenty miles west of the garden of Liang, there are thousands of willow branches on a spring canal. As if intended, I pass the road again, it is still the same old Wooden Bridge fifteen years ago. I once parted with a jade beauty on the bridge, and have not heard from her ever since" 梁苑城西二十里，一渠春水柳千条。若为此路今重过，十五年前旧板桥。曾共玉颜桥上别，不知消息到今朝。

Shangyin. The theme of Li Shangyin's poem shifts from farewell to romance as he places himself outside of the poem as a witness of the lovers. This does not mean that Li Shangyin was withdrawing but instead indicates that he was more actively participating in the culture of romance in Tang Dynasty.

Li Ying was a prominent character in the culture of romance, who was an active participant in the culture of romance in Tang Dynasty.¹⁸³ While high register language and obscurity in the identification of the characters in the poem are common traits of Li Shangyin's love poems, the straightforwardness of "Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge" was to a large extent caused by the circumstance of writing for Li Ying who is known for his romantic reputations.

Li Ying was well known in his time as a poet as well as a talented and romantic scholar even though he has few poems handed down in history. He might not qualify to be called a great poet but he was famous as a romantic poet, which was enough to make him a remarkable figure in the culture of romance. Poems in the Tang that were associated with anecdotes were not necessarily the best poems, but the combination of a nice poem and a romantic figure or romantic stories associated with that figure makes an ideal subject for public circulation.

We do not know much about Li Ying's life because few official records are left about him, but the unofficial records and anecdotes about him are easy to find. An

¹⁸³ Pan Min 潘敏, "Li Ying yanjiu" 李郢研究 (Master's thesis, Xiangtan University, 2011), 9-10, 15-16.

anecdote from Liu Chongyuan's 劉崇遠 *Miscellany of Master Jinhua* 金華子雜編 reads:

Li Ying wrote beautiful poetry, and also had the character of a young and talented scholar as he was the disciple of Minister Zheng. He lived in Hangzhou and did not try very hard in getting promoted in his official career and died as a supernumerary official. Before he set out for the provincial civil service examination, he competed with another man to marry a girl in his neighborhood. The girl's family provided a solution to the awkward situation promising to marry the girl to whoever first came with a thousand strings of cash. Li Ying and the other one came at the same time with the money. The family again asked them to write a poem to decide who was better. Thus Li Ying got the girl.

李郢詩調美麗，亦有子弟標格，鄭尚書顥門生也。居於杭州，疏於弛競，終於員外郎。初將赴舉，聞鄰氏女有容德，求娶之，遇同人爭娶之，女家無疑為辭。乃曰：“備一千緡先到，即許之”。兩傢俱錢，同日皆往。複曰：“請各賦一篇，以定勝負。負者乃甘退。”女競適郢。¹⁸⁴

From this piece of material, we can see that Li Ying as an ideal candidate in the culture of romance was related to his image as a talented scholar who was also serious in love matters, and he became famous for it before he started his official career. This fame continued to the time when he became an imperial official in Chang'an after he passed

¹⁸⁴ Liu Chongyuan 劉崇遠, *Jinhua zi zhibian*, in *Tang Wudai biji xiaoshuo daguan* 唐五代筆記小說大觀 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), 1763.

the provincial examination in the era of Xiantong (861-874), during which time he famously exchanged poems with Yu Xuanji 魚玄機 (844-871).¹⁸⁵

Li Ying's two poems written for Li Shangyin in the set of parting events are "Seeing Li Shangyin the Censor-in-Attendance off on a Diplomatic Mission into the Pass" and "Parting Again at the Wooden Bridge". We can see from "Parting Again at the Wooden Bridge" that Li Shangyin and Li Ying met each other in an entertainment hall.¹⁸⁶

Examined together with the first two more conventional poems by Li Shangyin as we have discussed earlier, Li Ying's two responding poems both center on the frustration over the failure in his political career and the two poets show profound sympathy for each other, which indicates that they identify with each other as underappreciated literati poets with political potential. This empathy exists in another layer of their relationship as both of the poems have allusions about romance. Li Ying's "Parting Again at the Wooden Bridge" uses the form of heptasyllabic regulated verse, but three couplets out of four are about romance, and the third couplet without alluding to romance has the actual effect of highlighting the theme of the romantic feeling in the poem. It was answering this poem, "Parting Again at the Wooden Bridge", which expresses a very strong feeling of romance, that Li Shangyin wrote his "Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge."

West of the old garden of Duke Liang and upon the river,

You are enchanted by the place of romance.

¹⁸⁵ Pan Min, "Li Ying yanjiu", 10.

¹⁸⁶ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1114-1115.

How many pink beauties are lovesick for you?

A song of music is played to the end to ask for your stay.

The king's affairs need your undistracted attention,

Sojourn life is like a dream.

If you meet the goddess besides the waters of Luoyang,

Don't fall in the hands of the Blue Mansion and the beautiful women there.

梁苑城西蘸水頭，玉鞭公子醉風流。

幾多紅粉低鬟恨？一部清商駐拍留。

王事有程須竹竹，客身如夢正悠悠。

洛陽浸畔逢神女，莫墜金樓醉石榴。¹⁸⁷

In the above analysis, I have tried to restore the circumstances and the larger cultural background of the farewell poetry exchange event between Li Shangyin and his friend Li Ying. But what the influence of that larger culture on Li Shangyin remains to be examined. I have mentioned earlier that the Tang *chuanqi* thrived at a time earlier than the peak of romantic poetry in the Tang. What attitude did Li Shangyin hold toward that larger culture of romance? What exactly prompted him to write the heptasyllabic quatrain parting with Li Ying might never be known but the influence of that culture and the earlier tradition of romantic *chuanqi* stories is not hard to detect. Li Shangyin lived at the time when *chuanqi* had peaked. *Chuanqi* was a combination of prose and poetry both in content and form. According to the statistics by Qiu Changyuan, the heptasyllabic

¹⁸⁷ Li Shangyin *shige jijie*, 1114-1115.

quatrain was the most popular poetic form that appears in *chuanqi*. For example, Pei Xing's 裴鉶 (fl. 860) namesake *chuanqi* anthology incorporates forty-seven poems, of which forty are heptasyllabic quatrains.¹⁸⁸ Li Shangyin's choice of heptasyllabic quatrain can thus be read as an indication of his expectation for making the poem more widely available to contemporary readers and possibly also those in later generations. "Parting at Dawn by the Wooden Bridge" was based on a real story and real persons but their identification plays little part in constructing the aesthetic value of the poem. Taken out of the context of the parting, the poem has the potential of connecting to a much larger audience than the direct participants in the event, as would a *chuanqi* story. Whether Li Shangyin did this intentionally or not we have no conclusive evidence, but given Li Shangyin's familiarity with the larger romantic culture of the time, it is possible that it might have been his intention to do so. What further supports this reading is that the poet's traditional role as the lyrical subject "describing things" or "representing emotions" is muted in the poem and that the voices of both sides in love at the parting are highlighted. This kind of poems indicate that Li was conversant in the conventions of the culture of romance, who used his romantic poems not as a collection of personal memories as in the case of Yuan Zhen or a reproduction of the Palace Style poetry based on personal experiences as in the case of Han Wo.

As Stephen Owen puts it, in the context of "the discursive culture of romance, with understanding guided by contemporary poetic usage and contemporary images of love

¹⁸⁸ Qiu Changyuan, *Shi yu Tangdai wenyan xiaoshuo*, 79.

and desire... the poet is not 'pouring out his heart' but demonstrating a sensibility."¹⁸⁹

"Scattered through poem collections of the ninth century are verses of erotic invitation and of longing real or fictive. While such poetry may well have been used in real situations, it is, in no sense, private: it is shared with a larger audience that appreciates and enjoys images of pleasure and desire."¹⁹⁰ There were many examples that poets in the Tang used *chuanqi* to spread their poems; Li Shangyin's use of the format might have been more assertive than we previously thought. And this may have important consequences for our understanding of how literati began to form mutual identifications by establishing a subjective lyrical voice of romantic emotional sincerity supported by the reciprocity of voices of both genders in romantic *ci* poetry in the Tang-Song transitional period.

¹⁸⁹ Owen, "What Did Liuzhi Hear?," 111.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

CHAPTER IV

THE RELIGIOUS PERCEPTIONS OF LOVE:

LI SHANGYIN'S LOVE POEMS IN THE DAOIST AND BUDDHIST CONTEXTS

This chapter discusses the religious culture of the Tang as a critical factor in Li Shangyin's redefining of gender relations in the representations of romantic poetry. The chapter consists of four parts after an introduction to Li's general religious experiences and his incorporation of religious elements in his poems: Li's poetic representation of Daoist nuns; his representation of traditional Daoist goddesses and their love emotions; the non-traditional Daoist images in his romantic poetry; and his association with Buddhism concerning the Buddhist thinking of *qing* 情 in his poetic representation and *qing* as a general ideological basis for his romantic poetry. I argue that Li's deep association with both Daoism and Buddhism formed the basis for his unconventionally equal representation of both genders, influenced especially by the Daoist cosmology and his own experiences and ideas of *qing*.

Peter Bol in *This Culture of Ours* writes when addressing Yang Yi's admiration of Li Shangyin: "Li had not been an advocate of antiquity, nor did he accept the notion that the sages of the Classics had a privileged claim to *tao* [Dao]."¹⁹¹ On the one hand, openness and innovativeness in Li's literary thoughts are reflected in his absorption of contemporary culture, and on the other hand, his works are closely related to his religious thoughts. During the confluence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism in the Tang

¹⁹¹ Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, 162.

Dynasty, the Confucian scholar-officials were influenced by both Buddhism and Daoism. For example, Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) was interested in Daoism and also showed lifetime passion to Buddhism, which is present in many of his poems and affected his poetic style, while his faith in Confucianism had never changed.¹⁹² While most people were superficial in their relationship with religion, Li Shangyin was different, whose early years of learning was deeply associated with Daoism, and the shift from Daoism to Buddhism in his later years was also facilitated by real-life experiences. The influence of Daoism on his romantic poetry is especially great, not only in rhetoric but also in ideology.

Gong Pengcheng pointed out the limitation of looking at Li's poems from political or literary perspectives separated from his life experience on the whole, and that Li's entire life is branded with Daoism and Buddhism. He writes:

If you look at the experiences of the literati in the Tang Dynasty studying Buddhism, you will find that Li Shangyin is very special. The literati of the Tang Dynasty studying Buddhism were mostly subject to a basic pursuit -- seeking longevity and immortality. The most important example is Bo Juyi's initial interest in Daoism. Bai once wrote a poem to ridicule Han Yu and said that he took sulfur and died from it; he ridiculed Han Yu, but he himself also took sulfur, and his friends died from it too. He finally found that taking sulfur did not offer immortality, not even longevity, and he left Daoism in an angry manner. He

¹⁹² See Sun Changwu 孫昌武, "Du Fu yu Fojiao" 杜甫與佛教, *Dongfang luntan* 東方論壇, no. 4 (2005): 42-46.

turned to Buddhism and named himself Lay Buddhist of Mount Xiang. He learned Daoism in his early years and turned to Buddhism in his late years, but the reason he turned to Buddhism was to acquire peace of mind in his own limited life to settle the fear of eventual death. But Li Shangyin is different because his poems never show that he believes in the immortality of the gods and goddesses. For example, on the one hand, he longs for the life of the gods: “I should have known that I have the predisposition of being a transcendent, for the past ten years I’ve been dreaming about collecting immortal herbs” 自有仙才自不知，十年長夢采華芝, in which he apparently believes that there is a predisposition in his personality to be a transcendent. On the other hand, however, his belief in Daoism is not for avoiding becoming grey-haired but a pursuit to be fulfilled before death: “Don’t waste life away till grey-haired, I have heartfelt expectation of going to Song Mountain (for Daoist practice)” 莫道白頭長只爾，嵩陽松雪有心期, saying that he intends to go back to the two mountains Yuyang and Wangwu where he learned Daoism in his early years. He was really eager to learn Daoism and did not have utilitarian demands like Bai Juyi. It is even more interesting as to his belief in Buddhism in his later years. Li Shangyin turned to Buddhism when Emperor Wu was trying to destroy Buddhism and when the power of the Buddhist establishments in the Tang was the most debilitating. He invested in Buddhism despite the situation, and his

belief in Buddhism became more and more pious, which clearly shows that his attitude was different from most of his contemporaries.¹⁹³

At present, the general orientation of the study of Li Shangyin's life in Chinese academia is based on the idea that, a self-labeled imperial descendant, he was ambitious in his official career but had little success as can be seen in his many prose works and some poems. Li's favor of the out-worldly way of life in the Daoist belief was largely neglected. Li regarded the court painter Cheng Xiuji (804-863) as his kind, even an idol, who according to his epitaph, "had an elegant and distant temperament, fair and beautiful posture" and was thought of by Li Yuan 李远 (fl. 831), who was mentioned in parallel with Xu Hun 許渾 as two influential poets in the ninth century,¹⁹⁴ "as a peer of Shen Yue and Xie Tiao". "In the early Dazhong era (847-860)," it continues, "Li Shangyin, a literary person [*ci ren*], often socialized with him, thinking that his metaphysical words and temperament could help him clear his mind."¹⁹⁵ This aspect of Li Shangyin is seldom mentioned in current scholarship, but image of him as a factious figure with improper conduct in the factional struggle in the court of the time gives rise to the illusion that he

¹⁹³ Gong Pengcheng 龔鵬程, *Zhongguo sige shilun* 中國詩歌史論 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2008), 39-40. It needs to be added that by the mid Tang, "external alchemy" 外丹 had been the main Daoist belief and practice even though there was intellectual criticism of it all the time. Other than Han Yu and Bai Juyi, Du Fu also was associated with it and expressed his regret to not have it successfully concocted as he approached his end. See Duan Yongsheng 段永昇, "Tangdai shiren dui Daojia Daojiao sixiang de jieshou 唐代詩人對道家道教思想的接受 (Master's Thesis, Shaanxi Normal University, 2009), 35-36.

¹⁹⁴ Liang Chaoran 梁超然, "Wantang Shiren Li Yuan Kaolue" 晚唐詩人李遠考略 *Guangxi minzu xueyuan xuebao (shehui kexue ban)*, no. 2 (1990): 47.

¹⁹⁵ *Tangdai muzhi huibian* 唐代墓誌彙編, comp. Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), 2398. "[Cheng] had an elegant and distant temperament, fair and beautiful posture; Li Yuan from Zhao County thought of him as a peer of Shen Yue and Xie Tiao. Li Shangyin, a literary person [*ci ren*], often socialized with him, thinking that his metaphysical words and temperament could help him clear his mind" 性夷雅疏澹，白皙美風姿，趙郡李遠見之，以為沈約、謝朓之流。大中初，詞人李商隱每從公遊，以為清言玄味，可雪緇垢。

was desperate for personal advancement. Generally speaking, Li Shangyin's friendship outside of the political factions has been insufficiently recognized, and the literati's friendship outside of the political context often indicated their real state of mind.¹⁹⁶ What is more interesting is that this epitaph for Cheng Xiuji called Li Shangyin a *ci ren* 詞人 (*ci* 詞 at Li's time very likely means poems for singing), which shows that in the minds of his late Tang contemporaries, he was appreciated mainly as a poet of romantic love because most of the poems for singing were in the subject of romantic love at the time. In the mid and late Tang, poets were started to be called a *ci ren* if they wrote poems for singing and that were related to romance. For example, an anecdote has it that Emperor Xuan called 李白 (701-762) a *ci ren* when he summoned him to write a song lyric for him and Consort Yang.¹⁹⁷ There is no record of Li Shangyin writing poems specifically marked for singing, but it is possible that his poems were being sung in the time when the above epitaph for Cheng Xiuji was written. Because of the largely romantic nature of the poems for singing, the term *ci ren* at this period could also describe broadly the romantic style of his poems. The combination of romantic poetry and "metaphysical words and ideas," if we can borrow Li Shangyin's comment on Cheng Xiuji to describe himself, is very interesting. It shows that there is more to his ideology than his official career can fully explain. We will find that his acceptance of Daoism was not confined to his early

¹⁹⁶ Other than Li's obvious association with Daoist priests and nuns, he also had plenty of association with Buddhist masters and monks as will be discussed in the last part of this chapter.

¹⁹⁷ Ding Fubao 丁福保, *Lidai shihua xu bian* 歷代詩話續編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 14-15.

experience of learning Daoism at Mount Yuyang and writing poems of Daoist Nuns but was born deeply in his ideas and practiced throughout his life.

When Li Shangyin was about fifteen years old, he was learning and practicing Daoism on Mount Yuyang. Yuyang Mountain was a branch of Wangwu Mountain. Wangwu Mountain was the first of the Ten Daoist Lands and the most prosperous place of Daoism in the Tang Dynasty.¹⁹⁸ The mountain stream between the east and west peaks of Yuyang Mountain was called Stream Yu or *Yu xi* 玉溪, and Li Shangyin was known by this style name “Scholar of Stream Yu” or *Yu xi sheng* 玉溪生.¹⁹⁹ In the ninth year of the Dahe 大和 reign (834), when he went to the capital the fourth time for the civil service examinations and still failed, he wrote a poem titled “Return to the East” 東還 to show his heart:

I should have known that I have the predisposition of being an transcendent
The past ten years I’ve been dreaming about collecting immortal herbs.
The autumn wind sweeping the ground and dusk approaching with golden clouds,
I shall go back to Songyang to look for my old teachers.

自有仙才自不知，
十年長夢采華芝。
秋風動地黃雲暮，

¹⁹⁸ Liang Guifang 梁桂芳, “Li Shangyin yu Daojiao” 李商隱與道教, *Yanbian daxue xuebao shehui kexue ban* 27, no. 5 (2005): 6.

¹⁹⁹ *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 recorded “three scrolls of the Scholar of Stream Yu’s poems” 玉溪生詩三卷 as Li Shangyin’s poetry anthology. See *Xin Tang shu*, comp. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 1612.

歸去嵩陽尋舊師。²⁰⁰

Later on, after becoming an official, he wrote many poems and proses in memory of his experience of being a young Daoist. Even after he turned to Buddhism in his late years, he still remembered: “When I was young, I aspired of achieving in Daoism” 兼之早歲，志在玄門。²⁰¹

Li Shangyin not only had very formal experiences of Daoist monasticism but also followed the Shangqing 上清 school, which began to take hold in Daoist practice in the late Tang.²⁰² The Shangqing school advocated the “internal alchemy” or *nei dan* 內丹 method and paid special attention to techniques of concentrated contemplation. The so-called “internal alchemy” is to use one’s body as an alchemy stove, and the essence, energy, and spirit as medicine, to form an immortal pill in the body through maintaining the energy and concentrating on the mind to achieve eventual transcendence. Concentrating on the mind means that the Daoist practitioner focuses his or her mind to receive his or her wandering spirit. In this stage, the practitioner sees images of the immortals and the transcendental world and can experience the imagination of encountering the immortals.²⁰³ In a sense, Li Shangyin carried out the “internal alchemy” method and the “mind concentrating” technique from Daoist thought and practice in his

²⁰⁰ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 79.

²⁰¹ *Li Shangyin wen biannian jiaozhu*, 1902.

²⁰² The Shangqing Daoist sect got its name from the Shangqing Sutra, which was given to Yang Yi 楊羲 by Lady Wei 魏夫人 in the Eastern Jin Dynasty and passed down from generation to generation. Tao Hongjing 陶弘景, the master of the ninth generation, was a hermit in *Mao shan* 茅山 or Mount Mao. He searched for the missing scriptures of the Shangqing Sutra, compiled the Daoist sutras including *Zhen gao* 真誥, and promoted the laws of the Shangqing Sutra. Thus Shangqing School was also called *Mao shan* School. See Liang Guifang, “Li Shangyin yu daojiang,” 7.

²⁰³ In addition to the many Chinese-language studies on *nei dan*, see also Livia Kohn and Robin Wang, *Internal Alchemy: Self, Society, and the Quest for Immortality* (Three Pines Press, 2009).

poems. His poem “Twenty Rhymes for My Daoist Comrades When We Gathered to Meditate in the Year of Wuchen” 戊辰會靜中出貽同志二十韻 is a good example.²⁰⁴

The majority of existing studies suggest that Li Shangyin learned Daoism in his early years, and then left Daoism to pursue an official career and became an advocate of Confucianism. In his poem “Sending My Uncle to the Military Office of Hongnong County at Dongchuan” 送從翁從東川弘農尚書幕, after he retrospectively describes his life of practicing Daoism in Yuyang Mountain with his uncle in his younger years, he writes: “Unexpectedly I heard the wooden bell, / and suddenly started admiring the music of Shun. // We both left the woods of the mountain, / and went after the uprooted tumbleweeds” 豈意聞周鐸, 翻然慕舜韶。皆辭喬木去, 遠逐斷蓬飄。²⁰⁵ “Wooden bell” was used to execute administrative orders in ancient times, referring to the order issued by the court; “the music of Shun” is the music of the legendary Emperor Shun, alluding to his aspiration for success in the imperial examinations.²⁰⁶ As the title and the quoted lines indicate, Li’s uncle received the appointment by the imperial court and they both left their Daoist practice in the mountain. In another poem, “Seventy-two Lines of Shifting Rhymes Randomly Composed for My Four Roommates” 偶成轉韻七十二句贈四同舍, he also recalls that experience, adding: “Then I heard of the terrace of King Zhao of Yan, / I stood up and looked eastward feeling my horizon widened. // I inclined to recite ‘The Joy of Military Service’ by Wang Can, / but not ‘Homeward Bound’ by Tao

²⁰⁴ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 927-928.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 178, n. 19.

Yuanming” 此時聞有燕昭臺，挺身東望心眼開。且吟王粲從軍樂，不賦淵明歸去來。²⁰⁷ “The terrace of King Zhao of Yan” was the place for the King Zhao of Yan 燕昭王 of the Warring States to seek talented people, located historically to the northeast of Yuyang Mountains. It refers to his taking part in the imperial examination. “The Joy of Military Service” is Wang Chan’s poem of expressing the joyful feeling of renouncing the pen and joining the army.

That of course does not mean that Li Shangyin left Daoism behind forever since that point. Li Shangyin expresses the regret of leaving Daoism in the poem “Forty Rhymes for the Pine Painting and Poetry of Li Gong” 李肱所遺畫松詩書兩紙得四十韻: “Sadly I fell into the net of the earthly world” 悲哉墮世網。²⁰⁸ Adding the examples in Gong Pengcheng’s discussion, it can be seen that the recurring reference to the regret of leaving Daoism and the hope to go back to it indicates his genuine regret for quitting his Daoist training to study, after which he went for the imperial examination and became a mediocre bureaucratic staff.

But Li Shangyin was not addicted to Daoism, which I will argue is the reason why he eventually left Daoism for Buddhism, and his criticism of contemporary and historical Daoist practice was obvious. The criticism of Daoism including the practice of the ruling class can be seen in many of his poems as well as his prose.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1079.

²⁰⁸ Li Junping, “Li Shangyin yu daojiao san ti,” 96-97. For the quoted line, see *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 161.

²⁰⁹ Liang Guifang, “Li Shangyin yu Daojiao,” 8-9.

In “Written at the Temple of the Queen Mother of the West at the Foot of Mount Hua”華嶽下題西王母廟, Li Shangyin writes:

There is no part for *qing* in becoming an transcendent,

The eight horses run after the setting sun in vain.

Don’t regret that the beloved concubine died in the middle of the night,

The emperor himself did not live forever.

神仙有分豈關情，

八馬虛隨落日行。

莫恨名姬中夜沒，

君王猶自不長生。²¹⁰

What is the importance of the thought that the alienation from *qing* or romantic love is the condition of becoming an transcendent for Li Shangyin as a poet of romantic love? This inquiry might lead us to answer the question why Li Shangyin finally stepped out of Daoism for Buddhism. The *qing* Li identifies in Daoism belongs to the unreachable celestial world of the Daoist immortals while the arrangement of the worldly *qing* in the Buddhist Tiantai sect makes Li Shangyin feel more at home. For Li Shangyin, religion is not only a kind of ultimate concern but also a place where the earthly thoughts are deposited. For the earthly part, Confucianism for him was not enough to serve as the carrier of *qing* that is generated by individual subjectivity, which either came from his own life experiences or from his perception of the culture of his time. The reason why Li

²¹⁰ Li Shangyin *shige jijie*, 618.

Shangyin was different from Du Fu who finally returned to Confucianism was that Li's exploration of individual subjectivities led him to discover the significance of *qing* as the essence of individual life. The most effective exploration of the most basic individuality of human beings was from the perspective of individual gender relations. Conversant with convention of poetry that combines lyricism with sociality, Li's enthusiasm in the relationship between individuals is different from Du Fu's returning to the collective. It is possible that Li Shangyin's initial coming into Daoism might have been prompted by some realistic reasons (for example, to get closer to his official goals by taking and passing the Daoist examinations or perhaps even attracted by the young and beautiful Daoist nuns); his understanding of Daoism, and for that matter, Confucianism and Buddhism, developed and matured only gradually over the course of his life.

According to the statistics by Fukazawa Kazuyuki 深沢一幸, in his poems Li Shangyin used more than 1,200 Daoist and Buddhist references, nine-tenths of which come from Daoist scriptures, with *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 and *Zhen gao* 真誥 being his two most favored sources.²¹¹ It is noteworthy that Li Shangyin not only use Daoist allusions in poems about Daoist nuns or other poems with Daoist themes; he uses them in most of his poems. His poems on history, for example, also use a lot of Daoist allusions. Daoist allusions also appear widely in his love poems that are not restricted to Daoist nuns. Therefore, we cannot infer from the many Daoist allusions used in his "Left Untitled" poems that they are about Daoist nuns. In short, the study of the relationship

²¹¹ Quoted in Liang Guifang, "Li Shangyin yu Daojiao," 77.

between Li Shangyin's love poems and Daoism cannot be limited to his poems on Daoist nuns.

In the following pages of this chapter, I first look at the relationship between the subjectivity of Li Shangyin's love poems and Daoism from three aspects, and then examine the influence of Buddhism on such poems. These three aspects are: his poems on Daoist nuns; the allusions of traditional goddesses in his love poems; and his innovative use of unconventional Daoist allusions in his romantic poems.

Li's Poems about Daoist Nuns

Li Shangyin's poems are famous for their obscurity, many of which are difficult to date, especially the poems about Daoist nuns. However, chronologists tend to date Li Shangyin's poems about Daoist nuns on the basis of his early year experience of learning Daoism at the Yuyang Mountain. Even so, evidence shows that some of the poems about Daoist nuns were written later. There are many misconceptions in the research history of Daoist nuns. In fact, the Daoist nuns of Tang were a special group of women in the time who were very different from the courtesans in religious and social status. Few Daoist nuns in the Tang Dynasty were originally courtesans, and none of the recorded Daoist nuns in "The Comprehensive Mirror of Generations of Authentic Immortals Comprehending the Dao" 歷代真仙體道通鑒後集 were originally courtesans.²¹² The imperial concubines going to Daoism of the Tang Dynasty and the palace maids who

²¹² Liu Ning 劉寧, "Shi xi Tang dai changji shi yu nüguan shi de chayi" 試析唐代娼妓詩與女冠詩的差異, *Tangdai dianji yu wenhua*, no. 4 (2003): 53.

entered Daoism with them seldom became poetesses who handed down their works and were easily forgotten by history. So were the other upper-class women who became Daoist nuns for various reasons. Other than them, some civilian Daoist nuns were well-known in history because of their extraordinary talent that could have been associated with their relatively freer social status. Among them the most famous were Yu Xuanji 魚玄機 (844-871), who was a concubine of a noble family before she became a Daoist nun; Li Ye 李冶 (730-784), who was sent to be a Daoist nun at a very young age by her parents; and Xue Tao 薛濤, who was from a scholar-official family and converted herself to Daoism long after her experience as an official courtesan caused by her father's death when she was very young.

They all chose their own way to communicate with the scholars because the latter held the most valuable cultural capital that had the potential to turn into social capital. They might have had sexual relationships with the scholars, but unlike the courtesans who traded their bodies for money, they were economically independent and conducted their sexual behaviors without the intervention of money. The economic independence also supported their relevantly equal status in cultural exchanges with the scholars; after all, their time was not to exchange for money, either. Economic independence and the opportunity to associate with scholars qualified these Daoist nuns as a group with high cultural literacy. These talented female Daoist poets were had economic freedom and mastered the cultural weapon to resist secular evaluation. Their existence in the Tang Dynasty was not only a result of the culture of the time but also quite extraordinary in the

whole Chinese history. They had the freedom to socialize with the literati not because they lived like prostitutes but because of their dilemmatic being in the hope of finding a suitable match and love in a stable relationship. Tang was a time when parentage played the deciding role in marriage. Most of the civilian Daoist poetesses were lacking privilege in parentage and thus were not ideal spouses for the literati.²¹³ Because of the economic independence of the Daoist nuns, the best bet of them to live up to their spiritual and emotional needs was keeping relationships with multiple literati scholars. Their view of gender relation was different from the courtesans in that they were granted the opportunity of free choice of romantic lovers, which led to their emphasis on love with their own subjectivity. So when they formed romantic relations with the scholars, factors other than romantic bonds often did not take part. But those relations had little hope to be regularized by the secular social system. It seems that most of them were only capable of keeping short-term love relationships with their choice of lovers. But their longing for stable and long-term love relationships was always there as shown in their poems. Although in the Tang, Daoist doctrine had little restraint on the disciples' romantic relationships, sanctions against Daoist priests and Daoist nuns who violated the precepts were actually harsher than for ordinary people by the secular sovereignty. According to the Tang Code, "The penalty for Daoist priests, Daoist nuns who were adulterous are two

²¹³ Tang Dongli 唐冬菘, "Tang dai nüguan qunti chansheng yuanyin tanxi" 唐代女冠群體產生原因探析, *Wenxue jie*, no. 1 (2010): 91.

grades harsher than for the lay people.”²¹⁴ And throughout history, their fame also suffered more than others because of their relationships with the literati scholars.

Those Daoist poetesses in love were wandering between secularity and religion. The harsh reality of the secular world prompted their need for the shelter of Daoism, which might have been their ultimate spiritual haven. The hope for pure and equal love that might have existed transiently in their associations with the scholars and could have been influenced by their Daoist belief was impractical to maintain in the secular social system that undoubtedly would compromise their independent subjectivity even in formal marriages. Their predicaments were rooted in their natural human desire for love. Li Ye’s “Occasional Residence” 偶居 expresses a Daoist nun’s mentality:

The heart is remote and non-returning as the floating cloud,
the heart and the cloud are both impalpable.

Why is the gale swaying them,
and blowing them to the south hill and then the north?

心遠浮雲知不還，

心雲並在有無間。

狂風何事相搖盪，

吹向南山復北山。²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 et al., *Tang lü shu yi* 唐律疏議, ed. Liu Junwen 劉俊文 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 143.

²¹⁵ *Quan Tang shi*, 9059.

For Li Shangyin, sympathizing with the Daoist nuns had more to do with the universal factor of human nature for love. It did not necessarily require a real love relationship with the Daoist nuns to write a poem of equal dialogue with them.

Because Daoist nuns were quite active during the Tang Dynasty, literati poets writing about them were often seen in the records. The famous late Tang Daoist poet Cao Tang's 曹唐 (797-866) "Lesser Poems on Wandering Immortals" 小游仙詩 is a set of loosely connected heptasyllabic quatrains on the subject of contemporary Daoist practice, including the life of the Daoist nuns at the time. Even though Cao had the experience as a Daoist and some of the poems might reflect his own experiences or observations, in general he keeps a very objective view in this set of poems and does not show much subjective emotions or desires.²¹⁶

By comparing Li Shangyin with other poets involved with Daoist nuns in poetry in the Tang when Daoism was unprecedentedly prominent, we can see that Li's representation of Daoist nuns in his poems is significantly different from that of other literati poets during the Tang.

Li Bai 李白, who lived in the eighth century, renders the image of Daoist nuns as an elusive Daoist adept in his "Sending off the Daoist Nun Chu Sanqing for the Southern Sacred Mountain on the River" 江上送女道士褚三清遊南嶽:

The Daoist nun from Wujiang
wears a lotus scarf on her head.

²¹⁶ I will further elaborate on Cao Tang's "Wandering Immortals" poems, especially his "Larger Wandering Immortals Poems" and their influence on Li Shangyin later in the chapter.

Her garment is not bedewed,
unlike the cloud of Yang Terrace.
She has the excursion footwear on her feet,
which picks up white dust on the water waves.
She is after the immortals at the Southern Marchmount,
where she shall see Lady Wei.

吳江女道士，頭戴蓮花巾。
霓衣不濕雨，特異陽臺雲。
足下遠遊履，凌波生素塵。
尋仙向南嶽，應見魏夫人。²¹⁷

The charm of the Daoist nun is marked by the representative Daoist clothing, and the conception relies on the allusions to the Daoist lore, including Yang Terrace, “on the water waves” and Lady Wei that were typical allusions in Daoist goddess themed poems ever since pre-Qin times. The body and the spirit of the Daoist nun are depicted from an apathetic perspective, with irrelevant interrelations. The poet is detached from his protagonist. The reversed meaning in the allusion “Yang Terrace” addresses the tradition of seeing women of any kind as existing solely for men’s desire in an interesting perspective.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ *Quan Tang shi*, 1804-1805.

²¹⁸ “Yang Terrace” 陽臺 is the place where King Huai of Chu met the goddess of Wu Mountain and had sexual relations with her in his dream in Song Yu’s “*Fu on Gaotang*” 高唐賦. See *Zhonghua ming fu jicheng* 中華名賦集成, comp. Guo Yuheng 郭預衡 (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 1999), 17. The couplet “Her garment is not bedewed, unlike the cloud of Yang Terrace” is reversing the conventional usage and seems to be praising the Daoist nun’s chastity or morality based on the presumption that Daoist nuns are usually immoral in their sexual conduct.

Bai Juyi wrote “For the Daoist Nun Surnamed Wei” 贈韋煉師 from a primarily male-centered perspective although the second-person and dialogical voices are also used.

The guest in Xunyang is a lay Daoist,

whose body is like a wandering cloud and heart like the ash.

You are a goddess in the transcendental world who should have no secular desire,
then why do you prefer me and hover around me?

Have we met in our previous lives

and were we a couple of some family then?

潯陽遷客為居士，身似浮雲心似灰。

上界女仙無嗜欲，何因相顧兩徘徊？

共遇過去人間世，曾作誰家夫婦來。²¹⁹

This can be read as a bold variation of the boudoir poetry that imagines a female protagonist’s desire from a male-centered perspective. His friend Liu Yuxi is much more restrained but is nonetheless speculating female desire from the male perspective in his “For the Daoist Nun Surnamed Zhang in the Eastern Marchmount” 贈東岳張煉師: “On the cloud you thrive without the male company, / and only plan to roam alone on a phoenix” 雲衢不要吹簫伴，只擬乘鸞獨自飛，²²⁰ implying that she should need one and she should be unsatisfied with her current situation.

Shi Jianwu 施肩吾 (780-861) was a Daoist poet living slightly earlier than Li Shangyin. His poem “Two Poems for the Daoist Nun Zheng Yuhua” 贈女道士鄭玉華二

²¹⁹ *Quan Tang shi*, 4900.

²²⁰ *Quan Tang shi*, 4059.

首 is teasing her from the stereotyped male view of what a sexually available woman should do by comparing her life as a Daoist nun now with an entertaining girl before:

A lotus flower was newly pinned on the black hair,
Cinnabar was taken to add to the whiteness of the snow-like skin.
The secular world was not worth loving,
She laughed at Scholar Liu's homesickness.
She stopped collecting lotus in the Lake of Bright Mirror,
And instead went to learn Daoism with the female master.
The red string accidentally dropped into the black sack,
Which used to be the string on her harp.

玄發新簪碧藕花，欲添肌雪餌紅砂。
世間風景那堪戀，長笑劉郎漫憶家。
明鏡湖中休採蓮，卻師阿母學神仙。
朱絲誤落青囊裏，猶是箜篌第幾弦。²²¹

Li Dong 李洞 (fl. 876), who lived in the second half of the ninth century when the Tang was about to end, wrote his poems on Daoist nuns in an even more problematic voice. In “For the Daoist Nun Surnamed Pang” 贈龐煉師, the nun becomes a desired female body that is attractive and can sing. If the title and the last couplet were not there, one would not know that this poem is for a Daoist Nun and may think it is for some courtesan.

²²¹ *Quan Tang shi*, 5643.

You live by the Fu River and have a beautiful voice,
after singing you begin to play the flute.

Your body in sleep is softer than the gold willow branches in spring,
your makeup is like the autumn rosy clouds that shine to the hairpin.

Your red drunken cheeks make red apricot flowers envious,
your crisp-tender chest is whiter than clouds.

If I can seek immortality with you,

We shall walk on the magpie bridge in the glowing galaxy hand in hand.

家住涪江漢語嬌，一聲歌戛玉樓簫。

睡融春日柔金縷，妝發秋霞戰翠翹。

兩臉酒醺紅杏妒，半胸酥嫩白雲饒。

若能攜手隨仙令，皎皎銀河渡鵲橋。²²²

Poems for Daoist nuns become the carrier of male literati's expression of their male sexual desire. It is a poem similar to the problematic love poems in male first-person voice in Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* under the influence of the poetic discourse of romance in the late Tang.

Li Shangyin has two poems with the titles clearly indicating they are for the Daoist nun Song Huayang who had a very close relationship with him. "For the Holy Lady Song at Huayang Temple and Also Sent to Master Liu at the Qingdu Temple" 贈華陽宋真人兼寄清都劉先生 treats Song Huayang with the same respect as Master Liu by equally

²²² *Quan Tang shi*, 8375.

giving two couplets to each and using formal Daoist allusions from Daoist classics for both, emphasizing Song's Daoist experience and quality and her unfulfilled expectation of Daoist achievements.²²³ In “Moon Night Sent Again to the Song Huayang Sisters” 月夜重寄宋華陽姊妹, Li Shangyin expresses his hope to appreciate the moon with Song Huayang and her sisters and his regret that the male and female Daoists were separated by the Daoist regulations.

Stealing the peaches and pilfering the elixirs cannot be done together,

Inside the twelve city walls, the bright-colored toad is locked up.

I wish to enjoy the moon together with you three bloom like ones,

But the crystal curtain in the jade tower is still hanging down.²²⁴

偷桃竊藥事難兼，十二城中鎖彩蟾。

應共三英同夜賞，玉樓仍是水精簾。²²⁵

Moon appreciation has distinct meanings as an image in poetry for literati official and for female character as the impersonated lyrical subject with the latter almost exclusively points to romantic lament of female loneliness, and literati male poets rarely appear as in the company of females when they write about moon appreciation or describe their sentiments using the image of the moon until female subjectivity and male first-person

²²³ For the Daoist allusions, see *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 2136-2141. This poem has the couplet “the letter came in jade case with confusing phoenix characters, dragon scale cooled down after the return to palace” 玉檢賜書迷鳳篆，金華歸駕冷龍鱗 that, as I will argue later in this chapter, is very possibly related to romantic sentiments because the parallel of dragon 龍 and phoenix 鳳 is symbolized to address love sentiments or even sexual encounters.

²²⁴ The translation is by James Liu, in *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, 105.

²²⁵ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 2143-2145. “Stealing the peaches” and “pilfering the elixirs” refer to the Daoist practice of male and female disciples, respectively.

lyrical voice began to coexist in *ci* in the Song Dynasty.²²⁶ Li's equal treatment of the sisters is suspicious of romantic implications, in which case the representations of Li and the sisters would be without an emotional hierarchy as shown in male impersonating female poems.

In the poetic atmosphere of the late Tang, Li distinctively seldom describes his female character(s) as a desirable female body with luring decorations. Even in a poem that is close to a conventional boudoir poem with the male poet conjecturing a generalized Daoist nun's emotion,²²⁷ the will of the Daoist nun is not entirely stated from a firm and authoritative male perspective, but with the word “must have” or *ying* 應 to form a tone of question that ask for response thus making the voices in the poem prone to be dialogical.

Against the screen of “mother-of-clouds” the candle throws its deep shadow;

The Long River gradually sinks, the morning star sets.

Ch'ang-o should regret having stolen the elixir.

The green sea – the blue sky – her heart every night!²²⁸

雲母屏風燭影深，長河漸落曉星沉。

嫦娥應悔偷靈藥，碧海青天夜夜心。²²⁹

²²⁶ For more about the lyrical voices of *ci* please see Chapter V. For the use of the moon image, examples include the line “At the water bank with the willows, the morning wind blow and the waning moon hang” by Liu Yong and the lines “Having looked out to the other side of the land for lovesickness, now we are both tired of the wind and moon” from He Zhu's “Shizhou yin” 石州引。

²²⁷ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1889-1890. As the editors noted, in the previously discussed poem “Moon Night Sent Again to the Song Huayang Sisters” and the poem “Responding to Secretary Han to Send a Palace Maid off to a Daoist Temple” I'm going to discuss shortly, Li Shangyin uses the Moon Lady, denoting Ch'ang-o, to allude to Daoist nuns.

²²⁸ The translation is by James Liu, in *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, 99.

²²⁹ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1887.

The whole poem focuses on the word “must have regretted” and conjectures her feelings from the empathetic perspective of the poet. The couplet is not to judge if the character should stick to the Daoist pursuits or if she should regret to have left the secular world but to express the poet’s psychological sympathy for her dilemmatic existence as a Daoist nun. In Bakhtin’s words, “the hero is located in a zone of potential conversation with the author, in a zone of dialogical contact.”²³⁰

This implicitly dialogical tone is also shown in another poem on Daoist nuns by Li Shangyin, “Pomegranate” 石榴, that appears to be a poem on things:

Pomegranate branches are graceful and pomegranate fruits are abundant,
the film of pomegranate pulp clear and bright, seeds bright red.

Is the peach tree of the Jade Pool worth envying?

The peaches as red as the rosy cheeks last over a thousand years.

榴枝婀娜榴實繁，榴膜輕明榴子鮮。

可羨瑤池碧桃樹，碧桃紅頰一千年。²³¹

The poem undoubtedly expresses the sympathy for the loneliness of the Daoist nuns.²³² yet it goes on to say that “the peach as red as the rosy cheeks lasts over a thousand years” is “enviable.” The affirmative description of the negative points out the contradiction. This touches on the essence of the existence of the Daoist nuns that comes from the

²³⁰ Bakhtin M. M., *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 45.

²³¹ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1776.

²³² *Ibid.*, 1778. See the editors’ notes on why this poem is about the Daoist nuns in the image of “the peach tree of the Jade Pool”.

dialogical relationship between the author and the hero adopted by the poet. The author is with a voice asking reciprocation from the analogized Daoist nuns.

Inheriting the tradition of the poems of laments by the palace ladies and the *yuefu* tradition of boudoir poems, there were sympathetic literati poems for the Daoist nuns in the Tang. Wei Yingwu's 韋應物 (737-792) "Sending a Palace Maid off to a Daoist Temple" 送宮人入道 is a typical one:

Afraid of growing old, she gave up the favor of the emperor and went after the
Dao,

She stood on the palace stairs without makeup, saying goodbye to the emperor.

The golden pills are planned to maintain her appearance until a thousand years
old,

No longer will she be shaping her eyebrow in front of the mirror.

After the princess collected her jewelry,

The emperor watched her put on the Daoist cap.

Other palace maids have always envied her,

She has always wept when the Daoist temple was mentioned.

舍寵求仙畏色衰，辭天素面立天墀。

金丹擬駐千年貌，寶鏡休勻八字眉。

公主與收珠翠後，君王看戴角冠時。

從來宮女皆相妒，說著瑤台總淚垂。²³³

²³³ *Quan Tang shi*, 2010.

“Sending a palace maid off to a Daoist temple” is a common theme in the Tang Dynasty. Wei Yingwu’s “Sending the Palace Maid off to a Daoist Temple” is a work that inherits the *yuefu* tradition of sympathizing with the protagonist. However, it is only from an observer’s point of view, and the protagonist appears as “her.” Moreover, the theme of “the fear of growing old” has always been the theme of traditional palace poems, and it is also a branch of the theme of male fantasizing “women thinking of men,” thus the sympathy for the maid is based on shaky grounds. In this construction of author-hero relation, women’s voice is still impersonated.

Poems of this topic or theme usually belong to the category of palace poems because of the impersonated female voice by male fantasy, many of which have no significant poetic value. The most typical example is Wang Jian’s 王建 (768-835) “Sending the Palace Maid off to a Daoist Temple” 送宮人入道:

She quitted combing her hair and cleaned the red makeup,
She headed out of the Weiyang Palace wearing a lotus on her head.
The Daoist disciples folded up the singing scores,
Her palace maid friends shared her dancing dresses.
Studying with the master she began to understand the sutra,
Going into meditation she burned the internal incense.
She made the vow to see the West Queen Mother in Penglai,
But instead, she went to the secular world to teach the way of the immortals.
休梳叢鬢洗紅妝，頭戴芙蓉出未央。弟子抄將歌遍疊，

宮人分散舞衣裳。問師初得經中字，入靜猶燒內裡香。

發願蓬萊見王母，卻歸人世施仙方。²³⁴

Li Shangyin also has “Responding to Secretary Han to Send a Palace Maid off to a Daoist Temple” 和韓錄事送宮人入道, which is responding to a poem of the same theme. The palace maid was called upon by Secretary Han, referred to as “the celestial messenger” in the poem, to go to a Daoist temple by the imperial order. Han’s poem was lost and Li’s was preserved as a response to it, in which Li teased Han and the palace maid with the possibility of a love relationship between them.

She (I) was not free when the celestial messenger called,

Her (My) two maids assisted her (me) to board the emerald jade boat.

Under the nine branches chandelier, she (I) paid homage to the golden palace hall,

In the clouds of the three colors, she (I) will be serving the Daoist master in the jade tower.

She (I) is (am) parting her (my) flamboyant palace maid friends for long,

The celibate nuns will be her (my) company.

If she (I) was in love with Han,

Her (My) regret won’t diminish after she (I) dies (die).

星使追還不自由，雙童捧上綠瓊輦。

九枝燈下朝金殿，三素雲中侍玉樓。

²³⁴ *Quan Tang shi*, 3412.

鳳女顛狂成久別，月娥孀獨好同遊。

當時若愛韓公子，埋骨成灰恨未休。²³⁵

The characteristic of the Chinese language is that sometimes a sentence is without a subject and it is determined by the context. In poetry, this is much more often and the lyrical subject is determined by the context as well as the poetic convention. This poem can be seen as either in the female perspective of the palace maid because of the close aesthetic distance between the author and the protagonist, or as the poet's description and evaluation from the third-person perspective as an observer. If we read from the first-person female voice, the consciousness of the female protagonist in the first and last couplet is very obvious.

Even if the author is seen as the lyrical subject who expresses his views on the event, or Han is the impersonated lyrical subject because it is a poem responding to Han's, the male lyrical subject is expressing his understanding and sympathy for the palace maid in a very different perspective from the other poems mentioned above, because the feeling of "not free" 不自由 and the explicit expression of "love" were not conventional poetic descriptions of female feelings and were very personal thus individualistic, having nothing to do with male collective fantasy as well as female social roles. This emergence of a female voice is also a result of the dialogical relationship between the male poet as the author and the female protagonist.

More innovative is the poem "Blowing the Pipe under the Milky Way" 銀河吹笙,

²³⁵ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 309.

which highlights the female romantic subjectivity in a female Daoist's voice all through. The poet plays the role of the heroine and writes about women's love psychology. However, it is quite different from the traditional boudoir lament poems. The authorial attitude of group imagination of men as social roles represented by the poet in the boudoir lament poems has become a woman's autonomic confession in the poet's representation under the Daoist worldview.

Looking to the Milky Way I blow the jade pipe,

The building and its yard are cold, connecting to the dawning sky.

The dream in tiered beddings ceased the other year,

The lonely female phoenix on the other tree startled me last night.

The old scent in the pavilion for moon viewing exhales because of the rain,

The burned candle is clear, protected by the air curtain from the frost.

There is no need to pursue immortality like Wang Ziqiao from Gou Mountain,

Love is there in the zither played by the Goddess of Xiang River and the flute played by Nongyu from Qin.

悵望銀河吹玉笙，樓寒院冷接平明。

重衾幽夢他年斷，別樹羈雌昨夜驚。

月榭故香因雨發，風簾殘燭隔霜清。

不須浪作緱山意，湘瑟秦簫自有情。²³⁶

I translated the poem in the female first-person perspective because if read from the third-person view the meaning of the last couplet would contradict the previous three. The female protagonist was startled, so she was not in peace with her status as a lonely Daoist nun; read in the third person, the lyrical last couplet has to be from the perspective of the poet, criticizing the nun's pursuit of Daoism, which does not conform to the meaning the previous three couplets conveyed. In the poem, the woman stares at the galaxy, the barrier between the cowherd and the Weaver Girl touches the hidden pain in her heart. The sound of the pipe also triggers the memories of the past. However, the delightful joy of love that extends to the dreams is long cut off, and the sad tweet of the female phoenix awakens the good dream so that in the cold building and its courtyard, there is no sleep till daybreak. And the scent of the flowers blooming in the rain falls on the pavilion, stirring up old memories, while the candle in front of the frost makes people feel even more lonesome. In such a desolate and lonely situation, the last couplet reveals the woman's inner desire with a soliloquy. She thinks of Wang Ziqiao who is good at blowing the pipe for the pipe she is blowing herself. Wang's seeking immortality weighs less in her heart than the life with one's pair of Goddess of Xiang River and Nongyu from

²³⁶ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1895.

Qin who get the joy of love. The implication is that, though immortals may live forever, it is not as desirable as human love so as to endure the same loneliness as described in the poem “Chang’e,” but it is not by the male poet’s conjecture but the soliloquy of the female Daoist herself. From the allusions of seeking immortals in the poem and the image of “lonely female phoenix,” it is no doubt about a Daoist nun and in her voice.²³⁷ In the poem, the memory of love in the past is compared with the present desolated situation, and the desire for love is conveyed from the subtle psychological feelings of a woman. The woman in this poem is not the “desirable” and “lovely” object of the male gaze, but Li Shangyin gives her subjectivity of love consciousness through the display of the woman’s passionate pursuit of love and the loneliness and perplexity of her inability to achieve it. The dialogical contact between the poet as the author and the female Daoist as the protagonist is shown in that the female protagonist is no longer described as an object of male desire either bodily or emotionally, or imposed with a voice imagined by the male poets with only a male exclusive perspective, but a subjectivity that has her autonomic feelings and emotions. Because of this change happens in a literati poet’s poetic representation, it indicates not an empirical change of female subjectivity but the change of the male literati’s self-identification as a person and self-fashioning as a poet.

The Unique Application of Traditional Goddesses Allusions in Li’s Love Poems

Because of the prosperity of Daoism in the Tang Dynasty, the goddesses of ancient mythologies and legends or the female Daoist goddesses in Daoist classics are very

²³⁷ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1899. See the concluding remark on the poem’s female voice in the editors’ note.

common allusions in Tang poetry, such as the Queen Mother of the West 西王母, Moon Goddess (Chang'e 嫦娥, Su'e 素娥, or Heng'e 姮娥), Weaver Girl 織女 (or Xing'e 星娥), Goddess of the Luo River 洛神 (or Fufei 宓妃), Goddess of the Xiang River 湘妃 (or Jiang'e 江娥), Goddess of Mount Wu 巫山神女 (or Yaoji 瑤姬). I examine Li's love poems on traditional goddesses in this part. The most obvious example is the Queen Mother of the West. She, for example, represents immortality in Li He's 李賀 poem "Leap Month" 閏月: "The peaches at the Queen Mother of the West's palace have bloomed thousands of times, / How many death have Peng Zu and Wu Xian died?" 王母桃花開千遍，彭祖巫鹹幾回死，²³⁸ and peaceful eternity in his "Music in the Jade Garden" 瑤華樂: "The colorful ribbons of the dancers haltingly hang their fringes, / The countenance of the Queen Mother of the West is like the clear and calm river and sea" 舞霞垂尾長蹢躅，江澄海靜神母顏。²³⁹

In Li Shangyin's "On the Jade Pool" 瑤池, the immortal and solemn Queen Mother of the West is described as a secular woman with a tender longing for her friend or lover, King Mu of Zhou 周穆王.

The window of the Queen Mother of the Jade Pool opens,
 The singing of King Mu's "Yellow Bamboo" mournfully shakes the earth.
 The eight horses go thirty thousand miles a day,
 Why on earth that King Mu never returns?
 瑤池阿母綺窗開，

²³⁸ *Quan Tang shi*, 4399.

²³⁹ *Quan Tang shi*, 4428.

黃竹歌聲動地哀。

八駿日行三萬裏，

穆王何事不重來。²⁴⁰

This secularization of immortals was a common phenomenon in the Tang Dynasty, especially after the flourishing of romantic poetry in the mid-Tang, such as Chen Yu's 陳羽 (fl. 806) "Words on Pacing the Void" 步虛詞: "The tiered halls and towers were where the Queen Mother of the West resides, / Red clouds stayed at the top of Kunlun Mountains. // She came out to see King Mu as the carousing band plays, / Smilingly pointing him to the blossoms of the jade trees" 樓殿層層阿母家，昆侖山頂駐紅霞。笙歌出見穆天子，相引笑看琪樹花。²⁴¹ However, Li Shangyin did more than anyone in positively linking the secular goddess allusions to the representation of female subjectivity in poetry.

Li Shangyin's favorite traditional goddess allusion is Chang'e. The traditional allusion of Chang'e has several meanings. In addition to referring to the moon, one is the symbol of immortality as in Li He's "Lyrics for a Dancing Song (in the second year of Zhanghe)" 舞曲歌辭 (章和二年中): "Everybody hopes to pay tribute to the god and ask for more years for the Emperor Zhang of Han, / so he can live longer than the Big Dipper and Chang'e" 拜神得壽獻天子，七星貫斷姮娥死。²⁴² Another is the image of beautiful girls as in Bai Juyi's "Neighbor's Daughter" 鄰女: "At fifteen she is prettier than the

²⁴⁰ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 623.

²⁴¹ *Quan Tang shi*, 3896.

²⁴² *Quan Tang shi*, 4421.

goddesses, / she is like Chang'e in daytime and lotus on land" 娉婷十五勝天仙, 白日嫦娥旱地蓮.²⁴³ Yet another is to humanize Chang'e such as in Du Fu's "Moon" 月: "I drink by myself like the widowed Chang'e, / enduring the cold weather of autumn" 斟酌姮娥寡, 天寒耐九秋²⁴⁴ or Luo Yin's 羅隱 (833-909) "Moon Not Seen on the Mid-Autumn Night" 中秋不見月: "Heaven is concerned with Chang'e's pain of being widowed, / letting the floating cloud rise in the northwest" 天為素娥孀怨苦, 並教西北起浮雲.²⁴⁵ Liu Yuxi goes further in his "Remembering the Courtesan" 懷妓: "The cloud way broke off when the Blue Bird left, / The Moon Palace is farfetched when Chang'e returned" 青鳥去時雲路斷, 姮娥歸處月宮深, added the component of love to the male perspective.²⁴⁶ The beauty of Chang'e is not related to the appearance in Li Shangyin's poems. He endows Chang'e with the beauty of the moon, which emphasizes an abstract gesture and elegance. For example, in "Autumn Moon" 秋月: "Chang'e has no makeup, / only displaying her charm and elegance" 姮娥無粉黛, 只是逞嬋娟.²⁴⁷ Furthermore, Li Shangyin's secularization of Chang'e is different from that of past poets. In some of his love poems, he uses "Moon Sister" 月姊 as a metaphor for the female lover as a Daoist nun.²⁴⁸ While showing affection toward the goddess, he defines the relationship between men and women within the Daoist world system by using Chang'e's identity to define not an elusive immortal but a Daoist nun, empowering the female Daoist with the ability of

²⁴³ *Quan Tang shi*, 4947.

²⁴⁴ *Quan Tang shi*, 2531-2532.

²⁴⁵ *Quan Tang shi*, 7620.

²⁴⁶ *Quan Tang shi*, 4081.

²⁴⁷ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1810.

²⁴⁸ See "Goddess Temple" 聖女祠, *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1875, and "Chatting with Friends about the Past on a Rainy Day" 水天閒話舊事, *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 863. Both concern a Daoist nun's love encounters.

acting and going to places by herself when describing the love encounter as female descending from the moon to meet the male. This kind of imagery eludes the clichés of traditional boudoir poems in which the woman always weeps to the moon in a confined space hoping for its help to convey her lovesickness to the unreachable and never returning male lover.

The goddess of the Luo River originates in Cao Zhi's 曹植(192-232) "*Fu* on the Goddess of the Luo River" 洛神賦.²⁴⁹ The allusions in Tang Dynasty love poems mostly use the image in its original meaning. It mainly highlights the goddess's gorgeous beauty, her offering herself to satisfy male desire. It even becomes a representative image of courtesans, such as in Li She's 李涉 (fl. 806) "For Cui Ying When I Was Drunk" 醉中贈崔鶻: "The songs and wine in Yangzhou cannot be traced, / the goddess of River Luo's shadow is on the curtain, and Consort Xiang speaks" 揚州歌酒不可追, 洛神映箔湘妃語.²⁵⁰ Yuan Zhen's "Zimeng the Nineteenth Son of the Lu family Recited Lu the Seventh's Six Rhymes of Meditation on the Past and Asked Me to Respond" 盧十九子蒙吟盧七員外洛川懷古六韻命餘和 is romanticizing the past, writing about the imagination of romance induced by the imagination of the beauty of the goddess of River Luo. It continues to look at the female goddess, however, from the perspective of male desire.²⁵¹

Worse still, though the image of Cao Zhi is added to Luo Qiu's "Poems of Comparing Hong'er with Others", the love between Cao and Consort Zhen is disparaged:

²⁴⁹ *Zhonghua ming fu jicheng*, 350-358.

²⁵⁰ *Quan Tang shi*, 5427.

²⁵¹ *Quan Tang shi*, 4640.

“If Cao sees the appearance of Hong’er, / he would not have loved the goddess of River Luo” 若教瞥見紅兒貌，不肯留情付洛神。²⁵² Liu Cang’s 劉滄 (fl. 867) “The Lament of the Goddess of River Luo” 洛神怨 follows the conventions by taking the goddess as the main character of the poem.

Regret is great after Zijian (Cao Zhi) returned to the east,
the goddess swingingly walk on the pond.

The reflection of her tall cloudy hair in the pond moves with the shadow of the palace in water,

her jewelry suddenly flares with the dew on the sand.

She sends her heart to the sky with her love in vain,
spring is melodious when she wakes up from her dream.

She parks at the scenic road beside the willows,
the moon is by the Blue Mansion and not yet set.

子建東歸恨思長，飄飄神女步池塘。

雲鬢高動水宮影，珠翠乍搖沙露光。

心寄碧沉空婉戀，夢殘春色自悠揚。

停車綺陌傍楊柳，片月青樓落未央。²⁵³

The poem is no different from the conventional boudoir poems. The goddess being the solely represented character in the poem, it nonetheless has no trace of female subjectivity.

²⁵² *Quan Tang shi*, 7626.

²⁵³ *Quan Tang shi*, 6799.

In terms of content, the second of Li Shangyin's "Four Untitled Poems" 無題四首 is the same as Liu Cang's poem, both of which are about female love sentiments. However, female subjectivity is unprecedentedly prominent, especially from the use of the "Fufei (Consort Zhen)" allusion from the perspective of women's love desires.

The east wind soughs and sighs as a fine drizzle falls;
Beyond the lotus pond there is the noise of a light thunder.
The golden toad bites the lock through which the burnt incense enters;
The jade tiger pulls the silk rope while turning above the well.
Lady Chia peeped through the curtain at young Secretary Han;
Princess Fu left a pillow to the gifted Prince of Wei.
Do not let the amorous heart vie with the flowers in burgeoning:
One inch of longing, one inch of ashes!²⁵⁴

颯颯東風細雨來，芙蓉塘外有輕雷。
金蟾齧鎖燒香入，玉虎牽絲汲井迴。
賈氏窺簾韓掾少，宓妃留枕魏王才。
春心莫共花爭發，一寸相思一寸灰。²⁵⁵

The allusions used in this poem, such as "Lady Chia" and "Fufei" or "Consort Zhen," are all related to women's love affair. Judging by the allusions in the poem and the inner monological tone of the last couplet, it is about the sprouting of a woman's "amorous heart" from a subjective female perspective. The first couplet is set in a spring scene,

²⁵⁴ I use James Liu's translation in *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, 64.

²⁵⁵ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1633.

which intensifies the woman's feeling for love. It can be regarded as the description of the actual scenery, but it can also be seen as the woman's mental images, which trigger abundant associations. Among others, the eastern wind and drizzle make people think of "The eastern wind blows the rain" 東風飄兮神靈雨, which kept the lover from considering to return" in "Mountain Ghost" 山鬼 of the *Chu ci* 楚辭.²⁵⁶ "Lotus pond" is often used as a place for lovers' meeting in *yuefu* poems,²⁵⁷ and "light thunder" can mean "the sound of the wheels of the male master" as in Sima Xiangru's "The Fu of Changmen" 長門賦: "The thunderstorm is intense, / the sound of it is like your master's cartwheel" 雷殷殷而響起兮, 聲象君之車音.²⁵⁸ On the other hand, the dark tones of the drizzle and thunder are also colored with a layer of indescribable sadness and perplexity for the woman's mood.

The second couplet has a strong sense of symbolism as well. "The golden toad bites the lock through which the burnt incense enters" uses the incense burner that bears the implication of sexual love between men and women since the *yuefu* poems of the Southern Dynasties,²⁵⁹ and "the jade tiger pulls the silk rope while turning above the well" uses the windlass (jade tiger) image that comes from Li He's romantic *yuefu* poem "Song of the Well in the Backyard" 後園鑿井歌 to symbolize the heart for love of the

²⁵⁶ *Chu ci* 楚辭, ed. Lin Jiali 林家驪 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 67.

²⁵⁷ Wen Yiduo 聞一多, *Wen Yiduo Shijing jiangyi* 聞一多詩經講義 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2005), 30.

²⁵⁸ *Zhonghua ming fu jicheng* 中華名賦集成, comp. Guo Yuheng 郭預衡 (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 1999), 119.

²⁵⁹ See "Yang Pan'er" 楊叛兒 in *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集, comp. Guo Maoqian 郭茂倩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 720. Li Bai also used the metaphor in a *yuefu* by the same title.

woman.²⁶⁰ This incorporation of *yuefu* elements in Li Shangyin's heptasyllabic regulated verse is an indication of Li's reinvention of the conventional literati poetry by a distinct approach from the conventional literati imitations of *yuefu* by including the images of both male and female.

The third couplet continues the theme by using two historical allusions to Lady Jia and Fufei (Consort Zhen). Either Chia's eyes are drawn to the young Han Shou or Fufei (Consort Zhen) offers her pillow to Cao Zhi for her admiration of him, it is about women's voluntary and enthusiastic pursuit of love, emphasizing the female romantic subjectivity. In the last couplet, as the emotion intensifies, the woman warns herself that the heart for love must not be in full bloom like the spring flowers; otherwise, it will eventually burn like incense and become ashes inch by inch. This soliloquy of self-warning nonetheless reveals the intensity of her love-longing. It creates tension to highlight the self-consciousness of the female subject. The poem unfolds the process of intense yearning, pursuit and eventual disillusionment; at the end of the process, the expectation is not eliminated but persists.

The goddess of Mount Wu was also secularized like the goddess of Luo River in the romantic poems of the Tang, such as in Li Qunyu's 李群玉 (808-862) "For Courtesan Feng after Getting Drunk" 醉後贈馮姬 as a metaphor for describing playful courship: "May I have the same dream of thunderstorm as King Xiang, / in which the goddess of Mount Wu will descend to the Yang Terrace" 願托襄王雲雨夢，陽臺今夜降神仙。²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ *Quan Tang shi*, 4419.

²⁶¹ *Quan Tang shi*, 6601.

Or in Yuan Zhen's couplet "The ocean makes all other waters unworthy of the name, / the incomparable clouds of Mount Wu makes all other clouds of no significance" 曾經滄海難為水，除卻巫山不是雲 from the fourth of his five poems of "Thoughts on Parting" 離思五首其四, in which he alluded his beloved woman to the goddess of Mount Wu.²⁶² Even though Yuan's poem implies the awakening of the consciousness for love, it was still exclusively from the male perspective.

In his poems, Li Shangyin lets the female characters reflect on their own fate, such as the second of "Two Untitled Poems" 無題二首:

Deeply sheltered by double curtains in Sans Souci's chamber;
Lying in bed, she feels the slow, slow passing of the quiet night.
The whole life of the goddess is really nothing but a dream;
Where the Little Maid lives, there's never a young man.
The winds and waves do not believe the water chestnut's twigs are weak;
Under the moonlit dew, who could make the cassia leaves smell sweet?
You may say that it is completely futile to be lovesick,
But perhaps melancholic "clear madness" will not do any harm.²⁶³

重帷深下莫愁堂，臥後清宵細細長。
神女生涯原是夢，小姑居處本無郎。
風波不信菱枝弱，月露誰教桂葉香。
直道相思了無益，未妨惆悵是清狂。²⁶⁴

²⁶² *Quan Tang shi*, 4643.

²⁶³ The translation is by James Liu in *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, 85.

In the way of inner soliloquy, the woman thinks deeply at night. Looking at her life as a goddess (could also be referring to a Daoist nun), it has been like a dream. She might have had love relationships but she never really had a real male companion of her longing. The third couplet turns from love frustration to life experience, showing the lament of her own fate with the images of “chestnut’s twigs” and “cassia leaves,” which are both metaphors of herself. The personification of windstorm, moonlight, and mildew reveals the woman’s strong complaint. After deep thinking, the last couplet sends out an astounding spiritual cry. The woman who is aware of the futility of love-longing and the risk of being regarded as a passion dominated maniac, decides to adhere to the infatuation, showing the tenacity of her longing for love. In the poem, the woman does not show a passive gesture of waiting for love or weeping silently, but shows a dedication despite her deep understanding of the futility of love but still a dedication built upon introspection. The powerful lyricism entices the reader to identify with the female subject, thus making the woman’s subjectivity more announced.

The use of the Weaver Girl image remained very throughout the Tang, even in the mid and late Tang when the romantic poems flourished. In the early Tang, in He Zhongxuan’s 何仲宣(fl. 630 AD) “Composed after chanting on Double Seventh Festival 七夕賦詠成篇”, the Weaver Girl is almost the same with a typical woman in the boudoir in conventional representations, who combs her hair and waste her day in longing for the reunion with her lover. She wears pendant made with the stars and a pretty dress made of

²⁶⁴ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1615.

clouds when she finally gets to meet with the lover, yet the lament starts even before the meeting ends.²⁶⁵ Later, Li Bai also used the Weaver Girl to symbolize a woman's beauty to ingratiate himself with his superior's wife. "When I was a nobody, I was a lower official of a county and once drove a cow through the courtyard when in the house of the county magistrate, whose wife got angry and was going to punish me. I promptly wrote a poem for her: 'You leaned against the bar, and your voice came out. If you are not the weaver girl, how come you were asking about the cowherd? 素面倚欄鉤，嬌聲出外頭。若非是織女，何得問牽牛。'"²⁶⁶ It can be imagined that he got forgiven because of his flattering and humorous poem.

After the mid-Tang Dynasty, the character Weaver Girl became an example of Confucian principles; for example, Du Fu's "Cowherd and Weaver Girl" 牽牛織女 focuses on her morality and diligent work.²⁶⁷ Interestingly, Yuan Zhen's "Ancient Words of Resolution" 古決絕詞 uses Weaver Girl to compare with the flirtatious and disloyal heroine, the lover of the first-person male lyrical subject and possibly as well as the poet himself. There is no consistent prejudice, but the imposed judgements on the heroine is obviously male-centered.²⁶⁸ Up to the late Tang, the image of Weaver Girl did not break through the image of a Confucian female virtue or a female boudoir lamenter who is always wistfully waiting for her man. Even in the Daoist poet Cao Tang's innovative "Larger Wandering Immortals Poems," the poem "Weaver Girl Thinking about Cowherd"

²⁶⁵ *Quan Tang shi*, 456-457.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1893.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2338-2339.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4637.

織女懷牽牛” is speaks in an authoritative male voice impersonating the female character, as in a typical boudoir poem.²⁶⁹

Li Shangyin’s poems of Weaver Girl change from the traditional praise of Weaver Girl’s diligence and loyalty to the representation of her love life in her subjective voice that is beyond the ethical norms. “Guest from Beyond the Sea” 海客 is about her extramarital affair:

The guest from beyond the sea ascended to the celestial world on a raft,
the Weaver Girl stopped weaving to greet him.

“I disregard the possible jealousy of Cowherd,
so I gift you the stone that supports my loom.”²⁷⁰

海客乘槎上紫氛，星娥罷織一相聞。

只應不憚牽牛妒，聊用支機石贈君。²⁷¹

The allusion was originally from the *Naturalis Historia* 博物誌 by Zhang Hua 張華 (232-300) in the Jin Dynasty, in which someone living by the sea floated on a raft to the Milky Way and saw the legendary Cowherd and Weaver Girl.²⁷² *Jingchu sui shi ji* 荆楚歲時記 slightly changed the story:

Emperor Wu of Han ordered Zhang Qian to send his envoy to the Grand Xia Kingdom, and he search for the source of the Yellow river. He rode on the raft for a month and arrived at a city where there was a building that looked like an official

²⁶⁹ *Quan Tang shi*, 7338.

²⁷⁰ *Zhi ying* 只應 is *zhi yin* 只因, according to *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 637-638. The *jun* 君 in the last line confirms that this couplet is in the voice of the Weaver Girl.

²⁷¹ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 637.

²⁷² Zhang Hua 張華, *Bo wu zhi* 博物誌 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 19.

residence. Inside it there was a weaver woman. He also saw a man watering an ox from the river. Qian asked, “What is this place?” “Ask Yan Junping,” came the reply. The Weaver Girl sent Qian back with the supporting stone of her loom.

漢武帝令張騫窮河源，乘槎經月而去，至一處，見城郭如官府，室內有一女織，又見一丈夫牽牛飲河，騫問云：“此是何處？”答曰：“可問嚴君平。”織女取杼機石與騫而還。²⁷³

Zhang Jian’s 張薦 “Guo Han 郭翰” in his *Collection about the Strange* or *Ling guai lu* 靈怪錄 was written earlier than Li Shangyin’s “Guest from Beyond the Sea”, which developed the story further with Weaver Girl dissatisfied with her loneliness who meets Guo Han during the year except for the seventh of July.²⁷⁴ Li Shangyin wrote this in poems, which is unprecedented. It is obvious that he has not only read *Collection about the Strange*, but he also had the mind to challenge the convention by including ideas from contemporary fictional narratives in poetry. In his poem, as usual, Li Shangyin takes advantage of the exploration of female subjectivity that appeared in fictional *Chuanqi* stories to reveal the depth of Weaver Girl’s romantic mentality. She immediately stopped her work after she heard the coming of the guest. The *jun* 君 used in the last line signifies that the last couplet can be read from her first-person perspective. The mentality of Weaver Girl’s putting her own needs before the Cowherd’s needs seems to emphasize her loneliness..

²⁷³ Zong Lin 宗懷, *Jingchu suishi ji* 荆楚歲時記, ed. Song Jinlong 宋金龍 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1987), 54.

²⁷⁴ *Taiping guangji*, 420-421.

Most of the annotators believe that this poem has political implications, and was written when Li resigned his position at the imperial library to serve as a staff in Zheng Ya's military governor office in Guilin as a result of the partisan struggles between the Niu and Li factions, interpreting Zheng Ya as the guest from beyond the sea, the poet himself as Weaver Girl, and members in the Niu faction as Cowherd. In that political allegorical interpretation, the poet was saying that he was not afraid of the jealousy of the Niu Faction and ready to serve Zheng Ya to repay his favor of "knowing" him.²⁷⁵ Whether there is political meaning or not, Li certainly makes the female subjectivity prominent. Judging from the first-person female point of view, and the fact that there is no playfulness indicated in the title of the poem, it is reasonable to conclude that the poet shows no prejudice against Weaver Girl's unethical behavior under the traditional lenses of interpretation.

The Relationship Between Li Shangyin's Usage of New Daoist Allusions and the Subjective Voice of His Poetry

Although Li Shangyin does have some romantic poems with few or none Daoist allusions, generally speaking, their use is very dense and this contributes to the formulation of some of his techniques that greatly influenced later romantic poetry. Stephen Owen writes, "Although most poets composed at least a few pieces on Daoist themes or drew upon Daoist lore when addressing serious practitioners, there are very

²⁷⁵ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 638-640.

few poets in our period that we would classify as Daoist poets.”²⁷⁶ I agree that Li Shangyin was not a typical Daoist poet; among others, he did not write typical Daoist poems on themes such as the “Wandering Immortals.” Most of his poems about Daoist practice or people have a second layer of meaning besides describing immortal affairs and can be read otherwise. “Composed in a Dream, After Listening to the Rain with Scholars Wang and Zheng on the Twenty-eighth of the Seventh Lular Month” 七月二十八日夜與王鄭二秀才聽雨後夢作 might be an exception by putting the theatrical descriptions of the immortal world in a dream frame.²⁷⁷ However, as Owen says, “Li Shangyin’s poetic imagination was formally homologous to Daoist knowledge, discursively separating the initiate from uninitiated.”²⁷⁸ It is fair to say that his use of new Daoist allusions in romantic poems was innovative and greatly influenced later poets.

“Poems on Wandering Immortals” has a long history starting from the Han Dynasty, originated perhaps in pre-Qin descriptions of similar experiences in, for example, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.²⁷⁹ Influenced by the rise of metaphysical poems 玄言詩, the wandering immortal poems of the Six Dynasties started to form a characteristic three-paragraph structure. Not only did Daoists write them, but the literati as well. Xiao Tong’s 蕭統 *Wenxuan* 文選 cataloges it as one of the literary forms.²⁸⁰ After the time, although the wandering immortal poems were not as prosperous as before, they continued to appear in many poets’ works. At the beginning of the Tang, Lu Zhaolin’s 盧照鄰 (636-695)

²⁷⁶ Owen, *The Late Tang*, 317.

²⁷⁷ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1183.

²⁷⁸ Owen, *The Late Tang*, 381.

²⁷⁹ *Zhuangzi* 莊子, annot. Sun Tonghai 孫通海 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), 13.

²⁸⁰ Xiao Tong 蕭統 ed., *Wen xuan* 文選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 14.

“Huaixian yin” 懷仙引, for example, was still in a typical three-paragraph structure – meeting the immortal, wandering with him, and ending with the hope of immortality.²⁸¹ In the early Tang, Zhang Zhuo’s 張鷟 (660-740) “The Cave of Roving Immortals” 遊仙窟 opened up the trend of writing about romantic or erotic love by alluding to the immortal world.²⁸² In poetry, this appears usually in the form of visiting courtesans at the entertainment quarters, in which the woman is referred to as an immortal or *xian ren* 仙人. Sometimes the lover is not a courtesan, such as in Yuan Zhen’s “Meeting the Holy One” 會真詩, where Yingying as an unwedded maid is described as a descending goddess and the erotic encounter is compared to an immortal encounter. However, these poems have little relationship with Daoist ideology; they neither reflect the practice of Daoism at the time, nor did they integrate Daoist ideology into the literati conception of poetry.

While comparing courtesans to goddesses is fairly common in late-Tang poem, poems on immortals are rare. Cao Tang, might be an exception, whom Owen calls a real Daoist poet.²⁸³ In his “Larger Wandering Immortals Poems”, he invented the form of narrating a story with a group of heptasyllabic regulated verses by structuring the narrative framework with poem titles to retell the story of Liu Chen 劉晨 and Ruan Zhao 阮肇 visiting the Tiantai Mountain.²⁸⁴ The representations of the story in these poems bear many changes related to the late-Tang culture. For example, it changes the theme of

²⁸¹ *Quan Tang shi*, 520.

²⁸² Zhang Wencheng 張文成, *You xian ku* 遊仙窟, annot. Li Shiren 李時人 and Zhan Xuzuo 詹緒左 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010).

²⁸³ Owen, *The Late Tang*, 317.

²⁸⁴ *Wenyuan yinghua* 文苑英華, comp. Li Fang 李昉 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1966), 1127-1128.

accidentally encountering immortals into their actively searching for immortals, and eliminates the plots of marriage and homesickness, and much increases the number of Daoist images. The first, second and fifth poems of the set are from the perspective of Liu and Ruan, and the third and fourth are from that of the goddesses. It also changes the focus of the narrative from men's erotic encounters with immortals to the emotional interaction between men and women.²⁸⁵

Therefore, Cao Tang's poetry of Wandering Immortals, both the larger and the smaller, demonstrates significant innovations in its poetic voice. Even the scattered poems in the "Smaller Wandering Immortals Poems" have this characteristic. For example, some poems describing love thoughts from a male perspective are distinct from the love poems from the Six Dynasties to the early Tang in expressing romantic feelings. Take the forty-eighth as an example: "The crane of the clouds went into the darkness, / only sorrow remained among the flowers and streams. // Who would know that the jade lady had broken her promise, / closing the gate after saying she would leave it open" 雲鶴冥冥去不分，落花流水恨空存。不知玉女無期信，道與留門卻閉門。²⁸⁶ Compared with Yuan Zhen's "Meeting the Holy One," Cao Tang's poem not only breaks down the objectified and muted female image, but also adds female autonomic subjectivity. Yuan Zhen's self-consciousness of male subjective romantic emotion is restricted by the prejudice of social conventions. There is no possibility of equal dialogue between the two

²⁸⁵ Xu Cuixian 徐翠先, "Cao Tang a youxian shi de yishu chuangxin" 曹唐大遊仙詩的藝術創新, *Jinyang xuekan*, no. 1 (2013): 144-145.

²⁸⁶ *Quan Tang shi*, 7349.

sides of love. Here the man has sent a signal of hope for equal dialogue to the woman after taking her words, hoping to get an explanation to address his regret for not getting to see her. While there are indeed romantic poems with no difference to the conventional ones in “Smaller Wandering Immortals Poems,” this piece appears as a proof that men and women are relatively much more equal in Daoist cosmology, which overrides the traditional Confucian social hierarchy.

Cao Tang was born fifteen years earlier than Li Shangyin. He was first a Daoist priest and then went for the imperial examinations for decades and finally became a lower official. His smaller and larger Wandering Immortal poems were well known in his time, which Li Shangyin was at least aware of and from his poems, we can see the influence. Other than poetic voices, Li Shangyin’s love poems are comparable to Cao Tang’s poems also because of the use of a lot of Daoist allusions and his poems of the Daoist nuns. His poem “Jade Mountain” 玉山 shows a lot of these characteristics.

The Jade Mountain is so high to equal the peak of Langfeng,

The Jade Stream is too clear to store mud.

Where else would the sun’s cart turn around?

There are even the ladders to heaven here.

A hundred *hu* of pearls are under the chin of the sleeping dragon,

The phoenix resides in the phoenix tree even of a thousand *xun*.

I hear there are great talents among the immortals,

Their company is desired after the blowing of the red pipe.

玉山高與閩風齊，玉水清流不貯泥。

何處更求回日馭，此中兼有上天梯。

珠容百斛龍休睡，桐拂千尋鳳要棲。

聞道神仙有才子，赤簫吹罷好相攜。²⁸⁷

Like his many other poems, “Jade Mountain” is open to various interpretations, including asking Ling Hutao’s patronage, mourning Li He, and mourning his own deceased wife.²⁸⁸

But all these explanations are based on the poem’s content, seeking immortality and the immortals. There are five Daoist allusions in the poem: the Jade Mountain; the peak of Langfeng; the sun’s cart turning around; sleeping dragon; and blowing the red pipe. According to *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* 山海經, the Jade Mountain, located west of Mount Kunlun, is the residence of the Queen Mother of the West.²⁸⁹ And Langfeng is a high peak of Mount Kunlun where the immortals reside.²⁹⁰ The sun’s driver Xihe 羲和 turns his cart around at Langfeng because it is too high to pass.

If the first two couplets are mostly clichés, there are new elements in the last two couplets. In the third couplet, the contrast between dragon and phoenix resonates with the common use of them in Li Shangyin’s poems. According to Zhong Laiyin, it is an innovation to use the parallel of the dragon 龍 and the phoenix 鳳 as a symbol for the more equal gender relationships in Li’s romantic poems.²⁹¹ Zhong believes that this usage

²⁸⁷ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 352.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 354-357.

²⁸⁹ *Shanhai jing quanyi* 山海經全譯, annot. and trans. Yuan Ke 袁珂 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1991), 38.

²⁹⁰ *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, comp. Luo Zhufeng 羅竹鳳 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2011), 16923.

²⁹¹ See Zhong Laiyin, *Li Shangyin aiqing shi jie*, 416-422.

is rooted in the Daoist *yinyang* 陰陽 thought.²⁹² By examining identical and similar parallels in Li's poetry, he argues that Li Shangyin has slightly changed the Daoist tradition of pairing dragons and tigers by pairing them instead with the more beautiful phoenixes.²⁹³ I need to add that this use of Li might have been influenced by the feminization and eroticization of the image of the phoenix since the Six Dynasties.²⁹⁴ According to Dai Dange, dragon and phoenix were originally totems and gained the meanings of auspicious signs and cultural authority ever since the pre-Qin time.²⁹⁵ Phoenix first appeared in the third century as an image to denote women other than virtuous men because of its colorful feathers and sonorous voice. In the Tang, dragon and phoenix inherited the meaning of ancestral spirit that could manifest in a good emperor, as well as a gentleman 君子 that was in a transitional period from nobleman to scholar officials. While dragon kept the association with male authority or virtue, phoenix was used more widely on images of women and became eroticized.²⁹⁶ Li Shangyin's use of the image of dragon and phoenix as images for lovers was a plebification or vulgarization of dragon as a romantic poetic image only used on royal circumstances.²⁹⁷ Even though Li also used phoenix image romantically and erotically (often has irony), his usage of

²⁹² Zhong Laiyin, *Li Shangyin aiqing shi jie*, 416.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 416-422.

²⁹⁴ Zheng Huaping 鄭華萍, "Tangsong 'feng' shici yanjiu" 唐宋"鳳"詩詞研究 (Nanjing Normal University, 2014), 18.

²⁹⁵ See Dai Dange 戴丹鶴, "Tangshi longfeng yixiang yanjiu 唐詩龍鳳意象研究" (East China Science & Engineering University, 2009).

²⁹⁶ Zheng Huaping, "Tangsong 'feng' shici yanjiu," 27-30.

²⁹⁷ Only poems on members of royal family use dragon and phoenix to denote romantic relations, for example, Xuan Emperor and Consort Yang in many poems in *Quan Tang shi*, and Princess Yuqing 玉清 and her fiancé-to-be in "The Elegy of Princess Yuqing" 玉清公主挽歌 in *Quan Tang shi*, 290. Also, see Ye Yingzhi 葉穎芝, "Li He shige 'long' 'feng' xilie yixiang yanjiu 李賀詩歌'龍' '鳳' 系列意象研究" (Guangzhou University, 2017)," 16-17.

dragon and phoenix to equally represent male and female in a love relation was his invention based on his own idea of perfect love, which was different from the poems depicting female beauty with the image of phoenix in male exclusive perspective as a popular representation of romantic poetry in Tang.²⁹⁸ Li's idea very possibly came from the story of Xiao Shi 蕭史 and Nong Yu 弄玉, in which dragon and phoenix were mounts or attendants of the two lovers who ascend to immortality, endowing the use with a perfect combination of the meaning of love and Daoist connotations.²⁹⁹ The use also appears in Li's other romantic poems that do not have a Daoist theme, for example, the aforementioned "Spring" of "Four Poems of Yan Terrace," the poem "West Stream" 西溪 for mourning his late wife,³⁰⁰ and "Winter" of the same Yan Terrace poems.³⁰¹

The parallel of dragon and phoenix also appears in Li's set of heptasyllabic regulated verses about the Daoist nunnery "Emerald Walls" 碧城 to denote Daoist nuns and their lovers in sexual encounters.³⁰² The three "Emerald Walls" poems are a group of love poems that use life in Daoist temples as their theme. The second uses a subjective male voice throughout to express male desire, hope, and disappointment of exclusive

²⁹⁸ Because phoenix appear in pairs originally and has been used to denote male and female lovers or couples, so parallel representations of both also appeared in Tang poetry including Li Shangyin's in a few occasions. See Dai Dange, "Tangshi longfeng," 30.

²⁹⁹ *Lie xian zhuan jiaojian*, 83. According to Wang's annotations, several reference books in Song and Ming including *Taiping guangji* cited from *Lie xian zhuan shiyi* 列仙傳拾遺 about the details of Xiao Shi riding a dragon and Nong Yu riding a phoenix. Even though whether Li was able to read *Lie xian zhuan shiyi* or not is unknown because the text and associated information were lost, the details was already shown in Bao Zhao's "Song of Xiao Shi" 蕭史曲 in the Southern Dynasties. Dragon and phoenix in immortal related poems as mounts or attendants of the immortals, which is not necessarily related to romantic relations, is a very common poetic representation in the Tang.

³⁰⁰ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1306.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 1847.

love, in which the third couplet is the description of a sexual encounter scene. According to Zhong Laiyin, it is Li Shangyin's contribution to the Chinese sexual literature, that is, the refinement of the representation of sexual encounter in poetry.³⁰³ Chinese poetry is not lacking descriptions of sexual behavior, especially in the late Tang erotic poems. Since Zhang Zhuo's "The Cave of Roving Immortals," the poets of Tang started writing male subjective sexual desires in narrative, often incorporating poems in the text. The same happened in poetry starting from the mid Tang even though it was more restrained. While the mid Tang produced complicated narratives of *chuanqi* that included female subjectivity into the representation of romantic relations, in poetry it was still very conservative compared to the late Tang period. Li Shangyin is different. When describing the sexual desire or sexual encounter, his poems address both male and female in equal representations. The set of poems titled "Emerald Walls" is from the male lyrical subject's view that probably represents the poet himself, but it does not depict male sexual desire from an exclusively male perspective like many other poets in the late Tang Dynasty. Instead, it represents love by the reciprocal satisfaction of the two genders. Here is the second poem of the set:

To glimpse her shadow, to hear her voice, is to love her.

On the pool of jade the lotus leaves spread out across the water.

Unless you meet Xiao Shi with his flute, do not turn your head:

Do not look on Hong Ya, nor ever touch his shoulder.

³⁰³ Zhong Laiyin, *Li Shangyin aiqing shi jie*, 414.

The purple phoenix strikes a pose with the pendant of *Chu* in its beak:
The crimson scales dance wildly to the plucked strings on the river.
Prince O despairs of his night on the boat,
And sleeps alone by the lighted censer beneath the embroidered quilts.³⁰⁴

對影聞聲已可憐，玉池荷葉正田田。
不逢蕭史休回首，莫見洪崖又拍肩。
紫鳳放嬌銜楚佩，赤鱗狂舞撥湘弦。
鄂君悵望舟中夜，繡被焚香獨自眠。³⁰⁵

The impersonation of females in the Tang Dynasty's romantic poems is still common. Even though the male voice in romantic poems is popular in the mid and late Tang, the representation of women in them is usually objectified, where the male authorial control of love poems is still too strong to form a real dialogical relationship. As mentioned earlier, the female image in love poems in the mid and late Tang is not fundamentally different from that in the traditional boudoir poems in the hands of other poets in the mid and late Tang, which proves that the manifestation of male confessional voice in the poems does not change the basic ideas of love poems. Even for Li Shangyin's younger generation Han Wo, who compiled *Xianglian ji*, it was still the same. Most of Li He's love poems are similar to his "The Beauty of Luo by the Name of Real Pearl" 洛姝真珠, which depicts the image of the female and her surroundings from a

³⁰⁴ The translation is by A. C. Graham, in *Poems of the Late T'ang* (Penguin Publishing Group, 1965), 167.

³⁰⁵ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1847.

male perspective and is no different from traditional Palace Style and boudoir poems.³⁰⁶ The poems in his “Twelve Months,” which Li Shangyin is said to have imitated in his “Four Poems of Yan Terrace,” also use very traditional boudoir lament images.³⁰⁷ Although his “Song of the Well in the Backyard” and similar poems express male confessional emotions as in many literati love poems in the mid and late Tang, women exist passively in his poems, making it impossible to form a dialogical perspective.³⁰⁸

In Li Shangyin’s poems, women are not only one equal side in the sexual relationship, but sometimes also have the same freedom of writing and moving about as the literati. An example is “For the Holy Lady Song at Huayang Temple and Also Send to Master Liu at the Qingdu Temple,” where the couplet “The letter came in jade case with confusing phoenix characters, / dragon scale cooled down after the return to palace” 玉檢賜書迷鳳篆，金華歸駕冷龍鱗 represents not only the female’s autonomy of writing but also her power in causing the emotional change on the part of the male.³⁰⁹ This kind of representation overturns the convention of female passivity and puts male and female in interactive positions.

There are also poems in which the female is described to be highly desired but unreachable, where the male poet seems to be at a inferior position. In these poems, the female image is distant and the male poet’s subjective voice is more announced as it desperately reaches out for dialogue with the distant female. Different from the

³⁰⁶ *Quan Tang shi*, 4400.

³⁰⁷ *Quan Tang shi*, 4397-4399.

³⁰⁸ *Quan Tang shi*, 2219.

³⁰⁹ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 2136.

traditional waiting-to-descend goddesses, these kind of poems often use uncommon Daoist allusions. For example, the image of “the immortal in the Purple Mansion” in an untitled heptasyllabic quatrain symbolizes a woman impossible to reach.

The immortal in the Purple Mansion is styled Precious Lamp;

The cloud-nectar, unconsumed, turns into ice.

How is it on a night when snow and moon mingle their lights,

You are still on the twelve-tiered Jasper Terrace?³¹⁰

紫府仙人號寶燈，雲漿未飲結成冰。

如何雪月交光夜，更在瑤台十二層。³¹¹

There have been many discussions on the reversal of the leading roles in male and female relationship in Li's love poems, but scholars tend to interpret the reversal to be Li's feeling of inferiority and based on it to search for political implications. In this poem, the goddess of the purple mansion is a female because of the image of Jasper Terrace or *Yao tai* 瑤台 and “purple mansion”,³¹² and it is not the conventional goddess in *Chu ci* that's been associated with political allusions. From the aspect of voice, the image of “the immortal in the purple mansion” in Li Shangyin's poems represents the other side of the dialogue the subjective voice of the male poet is targeting at.

Li's parallel of dragon and phoenix as romantic images was not inherited by later romantic poetry possibly because of the politically sensitive image of the dragon. But his

³¹⁰ The translation is by James Liu in *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, 107.

³¹¹ *Li Shangyin shige jiji*, 1612.

³¹² *Ibid.*, n. 1 and n. 3.

formalization of “Cloud and Rain of Wu Mountain” or “Wushan yunyu” 巫山雲雨 as a new allusion extracted from the image of traditional Goddess of Wu Mountain elegantly transforms the direct description of sexual behavior into an image comprehensively used by the literati. Description of sexual encounters, which rarely appeared in poems other than the ones with exclusively male perspective, was formalized and became a part of the language of literati poetry.

According to Ke Zhenchang’s research based on statistics, the image of “Cloud and Rain of Wu Mountain” still has rich meanings and flexible usage in Tang poetry. By Song *ci*, it is all related to love relation between men and women.³¹³ Song *ci* is the literary genre within the form of poetry in which love emotion is much more freely depicted in literati’s perspective. Sex life is an indispensable part of love relations. There are few direct descriptions of sexual encounters in Tang poetry. Representations such as Li Bai’s “How could we get to meet, and blow off the candles and untie the clothes” were not very popular with the literati, although the sex life of the literati in Tang was rich. Hence the poem “Meeting the Holy One” in Yuan Zhen’s “The Tale of Yingying” with the detailed and exposed sexual description was also protected by the double veils of fictional Chuanqi narrative and encountering the goddess. The poem “Before Dawn” by Han Wo mentioned in Chapter One is a comparison between the memory of an erotic tryst and the later “lonely life”. The direct description of sexual encounters in the memory is not common in the late Tang even when romantic/erotic poems were flooding.

³¹³ Ke Zhenchang 柯鎮昌, “Tang shi Song ci zhong ‘wushan yunyu’ yixiang zhi bijiao 唐詩宋詞中‘巫山雲雨’意象之比較,” *Lizhou shizhuan xuebao* 22, no. 4 (2007).

Most of them are representations of the objectified female as the carrier of male desire without essential difference from traditional boudoir poems and the Palace Style poems.

In the Song Dynasty, the word “cloud and rain” or “Yun yu 雲雨” appeared in a large number and only refers to sexual intercourse between men and women. Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書 said that it was “not used to describe obscene matters in the Six Dynasties”.³¹⁴ He criticized Yan Shu 晏殊 for reducing King Huai of Chu’s dream of the goddess of Wu Mountain to “dream of Chu” or “Chu meng 楚夢” and said: “This kind of wording is the habit that grew up in the Tang reference book *Chu Xue Ji* 初學記. It is even more affected by imitating Li Shangyin”.³¹⁵ Indeed, in the Tang, “Cloud and Rain” directly referring to sexual intercourse between men and women is very rare, although “Goddess of Wu Mountain” with the same reference was often used to allude to courtesans or lovers in literati love poems. The formalization of “Cloud and Rain of Wu Mountain” is comprehensively demonstrated in Song *ci* and formed a contrast with Tang Poetry. In this transformation, Li Shangyin played a very important role.³¹⁶ Song *ci* takes the line of refined sentimentality rather than the straight description of romantic/erotic desire that appeared in the late Tang Dynasty, in which the refined and symbolic representation of sexual relations plays an indispensable role. Chapter Four will discuss Li Shangyin’s role in the establishment of the sentimental style of Song *ci* in more detail.

³¹⁴ Qian Zhongshu 錢鍾書, *Guan zhui bian* 管錐編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 1071.

³¹⁵ Qian Zhongshu, *Song shi xuan zhu* 宋詩選注 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2011), 19.

³¹⁶ See the examples and the way Li Shangyin formalized it in Zhong Laiyin, *Li Shangyin aiqing shijie*, 451-452. According to him, the image of “cloud and rain” or just “rain” in Li’s poems with titles that do not mention it usually denotes sexual encounter.

Li Shangyin and Buddhism

In the aforementioned untitled poem on the Purple Mansion, while Purple Mansion is the residence of Daoist immortals, Precious Lamp is from Buddhism.³¹⁷ By using a Buddhist term to name a Daoist maid, Li Shangyin demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of his ideology and worldview. The mid to late Tang was also a time when we see the convergence of all three teachings, including Confucianism, which was comprehensively redefining the identity of the literati class.

Li Shangyin is neither a professional Daoist who inscribes and chants incantations, nor is he only a common believer who fasts, reads Daoist classics and participates in Daoist rituals. He is more of a Daoist who builds his belief on the foundation of the Daoist thought or philosophy. His “Another Eulogy on My Diseased Father-in-law the Lord Minister of Education” 重祭外舅司徒公文 has the paragraph:

Is the birth of a human being a change to something? Is the death of it a change back to something? In the space of unknown substance, *qi* 氣 generates from vacuity, changes into shape, and then changes into life. Now (as death approaches) life will be returned to shape, then to *qi*, it becomes indifferent and ignorant, vast and ungraspable. Then although there are joys and sorrows, they cannot place themselves in the unknown substance! If the changes from vacuity to life and life to vacuity are like the changes from morning to night and spring to summer, then whereas the changes of the seasons move our emotion, how could

³¹⁷ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1612, n. 1.

the hundred folds of changes from life to death be free of regretful emotion? If the regretful emotion is eradicated, how could human beings be valued as the most intelligent?

人之生也，變而往耶？人之逝也，變而來耶？冥冥之間，杳惚之內，虛變而有氣，氣變而有形，形變而有生。今將還生於形，歸形於氣，漠然其不識，浩然其無端，則雖有憂喜悲歡，而亦勿能措於其間矣！苟或以變而之有，變而之無，若朝昏之相交，若春夏之相易。則四時見代，尚動於情，豈百生莫追，遂可無恨！倘或去此，亦孰貴於最靈哉？³¹⁸

The purpose of practicing Daosim is to emphasize that human spirit can be freed from mundane worldly affairs and an ordinary person can transcend to the ranks of immortals and achieve blissful immortality. However, Li Shangyin attaches great importance to the emotional sentiments of life and believes that it is the most precious and spiritual essence of human life. This inclination shows the influence of Zen Buddhism that started to flourish in the mid Tang.

Li Shangyin began to learn Buddhism very early. He already had contacts with the monks Kuang Yi 匡一 and Zen Master Hui 惠禪師 when he studied Daoism in Wangwu Mountain.³¹⁹ In “Poem for Lord Anping” 安平公詩 written in 835, he wrote about his patron Cui Rong’s 崔戎 (764-834) visit to his residence in Zhongnan Mountain, where he prepared for the imperial examination in a Buddhist temple that had a large collection of

³¹⁸ *Li Shangyin wen biannian jiaozhu*, 956-957.

³¹⁹ Zhang Fenrui 張粉瑞, “Li Shangyin aiqing shi yu fojiao guanxi tanxi” 李商隱愛情詩與佛教關係探 (Master’s thesis, Fuzhou Normal University, 2008), 14-15.

Buddhist classics.³²⁰ During his services at the Guangxi, Xuzhou and Zizhou (now Sichuan) military governors' offices, he had frequent contacts with Buddhist monks. At the time of his Zizhou service, he had contacts with Buddhist Master Zhixuan 智玄法師 who returned to his old mountain from Chang'an in 845 because of Emperor Wu's suppression of Buddhism and because of that Li was later written into "Biographies of Eminent Monks of the Song Dynasty" 宋高僧傳 as Zhixuan's disciple.³²¹ The association with Zhixuan was written into a poem by Li titled "Parting with Buddhist Master Zhixuan" 別智玄法師.³²² After the death of his wife in 851, Li Shangyin, who was in Zizhou, subjected himself to Buddhism completely. In the same year, when Liu Zhongying 柳仲郢, Military Governor of Zizhou, wanted to give him a beautiful and talented singer as a female company, he wrote Liu a letter "Presented to the Lord of Hedong" 上河東公啟 to refuse.³²³ In the preface to his *Fannan yi ji* 樊南乙集 written in 853, he said: "For three years, I've lost my family, and was often unhappy. That was when I began to devote myself to Buddhism. Since then I've been willing to ring the bell and sweep the floor, and be an untoured monk in the cool mountains."³²⁴ In the same year, he said in another letter to Liu: "Although I am in the military office, I often stayed at the monasteries. Even so, I still regret that I am in lack of enlightenment and the power to eliminate the evil."³²⁵

³²⁰ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 60-61.

³²¹ Zan Ning 贊寧, *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳, annot. Fan Xiangyong 范祥雍 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 132.

³²² *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 2155.

³²³ *Li Shangyin wen biannian jiaozhu*, 1901-1902.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2177.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2158-2159.

Li Shangyin's Buddhist belief is attributed to the Tiantai sect, mainly based on his belief in the Tiantai sect's classic *Lotus Sutra*. He said in the same letter, "The *Lotus Sutra* is the king of all sutras, is the most respected and the greatest. I've devoted myself to it since I was a child," and that he "built five stone walls at the scriptures courtyard of Huiyi Vihara in Changping Mountain and carved the seven volumes of *Lotus Sutra* in gold characters on them" to show his piety.³²⁶ Li's total devotion to Buddhism was prompted by the death of his wife and only female companion. Different from the influence of Buddhism on poets in the Southern Dynasties when the newly flourishing belief brought new ways of observation, in the late Tang Buddhism had been much more integrated with Confucianism and Daoism and become part of many scholar-officials' basic cultivation. In the middle and late Tang, Chan Buddhism that had prospered among scholar-officials gradually lost its appeal and discipline as it expanded. The Tiantai Sect, which played a critical role in the originating phase of Chan, was closest to it in terms of doctrine. The Tiantai sect not only used Confucian thought to interpret Buddhism but also integrated Daoism into Buddhism by bringing in Daoist internal alchemy into its own "meditation to achieve wisdom" 止觀.³²⁷

In the context of the convergence of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, Chan developed the secularized Buddhism or Buddhism that "has *qing*" 有情. Huineng 慧能,

³²⁶ *Li Shangyin wen biannian jiaozhu*, 2159.

³²⁷ See He Xiaofen 何小芬, "Li Shangyin nüguan shi jiqi wenhua jingshen yanjiu 李商隱女冠詩及其文化精神研究," (Master's thesis, Shaanxi Science & Engineering University, 2010), 59-60.

the Sixth Patriarch of the Chan Sect, allegedly chanted this gatha before he went back to his hometown and achieved nirvana:

The heart is the place that bears the seed of affection,

The dharma rain preludes the blooming flower.

If self-enlightened with the thought that flower comes from the seed of affection,

The result of Bodhi is achieved.

心地含情種，法雨即花生。

自悟花情種，菩提菓自成。³²⁸

The *Vimalakirti Sutra* is a Mahayana Buddhist classic that had a great influence on the secularization of Buddhism in the Tang. Li Shangyin's poem "Responding to Cui the Eighth's Poem on the Early Plum Blossom He Sent Me and Showed Me" 酬崔八早梅有贈兼示之作 shows that he is conversant with Chan thinking:

I know that you went over the wild pond to visit the plum blossoms

The gold decorated bridle lingered long for your enchantment.

Xie Zhuang's sleeves first turned over snow,

Xun Yu again changed the incense in his censer.

Where to brush the chest with butterfly white,

when to apply the forehead with wasp yellow.

Even though Vimalakirti is constantly ill,

he also needs the celestial maiden to scatter flowers for the tests.

³²⁸ Huineng 慧能, *Tan jing jiaoshi* 壇經校釋, ed. Guo Peng 郭朋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 16.

知訪寒梅過野塘，久留金勒為回腸。

謝郎衣袖初翻雪，荀令熏爐更換香。

何處拂胸資蝶粉，幾時塗額藉蜂黃。

維摩一室雖多病，亦要天花做道場。³²⁹

The poem, as many commentators speculated, might indicate that Cui was visiting a beautiful woman, alluded to in the poem as plum blossoms, and that after the visit he showed it to Li Shangyin. If that is the case, Li in the last couplet might be alluding himself to Vimalakirti who manifests himself with illnesses for Buddhist teaching, and the woman Cui visited to the celestial beauty at Vimalakirti's place when the latter was visited by the Bodhisattvas asking about his illness.³³⁰ The celestial beauty was there to test the Bodhisattvas in the sutra. Jiao Ran 皎然 used this allusion in a poem answering Li Ye, in which he affirmed his own Buddhist cultivation as same as shown on the Bodhisattvas at Vimalakirti's place who did not hold the flowers the celestial beauty scattered on them.³³¹ Li instead focused on Vimalakirti and the celestial beauty accompanying him and pointed out the need for constant interaction between them to achieve wisdom. This wisdom not only does not exclude *qing* but also emphasizes the importance of *qing* in achieving Buddhist wisdom. He uses references from Buddhist scriptures to prove that *qing* is critical, and it became the key point for him to form his

³²⁹ Li Shangyin *shige jijie*, 1414.

³³⁰ See Li Shangyin *shige jijie*, 1415, n. 5.

³³¹ *Quan Tang shi*, 9268.

own ideas based on his learning of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. *Qing* is the central term for Li Shangyin to think about life and the world.

This poem, which was likely written in the period of his Zizhou service,³³² indicates that after the finalization of his thoughts in his late years, *qing* still occupied the main position in his ideas. His refusal of Liu Zhongying's present of a singing girl by saying that he "really had restrained himself from (the popular) romance" even though he writes romantic poetry,³³³ shows his undermining of the "sociable eroticism"³³⁴ and the sublimation of his ideas of romantic relation to *qing*. As my discussion in this chapter shows, it is on the basis of Daoist gender relations that Li Shangyin subverts the ideological objectification of women in his representations of women and romantic love. At the same time, he explores the basis of life by the Chan teaching of not abandoning *qing* and achieving enlightenment from the secular world, starting from the most basic human emotions generated from the relation between the two genders.

To conclude this chapter, I cite a short heptasyllabic quatrain by Li Shangyin titled "Sightseeing at the Qu River in Late Autumn" [中文], a concise illustration of his understanding that the root of *qing* lies within the human person:

Spring laments grow when lotus leaves grow,

Autumn sorrows complete when lotus leaves whither.

I deeply know my *qing* persists when my body is alive:

³³² *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1419.

³³³ *Li Shangyin wen biannian jiaozhu*, 1901-1902.

³³⁴ The term is used by Paul Rouzer in *Articulated Ladies*, 296.

I look at the river, and listen to the sound of the flowing water.

荷葉生時春恨生，荷葉枯時秋恨成。

深知身在情長在，悵望江頭江水聲。³³⁵

³³⁵ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1985.

CHAPTER V
FROM ROMANCE TO SENTIMENTALITY:
LI SHANGYIN'S LOVE POEMS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TANG-SONG POETIC
TRANSITION

In the Tang Dynasty when literati *ci* was still in its early phase, the difference between *shi* and *ci* was more a cultural one. They were authored by the same group of writers, and both had relations with the music entertainment culture. The influence of *shi* poetry on *ci* poetry is a question that interested both traditional and modern scholars. In this chapter I discuss the vital role played by Li Shangyin in this process.

Writing about romantic and erotic sentiments is the signature feature of *ci* from the beginning of its emergence. In the late Tang, Wen Tingyun first wrote large quantities of *ci*. Anna Shields researched on the influence of Wen's *ci* on the *Huajian ji* poets in the late Tang and Five Dynasties and how the latter began to show literati subjectivity in writing about romantic and erotic sentiments by adding different voices to the traditional impersonated female voice.³³⁶ As far as the metrical form is concerned, Wen Tingyun contributed greatly to the development of *ci*, but the form for him was only one among others to express the romantic and erotic sentiments; he also, for example, used *yuefu* abundantly. As one form of poetry, *ci* interested literati writers for the main reason of music. The influence of Li Shangyin's poetry on *ci* was also based on the musical nature

³³⁶ Shields, *Crafting A Collection*, 220-275.

of *ci* at its early phase in the late Tang.

In the late Tang and Five Dynasties, *shi* for singing, or *shengshi* 聲詩, and the initial form of *ci*, that is, *quzi ci* 曲子詞, existed at the same time, both of which were used for the party music or *yan yue* 燕樂.³³⁷ Wen Tingyun and the other Huajian *ci* poets as the creators of the literati *ci* favored *quzi ci* instead of *shi* because the development of the party music required more complicated construction of metrical forms of poetic lines and stanzas. Both *shi* (other than *yuefu* for the ancient music) and *ci* can be sung to the party music during this period. The *shi* for singing and *ci* in this time were similar in content because of their entertaining function, most of which were related to romantic and erotic sentiments. Many later *ci* tunes were developed from Tang music. Some even kept the original musical form of regulated verse. For example, “Auspicious Partridge” 瑞鷓鴣, which was a heptasyllabic regulated verse that had been used as lyrics for singing since the beginning of the Tang Dynasty, became a tune of *ci* later but kept all eight heptasyllabic lines.³³⁸ The other example is “Xiao Qinwang” 小秦王, which was originally the name of the Tang royal music academy or *jiaofang* 教坊 music tune “Xiaoqinwang pozhen yue” 小秦王破陣樂 and later used as a *ci* tune title, also known as “Yangguan qu” 陽關曲.³³⁹ From one anonymous poem by the name in the Tang Dynasty, we can see the typical characteristics of the poems for singing at that time.

Willow twigs are too tender to hold the crows,

³³⁷ See Zhang Yuzi 張煜梓, “Tangdai yanyue de yanjiu. 唐代燕樂的研究” (Hebei University, 2008).

³³⁸ *Cihua Cong Bian* 詞話叢編, comp. Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 177.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1116.

Xie Daoyun's home is there by the grey powdered walls.

The swallows haven't come, the spring is lonesome.

In rain, by the small window, she dreams of the pear flowers.

柳條金嫩不勝鴉，

青粉牆頭道韞家。

燕子不來春寂寞，

小窗和雨夢梨花。³⁴⁰

Li Shangyin's romantic poems often use luxuriant language and this sometimes leads to the misunderstanding of them as difficult to read; while in fact, like other contemporary writers such as Wei Zhuang 韋庄(836-910), Li also liked to use function words and colloquial expressions in romantic poetry, which made them unambiguous and straightforward.³⁴¹ A good example is the first of "Two Left Untitled poems":

Last night's stars, last night's winds,

By the West wall of the painted house, East of the hall of cassia.

For bodies no fluttering side by side of splendid phoenix wings,

For hearts the one minute thread from root to tip of the magic horn.

At separate tables, played hook-in-the-palm. The wine of spring warmed.

Teamed as rivals, guessed what the cup hid. The candle flame reddened.

Alas, I hear the drum, must go where office summons,

³⁴⁰ *Cihua Cong Bian*, 431.

³⁴¹ For Wei Zhuang's colloquial style, see Shields, *Crafting A Collection*, 220-275.

Ride my horse to the Orchid Terrace, the wind-uprooted weed my likeness.³⁴²

昨夜星辰昨夜風，畫樓西畔桂堂東。

身無彩鳳雙飛翼，心有靈犀一點通。

隔座送鉤春酒暖，分曹射覆蠟燈紅。

嗟余聽鼓應官去，走馬蘭臺類轉蓬。³⁴³

The repetition of the two “last nights” in the first couplet is colloquial. The sighing “Alas, I hear the drum” in the last couplet is colloquial with a strong first-person tone. What is more, many of Li Shangyin’s heptasyllabic regulated verses often use less common imagery. If you understand the imagery, the poem’s meaning is clear and easy to understand. These characteristics make most of Li’s romantic regulated verses, especially the “Left Untitled” poems, suitable for singing in public.

As I have discussed in the earlier chapters, many of Li’s romantic poems are written in the first-person male voice or can be read from a male subjective perspective. Were these poems actually sung by people in Li Shangyin own time? Did he ever write poems for singing?

We recall that in Cheng Xiuji’s Epitaph discussed in Chapter Four, Li was called a *ci ren*,³⁴⁴ a term that was also applied to Li Bai, referring primarily to a person who wrote poetry for singing in Tang especially late Tang times.³⁴⁵ There seems to be no doubt that at least some of Li’s poems were sung in the late Tang, but it is less clear whether Li

³⁴² The translation is by A. C. Graham in, *Poems of the Late T’ang*, 148.

³⁴³ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 428.

³⁴⁴ Zhou Shaoliang, *Tangdai muzhi huibian*, 2398.

³⁴⁵ Wu Xiangzhou 吳相洲, *Tangdai geshi yu shige* 唐代歌詩與詩歌 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 205.

Shangyin intentionally wrote the poems for singing or not.

According to Zhong Laiyin's research, Li Shangyin's love poems were so popular in his own time that "men and women in the Blue Mansion reciprocated poems, using Li Shangyin's techniques, and they even used his poems directly".³⁴⁶ The best example is the exchange of poems between Yang Lai'er 楊萊兒 and Zhao Guangyuan 趙光遠 as recorded in *Beili zhi* 北里志. Yang was a courtesan at Beili during the last half of the ninth century, and Zhao her patron staying in the capital for the imperial examinations. When Zhao failed, Yang refused to see him again. And Zhao wrote a heptasyllabic regulated verse, "Witten on Lai'er's Wall" 題妓萊兒壁, to remind her of her affection for him.

The door with fish-shaped lock and the Kylin shaped knocker is ajar,
Your memory of me should be like the ever-growing grass.
Drunk, you leaned on the keyhole to peep Han Shou,
In leisure throwing the gold shuttle, you were distressed for Xie Kun.
The night-glowing pearl you wore shone with the jade box,
The shadow of the cold-resistant hairpin fell on the jade cup.
If you want to find out how the person whose heart was broken is doing—
You have completely enslaved the soul of Jiang Yan after the parting.

魚鑰獸環斜掩門，萋萋芳草憶王孫。
醉憑青瑣窺韓壽，閑擲金梭惱謝鯤。

³⁴⁶ Zhong Laiyin, *Li Shangyin aiqing shi jie*, 406.

不夜珠光連玉匣，辟寒釵影落瑤尊。

欲知腸斷相思處，役盡江淹別後魂。³⁴⁷

The third line was inspired by Li Shangyin's "Lady Chia peeped through the curtain at young Secretary Han" in the second of his "Four Untitled Poems" discussed in Chapter Four.³⁴⁸

Lai'er responded with a poem that also uses a slightly modified line from one of Li's untitled poems:

You as my senior frequented my door in your car,

Like Sima Xiangru, you were certainly not admiring Zhuo Wangsun (but his daughter).

I've known that the wings of an ordinary bird are hard to follow those of the phoenix,

Favorably you did not transform from Kun into Peng in the waves (imperial exam).

Frail as me, my emerald ornamented bracelet stuck to my sleeve when parting,

Drunk and singing, my gold hairpin smashed the wine cup.

I am usually affectionate and constantly sick so my years should be short,

Precious fragrant coffin wood should be early prepared for my leaving the world.

³⁴⁷ Cui Lingqin 崔令欽, Sun Qi 孫啟, and Xia Bohe 夏伯合, *Jiaofang ji* 教坊記 *Beili zhi* 北里志 *Qinglou ji* 青樓集 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue chubanshe, 1957), 32.

³⁴⁸ *Li shangyin shige jijie*, 1635-1636, n. 9.

長者車塵每到門，長卿非慕卓王孫。
定知羽翼難隨鳳，卻喜波濤未化鯤。
嬌別翠鈿粘去袂，醉歌金雀碎殘樽。
多情多病年應促，早辦名香為返魂。³⁴⁹

The third line was modeled on Li's "For bodies no fluttering side by side of splendid phoenix wings" in the first of his "Two Untitled Poems." Lai'er used it to discourage Zhao from hoping to fly side by side with her again.

In *Hua'an ci xuan* 花庵詞選, there is an anecdote about how Li Shangyin inspired the early Northern Song scholar Song Qi 宋祁 (998-1061) in one of his song lyrics:

Zijing (Song's style name) crossed the busy street and met the carriages of the imperial family. One of the emperor's concubines in a carriage with lifted curtains saw him and said: "That's Xiao Song." Zijing wrote this *ci* when he was back. It was spread by singing all over the capital and reached the palace. Emperor Ren heard it and asked which of his concubines called out "Xiao Song." One said, "A while ago I served at the royal banquet and saw Your Majesty asking for the academician and the court attendants used that nickname for him. I happened to see him in the car and called out his name." The emperor summoned Zijing and calmly talked to him about this. Zijing became terrified and ashamed. But the emperor smiled and said, "Mount Penglai is not far away." And he gave the concubine to Zijing.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ Cui Lingqin 崔令欽, Sun Qi and Xia Bohe, *Jiaofang ji Beili zhi Qinglou ji*, 32.

³⁵⁰ *Hua'an ci xuan* 花庵詞選, ed. Huang Sheng 黃昇 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), 42.

Song Qi's song lyric is set to the tune of "Partridge Skies" 鷓鴣天 and it reads:

I crossed the path of the imperial carriage with painted wheels and embossed saddle,

there came a call from behind the curtains, wrenching my heart.

For bodies no fluttering side by side of splendid phoenix wings,
for hearts the one-minute thread from root to tip of the magic horn.

House in gold, jail in jade, carriages flowed like a running stream and horses lined up like a dragon.

Young Liu already resented the distance of the P'eng Mountain,

now ten thousand more P'eng Mountain rise!³⁵¹

畫轂雕鞍狹路逢，一聲腸斷簾中。

身無彩鳳雙飛翼，心有靈犀一點通。

金作屋，玉為籠，車如流水馬如龍。

劉郎已恨蓬山遠，更隔蓬山一萬重。³⁵²

Four lines or half of the poem are taken verbatim from, respectively, two of Li Shangyin's "Left Untitled" poems.³⁵³ This anecdote shows the degree in which Li Shangyin's poems were used by some song lyrics writers in the Song.

These indirect and direct uses of Li's "Left Untitled" poems in romantic settings indicated that his love poems had circulated widely from the late Tang to the early

³⁵¹ The translation of the first couplets by Li Shangyin borrowed here is by A. C. Graham in *Poems of the Late T'ang*, 148; and second by James Liu, in *The Poetry of Li Shang-yin*, 62.

³⁵² *Quan Song ci* 全宋詞, ed. Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 117.

³⁵³ The second couplet is from the first of "Two Left Untitled Poems", *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 428; the last couplet is from the first of the "Four Poems Left Untitled", *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1632.

Northern Song.

In the late Tang, romantic poems were unprecedentedly prosperous. Talented poets wrote regulated verses especially for singing. Huang Tao 黃滔 (840-911) said in “Responding to Chen Panyin’s Letter on Poetry” 答陳礪隱論詩書: “During the Xiantong 咸通 (860-874) and Qianfu 乾符 (874-879) reigns, the classical culture was getting bleak and the voices of Zheng and Wei took hold, called ‘regulated poems by talented authors for singing’ 今體才調歌詩.”³⁵⁴ Han Wo described how his poems in the *Xianglian ji* were sung in his preface to the anthology:

I wrote over a thousand songs and poems, amongst which hundreds are flamboyant that I am proud of. They are spreading among the scholars, or are used as lyrics for songs by the musicians. They are written on the powdered and pepper scented walls (everywhere), even in oblique lines and petite handwritings. People reciting them in private are countless.

所著歌詩不啻千首，其間以綺麗得意者，亦數百篇，往往在士大夫口，或樂官配入聲律，粉牆椒壁，斜行小字，竊咏者不可勝紀。³⁵⁵

The metrical forms of the poems in the anthology also provide internal evidence that some of them were possibly set to musical tunes and sung.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ Quoted in Luo Shijin 羅時進, “Xianqian shifeng jiqi caidiao geshi” 咸乾世風及其才調歌詩, *Wenxue pinglun*, no. 6 (2003), 112.

³⁵⁵ *Tangsong ci huiping tang wudai juan*, 224.

³⁵⁶ Shi Zhecun’s 施蜚存 points out that the “long and short sentences” -- “San yi 三憶” (three verses), “Yu he 玉合”, “Jinling 金陵” and “Yan hua luo 厭花落” in *Xianglian Ji* are neither ancient nor recent and seems to be neither *shi* poetry nor *ci* poetry; and they tends to be lyrics, meaning they has the potential to have music composed for it to be sung. Shi Zhecun 施蜚存, *Tangshi baihua* 唐詩百話 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 695-696.

Does this also apply to some of Li Shangyin's poems? My answer is that it was likely, although we do not have direct evidence. He might have deliberately created poems for singing. Many of his poems indicate entertainment circumstances or settings. One example is "Presented to the Two Secretaries on behalf of an Official Entertaining Girl at a Drinking Party" 飲席代官妓贈兩從事:

On the bridge the new master with spring jacket stands,
By the side of the river the old master tilts his hat.
I hope to be turned into a red ribbon,
So that it can be carried by the beaks of both phoenixes.

新人橋上著春衫，
舊主江邊側帽簷。
願得化為紅綬帶，
許教雙鳳一時銜。³⁵⁷

From the title we can see that the poem was very likely written for the singing girl to sing at the banquet. Some of his other similar poems were also possibly composed for singing originally.

He has another poem titled "Presented to Someone on Behalf of Someone Else" 代贈, which was likely sung because it shows some important characteristics of the lyrics of a song; e.g., its metrical form, its romantic content, and its impersonated voice. The combination of the two antithetical five-character regulated couplets and two seven-

³⁵⁷ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1439.

character free lines makes it closer to regulated verses. This kind of poems might be a unique attempt of Li Shangyin to adjust the metrical form of regulated verses to cater to music, making it prone to have been created for ready-made tunes, which was even closer to *quzi ci*.

Living at the end of the willow road
as well as by the lotus lake.
Having the brocade step screen as the riches,
it only reflects the pearl ornamented harp.
Mandarin ducks are better off both grey-haired,
flying around in the misty rain of autumn.
楊柳路盡處，芙蓉湖上頭。
雖同錦步障，獨映鈿箜篌。
鴛鴦可羨頭俱白，飛去飛來烟雨秋。³⁵⁸

Because of the complicated state of poetry being sung at the time and the lack of records, we cannot make a list of Li's poems that were probably sung because of their resembleness to the song lyrics. We can be more sure, however, what kind of poems were not sung in his time.

After the mid-Tang, poets may have chosen famous singers to sing their own poems, as Bai Juyi states in a poem: "I am acquainted with several old-time courtesan friends, / and I have a couple of new poems to spread by their singing" 故妓數人憑問訊，新詩兩

³⁵⁸ Li Shangyin *shige jijie*, 2010.

首情留傳。³⁵⁹ Although we have poems that have clear romantic themes such as Yuan Zhen's *yuanhe* style poems, these poems reasonably were not composed for singing. Most of the poems for singing at the time were those given to the entertaining girls like the one by Li Shangyin we just mentioned or third-person narrative poems such as "Song of Everlasting Sorrow."³⁶⁰ We can look at the poem exchanges between Han Wo and several scholar-officials in 901 and conclude that social and occasional poetry between literati poets in the late Tang was mostly in the form of male impersonating female and there was little confessional voice of male longing.³⁶¹ More importantly, although the confessional voice of male longing was seen in the romantic poems after the mid-Tang, the techniques of male subjective expression of romantic or erotic sentiments were still rough, and many of the poems were literally depicting blunt male sexual desires.

So our question is, how did the literati poets establish the kind of social and cultural relations in which they can express their love and feelings through the subjective first-person voice? Was it only a sudden phenomenon created by the geographical and historical conditions of western Sichuan when Huajian *ci* prevailed? That obviously ignores the preceding mid-to-late Tang time when romantic poetry including the early form of *ci* was comprehensively explored by many poets. In the Chapter Two, I mentioned that although Han Wo's *Xianglian ji* contains some poems directly expressing male longing, these poems either superficially address only male sexual desire, or are

³⁵⁹ Bai Juyi *ji jianzhu*, 2461.

³⁶⁰ Wu Xiangzhou, *Tangdai geshi yu shige*, 144-147.

³⁶¹ Liu Xuekai, *Li Shangyin shige jieshou shi*, 421-422.

coarse in their techniques. Women are still objectified in the expression of romantic and erotic relations and the aesthetic is also problematic evaluated under the orthodox tradition of poetry. Their contribution to the establishment of the subjective lyrical voice as in the later *ci* was therefore limited.

Anna Shields writes that for the earliest *ci* anthology *Huajian ji*, despite the innovative use of vernacular phrases, the poets were promoting a style that owed more to Tang poetry, particularly romantic poetry, than to popular songs. She suggests that the *Huajian ji* poets' development of the male-voiced lyric represents an effort to rework the song lyric to literati tastes: "by using a confessional voice of male longing, the poets appropriated the impression of emotional sincerity—the authenticity of *shi*—for song lyrics as a literary genre."³⁶² Shields considers Wen Tingyun and Li Shangyin as the two poets who had the most influence on *Huajian ci*. Among the two, I would add, the confessional voice of male longing in Li Shangyin, and for that matter, Han Wo, is much more announced than in Wen Tingyun, including both *shi* and *ci*.

Shields also notes that besides the traditional anonymous third-person observer describing a female subject and the male first-person voice as the two main categories of writing perspectives in the *Huajian ci*, there are also the uncertain third- or first-person perspective and the strong first-person voice of uncertain gender perspective. She writes, "In these two smaller groups of lyrics, the ambiguity of perspective or voice surely stems from the performance needs of song lyrics; this ambiguity would allow either kind of

³⁶² Shields, *Crafting A Collection*, 228.

song to be performed plausibly by either male or female singers.”³⁶³ The latter two kinds are not found in Han Wo’s poems but appear in Li Shangyin’s poems, such as “Spring” in the Yan Terrace set. Li’s poems of uncertain voice suitable to be read in male confessional voice would also be suitable for women to sing. When such a poem is sung by a female singer, not only is the female voice highlighted, but the subjectivity of the female singer also has an opportunity to be part of the dialogue. However, the number of such poems with unclear voices is small. Most of his poems have clear voices, including some poems with women as the lyrical subject and speaks women’s subjective consciousness.

The popularity of Li Shangyin’s “Left Untitled” poems may support the hypothesis that at least some of them were sung even though Li Shangyin may not have written them for that purpose. And being used as lyrics for singing might have been a precondition for the poems to be borrowed by *ci* writers in the Song. Although from poems in the *Huajian ji* we do not see direct influence of Li Shangyin in terms of word choice or syntax, they bear his mark in poetic voice. We can even argue that his influence is more profound than Wen Tingyun’s.

Although *Huajian ci* gave rise to innovative romantic poetic voices and initiated new changes in the love consciousness of *ci* poetry, a large portion of them still imitate the traditional boudoir laments. As Shields says, the group of *Huajian ci* “that use an anonymous third-person observer to describe a female subject” is “the largest.”³⁶⁴ The

³⁶³ Ibid., 222.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

sentimental style of later Song *ci* is still weak among Huajian poets.

Li Shangyin's romantic poetry was comprehensively borrowed by Song *ci* writers. The examples I am going to give are those borrowed by *ci* in the male first-person voice or voice of uncertain gender that can be read from the perspective of a male.

In a song lyric by Liu Yong 柳永 (984-1053) to the tune "Feng qi wu" 鳳栖梧, the couplet "I have no regret that the dress takes to loosen gradually; / more and more emaciated, I am rather for him/her only distressed as I did" 衣帶漸寬終不悔, 為伊消得人憔悴.³⁶⁵ It has no definite gender on the lyrical subject. The theme and rhetoric are similar to Li Shangyin's love poems with uncertain gender on the lyrical subject. The line borrows from Li's "The gown's sash lacks all feeling, it may be loose or tight" 衣帶無情有寬窄 from "Spring" of the Yan Terrace set.³⁶⁶ Half of Qin Guan's 秦觀 (1049-1100) "Ruan lang gui" 阮郎歸 is borrowed from the first of Li's the first two couplets of "Two Left Untitled Poems" discussed before: "Palace waist curling and the circled hair loosening, / we met deep in the night hall, for no reason the autumn wind blew out the silver candles. // We had shared hearts like the one minute thread from root to tip of the magic horn" 宮腰嫋嫋翠鬢松。夜堂深處逢。無端銀燭殞秋風。靈犀得暗通。³⁶⁷ Like Li's poem, Qin Guan's *ci* is based on the male lyrical subject's recalling of the encounter with his lover, with the second stanza adding his sorrow of separation after that. His "Queqiao xian 鵲橋仙", an elaboration of the theme of the title, has the line "When they

³⁶⁵ *Quan Song ci*, 25.

³⁶⁶ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 85.

³⁶⁷ *Quan Song ci*, 463. For the Li Shangyin poem, see *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 428.

(Weaver Girl and Cowherd) met at the time of gold wind and jade dew, no secular reunion can compare with that 金風玉露一相逢, 便勝卻人間無數”,³⁶⁸ which borrows Li’s poem “The evening of Double Seven Day in the year of Xinwei 辛未七夕”: “By the Milky Way in the sky, why wait until the time of gold wind and jade dew to reunite 由來碧落銀河畔, 可要金風玉露時”.³⁶⁹ “The time of gold wind and jade dew 金風玉露” was a phrasing created by Li that became a well-known idiom after the poem. Qin’s *ci* was subverting Li’s doubt on meeting on only the time of gold wind and jade dew, showing his perspective of treasured short meeting different from Li’s hoping for more meeting times for the lovers, but both the poems have no exclusive impersonating gendered voice that was commonly used in poems with the same theme ever since *The Nineteen Ancient Poems*. He Zhu 賀鑄 (1052-1125) said bluntly: “My brush drives Li Shangyin and Wen Tingyun so frequently that I am always on the hump” 吾筆端驅使李商隱、溫庭筠, 常奔命不暇. In his song lyric to the tune “Heng tang lu” 橫塘路, the line “who to spend the good years of the inlaid harp with” 錦瑟年華誰與度,³⁷⁰ for example, is borrowed from Li’s “The Inlaid Harp” 錦瑟: “The ornamented zither, for no reason, has fifty strings. / Each string, each bridge, recalls a youthful year” 錦瑟無端五十弦, 一弦一柱思華年,³⁷¹ which is used to express the lament of the male lyrical subject for not seeing his lover. Even Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), known for his *ci* poems’ bold and unconstrained style of *Haofang pai* 豪放派, borrowed the line “I’m sorrowful to the extent that my world turns

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 459.

³⁶⁹ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1172.

³⁷⁰ *Quan Song ci*, 513.

³⁷¹ *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1579.

upside down, you might not be able to recognize me when we meet 愁到天地翻，相看
不相識” in Li’s “Fangzhong qu 房中曲”³⁷² for mourning his wife in his “Jiang shen zi 江
神子”: “Even when we meet, you should be unable to recognize me, with my face
covered with dust and temples like the frost 縱使相逢應不識，塵滿面，鬢如霜”.³⁷³
Examples like these abound in the works of other *ci* writers.

The best example of Li’s original creation and use in a love poem became romantic
imageries that became linguistic references for later *ci* poetry is his “To Gift someone on
behalf of someone”. The poem is from an impersonating perspective, in which the lyrical
subject is sexually indeterminate, meaning both male and female are possible. Judging by
most of the poems in the same theme at Li’s time, the lyrical subject is more likely to be a
female, but knowing that Li has many poems in male subjective first-person voice, it is
also very possible to be in the voice of a male.

Upstairs, I viewed the dusk till dark,
The jade ladder ends abruptly under the crescent moon.
The plantain curls up and lilac bud doesn’t bloom,
Both lost in sorrow in the spring breezes.
樓上黃昏欲望休，
玉梯橫絕月如鉤。
芭蕉不展丁香結，

³⁷² *Li Shangyin shige jijie*, 1145.

³⁷³ *Quan Song ci*, 300.

同向春風各自愁。³⁷⁴

This work expressing love melancholy looks very much like the old-fashioned boudoir lament poems on the surface. However, despite the shadow of tradition, it is different from boudoir lament poems by the second couplet which becomes borrowed constantly by *ci* poetry. It describes the increasing love and sorrow build upon reciprocity. It is not clear if the imagery of lilac bud concentrating sorrow was invented by Li Shangyin, but the parallel of plantain leaf and lilac bud was definitely created originally by him.

An anecdote about He Zhu and his lover shows that this poem by Li was well known in the Northern Song. He Zhu's "Shizhou yin 石州引" has the line "The plantain curls up and lilac bud doesn't bloom" exactly the same with the line in Li's "To Gift someone on behalf of someone", clearly being a direct borrowing. At the end of the first stanza, after "I still remember that I exited the fortress at the same time of year 猶記出關來，恰如今時節", the second stanza begins:

I was about to head off.

Aromatic wine in the painted tower, ringing songs with red tears, we were suddenly about to part.

Now we've already parted for years, there has been no correspondence.

Want to know how much new sorrow is in the heart? The plantain curls up and lilac bud doesn't bloom.

Having looked out to the other side of the land for lovesickness, now we are both

³⁷⁴ Li Shangyin *shige jijie*, 2012.

tired of the wind and moon 。

將發 。

畫樓芳酒，紅淚清歌，頓成輕別 。

已是經年，杳杳音塵都絕 。

欲知方寸，共有幾許新愁？芭蕉不展丁香結 。

枉望斷天涯，兩厭厭風月 。

³⁷⁵

The long ci poem or *man ci* 慢詞 is about recalling the scene and feeling of separating from the lover in the perspective of the male lyrical subject. The line is no doubt in the male poet's voice but concerns both sides of the love relation, with the last line again pointing to "both" or "*liang* 兩": "Having looked out to the other side of the land for lovesickness, now we are both tired of the wind and moon". The poet's speculation of his lover is not ungrounded. Wu Zeng's 吳曾 (around 1162 AD) *Nenggai zhai manlu* 能改齋漫錄 volume sixteen recorded an anecdote about He's writing of this *ci*:

He Zhu was in love with a beautiful woman. They parted for a long time, and the woman sent a poem to convey her love:

Relying on the fence alone, full of tears;

I have no mood to seek spring in the garden.

Even though your affection is like the lilac bud,

my heart like the plantain leaves cannot spread (as freed from sorrow).

獨倚危欄淚滿襟 。

小園春色懶追尋 。

³⁷⁵ *Quan Song ci* 全宋詞, ed. Tang Guizhang 唐圭璋 et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), 540.

深恩縱似丁香結，難展芭蕉一片心。

He Zhu's poem was inspired by it.³⁷⁶

The woman's poem was obviously paying tribute to Li Shangyin's "To Gift someone on behalf of someone" by elaborating the line "The plantain curls up and lilac bud doesn't bloom, both lost in sorrow in the spring breezes" with announced voices of both genders in love. So is He Zhu by using the exact same line from Li's poem as the response, but in a long *ci* poetry with a function of speaking to his literati peers, not only responding to his lover privately.

Looking back at Li's "To Gift someone on behalf of someone" in the context of the late Tang, it can be seen that he wrote a popular poem of boudoir laments at his time and earlier that seems to fit only impersonated female voice into one with gender uncertainty on the lyrical subject, which was "copied" by *ci* poets to represent reciprocating love feelings in *ci* poems of male confessional first-person voice. The genders of the two "someone" in the title can easily be exchanged, although the lyrical subject is more likely to be a female because such a male confessional lyrical voice in the romantic poems was yet to form amongst most of the male literati at Li's time. But imagine this poem being sung, it would be easy for both men and women to identify with the lyrical subject. Because of the existence of reciprocating love empathy, it broke through boudoir lament poetry and introduced male subjectivity of love sentiments, thus opened up the free expression of love feelings in male literati poetry.

³⁷⁶ Wu Zeng 吳曾, *Nenggai zhai manlu* 能改齋漫錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1979), 484.

The process from Huajian *ci* to later styles of literati *ci* in the Song was gradual. Li Shangyin was the pioneer who made significant contributions to the transformation, whose influence in this area went far beyond the late Tang.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In 2017, Mark Obama Ndesandjo, half brother of former United States President Barack Obama, launched an ambitious project translating Li Shangyin's entire poetry into English. Although he was a businessman with diplomas in science and performance art based in Guangzhou, China, and despite his statement that "I don't much care, frankly, if there are several wrong notes as long as the feeling or emotion in the poem is captured[s]o if one is looking for a scholarly exegesis on each poem, this is not that place,"³⁷⁷ from what I have seen, the translations are quite faithful to the original text and quite coherent (he has really mastered the Chinese language). This fact, echoing Liuzhi's acceptance of Li's Yan Terrace poems by mere listening to them, indicates that the popular belief that Li's poetry is incomprehensible or untranslatable, is not really the case. Nearly everyone who can read Chinese can appreciate a large portion of Li's poetry.

In my dissertation, I have explored the relationship between the culture of mid-to-late Tang and the voices in Li's romantic poems that reinvented the romantic aspect of the literati identity. I have argued that the perspectives of literary and cultural history give us new ways of understanding Li's romantic poems as both a cultural artifact and poetic texts. More specifically, Li contributed significantly to the development of the refined confessional voice of male longing in romantic *ci* poetry.

³⁷⁷ Mark Obama Ndesandjo, "Poetry Index of The Complete Poems of Li Shangyin Interpreted into English by Mark Obama Ndesandjo," *A Tang Poet From Nairobi*, <https://atangpoetfromnairobi.com/poetry-index/complete-poems/> (accessed April 30, 2019).

I first put Li's romantic poetry into the context of romantic poetic composition as a cultural phenomenon that originated in the mid-Tang and rose to prominence at the end of the Tang. I argued that Yuan Zhen in the mid-Tang started exploring male literati first-person romantic subjectivity and that Li Shangyin's further experiment of the subject and form, much more innovative than his follower Han Wo, broke through the conventional male impersonating female voice and the late-Tang eroticized male-exclusive voice by rendering romantic poetic voices dialogical. By using fictional references in romantic poetry, Li incorporates *chuanqi* elements in his writing of romantic poetry to explore new possibilities with the poetic voice. Other than the culture of romance, the religious culture of Tang was also pivotal in redefining gender relations in Li Shangyin's poetry. Li's deep association with Daoism and Buddhism formed the basis for his unconventional equal representation of both genders and his emphasis on *qing*, which became a key value for him in both his life and his poetry. In poems with a female voice, the poet is no longer an impersonator but holds a dialogical position with his female protagonist. In poems with the poet's voice as the lyrical subject, the male perspective is not exclusively male-centered but incorporates the female as a reciprocating respondent, unlike many of his contemporaries who either eroticize the female and romantic encounter from an exclusive male perspective or impose male-centered judgments on the female protagonist. He also wrote poems with a completely female voice by legitimizing the female romantic discourse. His unconventional use of Daoist images also greatly influenced later poetic representations of romantic love.

Both traditional and modern scholars have tried to understand the great influence of Li Shangyin's poems on writers in later periods, especially his romantic poems on the development of the song lyrics. I argued that the influence of Li's romantic poems on the Huajian *ci* as the representative of the earliest literati *ci* is illustrated most prominently in his reinvention of the poetic voice in general even though we cannot tie that influence specifically at the lexical or sentence level. Other than the Huajian poets, Li's romantic poems were directly or indirectly borrowed by a lot of others, including both *shi* and *ci* writers. Most of the borrowings of Li's poetry by *ci* writers happen in those *ci* works with a male confessional voice or voice of uncertain gender. Li Shangyin played the most significant role in the transformation from romantic *shi* to romantic *ci*, especially in the rise of the confessional voice of male longing through the speaker's first-person voice.

In my study I was not able to look at the influence of Li Shangyin's romantic poems on the *ci* of the Southern Song, a period that saw the prominence of *wanyue ci* 婉約詞 in which the theme of romantic love plays an important role. The influence of Li Shangyin's romantic poetry on Chinese poetry in general, including *shi*, *ci*, and even *qu* 曲, is an even bigger topic that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It is also worth noting that the romantic poetry of Li Shangyin had an impact on modern Chinese poets as well, including Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899-1946), Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 (1905-1950), and others.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁸ Tang Zhenna 唐臻娜, "Lun Li Shangyin Shige Zai Zhongxifang de Xiandai Jiazhi 論李商隱詩歌在中西方的現代價值," *Renwen Zazhi*, no. 8 (2016): 68.

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