

Reviewed Work: *A Study of Liu Yong and His Lyrics*, by Laifong  
Leung. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing House, 2020.  
PP x + 506. ¥98.00 (paper back). ISBN 978-7-5001-6326-8

YUAN Long-zhen, DANG Zheng-sheng

Xi'an International Studies University, China

WANG Xiao-long

Gansu Agricultural University, Gansu, China

Laifong Leung

University of Alberta, Alberta, Canada

Laifong Leung, based on the literature and materials from Chinese, English and Japanese, by using empirical approach and closing reading, produced Chinese-English combined version *A Study of Liu Yong and His Lyrics*. The work mainly probes into Liu Yong's life story and closely analyzes the characteristics of his lyrics in the way of tune titles, thematic matters, images and diction, rhythm and structure, and his contributions to the establishment of Ci genre are dealt with. Therefore, it is rewarding to promote academic exchange and disseminate classical Chinese literature, and it is pioneering to provide a new angle in the study of Liu Yong and his lyrics by using quantitative analysis.

*Keywords:* writing techniques of Liu's lyrics, empirical approach, academic translation

Laifong Leung's Chinese-English version *A Study of Liu Yong and His Lyrics*, based on her thesis for Master Degree in 1976, which was published in 1985 by Hong Kong SDX Joint Publishing Company (三联书店) in full Chinese version, was released in 2020 in China after her two-year English translation. Ci (variously known as Tz's, lyrics, metrical meter, song lyrics), a successor of Tang Shi in the progress of Chinese poetry, was originally sung and performed on banquets for entertainment by songgirls and courtesans around Tang Dynasty (618-907), gained popularity for its expressing one's innermost feelings among commoners, and reached its zenith in Song Dynasty (960-1279). Regrettably, although Ci can rival with Shi poetry of Tang Dynasty in aesthetics and literary value, it has been less translated and studied in English speaking world compared with Tang Shi in terms of

---

YUAN Long-zhen (Contributors), a doctoral student in Xi'an International Studies University; Associate Professor of School of Humanities in Gansu Agricultural University, with research interest in literary translation, especially in English translation of Ci Poetry in Song Dynasty.

DANG Zheng-sheng (Corresponding reviewer), Professor, Doctor of literature, tutor of Ph.D. student in Xi'an International Studies University, specialized in literary translation studies and translation criticism.

WANG Xiao-long (Contributor), a doctoral student in Xi'an International Studies University, lecture in Gansu Agricultural University, with special interest in translation of Chinese Classics.

Laifong Leung, Professor Emerita of University of Alberta, presently Chief Executive Chairman of Chinese-Canadian Authors Association, pursues her research interests first in song lyrics and later devotes her life to researching and spreading contemporary Chinese literature and Sinophone Literature to the English world.

duration, scale and quantity of translation. In fact, translation matters more. Known to all, Ci is filled in to the melody (lyrical tune), with tune patterns restricting its meter, rhyming scheme, tonal quality, number of words, structural arrangement etc, especially its intrinsic musical quality (various rhyming schemes and even or oblique tones) designated by rule-bound tune patterns so the rigid rules of lyric composing techniques add much more difficulties to its English reproduction if one adheres to the original faithfully in form, prosody and meaning due to the respective linguistic and poetic differences. Therefore, although Ci poetry, as a gem in the gallery of Chinese literature, with national-specific artistic glamour, has been well composed throughout the history, few have been translated into foreign languages, and even the English translation of academic anthology on Ci poetry has even been scarce. The appearance of Leung's work is an adventurous breakthrough to make a study of Liu Yong's lyrics and disseminate it in the English reading world for the reason of relatively rare English-Chinese publications of academic research on Ci poetry committed to a particular lyricist and his works.

Liu Yong was a prominent lyricist in early Song Dynasty, when *xiaoling* (小令, short lyrics, popular from Tang and Five Dynasties on) took up the dominating position and was favored by the literati circles, while *manci* (慢词, long lyrics, a major category of Ci-poetry in classical Chinese literature) was rejected by the main stream of social construct due to its folk origin, causing its failure to be widely accepted as literary orthodox. Liu Yong, excelled in music and writing song words, devoted his life to innovate and develop a new mode of *manci* composing in form, content and writing devices, carrying on the lyrical character of Chinese poetry, making a forward step toward *manci*'s replacing *xiaoling* as the dominant genre in Ci poetry, and paving the way for the evolution of Drama of Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). However, as a principal promoter of *manci* composing artistry, he is nearly "invisible" in the history of Chinese poetry, even the exact dates of his birth and death was a long-standing unsettled issue and there has been controversial about his life story because of the shortage of source material on the events and activities throughout his life, and records in *History of Song Dynasty*, notes, jottings and local gazetteers related to his life story through ages were quite scarce, and less informative. What's more, little attention has been paid to conducting the specialist study of his composing characteristics. As such, the monograph, through probing into Liu Yong's life and writing peculiarities, is planned to introduce Liu Yong and his lyrics to English-speaking world, with the purpose of making academic exchange and disseminating classical Chinese literature.

The work is divided into two parts, the first is focused on Liu Yong's life story, including his family background, life in Bianjing (the capital where Liu Yong lived in his early years), failures in Imperial examinations, official career and the places where he visited and was buried after death. After examining the information from scattered sources available and logical analysis, the author not only puts forward that he was born in 985, died in 1053 (p. 180) and buried in Run Zhou (present day Zhen Jiang County in the province Jiangsu) (pp 198-199), which conforms the renowned Chinese scholars Tang Guizhang and Jin Qihua's statements (1959: p. 17; 1969, p. 72), but also reconstructed Liu Yong's life trajectory (p. 201) in a form of map. Part two is the main body, and contains five chapters exploring the characteristics of his lyric writings. The first chapter mainly discusses the tune patterns used by Liu Yong, his innovations in musical mode and his creation of tune patterns. Based on gathered historical materials, through cross-comparing Liu Yong with his contemporary counterparts in lyric parameters and consulting the books and dictionaries regarding prosody, the major findings are as follows: among 127 tune patterns of Liu's 213 lyrics, "at least 26 tune patterns were his own creation" (p. 215), which

addresses the controversial issue concerning the exact number of tune patterns produced by Liu; the tune pattern to Ci Ratio is 1.6, namely, he wrote 1.6 lyrics for every tune pattern, which shows that he was more adventurous to make innovation in using tune patterns; Liu's creative use of tune patterns derived from the popular folk songs of the time instead of "being obscure ones", the long-held theory by lyric critics; the author further stressed that Liu Yong combined refined *xiaoling* and medley (诸宫调, a type of story-telling, generally written to the same pattern in variant forms) into *manci*. Chapter 2 is devoted to the representative thematic matters of Liu Yong's Lyrics, which are roughly subsumed under the categories of chamber romance, separation and rootless wandering, and city life. Although there has been consensus among scholars through ages that Liu Yong had been harshly condemned for being vulgar and lewd within his lyrics concerning women and romance, and his pieces depicting separation and wandering about has won him high reputation, little concern has been given to his writings describing city life and even no concrete evidence has been provided to support how Liu Yong expanded the scope of Ci writings. The author states that Liu Yong was "the first lyricist to use the theme of city life in significant way" (pp. 268-269), and that his innovative use of expansive description "moved the world of Ci from confined bedchamber to the outdoors" (p. 274), thus broadening the poetic vision of Ci poetry greatly. In the third Chapter, the author discusses imagery and diction in Liu's lyrics, with special focus on his distinctive skill in juxtaposing two contrary images collocated with uncommon modifiers, making his lyrics more appealing and less repetitive. What's more, it is worth noting that, although the opinions have divided on Liu Yong's incorporation of colloquialism within his lyrics, the author argues that Liu's unconventional use of colloquialisms as "one of his magnificent contribution toward the language development of Ci", "changing the hackneyed and cliché-ridden language style of TWDC (唐五代词, Lyrics of Tang and Five Dynasties)" (p. 319), causing a controversial uproar within the literary realm that continues throughout history. She further comments that he combined colloquial expressions with his refined poetic diction artistically, which makes the language in his lyrics enriched and refreshing, the rhythmic flow strengthened, leading to the popularity of his lyrics among the general public. In Chapter 4, in response to the unique feature of "being in harmony with the musical rules", the author deals with Liu Yong's creative application of poetic devices for manifesting musical aspects (rhythm and structural continuity) in his compositions. For one thing, repetition devices at the word level in his lyrics are presented, such as onomatopoeia, alliteration, reduplicatives; for another, his skillful writing style at sentence-pattern level is concerned with caesural patterns, lead-words and enjambments, among them, the lead-words is considered as "unique characteristic" (p. 374) and especially his use of enjambment as his strong contributor to the "establishment of a continuous rhythm in the structure for *manci*" (p. 396). Liu's musical talent and linguistic gift provides the tight rhythm and structure continuity within his compositions, endowing his lyrics with rhythmic continuity, and enforcing the auditory effect. Chapter 5 makes a close analysis of structural features within Liu's lyrics, with the great importance put to his innovative writing techniques, such as narration, plain language description and expansive technique, especially the last one, the basic writing mode *formanci* which has been considered as "his unique generating principle" (p. 434) leading to Liu Yong's successful assimilating human emotions with images found in the nature, achieving "a fusion of emotion and scene". The concluding chapter is followed by a brief remark, accentuating that Liu's four significant contributions to the development of Ci poetry and his far-reaching influence on later lyricists, and restates that Liu Yong, the pioneer of *manci*, promotes *manci*'s popularity and makes *manci* a dominant literary genre in classical Chinese literature.

As the first scholarly publishing regarding Liu Yong and his lyrics written in Chinese and translated in English by the author, there are many merits to be noted, among which three major strengths deserve to be presented. Firstly, aside from gathering and analyzing various historical material and literature in Chinese, English and Japanese, the author's effort to innovating research methods of exploring Liu's lyrics can be a big breakthrough through combination of Chinese literature research method and Western empirical-based approach. Specifically speaking, the work, through examining a wide variety of source materials, including different base versions of *Collection of Songs* (乐章集) by Liu Yong, dictionaries on prosody past and present, research articles and works concerning Liu Yong and his lyrics, quantitative method is employed to draw direct and concrete statistics, which are shown in the form of tables and charts in every chapter. There are 3 charts and 274 tables to show the quantitative data throughout the book, with 87 tables in Chapter 4. The abundant research data drawn from quantitative method are used to provide supporting evidence to verify the author's statements. For instance, there is a total of 127 tune patterns used by Liu Yong within his 213 lyrics, 280 four-character phrases and 300 parallelisms produced by Liu Yong, even the frequency of use of "empty words", the number of rhyming modes and rhythmic patterns (also caesural patterns) in the lines are showed in exact numbers, just to name a few. As such, on the basis of a substantial quantity of data and lyrical pieces, in combination with logic reasoning, the author not only depicts a full picture of his unique writing mode to compose lyrics, but also makes the research discoveries more reliable and convincing.

Secondly, the author corrects the conventional theories and prejudices against the study of the poet and his lyrics and puts forward new insights into the topic after a close examination on Liu's lyrics. Though the detailed literature analysis and statistic-based reasoning, the new findings are drawn heuristically as follows: different from the traditional theory that Liu Yong was the first founder of *manci*, the author states that he developed *manci* from the folk origin by means of comparing his lyrics in *Collection of Songs* (乐章集) with *Edited Records of Dunhuang Songs* (敦煌曲校录) and *The Lyrics of Tang Dynasty and Five Dynasties* (唐五代词集); in the light of thematic world of Liu's lyrics, he freed Ci compositions from boudoir sentimental themes, thus broadening the scope of poetic vision of Ci poetry; for the use of colloquialisms in his lyrics, the author corrects the prejudice that Liu Yong's lyrics is "vulgar and crude", and argues that the poet devoted his life to innovating the language of Ci poetry by means of infusing the vernacular words and colloquial expressions in folk songs with refined words used by official literati, which displays his high mastery of language, thus creating spontaneity in his lyrics; Liu Yong's innovative application of expansive technique, namely sequential structure, is realized through "fusing human emotions with nature", making *manci* molded in one breath.

Last but not least, big concern should be given to the English translation of the work. The substantial English-Chinese volume, well-documented in content, includes 506 pages, with copious and well-rounded paratexts (covering notes, references, appendices and index), which are helpful in pursuing the lyrics further. The English section occupies 342 pages, accounting for the half of the total length of the book. It is worthwhile mentioning that the English version can provide references for English translation of Chinese academic works on Ci poetry. The big good point of the book lies in the authorship, with western education background and deep knowledge of Ci poetry, which allows the concise and clear English renderings, especially for the great quantity of national-specific words about official titles, names of cultural images typical of China and literary terms, the author gives concise translations. For the translations of Liu's lyrics, the author, gives priority to accessibility

and offers precise and graceful renderings for English-reading audience by making every effort to convey as much the meaning of Liu's writings as possible instead of staying faithful to the original in form and sound rigidly. To be specific, tune titles, the generic markers of Ci poetry, are fully translated into English, with corresponding Chinese scripts followed in the brackets; each line within a lyric is translated sentence by sentence without addition or abstraction, with focus on paraphrasing and interpreting the meaning of lines, but rhyming schemes are basically neglected in the translated texts; in the matter of form translation, the author doesn't follow the lengths of lines in the original closely, namely, the form of Ci poetry (long and short lines) is not manifested in English version. However, the reproduced lyrics are clear in meaning and acceptable for readers, but the salient features of Ci fails to be well transmitted. Ci poetry, as an enclosure of classical Chinese poetry, with genetic characteristics distinct from Shi in many aspects, is characterized by irregular length of lines and various rhyming schemes. If the two major features (form and sound) are not well presented in English, form feature of Ci can be less striking, and the musico-literary feature of Ci can not be preserved, causing the loss of the generic feature of Ci. In fact, as far as translation of lyric musicality is concerned, it is relatively understandable as the result of untranslatability of complex musical attributes of Ci poetry. However, neglecting to translate form and sound of Ci in English can cause English readers to mistake Ci for Shi and fail to enjoy its musical property. What's more, special focus should be put to cultural translation of the lyrics. Language is the carrier of culture, and in a certain degree, language translation means cultural translation. Due to the fact that the language in Chinese poetry is typical of succinctness and ambiguity because of its monosyllable attributes, it is unavoidable for the author to make minor mistakes and inaccurate translations. For example, the translation of the tune title “郭郎儿近拍” (Guo-lang-er-jin-pai) is rendered as “Recent Rhythm of Guo Langer”, in which “近” is misunderstood and translated literally as “recent”. In fact, the character “近” is a term in lyric composing, referring to musical tune (a slow tune) in writing Ci poems one should adhere to. In a degree, the above example can reflect the challenge and difficulty that translators must confront when translating classical Chinese poetry into English translation, the big barrier resulting from the multidimensional differences from language, culture and poetics. But the small defects can not obscure the big virtues.

In sum, Laifong Leung, the Canadian Chinese scholar, expertise in Ci studies and mastery of English and Chinese, produces and translates the work into English accurately and elaborately for the first time. The work is really a influential research work on Liu Yong and his lyrics. Indeed, the English anthologies of Ci have been published in bulks for decades, only devoted to certain lyricists, such as Li Yü (937-978) in Tang Dynasty, Su Shi (1037-1101) and Li Qingzhao (1084-c.1155) in Song Dynasty, who have been much translated and researched continuously by sinologists and English translators, and have achieved increasing popularity in the English world, but little attention has been paid to Liu Yong and his lyrics, only the representatives of James J. Y. Liu (1974) and Kang-I Sun Chang (1980), James R. Hightower (1998) and Stephen Owen (2019), who chose Liu's lyrics to render for the purpose of academic research on Chinese poetry. Moreover, the work enlarges the audience in magnificent way. The author is writing for broader readership compared with books of the same kind written in one language, so the audience can cover Chinese and English readers, such as specialists in Ci poetry, students of classical Chinese poetry, even those familiar with and interested in Ci poetry in China and English-speaking world. Just as the prominent scholar Florence Chia-Ying Yeh praised highly her for bilingual proficiency and academic competency in the preface to the book, “among many professors and scholars devoted to studying

Classical Chinese Literature, most of whom present their findings only in one language, few professors overseas, like Leung, who make their academic presentations in two languages are quite rare.” What’s more, Jan W. Walls praises the work for Leung’s authoritative appreciation of Liu Yong and her bringing Liu’s lyrics to 21st century English language readers, and recommended highly for serious students of traditional Chinese literature. Indeed, due to the fact that the study on Liu Yong’s life remains an unsettled issue, and that relevant research on his writing artistry has been insufficient, the work, bridging the research gap regarding the two aspects, is rewarding and pioneering.

### Conclusion

Ci poetry, as a rule-bound musico-literature, which originated in Tang Dynasty (618-907) and reached its zenith in Song Dynasty (960-1279), is filled in to the melody (lyrical tune) according to tune patterns, rivaling with Tang Shi (regulated verse) in aesthetic glamour and literary value for conveying one’s innermost feelings. However, few Ci poems have been translated into English due to its recreational function and its rigid composing rules. Liu Yong, a prominent lyricist in Song Dynasty, who promoted *manci* to be a literary orthodox, is nearly “invisible” in the history of Chinese poetry because of unavailable materials about his life. What’s more, little attention has been paid to conducting the specialist study of his composing characteristics. The monograph, by means of close reading and empirical approach, through probing into Liu Yong’s life and writing peculiarities, attempts is to reconstruct LiuYong’s life trajectory in a form of map, and explore his composing characteristics, with the purpose of making academic exchange and disseminating classical Chinese literature. It is worth mentioning that the study on Liu Yong’s life remains an unsettled issue, and that relevant research on his writing artistry has been insufficient and the English-Chinese version enlarges the audience in magnificent way different from those of the same kind written in one language, so it is significant for the work to bridge the research gap regarding the above two aspects.

### References

- Leung, L. F. (2020). *A study of Liu Yong and his lyrics*. Beijing: China Translation & Publishing House.
- TANG, G. Z., & JIN Q. H. (1969). *On the lyrics of Liu Yong, in collected papers on the study of Ci in Tang and Song*. Hong Kong: Chinese Literary Society.
- TANG, G. Z., & JIN, Q. H. (1959). “New evidence on Liu Yong’s life”, in *four textual criticisms on Ci in Song Dynasty edited by Tang Guizhang*. Nanking: Jiangsu Wenyi Press.