

Song lyrics – the graceful way of love expression



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Introduction

In various cultures there are different ways of love expression. Stephen Owen recalls the principles of main stages of love in the Medieval Ages. The principle was: “ Gradus amoris sunt hii: visus et alloquium, contactus, basia, factum.” (“ The phases of love are these: seeing and then talking together, touching, kisses, the act.” (Owen 33). Unlike the Western European culture, in China in the 11-12 century the popular prelude to the love act was usually signing. It was performed by a girl who predetermined to be shy. And the only way she could express the real feelings in her heart was signing songs. After a song is done, a couple could go to bed.

Many Chinese male poets wrote the love lyrics, which was dedicated to the signing girls (courtesans). Poetry by Zhou Baugyan, Yan Shu, Liu Yong, Ouyang Xiu, Yan Jidao and other authors of Song Dynasty Period wrote the perfect verses which explicitly conveyed many cultural determinants which are typical for Chinese love poetry tradition.

The Graceful Way of Love Expression in Song Dynasty

In the 11-12 century poets often visited “ urban entertainment centers” where they listened to courtesans’ love songs which “ attracted the attention of literati authors” much. (Ronald 2006: 237). For example, Liu Yong was so much respected among the signing girls, as they supported him with money and gifts throughout the life. After he died and his family had no money, they buried him and visited his grave every spring. Liu Yong’s romantic verses represented a new approach to love expression.

Lap Lam in his article "A Reconsideration of Liu Yong and His "Vulgar" Lyrics" suggests that in Liu Yong's lyrics the concepts of "marketplace aura and eroticism" are presented. (Lam 2003: 27). The researcher represents the passage from the poet's lyrics:

"In the faint orchid and musk fragrance

I heard your moan.

Underneath the light gauze and fine silk

I saw your skin."

In this passage it is possible to catch the hints on the erotic love and man's desire. The poet expresses his love and desire by using the details of woman's image, like "fine silk" and "musk fragrance". These epithets are used, in order to help readers to understand better the love feeling, which rose in the poet's heart. These devices are used in metaphorical context. For example, the comparison between "light gauze" and "fine silk" makes this metaphorical context more vivid. These concepts are associated with women of those days. Liu Yong expresses his love in an untypical way for the culture of that period, as in the 11-12th century men rarely expressed their desire to women in this way. Like I mentioned above, the prelude to the bed were a song performed by a girl.

The more of Liu Yong poems are "Happy Day and Night" (Chou yeh lo), "Spring in Brocade Hall" (Chin t'ang cb'un), "The Goddess Who Lost her Way" (Mi bsien yin), "Two Hearts United" (Liang t'ung bsien) and more.

Another poet of the 11-12th century period is Ouyang Xiu. In his poetry he used “ colloquial language and explicit references to flirtations or even to sexual love” (Ronald 2006: 274). For example, the poet expresses the “ strong sexual overtones anticipating the speaker’s attraction to the young girl” (Ronald 2006: 277) in this passage:

“ Fourteen or fifteen

Idly holding a pipa as she goes.

Tossing coins in the hall, hurrying by below the steps,

She attracted me when I saw her then...”

In these passage the metonymy is observed, as we can not know the name of the girl, just the author uses simply “ fourteen or fifteen”, so the name of the girl is hidden, just her image is associated with her age.

The love songs by Chou Pang-Yen are even more interesting by the way of love feeling expression the poet presents. For example, in his verse “ WestRiver” (Hsi bo) he speaks about “ the place of beauties”. According to James R. Hightower, “ the place of beauties” means not only the place with the beautiful nature, but also the place of beautiful women. (Hightower 1998: 306).

In his verse “ Recalling Old Excursions” Chou Pang-Yen speaks:

“ I sometimes seem to hear the sound of your bridle

And want to go meet you at the red door.”

It seems to be a very important meeting for the poet, perhaps, in cabaret with a courtesan who will sing him a song of love once again. In this passage poet's love is expressed in a way of describing the sounds. The poet hears the sound of the girl's bridle, and so it is closely associated with his beloved one.

The more of verses by Chou Pang-Yen are "A Visit to the House of Ch'in" (Huo Ch'in lou), "Spring in the House of Jade" (Yu lou b'un), "Longing for the Sountland" (Wang Chiang-nan). All of these lyric verses are written "in the tradition of the romantic song writers" (Hightower 1998: 322).

Although all the verses, which are under analysis, are translated in "white verse" writing technique, it is better to make more deeper analysis, which is related to comparing Chinese texts with their English translations. It is clear that poets wrote their poems to the signing girls, just in a way of transferring images from reality into poetical context. Their feelings are expressed in a way of describing sounds, beauty of the girls, the details of their cloths, nature around the lovers. It makes the verses more colorful, as they are filled with deep emotions. Sometimes, in these verses we observe change of word order, missing some words and concepts, as it helps to make the poetry more colorful.

The aesthetics of the song lyrics is related to the entire Chinese culture. The song poems describe women's beauty, which is associated with natural beauty. The poets describe the details of cloths, romantic scenes, which are related to their emotions, hidden deep inside. It makes the verses more stylistically and expressively colorful.

Conclusions

The period of 11-12th century was prominent for the Chinese history. It was marked by important political and cultural changes in China.

The poetry of this period is filled by romantic notes. As many poets were often the guests at cabarets, they were much welcomed by courtesans who cherished their fame and talent. The poets were often supported by them with the money and gifts.

Signing courtesans expressed their love to poets in love songs. Poets wrote love poems where they expressed their feelings to the signing girls. Such famous poets as Liu Yong, Zhou Baugyan, Yan Shu, Ouyang Xiu, Yan Jidao, Chou Pang-Yen found a way of poetical love expression in both colloquial and literary language. Some of them described the girls they fell in love with in a way of comparing them to the beauty of nature. In some verses one can observe some eroticism aspects. In some poetry there are themes of loneliness, as the poets understood that the courtesans, who sang so beautiful songs to them, can not belong to one man. This aspect makes some love poems a bit melancholically colored. When a poet realizes that his beloved one can not belong to him, it makes him depressed. In any case, Chinese poets of the 11-12th century admired the beauty of courtesans and expressed their love to signing girls in a unique way – they found the perfect metaphors, epithets, allegories and other expressive means and stylistic devices which helped them to make their verses emotionally colored.