ABSTRACT

The Ziyue love songs were the important lyrics among the Wuse (吴歌) of the Jiangsu Province in Southern China, where the Eastern Jin and the Southern Dynasties (including the Song, the Qi, the Liang and the Chen Dynasties, from 317 - 589 A.D.) established their kingdoms.

The Ziyue love songs can be classified into the following five categories:

1. The Ziyue songs 《子夜歌》. There are forty-two lyrics extant.
2. The Ziyue songs of Four Seasons 《子夜四时歌》. They can be subdivided into four sections:
   a. The Ziyue songs of Spring 《子夜春歌》. There are twenty lyrics extant.
   b. The Ziyue songs of Summer 《子夜夏歌》. There are twenty lyrics extant.
   c. The Ziyue songs of Autumn 《子夜秋歌》. There are eighteen lyrics extant.
   d. The Ziyue songs of Winter 《子夜冬歌》. There are seventeen lyrics extant.
3. The DaZiyue songs 《大子夜歌》. There are two lyrics extant.
4. The Ziyue Jingge songs 《子夜警歌》. There are two lyrics extant.
5. The Ziyue Biange songs 《子夜变歌》. There are three lyrics extant.

The last four categories are modified tunes of the Ziyue songs.

These are all folksongs except some of which might be written or
polished by scholars and even by rulers. But since the themes of these songs are the love stories of the poets and poetess themselves, it is more accurate to regard them as love songs instead of folksongs. These songs reflect the deep feelings of the people who looked upon love, more or less, as part of their lives.

The words of these popular songs were collected and composed into songs by the then official conservatory (乐府) in order to entertain the rulers. They were accompanied by stringed musical instruments when being sung.

The techniques of composing the Ziye love songs are highly regarded. Such techniques also reflect the wisdom and genius of the poets and the poetess. The most impressive technique of such songs was that puns were frequently used for expression. For example, 'lotus' (莲) was used to mean 'pity and love' (怜), both are of different forms of characters but with the same pronunciation, and 'cloth' (布匹的“匹”) was used to mean 'couple' (匹诽的“匹”), both are of the same characters and of the same pronunciation.

The form and style of the Ziye love songs have many influences on scholars of the same period and those of later generations especially the pioneer writers of the five syllabled Jueju poems (五言绝句) of the T'ang Dynasty (618 - 907 A.D.).