

POEM TO BE SUNG TO THE TUNE OF "SOUTHERN SONG"
(NAN-GE-ZI)

By Li Qingzhao

Introduction

Li Qingzhao (1084-ca. 1151) lived during the Song dynasty (960-1279). During her lifetime, the Song lost northern China to the expansionist Jurchen Jin dynasty, which had arisen in Manchuria and driven the Song out of their capital, Kaifeng, in 1126. This defeat and the Song retreat to the Yangzi valley marked the end of the Northern Song period (960-1127) and the beginning of the weaker and smaller Southern Song (1127-1279).

Li Qingzhao was raised in a family of notable scholar-officials. Both her parents were highly educated, and Li Qingzhao herself began to attract attention for her poetry when she was still in her teens.

In the poem below, Li describes her autumn dress decorated with a lotus-pond scene.

Selected Document with Questions

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Poem to be Sung to the Tune of "Southern Song" (Nan-ge-zi)

By Li Qingzhao

Up in heaven the star-river turns,
in man's world below
 curtains are drawn.
A chill comes to pallet and pillow,
 damp with tracks of tears.
I rise to take off my gossamer dress
and just happen to ask, "How late is it now?"

The tiny lotus pods,
 kingfisher feathers sewn on;
as the gilt flecks away
 the lotus leaves grow few.
The same weather as in times before,
 the same old dress —
only the feelings in the heart
are not as they were before.

**Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on
POEM TO BE SUNG TO THE TUNE OF "SOUTHERN SONG" (NAN-GE-ZI), BY LI QINGZHAO**

Questions:

1. In what season is the poem set?
2. What mood is conveyed in the poem?
3. What religious and/or philosophical tradition(s) does the poem draw on for its imagery and message?