

Research on the Artistic Conception Construction and Poetic Life Paradigm of Tang-Song Poetry

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Abstract: This article takes Tang-Song Poetry as its research object and explores in depth the construction of its artistic conception, the use of imagery, the characteristics of its meter, and the laws of emotional expression. By tracing the theoretical inheritance of Wang Changling's "Three Realms Theory" and Wang Guowei's "Realm Theory," this paper reveals the aesthetic essence of the "blending of emotions and scenery" in Tang-Song Poetry. The paper analyzes the generation mechanism of poetic imagery from dimensions such as imagery consideration, regulated style, and implicit writing. Using the works of famous poets such as Li Bai, Du Fu, Su Shi, and Li Qingzhao as examples, this paper showcases the diverse styles of emotional expression in Tang-Song Poetry. Research has shown that Tang-Song Poetry is not only the pinnacle of Chinese classical literature but also carries the spiritual pursuits and life experiences of literati and officials. Its value orientation of "serving the world" and "pursuing personal excellence" provides important spiritual nourishment and aesthetic paradigms for contemporary people to construct a poetic life.

Keywords: Tang-Song poetry; Artistic conception construction; Poetic life; Cultural heritage

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1. Introduction

Poetry, as the oldest and most literary style in China, has always been at the core of classical literature for thousands of years. Pursuing a poetic life has been the unwavering spiritual ideal of the Chinese nation for thousands of years. The origin of poetry lies in the artistic conception created by poetry. The establishment of artistic conception as an independent category of classical aesthetics can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. Poet Wang Changling first proposed the concept of "three realms" in poetry, dividing the realm of poetry into three levels: object realm, situation, and artistic conception, opening up the systematic construction of artistic conception theory^[1]. On the basis of absorbing the aesthetic ideas of previous generations, Wang Guowei inherited and developed the influential "realm theory". In his book "The Words of the Human World", he clearly stated that "speaking of temperament and charm is not as good as speaking of realm. Having realm is the essence; temperament, rhythm, and charm are the end", and emphasized that "realm is not only about scenery. Emotions such as joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness are also among the realms in people's hearts. Therefore, those who can write about real scenery and emotions are called having a realm"^[2]. Tang-Song Poetry matured and flourished under the nourishment of this aesthetic tradition, using the artistic technique of blending emotions and scenes to

construct an aesthetic world that combines Eastern charm and philosophical depth, becoming an important carrier of the Chinese cultural spirit and literati life experience. Artistic conception is not only a form of artistic expression but also a manifestation of one's attitude towards life and the spiritual realm. It is an exclusive spiritual home constructed by ancient literati after integrating their inner emotions with external objects.

2. The origin of poetry: The cultural tradition of expressing emotions and aspirations

The tradition of Chinese poetry has a long and profound history. The Book of Songs compiled by Confucius is the first comprehensive collection of poetry in China, with a wide range of themes and simple language, laying the foundation for the realism of classical literature. During the Warring States period, Qu Yuan drew on the artistic nutrients of Chu folk songs and created the dynamic and lyrical style of Chu Ci. Works such as "Li Sao" had magnificent imagination and sincere emotions, demonstrating a strong romantic temperament. The Book of Songs and the Chu Ci are both known as the "trend", together forming the two major sources of Chinese poetry, profoundly influencing the literary direction and cultural spirit of later generations. In the Qing Dynasty, Zhao Yi wrote in his poem "On Poetry": "Talented people have emerged in every dynasty, leading the way for hundreds of years." The influence of both has already surpassed the literary field and has been deeply integrated into the cultural bloodline of the Chinese nation.

The Han Dynasty inherited the literary style of Chu Ci and gave birth to Han Fu, which combines the beauty of poetic rhythm with the grandeur of prose. Han Fu is mainly characterized by exaggeration and exaggeration, with rich language, grand system, and rich content. Representative works such as Sima Xiangru's "Zixu Fu", "Shanglin Fu", and Zhang Heng's "Erjing Fu" concentrate on showcasing the grandeur and magnificence of the Han Dynasty, becoming the most representative literary style of the Han Dynasty.

The Tang Dynasty was the peak period of the development of classical Chinese poetry, with a stable and open society and a prosperous economy. In addition, the imperial examination included poetry and prose as important assessment contents, which pushed Tang poetry into a comprehensive and prosperous stage. There are nearly 50000 Tang poetry works in existence today, created by more than 2000 poets. In the early Tang Dynasty, Wang Bo, Chen Zi'ang, et al. worked hard to reform the literary style and embark on a path of poetic innovation. From the prosperous Tang Dynasty to the mid-Tang Dynasty, there were many famous poets and brilliant stars. Li Bai's poetic style was bold, elegant, romantic, and unrestrained, and he was praised as the "Poet Immortal" by later generations; Du Fu, based on social reality, had a melancholic style, and was revered as the "saint of poetry". His poetry was hailed as the "history of poetry"; Bai Juyi put forward the creative proposition of "combining articles with the times, and combining songs and poems with events"^[4], using simple and plain language to create a large number of satirical poems and leisurely poems that criticize current problems, which had a profound impact on later poetry creation.

The Ci style originated in the Tang Dynasty and flourished in the Song Dynasty. In the Song Dynasty, the commodity economy was highly developed, urban literature and art became increasingly prosperous, and the urban class continued to grow. The lyrics, with their varied sentence structures and the ability to be sung with music, were highly in line with the leisure and secular aesthetics of the common people, and quickly became the mainstream form of literature in the Song Dynasty. There are over 20000 outstanding works of Song poetry in existence, with a diverse range of schools and styles in the literary world. Liu Yong and Li Qingzhao are representatives of the Wanyue School, with a clear and subtle style and delicate emotions; Su Shi and Xin Qiji were masters of the bold and unrestrained style, with a majestic and desolate atmosphere and passionate emotions. The two schools of thought complemented each other, jointly creating the artistic peak of Song poetry.

In the development process of Chinese literature, poetry not only has extremely high aesthetic value, but also undertakes important social and cultural functions. Confucius succinctly summarized the social functions of poetry as "prosperity, observation, social interaction, and resentment"^[5]. "Prosperity" refers to the ability of poetry to convey aspirations, educate people, and evoke emotional resonance among readers. Observation "refers to the ability to

observe changes in social customs, gain insight into political gains and losses, and the state of people's livelihoods through poetry; 'Group' refers to the role of poetry in uniting people's hearts, enhancing emotional identification, and strengthening national cohesion; 'Resentment' refers to the ability of poetry to vent public emotions, satirize current political malpractices, and help rulers understand public sentiment. The four functions complement each other and together constitute the complete social and cultural value system of classical Chinese poetry. The core function of poetry is to express emotions and clarify aspirations. The spiritual pursuit of ancient literati is mainly reflected in two value orientations: one is the patriotic sentiment of "serving the world at the same time", with a heart for the people, loyalty to the emperor, and patriotism, represented by Qu Yuan's "although he died nine times, he did not regret it". The second is the character integrity of "being self-sufficient", adhering to ethics and not admiring the powerful, taking Tao Yuanming's "not bowing down to five dou of rice" and Li Bai's "being able to bow down to the powerful" as examples. These two spiritual orientations run through the creation of Tang-Song Poetry, establishing a poetic life paradigm with strong Eastern characteristics for future generations.

3. The realm of imagery: Refining objects and refining characters to convey spirit

Imagery is the basic unit that constitutes the artistic conception of poetry. It is an objective object that incorporates the author's subjective emotions and conveys subjective emotions through objective objects. Classical literature expert Yuan Xingpei pointed out that artistic conception is the artistic realm formed by the integration of the author's subjective emotions and objective objects, and imagery is the core cornerstone of artistic conception construction^[6]. The key to appreciating Tang-Song Poetry lies in grasping the imagery system of the work. Poets often form highly recognizable creative styles by constructing unique imagery groups.

In the literary world of Tang-Song Poetry, countless classic images are embedded. Images such as the bright moon, west wind, willow, plum blossom, fragrant grass, lone boat, precarious building, red candle, and letter written on silk repeatedly appear, gradually solidifying into cultural symbols that carry specific emotions and spiritual aspirations, possessing strong artistic expression and artistic conception shaping power. These images are not simply a pile of objects, but have been artistically refined and emotionally infused by poets, capable of outlining rich images and dynamic artistic concepts with minimal strokes. For example, in Su Shi's "Calm Wind and Waves," the phrase "a straw-cloaked man wandering in the misty rain for a lifetime" conveys a broad and detached attitude towards life through the image of a man walking alone in a straw cloak in the misty rain. The entire artistic conception is conveyed within one phrase, fully embodying the essence of Chinese freehand brushwork aesthetics.

One of the important techniques for constructing artistic conception in Tang-Song Poetry is the direct juxtaposition and combination of images, without relying on redundant conjunctions, creating a profound emotional charm solely through the arrangement of objects. In Wen Tingyun's "Morning Departure at Shangshan", the six images of "rooster crowing, moon over thatched inn, footprints, wooden bridge, frost" are juxtaposed, using just six words to depict a lonely and desolate scene of an early morning journey; in Du Fu's "Ascending the Mountain", the opening lines "the wind is strong, the sky is high, the monkey's howl is mournful, the islet is clear, the sand is white, and the birds fly back" combine natural images such as wind, sky, monkey, islet, sand, and bird to create a desolate, open, melancholic, and solemn artistic conception of ascending the mountain, fully demonstrating the artistic tension of image combination.

Word-refinement is a crucial aspect in achieving vivid imagery and profound artistic conception in Tang-Song Poetry. The ancients were extremely dedicated to word-refinement, pursuing the artistic realm of "never resting until the words shock the audience." Du Fu frankly stated, "I am eccentric and fond of excellent lines, and I will never rest until the words shock the audience," while Jia Dao lamented, "It took me three years to craft two lines, and I shed tears every time I recited them." Both are vivid interpretations of the spirit of word-refinement. Wang Guowei highly praised the excellence of word-refinement in "Human World Poetry Talks": "The spring vitality is lively on the branch of the apricot tree," with the word "lively" bringing out the entire artistic conception; "The moon appears through the broken clouds, and the flowers

play with their shadows,” with the word “play” bringing out the entire artistic conception. Wang Guowei also pointed out: “There are created landscapes and written landscapes, which is where the ‘ideal’ and ‘realistic’ schools differ. However, it is quite difficult to distinguish between the two, because the landscapes created by poets must conform to nature, and the landscapes written about must also be close to the ideal ^[7]”. A precise and vivid keyword can activate the entire artistic conception, allowing scenery and emotions to be highly integrated, achieving the aesthetic transcendence of “transcending the image beyond the scene.” The refinement of imagery and the vividness of word-refinement complement each other, enabling Tang-Song Poetry to convey infinite meaning with limited words, reaching an artistic height of blending scenery and emotion, and unifying the self and the world.

4. The realm of expression: Metrical form and implicit and indirect writing

Rhyme and meter are the formal foundations of Tang-Song Poetry, encompassing norms such as Ping and Zhe (tonal patterns), rhyme, antithesis, and adhesion, which endow poetry with both the structural beauty of neatness and symmetry and the musical beauty of cadence. Ancient Chinese poetry has always valued the beauty of sound and rhythm, with poetry creation closely intertwined with the tradition of recitation. Shen Deqian of the Qing Dynasty proposed, “Poetry serves its purpose through sound, and its subtlety lies in the cadence and modulation ^[8].” Zhu Xi advocated, “Recitation enriches it, and immersion nourishes it,” emphasizing that only through cadenced recitation can one deeply comprehend the inherent artistic conception of poetry ^[9]. The Tang Dynasty’s regular poetry has the most stringent requirements for rhyme and meter. Du Fu is a master of the Tang Dynasty’s regular poetry creation. His “Quatrain”, “Two orioles singing among the green willows, a row of egrets flying to the blue sky. The window frames the eternal snow of Western Mountains, and the door is moored to a ship from the distant East Wu”, features exquisite antithesis and harmonious sound and meter, becoming a classic model for the antithesis in modern-style poetry. In “Dream of the Red Chamber,” Cao Xueqin, through Daiyu’s mouth, elucidates the method of poetry composition, emphasizing that unique lines can be free from the constraints of rhyme and meter, fully demonstrating the core pursuit of vivid and natural creation in ancient poetry and prose ^[10].

As a variant of poetry, Ci falls under the category of long and short sentence patterns, with a more flexible and complex metrical structure compared to poetry. Each Ci has a fixed Ci tune, and the number of sentences, words, tones, and rhymes is all restricted by musical rules. Different Ci tunes have different rhythmic and emotional tones. Classic Ci tunes such as “Butterfly Loves Flower”, “Ode to the Garden Spring”, and “Niannujiao” can be either gentle and melodious, or generous and sonorous, or somber and melancholic, accurately adapting to different emotional expression needs, making Ci more flexible and infectious in expressing emotions and ideas.

Influenced by traditional cultural psychology and the introverted character of literati, Tang-Song Poetry generally adopts an implicit and indirect expression method, pursuing the artistic effect of having a limited word count but an endless meaning. Poets often use techniques such as metaphor, symbolism, allusion, and the use of the past to satirize the present, to convey their inner feelings and emotions in a tactful manner. Zhu Qingyu’s “A Bouquet for Zhang Shuibu” uses the scene of a woman in the boudoir painting her eyebrows and asking her husband as a metaphor for his own self-recommendation before the imperial examination, expressing his concern that his literary talent might not meet the examiners’ expectations. Su Shi’s “Bu Suanzi - Dwelling at Dinghui Temple in Huangzhou” uses the metaphors of “the secluded person” and “the lone swan” to express his personal integrity and refusal to conform to worldly customs during his exile. Some poems even use personal experiences to metaphorically reflect the rise and fall of the times. Li Shangyin’s “The Setting Sun is Endlessly Beautiful, But It’s Almost Dusk” uses the image of a sunset to metaphorically represent the decline of the late Tang Dynasty; Jiang Jie’s “Yu Meiren - Listening to the Rain” uses the experiences of listening to the rain in three stages: youth, adulthood, and old age, to express deep sighs of the decline of the country and the wandering of one’s life. This implicit and indirect expression paradigm not only fits the introverted and humble cultural character of Chinese literati, but also makes the poetry’s artistic conception more profound and lasting.

5. The realm of emotions: From subtle and implicit to unrestrained and vivid

Emotion is the soul of poetry, and only when the sentiment is sincere and profound can it touch people's hearts. Traditional concepts hold that "poetry expresses one's aspirations, while ci expresses one's emotions." In reality, both poetry and ci can express one's aspirations and emotions, but they present different emotional styles due to differences in their forms and rhythms: poetry follows a strict structure, with a more dignified and steady expression of emotion; ci employs flexible sentence patterns, allowing for a more unrestrained expression of emotions. Ye Jiaying once pointed out that Wang Guowei believed that Song people wrote ci more sincerely, because ci did not have to bear the solemn mission of "expressing one's aspirations," allowing for a freer revelation of one's true inner feelings^[11].

Li Bai's poetry expresses emotions in both subtle and unrestrained forms: his regular verses and quatrains are lyrical, subtle, and restrained, conveying emotions indirectly through descriptions of scenery. "Farewell at Jingmen Ferry" subtly expresses homesickness through the line "I still pity the hometown waters, seeing the boat sent off for thousands of miles", with a lingering charm; while his ancient Yuefu poetry is unrestrained and heartfelt. "Toasting", written in a heroic style, expresses the indignation of unrecognized talent and broad-minded self-confidence, with emotions flowing like a river, extremely powerful. As Yan Yu commented in "Canglang Poetry Talks": "Others use their pens to think when writing poetry, but Li Bai just lets his chest burst forth"^[12].

Su Shi's poetry is rich and diverse in emotion, combining boldness, openness, and deep feeling: "I will draw my bow like a full moon, looking northwest, and shoot down the Sirius" expresses his lofty ambition to achieve greatness; "With a bamboo staff and straw sandals, I am lighter than a horse. Who fears? I'll wear a straw raincoat and live a life of peace" conveys his openness and optimism in adversity; "Jiangchengzi - Dreams Recorded on the Night of the 20th Day of the First Month of the Year Bimao" is a mourning poem that expresses deep longing for his deceased wife, with sincere and touching emotions. Xin Qiji pushed the expression of boldness in poetry to the extreme. In "Pozhenzi - A Song Dedicated to Chen Tongfu", he first depicts the magnificent scene of battle, expressing his lofty ambition to serve the country, and then makes a sudden turn with "Pitiable white hair", directly expressing the sorrow and indignation of unfulfilled ambitions. The emotional fluctuations are intense and soul-stirring.

Li Qingzhao's poetic style shifted dramatically with the drastic changes in her life circumstances: her early works, such as "Rumbling Like a Dream - Often Remembering the Sunset at the Creek Pavilion," were elegant and lively, fully embodying the innocence and carefree spirit of a young girl. After the Jingkang Incident, she experienced the fall of the country, the destruction of her family, and wandering, and her work "Slowly Singing - Searching and Searching" begins with seven sets of repeated words, vividly expressing her lonely, sad, miserable, and helpless feelings in a melancholy and moving manner. The emotional expressions in Tang-Song Poetry are diverse and profound, ranging from being generous and solemn to leisurely and indifferent, from melancholy and lingering to open-minded and detached. Together, they constitute a vivid portrayal of the emotional world of the Chinese people, showing the unique emotional tension and spiritual depth of Eastern aesthetics.

6. Conclusion

Tang-Song Poetry, with artistic conception at its core, imagery as its skeleton, rhythm as its form, and true emotions as its soul, reached the pinnacle of classical Chinese poetry. It is not only a brilliant treasure in the history of Chinese literature but also carries the spiritual pursuits, life experiences, and cultural ideals of ancient literati and officials. The national responsibility of "serving the world at the same time" and the commitment to the personality of "being self-sufficient" together constitute the poetic life paradigm of ancient literati and provide a continuous source of spiritual nourishment and aesthetic inspiration for contemporary people seeking inner peace, enhancing the spiritual realm, and building a poetic life in fast-paced modern life. The aesthetic wisdom, life attitude, and cultural spirit contained in Tang-Song Poetry have remained timeless and irreplaceable in cultural value and historical significance even after thousands of years of time

and space. It reminds us that life is not only about material survival but also about pursuing spiritual abundance and the improvement of one's realm. Keeping one's inner poetry and composure in the midst of the complex world is the best inheritance and development of excellent traditional Chinese culture.

Disclosure statement

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