

## PROCEEDINGS ARTICLE

# Research on the "Plant Image" Category in Yan Jidao's Pessimistic Aesthetics

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## ABSTRACT

"Er Yan" in the Song Dynasty was an important figure in the lyrics of the early Song Dynasty. Younger Yan's lyrics not only inherited the essence of his father's thoughts, but also had his own unique opinions. In Yan Jidao's "Xiaoshan Ci", a large number of plant image categories were used, and the technique of borrowing things to express the author's sadness of recalling the past and regretting to leave. Although "Xiaoshan Ci" is sincere and elegant, readers can still experience a faint sadness from it. In the eyes of predecessors, Xiaoshan is good at romance, and his lyrics and works are all "Yan Ci", but from the perspective of modern cultural environment and appreciation, "Xiaoshan Ci" is not a feast of writing and art feasts and sad works. The plants used in the words do not carry a superficial meaning, but are endowed with the author's personal feelings. This article explores the origin and historical evolution of the category of "plant image", and its pessimistic aesthetic connotation and impact.

## ARTICLE DATA

## Article History

Received 24 February 2022

Revised 9 March 2022

Accepted 14 October 2022

## Keywords

Yan Jidao

"Xiaoshan Ci"

Plant image category

Pessimistic aesthetics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article is based on the main research on the plant image frequently used in Yan Jidao's "Xiaoshan Ci". The article analyzes and interprets some of the images based on the background of the times and the author's experience, and with reference to ancient Chinese poetry works. By searching for relevant materials and reading Chinese poetry classics, the article concludes that the tragicness of "Xiaoshan Ci" through "plant image" is closely related to the environment of the times and the author's experience to a certain extent. The scope of "plant image" is very large. In Chinese poetry, the emotion of "sorrow" is in the majority, which also has the conclusion of the factors of China's historical development background.

## 2. ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF "PLANT IMAGE" CATEGORY IN YAN JIDAO'S PESSIMISTIC AESTHETICS

The ancients always liked to borrow scenery to express emotions, and gave them some special meaning with the help of some special attributes of natural plants. Because of their own characteristics, plants also occupy a place in Chinese poetry, which is called "plant image".

### 2.1. Emergence and Development of "Plant Image" Category

The earliest poetry collection in China is "The Book of Songs", and plant image first appeared in "The Book of Songs" and occupied a very important position. There are many plants used in "The Book of Songs". According to statistics, there are 134 kinds of plants, vegetables and fruits, which can be divided into trees, shrubs, vines, herbs, aquatic plants, ferns and so on.

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Due to the political, economic and cultural reasons at that time, every plant used in the poems was closely related to the social life at that time, such as "staggered water chestnut" and "peach blossoms", people needed to collect wild vegetables and fruits as food, so there are many plants that can be used for life in poetry; another example: lotus, medicine, shun (hibiscus flower), (shoucao), neon grass, Chinese serviceberry, etc. These plants are visually pleasing due to their beautiful appearance and fragrant flowers, so these plant images are used to describe the beautiful appearance and character of a woman.

During the Warring States Period, most of the plants used in "Chu Ci" were vanillas, orange trees and other plants. The appearance of these plant images was inseparable from the living environment of Qu Yuan. Qu Yuan was a native of Zigui County, Yichang City. There are many kinds of orange trees in the area, and the environment is beautiful. There are also many plants growing along the Yangtze River. Therefore, Qu Yuan's use of these plants was also related to what he had seen and heard in his life. Secondly, the living conditions of the literati and officialdom in the Warring States Period have changed a lot compared to the period of "The Book of Songs". Although there was political chaos, there has been a great progress in the economy and culture. Many "vanillas" are used in "Chu Ci", not like the plants in "The Book of Songs", which are common in people's daily life, but with a kind of "The Spring Snow", which are used by the literati and officialdom for appreciating and expressing [1]. The role of plant image also began at this time, from being practical and exciting in life to being pleasing to the eye and spiritual sustenance.

In the poems of the Han and Han Dynasties, the use of plant image was even more important. The Han people of this period felt that they rose and fell with the sequence. When writing about these plants, they often use it as an example to express their feelings about the shortness of life and the eternity of time by describing the rise and fall of plants. These images demonstrate the strong sense of life in Han poetry [2]. Therefore, plant images such as pine and cypress, sycamore, and poplar are often used to metaphorize death. In addition, many poems recorded in "Han Yuefu", such as "上山采藤芜, 下山问故夫 (*going up to the mountains to pick *gracilaria confervoides*, and encountering the man when going down the mountains*)" in "Going to the Mountains to Pick *Gracilaria Confervoides*"<sup>1</sup>, *gracilaria confervoides* represented a woman with many children in ancient times. From this, people can think of the deep meaning of the happiness of husband and wife, more

children and more happiness, and a happy family. "藤芜 (*gracilaria confervoides*)" is opposite to "故夫 (*the man*)", and it also reveals a kind of sadness that things and people are all changing, and it is difficult to round the mirror. The plant image at this time not only represents the meaning of the plant itself at a superficial level, but also excavates a deeper meaning to express people's wishes and emotions. As for the use of plant image, although it appeared the earliest in "The Book of Songs", it is still from this time that the deep emotion is truly pinned on plant image and expressed through plant image.

## 2.2. Plant Image Appeared in Yan Jidao's Early Works

As a famous poet in the early Northern Song Dynasty, Yan Jidao's style of poetry was absolutely related to the social situation in the early Northern Song Dynasty and his family environment. Economically and culturally, the Northern Song Dynasty was prosperous and open, and Yan Jidao, as the son of Yan Shu — the official and the most senior, was born with a golden spoon in his mouth. In addition to the superior material conditions since childhood, Yan Jidao was also very intelligent since he was a child, and inherited the excellent literary talent of his father Yan Shu. Some people commented that he was "the treasured son of Yan's house". He grew up in a pile of rouge and powder, surrounded by pearls and greenery, and he was dressed in brocade and jade and ate well, just like what he said in his own poem "Sheng Cha Zi: Beautiful Boy with Golden Whip": "金鞍美少年, 去跃青骢马。牵系玉楼人, 绣被春寒夜 (*The mighty and handsome young man stepped on the golden saddle and galloped away lightly with the whip and the horse, which took her mind away from then on. Above the boudoir, the young wife misses him all the time, but feels that the embroidered quilt is not warm, and the spring night is even colder.*)"<sup>2</sup>. He enjoyed luxury every day, was sensual and sensual, did not worry about state affairs, nor did he worry about housework. He lived the life of a free-spirited son all day long. It is also for this reason that what Yan Jidao revealed in his poems when he recalled his childhood was also pure love, with a heavy fantasy color. When came to the Zhihe second year of Renzong, Yan Shu died, Yan's family was in a downturn, and Yan Jidao's happy life was over. He immediately felt the frost sword and snow sword of the real society. Without the protection of his father, even though his elder brother is an official in the court, life is still cruel, which also makes Yan Jidao's works in the middle and late stages always reveal a sad taste of despair. Some people say that Yan Jidao's works are all about the love of children, but in

<sup>1</sup> [Han Dynasty] Anonymous. "Han Yuefu · Going to the Mountains to Pick *Gracilaria Confervoides*".

<sup>2</sup> Yan Jidao. "Sheng Cha Zi: Beautiful Boy with Golden Whip".

fact through the love of children people can see the inner changes of Yan Jidao hidden under the coat of love for love. In his later years, Yan Jidao organized his works into "Xiaoshan Ci". His Xiaoling Ci developed to a peak in the early Song Dynasty. With the fresh and splendid and setback artistry, it combines the elegance and wealth of Yan Shu's poems with the elegant and popular characteristics of Liu Yong's poetry. The typical musical image of the combination of both elegant and vulgar lyrics makes the art form of ci gracefully enter the hall of elegance, and achieves a historic role in reversing the ruin of Song of Solomon [3]. Yan Jidao is also called "Er Yan" with his father Yan Shu because of his literary achievements.

Based on the fact that since the founding of the Song Dynasty, the sadness and a sentimental melody hidden in the hearts of the Song Dynasty shrouded the entire Song Dynasty. In addition to the existence of national and social contradictions, the careers of literati, literatus and officials were difficult and dangerous. As a result, a large number of writers avoid real contradictions in their creations, indulge in writing about trivial matters and feasting life, sing and answer each other, and amuse their lives. Literary creation has become a tool to entertain and relieve melancholy [4]. This is the political reason for Yan Jidao's unique style of words.

There is no research on the time of Yan Jidao's works, so the article does not specifically mention the early works, but only uses the parts of the works that recall early life for analysis.

Because of Yan Shu's strict discipline in his childhood, Yan Jidao did not meet the four singers "Lian, Hong, Ping and Yun" at a friend's house until he was a teenager. These four can be regarded as Yan Jidao's first love. In the masterpiece "Linjiang Xian", Yan Jidao recalled Xiao Ping's sentence, "落花人独立，微雨燕双飞。记得小蘋初见，两重心字罗衣。" (*In the middle of the night, I dreamed of returning to the tower and the red door was locked, and the curtain fell heavily when I woke up from a hangover. When the spring hatred came to my heart last year, people were secluded and independent amid falling flowers, and swallows both flew in the breeze and drizzle. I remember meeting Xiao Ping for the first time, and she once returned as her cloud-like figure. Pipa flicks the committee to talk about lovesickness. At that time, the bright moon is still there, and she once returned according to her colorful cloud-like figure.*)<sup>3</sup>. Through falling flowers to express the passing of time, Yan Jidao's regret and sorrow for his former sweetheart can only be recalled, but the word

"落花 (*falling flowers*)" not only expresses this meaning, but also reveals the desolation of self-harm. The image of "falling flowers" also appears many times in "Xiaoshan Ci", and each occurrence has similar but different meanings.

Zheng Qian said in "Cheng Fu Tan Ci": "Xiaoshan Ci's artistic conception is fresh and mournful, with a gorgeous appearance, which cannot hide his desolate and lonely heart. This is the top grade of sorrow literature"<sup>4</sup>. Where does "fresh and mournful" come from? From the image of plants, there are many plant images in "Xiaoshan Ci". Before "Xiaoshan Ci", most of them used plant image to express their broad-minded feelings. Starting from "Xiaoshan Ci", Yan Jidao often used plant images to express personal emotions and describe delicately. Such use and expression also influenced Li Qingzhao, Nalan Rongruo and others in the later period.

### 3. PESSIMISTIC AESTHETIC CONNOTATION OF "PLANT IMAGE" CATEGORY

#### 3.1. Image and Metaphor of "Falling Flowers"

Looking at "Xiaoshan Ci" in its entirety, understanding its background, general idea and emotion, and combining with the images used by the poet, it can be found that most of the images used by Yan Jidao have a sad and desolate color, and the emotions expressed in the lyrics are mostly memories and sighs of the past life. Although some people commented that Yan Shuyuan's life was sloppy and uninhibited, his works still revealed beauty and sadness.

Yan Jidao uses the image of "falling flowers" the most. There are many poems using "falling flowers" in ancient Chinese poems, such as Du Fu's "falling flowers and meeting you again", but here "falling flowers" refers to a time, "The flowers are gone, I meet you again", telling us the season time of "meeting someone". Besides Yan Jidao, the one who uses falling flowers and gives emotional color is Nalan Xingde in the Qing Dynasty.

In the words included in "Xiaoshan Ci", Yan Jidao used the image of "falling flowers" when recalling the past. "相寻梦里路，飞雨落花中 (*I want to find you in dream, the road disappeared in the falling flowers just like the flying rain*)", this sentence is a sigh that the person in the dream does not know where to go, the person in

<sup>3</sup> Yan Jidao. "Xiaoshan Ci": 06.

<sup>4</sup> Zheng Qian. "Cheng Fu Tan Ci".

the dream is the first love when the poet was young. The "falling flowers" here no longer express time and season, but a place that has passed away and cannot be found. The artistic conception of the words and sentences is very beautiful, but all they reveal are regrets and sighs. In "Partridge Sky", "花易落, 月难圆 (flowers fall easily, moons are difficult to round)". This poem is written to miss Xiao Lian, and the whole word condensed into four words are 物是人非 (everything is different), "I" miss "you", "I" can only rely on the scenery "I" have seen together to pin my thoughts on "I", but "you" is no longer. It is full of lovesickness, but there is no nostalgia for himself.

No matter how many people see the scene of "falling flowers", they will sigh. Although it is beautiful, it is sorrow. Readers only see Xiaoshan sighing beauty with falling flowers, but who can see that the poet is actually sighing at himself? The once high-spirited Yan Shuyuan was also "in the rain and falling flowers", nowhere to look for, and died as time goes by.

The literati endowed "falling flowers" with three interrelated complementary cultural and emotional connotations of the rise and fall of the Chinese New Year, the desolation of each other, and the governance of the world's fortunes. The inner meaning of falling flowers is also about these three connotations. Wang Guwei pointed out in "The Notes and Comments on Ci Poetry": "There is a realm of me, and I look at things with me, so everything has my color" [5]. For the image of "falling flowers", Yan Jidao, Nalan, Li Yu, etc. have different metaphors, but they are similar and slightly different, each with their own advantages.

### 3.2. Image of "Willow" and Its "Sadness"

Many people's initial impression of willow in ancient poems is "不知细叶谁裁出, 二月春风似剪刀 (Don't know who cuts the fine leaves, the spring breeze in February is like scissors)", and the description of women is also "like a weak willow supporting the wind". There is, "昔我往矣, 杨柳依依 (Recalling the original expedition, poplar and willow swayed with the wind.)" laid the foundation for the sad tone of the willow tree.

For this image, Song Dynasty poets often used it to express patriotic feelings and to reflect the suffering of people's livelihood. In Lu You's "Shan Nan Xing", "首溜连云马蹄健, 杨柳夹道车声高 (The alfalfa is connecting with the cloud and the horses are healthy. The poplars and willows are by the road and there are a lot of vehicles passing by.)", it has always been valued. The verse fully expresses Lu You's views on current affairs and the political situation. Alfalfa connects the clouds and willows cross the road, making people sigh at the rise and fall of the country. However, this is only a few, most of them are still used to express the sighs of time when time is fleeting and youth is gone, and the joys

and sorrows of love that are beautiful and unforgettable. For example, Yan Shu wrote in his poem "Untitled": "梨花院落溶溶月, 柳絮池塘淡淡风 (The courtyard where the pear blossoms and the bright moon meet, and the pond where the wind blows catkins hooks up endless memories)". This is a love poem about lovesickness after parting, using "willow" to recount the scene of parting, recalling the beautiful life before the flowers and the moon, revealing the lonely and desolate situation of beauty after leaving, and expressing the painstaking lovesickness of the loved one.

On the basis of his father, Yan Jidao made a new use of this image, in "Love of Butterfly", "月细风尖垂柳渡. 梦魂长在分襟处 (The moon is crescent, and the wind is sharp at the weeping willow cross, but my soul in my dream is always at the weeping willow cross where we separated.)". This poem is to write about the feelings of parting and missing, but it is not to miss the old acquaintances in childhood. The "weeping willow" here is the location. In the dream, "we" parted at the ferry where the weeping willows grew. The weeping willows witnessed the sorrow of separation. In the dream, "I" often came here, showing the deep affection for women. The "weeping willow" here is based on the sadness of parting and sadness given to it by the poet. "Willow" can also be used to describe women. In "Partridge Sky", "willow" in "舞低杨柳楼心月, 歌尽桃花扇影风 (The dancing began in the evening when the willow tops on the moon, until the late night when the moon fell on the top of the building and the treetops outside the building.)" no longer describes the place or time, but refers that the singers' dancing posture are swaying like a willow; another song "Partridge Sky" reads "风凋碧柳愁眉淡, 露染黄花笑靥深 (The wind withered the blue willow with sad brows, the dew dyed yellow flowers smiled deeply)", here "the wind withered the blue willow" means that the frown is fading, and the "willow" is used to describe a woman's eyebrows. This poem was written during Chongyang, and the addition of willow in Chongyang adds to the sorrow, but this song is uncharacteristically, and the emotional expression in it is worth pondering.

In "Huan Xi Sha", the two sentences "衣化客尘今古道, 柳含春意短长亭 (During the journey, the clothes were stained with dust and changed color, and the willow tree beside the long pavilion had already regained its sense of spring.)" express the infinite desolation of wandering children's feelings of returning home. During the journey, the clothes were stained with dust and changed color, and the willow tree beside the long pavilion that parted was already spring. The "willow" here refers to the changing of the four seasons, year after year, and time goes on and on. This expression makes the poem full of sadness and grief. "Liu Yao Ling" wrote "天涯倚楼新恨, 杨柳几丝碧 (At the column

*feeling sad, there are only some slices of green on the poplars and willows*)", expressing the nostalgia for nostalgia, and using the poplars and willows in his hometown to express his longing for family. At this time, the poplars and willows were endowed with the nostalgia of the author, and the wanderer placed his love on the poplars and willows, and the poplars and willows were the bearer of "sorrow" at this time.

The image of "willow" has won the favor of scholars and writers for its unique style, and has been passed down to this day for its unique charm. After a long-term historical and cultural accumulation, "willow" has become a unique aesthetic taste of the Chinese nation [6].

#### 4. INFLUENCE OF "PLANT IMAGE" CATEGORY ON YAN JIDAO'S PESSIMISTIC AESTHETICS

Huang Tingjian once listed Yan Jidao's "four absolute infatuation in his life" in his "Preface to Xiaoshan Ci" — "The first is that Yan Jidao was born in the official family but he couldn't rely on a rich family; the second is that Yan Jidao had his own style in his works but he refused to write for a official career; the third is that he once lived a rich life and then he was in poverty, but he always showed a pure and child face; the fourth is that he never hated people who betrayed him, when he trusted someone, he would never believe that person would cheat him." It seems to be a derogation, but it is actually a praise, and more importantly, it highlights the characteristics of Yan Jidao's character - nerd, that is, infatuation [7].

Since the beginning of Ci, it has gone through the Five Dynasties to the Song Dynasty. During the period, the "Huajian School" has had a huge impact on the creation of later poets, both in terms of the content of the Ci and the artistic technique of the Ci creation [8]. Er Yan's creation basically follows the tradition of "Huajian" and the Five Dynasties.

In general, Yan Jidao's life is full of pessimism, and it is precisely because of this tragic life that the sincere, profound and persistent emotional expression of "Xiaoshan Ci" is created. His words are full of sorrow and sadness. Feng Xu said he was "a sad person in ancient times", and Huang Tingjian said that Yan Jidao's words were "clear and strong, and they can shake people's hearts", which is completely different from the light sadness and philosophical sense of elder Yan's words. It is precisely because of Yan Jidao's unique perspective on writing words that his words are tactful but full of personal emotion, which

is very different from the Tang poetry of the Five Dynasties. Yan Jidao's works are full of past events, expressing sorrow, and most of them are "dreamland", through which he expresses the sadness of his inner world. It can be said that he is a master of "writing love with dreams". According to statistics, there are 57 poems in the collection that have written dreams, accounting for about one-fourth of all his poems. And these dreams are exposed through a large number of plant images. This way of writing expands the themes of poetry after the Song Dynasty. The poems before the Song Dynasty had great sentiments. Even in the early Song Dynasty, the poems still had political overtones. Although Liu Yong was a special case, his works still had a political atmosphere to some extent. To Yan Jidao's generation, "Xiaoshan Ci" has become a work of personal lyrical art, so Yan Jidao has a profound influence on Xiaoling (a style of short poems), especially the romantic Xiaoling. The great literatus before also borrowed scenes to express their feelings, but most of them are big scenes, such as rivers, lakes, seas, mountains and rivers, and Yanjidao's scenes are small scenes, such as falling flowers willows, plum peach branches. It is also from here that the subsequent lyric writers began to use Xiaojing to express their feelings and sorrows. When Li Qingzhao summed up the artistic gains and losses of the Tang and Five Dynasties and the Northern Song Dynasty, she wrote the article "Ci Lun", in which she said: "乃知别是一家，知之者少。后晏叔原、贺方回、秦少游、黄鲁直出，始能知之。(Ci is another school, and there were few people who knew it. Until Yan Shuyuan, He Fanghui, Qin Shaoyou, and Huang Luzhi appeared, people started to know it.)" [9].

Although Li Qingzhao criticized Yan Shuyuan, she was somewhat affected. The reason why Yan Jidao has a certain influence on Li Qingzhao is because her words do not use words to win, but "use simple and common language to express fresh meaning". It is elegant in the popular, with a natural and elegant artistic style, and achieves realms of the beauty of simplicity. Yan Jidao's writing is exactly this style.

Xiaoshan is longer than Xiaoling. Yan Jidao shares the same path with his father Yan Shu, and he is good at writing romances, so he is in tune with Liu Yong. Incorporating love into Xiaoling, his poems are deeper and more delicate than his father Yan Shu. His taste and expression of love are more condensed and purer than Liu Yong [10]. This is again the result of Yan Jidao's composing of rhetoric and the pursuit of elegance. When appreciating "Xiaoshan Ci" in detail, in addition to the faint sadness revealed in the lyrics, there was also a sense of freshness and elegance. Almost all of Yan Jidao's works after Xiaoshan have

this characteristic. They do not use words to pursue grandeur, but to express the most sincere feelings with the simplest words.

Later generations called Yan Jidao "Xiao Yan", not only because of his father, but also because he said that his spiritual world was small, so his poetry was so small that it could only carry his own feelings. "Xiaoshan Ci" is not as grand as the previous poems. However, it is precisely because of "smallness" that he concentrates on his heart and expresses his endless sadness with elegant words.

Yan Jidao's Xiaoling Ci developed to a peak in the early Song Dynasty. With the fresh and splendid and setback artistry, it combines the elegance and wealth of Yan Shu's poems with the elegant and popular characteristics of Liu Yong's poetry. The typical musical image of the combination of both elegant and vulgar lyrics makes the art form of ci gracefully enter the hall of elegance, and achieves a historic role in reversing the ruin of Song of Solomon. "Xiaoshan Ci" shows the common appreciation of poetry and poetry, rather than high-level literature that only nobles and nobles in elegant halls can appreciate.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Throughout the theme of "Xiaoshan Ci", it is always inseparable from the sad tone, from feeling of life, to self-love, to indulging in dreams, and finally lonely and downcast, Yan Jidao injected his pure temperament into "Xiaoshan Ci". It can be said that the tragic nature of "Xiaoshan Ci" is to a certain extent caused by the changing environment of the times, but more factors lie in Yan Jidao's own life experience and his arrogant personality out of reality. There are many poets and lyricists who will inject their own life and emotions into their works, but the difference is that other people's emotions are majestic and atmospheric. Compared with Yan Jidao's emotions, they are "little feelings", so he used small scenes to send little feelings, and finally formed a different style.

Yan Jidao's words are not gradually deepening in the artistic conception, not to further develop the words in terms of part of speech, poeticity or poeticization. On the contrary, it is to make the words return from the poeticization to the lyrics, as if there is a backflow in the development of the words. The vortex, so many people still call him founder of Song Ci. He inherited the poetry from the late Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties, developed and reached the peak, made himself and his father famous in the world as father and son poets, and wrote a rich and colorful addition to the Linchuan culture. Yan Jidao learned from his father Yan Shu, but his achievements in writing poetry were not the same. In description, he is more detailed

than his father; in rhetoric, he is more beautiful than his father; in emotion, he is more intense than his father. Although he is not as profound and broad as his father's thoughts, he is already young enough to be admired by the world only in terms of lyrics.

The images used by Yan Jidao are all plants that can be seen everywhere in life. Plants are inherently ruthless, but they grow with the four seasons and change with the spring and autumn, which makes people endow them with corresponding feelings. In a sense, to explain plants is to explain everything.

In Chinese traditional culture, the cultural definition of plants is special, unlike the Western cognition that divides plants into the ranks of lower creatures. Plants are endowed with the same vitality and ideology as human beings, with thousands of desires and understanding of the world [11].

The modernist artist Mondrian believed that art should be inseparable from life and nature. Some people say that art comes from life and is higher than life. Indeed, whether it is a literati or a painter, the source of their creation is nature. Poets are devoted to nature, and painters record nature to commemorate their feelings. No matter what kind of art, the connection with nature is essential.

There are also many modern Chinese poems and paintings that use plants to express their emotions. This is the result of the influence of classical art. This influence is deeply rooted in the soul after a long historical evolution and cultural heritage, and it is unavoidable.

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