

A Deliberate Interpretation on Linguistic Traits of Du Fu's Poems: A Study on The Poetics of Sung School of Qianlong and Jiaqing Reign (1736-1820)

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Abstract

Abstract: Qian Zai and Weng Fanggang, as the leaders of the Sung School, have carried out enlightening linguistic analyses on Du Fu's poems. Their analyses are of great significance to the understanding of the literary skills in Du Fu's poems. Their summary and revelation on many Du Fu's literary skills, such as "stack", "couplet of balanced stack", "double link" and "compact", are ground breaking. This paper illustrates Qian and Weng's main arguments and summarizes their achievement. Based on sound pattern, lexical and grammatical traits as well as structure, this paper systematically demonstrates the essences of Qian and Weng's research.

Key Words: Qian Zai, Weng Fanggang, Du Fu, Poetry, Linguistic Traits

1 Introduction

Du Fu (杜甫) opened up a new era of traditional Chinese poetry. (Li Zehou, 1981) He repeatedly refined his ancient verses and regulated verses, especially on the sound patterns, lexicon and grammar as well as structures. However, Only Jiangxi School poets had tried to explore and learn the literary skills of Du Fu before Qing Dynasty, until Qian Zai (錢載) and Weng Fanggang (翁方綱), the two leaders of Sung School in Qing Dynasty, began to make an interpretation on the linguistic traits of Du Fu' poems again.

Based on their profound knowledge on Chinese phonetics and linguistics, the Sung School (宋詩派) scholars, as the descendant of Jiangxi School, made a deliberate interpretation on Du Fu's poems. There are two definitions of Sung School. The general definition refers to the poets who appreciated Jiangxi School in Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The narrow definition refers to the poets who appreciated Jiangxi School in Daoguang and Xianfeng reigns of Qing Dynasty (1821-1861) (Liu Shinan "Qingshi Liupai Shi" 1995). This paper bases on the general definition to focus on Qian Zai and Weng Fanggang's research on Du Fu's poems.

2 Qian Zai's research on the sound pattern of Du Fu's poems

Qian Zai was born in Hangzhou in 1708 and died in 1793. Appraised by his contemporary poets, Qian Zai's poetics was described as a "in-depth study" (Guo Lin, 1841). This "deeply study" is reflected in a traditional literary proposition "merging Confucian classics into poetry". As a result, his poetry thoughts were regarded as Confucian scholar's thoughts, which emphasized that poets should absorb thoughts from Confucian classics to embellish writings (Qian Zhongshu, 1960). Besides, Du Fu's poetry thoughts were regarded as Confucian scholar's thoughts too. Weng Fanggang stated that in the history of poetry, there were poets' poems, geniuses' poems and scholars' poems. There were geniuses' poems in Southern Dynasty, and poets' poems in the early and high Tang Dynasty. Then, the scholar's poems could not be found before Du Fu. Meanwhile, Du Fu's poems embody the characteristics of genius's poems and poet's poems.¹ To study Du Fu's poems was a natural choice for Qian Zai because Du Fu was the ancestor of scholar poet. Actually, Qian Zai conducted a deeply study on Du Fu's poems, which was the best among the scholar on Du Fu study at that time. (Chen Yan, 1923)

The completed pattern of seven characters regulated poetry was integrated by Du Fu. In particular, Du Fu attempted to achieve breakthrough and development on the sound

¹ Weng Fanggang, "Qiyuan Lvshi Chao"(七言律詩鈔), Shanghai: Boguzhai, 1924, vol. 1.

pattern which inspired Qian Zai's research.

For example, Qian read the poem "Chengxi Bei Fanzhou" (城西陂泛舟) and made three comments. To understand Qian Zai's comments on this poem, the tones of each syllable are shown as below. ("ping" (平) means the tone of the syllable is level and "ze" (仄) means the tone of the syllable is oblique)

青蛾皓齒在樓船，橫笛短簫悲遠天。
平平仄仄仄平先 平仄仄平平仄先
春風自信牙檣動，遲日徐看錦纜牽。
平平仄仄平平仄 平仄平平仄仄先
魚吹細浪搖歌扇，燕蹴飛花落舞筵。
平平仄仄平平仄 仄仄平平仄仄先
不有小舟能蕩槳，百壺那送酒如泉。
仄仄仄平平仄仄 仄平仄仄仄平先

Qian Zai's first comment is that the tone of the syllable "pi"² (悲) of the second sentence must be level. According to the regulated sound pattern, the tones of the seven syllables of the second line should be "oblique – level – oblique – level" (仄仄平平仄仄平). However, the tone of the third syllable "tuan" (短) is oblique in Du Fu's second line. Therefore, to avoid an irregular pattern in regulated poetry, which in this case is that the level tone of the fourth syllable is placed between two oblique tones, the tone of the fifth syllable must be level.

Qian Zai's second comment is that the tones of the seven characters in the third sentence were specially arranged below the second sentence. And his last comment is that the sound patterns of the fifth and sixth sentence were back to regulated lines. From this the readers could understand the sound patterns of the third and fourth sentence were special but not metrical irregular lines.

Actually, there is another rule of regulated verse, the tones of the second, fourth and sixth syllables of the first line should be the same of the second line in the former couplet. But the sound patterns of the third and fifth lines are out of rule. Did Du Fu make a mistake? The answer is no. Generally speaking, the sound patterns of the later four lines are regulated. This means the problem is in the second couplet. Qian believed the sound pattern of the second couplet to be specially arranged but not irregular because this arrangement could correspond with the sound pattern of the second line.

In seven characters ancient poetry, the tone of the fifth syllable of the second line in each couplet is always level if the tone of the seventh syllable of the same line is level. Then, the tone of the second syllable in the next line (the first line in the next couplet)

² In this paper, "syllable" refers to the archaic phonology of the focal word in the phonology system of "History of Chinese phonology"; "character" refers to Pinyin; "word" refers to the meaning of the word.

should be level correspondingly (Wang Shizhen, 1792). In Du Fu's regulated verse, he put the sound pattern from ancient poetry into the former four lines. Qian Zai's poetics, however, revealed that Du Fu's attempt actually brought innovative developments on the sound pattern of regulated verse although the third line seems irregular. In the history of the propagation of Du Fu's poems, many scholars had made notes and comments, yet Qian Zai was the first one who illustrated the special sound arrangement in this poem.

For Du Fu's ancient verses, Qian Zai also got some new achievements on sound pattern research. For the ancient poem "Liren Xing" (麗人行), Qian Zai stated that understanding the "stack" (疊) of syllables was the foundation of understanding the stream of Du Fu's ancient verses. In another ancient verse "Leyouyuan Ge" (樂遊園歌), Qian suggested that writing ancient verse should be done after understanding "stack". These two comments advised the readers to pay attention to the identical phoneme between the adjacent syllables. Most syllables in Chinese consist of initials, finals and tones. Both alliteration and assonance contain identical phoneme between two adjacent syllables, even the reiterative make two same syllables to constitute a word. Therefore, Qian Zai analyzed several forms of alliteration, assonance and reiterative in these two poems and pointed out that the sound pattern of Du's ancient verses was melodious due to Du's excellent linguistic skill.

To check these two poems, readers could find alliterations in "Leyouyuan Ge" as "jīm jīaŋ" (森爽), "jjuæn jjuæn" (緣雲), "tʰj̄eŋ tʰj̄æt" (清切), assonances as "ian miæn" (煙綿), "tʰaŋ maŋ" (蒼茫), reiterative as "tʰj̄æi tʰj̄æi" (萋萋). And the "Liren Xing" contains many assonances such as "ki li" (肌理), "ha ma" (下馬), "ŋju dju" (禦廚), "kʰj̄æn j̄æn" (錦茵), "dzap dap" (雜遝), "tʰj̄uæn zjuæn" (逡巡), "fjuæn ljuæn" (紛綸), "siæi niæi" (細膩) and so forth. Besides, Du Fu rhymed all the end syllables of each line in "Liren Xing", which made the ancient verse sounds more like a song. According to the analysis above, we can understand that the "stack" in Qian Zai's literary criticism means that stacking identical phoneme in a poem could improve the musical beauty of the poem.

3 Qian Zai's research on the lexical and grammatical traits of Du Fu's poems

Qian Zai indicated that all the three hundreds poems in The Book of Poetry (詩經) were "stack".³ In ancient Chinese, most words are monosyllabic. With the linguistic evolution, there are more disyllabic and tri-syllabic phrase appeared in oral and writing Chinese. Qian Zai believed any notional word, which refers to noun, verb and adjective, could constitute one metrical foot in a line. If the notional word is monosyllabic, one syllable could constitute a metrical foot; if the notional word is disyllabic, this word could constitute a metrical foot which involves two syllables.

³ Huang Peifang, "Xiangshi Shihua" (香石詩話), Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2002, vol. 1706, pp. 114.

Therefore, although rare, a line consisting of seven notional monosyllables could have seven metrical feet at most. Qian Zai believed that in normal seven characters sentence, three or five metrical feet constituted by the notional words could make sure that the line is strong in artistic effect, which was also named “stack” by him.

Based on his analysis on stack, Qian Zai put forward a new idea “couplet of balanced stack” (對疊). In regulated poetry, each two lines in middle two couplets should be carefully balanced. Normally, poets pay attention to the balance in terms of the part of speech of each character and the metrical feet. Qian Zai believed metrical pattern constituted by “stack” could also be balanced. He gave readers several examples in Du Fu’s poems. Beside the couplet “I want to invite two young beauties named Wang and Zhao, and gather girls whose body and skin look like white silk again”, (愿攜王趙兩紅顏, 再聘肌膚如肅練) Qian Zai commented as “couplet of balanced stack”. Du Fu used function words “want to” (愿) and “again”(再) to lead each sentence. “young beauty” (紅顏) and “white silk” (素練) are balanced disyllables. “Invite” (攜) and “gather” (聘), “Wang” (王) and “body” (肌), “Zhao” (趙) and “skin” (膚) are balanced monosyllables. To sum up, each line of this couplet keeps four balanced metrical feet and each metrical foot was constituted by notional words.

In ancient poetry, “balancing” (對) could add syncopated cadence to the sound pattern of the whole context; “Stack” could add syncopated cadence to one sentence. Combination of these two skills would make the verse stronger but less fluent. The use of these skills is an important benchmark which distinguishes Du Fu’s ancient verses from Southern Dynasty’s ancient verses. Because of the stronger but less fluent style, Du Fu’s ancient poems were not accepted by literary restoration poets. However, the poets of Sung School appreciated this style of ancient poetry, as a leader, Qian Zai emphasized that the most important essence of ancient poetry is couplet of balanced stack.

4 Qian Zai’s research on the structure of Du Fu’s poems

Qian Zai believed a great verse should have a “compact”(緊) structure. He said that Du Fu’s “Gao Duhu Congma Xing” (高都護驄馬行) kept a “compact” structure and stronger than any other poems about horses, and could be appreciated as a piece of superb work. According to Qian Zai’s evaluation criterion, the poems with a marvelously intricate structure and the poems whose sentences had been meticulously organized would make a better one.

For instance, Qian Zai paid more attention to the end couplet of regulated poetry. Normally, He indicated that the application of the “double link” (雙綰) in the end couplet of Du Fu’s regulated verse made the poetry “compact” in terms of organization. For example, on the poem “Si Shangren Maozhai” (巳上人茅齋) Qian Zai pointed out that the second sentence is the topic sentence that laid out a context in

which two persons were having a contest of verse writing. Then, both the second and third couplet described the environment of the verse writing contest. In the end couplet, Du Fu used the allusion of Xu Xun (許詢) and Zhi Dun (支遁) to reflect the relationship between poet and his friend, who were the two persons in the topic sentence. Therefore, this skill make the whole poem well organized.

The same skill has been explained by Qian Zai in Du Fu's "Yan Zhongcheng Wangjia Jianguo". (嚴中丞枉駕見過) Du Fu used three sentences in the beginning to describe Yan Zhongcheng coming to visit him. The following three lines narrated the life of the poet himself as duckweed on the river. The end couplet told readers that only Yan Zhongcheng would appreciate the poet's talent and give the poet an opportunity to serve his country. Linking the former three lines with the next three lines, the end couplet is a perfect summary for this poem.

In addition to the "compact" organization, Qian Zai also found other unique structures in Du Fu's poems. For example, he commented that the poem "Liren Xing" (麗人行) is unique for three reasons. One is that the poem was telling a story in typical narration. The second is that it was describing characters in the end of the paragraphs. Lastly, the poem did not have a summary in the end. The three features made the structure of this poem unique in poetry. At the beginning of this poem, Du Fu described the stately bearings and behaviors of characters, but did not point out the identities of the characters. Du Fu did not point out the characters skillfully until the end, which made the readers suddenly enlightened. Considering the poem is a satire on the characters in poems, and those characters were dignitaries when Du Fu was writing the poem, it was safer for poet to organize this poem without a summary. And to end without a summary leaves more rooms of imagination to readers.

In general, Qian Zai valued the "compact" organization of Du Fu's poems. In his opinion, later poets should learn to arrange the link between sentences in a poem.

5 Weng Fanggang's study on Du Fu's poems

Weng Fanggang was born in 1733, 25 years younger than Qian Zai, and did not know how to analyze the linguistic traits of Du Fu's poems before he met Qian Zai. After 18 years discussion with Qian, Weng Fanggang made great progress in his study. We can say that Qian Zai was the teacher of Weng. Weng sorted out his achievements and published them in a book, which named "Dushi Fuji" (杜詩附記). In this book, there are 30 quotations directly from Qian Zai. While quotations without Qian Zai's name but actually from Qian would be much more than 30. To analyze those poems of Du Fu which had been analyzed by the two scholars seems valuable to understand their interpretations of Du Fu's poems. On the other hand, because Weng Fanggang's comments on poems were usually written in paragraphs, which contained plenty of content, his comments would not be discussed in different aspects.

Generally, regarding one issue, Qian and Weng would try to give different interpretations. For example, Du Fu's "Bu Ju" (卜居) is also a specially arranged regulated verse. And their discussions on it were recorded in "Dushi Fuji" as belows,

The first paragraph, Qian Zai stated that because of the change caused by the syllable "cǐui" (水), the sound pattern of the second line was ingenious. Weng believed that according to the sound pattern, the syllable "shui" had to be repeated. And according to the topic of this poem, Du Fu must repeat the word "water" (水) to express his feeling on his first visit to Huanhua Stream (浣花溪).

The second paragraph, Qian Zai said that "travelling towards the east" (東行) at the beginning of the last couplet marked a transition point in the structure and the last couplet benefited from these two characters. Weng believed that as a transition point, "travelling towards the east" makes the poem much stronger.

To understand their discussion, it is necessary to cite the poem "Bu Ju",

Huanhua Stream is flowing and I am standing on the west of the water.

浣花溪水水西頭，

The master divined where the lucky place is and chose a grove of calm near the bank.

主人為卜林塘幽。

I knew that living far away from the city means a peaceful life.

已知出郭少塵事，

Besides, the pure water would comfort my sorrow.

更有澄江消客愁。

Countless dragonflies are flying up and down.

無數蜻蜓齊上下

A pair of water fowl is diving and floating.

一雙鸕鶿對沉浮。

Travelling ten thousand miles towards the east would be joyful.

東行萬里堪乘興，

I should board a small boat to Shanyin.

須向山陰上小舟

The word "water" (水) is repeated in the first line. But different from repeated characters as reiterative in which the two same monosyllable words would constitute a new disyllable phrase, here the repeated "water" are separated from each other. The skill that repeats the same monosyllable word in one verse was borrowed from ancient poetry. But before Du Fu, this skill was rarely seen in regulated verses. If we check the sound pattern of the first couplet, we would find that the relationship of tones is as below,

浣花溪水水西頭，
仄平平仄仄平平
主人為卜林塘幽。
平平仄仄平平平

Because of the repeated word “water”, the first line looks like an ancient verse. To keep the special charm from ancient verse in a regulated verse, Du Fu chose to break the rules sometimes, which made the sound pattern of the second line totally inadequate in a regulated verse. However, the special arrangements brought ancient charm into regulated verse. So Qian Zai appreciated these couplets as ingenious. Weng Fanggang accepted Qian Zai’s conclusion and discussed why Du Fu used the same word consecutively in a single sentence through text analyzing. Since Du Fu liked waterscape and wrote many poems about waterscape. Weng Fanggang believed that to express his excitement on his first visit to the beautiful Stream, Du Fu repeated the word “water” (水) to highlight his feeling. Weng believed that the special arrangement of lexical reiteration would give the readers a vivid pictorial impression.

Besides, Qian Zai and Weng usually paid attention to the seventh line in a regulated verse. In “Bu Ju”, Qian Zai noted that the beginning “travelling towards the East” of the seventh line was the transition point of the whole structure. And Weng Fanggang gave an explanation. According to his explanation, the second couplet described a simple life in an ironic tone and was a hint foreshadowing the end couplet. The third couplet described a vivid picture of Huanhua Stream. But at the beginning of seventh line, Du Fu said that he wanted to board a boat and travel to the east where is far away from Huanhua Stream but near the center of country. The more attractive Huanhua Stream is described, the more powerful transition appears.

In these two instances, Weng Fanggang’s comments were from in-depth understanding of the topic of the poem. Actually, it is a feature of his linguistic research on Du Fu’s poems.

Also, he analyzed the sound pattern from understanding the whole poem quite often. For example, the sound pattern of the first line of regulated verse “Chu Yue” (初月) in a popular version was out of rule because the tone of the fourth syllable “k’i” (豈) should be level but actually was oblique. And there was another “Chu Yue” whose fourth syllable “jǐū” (初) was in level tone in another version of Du Fu’s poems. However, Weng Fanggang believed the version “Chu Yue” within “jǐū” was a draft but the “Chu Yue” within “k’i” was a revised and better version. Actually, Du chose the version out of rule of regulated poetry. Since the topic of this poem was to criticize the corruptive government and express his discontent of his career, Weng believed a sound pattern which is out of rule could express the discontent vividly.

Based on in-depth understanding of the content of Du’s poems, Weng made many brilliant comments on Du’s lexical skills. For instance, Weng gave a new explanation

on two characters “tao” (逃) and “zhen” (貞) of Du’s poem “Ji Ti Jiangwai Caotang” (寄題江外草堂). Normally, “tao” means “escape” and “zhen” means “straight”. But in this poem, Weng pointed out that “tao” means “plough into” and “zhen” means “to persevere”, which were near to the original meaning and better for readers to follow Du’s emotion expressed in this poem.

Weng Fanggang’s most important poetic idea is “musculature” (肌理) which means the structure of the poetry should be organized as compact as human’s body. Based on this opinion, Weng would like to pay attention to analyze the connection between different words in one poem. For example, in “Leyouyuan Ge” (樂遊園歌) Weng pointed out that the word “white” (白) correspond to “ugly” (醜) and the word “merciful” (慈) corresponded to “deeply” (深). In “Youzuo Ci Feng Weiwang” (又作此奉衛王), Weng said that the character “xiong” (雄) which means “being the best” and the character “wei” (為) which means “achieving” made the poem strong and these two characters has inherent connection. These nice connections between words make all the words well integrated and become the musculature of poetry.

Focus on the organization of Du Fu’s poems, Weng Fanggang always gave comments on the structure from analyzing the connections between lines. In the seventh poem of ten chapters of “Pei Zhengguangwen You Hejiangjun Shanlin” (陪鄭廣文游何將軍山林), Weng believed the third line corresponded to the second line, while the fourth line corresponded to the first line. This arrangement made the structure looks more intricate and could be also found in “Feng Liuzeng Jixianyuan Cui Yu Erxueshi” (奉留贈集賢院崔、于二學士). Weng said that the fifth line linked with the fourth line, while the sixth line linked with the third line in the poem. In addition, there was a skill named “intricacies of void and real” (虛實乘承) by Weng Fanggang. In “Qianqiujie Yougan Ershou” (千秋節有感二首) most of the couplets are composed by a line which described past events (void) and a line recording what happened “today” (real). Therefore, all the lines about old days became a family, while the other family was about story happened in “today”. At the end, the conversation between these two families was the structure of this poem.

6 The meaning of illumination on linguistic traits of Du’s poems in Qing Dynasty

From 1757, the poetry writing examination reappeared in the imperial competitive examination after hundreds of years. To learn, research, and even teach poetry writing became a focus in the big scholars’ circle. Traditional random notes on classical poets and poetry were not very useful for young scholars to learn poetry writing because those notes always gave an ambiguous answer to questions in poetry writing. Therefore, detailed analyses on linguistic traits of the best poet’s works were an inevitable outcome in that social environment. Since the research on Chinese phonetics and linguistics achieved a high point in ancient China at the reign of Qianlong, the court scholars had enough knowledge to analyze the linguistic traits of

Du's poems. In a word, Qian Zai and Weng Fanggang set a good example for research on Du's poems and learning on poetry writing. The method of analyzing poems quickly influenced other styles of traditional literature research. The Sung School and the Tongguang School (同光體) after Qian and Weng inherited their research method, and publish more books of detailed comments on Du's poems appeared in the history.

However, this method had been abandoned at the 20th century in Mainland China academia. But three demonstrative papers had been completed by Chinese scholars in American. In the 21st century, more Chinese scholars begin to carry out research on the linguistic traits of traditional Chinese literatures. It is significant for today's research to know the antecessors' achievements.

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