

# THE EMOTIONAL CONNOTATIONS OF ZHANG YAN'S EROTIC LYRICS

YanLi Chen

*School of international education, Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing 312000, Zhejiang, China.*

*Corresponding Email: 6131381@qq.com*

**Abstract:** Zhang Yan was an important poet during the transition from the Song to the Yuan Dynasty, and his erotic works, imbued with the feelings of a displaced person and the sorrow of the collapse of the millet, "gave his erotic lyrics a unique charm. In terms of emotional content, although a small part of Zhang Yan's erotic lyrics did not break away from the grievances of predecessors and still inherited the implicit and graceful style, it is undeniable that most of Zhang Yan's erotic lyrics underwent a qualitative change due to the factors of the downfall of his family and the demise of his country.

**Keywords:** Zhang Yan; Erotic Lyrics; Displaced Person Identity; Emotional Connotations

## 1 INTRODUCTION

"Poetry is solemn, lyrics are charming, "and" lyrics are for the erotic. "From the beginning, lyrics focused on depicting the emotions between men and women, with a characteristic of gentleness and beauty. [1]Lyrics often depicted women such as young girls, wives, concubines, and courtesans. Among the 302 lyrics created by Zhang Yan, there are about 26 erotic lyrics, accounting for about one-tenth of his total lyrics. In Zhang Yan's erotic lyrics, apart from the longing for his wife and concubines, the poet depicted more often the courtesans he interacted with. Among Zhang Yan's 26 erotic lyrics, there are 14 that directly depict courtesans, except for "Yi Jiu You" (Feeling at the Old Residence), "Du Jiang Yun" (The Fragrant Silk is All Around), "Chang Ting Yuan" (Feeling at the Old Residence), and "Qi Luo Xiang. Xi Jian Dai Ren Fu Qing" (The Deep Lamp at Hou Guan), which are four works about missing wives and concubines, the remaining 22 are more or less related to courtesans. The courtesans who interacted with Zhang Yan include Shen Mei Jiao, Gui Qing, Xiao Qian, Che Xiu Qing, Su Liu Er, Ai Ju, Qing Qing, Yang Rou Qing, Yun Yu, Guan Guan, Shuang Bo, and others.

## 2 INHERITING THE GRIEVANCES OF PREDECESSORS

Lyrics often depict women, and women inevitably become synonymous with "grievances." For example, a lovesick girl complains about her beloved's long absence; a young wife in the boudoir, lazy and coquettish, is lonely and hard to bear; a courtesan, after her old lover's change of heart, is left alone in the room, desolate and sorrowful. Zhang Yan's erotic lyrics also include some works depicting women's sorrows.

Before the fall of the Southern Song Dynasty, Zhang Yan only wrote two erotic lyrics, "Huan Xi Sha" and "Dan Huang Liu. Zeng Su Shi Liu Er," which basically followed the implicit and graceful style of previous generations. For example, in "Huan Xi Sha" :

Rhinoceros clasps the heavy curtains of the deep courtyard. Willow fluff pounces on the account during the day. Dreaming back, a lonely butterfly plays in the spring shade.

Suddenly reduced Chu clothes collect belt eyes, initially even Shang Ding irons fragrant heart. Swallows return and shake the flower protection bell.

In the luxurious deep courtyard, a sentimental woman, enslaved by love, longs for her lover and becomes thin. The term "fragrant heart" refers to a fragrant and clean heart. Yu Xin of the Northern Zhou Dynasty in "Shang Xian Si Xian Du Fu" and Li Shangyin of the Tang Dynasty in "Yan Tai Poems·Winter" both mentioned it. The deep environment, light longing, and sorrowful emotions run through the work. The work continues the style of the Hua Jian Ci with gorgeous rhetoric, gorgeous colors, and empty content. The female protagonist's form and spirit can be found in the erotic lyrics of predecessors at will.

After the fall of the Song Dynasty, Zhang Yan also wrote lyrics such as "Hao Shi Jin" (Gift to Xiao Qian), "Zhu Ying Yao Hong" (Listening to Songs Through the Window), "Die Lian Hua" (Gift to Yang Rou Qing), "Xi Hong Yi" (Gift to Prostitute Shuang Bo), "Pu Sa Man" (rui xiang does not love the pipa knot), and "Sheng Sheng Man" (Hair wet with fog), which are generally about flowers and grass. These lyrics still focus on the women's physique and expression, and all are filled with the heroine's unspeakable longing and light sorrow, not much different from the erotic lyrics before the Song Dynasty. However, some erotic lyrics, although still mainly about men and women's love, the poet has integrated the feeling of time passing quickly into it. For example, in "Zhen Zhu Ling" :

The sound of singing under the peach blossom fan is gone. How much sorrow. It feels that the flower shade is idle. Why not come back, why not come back early.

Don't sweep the courtyard full of flying flowers. Keep it for the thin sentiment to know. Afraid it's like flying flowers, and spring is old together.

This is a very typical lyric about longing. In the lyric, the woman has no heart for singing and dancing because of her lover's departure. "How much sorrow. It feels that the flower shade is idle." The poet merges emotions into the scenery, and the sorrowful woman attributes the natural withering of the flowers to her sorrow. "Why not come back, why not come back early" outlines the woman's eager expectation for her lover's return. After a long wait, "Don't sweep the courtyard full of flying flowers. Keep it for the thin sentiment to know." The woman, born out of love and hate, accuses the man of being unfaithful. The lyric's emotions and hatred run through it. However, "Afraid it's like flying flowers, and spring is old together." It swings the pen and ink, emitting a sigh of time passing quickly and the face is easy to age. Due to the change in the poet's identity, the lyric has a deep and heavy feeling in the strong longing, and the erotic component is thus diluted, and the artistic conception of the lyric is more profound. "Jing Meng Hui, Lan Shuo Xiang Si, after all, now old" in "Jie Hua Yu" (Singing While Walking in the Moonlight) also has a sigh about the fast passage of time.

In Zhang Yan's erotic lyrics, the identity of women is mostly courtesans. The poet, triggered by the charming and comfortable atmosphere, creates fragrant and soft lyrics on the spot, and the purpose is for entertainment and leisure needs, which should be the same as the purpose of predecessors. Zhang Yan's erotic lyrics mainly depict women's physique and expression, and the unspeakable longing and light sorrow run through them, inheriting the implicit and graceful style of predecessors. [2] Although a small part of Zhang Yan's erotic lyrics has a sense of time passing, making the artistic conception of the lyrics more profound, thus distinguishing them from general complaints, the writing techniques are still mainly in the style of grace and grace, and in the final analysis, they are still inheriting the grievances of predecessors.

### 3 EXPRESSING THE THOUGHTS OF INSCRIPTION ON RED LEAVES

Zhang Yan wandered between the green buildings, both lingering on courtesans and missing his wife infinitely. In "Inscription on Red Leaves," we can slightly explore Zhang Yan's emotional journey.

"Inscription on Red Leaves" is a story of love that uses red leaves as a medium, and under the condition of a coincidence, it leads to a touching love story. [3] The protagonists in the blueprint are scholars and palace women. In March of the first year of Deyou (1275), Zhang Yan's grandfather, Zhang Lu, killed the Mongolian envoy Lian Xi Xian during the defense of the pass. In March of the following year, the Yuan army marched south and violently retaliated against the Southern Song Dynasty, killing Zhang Lu and confiscating his family's property. Zhang Yan's wives and concubines were also confiscated in this disaster. The Yuan rulers often confiscated the property and wives of "criminals" and rewarded them to meritorious officials or punished them as official prostitutes; sometimes they even confiscated other people's property to seize others' wives and daughters. After Zhang Yan's wives and concubines were confiscated, they would inevitably end up in entertainment venues. In order to find the whereabouts of his confiscated wives and concubines, Zhang Yan had to often visit brothels and banquets held by officials, and spread his search for his wife through the circulation of "Inscription on Red Leaves" in public places.

The romantic Zhang Yan was attached to the green buildings and entertainment venues. The downfall of the country and the loss of his home left his emotions without a place to settle, and only in these romantic places could he find a trace of comfort and solace. At the same time, he hoped to hear about his wife's whereabouts here. For example, he wrote "Qi Luo Xiang. Xi Jian Dai Ren Fu Qing" at a banquet:

In the guesthouse, deep in the night, with the light dim,  
A broken feather in the vast sky, recent letters seem lost.  
In the blink of an eye, my heart aches, I'm too lazy to watch  
The remaining songs, the incomplete melodies.  
Just forgotten, yet still pondering,  
About to leave, how can I bear the parting?  
I only hate, the peach leaves on the empty river,  
Not as diligent as the thanked red leaves.  
On this fine night, who thinks of my choking sobs?  
Facing the incense burner, like a measure of the elephant's tread, idly accompanying the sorrow.  
Alone in the west wind, still remembering the old home season.  
Following slow steps, flowers hide the spring,  
Listening to whispers, willows sparsely resent the moon.  
Today, don't ask about the swallow's promise, the oriole's date,  
Dreaming, I wander, taking advantage of the butterfly's time.

In the dimly lit guesthouse, amidst the clinking of cups and the swirling dance of revelry, the poet, burdened with cares, pays no mind to the feast's splendor. Gazing at the silent sky, he is overwhelmed with sorrow as he thinks of the letters he has sent into the void, without a trace. Memories of sweet nothings whispered under the moonlit flowers with his beloved (perhaps his wife or concubine), and the promises they made to each other, now seem like a fleeting dream. "Standing alone in the west wind, still remembering the old days" could be a longing for his past lover (wife or concubine), a reflection on the rise and fall of his homeland, or perhaps both, leaving us to wonder. Yet, it is this "implying more than is said" that gives us boundless imagination, enriching the content of his poetry. The phrase "not as diligent as the red leaves" is derived from the allusion of "inscribed poems on red leaves." "Diligently thanking the red leaves, may they go to the human world" -to what end? Naturally, to seek out the wife or concubine lost due to

confiscation. Alas, "the fallen flower has intent, but the flowing water is heartless," and the word "not" reveals the poet's deep sense of disappointment. The arduous longing and the difficult search lead only to the despair of "to whom shall I send the inscribed red leaves?" One can only imagine the emotional turmoil of the passionate young master, Zhang Yan. Zhang Yan's quest to find his wife was not a fleeting endeavor; he also wrote many poems expressing his longing for her before and after his northern travels. For instance, in "Memories of the Past" (Feelings upon Passing the Old Garden), he writes, "The lotus in the mirror ages, where is she now?" The beloved's (wife or concubine's) visage fades with time, yet her whereabouts remain unknown. "To share the sorrows of exile, I know the path is barred by willows." He wishes to confide his wandering sorrows to his beloved, but the way is obstructed by the willows. In "The Grievance of the Long Pavilion" (Feelings upon the Old Residence), "Hate the west wind, it does not protect the cold cicada. It blows away all the leaves in the forest," he depicts the desolate scene of parting with his beloved. Zhang Yan frequented places of romantic encounters and expressed his yearning in abundance, hoping that through the singing of courtesans and the circulation of his poems at banquets, he might find his wife. Zhang Yan's "inscribed poems on red leaves" was a desperate measure as a commoner, but it was also the most effective way to spread his message. Another of his poems, "Crossing the River Clouds. In the Rhyme of Zhao Yuanfu," goes:

Brocade fragrance winds around the ground, deep lamps hang on the wall. The curtain's shadow slants like waves. After the wine boat returns, turning to the river bridge, where to recognize the patterned gauze. The promise of the mirror, still remembered, the qian jia of yore. Only the leaves inscribed can be sent, but they cannot reach to the ends of the earth.

Astonished, a decade of thoughts, a few tunes at the railing, thinking of the value of Xiao Niang's voice. Idle past the dusk, sparse willows and crowing crows. The river tide surges at night, the white sand flat, asking the broken goose, where has it fallen. The letter is far away, the empty river, a sliver of moon, and reeds in bloom.

The poet begins with "Brocade fragrance winds around the ground" to depict a warm and romantic scene, followed by "deep lamps hang on the wall. The curtain's shadow slants like waves" which leads us into a desolate realm. The phrase "the promise of the mirror" signifies the wish for a couple to be reunited, and "Qin Jia of yore" comes from the allusion of "Qin Jia's bright mirror," indicating a deep and caring relationship between husband and wife. This reveals that it is a poem reminiscing about his wife. Once so romantic and sweet with his wife, the poet is now in such a desolate state after their separation. "Only the leaves inscribed can be sent, but they cannot reach to the ends of the earth" -the poet wishes to find his wife, whom he longs for day and night, through the method of "inscribed poems on red leaves," but fate is merciless, insisting on keeping two lovers apart. "The letter is far away, the empty river, a sliver of moon, and reeds in bloom" -the poet, unsuccessful in his search, can only sigh alone facing the vast, empty river. In that era where one's fortune could change with a flick of a hand, individuals seemed so insignificant, and in the face of fate's caprices, all one could do was accept, lament, and feel powerless. The deep and bitter longing, the distant and profound expectations, the despair of a fruitless search, and the inexpressible sighs all give a sense of ethereal sorrow.

"Red leaves" symbolize the conveyance of affection. "Inscribed poems on red leaves" is a beautiful hope for "lovers to become a couple." [4]Zhang Yan, due to the confiscation of his family's wealth, also lost his wife in this process. Thus, his purpose in writing "inscribed poems on red leaves" was to achieve the reunion of husband and wife. Zhang Yan's journey to find his wife was arduous and long, and his longing for her in "inscribed poems on red leaves" is mournful and profound. On his journey to find his wife, the poet conveys his boundless longing with his delicate emotions.

Zhang Yan's method of using "Red Leaf Inscription" to search for his wife inherently carries a certain tragic hue. As a commoner, Zhang Yan's attempt to find his wife in the vast Yuan Dynasty was as difficult as finding a needle in a haystack, and the suffering he endured during his journey is beyond our knowledge. However, it was this extraordinary experience that, while allowing Zhang Yan to fully taste the bitterness of longing, also shaped the elegant and proper style of his poetic works.

#### 4 EXPRESSING THE SORROW OF THE SENTIMENTS IN SORGHUM AND MILLET

Zhang Yan's status as a remnant scholar is undoubted. He was deeply concerned with his fallen country, maintaining a refined and elegant character, preferring poverty and misfortune to flattering the Yuan Dynasty. [5]Although he experienced a period of traveling north to transcribe scriptures, it ultimately ended abruptly with the "thunderclap at the Jiefang Temple." From a wealthy noble to a destitute royal descendant, the stark contrast between his former and current life made him acutely aware of the bitterness of his fate. Decades of a rootless, drifting life further instilled in him the sorrow of a nation in ruins and a life adrift, akin to "rivers and mountains shattered like tattered catkins, a life buoyant and sinking like a duckweed in the rain" —a deep-seated hatred for a lost homeland. The upheaval in his identity, from a family's collapse to a nation's demise, inevitably found its way into his creative practice, and his romantic works are no exception. For instance, in "Guo Xiang" :

Orioles on the willow smoke embankment. Recalling the uncharmed green fruits, once compared to the beauty of a maiden. Graceful and charming, slightly revealing the spring, with twin strands of green hair hanging down. Unaware that the immortal could not stay, no dreams were blown to the southern branch. Looking at each other, both adrift, covering their faces in shyness, afraid to speak of the past.

This lyric depicts a scene of a long-lost lover's encounter. The first part reminisces about the beautiful scenes of the past, where the elegant and wealthy Zhang Yan met the young, beautiful, and intelligent courtesan (Shen Meijiao) by the West Lake's "oriole on the willow smoke embankment." "Not yet chanting green fruits," Du Mu once wrote the poem "Sigh for the Flower": "It's my own fault that I seek spring too late, no need to feel melancholy or complain about the time.

The wild wind has fallen all the deep red, and the green leaves are shaded with full branches." Du's poem uses the technique of comparison, with the natural blooming and withering of flowers, the green trees shading and full branches, as a metaphor for the prime of a girl's youth having passed, and marriage and childbirth. Zhang Yan, in his verse, reverses this allusion, "not yet chanting green fruits" indicating that Shen Meijiao is in her prime, "once compared to a beauty" also uses an allusion, saying she is beautiful and intelligent, and Zhang Yan's fondness for Shen Meijiao can be imagined. The above allusions have no substantial feeling but have the wonder of emptiness. Now, when they meet again, they are both in a state of destitution, "looking at each other, both adrift, covering their faces in shyness, afraid to speak of the past." As the two meet against the backdrop of a nation in ruins and a home lost, the vast difference between then and now, they both experience the sorrow of the world and the feeling of being castaways at the ends of the earth, and the poet will surely integrate the "sorrow of the millet departure" into it. "Past dusk, still saying do not return" then "implies more than is said," and the reluctance of the two to part is self-evident. On Zhang Yan's way to the north to transcribe scriptures, he wrote another poem for Shen Meijiao, "Ruan Lang Gui," in which he says, "Drunk, I do not believe there are weeping orioles. Thirty years in Jiangnan." The loving couple did not believe they would part and return, little knowing that one parting from the lover would be for twenty years. While the poet is in pain and helplessness, he also infuses the reality of a home lost and a nation in ruins, causing the two to be separated by the world and difficult to meet for a long time, into his work.

Zhang Yan's romantic poems that integrate the "sorrow of the millet departure" are about 15 in number, accounting for a significant proportion of his romantic works. For example, in "Yi Wang Wang" (The Wu wa of Wind and Moon), "No one knows this meaning, and who is the bright moon for? The red dust rolls, and the old is beautiful," "Yi Jiu You" (Remembering the Makeup Leaning on the Fan), "Waiting to tell the sorrow of exile, knowing the road is separated by willows," "Chang Xiang Si" (The Heart of Coming and Going, the Short and Long Pavilion), "Both are people who have fallen to the ends of the earth," "Zhao Zhong Cuo" (The Rain is Clamorous during the Qingming Festival), "Picking a willow branch, returning to whom to insert," and "Nan Lou Ling" (The Wind and Rain are Afraid of a Different Country), "The bright moon half bed, people sleep, saying that it is cool in the middle of the night," etc., all have the contrast of the past and present, which is also due to the demise of the home and country. Zhang Yan's status as a remnant scholar inevitably stamps his romantic poems with the "sorrow of the millet departure."

The poet integrates the hatred of "the sorrow of the millet departure" and the sadness of a drifting life into romance, which not only dilutes the romantic elements but also enriches the content of the poem. Zheng en xiao, who also shares the status of a remnant scholar, commented on Zhang Yan's poetry in this way: "It can make the next thirty years of the West Lake's beautiful landscape still resonate, not allowing a bit of new sorrow to fly to the eyebrows of tourists. It naturally generates a kind of joy and pleasure." [6] The former prosperity and the former leaning on the red and snuggling the green are all fleeting, gone and not returning. What they can do is to create a spiritual homeland for themselves with infinite thoughts, to comfort a tired and wandering soul.

Zhang Yan's romantic poetry abandons the flamboyant and implicit style, integrating the "sorrow of the millet departure" with his special status as a remnant scholar. At the same time, he also infuses his own clear and elegant poetic thoughts into the poems, thereby diluting the romantic elements and enriching the content, bringing a reforming wind to the innovation of romantic poetry.

The status of a remnant scholar, the hatred for the home and country, and the infinite longing for his wife give Zhang Yan's romantic poetry a profound connotation, and the interweaving of various emotions make Zhang Yan's romantic poetry beyond the category of being made for "romance" and "feelings."

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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