

The Problem of Hua Zhongyan's Annotation and a Plausible Interpretation of "Flower Patterns" in Zhang Mi's Liu Zhi

Dian Shang^{1,a,*}

¹ Department of Philosophy, Drew University, 36 Madison Ave, New Jersey, the United States
a.dshang@drew.edu

*corresponding author

Abstract: Hua Zhongyan's *Annotation of Songs Among the Flowers* greatly influences *Huajian Ji*'s study. For the annotation of Zhang Mi's *Liu Zhi*, Hua Zhongyan interprets that the phrase "flower patterns" implies the flowerlike textures sewed on the pillow. I found Hua Zhongyan's interpretation feasible but less correlative to this specific verse because he seems to ignore the criterion of judging a song lyric and how a *huajian ci* is supposed to achieve in order to make itself unique from palace poetry. We are responsible for seeking a more plausible interpretation of the "flower patterns" to understand better why Chinese literati value the image of "fallen petals" and associate it with the comprehension of the universe and what interest the *Huajian Ji* refers to palace poetry but has its own improvements. I firstly criticized Hua Zhongyan's inappropriate annotation and provided some pieces of evidence. Then, I stated that Zhang Mi's "flower patterns" represent the "fallen petals" instead of the textures on the pillow.

Keywords: Huajian Ji, Hua Zhongyan, Zhang Mi, fallen petals, flower patterns

1. Introduction

Among various annotations of *Huajian Ji*, Hua Zhongyan's *Annotations of Songs Among the Flowers* is considered one of the most trustworthy and influential publications. In this work, I found one important issue that must be pointed out to further understand song lyrics in *Songs Among the Flowers*. When annotating Zhang Mi's *Liu Zhi*, he analyzes the verse "Rosy cheek uncovers the flower patterns on the pillow" by claiming that "uncovers" corresponds to the "flower patterns," which signifies that the phrase "flower patterns" represent the handcrafted well-sewed textures on the pillow [1]. I argue that this interpretation is receptive but fails to correlate to this verse perfectly. Also, Hua Zhongyan ignores the feature of *Songs Among the Flowers*. In addition, I shall provide a more plausible interpretation that might address the issues. I state that Zhang Mi's "flower patterns" refer to the fallen petals outside of the window based on two pieces of evidence: The image of "fallen petals" has a valued meaning in Chinese culture, and Zhang Mi borrows some scenes from Xiao Gang's palace poem *Ode For My Sleeping Concubine*.

2. The Problem of "Textures on Pillow"

Firstly, I shall discuss why Hua Zhongyan's interpretation fails to match this context. The translated version of Zhang Mi's *Liu Zhi* is shown below:

"The thick powder and fragrant makeup coming through the verdant gauze curtain,
and please not to adore me. The golden phoenix, the glowing hairpin, tilting from my hair and
about to fall.

Leaning on the cloudlike screen and falling asleep, she smiles in a spring dream. Rosy cheek
uncovers the flower patterns on the pillow, only a little [2]."

By the definition of "uncovers" in Hua Zhongyan's annotation, he assumes that this sleeping
beauty turns her head to the sides while in a dream and makes the flowerlike textures on the pillow
emerge and disappear following her motions. Indeed, such a statement is one of the possible
interpretations, meaning it is not falsehood; however, it does not satisfy the entire context. A priori
to the content, knowing the differences between *xiao ling* and *chang diao* in song lyric patterns is
significant. Since *Liu Zhi* belongs to *xiao ling*, there must be some structural limits to the content
expression to catch the quintessential ideas and filter the featherweights. This commonly
acknowledged feature of *xiao ling* has been inherited from the Late Tang dynasty (Mid Tang is not
as representative as the Late Tang) to the Qing dynasty. A counter-example is *chang diao*, which
length is much longer than *xiao ling*. Manifestly, *chang diao* provides more space and allows the
literati, as well as the court entertainment bureau, to fully elaborate their inner thoughts to compose
a narrative or a magnificent music chapter. Namely, literati prefer to use unrelative and repetitive
phrases to fill out the *chang diao*'s pattern. However, they must figure out how to extract and refine
their dictions in order to avoid trivial rhetorics while composing a *xiao ling*. Thus, looking back to
Zhang Mi's *Liu Zhi*, the second stanza says: "Leaning on the cloudlike screen and falling asleep, she
smiles in a spring dream. Rosy cheek uncovers the flower patterns on the pillow, only a little [2]."
Suppose I explain this scene as the woman turning her head back and forth and moving around on
the pillow. In that case, it will make this stanza tedious and limitary, which automatically strangles
the readers' imagination since he is repeating the similar scenes that he already expresses in the first
stanza. The consequence would be the loss of control of what a *xiao ling* is supposed to be.

Yet now the question comes as to what standard should be referred to judge a song lyric. I have
to mention Wang Guowei's one of the four most remarkable theories during his whole academic
life—the theory of realm (*Jing Jie Shuo*). Wang Guowei establishes several criteria for song lyrics
in *Critique of Song Lyrics of Humans*, but the theory of realm is considered the most influential.
According to the theory of realm, Wang Guowei claims that "*Jing Jie* is the supreme standard to
compose and criticize a song lyric. A song lyric possessing this sublime quality must come up with
brilliant verses [3]". The term "*Jing Jie*" is translated in Buddhism classics which could be well-
conveyed as the level of comprehending the meaning of life. In the first stanza of Zhang Mi's piece,
he portrays the beautiful makeup and elegant decorations on this woman or around her boudoir,
which is good enough to deliver the graceful interests of a woman from the upper class (specific
class can not be identified according to the content, but at least know that she is a concubine or a
court singing lady). If Zhang Mi repeatedly emphasizes the frivolous surroundings in the second
stanza, then he would fail to meet Wang Guowei's standard of *Jing Jie*. However, the premise that
has to be acknowledged is that readers assume and prefer to seek *Jing Jie* in song lyrics, even
though *Songs Among the Flowers*, a collection that looks similar to *Yutai Xinyong*, is mainly
compiled for court entertainment in which poets are encouraged to have some superior thinkings
(Not as *Yutai Xinyong* which almost merely focuses on the aesthetics of females); just as Professor
Anna Shields mentions in her publication *Crafting a Collection: The Cultural Contexts and Poetic
Practice of the Huajian Ji (Collection from Among the Flowers)*, Ouyang Jiong compiles *Songs
Among the Flowers* for the sake of promoting the taste of Shu court, which shall be a type of upper-
level interest [4]. That is, I must assume that as one of the most remarkable *Huajian* poets, Zhang
Mi has the same pursuit as well. However, some may even argue that there exist pieces considered
excellent in *Songs Among the Flowers* without the elements of *Jing Jie*, such as Wen Tingyun's first

Pusa Man: Hills on many layers. This is indeed a complex issue to address, but I can still at least see an apparent logical fallacy within that argument. As Chen Tingzhuo criticizes Wen Tingyun's song lyrics in *Critique of Song Lyrics of Baiyu Zhai*: "...Things that seem visible through the mist; the mood is roundabout and going back and forth; and finally, he never touches the point, you never catch the heart [5]", what Chen Tingzhuo praises is the incomprehensibility and potentiality of Wen Tingyun's song lyrics— it sounds great to discuss *Jing Jie* upon Wen Tingyun, but how to do it without knowing the exact content? Wen Tingyun brings too many cultural associations that challenge the basic understanding and perplex the general conjectures. Thus, the better way would be not to interfere with Wen Tingyun's piece by referring to *Jing Jie*. Nonetheless, Zhang Mi's piece is distinct from Wen Tingyun's because he demonstrates a series of things and emotions in front of the readers apparently, and it becomes reasonable to judge it with the theory of realm. Therefore, in order to raise the realm to a higher level, Zhang Mi has to break away from the narrowness by merely focusing on the beautiful flower patterns on the pillow but broadening his vision to somewhere else that is more meaningful and life-related.

3. A Plausible Interpretation: Fallen Petals Outside of Window

For this part, I claim that "flower patterns on the pillow" represent the fallen petals that fly through the woman's boudoir from the window and drop on her pillow. In order to demonstrate more clearly, I shall explain why the image of "fallen petals" is the potential for Chinese literati to arouse the comprehension of the meaning of life; in addition, I will analyze how Zhang Mi consciously refers to Xiao Gang's palace poem *Ode For My Sleeping Concubine*.

Chinese aesthetics is, at least in accordance with the present studies, distinct from western aesthetics. For instance, Kant would distinguish between a flying butterfly and a volcano eruption as two totally different types of beauty. The latter is sublime and superior to providing me with much more meaningful feelings than the former. However, Chinese culture tends to merge into both types as a unity. Interestingly, Chinese literati were unaware of this until Bodhidharma traveled to China from India and educated *Lankavatara Sutra* to the second pupil of Zen Buddhism, Hui Ke. After Bodhidharma's passing away until imparting the classics to Hui Neng, the sixth pupil of Zen Buddhism, Chinese literati began to comprehend the fundamental structure of their aesthetic appreciation, even though they had been using it ever since. It is appropriate even to state that Chinese literati have always pursued Zen's aesthetic, encouraging people to aim for their true essence. Commonly seen in Chinese poetry that any subtle scenes can be associated with the sublimity of life; and as Lingmu Dazhuo discusses in *The Realm of Zen*, the authentic beauty for Chinese literati is the stillness that exists beyond the limits of space and time [6]. Regarding the example of "fallen petals," it is the implication of the evanescence of the universe and the eternity of change, which is the contradiction within the consistency. I shall use Du Fu's *Qu Jiang* as extraordinary evidence: "When a single petal falls away, it diminishes spring, as breeze whirls thousands of flecks it makes a man most sad [7]." A great poet's personality must be sentimental, and the way to discover that is to observe how he might perceive the universe and conjoin it with human lives. According to this verse, Du Fu's fallen petals point out the relationship between the human race and the universe; but "fallen petals" can also be conveyed in terms of romantic love. As one of Yan Jidao's most well-known song lyrics *Lin Jiangxian*, it says: "We shall only encounter again in the path of a dream, by the raining day with fallen petals [8]." Such a verse merely expresses the lovesickness for the gone beloved one. However, it possesses the potential for betrayal reading, allowing readers to expand their imaginations to something more sublime than love. Huang Fang talks about this phenomenon in his article *The Discovery Of the Helplessness of Life Within the Fallen Petals In Classic Chinese Poetry*: "In classic Chinese poetry, the figure of fallen petals always points to the helplessness of life [9]." Conclusively, "fallen petals," as one of

the Chinese cultural images, can always leave its initial representation and provide a higher calling, no matter if it is sorrow, tranquility, aesthetics, or profound cognition to the world; it somehow carries the will of Chinese literati, and it fits the traditional three means of poetry-making in *Zhou Li: Da Shi* [10]. Turning back to Zhang Mi's verse, it surely manifests some romantic dream about love that makes this woman smile. Based on what I have analyzed above, the conjunction of "fallen petals" could be reasonably associated with the scene that Zhang Mi puts in this verse. Furthermore, since this piece is compiled in *Songs Among the Flowers* by Ouyang Jiong, it indirectly reveals that it must contain some essential factors distinct from most of the palace poems in the South and North dynasties, concentrating merely on sundries of females. Ouyang Jiong discusses his standard of collecting song lyrics in his preface by saying, "Thusly this collection entertains the literati, and gives new pieces to the beautiful singing ladies so that they might abolish the old lotus melodies [2]." The so-called "old lotus melodies," according to Ouyang Jiong, are palace poems in *Yutai Xinyong* compiled by Xu Ling in South Liang. If Zhang Mi's verse still falls into the "tradition" of palace poems, which concentrates merely on the sundries of females, Ouyang Jiong would not take it into consideration. Therefore, the "flower patterns" in the second stanza should represent the "fallen petals" in order to create a superior comprehension realm that differentiates from palace poetry.

Meanwhile, I found that Zhang Mi's verse borrows the image from Xiao Gang's palace poem *Ode For My Sleeping Concubine*. By Looking at the preface of *Songs Among the Flowers* again, it is simple to notice that Ouyang Jiong himself admits that *Songs Among the Flowers* originated from *Yutai Xinyong*, especially showing great respect to Xu Ling's preface; it is thusly believable that *Songs Among the Flowers* maintains characteristics of the palace or erotic poetry. In the article *About Appreciation And Flirting ---- The Distance of the Sexes In HuaJian Ji And Yutai Xinyong*, Ai Chunming argues that: "Not only the historical background of these two collections are identical but also are the literary style and referent less different [11]." Based on her studies, I shall further state that the *Huajian* poets praised palace poetry and imitated this style with their improvements and new purposes. As one of the *Huajian* poets, Zhang Mi is influenced by palace poetry as well, and he directly refers to Xiao Gang's image of "fallen petals" without any significant changes. In one of the verses of Xiao Gang's *Ode For My Sleeping Concubine*, he writes: "Her flowery smile emerges from the dream; her soft cloudlike hair covers the fallen petals [12]." In terms of Xiao Gang, it is logically reasonable that the "fallen petals" must represent flowers flying through the window and dropping on the pillow. In comparison, Zhang Mi starts to borrow images from the first verse of the second stanza and almost replicates the whole scene from Xiao Gang in his own writing. Note that I am not claiming that Zhang Mi and Xiao Gang deliver the same content. At the end of Xiao Gang's poem, he says: "My husband and I are always in love, so please not to mistaken [12]." Because of this narrow ending, he limits the possibility of extending the literary realm and gives no space for further associations. Zhang Mi, however, leaves an open ending that allows readers to use cultural associations and makes this piece much more meaningful; this is frequent in *Songs Among the Flowers*, which is also a sign to differentiate it from palace poetry.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, I criticized that Hua Zhongyan's annotation of "flower patterns" does not plausibly correlate with Zhang Mi's verse because Hua Zhongyan believes that the "flower patterns" represent the well-sewed flowerlike textures on the pillow. As Wang Guowei mentions the theory of realm according to the essence of song lyrics, Zhang Mi has to broaden his view in order to raise the realm of this piece, so he must abandon emphasizing the surroundings of a woman. Also, I state that the "flower patterns" should represent the fallen petals outside the window by providing two pieces of evidence: fallen petals are always considered an image that arouses the perception of the changing

of the universe. Furthermore, Zhang Mi refers to the image of "fallen petals" from Xiao Gang's palace poem. Finally, there still could exist other possible interpretations for the "flower patterns," and I look forward to future studies.

References

- [1] Hua, ZY. (1983) *Annotations of Songs Among the Flowers*. Zhongzhou Shushe.
- [2] Zhao, CZ. (2018) *Songs Among the Flowers*. Guangling Shushe.
- [3] Wang, GW. (2019) *Critiques of Songs Lyrics of the Humans*. Guangling Shushe.
- [4] Shields, M.A. (2006) *Crafting a Collection: The Cultural Contexts and Poetic Practice of the Huajian Ji (Collection from Among the Flowers)* Harvard University Asian Center.
- [5] Chen, TZ. (2005) *Critiques of Song Lyrics of Baiyu Zhai*. Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe.
- [6] Lingmu, DZ. (1989) *The Realm of Zen*. Zhongguo Qingnian Chubanshe.
- [7] Owen, S. (2016) *The Poetry of Du Fu*. Deutsche Nationalbibliografie.
- [8] Yan, JD. (1912-1948) *Song Lyrics Of Xiaoshan*. Shangwu Yinshuguan.
- [9] Huang, F. (2019) *The Discovery Of the Helplessness of Life Within the Fallen Petals In Classic Chinese Poetry*. Nanjing Tiedao Zhiye Jishu Xueyuan.
- [10] Zhouli. (2014). *Dashi*. Zhonghua Shuju.
- [11] Ai, CM. (2001) *Appreciation And Flirting ---- The Distance of the Sexes In HuaJian Ji And Yutai Xinyong*. Jinzhou Shifan Xueyuan Xuebao.
- [12] Xiao, G, Xu, L. (2018) *Ode For My Sleeping Concubine*. Yutai Xinyong. Zhongguo Shudian.