

The Literati's Interpretation of Chen Ping's Image in Ming and Qing Dynasties

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ABSTRACT

The article mainly focuses on Chen Ping, a well-known politician and tactician in the early Western Han Dynasty, to examine the interpretation and changes of his character images in Ming and Qing literary Dynasties. The author first examines and distinguishes the texts of literary works, and on this basis, makes a theoretical explanation of its content, and interprets the changes and reshaping of Chen Ping's image from the perspective of interpretation. In fact, in the process of interpreting Chen Ping's character, researchers in the Ming and Qing Dynasties gradually turned Chen Ping's flat character into three-dimensional. He was no longer just a persevering adviser like a god, but the one who constantly sought for the country and himself.

Keywords: *Chen Ping, Image, Acceptance, Interpretation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

As an important member of Liu Bang's counsellors in the early Han Dynasty, Chen Ping's image was recorded in Sima Qian's "Historical Records · Chen". Meanwhile, the description in "Biographic sketches of Xiangyu", "Biographic sketches of Liu Bang", "Biographic sketches of Lv Zhi", "Biography of Zhou Bo", "Biography of Han Xin", "Biography of Lu Jia" made the figure alive. The historical books of later generations basically follow the records of Chen Ping in the "Historical Records". For example, the contents in "History of the Han Dynasty · Zhang Liang" are mostly the same as those in the "Historical Records", but the dialogue on Lv Zhi's idea of enthroning people surnamed Lv as the princes among Wang Ling, Chen Ping and Zhoubo is added. In Sima Guang's "History as a Mirror", Chen Ping's deeds are recorded in detail, and under Lv Zhi's dictatorship, Chen Ping's psychology changed that disaster would affect himself. Generally speaking, in the process of spreading and accepting these historical records, Chen Ping is also gradually well known. It is accepted and interpreted by scholars of previous dynasties. Ming and Qing Dynasties are the

transition period of accepting and elaborating Chen Ping's image. Chen Ping's image is gradually alive and three-dimensional, and he is no longer an inaccessible historical figure, but a real figure that would feel fear facing choice, and also have his own selfishness.

2. CHEN PING'S IMAGE IN "HISTORICAL RECORDS"

According to the "Historical Records", Chen Ping was poor when he was young, and he preferred reading to working. When he grew up, he married the granddaughter of the rich family Zhang, whose five husbands died, and then his life was gradually generous. He is a man of great ambition. When distributing meat, he said: "if I have the chance to govern the world, I will be fair as distributing meat." [1]²⁴⁹⁴ Chen She started the uprising first, and there were many forces in the world against the governance of Qin Dynasty. Chen Ping followed Jiu, the King of Wei Dynasty, Xiangyu, and finally Liu Bang. Zhou Bo, Guanying and others talked to Liu Bang that Chen Ping "had secret communication with his sister-in-law and received bribes". With the explanation of Wei Wuzhi and Chen Ping, he was valued. When Liu Bang was besieged in Xingyang, Chen Ping took counterplot with the gold and treated the emissaries of Chu Dynasty with bad food, thus arousing Xiang

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Yu's suspicion and successfully alienating Xiang Yu and his officials. And then, Fan Zeng, the important counselor, was removed and died of death. When Liu Bang disintegrated Xiangyu's forces, he said: "Xiang Yu don't appoint Fan Zeng, and this is the reason why I defeated him." [1]⁴⁸⁰ When Liu Bang was besieged in Xingyang, Chen Ping sent 2000 women to the east gate to seduce the enemy in the evening, and fled from the west gate with Liu Bang. When Han Xin, the colleague, was rumored to be king, Chen Ping took small actions to stop Liu Bang from getting angry and keep Han Xin calm. Later, when Han Xin was reported to have a rebellion, Chen Ping gave a suggestion to Liu Bang that "it is necessary to pretend to be in the dream" to capture Han Xin. When Liu Bang was besieged by Xiongnu in Baideng, Chen Ping used a mysterious trick to help Liu Bang out again. Chen Ping made six wonderful ideas in the process of assisting Liu Bang [1]²⁵⁰¹. Fan Kuai was not only Liu Bang's old subordinate, but also the husband of Lv Xu, empress Lv's sister. When Liu Bang of the Han Dynasty assigned Chen Ping and Zhou Bo to kill Fan Kuai, Chen Ping and Zhou Bo didn't kill Fan Kuai directly. Instead, they tied him up and brought him back to Chang'an. Before they returned to Chang'an, Liu Bang died. Chen Ping rushed to the palace to avoid someone taking the opportunity to slander empress Lv and endanger his life. Finally, the crisis was resolved. When empress Lv was in power, she wanted to enthrone her children prince, which was severely opposed by Wang Ling. Chen Ping pretended to obey empress Lv's order and was appointed the prime minister, but he only drank wine every day. When empress Lv died, Chen Ping conspired with Zhou Bo to kill all the people of Lv family and supported Emperor Wen of the West Han Dynasty. After Emperor Wen of the West Han Dynasty came to power, Chen Ping did not take credit. He gave up the position of influential figure right prime minister to Zhou Bo, and took the position of left prime minister. Later, Zhou Bo could not answer Emperor Wen's questions about justice and finance. Chen Ping responded with his own theories and eventually became the influential figure right prime minister.

In this biography, Chen Ping commented on himself: "I often use secret tricks, which is taboo in Taoism. If the marquis is dethroned in my generation, it will be over forever, and it will not rise again in the end. However, I have accumulated a lot of evils secretly." [1]²⁵⁰⁵ In this way, a conspirator portrayed in the article had been publicized to the public. Sima Qian commented:

"when Chen was young, he was fond of the Taoism of Yellow Emperor and Laozi. When he distributed the sacrificial meat on the chopping board, his ambition was great. Later, he wandered between Chu Dynasty and Wei Dynasty and finally came to Liu Bang. He often gave his masterpieces to save the country from various dangers. In the period of Empress Lv, there were many changes in state affairs. However, Chen Ping was able to avoid disaster, stabilize the Han Dynasty, and end his life with a glorious reputation. He was called a virtuous prime minister. It is actually a good beginning and a good ending! It is believed that without wisdom and strategy, there is no body doing this thing well. [1]²⁵⁰⁵ According to this description, Chen Ping's actions of seizing state power by armed forces and stabilizing internal troubles was highly affirmed, and his wisdom was also highly evaluated. In the "Autobiography of Sima Qian", it is said that "Chen Ping was the main planner to pacify the Lv family, which ultimately helped to stabilize the Han Dynasty." [1]⁴⁰¹⁹ It is impossible to avoid the suspicion of whitewashing. Although it can be seen from some narratives in the biography that Chen Ping had some problems in his personal morality, Sima Qian did not comment on it. Instead, Sima Qian just described the facts, and readers can make the judgement by themselves, leaving unlimited space for the acceptance and interpretation of Chen Ping's image. From the Wei and Jin Dynasties, Chen Ping appeared in literary works as an image of stabilizing a nation. In the Tang and Song Dynasties, the image of counselor had been still popular, but Chen Ping's counselor image had been questioned. It is believed that Chen Ping's stratagem is just insignificant skill, and most of his stratagem can succeed because of luck. Chen Ping is also considered to be a treacherous villain. Chen Ping was considered as a profiteer. Following Emperor Gaozu of Han Dynasty was just driven by the profit. The acceptance and interpretation of Chen Ping in this period is slowly out of the original shackles. It has already begun to interpret and analyze Chen Ping from all aspects and various angles. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the acceptance and interpretation of Chen Ping's image can be said to have an all-round development, making Chen Ping's image more three-dimensional, and the lack of human nature of the characters is easier to accept. It is not limited to the discussion of the characters or events, but focuses on the historical facts and objective factors behind them, overlooks the facts from the perspective of history, and reshapes the characters, reflecting the further improvement of human understanding.

3. THE ACCEPTANCE AND INTERPRETATION OF CHEN PING'S IMAGE IN MING DYNASTY

With the rapid rise of printing technology in Ming Dynasty, "Historical Records" had been printed in a large number. The "Historical Records" had been popular, and the acceptance and re-creation of "Historical Records" had been more numerous. The acceptance and interpretation of Chen Ping's image in Ming Dynasty was also three-dimensional. It not only had the understanding of the character and events, but also revealed the reasons behind the choice from the perspective of human nature through the analysis of his behavior.

On the one hand, following the previous point of view, Chen Ping was a resourceful counselor. In order to create a perfect image of a counselor, someone tried to prove Chen Ping's innocence. In the past, Chen Ping was thought to have some shortcomings in personal morality, one of which was to have an affair with his sister-in-law. As for the affair of "having adultery with sister-in-law", no one has discussed the fact before, but it can be seen from the words that people have tacitly regarded it as a fact. Xu Yingyuan and Wang Wei conspire against the issue that "Chen Ping has an affair with his sister-in-law". According to Sima Qian's descriptions, such as "Chen Ping's brother drives away his wife" and "Chen Ping treats his sister-in-law like a mother", they believed that there is no special relationship between Chen Ping and his sister-in-law. In the Qing Dynasty, Yin Jimei argued for a long time that the affair of "having an affair with a sister-in-law" could not be true, and pointed out that Wei Wuzhi and Chen Ping did not explain the affair, which didn't mean that they agreed with the argument.

On the other hand, some people completely deny Chen Ping's image as a wise man. They think that he is not the contributed one but a cunning man. From making Emperor Gaozu of Han Dynasty pretend to have the dreams and alienate Xiang Yu and his officials, to answering questions about justice and finance when Emperor Wen of the West Han Dynasty asked, none of the so-called "six tricks" can be regarded as a real conspiracy, but Chen Ping has always been good at speculation. As for answering questions about justice and finance, it is considered as Chen Ping's cunning. He used the things that belong to the prime minister's duty as the sophistry to deceive the emperor, his behavior should be despised by the gentleman. On the issue

of "pretending to have dreams", Ling Zhilong put forward a new view: "Is it a piece of real stratagem? Fortunately, Han Xin did not conspire. If Han Xin really conspired and quietly set troops in Yunmeng to attack Liu Bang, how could he be caught later?" [2]⁶⁹⁷ The success of Chen Ping's plan was entirely due to Han Xin's lack of rebellion. If Han Xin intended to rebel, Chen Ping's plan would be counterproductive. Huang Zhenfu said, "those who steal come out at night and have a rest during the day. When everyone is resting, they steal things. Is this the wisdom of Chen Ping? But Chen Ping's stratagem confused people all over the world. Due to his ingenious tactics, he is called "intelligent thief" together with Zhang Liang [3]⁴³¹. It is believed that Chen Ping's six masterpieces are all tactics that can't be considered elegant, which can be said to negate Chen Ping in terms of wisdom and character.

It can be seen from the above that the acceptance of Chen Ping by the people in Ming Dynasty gradually tended to be extreme, while some scholars looked at the essence through the phenomenon and pointed out that Chen Ping was good at calculating and planning for himself, and the so-called "intrigue" had nothing to do with the general interests of the country, but was the most favourable choice made for himself under the promotion of history. Xu Zhongxing of Ming Dynasty said: "Chen Ping went to help people with funerals from morning to night, just for impressing Zhang Fu and being married with his granddaughter, but not for help. When Chen Ping ran away from the footpath, he untied his clothes and bared his upper body to help the boatman pull the boat. In fact, he wanted to show the boatman that he had no money, so as to avoid being killed." [2]⁶⁸⁸ When he got married and fled, he could make changes from the details to achieve his own goal, so he would not be taken lightly in national affairs. Therefore, Chen Ping's behaviors were actually plans to achieve a certain purpose. Ling Zhilong pointed out that Chen Ping didn't forget Wei Wuzhi's kindness after he was granted the marquis, which was not really for gratitude, but to dispel Liu Bang's doubts and seek self-protection; Yang Weizhen pointed out that Chen Ping's failure to kill Fan Kuai in violation of the order was not "to obey the order because of morality", and he was worried about the consequences of killing Fan Kuai. Li Dongyang wrote a poem: "when Liu was in power, Chen Ping was inferior to Wang Ling. Chen Ping was not as good as Zhou Bo when LV was in power. Is it because Chen Ping's IQ is not enough

that he is not as good as the two of them? In fact, he didn't want to be a target. He just planned for himself." [4]²¹ From this point of view, people in the Ming Dynasty believed that Chen Ping was good at planning. As Mao Kun said, "For Chen Ping, nothing could be done without a plan." But his strategy was not "fantastic", and what he did was for seeking his own interests and the balance.

4. THE ACCEPTANCE AND INTERPRETATION OF CHEN PING'S IMAGE IN QING DYNASTY

The Qing Dynasty is the period of the development of ancient literature, and also the peak of the spread of "Historical Records". There are many works and articles on "Historical Records". At the same time, the literary creation of "Historical Records" is endless. Compared with the previous dynasties, more extensive acceptance and interpretation of Chen Ping's image were carried out in the Qing Dynasty. On the whole, more attention was paid to the textual research of historical facts. On this basis, the image of Chen Ping is accepted and interpreted. Under this kind of cognition, it is closer to the objective historical facts and human nature.

For example, Han Xin's conspiracy is a false accusation. The scholars in the previous dynasties have tacit understanding of it. When talking about the issue of "pretending to have the dream", more people think it is a good way, and often don't consider whether it should happen or not. Scholars in the Qing Dynasty pointed out "based on the fact that Hanxin did not intend to rebel, Chen Ping's capture of Hanxin by "pretending to have dreams" was morally unreasonable, and the result was tragic. Chen Ping had something to do with Hanxin's eventual death by Empress Lv. Shi Er said: "Chen Ping did not verify the truth of Han Xin's rebellion, and he proposed to arrest him, which was the most shameless of his six masterpieces." [5]^{10a} Wang Mingsheng even pointed out that "Chen Ping was a villain. Han Xin was responsible for the political power of Han Dynasty. Naturally, some people were envious, and then slandered that Han Xin took the rebellion. At this time, Chen Ping did not ask the emperor to find out the truth. Instead, he proposed a trick of pretending to have dreams, which led to Han Xin's innocent demotion. Later, he was killed by Empress Lv, which had a lot to do with Chen Ping. When the emperor ordered that when Fan Kuai was arrested,

he should be beheaded, but Chen Ping brought him back. Because he was the husband of empress Lv's younger sister, Chen Ping did not dare to kill him. It can be seen that Chen Ping was such a man who was in favor of others." [6]⁴⁴ According to the contrast, Chen Ping's nature of seeking advantages and avoiding disadvantages can be seen. This kind of understanding is different from that of the previous scholars that it is not judged from the result of the event, but from the source of the event. The former is a problem of ability, and the latter is a problem of morality. From this perspective, there are more discussion on human nature.

As for Chen Ping's support for the conferment of the children of the Lv family as marquis and serving the regime of the Lv family, it is no longer limited to discussing whether Chen Ping intended to compromise. Instead, it is pointed out that Chen Ping's and Zhou Bo's words of "protecting the country" are only the compliance of Sima Qian. "People can't predict what will happen in the future. How can Chen Ping and Zhou Bo know that they can kill the people of the Lv family eight years later, and know about the newly established Emperor Liu?" [7]⁴⁷ That is to say, Chen Ping could not judge whether Liu was able to regain power at that moment. Later, people actually looked at the problem from the perspective of God and thought that Chen Ping was temporarily attached to the regime of Lv family for the restoration of Liu's regime. Therefore, this conclusion is not in line with the facts. Moreover, this practice has affected many officials in later generations. When they do something to save their official positions, they often do it under the banner of having to do it for the sake of the country. Guo Songtao ironically said: "Wang Ling could not bear Empress Lv's stealing of power, but Chen Ping still acted as the prime minister. Emperor Wen of Han Dynasty was well versed in the affairs of governing the country, but Zhou Bo was not competent, and Chen Ping still acted as prime minister. In the next two thousand years, many people followed Chen Ping in order to preserve their official positions. They thought it was a clever plan." [8]¹⁶⁰

The acceptance of Chen Ping in the Qing Dynasty is deeply influenced by the academic thoughts of the Qing Dynasty. By examining the historical events, a reliable text for the acceptance and understanding of the character can be provided. With the consideration of the problems in the historical environment at that time, only in this way can people realize Chen Ping more close to the real one and enrich the acceptance of Chen Ping's

image. Chen Ping is no longer a counselor, but an individual with thoughts, strategies and shortcomings.

5. CONCLUSION

Vertically, the acceptance of Chen Ping's character image is a process of constant change and development. Before the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Chen Ping had been a counselor deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. Although there are some moral flaws, he was still a relatively perfect image in general. According to the current aesthetic judgment, he may be close to the image in the second dimension, which is beautiful and one-sided. The Ming and Qing Dynasties are the peak period of accepting Chen Ping's image. A large number of works about Chen Ping emerged, and the attention to Chen Ping's image was more specific and subtle. Not only the counselor image had been deeply accepted, but its cunning side had also been found and expanded. It seems that from the moral aspect, he is not so perfect, there are many shortcomings, and even there is a lot of luck in his contributions. He is believed to be favoured by history. In short, in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, the acceptance of Chen Ping's image became more full and three-dimensional. He was no longer like a God. He was like normal people, planning for himself and the country in his own way. Although he was not perfect, he made great achievements by various coincidences. From the diachronic perspective, there will inevitably be differences in the understanding and reshaping of the image of the characters. On the one hand, the history rolls on, the society is gradually stable, and the models and images needed by different times are different, and the reshaped image must meet the needs of the times. On the other hand, with the continuous improvement of people's cognitive level, people's understanding is gradually rational, and the acceptance and interpretation of the characters are more objective.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Yunfei Li.

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