



# On the Yuyao Seawall Disaster Poem in *Collected Poems of the Yuan Dynasty*

Yanlin ZHU

The College of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu, China  
E-mail: zhuyanlin20202022@163.com

**Abstract.** Yuyao seawall has remarkable achievements in disaster prevention and mitigation, which also provides materials for the creation of disaster literature. Disaster poems involving Yuyao seawall account for a certain proportion in *Collected Poems of the Yuan Dynasty*. In this paper, by interpreting the disaster poems related to the Yuyao seawall in *Collected Poems of the Yuan Dynasty*, we explore their main contents and ideological connotations, and further excavate the practical significance embodied in them. Through the Yuyao seawall disaster poems, we can understand the performance of individuals in disaster response, and we can also realize the commonality of disaster poems.

**Keywords:** *Collected Poems of the Yuan Dynasty*, Yuyao Seawall, Disaster Poetry

## 1 Introduction

Due to its special geographic location, Yuyao, Zhejiang Province, was always affected by tidal waves, and the people on both sides of the river were often plagued by flooding. Therefore, warding off floods was an important issue for the local rulers to consider. In the disaster poems of *Collected Poems of the Yuan Dynasty*, the sea dike built under the auspices of the local state judge Ye Heng is mentioned several times. The literati's emphasis on and celebration of this disaster-resistant structure suggests that the Yuyao seawall made an outstanding contribution to disaster resistance and mitigation at that time.

## 2 The Significant Improvement of Seawall's Disaster Prevention Capability in a Dual Comparison

Ye Heng served as the governor of Yuyao Prefecture during the reign of Zhizheng. During his tenure, he continued to strengthen the Yuyao seawall in the previous generation, which led to a significant improvement in the seawall's ability to protect against disasters. (Le, 1990, p. 44) <sup>[10]</sup> In the related poems of *Collected Poems of the Yuan Dynasty*, poets make use of comparisons to highlight the changes that the seawall has made to the local area.

© The Author(s) 2023

Y. Chen et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2023 2nd International Conference on Public Culture and Social Services (PCSS 2023)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 787,  
[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-130-2\\_24](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-130-2_24)

## 2.1 Comparison of the living conditions and psychology of the local people before and after the construction of the seawalls

Before Ye Heng built the seawall, the tides often overwhelmed the defenses and turned the village into an ocean. Some poets gave direct depictions of the victims at that time, Yu Mengxiang mentioned in “Yuyao Seawall Singing”, “The levees are breaking down and people are being flooded like fish. They want to drive the Jingwei to fill up the ocean.” Hu Weiren wrote: “People fall into the water like fish.” Some poets show the townspeople’s concern from a psychological point of view, poet Bao Bao wrote: “The sound of the tide breaks the canal day and night, and the townspeople tell each other that they are afraid of becoming fish.” Xia Yizhong wrote: “The people are worried day and night that they’ll turn into fish and turtles.”<sup>[1]</sup> Many poets have mentioned the situation of “being a fish”. In front of the absolute force of nature, human beings are just like a small fish without any resistance, which is enough to see the great threat of uncontrolled tides to the local people’s lives. At the same time, the local production was also destroyed again and again, and a large area of fields was flooded, facing a serious challenge to the survival of human beings. Zhao Yan wrote: “Yuyao is on the edge of the sea, and the tides hurt the farmland every year.” Peng Wei wrote: “The fertile land bordering the sea for 200 miles is all a continent.”<sup>[1]</sup>

In addition, the more lasting negative impact of disasters lies in the psychological trauma caused to people, and many people may suffer from mental illness. In a desperate situation, people often choose to turn to the gods for help. “Cutting open sheep and wine to pray for Yang Hou, but the tide goes away and the harm is done,”<sup>[1]</sup> said the local people, who had to turn to the god of waves for help and were given a brief moment of peace. “Though the activity of sacrificing to the gods can play a role in stabilizing people’s hearts and maintaining social order in times of disaster” (Duan, 2008, p. 74)<sup>[9]</sup>, it is only a reflection of the helplessness and despair of the people in the face of disasters, and it is a more effective way to actively and positively cope with disasters and seek for solutions than passively sacrificing to the gods.

When Ye Heng saw the damage of the earth dyke in the previous generation, he sighed “This is a scourge for the people, and there is no end to it” (Li, 1998, p. 306)<sup>[2]</sup>, and he decided to solve this problem for the people once and for all. After he led the people to build the seawall, the local production life was restored. People’s fields were well protected and their livelihood problems were solved, Zhao Silu wrote, “There is no flooding in the field, and the residents have kept their fields since then”<sup>[1]</sup>; the main mode of production in the area was also changed, “In the past, I heard that the countryside wells produced fish and turtles, but now I see that all the crops are harvested here”<sup>[1]</sup>. After having fields to cultivate, the villagers could fully satisfy their living needs through self-sufficiency. Xia Yizhong shows a beautiful picture of peace and happiness: “In former times, the countryside was marshy and depressed, but now the transportation is very busy. Everyone is happy with their work and rich in cattle and wine, while small families have enough fields to feed their bodies and mouths.”<sup>[1]</sup> Under the defense of the seawall, the people of Yuyao live and work in peace and contentment, no longer under the shadow of the sea tide.

## 2.2 Comparison between the seawalls constructed during Ye Heng's time and the seawalls of the previous generation

The construction of the Yuyao seawall has a historical extension, and many officials in the previous generation also presided over this work, for example, Xie Jingchu in the Song Dynasty, and he wrote: "To make the people at ease with their lives, and not to be ashamed of the civil society." (Chen, 1969, p. 15a-15b) <sup>[4]</sup> It can be seen that the officials in the previous generation also had the determination and sense of responsibility to "build a life for the people". Ye Heng's act of building the embankment was not ground-breaking, but why was it repeatedly praised by the people of the time and later generations, leaving behind so many hymns? This leads to the second contrast.

Dai Liang in the "Preface to Yuyao Seawall Poetry Collection" recorded: "In the Song Dynasty, the county magistrate Xie Jingchu built 28,000 feet of seawalls, and Shi Su followed with 42,000 feet of seawalls, while 5,700 feet of them were stone dykes, so it fights the sea." (Li, 1998, p. 294) <sup>[2]</sup> About seven-eighths of the sea dykes built by previous generations were earthen dykes, which had a limited ability to block the sea tide and did not provide long-lasting protection. In the Yuan dynasty, there were also poems dedicated to the differences between the dykes built during Ye Heng's time and those of his predecessors, the most typical of which is Zhuo Yue's "Yuyao Seawall Singing", which not only illustrates the functionality of the dyke Ye Heng constructed, but also compares and contrasts the impact of the two types of dykes on the public. (Zhang, 2016, p. 53) <sup>[8]</sup> Referring to the seawalls of the previous generation, he wrote: "The seawalls of the previous generation not only crumbled repeatedly, but also consumed a great deal of people and material resources, and the effect of anti-disaster was not good." <sup>[1]</sup> Therefore, the poet borrowed the "old man" to explain his own views: "The seawall used to be prone to collapse, but now it is not worrying." <sup>[1]</sup> These two different building effects make the people's reaction is not the same: "In the past, there were people who were concerned about the problem of tidal waves but did not solve it, leaving people helpless. Unlike now, the people have something to fall back on and rejoice in their hearts. In the past, there were people who did something, but they did not eradicate the suffering of the people. Unlike now, the people are happy and celebrate." <sup>[1]</sup> Ye Heng led the construction of the sea dike can win the current and future generations such a high evaluation, naturally has its own outstanding features.

## 3 Innovation in disaster response: the perfect match between people and technology

One of the important reasons why Ye Heng was able to outperform the previous generation of officials was his ability to use his resources to the fullest extent.

The first is the determination of the construction strategy. Peng Wei in the "Yuyao Seawall Singing" wrote: "After arriving for his tour, Yeh Hou worried about the local people, so he gathered the local people to gather ingenuity and wonders." <sup>[1]</sup> Ye Heng didn't directly build the seawall, but called the local townspeople to plan countermeasures, brainstorming. As a new official just arrived, his understanding of the disaster is

not as good as the local people, in order to better find the countermeasures, he has to do it. One of the important principles of disaster management is to adapt to local conditions, only in-depth understanding of the causes of disasters, in order to better prevent and mitigate disasters. According to the record of Chen Lv, Ye Heng and the locals unanimously decided that “a stone embankment is appropriate” after discussing.

The second is the mobilization of the construction personnel. In fact, there is no need to deliberately mobilize, the residents has long hoped to change the status. Peng Wei's poem describes the local people's enthusiasm for the construction: “The people are happy to hear it and eulogize it, and there is a harvest in the years when the Hou can do so. I tell my wife to harrow me. I collect the grain quickly and work aggressively. I cut down the mountains to get wood, and the demons and devils cry; I fill up the pits and annihilate the valleys, and the dragons are worried. Thousands of men carry axes and chiseled huge stones, and ten thousand men carry dustpans and open deep ditches.”<sup>[1]</sup> People contribute to the food, full of energy, which reflects the urgent needs of the people to resist disasters, but also to the work of disaster management and mitigation provides inspiration: in the face of disasters, the need for a strong leadership center to coordinate the overall situation and organize all the forces, or else disaster prevention and mitigation work can only be a piece of loose sand.

The construction was also the result of coordination between the private sector and the government. “Counting the field out of the corn does not wait for take up, divide the land to supervise the work does not wait for turtledove”<sup>[1]</sup>, the construction of such a large-scale project, in accordance with common sense is the official burden of expenses, why can the civil society have such great enthusiasm? Referring to the Chen Lv's account of Ye Heng's language in the “Yuyao seawall record”: “Tapping stone great fee, out of the money of government, when troublesome paperwork, late years and months, by the time we get a reply, Yuyao is almost turned into a cistern. If you can work with me for it? Although the fee is huge, the cost of every year is saved, and your children and grandchildren will live in peace.”<sup>[1]</sup> Ye Heng's consideration is very thoughtful, the treatment of disaster pay attention to timely, otherwise there will be more people suffer. People are on board with his proposal. Subsequently, Ye Heng explained the situation to the government, and the government also expressed understanding: “Talk to the government, the government will listen to what the people do.”<sup>[1]</sup> At the same time, for the people who built the seawall, Ye Heng also requested the government to reduce their other corvee duties: “Ye requested the government to exempt the people from other corvee duties, so that they could do their best.”<sup>[1]</sup> The government also supported Ye Heng's work: “The Emperor issued an edict not to allow anything else to disturb Ye Heng.”<sup>[1]</sup> In the disaster relief and mitigation work, the civil power and the official power coordinate the operation of many parties in order to achieve the best effect. (Su, 2018, p. 57)<sup>[6]</sup>

Ye Heng in the dike building technology has also been innovated. According to Chen Lv in *Collected Works of the Yuan Dynasty*, Ye Heng's method of pond construction used wooden piles as the foundation of the pond, which strengthened the bearing capacity of the powdered sand foundation. In the pond base to meet the water surface at the increase of bedding wood (horizontal wood) and side stone, have to prevent the tide of the pond feet of the efficacy of the hollow brush. In addition, in the stone pond inner

slope and soil attached to the combination, the use of gravel for the transition layer, not only can prevent soil with seepage from the gap in the block stone loss, but also to slow down the stone pond to bear the lateral soil pressure. The application of these two measures further enhances the stability of the pond and is technically innovative. (Zhang, 2009, p. 235) <sup>[5]</sup>

#### 4 Praise and worship: The Circulation, Recording, and Celebration of Marquis Ye's Achievements

Ye Heng's construction of the seawall for the benefit of the people in the area had a far-reaching impact on the local community and was praised by the people, "the songs of the old and the young were deeply praised and happy" <sup>[1]</sup>. The people not only sang songs praising Ye Heng, but also requested the literati of the time to record this event. In addition, there were also many literati who spontaneously sang songs about Ye Heng, such as Hu Yi: "How long has it been since I have extolled the merits and virtues of Marquis Ye, and how long has my heart been grateful to Marquis Ye." Zheng Tao: "Gold can be canceled, stone will crack, and the folk will not stop singing Marquis Ye's praises for a thousand years." Dong You'an: "There must be an engraved text left in Yu's cave, and the eulogy should be compared to the praise of Han Wang." Minority poet Bao Bao: "Marquis Ye is a virtuous man who has made a great achievement. Taishi should write his achievements on bamboo slips." <sup>[1]</sup> Some people even came to the capital to request the Tai Shi to make poems to record and glorify Ye Heng's merits: "Kong Zhao came to the capital to request the Tai Shi to form songs and poems." <sup>[1]</sup> In "Yuyao State Seawall Records", Chen Lv made a more detailed record: "Yang Ying, a state scholar, was chosen to be a school official in the capital city, and asked the words of his elders to be recorded." <sup>[1]</sup> This action of "petitioning for the people" is the result of the folk pushing the official sector in the opposite direction, and is also a vivid reflection of Ye Heng's achievements. These poems were collected by Ye Heng's descendants to form *Yuyao Seawall Poetry Collection*, which contains many narrative poems that have certain practical significance and promote the development of related poems. At the same time, this collection, which is also a supplement to the official history, has certain literary and historiographical significance. (Li, 2022, p. 104) <sup>[7]</sup>

"At the end of the reign of Zhi Zheng, the imperial decree conferred the title of Marquis of Ren Gong, and a temple was established to worship him." (Yong, 1965, p.191) <sup>[3]</sup> The enthusiasm of the people is manifested in the material form, that is, the people built a shrine and statue for Ye Heng, cast a monument and engraved an inscription, and honored this parental official with sacrifices. This behavior is reflected in a number of poems included in *Collected Poems of the Yuan Dynasty*. Zhao Yan: "County people can't forget, high build ancestral palace strict statue set." Peng Wei: "Recently has been twenty five years, the dome monument record new engraving." Shi Dazi: "The long embankment suffers from seaside states, and people on the embankment worship Marquis Ye." <sup>[1]</sup> As a scholar, it was a great honor to be awarded the title of Marquis and enjoy the treatment of "temple food", and Ye Heng reached the peak of the ancient scholars. Some poets also mentioned this fact in their poems: Yu Mengxiang wrote:

“Why should life all be feudal lords, the temple food can be memorized for a thousand years.” Ding Henian expressed a similar sentiment: “Although the Marquis has passed away and his legacy survives, I stand in the ancestral halls and listen to the pipes and drums. Why should life be honored with nine tripods, the temple food is worth a thousand years of fame.”<sup>[1]</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

The Yuyao seawall has remarkable results in disaster prevention and mitigation, and also provides rich materials for the creation of disaster literature. There are some poems involving disasters in *Collected Poems of the Yuan Dynasty*, and the poems in *Yuyao Seawall Poetry Collection* account for a large proportion of them, which provide an angle for us to deeply analyze the disaster poems of the Yuan Dynasty. By interpreting the disaster poems related to the Yuyao seawall, we can not only understand the specific role of the Yuyao seawall in disaster relief and treatment, but also summarize the commonality of disaster poems, namely, the concern for reality and the care for people.

## References

1. Yang, X. (2013) *Collected Poems of the Yuan Dynasty*. Zhonghua Book Company, Beijing. DOI: CNKI: SUN: QGXS.0.2013-07-006
2. Li, X. S. (1998) *Collected Works of the Yuan Dynasty*. Jiangsu Ancient Books Press, Nanjing. [https://xueshu.baidu.com/usercenter/paper/show?paperid=f93ecb03118ad08476c20be44db1bfa4&site=xueshu\\_se](https://xueshu.baidu.com/usercenter/paper/show?paperid=f93ecb03118ad08476c20be44db1bfa4&site=xueshu_se)
3. Yong, R. (1965) *Si Ku Quan Shu Zong Mu*. Zhonghua Book Company, Beijing. <http://find.nlc.cn/search/showDocDetails?docId=7035228853512800435&data-Source=ucs01&query=%E5%9B%9B%E5%BA%93%E5%85%A8%E4%B9%A6%E6%80%BB%E7%9B%AE>
4. Chen, Z. (1969) *The Song-Yuan Poetry Society*. Commercial Press, Taiwan, Taiwan. [https://xueshu.baidu.com/usercenter/paper/show?paperid=98528b0bf77b73e8edb8ae49c8e2d642&site=xueshu\\_se](https://xueshu.baidu.com/usercenter/paper/show?paperid=98528b0bf77b73e8edb8ae49c8e2d642&site=xueshu_se)
5. Zhang, F. (2009) *History of irrigation engineering technology in ancient China*. Shanxi Education Press, Taiyuan. [https://xueshu.baidu.com/usercenter/paper/show?paperid=0aba43b8a973a97d27289232e2221a5f&site=xueshu\\_se](https://xueshu.baidu.com/usercenter/paper/show?paperid=0aba43b8a973a97d27289232e2221a5f&site=xueshu_se)
6. Su, L. (2018) The Storm Surge and Countermeasures in the Yuan Dynasty. *Lanzhou Academic Journal*, 02: 50-59. DOI: 10.3969/j.issn.1005-3492.2018.02.005
7. Li, W. S. (2022) On Upright Officials and Literary Writing in Yuan Dynasty. *Journal of Harbin Institute of Technology (Social Sciences Edition)*, 24(02): 98-105. DOI: 10.16822/j.cnki.hitskb.2022.02.012.
8. Zhang, T. H. (2016) On Natural Disaster Literary Writing and Cultural Function in the New Century. *Social Science Journal*, 03: 48-53. <https://kns.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?FileName=SHKK201603008&DbName=CJFQ2016>
9. Duan, W. (2008) Superstition and rationality: A preliminary study of the disaster avoidance system in the Han Dynasty. *Journal of Shanxi University (Philosophy & Social Science)*, 06: 70-75. DOI: 10.13451/j.cnki.shanxi.univ(phil.soc.).2008.06.014.

10. Le, C. Y. Xu, Z. W. (1990) The development of agriculture in Ningbo during the Song Dynasty and its causes. *Zhejiang Academic Journal*, 04: 43-47. DOI: 10.16235/j.cnki.33-1005/c.1990.04.011.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

